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The Young Folks

Story - March-April 1940

ABOUT eleven o'clock, Lucille Henderson, observing that her party was soaring at the proper height, and just having been smiled at by Jack Delroy, forced herself to glance over in the direction of Edna Phillips, who since eight o'clock had been sitting in the big red chair, smoking cigarettes and yodeling hellos and wearing a very bright eye which young men were not bothering to catch. Edna's direction still the same, Lucille Henderson sighed as heavily as her dress would allow, and then, knitting what there was of her brows, gazed about the room at the noisy young people she had invited to drink up her father's scotch. Then abruptly, she swished to where William Jameson Junior sat, biting his fingernails and staring at the small blonde girl sitting on the floor with three young men from Rutgers.

"Hello there," Lucille Henderson said, clutching William Jameson Junior's arm. "Come on," she said. "There's someone I'd like you to meet."

"Who?"

"This girl. She's swell." And Jameson followed her across the room, at the same time trying to make short work of a hangnail on his thumb.

"Edna baby," Lucille Henderson said, "I'd love you to really know Bill Jameson. Bill-- Edna Phillips. Or have you two birds met already?"

"No," said Edna, taking in Jameson's large nose, flabby mouth, narrow shoulders. "I'm awefully glad to meet you," she told him.

"Gladda know ya," Jameson replied, mentally contrasting Edna's all with the all of the small blonde across the room.

"Bill's a very good friend of Jack Delroy's," Lucille reported.

"I don't know him so good," said Jameson.

"Well. I gotta beat it. See ya later you two!"

"Take it easy!" Edna called after her. Then, "Why don't you sit down?"

"Well, I don't know," Jameson said. "I been sitting down all night, kinda."

"I didn't know you were a good friend of Jack Delroy's," Edna said. "He's a grand person, don't you think?"

"Yeah, he's alright, I guess. I don't know him so good. I never went around with his crowd much."

"Oh, really? I thought I heard Lu say you were a good friend of his."

"Yeah, she did. Only I don't know him so good. I really oughtta be getting' home. I got this theme for Monday I'm supposed to do. I wasn't really gonna come home this week-end."

"Oh, but the party's young!" Edna said. "The shank of the evening!"

"The what?"

"The shank of the evening. I mean it's so early yet."

"Yeah," said Jameson. "But I wasn't even gonna come t'night. Accounta this theme. Honest. I wasn't gonna come home this weekend at all."

"But it's so early I mean!" Edna said.

"Yeah, I know, but--"

"What's your theme on, anyway?"

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Suddenly, from the other side of the room, the small blonde shrieked with laughter, the three young men from Rutgers anxiously joined her.

"I say what's your theme on anyway?" Edna repeated.

"Oh, I don't know," Jameson said. "About this description of some cathedral. This cathedral in Europe. I don't know."

"Well, I mean what do you have to do?"

"I don't know. I'm supposed to criticize it, sort of. I got it written down."

Again the small blonde and her friends went off into a high laughter.

"Criticize it? Oh, then you've seen it?"

"Seen what?" said Jameson.

"This cathedral."

"Me? Hell, no."

"Well, I mean how can you criticize it if you've never seen it?"

"Oh. Yeah. It's not me. It's this guy that wrote it. I'm supposed to criticize it from what he wrote, kinda."

"Mmm. I see. That sounds *hard*."

"Wudga say?"

"I say that sounds hard. I know. I've wrestled with that stuff puhlenty myself."

"Yeah."

"Who's the rat that wrote it?" Edna said.

Exuberance again came from the locale of the small blonde.

"What?" Jameson said.

"I say who wrote it?"

"I don't know. John Ruskin."

"Oh, boy," Edna said. "You're in for it fella."

"Wudga say?"

"I say you're in for it. I mean that stuff's hard."

"Oh. Yeah. I guess so."

Edna said, "Who're ya looking at? I know know most of the gang here tonight."

"Me?" Jameson said. "Nobody. I think maybe I'll get a drink."

"Hey! You took the words right out of my mouth."

They arose simultaneously. Edna was taller than Jameson and Jameson was shorter than Edna.

"I think," Edna said, "there's some stuff out there on the terrace. Some kind of junk, anyway. Not sure. We can try. Might as well get a breath of fresh air."

"All right," said Jameson.

They moved on toward the terrace, Edna crouching slightly and brushing off imaginary ashes from what had been her lap since eight o'clock. Jameson followed her, looking behind him and gnawing on the index finger of his left hand.

For reading, sewing, mastering crossword puzzles, the Henderson terrace was inadequately lighted. Lightly charging through the screen door, Edna was almost immediately aware of hushed vocal tones coming from a much darker vicinity to her left. But she walked directly to the front of the terrace, leaned heavily on the white railing, took a very deep breath, and then turned and looked behind her for Jameson.

"I hear somebody talkin'," Jameson said, joining her.

"Shhh....Isn't it a gorgeous night? Just take a deep breath."

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"Yeah. Where's the stuff? The scotch?"

"Just a second," Edna said. "Take a deep breath. Just once."

"Yeah, I did. Maybe that's it over there." He left her and went over to a table. Edna turned and watched him. By silhouette mostly, she saw him lift and set things on the table.

"Nothing left!" Jameson called back.

"*Shhh*. Not so loud. C'mere a minute."

He went over to her.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Just look at that sky," Edna said.

"Yeah. I can hear somebody talkin' over there, can't you?"

"Yes, you *ninny*."

"Wuddaya mean ninny?"

"*Some* people," Edna said, "wanna be *alone*."

"Oh. Yeah. I get it."

"Not so *loud*. How would you like it if someone spoiled it for you?"

"Yeah. Sure," Jameson said.

"I think I'd kill somebody, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. Yeah. I guess so."

"What do you do most of the time when you're home weekends, anyway? Edna asked.

"Me? I don't know."

"Sow the old wild oats, I guess, huh?"

"I don't getcha," Jameson said.

"You know. Chase around. Joe College stuff."

"Naa. I don't know. Not much."

"You know something," Edna said abruptly, "you remind me a lot of this boy I used to go around with last summer. I mean the way you look and all. And Barry was your build almost exactly. You know. Wiry."

"Yeah?"

"Mmm. He was an artist. Oh, Lord!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only I'll never forget this time he wanted to do a portrait of me. He used to always say to me--serious as the devil, too-- 'Eddie, you're not beautiful according to conventional standards, but there's something in your face I wanna catch.' Serious as the devil he'd say it, I mean. Well. I only posed for him this once."

"Yeah," said Jameson. "Hey, I could go in and bring out some stuff?"

"No," Edna said, "let's just have a cigarette. It's so grand out here. Amorous voices and all, what?"

"I don't think I got any more with me. I got some in the other room, I think."

"No, don't bother," Edna told him. "I have some right here." She opened her evening bag and brought out a small black, rhinestoned case, opened it, and offered one of three cigarettes to Jameson. Taking one, Jameson remarked that he really oughtta get going, that he had told her about this theme he had for Monday. He finally found his matches, and struck a light.

"Oh," Edna said, puffing on her cigarette, "it'll be breaking up pretty soon. Did you notice Doris Leggett, by the way?"

"Which one is she?"

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"Terribly short? Rather blonde? Used to go with Pete Ilesner? Oh, you must have seen her. She was sitting on the floor per usual, laughing at the top of her voice."

"That her? You know her?" Jameson said.

"Well, sort of," Edna told him. "We never went around much together. I really know her mostly by what Pete Ilesner used to tell me."

"Who's he?"

"Petie Ilesner? Don't you know Petie? Oh, he's a *grand* guy. He went around with Doris Leggett for a while. And in my opinion, she gave him a pretty raw deal. Simply rotten, *I* think."

"How?" Jameson said. "Wuddaya mean?"

"Oh, let's drop it. You know me. I hate to put my two cents in when I'm not sure and all. Not any more. Only I *don't* think Petie would lie to me though. After all, I mean."

"She's not bad," said Jameson. "Doris Liggett?"

"Leggett," Edna said. "I guess Doris *is* attractive to men. I don't know. I think I really liked her better though--her looks I mean--when her hair was natural. I mean bleached hair--to me anyway--always looks sort of artificial when you see it in the light or something. I don't know. I may be wrong. Every-body does it, I guess. Lord! I'll bet Dad would *kill* me if I ever came home with my hair touched up even a *little*! You don't know Dad. He's terribly old fashioned. I honestly don't think I ever *would* have it touched up, when you come right *down* to it. But you know. Sometimes you do the craziest things. Lord! Dad's not the only one! I think *Barry* even would kill me if I ever did!"

"Who?" said Jameson.

"Barry. This boy I told you about."

"He here t'night?"

"*Barry*? Lord, no! I can just picture Barry at one of these things. You don't know *Barry*."

"Go t'college?"

"Barry? Mmm, he did. Princeton. I *think* Barry got out in thirty-four. Not sure. I really haven't seen Barry since last summer. Well, not to talk to. Parties and stuff. I always managed to look the other way when *he* looked at *me*. Or ran out to the john or something."

"I thought you liked him, this guy," Jameson said.

"Mmm. I did. Up to a point."

"I don't getcha."

"Let it go. I'd rather not talk about it. He just asked too much of me, that's all."

"Oh," said Jameson.

"I'm not a prude or anything. I don't know. Maybe I am. I just have my own standards and in my funny little way I try to live up to them. The best I can, anyway."

"Look," Jameson said. "This railing is kinda shaky -"

Edna said, "It isn't that I can't appreciate how a boy feels after he dates you all summer and spends money he hasn't any right to spend on theater tickets and night spots and all. I mean, I can understand. He feels you owe him something. Well, I'm not that way. I guess I'm just not built that way. It's gotta be the real thing with me. Before, you know. I mean love and all."

"Yeah. Look, uh. I really oughtta get goin'. I got this theme for Monday. Hell, I shoulda been home hours ago. So I think I'll go in and get a drink and get goin'."

"Yes," Edna said. "Go on in."

"Aren'tcha coming?"

"In a minute. Go ahead."

"Well. See ya," Jameson said.

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Edna shifted her position at the railing. She lighted the remaining cigarette in her case. Inside, somebody had turned on the radio, or the volume suddenly had increased. A girl vocalist was huskying through the refrain from that new show, which even the delivery boys were beginning to whistle.

No door slams like a screen door.

"Edna!" Lucille Henderson greeted.

"Hey, hey," said Edna. "Hello Harry."

"Wuttaya say."

"Bill's inside," Lucille said. "Get me a drink, willya, Harry?"

"Sure."

"What happened?" Lucille wanted to know. "Didn't you and Bill hit it off? Is that Frances and Eddie over there?"

"I don't know. He hadda leave. He had a lot of work to do for Monday."

"Well, right now he's in there on the floor with Dottie Leggett. Delroy's putting peanuts down her back. That *is* Frances and Eddie over there."

"Your little Bill is quite a guy."

"Yeah? How? Wuttaya mean?" said Lucille.

Edna fish-lipped her mouth and tapped her cigarette ashes.

"A trifle *warm*-blooded, shall I say?"

"Bill *Jameson*?"

"Well," said Edna, "I'm still in one piece. Only keep that guy away from me, willya?"

"Hmm. Live and learn," said Lucille Henderson. "Where *is* that dope Harry? I'll see ya later, Ed."

When she finished her cigarette Edna went in too. She walked quickly, directly up the stairs into the section of Lucille Henderson's mother's home barred to young hands holding lighted cigarettes and wet highball glasses. She remained upstairs nearly twenty minutes. When she came down, she went back into the living room. William Jameson, Junior, a glass in his right hand and the fingers of his left hand in or close to his mouth, was sitting a few men away from the small blonde. Edna sat down in the big red chair. No one had taken it. She opened her evening bag and took out her small black, rhinestone case, and extracted one of ten or twelve cigarettes.

"Hey!" she called, tapping the cigarette on the arm of the big red chair. "Hey, Lu! Bobby! See if you can't get something better on the radio! I mean *who* can dance to that stuff?"

Go See Eddie

University of Kansas City Review - December 1940

HELEN'S bedroom was always straightened while she bathed so that when she came out of the bathroom her dressing table was free of last night's cream jars and soiled tissues, and there were glimpses in her mirror of flat bedspreads and spotted chair cushions. When it was sunny, as it was now, there were bright warm blotches to bring out the pastels chosen from the decorator's little book.

She was brushing her thick red hair when Elsie, the maid, came in.

"Mr. Bobby's here, ma'am," said Elsie.

"Bobby?" asked Helen. "I thought he was in Chicago. Hand me my robe, Elsie. Then show him in."

Arranging her royal-blue robe to cover her long bare legs, Helen went on brushing her hair. Then abruptly a tall sandy-haired man in a polo coat brushed behind and past her, snapping his index finger against the back of her neck. He walked directly to the chaise-lounge on the other side of the room and stretched himself out, coat and all. Helen could see him in her mirror.

"Hello you," she said. "Hey. That thing was just straightened. I thought you were in Chicago."

"Got back last night," Bobby said, yawning. "God, I'm tired."

"Successful?" asked Helen. "Didn't you go to hear some girl sing or something?"

"Uh," Bobby affirmed.

"Was she any good, the girl?"

"Lot of breast-work. No voice."

Helen set down her brush, got up, and seated herself in the peach-colored straight chair at Bobby's feet. From her robe pocket she took an emory board and proceeded to apply it to her long, flesh-pink nails. "What else do you know?" she inquired.

"Not much," said Bobby. He sat up with a grunt, took a package of cigarettes from his overcoat pocket, stuck them back, then stood up to remove the overcoat. He tossed the heavy thing on Helen's bed, scattering a colony of sunbeams. Helen continued filing her nails. Bobby sat on the edge of the chaise-lounge, lighted a cigarette, and leaned forward. The sun was on them both, lushing her milky skin, and doing nothing for Bobby but showing up his dandruff and the pockets under his eyes.

"How would you like a job?" Bobby asked.

"A job?" Helen said, filing. "What kind of job?"

"Eddie Jackson's going into rehearsals with a new show. I saw him last night. Y'oughtta see how gray that guy's getting. I said to him, have you got a spot for my sister? He said maybe, and I told him you might be around."

"It's a good thing you said *might*," Helen said, looking up at him. "What kind of a spot? Third from the left or something?"

"I didn't ask him what kind of spot. But it's better than nothing, isn't it?"

Helen didn't answer him and went on attending to her nails.

"Why don't you want a job?"

"I didn't say I didn't want one."

"Well, then what's the matter with seeing Jackson?"

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"I don't want anymore chorus work. Besides, I hate Eddie Jackson's guts."

"Yeah," said Bobby. He got up and went to the door. "Elsie!" he called. "Bring me a cup of coffee!" Then he sat down again.

"I want you to see Eddie," he told her.

"I don't want to see Eddie."

"I want you to see him. Put down that goddam file a minute."

She went on filing.

"I want you to go up there this afternoon, hear?"

"I'm not going up there this afternoon or any other afternoon," Helen told him, crossing her legs. "Who do you think you're ordering around?"

Bobby's hand was half fist when he knocked the emery board from her fingers. She neither looked at him nor picked up the emery board from the carpet. She just got up and went back to her dressing table to resume brushing her hair, her thick red hair. Bobby followed to stand behind her, to look for her eyes in the mirror.

"I want you to see Eddie this afternoon. Hear me, Helen?"

Helen brushed her hair. "And what'll you do if I don't go up there, tough guy?"

He picked that up. "Would you like me to tell you? Would you like me to tell you what I'll do if you don't go up there?"

"Yes, I'd like you to tell me what you'll do if I don't go up there," Helen mimicked.

"Don't do that. I'll push in that glamour kisser or yours. So help me," Bobby warned. "I want you to go up there. I want you see Eddie and I want you to take that goddam job."

"No, I want you to tell me what you'll do if I don't go there," Helen said, but in her natural voice.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Bobby said, watching her eyes in the mirror. "I'll ring up your greasy boyfriend's wife and tell her what's what."

Helen horse-laughed. "Go ahead!" she told him. "Go right ahead, wise guy! She knows *all* about it!"

Bobby said, "She knows, eh?"

"Yes, she knows! And don't you call Phil greasy! You wish you were half as good looking as he is!"

"He's a greaser. A greasy lousy cheat," Bobby pronounced. "Two for a lousy dime. That's your boyfriend."

"Coming from you that's good."

"Have you ever seen his wife?" Bobby asked.

"Yes-I've-seen-his-wife. What about her?"

"Have you seen her face?"

"What's so marvelous about her face?"

"Nothing's so marvelous about it! She hasn't got a glamour kisser like yours. It's just a nice face. Why the hell don't you leave her dumb husband alone?"

"None of your business why!" snapped Helen.

The fingers of his right hand suddenly dug into the hollow of her shoulder. She yelled out in pain, turned, and from an awkward position but with all her might, slammed his hand with the flat of her hairbrush. He sucked in his breath, pivoted swiftly so that his back was both to Helen and Elsie, the maid, who had come in with his coffee. Elsie set the tray on the window seat next to the chair where Helen had filed her nails, then slipped out of the room.

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Bobby sat down, and with the use of his other hand, sipped his coffee black. Helen, at the dressing table, had begun to place her hair. She wore it in a heavy old-fashioned bun.

He had long finished his coffee when the last hairpin was in its place. Then she went over to where he sat smoking and looking out the window. Drawing the lapels of her robe closer to her breast, she sat down with a little *oop* sound of unbalance on the floor at his feet. She placed a hand on his ankle, stroked it, and addressed him in a different voice.

"Bobby, I'm sorry. But you made me lose my temper, darling. Did I hurt your hand?"

"Never mind my hand," he said, keeping it in his pocket.

"Bobby, I love Phil. On my word of honor. I don't want you to think I'm just playing around. You don't, do you? I mean you don't just think I'm playing around, trying to hurt people?"

Bobby made no reply.

"My word of honor, Bob. You don't know Phil. He's really a grand person."

Bobby looked at her. "You and your goddam grand persons. You know more goddam grand persons. The guy from Cleveland. What the hell was his name? Bothwell. Harry Bothwell. And how 'bout that blond kid used to sing at Bill Cassidy's? Two of the goddamndest grandest persons you ever met." He looked out the window again. "Oh, for Chrissake, Helen," he said finally.

"Bob," said Helen, "you know how old I was. I was terribly young. You know that. But Bob, this is the real thing. Honestly. I know it is. I've never felt this way before. Bob, you don't really in your heart think I'm taking all this from Phil just for the hell of it?"

Bobby looked at her again, lifting his eyebrows, thinned his lips. "You know what I hear in Chicago?" he asked her.

"What, Bob?" Helen asked gently, the tips of her fingers rubbing his ankle.

"I heard two guys talking. You don't know 'em. They were talking about you. You and this horsey-set guy, Hanson Carpenter. They crummied the thing inside out." He paused. "You with him, too, Helen?"

"That's a goddam lie, Bob," Helen told him softly. "Bob, I hardly know Hanson Carpenter well enough to say hello to him."

"Maybe so! But it's a wonderful thing for a brother to have to listen to, isn't it? Everybody in town gives me the horse-laugh when they see me comin' around the corner!"

"Bobby. If you believe that slop it's your own damn fault. What do you care what they say? You're bigger than they are. You don't have to pay any attention to their dirty minds."

"I didn't say I believed it. I said it was what I heard. That's bad enough, isn't it?"

"Well, it's not so," Helen told him. "Toss me a cigarette there, hmm?"

He flipped the package of the cigarettes into her lap; then matches. She lighted up, inhaled, and removed a piece of tobacco from her tongue with the tips of her fingers.

"You used to be such a swell kid," Bobby stated briefly.

"Oh! And I ain't no more?" Helen little-girl'd.

He was silent.

"Listen, Helen. I'll tell ya. I had lunch the other day, before I went to Chicago with Phil's wife."

"Yeah?"

"She's a swell kid. Class," Bobby told her.

"Class, huh?" said Helen.

"Yeah. Listen. Go see Eddie this afternoon. It can't do any harm. Go see him."

Go See Eddie

Helen smoked. "I hate Eddie Jackson. He always make a play for me."

"Listen," said Bobby, standing up. "You know how to turn on the ice when you want to." He stood over her. "I have to go. I haven't gone to the office yet."

Helen stood up and watched him put on his polo coat.

"Go see Eddie," Bobby said, putting on his pigskin gloves. "Hear me?" He buttoned his overcoat. "I'll give you a ring soon."

Helen chided, "Oh, you'll give me a ring soon! When? The fourth of July?"

"No. Soon. I've been busy as hell lately. Where's my hat? Oh, I didn't have one."

She walked with him to the front door, stood in the doorway until the elevator came. Then she shut the door and walked quickly back to her room. She went to the telephone and dialed swiftly but precisely.

"Hello?" she said into the mouthpiece. "Let me speak to Mr. Stone, please. This is Miss Mason." In a moment his voice came through. "Phil?" she said. "Listen. My brother Bobby was just here. And do you know why? Because that adorable little Vassar-faced wife of yours told him about you and I. Yes! Listen, Phil. Listen to me. I don't like it. I don't care if you had anything to do with it or not. I don't like it. I don't care. No, I can't. I have a previous engagement. I can't tonight either. You can call me tomorrow. I'm very upset about all this. I said you can call me *tomorrow*, Phil. No. I said *no*. Phil. Goodbye."

She set down the receiver, crossed her legs, and bit thoughtfully at the cuticle of her thumb. Then she turned and yelled loudly: "*Elsie!*"

Elsie moused into the room.

"Take away Mr. Bobby's tray."

When Elsie was out of the room, Helen dialed again.

"Hanson?" she said. "This is me. Us. We. You dog."

The Hang of It

Collier's - July 12, 1941

THIS country lost one of the most promising young men ever to tilt a pinball table when my son, Harry, was conscripted into the Army. As his father, I realize Harry wasn't born yesterday, but every time I look at the boy I'd swear it all happened sometime early last week. So offhand I'd say the Army was getting another Bobby Pettit.

Back in 1917 Bobby Pettit wore the same look that Harry wears so well. Pettit was a skinny kid from Crosby, Vermont, which is in the United States too. Some of the boys in the company figured Pettit had spent his tender years letting that Vermont maple syrup drip slowly on his forehead.

Also one of the dancing girls in that 1917 company was Sergeant Grogan. The boys in camp had all kinds of ideas about the sarge's origin; good, sound, censorable ideas that I won't bother to repeat.

Well, on Pettit's first day in the ranks the sarge was drilling the platoon in the manual of arms. Pettit had a clever, original way of handling his rifle. When the sarge hollered "Right shoulder arms!" Bobby Pettit did left shoulder arms. When the sarge requested "Port arms!" Pettit complied with present arms. It was a sure way of attracting the sarge's attention, and he came over to Pettit smiling.

"Well, dumb guy," greeted the sarge, "what's the matter with you?"

Pettit laughed. "I get a little mixed up at times," he explained briefly.

"What's your name, Bud?" asked the sarge.

"Bobby. Bobby Pettit."

"Well, Bobby Pettit," said the sarge, "I'll just call ya Bobby. I always call them by their first names. And they all call me Mother. Just like they was at home."

"Oh," said Pettit.

Then it went off. Every fuse has two ends: the one that's lighted and the one that's clubby with T.N.T.

"*Listen, Pettit!*" boomed the sarge. "I ain't running no fifth grade. You're in the Army, dumb guy. You're supposed t'know ya ain't got two left shoulders and that port arms ain't present arms. Wutsa matter with ya? Ain'tcha got no *brains?*"

"I'll get the hang of it," Pettit predicted.

The next day we had practice in tent pitching and pack making. When the sarge came around to inspect, it developed that Pettit hadn't bothered to hammer the tent pegs slightly below the surface of the ground. Observing the subtle flaw, the sarge, with one yank of his hand, collapsed entirely Bobby Pettit's little canvas home.

"Pettit," cooed the sarge. "You are...without a doubt...the *dumbest*...the *stupidest*...the *clumsiest* gink I ever seen. Are ya nuts, Pettit? *Wutsa matter with ya? Ain'tcha got no brains?*"

Pettit predicted, "I'll get the hang of it."

Then everybody made up full packs. Pettit made up his like a veteran - just like one of the Boys in the Blue. Then the sarge came around to inspect. It was his cheery custom to pass in the

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rear of the men, and with a short, bludgeon-like stroke or his forearm slam down on the regulation burden on the back of every mother's son.

He came to Pettit's pack. I'll spare the details. I'll just say that everything came apart save the last five segments in Bobby Pettit's vertebrae. It was a sickening sound. The sarge came around to face Pettit, what was left of him.

"Pettit. I met lotsa dumb guys in my time," related the sarge. "Lots of 'em. But you, Pettit, you're in a class by yourself. Because you're the dumbest!"

Pettit stood there on his three feet.

"I'll get the hang of it," he manage to predict.

First day of target practice, six men at a time fired at six targets, prone position exclusively. The sarge passed up and down, examining firing positions.

"Hey, Pettit. Which eye are you lookin' through?"

"I don't know," said Pettit. "The left, I guess."

"Look through the *right*!" bellowed the sarge. "Pettit, you're takin' twenty years offa my life. *Wutsa matter with ya? Ain'tcha got no brains?*"

That was nothing. When, after the men had fired, the targets were rolled in, there was a gay surprise for all. Pettit had fired all his shots at the target of the man on his right.

The sarge almost had an attack of apoplexy. "Pettit," he said, "you got no place in this man's army. *You got six feet. You got six hands. Everybody else only got two!*"

"I'll get the hang of it," said Pettit.

"Don't say that to me again. Or I'll kill ya. I'll akchally kill ya, Pettit. Because I hatecha, Pettit. *You hear me? I hatecha!*"

"Gee," said Pettit. "No kidding?"

"No kidding, brother," said the sarge.

"Wait'll I get the hang of it," said Pettit. "You'll see. No kidding. Boy, I like the Army. Someday I'll be a colonel or something. No kidding."

Naturally I didn't tell my wife that our son, Harry, reminds me of Bob Pettit back in '17. But he does nevertheless. In fact, the boy is even having sergeant trouble at Fort Iroquois. It seems, according to my wife, that Fort Iroquois nurses to its bosom one of the toughest, meanest first sergeants in the country. There is no necessity, declares my wife, in being *mean* to the boys. Not that Harry's complained. He likes the Army, only he just can't seem to please this terrible first sergeant. Just because he hasn't got the hang of it yet.

And the colonel of this regiment. He's no help at all, my wife feels. All he does is walk around and look important. A colonel should *help* the boys, see to it that mean first sergeants don't take advantage of the boys, destroy their spirit. A colonel, my wife feels, should do more than just *walk* around the place.

Well, a few Sundays ago the boys at Fort Iroquois put on their first spring parade. My wife and I were there in the reviewing stand, and with a yelp that nearly took my hat off she picked out our Harry as he marched along.

"He's out of step," I told my wife.

"Oh, don't be that way," said she.

"But he *is* out of step," I said.

The Hang of It

"I suppose that's a *crime*. I suppose he'll be *shot* for that. See! He's in step again. He was only out for a minute."

Then, when the parade was over and the men had been dismissed, First Sergeant Grogan came over to say hello. "How do, Mrs. Pettit."

"How do you do," said my wife, very chilly.

"Think there's hope for our boy, sergeant?" I asked.

"Not a chance," he said. "Not a chance, colonel."

The Heart of a Broken Story

Esquire - September 1941

EVERY DAY Justin Horgenschlag, thirty-dollar-a-week printer's assistant, saw at close quarters approximately sixty women whom he had never seen before. Of these 75,120 women, roughly 25,000 were under thirty years of age and over fifteen years of age. Of the 25,000 only 5,000 weighed between one hundred five and one hundred twenty-five pounds. Of these 5,000 only 1,000 were not ugly. Only 500 were reasonably attractive; only 100 of these were quite attractive; only 25 could have inspired a long, slow whistle. And with only 1 did Horgenschlag fall in love at first sight.

Now, there are two kinds of *femme fatale*. There is the *femme fatale* in every sense of the word, and there is the *femme fatale* who is not a *femme fatale* in every sense of the word.

Her name was Shirley Lester. She was twenty-four years old (eleven years younger than Horgenschlag), was five-foot-four (bringing her head to the level of Horgenschlag's eyes), weighed 117 pounds (light as a feather to carry). Shirley was a stenographer, lived with and supported her mother, Agnes Lester, an old Nelson Eddy fan. In reference to Shirley's looks people often put it this way: "Shirley's as pretty as a picture."

And in the Third Avenue bus early one morning, Horgenschlag stood over Shirley Lester, and was a dead duck. All because Shirley's mouth was open in a peculiar way. Shirley was reading a cosmetic advertisement in the wall panel of the bus: and when Shirley read, Shirley relaxed slightly at the jaw. And in that short moment while Shirley's mouth was open, lips were parted, Shirley was probably the most fatal one in all Manhattan. Horgenschlag was her is a positive cure-all for a gigantic monster of loneliness which had been stalking around his heart since he had come to New York. Oh, the agony of it! The agony of standing over Shirley Lester and not being able to bend down and kiss Shirley's parted lips. The inexpressable agony of it!

That was the beginning of the story I started to write for *Collier's*. I was going to write a lovely tender boy-meets-girl story. What could be finer, I thought. The world needs boy-meets-girl stories. But to write one, unfortunately, the writer must go about the business of having the boy meet the girl. I couldn't do it with this one. Not and have it make sense. I couldn't get Horgenschlag and Shirley together properly. And here are the reasons:

Certainly it was impossible for Horgenschlag to bend over and say in all sincerity:

"I beg your pardon. I love you very much. I'm nuts about you. I *know* it. I could love you all my life. I'm a printer's assistant and I make thirty dollars a week. Gosh, how I love you. Are you busy tonight?"

This Horgenschlag may be a goof, but not *that* big a goof. He may have been born yesterday, but not today. You can't expect *Collier's* readers to swallow that kind of bilge. A nickel's a nickel, after all.

I couldn't, of course, all of a sudden give Horgenschlag a suave serum, mixed from William Powell's old cigarette case and Fred Astaire's old top hat.

"Please don't misunderstand me, Miss. I'm a magazine illustrator. My card. I'd like to sketch you more than I've ever wanted to sketch anyone in my life. Perhaps such an undertaking would be to a mutual advantage. *May* I telephone you this evening, or in the very near fut-ure?"

The Heart of a Broken Story

(Short, debonair laugh.) I hope I don't sound too desperate. (Another one.) I suppose I am, really."

Oh, boy. Those lines delivered with a weary, yet gay, yet reckless smile. If only Horgenschlag had delivered them. Shirley, of course, was an old Nelson Eddy fan herself, and an active member of the Keystone Circulating Library.

Maybe you're beginning to see what I was up against.

True, Horgenschlag might have said the following:

"Excuse me, but aren't you Wilma Pritchard?"

To which Shirley would have replied coldly, and seeking a neutral point on the other side of the bus:

"No."

"That's funny." Horgenschlag could have gone on, "I was willing to swear you were Wilma Pritchard. Uh. You don't by any chance come from Seattle?"

"No."--More ice where that came from.

"Seattle's my home town."

Neutral point.

"Great little town, Seattle. I mean it's really a great little town. I've only been here--I mean New York--four years. I'm a printer's assistant. Justin Horgenschlag is my name."

"I'm *really* not inter-ested."

Oh, Horgenschlag wouldn't have got anywhere with that kind of line. He had neither the looks, personality, or good clothes to gain Shirley's interest under the circumstances. He didn't have a chance. And, as I said before, to write a really good boy-meets-girls story it's wise to have the boy meet the girl.

Maybe Horgenschlag might have fainted, and in doing so grabbed for support: the support being Shirley's ankle. He could have torn the stocking that way, or succeeded in ornamenting it with a fine long run. People would have made room for the stricken Horgenschlag, and he would have got to his feet, mumbling: "I'm all right, thanks," then, "Oh, say! I'm terribly sorry, Miss. I've torn your stocking. You must let me pay for it. I'm short of case right now, but just give me your address."

Shirley wouldn't have given him her address. She just would have become embarrassed and inarticulate. "It's all right," she would have said, wishing Horgenschlag hadn't been born. And besides, the whole idea is illogical. Horgenschlag, a Seattle boy, wouldn't have dreamed of clutching at Shirley's ankle. Not in the Third Avenue Bus.

But what is more logical is the possibility that Horgenschlag might have got desperate. There are still a few men who love desperately. Maybe Horgenschlag was one. He might have snatched Shirley's handbag and run with it toward the rear exit door. Shirley would have screamed. Men would have heard her, and remembered the Alamo or something. Horgenschlag's flight, let's say, is now arrested. The bus is stopped. Patrolman Wilson, who hasn't made a good arrest in a long time, reports on the scene. What's going on here? Officer, this man tried to steal my purse.

Horgenschlag is hauled into court. Shirley, of course, must attend session. They both give their addresses; thereby Horgenschlag is informed of the location of Shirley's divine abode.

Judge Perkins, who can't even get a good, really good cup of coffee in his own *house* sentences Horgenschlag to a year in jail. Shirley bites her lip, but Horgenschlag is marched away.

The Heart of a Broken Story

In prison, Horgenschlag writes the following letter to Shirley Lester:

Dear Miss Lester,

I did not really mean to steal your purse. I just took it because I love you. You see, I only wanted to get to know you. Will you please write me a letter sometime when you get the time? It gets pretty lonely here and I love you very much and maybe even you could come to see me some time, if you get the time.

Your friend,
Justin Horgenschlag

Shirley shows the letter to all her friends. They say, "Ah, it's *cute*, Shirley." Shirley agrees that it's kind of cute in a way. Maybe she'll answer it. "Yes! Answer it. Give'm a break. What've ya got to loose?" So Shirley answers Horgenschlag's letter.

Dear Mr. Horgenschlag,

I received your letter and really feel very sorry about what has happened. Unfortunately there is very little we can do about it at this time, but I do feel abominable concerning the turn of events. However, your sentence is a short one and soon you will be out. The best of luck to you.

Sincerely yours,
Shirley Lester

Dear Miss Lester,

You will never know how cheered up you made me feel when I received your letter. You should not feel abominable at all. It was all my fault for being so crazy so don't feel that way at all. We get movies here once a week and it really is not so bad. I am 31 years of age and come from Seattle. I have been in New York 4 years and think it is a great town, only once in a while you get pretty lonesome. You are the prettiest girl I have ever seen even in Seattle. I wish you would come to see me some Saturday afternoon during visiting hours 2 to 4 and I will pay your train fare.

Your friend,
Justin Horgenschlag

Shirley would have shown this letter, too, to all her friends. But she would not answer this one. Anyone could *see* that this Horgenschlag was a goof. And after all. She *had* answered the first letter. If she an-swered *this* silly letter the thing might drag on for *months* and every-thing. She did all she could do for the man. And what a name. *Horgenschlag*.

Meanwhile, in prison Horgenschlag is having a terrible time, even though they have movies once a week. His cell-mates are Snipe Morgan and Slicer Burke, two boys from the back room, who see in Horgenschlag's face a resemblance to a chap in Chicago who once ratted on them. They are convinced that Ratface Ferrero and Justin Horgenschlag are one and the same person.

"But I'm *not* Ratface Ferrero," Horgenschlag tells them.

"Don't gimme that," says Slicer, knocking Horgenschlag's meager food rations to the floor.

"Bash his head in," says Snipe.

"I tell ya I'm just here because I stole a girl's purse on the Third Avenue Bus," pleads Horgenschlag. "Only I didn't really steal it. I fell in love with her, and it was the only way I could get to know her."

"Don't gimme that," says Slicer.

The Heart of a Broken Story

"Bash his head in," says Snipe.

Then there is the day when seventeen prisoners try to make an es-cape. During play period in the recreation yard, Slicer Burke lures the warden's niece, eight-year-old Lisbeth Sue, into his clutches. He puts his eight-by-twelve hands around the child's waist and holds her up for the warden to see.

"Hey, warden!" yells Slicer. "Open up them gates or it's curtains for the kid!"

"I'm not afraid, Uncle Bert!" calls out Lisbeth Sue.

"Put down that child, Slicer!" commands the warden, with all the impotence at his command.

But Slicer knows he has the warden just where he wants him. Seventeen men and a small blonde child walk out the gates. Sixteen men and a small blonde child walk out safely. A guard in the high tower thinks he sees a wonderful opportunity to shoot Slicer in the head, and thereby destroy the unity of the escaping group. But he misses, and succeeds only in shooting the small man walking nervously behind Slicer, killing him instantly.

Guess who?

And, thus, my plan to write a boy-meets-girl story for *Collier's*, a tender, memorable love story, is thwarted by the death of my hero.

Now, Horgenschlag never would have been among those seventeen desperate men if only he had not been made desperate and panicky by Shirley's failure to answer his second letter. But the fact remains that she did *not* answer his second letter. She never in a hundred years would have answered it. I can't alter facts.

And what a shame. What a pity that Horgenschlag, in prison, was unable to write the following letter to Shirley Lester:

Dear Miss Lester,

I hope a few lines will not annoy or embarrass you. I'm writing, Miss Lester, because I'd like you to know that I am not a common thief. I stole your bag, I want you to know, because I fell in love with you the moment I saw you on the bus. I could think of no way to become acquainted with you except by acting rashly--foolishly, to be accurate. But then, one is a fool when one is in love.

I loved the way your lips were so slightly parted. You represented the answer to everything to me. I haven't been unhappy since I came to New York four years ago, but neither have I been happy. Rather, I can best describe myself as having been one of the thousands of young men in New York who simply exist.

I came to New York from Seattle. I was going to become rich and famous and well-dressed and suave. But in four years I've learned that I am not going to become rich and famous and well-dressed and suave. I'm a good printer's assistant, but that's all I am. One day the printer got sick, and I had to take his place. What a mess I made of things, Miss Lester. No one would take my orders. And I don't blame them. I'm a fool when I give orders. I suppose I'm just one of the millions who was never meant to give orders. But I don't mind anymore. There's a twenty-three-year-old kid my boss just hired. He's only twenty-three, and I am thirty-one and have worked at the same place for four years. But I know that one day he will become head printer, and I will be his assistant. But I don't mind knowing this anymore.

Loving you is the important thing, Miss Lester. There are some people who think love is sex and marriage and six o'clock kisses and children, and perhaps it is, Miss Lester. But do you know what I think? I think love is a touch and yet not a touch.

I suppose it's important to a woman that other people think of her as the wife of a man who is either rich, handsome, witty or popular. I'm not even popular. I'm not even hated. I'm just--I'm just--Justin

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Horgenschlag. I never make people gay, sad, angry or even disgusted. I think people regard me as a nice guy, but that's all.

When I was a child no one pointed me out as being cute or bright or good-looking. If they had to say something they said I had sturdy little legs.

I don't expect an answer to this letter, Miss Lester. I would like an answer more than anything else in the world, but truthfully I don't expect one. I merely wanted you to know the truth. If my love for you has only led me to a new and great sorrow, only I am to blame.

Perhaps one day you will understand and forgive your blundering admirer.

Justin Horgenschlag

Such a letter would be no more likely than the following:

Dear Mr. Horgenschlag,

I got your letter and loved it. I feel guilty and miserable that events have taken the turn they have. If only you had spoken to me instead of taking my purse! But then, I suppose I should have turned the conversational chill on you.

It's lunch hour at the office, and I'm alone here writing you. I felt that I wanted to be alone today at lunch hour. I felt that if I had to go have lunch with the girls at the Automat and they jabbered through the meal as usual, I'd suddenly scream.

I don't care if you're not a success, or that you're not handsome, or rich, or famous or suave. Once upon a time I would have cared. When I was in high school I was always in love with the Joe Glamour boys. Donald Nicolson, the boy who walked in the rain and knew all Shakespeare's sonnets backwards. Bob Lacey, the handsome gink who could shoot a basket from the middle of the floor, with the score tied and the chukker almost over. Harry Miller, who was so shy and had such nice, durable brown eyes.

But that crazy part of my life is over.

The people in your office who giggled when you gave them orders are on my black list. I hate them as I've never hated anybody.

You saw me when I had all my make-up on. Without it, believe me, I'm no raving beauty. Please write me when your allowed to have visitors. I'd like you to take a second look at me. I'd like to be sure that you didn't catch me at my phony best.

Please let me know when I may come to see you.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Lester

But Justin Horgenschlag never got to know Shirley Lester. She got off at Fifth-Sixth Street, and he got off at Thirty-Second Street. That night Shirley Lester went to the movies with Howard Lawrence with whom she was in love. Howard thought Shirley was a darn good sport, but that was as far as it went. And Justin Horgenschlag that night stayed home and listened to the Lux Toilet Soap radio play. He thought about Shirley all night, all the next day, and very often during that month. Then all of a sudden he was introduced to Doris Hillman who was beginning to be afraid she wasn't going to get a husband. And then before Justin Horgenschlag knew it, Doris Hillman and things were filing away Shirley Lester in the back of his mind. And Shirley Lester, the thought of her, was no longer available.

And that's why I never wrote a boy-meets-girl story for *Collier's*. In a boy-meets-girl story the boy should always meet the girl.

The Long Debut of Lois Taggett

Story - September-October 1942

LOIS TAGGETT was graduated from Miss Hascomb's School, standing twenty-sixth in a class of fifty-eight, and the following autumn her parents thought it was time for her to come out, charge out, in what they called Society. So they gave her a five-figure la-de-da Hotel Pierre affair, and save for a few horrible colds and Fred-hasn't-been-well-lately's, most of the preferred trade attended. Lois wore a white dress, an orchid corsage, and a rather lovely, awkward smile. The elderly gentlemen guests said, "She's a Taggett, all right;" the elderly ladies said, "She's a very sweet child;" and the young gentlemen said, "Where's the liquor?"

That winter Lois did her best to swish around Manhattan with the most photogenic of the young men who drank scotch-and-sodas in the God-and-Walter Winchell section of the Stork Club. She didn't do badly. She had a good figure, dressed expensively and in good taste, and was considered Intelligent. That was the first season when Intelligent was the thing to be.

In the spring, Lois' Uncle Roger agreed to give her a job as a receptionist in one of his offices. It was the first big year for debutantes to Do Something. Sally Walker was singing nightly at Alberti's Club; Phyll Mercer was designing clothes or something; Allie Tumbleton was getting that screen test. So Lois took the job as receptionist in Uncle Roger's downtown office. She worked for exactly eleven days, with three afternoons off, when she learned suddenly that Ellie Podds, Vera Gallishaw, and Cookie Benson were going to take a cruise to Rio. The news reached Lois on a Thursday evening. Everybody said it was a perfect *riot* down in Rio. Lois didn't go to work the following morning. She decided instead, while she sat down on the floor painting her toenails red, that most of the men who came into Uncle Roger's downtown office were a bunch of *dopes*.

Lois sailed with the girls, returning to Manhattan early in the fall--still single, six pounds heavier, and off speaking terms with Ellie Podds. The remainder of the year Lois took courses at Columbia, three of them entitled *Dutch and Flemish Painters*, *Technique of the Modern Novel*, and *Everyday Spanish*.

Come springtime again and air-conditioning at the Stork Club, Lois fell in love. He was a tall press agent named Bill Tedderton, with a deep, dirty voice. He certainly wasn't anything to bring home to Mr. and Mrs. Taggett, but Lois figured he certainly was something to bring home. She fell hard, and Bill, who had been around plenty since he'd left Kansas City, trained himself to look deep enough into Lois' eyes to see the door to the family vault. Lois became Mrs. Tedderton, and the Taggetts didn't do very much about it. It wasn't fashionable any longer to make a row if your daughter preferred the iceman to that nice Astorbilt boy. Everybody knew, of course, that press agents were icemen. Same thing.

Lois and Bill took an apartment in the Sutton Place. It was a three-room, kitchenette job, and the closets were big enough to hold Lois' dresses and Bill's wide-shouldered suits.

When her friends asked her if she were happy, Lois replied, "Madly." But she wasn't quite sure if she were madly happy. Bill had the most gorgeous rack of ties; wore such luxurious broadcloth shirts; was so marvelous, so masterful, when he spoke to people over the telephone; had such a fascinating way of hanging up his trousers. And he was so sweet about--well, you know--everything. But...

The Long Debut of Lois Taggett

Then suddenly Lois knew for sure that she was Madly Happy, because one day soon after they were married, Bill fell in love with Lois. Getting up to go to work one morning, he looked over at the other bed and saw Lois as he'd never seen her before. Her face was jammed against the pillow, puffy, sleep-distorted, lip-dry. She never looked worse in her life--and at that instant Bill fell in love with her. He was used to women who wouldn't let him get a good look at their morning faces. He stared at Lois for a long moment, thought about the way she looked as he rode down the elevator; then in the subway he remembered one of the crazy questions Lois had asked him the other night. Bill had to laugh right out loud on the subway.

When he got home that night, Lois was sitting in the Morris chair. Her feet, in red mules, were tucked underneath her. She was just sitting there filing her nails and listening to Sancho's rhumba music over the radio. Seeing her, Bill was never so happy in his life. He wanted to jump in the air. He wanted to grit his teeth, then let out a mad, treble note of ecstasy. But he didn't dare. He would have had trouble accounting for it. He couldn't just say to Lois, "Lois. I love you for the first time. I used to think you were just a nice little drip. I married you for your money but now I don't about it. You're my girl. My sweetheart. My wife. My baby. Oh, Jesus, I'm happy." Of course, he couldn't say that to her; so he just walked over where she sat, very casually. He bent down, kissed her, gently pulling her to her feet. Lois said, "Hey! What's goin' on?" And Bill made her rumba with him around the room.

For fifteen days following Bill's discovery, Lois couldn't even stand at the glove counter at Saks' without whistling *Begin the Beguine* between her teeth. She began to like all her friends. She had a smile for conduct-ors on Fifth Avenue busses; was sorry she didn't have any small change with her when she handed them dollar bills. She took walks to the zoo. She spoke to her mother over the telephone every day. Mother became a Grand Person. Father, Lois noticed, worked too hard. They should both take a vacation. Or at least come to dinner Friday night, and no *arguments*, now.

Sixteen days after Bill fell in love with Lois, something terrible happened. Late on that sixteenth night Bill was sitting in the Morris chair, and Lois was sitting on his lap, her head back on his shoulder. From the radio pealed the sweet blare of Chick West's orchestra. Chick himself, with a mute in his horn, was taking the refrain of that swell oldie, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*.

"Oh, darling," Lois breathed.

"Baby," answered Bill softly.

They came out of a clinch. Lois replaced her head on Bill's big shoulder. Bill picked up his cigarette from the ashtray. But instead of dragging on it, he took it between his fingers, as though it were a pencil, and with it made tiny circles in the air just over the back of Lois' hand.

"Better not," said Lois, with a mock warning. "Burny Burny."

But Bill, as though he hadn't heard, deliberately, yet almost idly, did what he had to do. Lois screamed horribly, wrenched herself to her feet, and ran crazily out of the room.

Bill pounded on the bathroom door. Lois had locked it.

"Lois. Lois, baby. Darling. Honest to God. I didn't know what I was doing. Lois. Darling. Open the door."

Inside the bathroom Lois sat on the edge of the bathtub and stared at the laundry hamper. With her right hand she squeezed the other, the injured one, as though pressure might stop the pain or undo what had been done.

On the other side of the door, Bill kept talking to her with his dry mouth.

"Lois. Lois, Jesus. I tellya I didn't know what I was doing. Lois, for God's sake open the door. Please, for God's sake."

The Long Debut of Lois Taggett

Finally Lois came out and into Bill's arms.

But the same thing happened a week later. Only not with a cigarette. Bill, on a Sunday morning, was teaching Lois how to swing a golf club. Lois wanted to learn to play the game, because everybody said Bill was a crackerjack. They were both in their pajamas and bare feet. It was a helluva lot of fun. Giggles, kisses, guffaws, and twice they both had to sit down, they were laughing so hard.

Then suddenly Bill brought down the head-end of his brassie on Lois' bare foot. Fortunately, his leverage was faulty, because he struck with all his might.

That did it, all right. Lois moved back into her old bedroom in her family's apartment. Her mother bought her new furniture and curtains, and when Lois was able to walk again, her father immediately gave her a check for a thousand dollars. "Buy yourself some dresses," he told her. "Go ahead." So Lois went down to Saks' and Bonwit Teller's and spent the thousand dollars. Then she had a lot of clothes to wear.

New York didn't get much snow that winter, and Central Park never looked right. But the weather was very cold. One morning, looking out her window facing Fifth, Lois saw somebody walking a wire-haired terrier. She thought to herself, "I want a dog." So that afternoon she went to the pet shop and bought herself a three-months-old scotty. She put a bright red collar and leash on it, and brought the whimpering animal home in a cab. "Isn't is *darling*?" she asked Fred, the doorman. Fred patted the dog and said it sure was a cute little fella. "Gus," Lois said happily, "meet Fred. Fred meet Gus." She dragged the dog into the elevator. "In ya go, ya little cutie. *Yes*. You're a little *cutie*. That's what you are. A little *cutie*." Gus stood shivering in the middle of the elevator and wet the floor.

Lois gave him away a few days later. After Gus consistently refused to be housebroken, Lois began to agree with her parents that it was cruel to keep a dog in the city.

The night she gave away Gus, Lois told her parents it was *dumb* to wait till spring to go to Reno. It was better to get it *over* with. So early in January Lois flew West. She lived at a dude ranch just outside of Reno and made the acquaintance of Betty Walker, from Chicago, and Sylvia Haggerty, from Rochester. Betty Walker, whose insight was as penetrating as any rubber knife, told Lois a thing or two about men. Sylvia Haggerty was a quiet dumpy little brunette, and never said much, but she could drink more scotch-and-sodas than any other girl Lois had ever known. When their divorces all came through, Betty Walker gave a party at the Barclay in Reno. The boys from the ranch were invited, and Red, the good-looking one, made a big play for Lois, but in a nice way. "*Keep away from me!*" Lois suddenly screamed at Red. Everybody said Lois a rotten sport. They didn't know she was afraid of tall, good-looking men.

She saw Bill again, of course. About two months after she'd returned from Reno, Bill sat down at her table in the Stork Club.

"Hello, Lois"

"Hello, Bill. I'd rather you didn't sit down."

"I've been up at this psychoanalyst's place. He says I'll be alright."

"I'm glad to hear that. Bill, I'm waiting for somebody. Please leave."

"Will you have lunch with me sometime?" Bill asked.

Bill got up. "Can I call you?" he asked.

"No."

Bill left, and Middie Weaver and Liz Watson sat down. Lois ordered a scotch-and-soda, drank it, and four more like it. When she left the Stork Club she was feeling pretty drunk. She walked and she walked and she walked. Finally she sat down on a bench in front of the zebra's

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cage at the zoo. She sat there till she was sober and her knees had stopped shaking. Then she went home.

Home was a place with parents, news commentators on the radio, and starched maids who were always coming around to your left to deposit a small chilled glass of tomato juice in front of you.

After dinner, when Lois returned from the telephone, Mrs. Taggett looked up from her book, and asked, "Who was it? Carl Curfman, dear?"

"Yes," said Lois, sitting down. "What a dope."

"He's not a dope," contradicted Mrs. Taggett.

Carl Curfman was a thick-ankled, short young man who always wore white socks because colored socks irritated his feet. He was full of information. If you were going to drive to the game on Saturday, Carl would ask what route you were taking. If you said, "I don't know. I guess Route 26," Carl would suggest eagerly that you take Route 7 instead, and he'd take out a notebook and pencil and chart out the whole thing for you. You'd thank him profusely for his trouble, and he'd sort of nod quickly and remind you not for *anything* to turn off at Cleveland Turnpike despite the road signs. You always felt a little sorry for Carl when he put away his notebook and pencil.

Several months after Lois was back from Reno, Carl asked her to marry him. He put it to her in the negative. They had just come from a charity ball at the Waldorf. The battery in Carl's sedan was dead, and he started to get all worked up about it, but Lois said, "Take it easy, Carl. Let's smoke a cigarette first." They sat in the car smoking cigarettes, and it was then that Carl put it to Lois in the negative.

"You wouldn't wanna marry me, would you, Lois?"

Lois had been watching him smoke. He didn't inhale.

"Gee, Carl. You *are* sweet to ask me."

"I'd do my damndest to make you happy, Lois. I mean I'd do my damndest."

"You're very sweet to ask me, Carl," Lois said. "But I just don't wanna think about marriage for a while yet."

"Sure," said Carl quickly.

"Hey," said Lois, "there's a garage on Fiftieth and Third. I'll walk down with you."

One day the following week Lois had lunch at the Stork with Middie Weaver. Middie Weaver served the conversation as nodder and cigarette-ash-tipper. Lois told Middie that at first she had thought Carl was a dope. Well, not exactly a *dope*, but, well, Middie knew what Lois meant. Middie nodded and tipped the ashes of her cigarette. But he *wasn't* a dope. He was just sensitive and shy. And terribly sweet. And terribly intelligent. Did Middie know that Carl really *ran* Curfman and Sons? Yes. He really did. And he was a marvelous dancer, too. And he really had nice hair. And he wasn't really *fat*. He was solid. And he was terribly sweet.

Middie Weaver said, "Well, I always liked Carl. I think he's a grand person."

Lois thought about Middie Weaver on the way home in the cab. Mid-die was swell. Middie really was a swell person. So intelligent. So few people were intelligent, *really* intelligent. Middie was perfect. Lois hoped Bob Walker would marry Middie. She was too good for him. The rat.

Lois and Carl got married in the spring, and less than a month after they were married, Carl stopped wearing white socks. He also stopped wearing a winged collar with his dinner jacket. And he stopped giving people directions to get to Manasquan by avoiding the shore route. If people want to take the shore route, let them *take* it, Lois told Carl. She also told him not to

The Long Debut of Lois Taggett

lend any more money to Bud Masterson. And when Carl danced, would he please take longer steps. If Carl noticed, only short fat men *minced* around the floor. And if Carl put any more of that greasy stuff on his hair, Lois would go mad.

They weren't married less than three months when Lois started going to the movies at eleven o'clock in the morning. She'd sit up in the loges and chain-smoke cigarettes. It was better than sitting in the damned apartment. It was better than going to see her mother. These days her mother had a four-word vocabulary consisting of, "You're too thin, dear." Going to the movies was also better than seeing the girls. As it was, Lois couldn't go anywhere without bumping into one of them. They were all such ninnies.

So Lois started going to the movies at eleven o'clock in the morning. She'd sit through the show and then she'd go to the ladies room and comb her hair and put on fresh make-up. Then she'd look at herself in the mirror, and wonder, "Well. What the hell should I do now?"

Sometimes Lois went to another movie. Sometimes she went shopping, but rarely these days did she see anything she wanted to buy. Sometimes she met Cookie Benson. When Lois came to think of it, Cookie was the only one of her friends who was intelligent, *really* intelligent. Cookie was swell. Swell sense of humor. Lois and Cookie could sit in the Stork Club for hours, telling dirty jokes and criticizing their friends.

Cookie was perfect. Lois wondered why she had never liked Cookie before. A grand, intelligent person like Cookie.

Carl complained frequently to Lois about his feet. One evening when they were sitting at home, Carl took off his shoes and black socks, and examined his bare feet carefully. He discovered Lois staring at him.

"They itch," he said to Lois, laughing. "I just can't wear colored socks."

"It's your imagination," Lois told him.

"My father had the same thing," Carl said. "It's a form of eczema, the doctors say."

Lois tried to make her voice sound casual. "The way you go into such a stew about it, you'd think you had leprosy."

Carl laughed. "No," he said, still laughing, "I can hardly think it's leprosy." He picked up his cigarette from the ashtray.

"Good Lord," said Lois, forcing a little laugh. "Why don't you inhale when you smoke? What possible pleasure can you get out of smoking if you don't inhale?"

Carl laughed again, and examined the end of his cigarette, as though the end of his cigarette might have something to do with his not inhaling.

"I don't know," he said, laughing. "I just never did inhale."

When Lois discovered she was going to have a baby, she stopped going to the movies so much. She begun to meet her mother a great deal for lunch at Schrafft's, where they ate vegetable salads and talked about maternity clothes. Men in busses got up to give Lois their seats. Elevator operators spoke to her with quiet new respect in their nondescript voices. With curiosity, Lois began to peek under the hoods of baby carriages.

Carl always slept heavily, and never heard Lois cry in her sleep.

When the baby was born it was generally spoken of as *darling*. It was a fat little boy with tiny ears and blond hair, and it slobbered sweetly for all those who liked babies to slobber sweetly. Lois loved it. Carl loved it. The in-laws loved it. It was, in short, a most successful production. And as the weeks went by, Lois found she couldn't kiss Thomas Taggett Curfman half enough. She couldn't pat his little bottom enough. She couldn't talk to him enough.

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"Yes. Somebody's gonna get a *bath*. Yes. Somebody I know is gonna get a nice clean *bath*. Bertha, is the water right?"

"Yes. *Somebody's* gonna get a *bath*. Bertha, the water's too hot. I don't *care*, Bertha. It's too hot."

Once Carl finally got home in time to see Tommy get his bath. Lois took her hand out of the scientific bathtub, and pointed wetly at Carl.

"Tommy. Who's that? Who's that big man? Tommy, who's that?"

"He doesn't know me," said Carl, but hopefully.

"That's your *Daddy*. That's your *Daddy*, Tommy."

"He doesn't know me from Adam," said Carl.

"Tommy. Tommy, look where Mommy's pointing. Look at Daddy. Look at the big man. Look at Daddy."

That fall Lois' father gave her a mink coat, and if you had lived near Seventy-Fourth and Fifth, many a Thursday you might have seen Lois in her mint coat, wheeling a big black carriage across the Avenue into the park.

Then finally she made it. And when she did, everybody seemed to know about it. Butchers began to give Lois the best cuts of meat. Cab drivers began to tell her about their kids' whopping cough. Bertha, the maid, began to clean with a wet cloth instead of a duster. Poor Cookie Benson during her crying jags began to telephone Lois from the Stork Club. Women in general began to look more closely at Lois' face than at the clothes. Men in theater-boxes, looking down at the women in the audience, began to single out Lois, if for no other reason than that they liked the way she put on her glasses.

It happened about six months after young Thomas Taggett Curfman tossed peculiarly in his sleep and a fuzzy woolen blanket snuffed out his little life.

The man Lois didn't love was sitting in his chair one evening, staring at a pattern on the rug. Lois had just come in from the bedroom where she had stood for nearly a half-hour, looking out the window. She sat down in the chair opposite Carl. Never in his life had he looked more stupid and gross. But there was something Lois had to say to him. And suddenly it was said.

"Put on your white socks. Go ahead," Lois said quietly. "Put them on, dear."

Personal Notes on an Infantryman

Collier's -December 12, 1942

HE CAME into my Orderly Room wearing a gabardine suit. He was several years past the age--is it about forty?--when American men make living-room announcements to their wives that they're going to gym twice a week--to which their wives reply: "That's nice, dear--will you *please* use the ashtray? That's what it's there for." His coat was open and you could see a fine set of carefully trained beer muscles. His shirt collar was wringing wet. He was out of breath.

He came up to me with all his papers in his hand, and laid them down on my desk.

"Will you look these over?" he said.

I told him I wasn't the recruiting officer. He said, "Oh," and started to pick up his papers, but I took them from him and looked them over.

"This isn't an Induction Station, you know," I said.

"I know. I understand enlistments are taken here now, though."

I nodded. "You realize that if you enlist at this post you'll probably take your basic training here. This is Infantry. We're a little out of fashion. We walk. How are your feet?"

"They're all right."

"You're out of breath," I said.

"But my feet are all right. I can get my wind back. I've quit smoking."

I turned the pages of his application papers. My first sergeant swung his chair around, the better to watch.

"You're a technical foreman in a key war industry," I pointed out to this man, Lawlor.

"Have you stopped to consider that a man your age might be of greatest service to his country if he just stuck to his job?"

"I've found a bright young man with a A-1 mind and a F-4 to take over my job," Lawlor said.

"I should think," I said, lighting a cigarette, "that the man taking your place would require years of training and experience."

"I used to think so myself," Lawlor said.

My first sergeant looked at me, raising one hoary eyebrow.

"You're married and have two sons," I said to Lawlor. "How does your wife feel about your going to war?"

"She's delighted. Didn't you know? All wives are anxious to see their husbands go to war," Lawlor said, smiling peculiarly. "Yes, I have two sons. One is in the Army, one is in the Navy--till he lost an arm at Pearl Harbor. Do you mind if I don't take up any more of your time? Sergeant, do you mind telling me where the recruiting officer is?"

Sergeant Olmstead didn't answer him. I flipped Lawlor's papers across the desk. He picked them up, and waited.

"Down the company street," I said. "Turn left. First building on the right."

"Thanks. Sorry to have bothered you," Lawlor said sarcastically. He left the Orderly Room, mopping the back of his neck with a handkerchief.

I don't think he was out of the Orderly Room five minutes before the phone rang. It was his wife. I explained to her that I was not the recruiting officer and that there was nothing I could do. If he wanted to join the Army and was mentally, physically, and morally fit--then there

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wasn't anything the recruiting officer could do either, except swear him in. I said there was always the possibility that he wouldn't pass the physical exam.

I talked to Mrs. Lawlor for quite a while, even though it wasn't a strictly G.I. phone call. She has the sweetest voice I know. She sounds as though she'd spent most of her life telling little boys where to find the cookies.

I wanted to tell her not to phone me anymore. But I couldn't be unkind to that voice. I never could.

I had to hang up finally. My first sergeant was ready with a short lecture on the importance of getting tough with dames.

I kept an eye on Lawlor all through his basic training. There wasn't any one call-it-by-a-name phase of Army life that knocked him out or even down. He pulled K.P. for a solid week, too, and he was as good a sink admiral as the next one. Nor did he have trouble learning to march, or learning to make up his bunk properly, or learning to sweep out his barrack.

He was a darned good soldier, and I wanted to see him get on the ball.

After his basic, Lawlor was transferred to "F" Company of the First Battalion, commanded by George Eddy, a darn' good man. That was late last spring. Early in summer Eddy's outfit got orders to go across. At the last minute, Eddy dropped Lawlor's name from the shipping list.

Lawlor came to see me about it. He was hurt and just a little bit insubordinate. Twice I had to cut him short.

"Why tell me about it?" I said. "I'm not your C.O."

"You probably had something to do with it. You didn't want me to join up in the first place."

"I had nothing to do with it," I said. And I hadn't. I had never said a word to George Eddy, either pro or con.

Then Lawlor said something to me that sent a terrific thrill up my back. He bent over slightly and leaned across my desk. "I want action," he said. "Can't you understand that? *I want action.*"

I had to avoid his eyes. I don't know quite why. He stood straight up again.

He asked me if his wife had telephoned me again.

I said she hadn't.

"She probably phoned Captain Eddy," Lawlor said bitterly.

"I don't think so," I said.

Lawlor nodded vaguely. Then he saluted me, faced about, and left the Orderly Room. I watched him. He was beginning to wear his uniform. He had dropped about fifteen pounds and his shoulders were back and his stomach, what was left of it, was sucked in. He didn't look bad at all.

Lawlor was transferred again, to Company "L" of the Second Battalion. He made corporal in August, got his buck sergeant stripes early in October. Bud Ginnes was his C.O. and Bud said Lawlor was the best man in his company.

Late in the winter, just about the time I was ordered to take over the basic training school, the Second Battalion was shipped across. I wasn't able to phone Mrs. Lawlor for several days after Lawlor was shipped. Not until his outfit had officially landed abroad. Then I long distanced her.

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She didn't cry. Her voice got very low, though, and I could hardly hear her. I wanted to say just the right thing to her I wanted to bring her wonderful voice up to normal. I thought of alluding to Lawlor as being one of our gallant boys now. But she knew he was labored and phony. I thought of a few other phrases, but they were all on the long-haired side, too.

Then I knew that I couldn't bring her voice up to normal--at least not on such short order. But I could make her happy. I knew that I could make her happy.

"I sent for Pete," I said. "And he was able to go to the boat. Dad started to salute us, but we kissed him good-by. He looked good. He really looked good, Ma."

Pete's my brother. He was an ensign in the Navy.

The Varioni Brothers

The Saturday Evening Post - July 17, 1943

Around Old Chi

WITH GARDENIA PENNY

WHILE Mr. Penny is on his vacation, his column will be written by a number of distinguishing personalities from all walks of life. Today's guest columnist is Mr. Vincent Westmoreland, the well-known pro-ducer, raconteur, and wit. Mr. Westmoreland's opinions do not necessarily reflect those of Mr. Penny or this newspaper.

If, like Aladdin, I had means to be waited on by a sociable genie, I would first demand that he pop Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito into a fair-sized cage, and promptly deposit the menagerie on the front steps of the White House. I should then seriously consider dismissing my accommodating servant, after I had asked his one question - namely: "Where is Sonny Varioni?"

To me, and probably to thousands, the story of the brilliant Varioni Brothers is one of the most tragic and unfinished of this century.

Although the music these golden boys left us is still warm and alive in our hearts, perhaps their story is cold enough to be told to some of the younger readers and retold to the old ones.

I was there on the fatal night their music publisher and friend, Teddy Barto, gave them the handsomest, most ostentatious party of the crazy Twenties. It was in celebration of their fifth year of collaboration and success. The Varioni Brothers' mansion was stuffed with the best shirts of the day. And the most beautiful, most talked about or against, women. The most supercolossal blackest colored boy I have ever seen stood at the front door with a silver plate the size of a manhole cover into which dropped the invitation cards of our then favorite actors, actresses, writers, producers, dancers, men and ladies about town.

It seemed that with success Sonny Varioni had developed quite a taste for gambling. Not with just anybody, but with big shots like the late, little-lamented Buster Hankey. About two weeks before the party, Sonny had lost about forty thousand dollars to Buster in a poker game. Sonny had re-fused to pay, accusing the Buster of dirty-dealing him.

At about four A.M. on that festive, frightful morning there were about two hundred of us jammed fashionably in the crazy, boyish basement where the Varionis wrote all their hits. It was there that the thing happen-ed. If I must have a reason for retelling a tragic story, I shall say with conviction that it is my right, because I honestly believe that I was the only sober individual in that basement.

Enter Rocco, Buster Hankey's newest, most-likely-to-succeed trigger- man. Rocco inquires sweetly of the dizziest blonde - poor thing - points wildly in the direction of the piano. 'Over there, handsome. But what's your hurry? Have a li'l' drink.'

Rocco doesn't have time for a li'l' drink. He elbows his way through the crowd, fires five shots, very fast, into the wrong man's back. Joe Varioni, whom no one had ever heard play piano before, because that was Sonny's affair, dropped dead to the floor. Joe,

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the lyricist, only played the piano when he was tight, and he only got tight once a year, at the great parties Teddy Barto threw for him and Sonny.

Sonny stayed in Chicago for a few weeks, walking around town without a hat, without a necktie, without a decent Christian night of sleep. Then suddenly he disappeared from the Windy City. There is no record of anyone having seen or heard of him since. Yes, I think I should ask my hypothetical genie: "Where is Sonny Varioni?"

Some remote little person somewhere must have the inside dope. As, unfortunately, I am a little on genii, will he or she enlighten a sympathetic admirer, one of thousands?

MY NAME is Sarah Daley Smith. I am one of the remotest little numbers I know. And I have the inside dope on Sonny Varioni. He is in Way-cross, Illinois. He's not very well and he's working day and night typing up the manuscript of a very lovely, wild and possibly great novel. It was written and thrown into a trunk by Joe Varioni. It was written longhand on yellow paper, on lined paper, on crumbled paper, on torn paper. The sheets were not numbered. Whole sentences and even paragraphs were marked out and rewritten on the back of envelopes, on the unused sides of college exam papers, in the margins of railroad timetables. The job of making head and tail, chapter and book, of this wild colossus is an im-measurably enervating one, requiring, one would think, youth and health and ego. Sonny Varioni has none of these. He has a hope for a kind of salvation.

I don't know Mr. Westmoreland, of the guest-columnist Westmore-lands, but I guess I approve of his curiosity. I think he must remember all his old girls by the Varioni Brothers' words and music.

So, if the gentlemen with the drums and bugles are ready, I shall pass among the Westmorelands with the inside dope.

Because the inside dope begins there, I must go back to the high, wide and rotten Twenties. I can offer no important lament or even a convincing shrug for the general bad taste of that era.

I happened to be a sophomore at Waycross College, and I actually wore a yellow slicker with riotously witty sayings pen-and-inked on the back, suggesting liberally that sex was the cat's pajamas, and that we all get behind the ole football team. There were no flies on me.

Joe Varioni taught *English III-A*, from Beowulf through Fielding, as the catalogue put it. He taught it beautifully. All little girls who take long walks in the rain and major in English have had Grendel's bloody arm dragged across their education at least three times, in this school or that. But somehow when Joe talked about Beowulf's silly doings they seemed to have undergone a rewrite job by one of the Brownings.

He was the tallest, thinnest, weariest boy I had ever seen in my life. He was brilliant. He had gorgeous brown eyes, and he had only two suits. He was completely unhappy, and I didn't know why.

If he called for volunteers to come to the blackboard and drop dead for him, I would have won a scholarship. He took me out several times, walking just ahead of my gun. He wasn't much interested in me, but he was terribly short on the right audiences. He sometimes talked about his writing, and he read me some of it. It was part of the novel. He'd been reading some crazy sheets of yellow paper; then all of a sudden he'd cut himself short. "Wait a minute," he'd say. "I changed that." Then he'd fish a couple of envelopes out of his pocket and read from the backs of them. He could cram more writing in less space than anybody I ever knew.

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Suddenly one month he stopped reading to me. He avoided me after classes. I saw him from the library window one afternoon, and I leaned out and hollered to him to wait for me. Miss MacGregor campused me for a week for hollering out the library window. But I didn't care. Joe waited for me.

I asked him how the book was coming.

"I haven't been writing," he said.

"That's terrible. When are you gonna finish it?"

"As soon as I get the chance."

"Chance? What've you been doing nights?"

"I've been working with my brother, nights. He's a songwriter. I do the lyrics for him."

I looked at him with my mouth open. He had just told me that Robert Browning had been hired to play third base for the Cards.

"You're being ridiculous," I said.

"My brother writes wonderful music."

"That's great. That's peachy."

"I'm not going to write lyrics for him all my life," Joe explained. "Just till he clicks. When he clicks I'm through."

"Do you spend all your time nights doing that? Haven't you worked on the novel at all?"

Joe said coldly, "I told you I'm waiting till he clicks. When he clicks I'm through."

"What does he do for a living?" I asked.

"Well, right now he spends most of his time at the piano."

"I get it. Joe Artist doesn't work."

"Do you want to hear one of Sonny's numbers?" Joe asked.

I said no, but he took me in the rec room anyway. Joe sat down at the piano and played the number that was later to be called *I Want to Hear the Music*. It was tremendous, of course. It knocked you out. I dated the time and place, and filed both away for a future sweetness. Joe played it through twice. He played rather nicely. When he was finished, he ran a skinny hand through his black hair. "I'll wait till he clicks," he said. "When he clicks I'm through."

For the Inside Dope Department, Sonny Varioni was handsome, charming, insincere, and bored. He was also a brilliant creative technician at the piano. His fingers were marvelous. I think they were the best of the old 1926 fingers. I think his fingers played with a keyboard so expertly that something new had to come out of the piano. He played hard, full-chord right hand and the fastest, most-satisfying bass I have ever heard, even from colored boys. When he was in the mood to show off for himself, he was the only man I have ever seen throw either arm over the back of his chair and play the bass and the treble with his re-maining hand alone, and you could hardly tell the difference. He was so congenitally conceited that he appeared to be modest. Sonny never asked you if you liked his music. He assumed too confidently that you did.

I'm always willing to acknowledge one virtue in Sonny. While he knew there were Berlins, Carmichails, Kerns, Isham Joneses plugging out tunes comparable in quality with his own, he knew that Joe was in a class strictly by himself among the lyric writers. If Sonny ever took the trouble to brag at all in public, he bragged about Joe.

Sonny would never let me watch him and Joe work together. I don't know what their methods were, except what Joe once told me. Joe told me Sonny would play whatever he had composed through about fifteen times, while he, Joe, would follow his playing with a pad and pencil handy. I think it must have been a pretty cold business.

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I went with them to Chicago the day they sold *I Want to Hear the Music, Mary, Mary*, and *Dirty Peggy*. My uncle was Teddy Barto's lawyer, and I got them in to see Teddy.

When Teddy announced dramatically that he wanted to buy all three of the numbers, Neither of the Varionis went into a soft-shoe routine.

"I want all three," Teddy said again, but more impressively. "I want all three of them songs. You guys got an agent?"

"No," Sonny said, still at the piano.

"You don't need one," Teddy informed.

"I'll publish your stuff and be your agent. Look happy. I'm a very smart man. What have you guys been doing for a living?"

"I teach," Joe said, looking out the window.

"I weave baskets," Sonny said, at the piano.

"You should move into town right away. You should be near the pulse of things. You're two very talented geniuses," Teddy said. "I'm going to give you check on account. You should both move into town right away."

"I don't want to move into Chicago," Joe told him. "It's hard enough to make my first class on time as it is."

Teddy turned to me. "Miss Daley, impress on the boy he should move in town by the pulse of the whole country."

"He's a novelist," I said. "He shouldn't be writing songs."

"So he can write a few novels in town," Teddy said, solving everything. "I like books. Everybody likes books. It improves the mind."

"I'm not moving into Chicago," Joe said, at the window.

Teddy started to say something, but Sonny put a finger to his lips, ordering silence. I hated Sonny for that.

"I'll leave it to you to work out for yourselves in the most advantage to yourselves personally," Teddy said beautifully. "I'm not worried. I'm confident, you might say. We're all adults."

On the train back to Waycross we had the porter put up a table and we played poker. We played for hours. Then all of a sudden I felt something terrible and certain. I put down my cards and walked back to the platform and lighted a cigarette. Sonny came back and bummed a cigarette. He stood over me easily, positively, frighteningly. He was so masterful. He couldn't even stand over you on a platform between cars without being the master of the platform.

"Let him go, Sonny," I begged him.

"You don't even let him play cards his own way."

He wasn't the sort to say "What do you mean?" He knew exactly what I meant, and didn't care if I knew he knew. He just waited easily for me to finish.

"Let him go, Sonny. What do you care? You've got your break. You can get somebody else to write lyrics for you. It's your music that's terrific."

"Joe does the best lyrics in the whole country. Nobody touches him or comes close to it."

"Sonny, he can write," I said. "He can really write. I spoke to Professor Voorhees at college - you've heard of him - and when I told him Joe wasn't writing any more, he just shook his head. He just shook his head, Sonny. That was all."

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Sonny snapped his butt to the platform floor, ground it out with his shoe. "Joe's as bored as I am," he said. "We were born bored. Success is what both of us need. It'll at least demand our interest. It'll bring in money. Even if Joe does write this novel, it may take the public years to pat him on the ego."

"You're wrong. You're so wrong," I said. "Joe's not bored. Joe's just lonely for his own ideals. He has lots of them. You don't have any. You're the only one who's bored, Sonny."

"You certainly have it bad," Sonny said. "And you're wasting your time. Could I interest you in something on my type?"

"I hate you," I said. "All my life I'm going to try to hate your music."

He took my handbag away from me, opened it and took out my cigarettes.

"That," he said, "is impossible."

I went back into the car.

The Varioni Brothers followed up *Dirty Peggy* with *Emmy-Jo*, and before *Emmy-Jo* was cold that wonderful job, *The Sheik of State Street* was dropped on Teddy Barto's new, more expensive desk. After the Sheik they did *Is It All Right if I Cry, Annie?* and after Annie came *Stay a While*. Then came *Frances Was There Too*, then *Weary Street Blues*, then - Oh, I could name them all. I could sing them all. But what's the use?

Right after *Mary, Mary* they moved into Chicago, bought a big house and filled it with poor relations. They kept the basement to themselves. It had a piano, a pool table and a bar. Half the time they slept down there. Almost overnight they were financially able to do almost anything- chucking emeralds at blondes, or what have you. There just suddenly wasn't a grocery clerk in America who could climb a ladder for a can of asparagus without whistling or singing a Varioni Brothers' song, on or off key.

Just after *Is It All Right if I Cry, Annie?* my father became ill, and I had to go to California with him.

"I'm leaving tomorrow with daddy. We're going to California, after all," I told Joe. "Why don't you ride as far as California with me? I'll propose to you in Latvian."

He had taken me to lunch.

"I'll miss you, Sarah."

"Corinne Griffith is going to be on the train. She's pretty."

Joe smiled. He was always a good smiler. "I'll wait for you to come back, Sarah," he said. "I'll be a big boy then."

I reached for his hand across the table, his skinny, wonderful hand.

"Joe, Joe, sweetheart. Did you write Sunday? Did you, Joe? Did you go near the script?"

"I nodded at it very politely." He took his hand away from mine.

"You didn't write at all?"

"We worked. Leave me alone. Leave me alone, Sarah. Let's just eat our shrimp salads and leave each other alone."

"Joe, I love you. I want you to be happy. You're burning yourself out in that terrible basement. I want you to go away and do your novel."

"Sarah, please. Will you keep quiet, absolutely quiet, if I tell you something?"

"Yes."

"We're doing a new number. I've given Sonny my two weeks' notice. Lou Gangin is going to write lyrics for him from now on."

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"Did you tell Sonny that?" I said.

"Of course I told him."

"He doesn't want Lou Gangin. He wants you."

"He wants Gangin," Joe said. "I'm sorry I told you."

"He'll trick you, Joe. He'll trick you into staying," I told him. "Come to California with me. Or just get on the train with me. You can get off where and when you like. You can - "

"Sarah, shut up, please."

While Joe came to the train with me and daddy, I made Professor Voorhees go to see Sonny. I couldn't have seen him myself. I couldn't have stood those cold, bored eyes of his, anticipating all my poor little strategies.

Sonny received Professor Voorhees in the basement. He played the piano the whole time the old man was there.

"Have a seat, professor."

"Thank you. You play well, sir."

"I can't give you too much time, professor. I've got an engagement at eight."

"Very well." The professor got right to the point. "I understand that Joseph is through writing lyrics for you, that a young man named Gangley is going to take his place."

"Gangin," corrected his host. "No. Somebody's been kidding you. Joe writes the best lyrics in the country. Gangin's just one of the boys."

Professor Voorhees said sharply, "Your brother is a poet, Mr. Varioni."

"I thought he was a novelist."

"Let us say he is a writer. A very fine writer. I believe he has genius."

"Like Rudyard Kipling and that crowd, eh?"

"No. Like Joseph Varioni."

Sonny was playing with some minor chords in the bass, running them, striking them solid. The professor listened in spite of himself.

"What makes you so sure," Sonny said. "What makes you so sure he wouldn't plug out words for years and then have a bunch of guys tell him he was also-ran?"

"I think that Joseph is worthy of taking that chance, Mr. Varioni," Professor Voorhees said. "Have you ever read anything your brother has written?"

"He showed me a story once. About some kids coming out of school. I thought it was lousy. Nothing happened."

"Mr. Varioni," said the professor, "you've got to let him go. You have a tremendous influence on him. You must release him."

Sonny stood up suddenly and buttoned the coat of his hundred-and-fifty-dollar suit. "I have to go. I'm sorry, professor."

The professor followed Sonny upstairs. They put on their overcoats. A footman opened the door and they went out. Sonny hailed a cab and offered the professor a lift, which he declined politely.

One last attempt was made. "You're quite determined to burn out your brother's life?" Professor Voorhees asked.

For answer, Sonny dismissed the cab he had hailed. He turned and made his reply, scrupulously for him. "Professor, I want to hear the music. I'm a man who goes to night clubs. I can't stand going into a night club and hearing some little girl sing Lou Gangin's

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words to my music. I'm not Mozart. I don't write symphonies. I write songs. Joe's lyrics are the best- jazz, torch, or rhythm, his are the best. I've known that from the beginning."

Sonny lighted a cigarette, got rid of smoke through thinned lips.

"I'll tell you a secret," he said. "I'm a man who has an awful lot of trouble hearing the music. I need every little help I can get." He nodded good-bye to the professor, stepped off the curb and got into another cab.

Perhaps my sensitivity because has become blunted somewhere along the disposition of a reasonably normal, happy life. For a long time after Joe Varioni's death I tried to stay away from places where jazz was played. Then I suddenly met Douglas Smith at teachers' college, fell in love with him, and we went dancing. And when the orchestra played a Varioni Brothers' number, I treacherously found that I could use Varioni words and music to date and identify my new happiness for future nostalgic purposes. I was that young and that much in love with Douglas. And there was a wonderful, ungeniuslike thing about Douglas - his arms were so ready to be filled with me. I think if ever a lady, in memory of a gentleman, were determined to write an ode to the immortality of love, to make it convincing she would have to remember how the gentleman used to take her face between his hands and how he examined it with at least polite interest. Joe was always too wretched, too thwarted, too claimed by his own unsatisfied genius, to have had either inclination or time to examine, if not my face, my love. As a consequence, my mediocre heart rang out the old, in with the new.

Intermittently through the seventeen years since Joe Varioni's death, I certainly have been aware and close to the tragedy of it. Often painfully so. I sometimes remember whole sentences at a time of the unfinished novel he read to me when I was a sophomore at Waycross. Oddly, I remember them best while I was bathing the children. I don't know why.

As I have already mentioned, Sonny Varioni is now in Waycross. He is living with Douglas and me in our home about a mile from the college. He isn't at all well, and he looks much older than he is.

About three months ago, Professor Voorhees, very old and dear, opened the door of my classroom during one of my lectures, and asked me if I would kindly step outside for a moment. I did so, prepared for some major announcement or admonition. I was horribly late with my mid-term grades again.

"Sarah, dear," he said, "Sonny Varioni is here."

It registered immediately, but I denied it. "No, I don't believe you."

"He's here, my dear. He came into my office about twenty minutes ago."

"What does he want," I asked, just a little shrilly.

"I don't know," the professor said slowly. "I don't really know."

"I don't want to see him. I just don't want to see him, that's all. I'm married. I have two fine children. I don't want anything to do with him."

"Please, Sarah," Professor Voorhees said quietly. "This man is ill. He wants something. We must find out what it is."

I didn't think my voice would work, so I didn't say anything.

"Sarah" - the professor was gentle but firm - "the man in my office is harmless."

"All right," I said.

I followed Professor Voorhees down the corridor. My legs suddenly weren't too sure of themselves. They seemed in the process of dissolving.

He was sitting in one of the worn leather chairs in the professor's office. He stood up when he saw me.

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"Hello, Sarah."

"Hello, Sonny."

He asked me if he could sit down. I said, very quickly, "Yes, please do."

Sonny sat down and Professor Voorhees moved into his place behind the big desk. I sat down, too, and I tried to look unhostile. I wanted to help this man. I think I said something about seventeen years being quite a long time. Sonny made no perfunctory reply. He was staring at the floor.

"What is it you want, Mr. Varioni?" Professor Voorhees asked him deliberately, yet helpfully. "What can we do for you?"

Sonny was a long time making an answer. Finally he said, "I have Joe's trunk with his script in it. I've read it. Most of it's written on the inside of a match folder."

I didn't know what he was getting at, but I knew he needed help.

"I know what you mean," I said. "He didn't care what he wrote on."

"I'd like to put his book together. Kind of type it up. I'd like to have a place to stay while I do it." He didn't look up at either of us.

"It isn't even finished," I said. "Joe didn't even finish it."

"He finished it. He finished it that time you went to California with your father. I never let him put it together."

Professor Voorhees accepted the responsibility of making further comment. He leaned forward over his desk. "It will be a tremendous job," he told Sonny.

"Yes."

"Why do you want to undertake it?"

"Because I hear the music for the first time in my life when I read his book."

He looked up helplessly at both Professor Voorhees and me, as though hoping that neither of us would take advantage of the irony at his expense.

Neither of us did.

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The Saturday Evening Post - February 26, 1944

THERE really isn't much to tell - I mean it wasn't serious or anything, but it was kind of funny at that. I mean because it looked there for a while as though everybody at the plant and Ruthie's mother and all was going to have the laugh on us. They had all kept saying I and Ruthie were too young to get married. Ruthie, she was seventeen, and I was twenty, nearly. That's pretty young, all right, but not if you know what you're doing. I mean not if everything's Jake between she and you. I mean both parties concerned.

Well, like I was saying, Ruthie and I, we never really split up. Not really split up. Not that Ruthie's mother wasn't wishing we did. Mrs. Cropper, she wanted Ruthie to go to college instead of getting married. Ruthie got out of high school when she was fifteen only, and they wouldn't take her at where she wanted to go to till she was eighteen. She wanted to be a doctor. I used to kid her, "Calling Doctor Kildare!" I'd say to her. I got a good sense of humor. Ruthie, she don't. She's more inclined to be serious like.

Well, I really don't know how it all started, but it really got hot one night last month at Jake's Place. Ruthie, she and I were out there. That joint is really class this year. Not so much neon. More bulbs. More parking space. Class. Know what I mean? Ruthie don't like Jake's much.

Well, this night I was telling you about, Jake's was jam-packed when we got there, and we had to wait around for about an hour till we got a table. Ruthie was all for not waiting. No patience. Then finally when we did get a table, she says she don't want a beer. So she just sits there, lighting matches, blowing the out. Driving me nuts.

"What's the matter?" I asked her finally. It got on my nerves after a while.

"Nothing's the matter," Ruthie says. She stops lighting matches, starts looking around the joint, as though she was keeping an eye peeled for somebody special.

"Something's the matter," I said. I know her like a book. I mean I know her like a book.

"Nothing's the matter," she says. "Stop worrying about me. Everything's swell. I'm the happiest girl in the world."

"Cut it out," I said. She was being cynical like. "I just asked you a question, that's all."

"Oh, pardon me," Ruthie said. "And you want an answer. Certainly. Pardon me." She was being very cynical like. I don't like that. It don't bother me, but I don't like it.

I knew what was eating her. I know her inside out, her every mood like. "Okay," I said. "You're sore because we went out tonight. Ruthie, for cryin' out loud, a guy has a right to go out once in a while, doesn't he?"

"Once in a while!" Ruthie says. "I love that. Once in a while. Like seven nights a week, huh, Billy?"

"It hasn't been seven nights a week," I said. And it hadn't! We hadn't come out the night before. I mean we had a beer at Gordon's, but we came right home and all.

"No?" Ruthie said. "Okay. Let's drop it. Let's not discuss it."

I asked her, very quiet like, what was I supposed to do. Sit around home like a dope every night? Stare at the walls? Listen to the baby bawl its head off? I asked her, very quiet like, what she wanted me to do.

"Please don't shout," she says. "I don't want you to do anything."

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"Listen," I said. "I'm paying that crazy Widger dame eighteen bucks just to take care of the kid for a couple hours a night. I did it just so you could take it easy. I thought you'd be tickled to death. You used to like to go out once in while," I said to her.

Then Ruthie says she didn't want me to hire Mrs. Widger in the first place. She said she didn't like her. She said she hated her, in fact. She said she didn't like to see Mrs. Widger even hold the baby. I told her that Mrs. Widger has had plenty of babies on her own, and I guessed she knew pretty good how to hold a kid. Ruthie said when we go out at night Widger just sits in the living room, reading magazines; that she never goes near the baby. I said what did she want her to do-get in the crib with the kid? Ruthie said she didn't want to talk about it any more.

"Ruthie," I said, "what are you trying to do? Make me look like a rat?"

Ruthie, she says, "I'm not trying to make you look like a rat. You're not a rat."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," I said. I can be cynic-like too.

She says, "You're my husband, Billy." She was leaning over the table, crying like-but, holy mackerel, it wasn't my fault!

"You married me," she says, "because you said you loved me. You're supposed to love our baby, too, and take care of it. We're supposed to think about things sometimes, not just go chasing around."

I asked her, very calm like, who said I didn't love the baby.

"Please don't shout," she says. "I'll scream if you shout," she says.

"Nobody said you didn't love it, Billy. But you love it when it's convenient for you or something. When it's having its bath or when it plays with your necktie."

I told her I loved it all the time. And I do! It's a nice kid, a real nice kid.

She says, "Then why aren't we home?"

I told her then. I mean I wasn't afraid to tell her. I told her. "Because," I said, "I wanna have a couple of beers. I want some life. You don't work on a fuselage all day. You don't know what it's like." I mean I told her.

Then she tried to make funny like. "You mean," she says, "I don't slave over a hot fuselage all day?"

I told her it was pretty hot. Then she started lighting matches again, like a kid. I asked her if she didn't get what I meant at all. She said she got what I meant all right, and she said she got what her mother meant, too, when her mother said we were too young to get married. She said she got what a lot of things meant now.

That really got me. I admit it. I'm willing to admit it. Nothing really gets me except when she brings up her mother. I asked Ruthie, very quiet like, what she was talking about. I said, "Just because a guy wants to go out once in a while." Ruthie said if I ever said "once in a while" again, I'd never see her again. She's always taking things the way I don't mean them. I told her that. She said, "C'mon. We're here. Let's dance."

I followed her out to the floor, but just as we got there the orchestra got sneaky on us. They started playing Moonlight Becomes You. It's old now, but it's a swell song. I mean it isn't a bad song. We used to hear it once in a while on the radio in the car or the one at home. Once in a while Ruthie used to sing the words. But it wasn't so hot, hearing it at Jake's that night. It was embarrassing. And they must have played eighty-five choruses of it. I mean they kept playing it. Ruthie danced about ten miles away from me, and we didn't look at each other much. Finally they stopped. Then Ruthie broke away from me like. She walks back to the table, but she don't sit down. She just picks up her coat and beats it. She was crying.

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I paid the check and went out after her as quickly as I could. Boy, it was cold out all of a sudden. I had on my blue suit, but Ruthie, she only had on her yellow dress. That thing wouldn't keep a flea warm. So all I wanted to do was get to the car fast and take off my coat, and maybe put it around her. I mean it was pretty cold.

She was on her side of the car, all doubled up like, and she was crying - noisy, like a kid cries. I put my coat around her and tried to turn her around to look at me, but she wouldn't turn. Boy, that's a lousy feeling when Ruthie does that. I mean that's a lousy feeling. I'd rather be dead.

I asked her around a million times just to look at me once. But she wouldn't do it. She was half on the floor of the car. She told me to go back and drink a couple beers, that she'd wait for me in the car. I told her I didn't want any beer. All I wanted was she should look at me. I told her not to believe her mother, her always saying we were too young and all. I told her her mother was nuts.

Well, like I said, I kept asking her to turn around, sit up like, and look at me, but she wouldn't do it. So finally I started up the car and drove home. She cried all the way, half on the seat, half on the floor, like a kid. But by the time I'd backed the car in the garage, she'd cut it out a little, was sitting up in her seat more. I'll admit it, usually when we drive in the garage at night we neck a little. You know what I mean. It's dark and all, and you get the feeling you're in your own garage and all, and hers too. I mean it's swell sometimes. But we just right out of the car this time. Ruthie, she almost ran upstairs. By the time I was ready to go upstairs I heard the front door slam. That was Mrs. Widger, going. When we come in at night, she breaks about thirty speed records getting out of the house.

When I got upstairs to our room, and had took off my necktie, Ruthie says to me - it made me sore, "I don't suppose you want to take a look at the baby. How do you know? Maybe it grew a mustache or something since the last time you saw it. Or don't you want to see him at all this month?"

I don't like that cynic-like stuff. I said to Ruthie, "Wuddaya mean I don't wanna see him? Naturally, I want to see him," and I went out of the room.

Ruthie, she leaves the light burning in the hall right outside the kid's room, so it's never pitch dark in there. I bent over the crib and looked at the kid. It had its thumb in its mouth. I took it out but the kid put it right back in again, even though it was asleep. I mean being asleep don't stop the kid from thinking. It's smart. I mean it's not dumb or anything. I took its foot in my hand and held it for a while. I like the kid's feet. I mean I just like them. Then I felt Ruthie come in the room and stand behind me. I covered up the kid and walked out. When we got back to our room, I don't know why I said what I did, because the baby really looked good. Healthy. Like Ruthie.

"It doesn't look so hot to me," I told her.

Ruthie said, "What do you mean it doesn't look so hot to you? What's the matter with it?"

"It looks kind of underweight," I said.

"You're underweight in the head," Ruthie said.

I said, very cynic-like, "Thank you. Thank you very much."

Ruthie, she and I didn't talk to each other again till morning.

Ruthie always gets up to make breakfast and drive me to the bus stop. I always wait till I have my shirt and necktie on before I shake her because she's already awake. But that morning I had to shake the stuffin's out of her. It made me kind of sore that she was sleeping so good - well, I mean - because I hadn't slept good - well, at all. I never sleep good when I'm sort of worried. But finally she opened her eyes.

I says to her, "You wanna get up? You wanna get up? You don't have to, you know."

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"I know I don't," she says, cynic-like. But she got up anyway, fixed breakfast and drove me to the bus stop.

We didn't talk at all in the car. I mean we didn't say a word. I just said "So long" to her at the bus stop, then walked quick over to where Bob Moriarty was standing. Then I did something nuts. I slammed Moriarty on the back like he was my long-lost brother - and I can't even stand the guy! He's on fuselages with me, and he always slows down my output. How do you like that?

Boy, I put in a lousy day on the line. I slowed down Moriarty instead of the other way around. He started giving me the razz about it, and I nearly took a poke at him, except that Sidney Hoover was watching. Sidney Hoover's the foreman on fuselages.

Twice during lunch I went in the phone booth, but both times I hung up before I finished dialing our number. I don't know why. I mean, what'd I go in here for in the first place?

That night after work I was supposed to play basketball at the Y, but I only played the first half, then caught the bus. Ruthie wasn't there to meet me, I figured, because she thought I was going to play the whole game. I mean I didn't get sore or anything because she wasn't there. And, anyway, Joe and Rita Santine gave me a lift in their car, so I was all right.

When I got home, what do you think? Figure it out. Well, I'll tell you. Ruthie, she wasn't there. There was just this note on the table in the hall. I brought it in the living room with me. I didn't even take my hat off. And it was a funny thing. My hands were shaking like. I mean they were shaking.

The note, it said:

Billy,

I just don't see any use of our staying together. You don't seem to realize that we are supposed to grow out of certain things. We are supposed to get a new kind of fun. I don't know how to tell you what I mean. Anyway, there is no use hashing over it again, because you know how I feel, and it only makes you angry anyway. Please don't come around to Mother's. If you want to see the baby, please wait a while.

Ruth

Well, I lit a cigarette and sat there for a long time in the chair we bought together at Louis B. Silverman's. That's the best store in town. Class. Then I started reading Ruthie's letter over and over again. Then I memorized it, really memorized it. Then I started to memorize it backwards, like this: *while a wait please baby the see to want you If*. Like that. Crazy. I was crazy. I still hadn't even took off my hat. Then all of a sudden Mrs. Widger, she came in.

She says, "Ruthie told me to fix your dinner. It's ready"

Boy, she was a cold number. How I hated her. I figured she put Ruthie up to leaving me.

"I don't want any dinner," I told her. "Go on home."

"It's a pleasure," she says. An A-No.-1 dame.

In a few minutes Widger slams the door and I'm alone. Boy, am I alone! I keep memorizing Ruthie's letter backwards, then I go out to the kitchen. I made myself a little sandwich, then I opened up our bottle of bourbon and brought it in the living room with me. With a glass. I kept thinking about how drunk Humphrey Bogart got in Casablanca when he was waiting for Ingrid Bergman to show up. Humphrey Bogart had that colored piano player, Sam, with him, and after I had a few drinks I began to make believe Sam was in the room with me. Boy, was I nuts!

"Sam," I said, making believe Sam was around, "play *Moonlight Becomes You* for me."

Then I was Sam too.

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"Ah, ain't gonna play dat numbuh, boss," I said, making believe I was Sam. "That's yours and Ruthie's number." Boy, was I nuts!

"Play it Sam!" I yelled, making believe I was Humphrey Bogart. "Play it, Sam. *While a wait please baby the see to want you If*. Understand me, Sam? Got it?"

I got tired of that crazy stuff and went over to the phone and talked my ear off. "Well, Billy Vullmer! You sure are a stranger! And how's that darling little wife of yours, and that adorable little baby?" Boy, she can really bend an ear, that woman. She said Bud wasn't home. She said, "You know these bachelors." Then she laughed like a dope. I hung up. She was driving me crazy.

Boy, I spent the next four hours sitting in the Louis B. Silverman chair, getting drunk, making believe I was talking to Sam. I kept waiting for Ruthie to come in. Once I got up and went to the front door and yanked it open. Ruthie wasn't there, but I pretended she was. I mean I made believe she was out there.

I yelled, "It's all right! You can come in, Ruthie!"

Finally, I went back inside the house. I felt like crying, only I didn't of course. Then I went over to the phone and called Ruthie's house. The phone rang and rang, till I nearly went crazy, then Mrs. Cropper answered it. Boy, I hate to talk to her on the phone. She said Ruthie was asleep. But she wasn't, because Ruthie got on the phone. Ruthie, she and I chatted for a while like, I sort of asked her to come home. I told her I was home. She said she'd come home. She hung up and I hung up.

In a half-hour I heard her old man's car turn in our driveway, and I went to the window, Ruthie got out of the car, but she stood talking to her old man for an awful long time. Then all of a sudden she turned around and started coming towards the house. Her old man drove off.

Pretty soon she was inside, and she put her arms around me. She was crying to beat the band. I couldn't think of anything to say except "Ruthie, Ruthie." I kept saying that over and over again, like a dope. Then I sat down on the Louis B. Silverman chair - that's really a good chair - and she sat on my lap.

I told her I was sort of afraid she wasn't coming home. She didn't say anything. Her face was on my neck. When her face is on my neck, she never talks.

I says to her, "Where's the baby?" She didn't have it with her and it wasn't upstairs.

Ruthie, she says, "It was asleep. I didn't wanna wake it. Mother'll bring him over tomorrow."

"I was afraid you weren't coming home," I said.

Ruthie said her mother nearly killed her for coming home to see me. I didn't say anything. Then Ruthie said something funny:

"Mother answered the phone wearing her hair net," Ruthie said. "It got me down. I mean when I saw her looking so funny in her hair net again. I knew I wouldn't be any good at home anymore. I mean not any good at their home."

I asked her what she meant, but she said she didn't know what she meant. Funny kid.

It thundered and lighteninged that night real late. I woke up around three o'clock, and Ruthie, she wasn't there next to me. I kind of jumped out of bed sort of fast and walked downstairs. All the lights were on downstairs - all of 'em. Ruthie, she wasn't in the hall closet, she was in the kitchen. She had on her blue pajamas and those wooly slippers - strictly Ruthie - and she was sitting at the kitchen table, reading a magazine; only she wasn't reading it, because she gets to scared to read. You haven't never seen my wife when she's got blue pajamas on or a

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blue dress of a blue bathing suit. I never knew what color stuff a girl had on before I knew Ruthie. But with Ruthie you know she's got something blue on.

Ruthie, she said she only came downstairs because she wanted a glass of milk.

Boy, what a lousy guy I am. You don't understand.

I said to her all of a sudden, just for the heck of it, how I kind of memorized her note backwards. The one she wrote me. I recited the whole thing backwards for her. I said to her, "while a wait please baby the see to want you If." I says to her, "That's it. That's it backwards."

Then - get this. I mean get this. Ruthie she started to cry! Then she said, "I don't care about anything now."

It was a funny thing to say. Ruthie, she says plenty of funny things. Funny kid. It's a good thing I know her inside and out. Sort of.

Then I said sort of, "Wake me when it thunders, Ruthie. Please. It's okay. I mean, wake me when it thunders."

That made her cry harder. Funny kid. But she wakes me now, that's what I mean. It's okay with me. I mean it's okay with me. I mean I don't care if it thunders every night.

Soft-Boiled Sergeant

The Saturday Evening Post - April 15, 1944

JUANITA, she's always dragging me to a million movies, and we see these here shows all about war and stuff. You see a lot of real handsome guys always getting shot pretty neat, right where it don't spoil their looks none, and they always got plenty of time, before they croak, to give their love to some doll back home, with who, in the beginning of the pitcher, they had a real serious misunderstanding about what dress she should ought to wear to the college dance. Or the guy that's croaking nice and slow has got plenty of time to hand over the papers he captured off the enemy general or to explain what the whole pitcher's about in the first place. And meantime, all the other real handsome guys, His buddies, got plenty of time to watch the handsomest guy croak. Then you don't see no more, except you hear some guy with a bugle handy take time off to blow taps. Then you see the dead guy's home town, and around a million people, including the mayor and the dead guy's folks and his doll, and maybe the President, all around the guy's box, making speeches and wearing medals and looking spiffier in mourning duds than most folks so all dolled up for a party.

Juanita, she eats that stuff up. I tell her it sure is a nice way to croak; then she gets real sore and says she's never going to no show with me again; then next week we see the same show all over again, only the war's in Dutch Harbor this time instead of Guadalcanal. Juanita, she went home to San Antonio yesterday to show our kid's hives to her old lady - better than having the old lady jump in on us with eighty-five suitcases. But I told her about Burke just before she left. I wisht I hadn't of. Juanita, she ain't no ordinary dame. If she sees a dead rat laying in the road, she starts smacking you with her fists, like as if it was you that ran over it. So I'm sorry I told her about Burke, sort of. I just figured it'd stop her from making me to all them war movies all the time. But I'm sorry I told her. Juanita, she ain't no ordinary dame. Don't ever marry no ordinary dame. You can buy the ordinary dame a few beers, maybe trip the light fantastict with them, like that, but don't never marry them. Wait for the kind that starts smacking you with their fists when they see a dead rat laying in the road.

If I'm gonna tell *you* about Burke, I gotta go back a long ways, explain a couple of things, like. You ain't been married to me for twelve years and you don't know about Burke from the beginning.

I'm in the Army, see-

That ain't right. I'll start over, like.

You hear guys that come in on the draft kick about the Army, say how they wish they was out of it and back home, eating good chow again, sleeping in good bunks again - stuff like that. They don't mean no harm, but it ain't nice to hear. The chow ain't bad and there ain't nothing wrong with the bunks. When I first come in the Army, I hadn't eat in three days, and where I been sleeping - well, that don't matter.

I met more good guys in the Army than I ever knowed when I was a civilian. And I seen big things in the Army. I been married twelve years now, and I wisht I had a buck for every time I told my wife, Juanita, about something big I seen that's made her say, "That gives me goose pimples, Philly." Juanita, she gets goose pimples when you tell her about something big you seen- Don't marry no dame that don't get goose pimples when you tell her about something big you seen.

Soft-Boiled Sergeant

I come in the Army about four years after the last war ended. They got me down in my service record as being eighteen, but I was only sixteen.

I met Burke the first day I was in. He was a young guy then, maybe twenty-five, twenty-six, but he wasn't the kind of a guy that would of ever looked like a young guy. He was a real ugly guy, and real ugly guys don't never look very young or very old. Burke, he had bushy black hair that stood up like steel wool, like on his head. He had them funny, slopy-like, peewee shoulders, and his head was way too big for them- And he had real Barney Google goo-goo-googly eyes. But it was his voice that was craziest, like. There ain't no other voice like Burke's was. Get this: it was two-toned. Like a fancy whistle. I guess that's part why he never talked much.

But Burke, he could do things You take a real ugly guy, with a two-toned voice, with a head that's too big for their shoulders, with them goo-goo-googly eyes well, that's the kind of a guy that can do things- I've knowed lots of Handsome Harry's that wasn't so bad when the chips was down, but there never was one of them that could do the big things I'm talking about. If a Handsome Harry's hair ain't combed just right, or if he ain't heard from his girl lately, or if somebody ain't watching him at least part of the time, Harry ain't gonna put on such a good show. But a real ugly guy's just got himself from the beginning to the end, and when a guy's just got himself, and nobody's ever watching, some really big things can happen. In my whole life I only knowed one other guy beside Burke that could do the big things I'm talking about, and he was a ugly guy too. He was a little lop-eared tramp with TB on a freight car. He stopped two big gorillas from beating me up when I was thirteen years old - just by insulting them, like. He was like Burke, only not as good. It was part because he had TB and was almost dead that made him good. Burke, he was good when he was healthy like.

First off, maybe you wouldn't think what Burke done for me was the real big stuff. But maybe, too, you was never sixteen years old, like I was, sitting on a G.I. bunk in your long underwear, not knowing nobody, scared of all the big guys that walked up the barracks floor on their way to shave, looking like they was tough, without telling the way real tough guys look. That was a tough outfit, and you could take my word for it. Them boys was nearly all quite tough. I'd like to have a nickel for every shrapnel or mustard-scar that I seen on them boys. It was Capt. Dickie Pennington's old company during the war, and they was all regulars, and they wasn't busted up after the war, and they'd been in every dirty business in France.

So I sat there on my bunk, sixteen years old, in my long underwear, crying my eyes out because I didn't understand nothing, and those big, tough guys kept walking up and down the barracks floor swearing and talking to theirselves easy like. And so I sat there telling, in my long underwear, from five in the afternoon till seven that night. It wasn't that the guys didn't try to snap me out of it. They did. But, like I said, it's only a couple of guys in the world that really know how to do things.

Burke, he was a staff sergeant then, and in them days staffs only talked to other staffs. I mean staff-s except Burke. Because Burke come over to where I was sitting on my bunk, bawling my head off - but quiet like - and he stood over me for around twenty minutes, just watching me like, not saying nothing. Then he went away and come back again. I looked up at him a couple times and figured I seen about the ugliest looking guy I ever seen in my life. Even in uniform Burke was no beaut, but that first time I seen him he had on a fancy store bathrobe, and in the old Army only Burke could get away with that.

For a long time, Burke just stood there over me. Then, sudden like, he took something out of the pocket of his fancy store bathrobe and chucked it on my bunk. It chinked like it had dough

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in it, whatever it was. It was wrapped up in a handkerchief and it was about the size of a kid's fist.

I looked at it, and then up at Burke.

"Untie them ends and open it up," Burke says.

So I opened up the handkerchief. Inside it was a hunk of medals, all pinned together by the ribbons. There was a bunch of them, and they was the best ones. I mean the best ones.

"Put'em on," Burke says, in that cockeyed voice of his.

"What for?" I says.

"Just put'em on," Burke says. "You know what any of them are?"

One of them was loose and I had it in my hand. I knowed what it was all right. It was one of the best ones, all right.

"Sure," I says "I know this one. I knowed a guy that had this one. A cop in Seattle. He give me a handout."

Then I give Burke's whole bunch of medals the once-over. I seen most of them on guys somewheres.

"They all yours?" I says.

"Yeah," says Burke. "What's your name, Mac?"

"Philly," I says, "Philly Burns."

"My name's Burke," he says "Put them medals on, Philly." "On my underwear?" I says.

"Sure," says Burke.

So I done it. I untangled Burke's bunch of medals and pinned every one of them on my G.I. underwear. It was just like I got a order to so it. The googly-eyed guy with the cockeyed voice told me to. So I pinned them on - straight acrost my chest, and some of them right underneath. I didn't even know enough to put them on the left side. Right smack in the middle of my chest I put them. Then I looked down at them, and I remember a big, fat, kid's tear run out of my eye and splashed right on Burke's Crah de Gairry. I looked up at Burke, scared that maybe he'd get sore about it, but he just watched me. Burke, he really knowed how to do big things.

Then, when all Burke's medals was on my chest, I sat up a little off my bunk, and come down hard so that I bounced, and all Burke's medals chimed, like - like church bells, like. I never felt so good. Then I sort of looked up at Burke.

"You never seen Charlie Chaplin?" Burke says.

"I heard of him," I says. "He's in movie pitchers."

"Yeah," Burke says. Then he says, "Get dressed. Put your coat on over your medals."

"Just right over them, like?" I says.

And Burke says, "Sure. Just right over them."

I got up from my bunk with all them medals chiming, and I looked around for my pants. But I says to Burke, "I ain't got one of them passes to get out the gate. The fella in that little house said it wouldn't be wrote out for a couple days yet."

Burke says, "Get dressed, Mac."

So I got dressed and Burke got dressed. Then he went in the orderly room and come out in about two minutes with my name wrote out on a pass. Then we walked into town, me with Burke's medals chiming and clanking around under my blouse, me feeling like a hotshot, happy like. Know what I mean?

I wanted Burke to feel sort of happy like too. He didn't talk much. You couldn't never tell what he was thinking about. I called him "Mister" Burke most of the time. I didn't even know you was supposed to call him sergeant. But thinking it over, most of the time I didn't call him

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nothing; the way it is when you think a guy's really hot - you don't call him nothing, like as if you don't feel you should ought to get too clubby with him.

Burke, he took me to a restaurant. I eat everything like a horse, and Burke paid for the whole thing. He didn't eat nothing much.

I says to him, "You ain't eating nothing."

"I ain't hungry," Burke says. Then he says, "I keep thinking about this girl."

"What girl?" I says.

"This here girl I know," Burke says. "Got red hair. Don't wiggle much when she walks. Just kind of walks straight like."

He didn't make no sense to a sixteen-year old kid.

"She just got married," Burke says. Then he says, "I knowed her first though."

That didn't interest me none, so I goes on feeding my face.

After we eat - or after *I* eat - we went to the show. It was Charlie Chaplin like Burke said.

We went inside and the lights wasn't out yet, and when we was walking down the aisle Burke said "Hello" to somebody. It was a girl with red hair, and she said "Hello" back to Burke, and she was sitting with a fella in civvies. Then me and Burke sat down somewheres. I asked him if that was the redhead he was talking about when we was eating. Burke nodded like, and then the pitcher started.

I jiggled around in my seat the whole show, so's people would hear them medals clanking. Burke, he didn't stay for the whole show. About halfways through the Chaplin pitcher he says to me, "Stay and see it, Mac. I'll be outside."

When I come outside after the show I says to Burke, "What's the matter, Mr. Burke? Don't you like Charlie Chaplin none?" My sides was hurting from laughing at Charlie.

Burke says, "He's all right. Only I don't like no funny looking little guys always get chased by big guys. Never getting no girl, like. For keeps like."

Then me and Burke walked back to camp. You never knowed what kink of sadlike thoughts Burke was thinking while he walked, but all I was thinking was, *Will he want these here medals back right away?* I always have kind of wished that I would of knowed enough that night to say something nice like to Burke. I wisht I'd of told him that he was way better than that there redhead that he knowed first. Maybe not that, but I could of said something. Funny, ain't it? A guy like Burke could live a whole life being a great man, a really great man, and only about twenty or thirty guys, at most, probably knowed about it, and I bet there wasn't one of us that ever kinda tipped him off about it. And never no women. Maybe a coupla ordinary dames, but never the kind that don't wiggle when they walk, the kind that sort of walks straight like. Them kind of girls, the kind Burke really liked, was stopped by his face and that rotten joke of a voice of his. Ain't that nice?

When we got back to the barracks, Burke says, "You want to keep them medals a while, don't you, Mac?"

"Yeah," I says. "Could I?"

"Sure," says Burke. "You can keep'em if you want'em."

"Don't you want'em?" I says.

Burke says, "They don't look so good on me. Good night, Mac." Then he goes inside.

I sure was a kid. I wore them medals of Burke's on my G.I. underwear for three weeks straight. I even wore them when I washed up in the mornings. And none of them tough birds razzed me none. They was Burke's medals I had on. They didn't know what made Burke tick, but about sixty per cent of the guys in that outfit had been in France with Burke. If Burke had give

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me them medals to wear on my G.I.'s it was all right with them. So nobody laughed or give me the razz.

I only took them medals off to give them back to Burke. It was the day he was made first sergeant. He was sitting alone in the orderly room - the guy was always alone - at about half past eight at night. I went over to him and laid his medals down on the desk; they was all pinned together and wrapped in a handkerchief, like when he chunked them on my bunk.

But Burke, he didn't look up. He had a set of kid's crayons on his desk, and he was drawing a pitcher of a girl with red hair. Burke, he could draw real good.

"I don't need them no more," I says to him "Thanks."

"Okay, Mac," Burke says, and he picks up his crayon again. He was drawing the girl's hair. He just let his medals lay there.

I started to take off, but Burke calls me back, "Hey, Mac." He don't stop drawing though. I comes back over to his desk.

"Tell me," Burke says. "Tell me if I'm wrong, like. When you was settin' on your bunk cryin' - "

"I wasn't crying," I says. (What a kid.)

"Okay. When you was settin' on your bunk laughin' your head off, was you thinking that you wanted to be laying on your back in a boxcar on a train that was stopped in a town, with the doors rolled open halfways and the sun in your face?"

"Kind of," I says. "How'd you know?"

"Mac, I ain't in this Army straight out of West Point," Burke says.

I didn't know what West Point was, so I just watched him draw the pitcher of the girl.

"That sure looks like her," I says.

"Yeah, don't it?" says Burke. Then he says, "Good night, Mac."

I started to leave again. Burke calls after me, like, "You're transferrin' out of here tomorrow, Mac. I'm getting you sent to the Air Corps. It's gonna be big stuff."

"Thanks," I says.

Burke, he gives me some last advice just as I goes out the door. "Grow up and don't cut nobody's throat," he says.

I shipped out of that outfit at ten o'clock the next morning, and I never saw Burke again in my whole life. All these years I just never met up with him. I didn't know how to write in them days. I mean I didn't write much in them days. And even if I would of knowed how, Burke wasn't the kind of guy you'd write to. He was too big, like. Too big for me, anyways.

I never even knowed Burke transferred to the Air Corps himself, if I hadn't of got this letter from Frankie Miklos. Frankie, he was at Pearl Harbor. He wrote me this letter. He wanted to tell me about this fella with this crazy voice - a master, Frankie said, with nine hash marks. Named Burke.

Burke, he's dead now. His number come up there at Pearl Harbor. Only it didn't exactly come up like other guy's numbers do. Burke put his own up. Frankie seen Burke put his own number up, and this here is what Frankie wrote me:

The Jap heavy stuff was coming over low, right over the barracks area, and dropping their load. And the light stuff was strafing the whole area. The barracks was no place to be safe like, and Frankie said the guys without no big guns was running and zigzagging for any kind of a halfways decent shelter. Frankie said you couldn't get away from the Zero's. They seemed to be

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hunting special - like for guys that was zigzagging down the streets for shelter- And the bombs kept dropping, too, Frankie said, and you thought you was going nuts.

Frankie and Burke and one other guy made it to the shelter okay. Frankie said that him and Burke was in the shelter for about ten minutes, then three other guys run in.

One of the guys that come in the shelter started telling about what he just seen. He seen three buck privates that just reported to the mess hall for K.P. lock theirselves in the big mess-hall refrigerator, thinking they was safe there.

Frankie said when the guy told that, Burke sudden - like got up and started slapping the guy's face around thirty times, asking him if he was nuts or something, leaving them guys in that there refrigerator. Burke said that was no safe place at all, that if the bombs didn't make no direct hit, the vibration like would kill them buck privates anyhow, on account of the refrigerator being all shut up like.

Then Burke beat it out of the shelter to get them guys out of the refrigerator.

Frankie said he tried to make Burke not go, but Burke started slapping his face real hard too.

Burke, he got them guys out of the refrigerator, but he got gunned by a Zero on the way, and when he finally got them refrigerator doors open and told them kids to get the hell out of there, he give up for good. Frankie said Burke had four holes between his shoulders, close together, like group shots, and Frankie said half of Burke's jaw was shot off.

He died all by himself, and he didn't have no messages to give to no girl or nobody, and there wasn't nobody throwing a big classy funeral for him here in the States, and no hot-shot bugler blowed taps for him.

The only funeral Burke got was when Juanita cried for him when I read her Frankie's letter and when I told her again what I knowed. Juanita she ain't no ordinary dame. Don't never marry no ordinary dame, bud. Get one that'll cry for a Burke.

Last Day of The Last Furlough

The Saturday Evening Post - July 15, 1944

TECHNICAL SERGEANT John F. Gladwaller, Jr., ASN 32325200, had on a pair of gray-flannel slacks, a white shirt with the collar open, Argyle socks, brown brogues and a dark brown hat with a black band. He had his feet up on his desk, a pack of cigarettes within reach, and any minute his mother was coming in with a piece of chocolate cake and a glass of milk.

Books were all over the floor - opened books, closed books, best sellers, worst sellers, classic books, dated books, Christmas-present books, library books, borrowed books.

At the moment, the sergeant was at the studio of Mihailov, the painter, with Anna Karenina and Count Vronsky. A few minutes ago he had stood with Father Zossima and Alyosha Karamazov on the portico below the monastery. An hour ago he had crossed the great sad lawns belonging to Jay Gatsby, born James Gatz. Now the sergeant tried to go through Mihailov's studio quickly, to make time to stop at the corner of Fifth and 46th Street. He and a big cop named Ben Collins were expecting a girl named Edith Dole to drive by... There were so many people the sergeant wanted to see again, so many places worth -

"Here we are!" said his mother, coming in with the cake and milk.

Too late, he thought. *Time's up. Maybe I can take them with me. Sir, I've brought my books. I won't shoot anybody just yet. You fellas go ahead. I'll wait here with the books.*

"Oh, thanks, Mother," he said, coming out of Mihailov's studio. "That looks swell."

His mother set down the tray on his desk. "The milk is ice cold," she said, giving it a build-up, which always amused him. Then she sat down on the foot-stool by his chair, watching her son's face, watching his thin, familiar hand pick up the fork - watching, watching, loving.

He took a bite of the cake and washed it down with milk. It was ice cold. Not bad.

"Not bad," he commented.

"It's been on the ice since this morning," his mother said, happy with the negative compliment. "Dear, what time is the Corfield boy coming?"

"Caulfield. He's not a boy, Mother. He's twenty-nine. I'm going to meet the six-o'clock train. Do we have any gas?"

"No, don't believe so, but your father said to tell you that the coupons are in the compartment. There's enough for six gallons of gas, he said." Mrs. Gladwaller suddenly discovered the condition of the floor. "Babe, you will pick up those books before you go out, won't you?"

"M'm'm," said Babe unenthusiastically, with a mouthful of cake. He swallowed it and took another drink of milk - boy, it was cold. "What time's Mattie get out of school?" he asked.

"About three o'clock, I think. Oh, Babe, please call for her! She'll get such a kick out of it. In your uniform and all."

"Can't wear the uniform," Babe said, munching. "Gonna take the sled."

"The sled?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, goodness gracious! A twenty-four-year-old boy."

Babe stood up, picked up his glass and drank the last of the milk - the stuff was really cold. Then he side-stepped through his books on the floor, like a halfback in pseudo-slow motion, and went to his window. He raised it high.

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"Babe, you'll catch your death of cold."

"Naa."

He scooped up a handful of snow from the sill and packed it into a ball; it was the right kind for packing, not too dry.

"You've been so sweet to Mattie," his mother remarked thoughtfully.

"Good kid," Babe said.

"What did the Corfield boy do before he was in the Army?"

"Caulfield. He directed three radio programs: *I Am Lydia Moore*, *Quest for Life*, and *Marcia Steele, M.D.*"

"I listen to *I Am Lydia Moore* all the time," said Mrs. Gladwaller excitedly. "She's a girl veterinarian."

"He's a writer too."

"Oh, a writer! That's nice for you. Is he awfully sophisticated?"

The snowball in his hands was beginning to drip. Babe tossed it out the window. "He's a fine guy," he said. He has a kid brother in the Army who flunked out of a lot of schools. He talks about him a lot. Always pretending to pass him off as a nutty kid."

"Babe, close the window. Please," Mrs. Gladwaller said.

Babe closed the window and walked over to his closet. He opened it casually. All his suits were hung up, but he couldn't see them because they were enveloped in tar paper. He wondered if he would ever wear them again. *Vanity*, he thought, *thy name is Gladwaller*. All the girls on a million busses, on a million streets, at a million noisy parties, who had never seen him in that white coat Doc Weber and Mrs. Weber brought him from Bermuda. Even Frances had never seen it. He ought to have a chance to come in some room where she was, wearing that white coat. He always felt he looked so homely, that his nose was bigger and longer than ever, when he was around her. But that white coat. He'd have killed her in that white coat.

"I had your white coat cleaned and pressed before I put it away," his mother said, as though reading his thoughts - which irritated him slightly. He put on his navy-blue sleeveless sweater over his shirt, then his suede windbreaker. "Where's the sled, mom?" he asked.

"In the garage, I suppose," his mother said.

Babe walked past where she still sat on the footstool, where she still sat watching, loving. He slapped her gently on the upper arm.

"See ya later. Stay sober," he said.

"Stay sober!"

Late in October you could window-write, and now, before November was through, Valdosta, New York, was white - tun-too-the-window white, take-a-deep-breath white, throw-your-books-in-the-hall-and-get-out-in-it white. But even so, when the school bell rang at three o'clock these afternoons the passionate few - all girls - stayed behind to hear adorable Miss Galtzer read another chapter of *Wuthering Heights*. So Babe sat on the sled, waiting. It was nearly three-thirty. *C'mon out, Mattie*, he thought. *I don't have much time*.

Abruptly, the big exit door swung open and about twelve or fourteen little girls pushed and shoved their way into the open air, chattering, yelling. Babe thought they hardly looked like an intellectual bunch. Maybe they didn't like *Wuthering Heights*. Maybe they were just bucking for rank, polishing apples. Not Mattie though. *I'll bet she's nuts about it*, Babe thought. *I'll bet she wants Cathy to marry Heathcliff instead of Linton*.

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Then he saw Mattie, and she saw him at the same instant. When she saw him, her face lit up like nothing he ever saw before, and it was worth fifty wars. She ran over to him crazily in the knee-deep, virgin snow.

"Babe!" she said. "Gee!"

"Hiya, Mat. Hiya, kid," Babe said low and easy. "I thought maybe you'd like to go for a ride."

"Gee!"

"How was the book?" Babe asked.

"Good! Did you read it?"

"Yep."

"I want Cathy to marry Heathcliff. Not that other droop, Linton. He gives me a royal pain," Mattie said. "Gee! I didn't know you were coming! Did mamma tell you what time I got out?"

"Yes. Get on the sled and I'll give ya a ride."

"No. I'll walk with you."

Babe bent down and picked up the drag rope of the sled; then he walked through the snow toward the street, with Mattie beside him. The other kids, the rest of the *Wuthering Heights* crowd, stared. Babe thought, *This is for me. I'm happier than I've ever been in my life. This is better than my books, this is better than Frances, this is better and bigger than myself. All right. Shoot me, all you sneaking Jap snipers that I've seen in the newsreels. Who cares?*

They were in the street now. Babe took up the slack of the drag rope, attached it out of the way and straddled his sled.

"I'll get on first," he said. He got into position. "Okay. Get on my back, Mat."

"Not down Spring Street," Mattie said nervously. "Not down Spring Street, Babe." If you went down Spring Street you coasted right into Locust, and Locust was all full of cars and trucks.

Only the big, tough, dirty-words boys coasted down Spring. Bobby Earhardt was killed doing it last year, and his father picked him up and Mrs. Earhardt was crying and everything.

Babe aimed the nose of the sled down Spring and got ready. "Get on my back," he instructed Mattie again.

"Not down Spring. I can't go down Spring, Babe. How 'bout Randolph Avenue? Randolph is swell!"

"It's all right. I wouldn't kid you, Mattie. It's all right with me."

Mattie suddenly got on his back, pushing her books under her stomach.

"Ready?" said Babe.

She couldn't answer him.

"You're shaking," Babe said, finally aware.

"No."

"Yes! You're shaking. You don't have to go, Mattie."

"No, I'm not. Honest."

"Yes," said Babe. "You are. You can get up. It's all right. Get up, Mat."

"I'm okay!" Mattie said. "Honest I am, Babe. Honest! Look!"

"No. Get up, honey."

Mattie got up. Babe stood up, too, and banged the snow free from the runners of the sled. "I'll go down Spring with you, Babe. Honest. I'll go down Spring with you," Mattie said anxiously.

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"I know that," said her brother. "I know that." *I'm happier than I ever was*, he thought. "C'mon," he said. "Randolph is just as good. Better." He took her hand.

When Babe and Mattie got home, the door was opened for them by Corp. Vincent Caulfield in uniform. He was a pale young man with large ears and a blanched scar on his neck from a boyhood operation. He had a wonderful smile, which he used infrequently. "How do you do," he said, dead-pan, opening the door. "If you've come to read the gas meter, you two, you've come to the wrong house. We don't use gas. We burn the children for heat. Always have. Good day."

He started to close the door. Babe put his foot in the doorway, which his guest proceeded to kick violently.

"Ow! I thought you were coming on the six o'clock!"

Vincent opened the door. "Come in," he said. "There's a woman here who'll give you both a piece of leaden cake."

"Old Vincent!" Babe said, shaking his hand.

"Who's this?" asked Vincent, looking at Mattie, who looked slightly frightened.

"It's Matilda," he answered himself. "Matilda, there's no use in our waiting to get married. I've loved you ever since that night in Monte Carlo when you put your last diaper on Double-O. This war can't last - "

"Mattie," Babe said, grinning, "this is Vincent Caulfield."

"Hiya," said Mattie, with her mouth open.

Mrs. Gladwaller stood bewildered by the fireplace.

"I have a sister just your age," Vincent told Mattie. "She's not the beauty that you are, but she's probably far brighter."

"What's her grades?" Mattie demanded.

"Thirty in arithmetic, twenty in spelling, fifteen in history and zero in geography. She can't seem to bring her geography grades up with the others," Vincent said.

Babe was very happy, listening to Vincent with Mattie. He'd known that Vincent would be nice with her.

"Those are terrible grades," Mattie said, giggling.

"All right, you're so smart," said Vincent. "If A has three apples, and B leaves at three o'clock, how long will it take C to row five thousand miles upstream, bounded on the north by Chile?...Don't tell her, sergeant. The child must learn to do things by herself."

"C'mon upstairs," Babe said, slapping him on the back. "Hiya, mom! He said your cake was leaden."

"He ate two pieces."

"Where're your bags?" Babe asked his guest.

"Upstairs, the pretties," said Vincent, following Babe up the stairs.

"I understand you're a writer, Vincent!" Mrs. Gladwaller called before they had reached the top.

Vincent leaned over the banister. "No, no. I'm an opera singer, Mrs. Gladwaller. I've brought all my music with me, you'll be glad to hear."

"Are you the guy that's in *I Am Lydia Moore*?" Mattie asked him.

"I am Lydia Moore. I've shaved off my mustache."

"How was New York, Vince?" Babe wanted to know, when they were relaxed in his room and smoking.

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"Why are you in civilian clothes, sergeant?"

"Been indulging in athletics. I went sledding with Mattie. No kidding. How was New York?"

"No more horsecars. They've taken the horsecars off the streets since I enlisted." Vincent picked up a book from the floor and examined the cover. "Books," he said contemptuously. "I used to read 'em all. Standish, Alger, Nick Carter. Book learning never did me no good. Remember that, young feller."

"I will. For the last time, how was New York?"

"No good, sergeant. My brother Holden is missing. The letter came while I was home."

"No, Vincent!" Babe said, taking his feet off the desk.

"Yes," said Vincent. He pretended to look through the pages of the book in his hand. "I used to bump into him at the old Joe College Club on Eighteenth and Third in New York. A beer joint for college kids and prep school kids. I'd go there just looking for him, Christmas and Easter vacations when he was home. I'd drag my date through the joint, looking for him, and I'd find him way in the back. The noisiest, tightest kid in the place. He'd be drinking Scotch and every other kid in the place would be sticking to beer. I'd say to him, 'Are you okay, you moron? Do you wanna go home? Do you need any dough?' And he'd say, 'Naaa. Not me. Not me, Vince. Hiya boy. Hiya. Who's the babe' And I'd leave him there, but I'd worry about him because I remembered all the crazy, lost summertimes when the nut used to leave his trunks in a wet lump at the foot of the staircase instead of putting them on the line. I used to pick them up because he was me all over again." Vincent closed the book he was pretending to look through. With a circuslike flourish he took a nail file from his blouse pocket and started filing his nails. "Does your father send his guests away from the table if their nails aren't tidy?"

"Yes."

"What does he teach? You told me, but I forgot."

"Biology...How old was he, Vincent?"

"Twenty," Vincent said.

"Nine years younger than you," Babe calculated inanely. "Do your folks - I mean do your folks know you're going overseas next week?"

"No," said Vincent. "Yours?"

"No. I guess I'll have to tell them before the train leaves in the morning. I don't know how to tell mother. Her eyes fill up if somebody even mentions the word 'gun.'"

"Have you had fun, Babe?" Vincent asked seriously.

"Yes, a lot," Babe answered. "...The cigarettes are behind you."

Vincent reached for them. "Seen a lot of Frances?" he asked.

"Yes. She's wonderful, Vince. The folks don't like her, but she's wonderful for me."

"Maybe you should have married her," Vincent said. Then, sharply, "He wasn't even twenty, Babe. Not till next month. I want to kill so badly I can't sit still. Isn't that funny? I'm notoriously yellow. All my life I've even avoided fist fights, always getting out of them by talking fast. Now I want to shoot it out with people. What do you think of that?"

Babe said nothing for a minute. Then, "Did you have a good time - I mean till that letter came?"

"No. I haven't had a good time since I was twenty-five. I should have got married when I was twenty-five. I'm too old to make conversation at bars or neck in taxicabs with new girls."

"Did you see Helen at all?" Babe asked.

"No. I understand she and the gentleman she married are going to have a little stranger."

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"Nice," said Babe dryly.

Vincent smiled. "It's good to see you, Babe. Thanks for asking me. G.I.'s - especially G.I.'s who are friends - belong together these days. It's no good being with civilians anymore. They don't know what we know and we're no longer used to what they know. It doesn't work out so hot."

Babe nodded and thoughtfully took a drag from his cigarette.

"I never really knew anything about friendship before I was in the Army. Did you, Vince?"

"Not a thing. It's the best thing there is. Just about."

Mrs. Gladwaller's voice shrilled up the stairs and into the room, "Babe! Your father's home! Dinner!"

The two soldiers stood up.

When the meal was over, Professor Gladwaller held forth at the dinner table. He had been in the "last one" and he was acquainting Vincent with some of the trials the men in the "last one" had undergone. Vincent, the son of an actor, listened with the competent expression of a good player on stage with the star. Babe sat back in his seat, staring at the glow of his cigarette, occasionally lifting his cup of coffee. Mrs. Gladwaller watched Babe, not listening to her husband, searching out her son's face, remembering it when it was round and pink, remembering the summer when it had started to get long and dark and intense. It was the best face, she thought. It wasn't handsome like his father's, but it was the best face in the family. Mattie was under the table, untying Vincent's shoes. He was holding his feet still, letting her, pretending not to notice.

"Cockroaches," said Professor Gladwaller impressively. "Everywhere you looked, cockroaches."

"Please, Jack," said Mrs. Gladwaller absently. "At the table."

"Everywhere you looked," her husband repeated. "Couldn't get rid of 'em."

"They must have been a nuisance," Vincent said.

Annoyed that Vincent had to make a series of perfunctory remarks to humor his father, Babe suddenly said, "Daddy, I don't mean to sound pontifical, but sometimes you talk about the last war - all you fellas do - as though it had been some kind of rugged, sordid game by which society of your day weeded out the men from the boys. I don't mean to be tiresome, but you men from the last war, you all agree that war is hell, but - I don't know - you all seem to think yourselves a little superior for having been participants in it. It seems to me that men in Germany who were in the last one probably talked the same way, or thought the same way, and when Hitler provoked this one, the younger generation in Germany were ready to prove themselves as good or better than their fathers." Babe paused, self-consciously. "I believe in this war. If I didn't, I would have gone to a conscientious objectors' camp and swung an ax for the duration. I believe in killing Nazis and Fascists and Japs, because there's no other way that I know of. But I believe, as I've never believed in anything else before, that it's the moral duty of all the men who have fought and will fight in this war to keep our mouths shut, once it's over, never again to mention it in any way. It's time we let the dead die in vain. It's never worked the other way, God knows." Babe clenched his left hand under the table. "But if we come back, if German men come back, if British men come back, and Japs, and French, and all the other men, all of us talking, writing, painting, making movies of heroism and cockroaches and foxholes and blood, then future generations will always be doomed to future Hitlers. It's never occurred to boys to have contempt for wars, to point to soldiers' pictures in history books, laughing at them. If German boys had

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learned to be contemptuous of violence, Hitler would have had to take up knitting to keep his ego warm."

Babe stopped talking, afraid that he had made a terrible fool of himself in front of his father and Vincent. His father and Vincent made no comment. Mattie suddenly came up from under the table, wriggled onto her chair, in cahoots with herself. Vincent moved his feet, looking at her accusingly. The laces of one shoe were tied to the laces of the other.

"You think I'm talking through my hat, Vincent?" Babe asked, rather shyly.

"Nope. But I think you ask too much of human nature."

Professor Gladwaller grinned. "I didn't mean to romanticize my cockroaches," he said.

He laughed and the others laughed with him, except Babe, who resented slightly that what he felt so deeply could be reduced to a humor.

Vincent looked at him, understanding that, liking his friend immensely.

"What I really want to know," Vincent said, "is who do I have a date with tonight. Whom."

"Jackie Benson," Babe answered.

"Oh, she's a lovely girl, Vincent," Mrs. Gladwaller said.

"The way you say it, Mrs. Gladwaller, I'm sure she's as homely as sin,"

Vincent said.

"No, she's lovely.... Isn't she, Babe?"

Babe nodded, still thinking of what he had said. He felt immature and a complete fool. He had been windy and trite.

"Oh, I remember the name now," Vincent recalled. "Isn't she one of your old flames?"

"Babe went with her for two years," Mrs. Gladwaller said fondly, possessively. "She's a grand girl. You'll love her, Vincent."

"That'll be nice. I haven't been in love this week.... Who are you taking, Vincent, as if I didn't know."

Mrs. Gladwaller laughed and stood up.

The others stood up too.

"Somebody has tied my shoelaces together," Vincent announced. "Mrs. Gladwaller. At your age."

Mattie nearly had a fit. She slammed Vincent on the back, laughing till she was almost hysterical. Vincent watched her, dead-pan, and Babe came around the table, smiling again, picked up his sister and sat her high on his shoulder. He took off Mattie's shoes with his right hand and gave them to Vincent, who solemnly opened the side flaps of his blouse and put the shoes in his pockets. Mattie howled with laughter, and her brother set her down and walked into the living room.

He went to the window where his father was standing, and put a hand on his shoulder. "It's snowing again," he said to him.

Late at night, Babe couldn't sleep. He tossed and twisted in the dark, then suddenly relaxed, lying on his back. He had known how Vincent would react to Frances, but he had hoped that Vincent wouldn't say how he felt. What was the good of telling a guy what he knew anyway? But Vincent had said it. He had said it not thirty minutes ago, in this very room. "Boy, use your head," he had said. "Jackie is twice the girl Frances is. She runs rings around her. She's better-looking than Frances, she's warmer, she's smarter; she'll give you ten times the understanding that Frances would ever give you. Frances will give you nothing. And if ever a guy needed understanding, it's you, brother."

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Brother. The "brother" had irritated Babe as much as anything. Even from Vincent.

He doesn't know, thought Babe, lying in the dark. He doesn't know what Frances does to me, what she's always done to me. I tell strangers about her. Coming home on the train, I told a strange G.I. about her. I've always done that. The more unrequited my love for her becomes, the longer I love her, the oftener I whip out my dumb heart like crazy X-ray pictures, the greater urge I have to trace the bruises: "Look, stranger, here is where I was seventeen and borrowed Joe Mackay's Ford and drove her up to Lake Womo for the day....Here, right here, is where she said what she said about big elephants and little elephants....Here, over here, is where I let her cheat Bunny Haggerty at gin rummy at Rye Beach; there was a heart in her diamond run, and she knew it....Here, ah, here, is where she yelled 'Babe!' when she saw me serve an ace to Bobby Teemers. I had to serve an ace to hear it, but when I heard it my heart - you can see it right here - flopped over, and it's never been the same since....And here - I hate it here - here is where I was twenty-one and I saw her in one of the booths at the drugstore with Waddell, and she was sliding her fingers back and forth through the knuckle grooves of his hand." He doesn't know what Frances does to me, Babe thought. She makes me miserable, she makes me feel rotten, she doesn't understand me - nearly all of the time. But some of the time, some of the time, she's the most wonderful girl in the world, and that's something nobody else is. Jackie never makes me miserable, but Jackie never really makes me anything. Jackie answers my letters the day she gets them. Frances takes anywhere from two weeks to two months, and sometimes never, and when she does, she never writes what I want to read. But I read her letters a hundred times and I only read Jackie's once. When I just see the handwriting on the envelope of Frances' letters - the silly, affected handwriting - I'm the happiest guy in the world.

I've been this way for seven years, Vincent. There are things you don't know. There are things you don't know, brother.

Babe rolled over on his left side and tried to sleep. He lay on his left side for ten minutes, then he rolled over on his right side. That was no good either. He got up. He walked around his room in the dark, tripped over a book, but finally found a cigarette and a match. He lighted up, inhaled till it almost hurt, and as he exhaled he knew there was something he wanted to tell Mattie. But what? He sat down on the edge of his bed and thought it out before he put on his robe.

"Mattie," he said silently to no one in the room, "You're a little girl. But nobody stays a little girl or a little boy long - take me, for instance. All of a sudden little girls wear lipstick, all of a sudden little boys shave and smoke. So it's a quick business, being a kid. Today you're ten years old, running to meet me in the snow, ready, so ready, to coast down Spring Street with me; tomorrow you'll be twenty, with guys sitting in the living room waiting to take you out. All of a sudden you'll have to tip porters, you'll worry about expensive clothes, meet girls for lunch, wonder why you can't find a guy who's right for you. And that's all as it should be. But my point, Mattie - if I have a point, Mattie - is this: kind of try to live up to the best that's in you. If you give your word to people, let them know that they're getting the word of the best. If you room with some dopey girl at college, try to make her less dopey. If you're standing outside a theater and some old gal comes up selling gum, give her a buck if you're got a buck - but only if you can do it without patronizing her. That's the trick, baby. I could tell you a lot, Mat, but I wouldn't be sure that I'm right. You're a little girl, but you understand me. You're going to be smart when you grow up. But if you can't be smart and a swell girl, too, then I don't want to see you grow up. Be a swell girl, Mat."

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Babe stopped talking to no one in the room. He suddenly wanted to tell Mattie herself. He got up from the edge of his bed, put on his robe, sniped his cigarette in his ashtray and closed the door of the room behind him.

There was a hall light burning outside Mattie's room, and when Babe opened the door, the room was adequately lighted. He went over to her bed and sat on the edge of it. Her arm was outside the cover, and he rocked it back and forth gently, but strongly enough to wake her. She opened her eyes, startled, but the light in the room wasn't strong enough to hurt.

"Babe," she said.

"Hello, Mat," Babe said awkwardly. "What are ya doing?"

"Sleeping," said Mattie logically.

"I just wanted to talk to you," Babe said.

"What, Babe?"

"I just wanted to talk to you. I wanted to tell you to be a good girl."

"I will, Babe." She was awake now, listening to him.

"Good," said Babe heavily. "Okay. Go back to sleep."

He stood up, started to leave the room.

"Babe!"

"Sh-h-h!"

"You're going to war. I saw you. I saw you kick Vincent under the table once. When I was tying his shoelaces. I saw you."

He went over to her and sat down on the edge of the bed again, his face serious. "Mattie, don't say anything to Mother," he told her.

"Babe, don't you get hurt! Don't you get hurt!"

"No. I won't, Mattie. I won't," Babe promised. "Mattie, listen. You mustn't tell Mother. Maybe I'll have a chance to tell her at the train. But don't you tell her, Mat."

"I won't. Babe! Don't you get hurt!"

"I won't, Mattie. I swear I won't. I'm lucky," Babe said. He bent over and kissed her good night. "Go back to sleep," he told her. And he left the room.

He went back to his own room, turned on his lights. Then he went to his window and stood there, smoking another cigarette. It was snowing hard again, big flakes that you couldn't really see till they popped big and wet against the windowpane. But the flakes would get drier before the night was over, and by morning the snow would be deep and good and fresh all over Valdosta.

This is my home, Babe thought. This is where I was a boy. This is where Mattie is growing up. This is where Mother used to play the piano. This is where Dad dubbed his tee shots. This is where Frances lives and brings me happiness in her way. But this is where Mattie is sleeping. No enemy is banging on our door, waking her up, frightening her. But it could happen if I don't go out and meet him with my gun. And I will, and I'll kill him. I'd like to come back too. It would be swell to come back. It would be -

Babe turned, wondering who it was.

"Come in," he said.

His mother came in, in her dressing gown. She came over to him, and he put his arm around her.

"Well, Mrs. Gladwaller," he said, pleased, "The etching department is right over -"

"Babe," his mother said, "You're going over, aren't you?"

Babe said, "What makes you say that?"

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"I can tell."

"Old Hawkshaw," Babe said, trying to be casual.

"I'm not worried," his mother said - calmly - which amazed Babe. "You'll do your job and you'll come back. I have a feeling."

"Do you, Mother?"

"Yes, I do, Babe."

"Good."

His mother kissed him and started to leave, turning at the door. "There's some cold chicken in the icebox. Why don't you wake Vincent, and you two go down to the kitchen?"

"Maybe I will," Babe said happily.

Once A Week Won't Kill You

Story - November-December 1944

HE HAD a cigarette in his mouth while he packed, and his face squinted to avoid smoke in the eyes; so there was no way of telling by his expression if he was bored or apprehensive, annoyed or resigned. The young woman sitting in the big man's chair, looking like a guest, had her pretty face caught in a blotch of early morning sunshine; it did her no harm. But her arms were probably the best of her. They were brown and round and good.

"Sweetie," she said, "I don't see why Billy couldn't be doing all that. I mean."

"What?" said the young man. He had a thick, chain-smoker's voice.

"I mean I don't see why Billy couldn't be doing all that."

"He's too old," he answered. "How 'bout turning on the radio. There might be some canned music on at this time. Try 1010."

The young woman reached behind her, using the hand with the gold band wedding ring and on the little finger beside it the incredible emerald; she opened some white compartment doors, snapped something, turned something. She sat back and waited, and suddenly, without any pretext, she yawned. The young man glanced at her.

"What a *horrible* time to start, I mean," she said.

"I'll tell them," said the young man, examining a stack of folded handkerchiefs. "My wife says it's a horrible time to start out."

"Sweetie, I *am* going to miss you horribly."

"I'll miss you, too. I have more white handkerchiefs than this."

"I mean, I *will*," she said. It's all so *stinking*. I mean. And all"

"Well, that's that," said the young man, closing the valise. He lighted a cigarette, looked at the bed, and dropped himself on it....

Just as he stretched himself out the tubes of the radio were warmed, and a Sousa march, featuring what seemed to be an unlimited fife section, triumphed voluminously into the room. His wife swung back one of her marvelous arms and put a stop to it.

"There might have been something else on."

"Not at this *crazy* time."

The young man blew a faulty smoke ring at the ceiling.

"You didn't have to get up," he told her.

"I *wanted* to."

It had been three years and she had never stopped talking to him in italics.

"Not get *up*!" she said.

"Try 570," he said. "There might be something there."

His wife tried the radio again, and they both waited, he closing his eyes. In a moment some reliable jazz came through.

"Do you have enough *time* to lay down like that? I mean."

"To lie down like that--yes. It's early."

His wife suddenly seemed to be struck with a rather serious conjecture. "I *hope* they put you in the Calvary. The Calvary's lovely," she said. "I'm mad about those little sword do-hickies they wear on their collars. And you *love* to *ride* and all."

Once A Week Won't Kill You

"The Calvary," said the young man, with his eyes shut. "There's not much chance of that stuff. Everybody's going to the Infantry, these days."

"Horrible, Sweetie, I *wish* you'd phone that man with the thing on his face. The Colonel. The one at Phyll and Kenny's last week. In Intelligence and all. I mean *you* speak French and *German* and all. He'd certainly get you at *least* a *commission*. I mean you know how *miserable* you'll be just being a private or something. I mean you even hate to *talk* to people and everything."

"Please," he said. "Keep quiet about that. I told you about that. That commission business."

"Well, I hope at *least* they send you to *London*. I mean where there's some *civilized* people. Do you have Billy's APO number?"

"Yes," he lied.

His wife was making another apparently grave conjecture. "I'd *love* some material. Some tweed. *Anything*." Then, almost instantly, she yawned, and said the wrong thing: "Did you say good-by to your aunt?"

Her husband opened his eyes, sat up rather sharply, and swung his feet over to the floor. "Virginia. Listen. I didn't get a chance to finish last night," he said. "I want you to take her to the movies once a week."

"The movies?"

"It won't kill you," he said. "Once a week won't kill you."

"No, of *course* not, Sweetie, but--"

"No buts," he said. "Once a week won't kill you."

"Of *course* I'll take her, you *crazy*. I only meant--"

"It isn't too much to ask. She isn't young or anything any more."

"But Sweetie, I mean she's getting *worse* again. I mean she's so *batty*, she isn't even *funny*. I mean *you're* not in the *house* with her all day."

"Neither are you," he said. "And besides, she doesn't ever leave her rooms unless I take out somewhere or something." He leaned closer to her, almost sitting off the edge of the bed. "Virginia, once a week won't kill you. I'm not kidding."

"Of *course*, Sweetie. If that's what you *want*. I mean."

The young man stood up suddenly.

"Will you tell cook I'm ready for breakfast?" he asked, starting to leave for somewhere.

"Give us a teeny *kiss* first," she said. "You ole soldier boy."

He bent over and kissed her wonderful mouth and left the room.

He climbed a flight of wide, thickly carpeted steps, and at the top landing turned to his left. He rapped twice at the second door, on the outside of which was tacked a white, formal card from the old Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York: *Please Do Not Disturb*. There was a faded notation in ink, written in the margin of the card:

Going to Liberty Bond Rally. Be back. Meet Tom for me in lobby at six. His left shoulder is higher than his right and he smokes a darling little pipe. Love, Me

The note was written to the young man's mother, and he had read it when he was a small boy, and a hundred times since, and he read it now: in March, 1944.

"Come in, come in!" called a busy voice. And the young man entered.

By the window, a very nice-looking woman in her early fifties sat at a fold-leg card table. She wore a charming beige morning gown, and on her feet a pair of extremely dirty white gym shoes. "Well, Dickie Camson," she said. "How did you ever get up so early, you lazy boy?"

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"One of those things," said the young man, smiling easily. He kissed her on the cheek, and with one hand on the back of her chair casually examined the huge leather-bound book opened before her. "How's the collection coming?" he asked.

"Lovely. Simply lovely. *This* book--you haven't seen it, you terrible boy--is brand new. Billy and Cook are going to save me all theirs, and you can save me all *yours*."

"Just cancelled American two-cent stamps, eh?" said the young man.

"Quite an idea." He looked around the room. "How's the radio going?" It was tuned to the same station he had had on downstairs.

"Lovely. I took the exercises this morning."

"Now, Aunt Rena, I asked you to stop taking those crazy exercises. I mean you'll strain yourself. I mean there's no sense to it."

"I like them," said his aunt firmly, turning the page in her album. "I like the music they play with them. All the old tunes. And it certainly doesn't seem fair to listen to the music and not take the exercises."

"It is fair. Now please cut it out. A little less integrity," her nephew said. He walked around the room a bit, then sat down heavily on the window seat. He looked out across the park, searching between the trees for the way to tell her he was leaving. He had wanted her to be the one woman in 1944 who did not have someone's hourglass to watch. Now he knew he had to give her his. A gift to the woman in the dirty white gym shoes. The woman with the cancelled American two-cent stamp collection. The woman who was his mother's sister, who had written notes to her in the margins of old Waldorf *Please Do Not Disturb* cards....Must she be told? Must she have his absurd, shiny little hourglass to watch?

"You look like your mother when you do that with your forehead. Yes. Just like her. Do you remember her at all, Richard?"

"Yes." He took his time. "She never used to walk. She always ran, and then she'd stop short in a room. And she always used to whistle through her teeth when she was drawing the blinds in my room. The same tune most of the time. It was always with me when I was a boy, but I forgot it as I grew older. Then in college--I had a roommate from Memphis, and he was playing some old phonographs some afternoon, some Bessie Smiths, some Tea Gardens, and one of the numbers nearly knocked me out. It was the tune Mother used to whistle through her teeth, all right. It was called *I Can't Behave On Sundays 'Cause I'm Bad Seven Days a Week*. A guy named Altrevi stepped on it when he was tight later on in the term, and I've never heard it since." He stopped. "That's about all I remember. Just dumb stuff."

"Do you remember how she looked?"

"No."

"She was quite a package." His aunt placed her chin in the cup of one of her thin, elegant hands. "Your father couldn't sit still, like a human being, in a room if your mother had left it. He'd just nod idiotically when someone talked to him, keeping those peculiar little eyes of his on the door she'd left by. He was a strange, rather rude little man. He did nothing with interest except make money and stare at your mother. And take your mother sailing in that weird boat he bought. He used to wear a funny little English sailor hat. He said it was his father's. Your mother used to hide it on the days she had to go sailing."

"It was all they found, wasn't it?" asked the young man. "That hat."

But his aunt's glance had fallen on her album page.

"Oh, here's a *beauty*," she said, and she held one of her stamps up to the daylight. "He has such a strong, bashed-nose face. Washington."

Once A Week Won't Kill You

The young man got up from the window seat. "Virginia told Cook to fix breakfast. I'd better go downstairs," he said. But instead of leaving he walked over to his aunt's card table. "Aunt Rena," he said, "give me your attention a minute."

His aunt's intelligent face turned up to him.

"Aunt--Uh--There's a war on. Uh--I mean you've seen it on the newsreels. I mean you've heard it on the radio and all, haven't you?"

"Certainly," she snorted.

"Well, I'm going. I have to go. I'm leaving this morning."

"I knew you'd have to," said his aunt, without panic, without bitter-sentimental reference to "the last one." She was wonderful, he thought. She was the sanest woman in the world.

The young man stood up, setting his hourglass flippantly on the table--the only way to do it. "Virginia'll come to see you a lot, Kiddo," he told her. "And she'll take you to the movies pretty often. There's an old W. C. Fields picture coming to the Sutton next week. You like Fields."

His aunt stood up, too, but moved briskly past him. "I have a letter of introduction for you," she announced. "To a friend of mine."

She was over at her writing desk now. She opened the topmost left-hand drawer, positively, and took out a white envelope. Then she went back to her stamp-album table again and casually handed the envelope to her nephew. "I didn't seal it," she said, "and you can read it if you like."

The young man looked at the envelope in his hand. It was addressed in his aunt's rather strong handwriting to a Lieutenant Thomas E. Cleve, Jr.

"He's a wonderful young man," said his aunt. "He's with the Sixty Ninth. He'll look after you, I'm not at all worried." She added impressively, "I *knew* this would happen two years ago, and immediately I thought of Tommy. He'll be marvelously considerate of you." She turned around, rather vaguely this time, and walked less briskly back to her writing desk. Again she opened a drawer. She took out a large, framed photograph of a young man in the high-collared, 1917 uniform of a second lieutenant.

She moved unsteadily back to her nephew, holding the picture out for him to see. "This is his picture," she informed him, "This is Tom Cleve's picture."

"I have to go now, Aunt," the young man said. "Good-by. You won't need anything. I mean you won't need anything. I'll write you."

"Good-by, my dear, dear boy," his aunt said, kissing him. "You find Tom Cleve now. He'll look after you, till you get settled and all."

"Yes. Good-by."

His aunt said absently, "Good-by, my darling boy."

"Good-by." He left the room and nearly stumbled down the stairs.

At the lower landing he took the envelope, tore it in halves, quarters, then eighths. He didn't seem to know what to do with the wad, so he jammed it into his trouser pocket.

"Sweetie. *Everything's* cold. Your eggs and all."

"You can take her to the movies once a week," he said. "It won't kill you."

"Who said it *would*? Did I ever once say it would?"

"No." He walked into the dining room.

A Boy In France

The Saturday Evening Post - March 31, 1945

AFTER he had eaten half a can of pork and egg yolks, the boy laid his head back on the rain-sogged ground, hurtfully wrenched his head out of his helmet, closed his eyes, let his mind empty out from a thousand bungholes, and fell almost instantly asleep. When he awoke, it was nearly ten o'clock--wartime, crazy time, nobody's time--and the cold, wet, French sky had begun to darken. He lay there, opening his eyes, till slowly but surely the little war thoughts, those that cold not be disremembered, those that were not potentially and thankfully void, began to trickle back into his mind. When his mind was filled to its unhappy capacity, one cheerless, nightful trend rose to the top: Look for a place to sleep. Get on your feet. Get your blanket roll. You can't sleep here.

The boy raised his dirty, stinking, tired upper body, and from a sitting position, without looking at anything, he got to his feet. Groggily he bent over, picked up and put on his helmet. He walked unsteadily back to the blanket truck, and from a stack of muddy blanket rolls he pulled out his own. Carrying the slight, unwarm bundle under his left arm, he began to walk along the bushy perimeter of the field. He passed by Hurkin, who was sweatily digging a foxhole, and neither he nor Hurkin glanced with any interest at the other. He stopped where Eeves was digging in, and he said to Eeves, "You on tonight, Eeves?"

Eeves looked up and said, "Yeah," and a drop of sweat glistened and disengaged itself from the end of his long Vermont nose.

The boy said to Eeves, "Wake me up if anything gets hot or anything," and Eeves replied, "How'll I know where you're gonna be at?" and the boy told him, "I'll holler when I get there."

I won't dig in tonight, the boy thought, walking on. I won't struggle and dig and chop with that damn little entrenching tool tonight. I won't get hit. Don't let me get hit, Somebody. Tomorrow night I'll dig a swell hole, I swear I will. But for tonight, for just now, when everything hurts, let me just find someplace to drop. All of a sudden the boy saw a foxhole, a German one, unmistakably vacated by some Kraut during the afternoon, during the long, rotten afternoon.

The boy moved his aching legs a little faster, going toward it. When he got there he looked down into it, and his whole mind and body almost whimpered when he saw some G.I.'s dirty field jacket neatly folded and placed on the bottom of the hole, in the accepted claim. The boy moved on.

He saw another Kraut hole. He hurried awkwardly toward it. Looking down into it, he saw a gray woolen Kraut blanket, half spread, half bunched on the damp floor of the hole. It was a terrible blanket on which some German and recently lain and bled and probably died.

The boy dropped his blanket roll on the ground beside the hole, and then he removed his rifle, his gas mask, his pack and helmet. Then he stooped beside the hole, dropped the little distance to his knees, reached down into the hole and lifted out the heavy, bloody, unlamented Kraut blanket. Outside the hole, he rolled the thing into an absurd lump, picked it up and threw it into the dense hedgerow behind the hole. He looked down into the hole again. The dirt floor, he saw, was messy with what had permeated two folds of the heavy Kraut blanket. The boy took his entrenching tool from his pack, stepped into the hole and leadenly began to dig out the bad places.

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When he was finished he stepped out of the hole, undid his blanket roll and laid the blankets out flat, one on top of the other. As if they were one, he folded the blankets in half the long way, and then he lifted this bed thing, as though it had some sort of spine to it, over to the hole and lowered it carefully out of sight.

He watched the pebbles of dirt tumble into the folds of his blankets. Then he picked up his rifle, gas mask and helmet, and laid them carefully on the natural surface of the ground at the head of the hole.

The boy lifted up the two top folds of his blankets, placed them aside slightly, and then he stepped with his muddy shoes into his bed. Standing up, he took off his field jacket, bunched it up into a ball, and then he lowered himself into position for the night. The hole was too short. He could not stretch out without bending his legs sharply at the knees. Covering himself with the top folds of his blankets, he laid his filthy head back on his filthier field jacket. He looked up into the darkening sky and felt a few mean little lumps of dirt trickle into his shirt collar, some lodging there, some continuing down his back. He did nothing about it.

Suddenly a red ant bit him nastily, uncompromisingly, on the leg, just above his leggings. He jammed a hand under the covers to kill the thing, but the movement caught itself short, as the boy hissed in pain, re feeling and remembering where that morning he had lost a whole fingernail.

Quickly he drew the hurting, throbbing finger up to the line of his eye and examined it in the fading light. Then he placed the whole hand under the folds of the blankets, with the care more like that proffered a sick person than a sore finger, and let himself work the kind of abracadabra familiar to and special for G.I.'s in combat.

"When I take my hand out of this blanket," he thought, "my nail will be grown back, my hands will be clean. My body will be clean. I'll have on clean shorts, clean undershirt, a white shirt. A blue polka-dot tie. A gray suit with a stripe, and I'll be home, and I'll bolt the door. I'll put some coffee on the stove, some records on the phonograph, and I'll bolt the door. I'll read my books and I'll drink coffee and I'll listen to music, and I'll bolt the door. I'll open the window, I'll let in a nice, quiet girl--not Frances, not anyone I've ever known--and I'll bolt the door. I'll ask her to read some Emily Dickinson to me--that one about being chartless--and I'll ask her to read some William Blake to me--that one about the little lamb that made thee--and I'll bolt the door. She'll have an American voice, and she won't ask me if I have any chewing gum or bonbons, and I'll bolt the door."

The boy took his hurting hand out of the blankets suddenly, expecting and getting no change, no magic. Then he unbuttoned the flap of his sweat-stained, mud-crumbly shirt pocket, and took out a soggy lump of newspaper clippings. He laid the clippings on his chest, took off the top one and brought it up to eye level. It was a syndicated Broadway column, and he began to read in the dim light:

Last night--and step up and touch me, brother--I dropped in at the Waldorf to see Jeanie Powers, the lovely starlet, who is here to attend the premiere of her new picture, *The Rockets' Red Glare*. (And don't miss it, folks. It's grand.) We asked the corn-fed Iowa beauty, who is in the big town for the first time in her lovely lifetime, what she wanted to do most while she was here. "Well," said the Beauty to the Beast, "when I was on the train, I decided that all I really wanted in New York was a date with a real, honest-to-goodness G.I.! And what do you suppose happened? The very first afternoon I was here, right in the lobby of the Waldorf. I bumped square into Bubby Beamis! He's a

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major in public relations now, and he's stationed right in New York! How's that for luck?" ... Well, your correspondent didn't say much. But lucky Beamis, I thought to my--

The boy in the hole crumpled the clipping into a soggy ball, lifted the rest of the clippings from his chest, and dropped them all, on the natural ground to the side of the hole.

He stared up into the sky again, the French sky, the unmistakably French, not American sky. And he said aloud to himself, half snickering, half weeping, "Oo la-la!"

All of a sudden, and hurriedly, the boy took a soiled, unrecent envelope from his pocket. Quickly he extracted the letter from inside it and began to reread to for the thirty-oddth time:

MANASQUAN, NEW JERSEY

July 5, 1944

Dear Babe,

Mama thinks you are still in England, but I think you are in France. Are you in France? Daddy tells mama that he thinks you are in England still, but I think he thinks you are in France also. Are you in France?

The Bensons cane down to the shore early this summer and Jackie is over at the house all the time. Mama brought your books with us because she thinks you will be home this summer. Jackie asked if she could borrow the one about the Russian lady and one of the ones you used to keep on your desk. I gave them to her because she said she would not bend the pages or anything. Mama told her she smokes too much, and she is going to quit. She got poisoned from sunburn before we came down. She likes you a lot. She may go in the Wacks.

I saw Frances on my bike before we left home. I yelled at her, but she did not hear me. She is very stuck up and Jackie is not. Jackie's hair is prettier also.

There are more girls than boys on the beach this year. You never see any boys. The girls play cards a lot and put a lot of sun tan oil on each other's back and lay in the sun, but go in the water more than they used to. Virginia Hope and Barbara Geezer had a fight about something and don't sit next to each other on the beach anymore. Lester Brogan was killed in the army where the Japs are. Mrs. Brogan does not come to the beach anymore except on Sundays with Mr. Brogan. Mr. Brogan just sits on the beach with Mrs. Brogan, and he does not go in the water, and you know what a good swimmer he is. I remember when you and Lester took me out to the float once. I go out to the float myself now. Diana Schults married a soldier that was at Sea Girt and she went back to California with him for a week, but he is gone now and she is back. Diana lays on the beach by herself.

Before we left home, Mr. Ollinger died. Brother Teemers went into the store to get Mr. Ollinger to fix his bike and Mr. Ollinger was dead behind the counter. Brother Teemers ran crying all the way to the courthouse and Mr. Teemers was busy talking to the jury and everything. Brother Teemers ran right in anyway and yelled "Daddy! Daddy! Mr. Ollinger is dead!"

I cleaned out your car for you before we left for the shore. There was a lot of maps behind the front seat from your trip to Canada. I put them in your desk. There was also a girls comb. I think it was Frances'. I put it in your desk also. Are you in France?

Love,
MATILDA

P.S.: Can I go to Canada with you next time you go? I won't talk much and I'll light your cigarettes for you without really smoking them.

Sincerely yours,
MATILDA

I miss you. Please come home soon.

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Love and kisses,
MATILDA

The boy in the hole carefully put the letter back inside the dirty, worn envelope, and put the envelope back into his shirt pocket.

Then he raised himself slightly in the hole and shouted, "Hey, Eeves! I'm over here!"

And across the field Eeves saw him and nodded back.

The boy sank back into the hole and said aloud to nobody, "Please come home soon."
Then he fell crumbily, bent-leggedly, asleep.

Elaine

Story - March-April 1945

ON an exquisite Saturday afternoon in June, an assistant watch repairer named Dennis Cooney temporarily distracted the audience at an indoor flea circus just off Forty-third and Broadway by dropping dead. He was survived by his wife, Evelyn Cooney, and a daughter, Elaine, aged six, who had won two Beautiful Child contests; the first at the age of three, the second at the age of five, being defeated when she was four by a Miss Zelda "Bunny" Krakauer, of Staten Island. Cooney left his wife little insurance: enough for her to import her widowed mother, a Mrs. Hoover, from Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the aging woman had supported herself by working as a cashier in a cafeteria. The money was enough for the three to live in relative comfort in the Bronx. The superintendent of the apartment house in which Mrs. Cooney and her mother and daughter proceeded to live was a Mr. Freedlander. A few years before, Freedlander had been "super" of the house where they finally "got" Bloomy Bloomberg. Freedlander informed Mrs. Cooney that Bloomy didn't look any deader than Mrs. Cooney, or *anybody*. Freedlander made it clear to Mrs. Cooney that Bloomy never called Freedlander anything but Mort, and Freedlander never called Bloomy anything but Bloomy.

"I remember readin' all about it," remarked Mrs. Cooney enthusiastically. "I mean I remember readin' all about it."

Freedlander nodded approvingly. "Yeah, it was quite a case." He looked around his tenant's living room. "Where's Mrs. Boyle?" he asked. "I haven't seen her around lately."

"Who?"

"Mrs. - your mother."

"Oh. Mrs. Hoover. My mother's name is Hoover. I oughtta know. It was my name once!"

Mrs. Cooney laughed immoderately. Freedlander laughed with her.

"What'd I call her?" he asked. "Boyle didn't I? We had a Mrs. Boyle in this apartment last. That's why. Hoover. Hoover's her name, eh? I get it."

"She's out," said Mrs. Cooney.

"Oh," said Freedlander.

"It's really awful. I mean she stays out for hours and hours. I keep thinking of her getting run over by a truck or something at her age."

"Yeah," Freedlander commented, sympathetically. "Cigarette?"

At the age of seven, little Elaine Cooney was sent to Public School 332 in the Bronx, where she was tested in accordance with the newest, most scientific methods, and consequently placed in Class 1-A-4, which included a group of forty-four pupils referred to among the faculty as the "slower" children. Every day Mrs. Cooney or her mother, Mrs. Hoover, brought the child to and from school. Usually it was Mrs. Hoover who made the delivery in the morning, and Mrs. Cooney would pick up her daughter in the afternoon. Mrs. Cooney went to the movies at least four times a week, frequently attending the late evening show, in which case she slept late mornings. Sometimes, owing to some unforeseen emergency, Mrs. Cooney was unable to call for her daughter. Under this not uncommon circumstance, the child was forced to wait as long as an hour by the second exit door from the corner, marked *Girls*, until her grandmother plodded

irritably into view. On the way to and from school, the conversation between Elaine and her grandmother never achieved an exceptionally high degree of camaraderie between generations.

"Don't lose your lunch box again."

"What, Grandma?"

"Don't lose your lunch box again."

"Do I have peanut butter?"

"Do you have what?"

"Peanut butter."

"I don't know. Your mother fixed your lunch. Pull up your pants."

It was always a conversation both varicose and unloved, like Mrs. Hoover's legs. The child didn't seem to mind. She seemed to be a happy child. She smiled a great deal. She laughed constantly at things that were not funny. She didn't seem to mind the bilious pastel and tasteless print dresses in which her mother dressed her. She didn't seem to live in the unhappy child's world. But when she was in the fourth grade her teacher, Miss Elmendorf, a tall, fine young woman with very bad legs and ankles, spoke of her to the principal.

"Miss Callahan? I wonder if you can spare a minute."

"Indeed I can!" said Miss Callahan. "Come in, dear!"

Young Miss Elmendorf dosed the door behind her. "That Cooney child I was telling you about-"

"Cooney. Cooney. Yes! That very pretty child," said Miss Callahan, enthusiastically. "Sit down, dear."

"Thank you... I think we'll have to drop her back a class, Miss Callahan. The work is much too difficult for her. She *can't* spell, she *can't* do arithmetic. Her oral reading is positively painful to listen to."

"Well!" said Miss Callahan. "Ding, dong, dell!"

"She's a *sweet* child," said Miss Elmendorf. "And certainly the most *exquisite* thing I've ever seen in my life. She looks like Rapunzel."

"Who?" said Miss Callahan sharply.

"Rapunzel," said Miss Elmendorf.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair. Remember the fairy prince who climbed to the castle tower by Rapunzel's hair?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Callahan shortly. She picked up a pencil with her thin, genderless fingers. Miss Elmendorf was already sorry she had brought up that unfamiliar business about Rapunzel.

"I think," said Miss Elmendorf, "she'd find it less difficult if we dropped her to a lower class."

"Well, then! In a lower class she goes, she goes, she goes!" sang out Miss Callahan, getting up like a man.

Miss Callahan had spoken, but Miss Elmendorf, dining alone at Bickford's Cafeteria that evening, decided that she couldn't just *drop* this child, this Rapunzel, into a lower class without a word to her or anything. Miss Elmendorf wanted to be disenchanted before she did any dropping. So she kept Elaine in the following, afternoon, hoping to be disenchanted.

"Elaine, dear," she said to her, "I'm going to let you report to 4-A-4 tomorrow instead of your own class. We'll just try it for a while. I don't think the work will be so *hard* for us. Do you understand, dear? Stand still."

"I'm in 4-B-4," said Elaine. What was Miss Elmendorf talking about?

"Yes, dear; I know. But we're going to try 4-A-4 for a while. It won't be quite so hard for us. We'll get a much better foundation, so that when the new term starts 4-B-4 will be ever so much easier for us."

"I'm in 4-B-4," Elaine said. "I'm in 4-B-4."

The child *is* stupid, thought Miss Elmendorf. She's stupid. She's not bright. She's wearing the most horrid little green dress I ever saw. I look in those tremendous blue eyes, and there's nothing there, absolutely nothing. But this is the Rapunzel in my class. This is the beauty. This is the most glorious, slim-ankled, golden-haired, red-lipped, lovely-nosed, beautiful skinned child I have ever seen in my life.

"We'll just try it for a while, shall we, Elaine?" Miss Elmendorf said, hopelessly. "We'll just see how we like it, shall we? Stand still, dear."

"Yes, Miss Ellumdorf," chanted the child nasally.

It took Elaine nine and a half years to be graduated from the eighth grade. She had entered grammar school when she was seven, and she was graduated when she was sixteen. At her graduation she wore lipstick, as did only one other child: an Italian girl named Theresa Torrini, who was eighteen and the mother of an illegitimate child by a taxi driver named Hugo Munster. At graduation, Phyllis Jackson, aged twelve, delivered the valedictory; Mildred Horgand, also twelve, played *Elegie* and *Somebody Else Is Taking My Place* on her violin; Lindsay Feurstein, just turned thirteen, recited *Gunga Din* and *I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud*; Thelma Ackerman, thirteen-and-a-half, tap-danced with maximum intricacy, and gave her impressions of Eddie Cantor and Red Skelton. And there were others whose names featured prominently in the mimeographed programs: *Piano Selections*-Babs Wasserman; *Bird Calls* Dolores Strovak; *What America Means to Me*-an original essay, by Mary Frances Leland. None of the latter group was over thirteen, and Dolores Strovak, who knew and could repeat the calls of thirty-six different birds, was only eleven.

These individual accomplishments were followed by a pageant, entitled *The Blood of Democracy*, which included in its cast the entire graduating class.

Elaine Cooney enacted the part of the Statue of Liberty. Hers was the only non-speaking part in the pageant. She was required simply to stand with her arm raised for nearly fifty minutes, supporting a torch made of solid lead, painted bronze-a piece of property conceived and wrought by Marjorie Briganza's brother, Felix, a young pill. Elaine never dropped the heavy thing. She never relaxed under the weight of solid lead and, something heavier, unsung responsibility. Neither seemed to weigh heavily upon her. Nor did she once furtively scratch her golden head, which was adorned with a light, tight cardboard crown. It didn't even seem to itch.

Twice during the pageant of *The Blood of Democracy*, Elaine's left foot, unbelievably small for a girl of her height, was tramped upon with all the ruthlessness of accident by both Estelle Lipschutz and Marjorie Briganza. At neither time did Elaine even wince. She lost a little color, temporarily.

After the graduation exercises Elaine went with her mother, her grandmother, and Mr. Freedlander (the "super"), to see a film her mother had particularly wanted to see all week, at the neighborhood movie. Elaine seemed to find the occasion unbearably festive, the fourth-rate feature picture exceptionally engrossing, happy-making. The Mickey Mouse cartoon made her laugh so hard that her almost-violet, great eyes wept ecstatic tears, and Mrs. Hoover had to slap and half-punch her on her lovely back to shock her out of hysteria, reminding her irritably that it was only a *picture*, and there wasn't any sense *crying* about it. During the entire show Mr. Freedlander pressed his leg against Elaine's. She made no attempt to move her leg away from

his. She simply was unaware of the imposed intimacy. She was sixteen years old and mature enough physically to like or dislike leg pressure from a man in the dark, but she was totally unqualified to accommodate sex and Mickey Mouse simultaneously. There was room for Mickey; no more.

The summer following her graduation from elementary school Elaine chiefly spent attending the movies with her mother, and listening to afternoon dramatic serials on the little, faulty-toned radio in their living room. She had no girl friends of her own age, and she knew no boys. Boys whistled at her, boys wrote clean or dirty notes to her, boys said "Hiya, beautiful" to her in hallways, in drugstores, on street corners; but she didn't go out with any of them, or even know any of them. If they asked her to go for a walk; or to a movie, she said she couldn't, that her mother wouldn't let her. This was not true. The question had never even come up at home. Elaine was not unwilling to go out with boys, but she was unwilling to be confused by unfamiliar, evadable issues.

So Elaine went through July and August of the summer of her graduation from elementary school, living in a Hollywood - and radio-promoted world peopled with star newspaper reporters, crackerjack young city editors, young brain surgeons, intrepid young detectives, all of whom crusaded or operated or detected brilliantly when they were not being sidetracked by their own incorrigible charm. Everybody in Elaine's world combed his hair beautifully, or had it tousled attractively by an expensive makeup man. All of her men spoke in deep, trained voices that sometimes swooped pleasantly through a sixteen-year-old girl's legs. On and on Elaine and her mother drove on foot, from one soap opera to the next, from one movie house to the next. They presented a strange picture, walking together on hot Bronx streets. Mrs. Cooney, and sometimes Mrs. Hoover, ever looking like centuries of literary Nurses, Elaine ever looking like centuries of Juliets and Ophelias and Helens. The troll-like servants and the beautiful mistress. Bound for a rendezvous with Romeo, with Hamlet, with Paris...bound for a rendezvous with the Warner Brothers, with Republic, with M.G.M., with Monogram, with R.K.O....there were thousands of Bronx people who saw them on their way. There was never one to cry out, to wonder, to intercept....

Early in September, shortly before high schools opened, there was an irregularity in the program. One of the ushers at the neighborhood R.K.O. theater, a slight, pale, blond boy who carried a white comb in his hip pocket and was constantly running it through his hair, invited Elaine to the beach over Sunday, and his invitation was accepted. The invitation was made while Elaine's mother, who chronically suffered with head colts, saw fit before seating herself to retire to the ladies' room to administer nose drops. Elaine waited in the front lobby of the theater, examining the release photographs of scenes from next week's film. The usher, whose name was Teddy Schmidt, spoke to her.

"Hey. Your name's Elaine, ain't it?"

"Yeah! How'dja know?" Elaine asked.

"I heard ya mother call ya around a million times," said Schmidt. "Listen. I mean wuddaya doin' Sunday? You wanna go to the beach? This friend of mine, Frank Vitrelli, he has this Pontiac convert. I and he and his girlfriend, were all driving out to the beach, Sunday. You wanna come? I mean you wanna come?"

"I don't know," said the recent graduate of P.S. 332, watching him, liking his wavy, effeminate hair.

"It'll be fun. I mean you'll have a good time. This friend of mine, Frank Vitrelli, is a panic. I mean you'll get a good sunburn and all. How 'bout it?"

"I hafta ask my mother," Elaine said.

"Swell!" said Teddy Schmidt. "Swell! I'll pick ya up at nine, Sunday morning. Where d'ya live?"

"Four fifty-two Sansom," Elaine sing-songed.

"Swell! Be downstairs!"

Mrs. Cooney, snuffing back nose drops, interrupted the conversation. Teddy Schmidt's white, white hands tore her tickets in two, and Elaine followed her mother into the familiar darkness.

When the names of the personnel responsible for the film flashed on the screen, Elaine whispered to her mother, "Mama."

"What?" said Mrs. Cooney, watching the screen.

"Can I go to the beach on Sunday?"

"What beach?"

"The beach. The usher wants me to go. He's going and I can go with him."

"I don't know. We'll see."

A man's figure appeared on the screen, and Elaine gave it her immediate interest biting her fingernails. The film progressed for ten minutes, then suddenly Mrs. Cooney addressed her daughter. "You don't have no bathing suit."

"What?" said Elaine, watching the screen.

"You don't have no bathing suit."

"I can get one, can't I?" Elaine asked.

Mrs. Cooney nodded in the dark, and the subject was closed indefinitely. The screen was becoming involved with a condition which promised the Cooneys a sudden lurch of romance.

The following Saturday night, when Elaine and her mother were walking home from another film at another theater, Mrs. Cooney gave her daughter certain motherly advice.

"Don't let nobody get wise with ya tomorrow."

"What?" Elaine said.

"Don't let nobody get wise with ya tomorrow. In this man's car or anything. Don't let nobody get funny."

Elaine walked with her beautiful mouth slightly open, listening to her mother.

"Just watch your P's and Q's," Mrs. Cooney advised.

"What?" said Elaine.

"Watch your P's and Q's tomorrow," Mrs. Cooney said, and added somewhat more vehemently, "I hope ya grandma's picked up the papers after her in the livin' room. I'm sick an' tired of pickin' up after her. Pickin' up, pickin' up, *pickin' up*."

At ten minutes before nine the next morning, Elaine stood in front of the house, with a Kresge dime-store valise containing a cheap royal blue bathing suit, a thin, easily tearable bathing cap, and a face towel. She set down the valise at her small feet, and waited. It was a stunning, bright day, with special little breezes doing justice to Elaine's hair. At least three cars with men in them passed by her slowly, tooting their horns. One man went so far as to draw up to the curb, reach over and open his front door.

"Going my way, kid?"

"No. This boy's coming for me," Elaine explained.

The man shook his head. "He's not coming," he said. "I got a hot tip."

Elaine was suspicious. "How do you know?" She wanted to know.

The man stared at her. "What's your name, kid?" he asked.

"Elaine. Elaine Coooo-ney."

But just at that moment Teddy Schmidt's party pulled up behind the masher's car. Elaine recognized Teddy in the back of the car, and smiled. The masher drove off.

It was twenty minutes to eleven. Teddy got out of the back of the car. "Sorry I'm late!" he said, without a jot of regret in his voice. "Frank couldn't find the keys!" It was a great joke. He ushered the young girl into the back of the car, and got in beside her. The two people in the front were turned around and staring.

"Elaine, meet Monny Monahan. Monny, meet Elaine. Elaine, meet Frank," introduced Teddy.

Frank Vitrelli acknowledged his introduction by issuing a long, low whistle.

"Hello, kid," Monny said to Elaine, staring.

"Hello," said Elaine.

"Drive on, McGinsberg," ordered Teddy. Frank Vitrelli shifted gears, and the car moved off. "How ya been, Elaine?" Teddy inquired, affecting a casualness for the information of Frank and Monny.

"O.K.," said Elaine, sitting straight in her seat.

"Not bad lookin', eh, Monny?" Teddy asked Monny, who was still staring.

"What do you do, kid?" Monny asked Elaine. "You go to school?"

"I graduated."

"From high school?"

"No, from 8-B. I'm going to high school next week. George Washington High."

"That's co-ed, isn't it?" Monny said.

"No. Boys *and* girls," Elaine informed her.

When the gorgeous sun was descending that day, Frank Vitrelli suddenly sprang to his feet, brushing off sand from his hairy legs. "Well," he announced, "I don't care what others want to do, but as for me, give me liberty or give me paddle tennis." He reached down, and with only the slightest exertion of his powerful arm, yanked Monny Monahan to her feet.

"Let's play doubles," Monny suggested. "You play paddle tennis, Elaine?"

"What?" said Elaine.

"You play paddle tennis?" Elaine shook her head.

"Well, c'mon along, anyway," Monny said to her, glancing at Teddy Schmidt. "It's fun to watch."

"Naa, we'll stay here," said Teddy casually.

Frank Vitrelli abruptly made a little fullback-like movement, lunging his huge shoulders at the lower quarters of Monny Monahan, and in an instant Monny was sitting on his shoulders. She made a painful little grimace, replaced it with a smile, and said, "Oh, you!" to Frank Vitrelli. The latter turned around for the benefit of the others, with his hands so placed and gripped on Monny's thighs to show off best his deltoid muscles. Then, sharply, he twisted about, as though to ward off a sudden and formidable opponent, and galloped off, with his burden bouncing high and painfully on his shoulders.

"He's a panic," commented Teddy.

"He's strong," Elaine observed, basically.

Teddy shook his head. "Muscle-bound," he said briefly. "See him in the water?"

"No."

"Muscle-bound. I mean he's all muscle-bound." Teddy changed the subject. "Listen. This sand is killing my feet. I mean it's shady under the boardwalk. Let's take a walk."

"Okay," said Elaine, and they both stood up.

For the first time Elaine noticed that the beach was fast becoming deserted. There were a few city die-hards like the Schmidt-Vitrelli party, but it seemed as though all the "regulars" had suddenly folded a single, great, green-and-orange umbrella, and plodded across the scorched sand toward the parking lots. Standing up, Elaine was almost instantly involved in a private, terrible panic. She had never been to a beach before, but she had seen hordes of Coney Islanders in newsreel shots taken annually on the Fourth of July or Labor Day, and the occasion of being on a crowded beach all day had not estranged her violently from the dimensions of her own world. But now - the sudden vast, lonely expanse of a deserted public beach at dusk came as a terrible visitation upon her. The beach itself, which before had been only a fair-sized manifestation of tiny handfuls of hot sand which could slip with petty ecstasy through the fingers, was now a great monster sprawled across infinity, prejudiced personally against Elaine, ready to swallow her up - or cast her, with an ogreish laugh, into the sea. And with the sudden exodus of the beach people, Teddy Schmidt took on a new meaning for her. He was no longer Teddy Schmidt, pretty, wavy-haired, male; he was Teddy Schmidt, not her mother, not her grandmother, not a movie star, not a voice on the radio, not -

"What's the matter?" Teddy demanded, but softly. Elaine had snatched her hand away from his as they walked, as though it had been charged with high voltage. She did not answer him. As they walked along, everything he said was unintelligible to her. There was only her heart clomping. There was only a frightened prayer that the beach and ocean change into a Bronx street, with tooting horns and clanking trolleys and jostling clothed people. She listened only for the beach to move, to spring, to swallow up. The sand and air under the boardwalk was cool and clammy, and there were smells of sea things and picnic. But it was dark and, abruptly, retreatful for Elaine, and the farther she walked under the boardwalk with Teddy, the more intelligible his conversation became, the less her heart clomped.

"Too cold here?" Teddy asked, in a peculiar voice.

"No!" Elaine almost shouted.

Like a child with its head under blankets, afraid to look at the panic-making silhouettes of objects in the room, she wanted to stay under the boardwalk until the transition to her own familiar world could be made instantaneously.

"Let's sit down," Teddy said, at the right moment. His mediocre heart had begun to pound excitedly, because with the eternal rake's despicable but seldom faulty intuition, he knew it was going to be easy...so easy....

At that moment, on the paddle tennis courts Monny Monahan walked up to net and said to Frank Vitrelli, "Let's go back, huh? My feet hurt."

"One more set."

"I don't like that guy there with that kid."

"What guy?" Vitrelli said, turning to look at the players in the next court.

"No. I mean Schmidt."

"Teddy? Oh, he's a good guy. C'mon. You serve," said Vitrelli, and jogged back to his own base line.

Monny served, hating Vitrelli, but aware that he made sixty-five dollars a week, aware of the great potential security of him.

When she came in from that first night under the boardwalk with Teddy Schmidt, Elaine was required to relate very few details of the day. Her mother was washing her hair, her soapy head bent over the hand bowl in the bathroom. Her grandmother was asleep.

"That you, Elaine?"

"Yes, Mama." Elaine walked into the bathroom, and watched her mother wash her hair.

"Have a good time?"

"Yes."

"The suit shrink?" Her mother wanted know.

"I don't know," Elaine said.

"You eat anything?"

"We had hot dogs. With relish."

"That's nice," said her mother.

Elaine stood there. She was almost ready to say something.

"Anybody get wise with you?" her mother asked suddenly.

"No," Elaine said.

"That's good. Hand me the towel, dolly."

Elaine handed her a towel.

"Go look and see in the papers what's at the Capitol. Maybe we'll go in the morning."

"I can't," Elaine said. "Teddy doesn't work in the mornings. He's going to learn me how to play bridge."

"Oh, that's nice! You can play with me and your Uncle Mort and your grandmother when you know how. See once what's playing for me, though, like a dolly."

A month later—two weeks before her seventeenth birthday Elaine was married to Teddy Schmidt. The marriage was performed at the Schmidts' home, and was attended by Teddy's large family and several of his friends. Mrs. Cooney, Mrs. Hoover, and Mr. Freedlander represented Elaine. It was a cold, rainy October day, with threat of intenser chills and more rain in the late afternoon. Elaine wore a cheap, thin "traveling" suit and a dreary gladioli corsage which Teddy's sister, Bertha Louise, had selected for her. But no Grade-B Hollywood film had ever seemed to make Elaine as happy as she looked on her wedding day. No last-reel film kiss would have stirred her heart so tenderly, if objectively she could have witnessed herself raising her own lips to meet the thin, effeminate mouth of her new husband.

Teddy was nervous throughout the ceremony, and at the wedding table following the ceremony he was irritable with his bride. Elaine was too happy to cut the wedding cake effectually, and he had to take the knife away from her. He was thoroughly disgusted with her incompetence.

Teddy's mother and Mrs. Cooney began to argue with guarded politeness concerning the virility of a certain popular male movie star, Mrs. Schmidt questioning it, Mrs. Cooney swearing by it. It took them very little time to drop their guards, to raise their voices; and when Mr. Freedlander had responded to Mrs. Cooney's request to "stay out of it," Mrs. Cooney thoughtfully, effectively, struck her daughter's mother-in-law full in the mouth with her open hand. Teddy's mother screamed and rushed forward, but met with the interference of Frank Vitrelli. Freedlander grabbed Mrs. Cooney. The groom stayed in the background, frightened, avoiding active participation by pretending to comfort his bride. Elaine wept like a small child, all the happiness wrenched away from her, like a broken film in a projector. Monny Monahan came up to Teddy. "Get her out of here," she told Teddy. Teddy nodded nervously, and looked around, as though selection of a proper exit was questionable. But he stood there, panicky.

"Get her out, you dope!" Monny Monahan grated at him.

Teddy grabbed his wife's arm roughly.

"C'mon," he said.

"No!" said Elaine. "Mama!" She broke away from Teddy, and rushed over to her mother, who was being pacified somewhat inadequately by Mr. Freedlander and Mrs. Hoover.

"Mama," Elaine begged. "Me and Teddy are goin'."

"I'll kill her," threatened Mrs. Cooney, ferociously.

"Mama. Mama. Me and Teddy are goin'," Elaine said.

"Go ahead, kid," Freedlander advised.

"Your mother don't feel so good. Have a good time. Don't do nothing I wouldn't do."

"Mama," begged Elaine.

Mrs. Cooney suddenly looked up at her daughter. And something strange happened. A great tenderness crossed Mrs. Cooney's face, and she took her daughter's beautiful face between her two hands and drew it down to her own. "Good-by, dolly," she said, and fervently kissed Elaine on the mouth several times.

"Good-by, Grandma," Elaine said to Mrs. Hoover.

Mrs. Hoover gathered her granddaughter in her arms, and sobbed over her. Teddy prodded his wife to make the embrace short. The newlyweds started to leave the house. But there was a change of plans.

"Elaine!" Mrs. Cooney suddenly called, shrilly.

Elaine turned, her big eyes wide. Her husband swung around, too, with his mouth open.

"You ain't goin' nowhere," said Mrs. Cooney. And the entire gathering of wedding guests snapped their attention her way; even the sobbing of the groom's mother was abruptly suspended.

"What, Mama?" said the bride.

"You come back, you beautiful," ordered Mrs. Cooney, crying. "You ain't goin' nowhere with that sissy boy."

"Listen," Teddy started to bluster, "we're leaving right -"

"Keep quiet, you," commanded Mrs. Cooney, and turned to Mrs. Hoover. "C'mon, Ma."

Mrs. Hoover stood up painfully, but readily, on her swollen legs. She followed her daughter across the room toward her granddaughter.

Teddy's lower jaw trembled violently. "Listen," he told his mother-in-law, nervously, as the latter put her arm around the bride's waist, "she's my wife, see. I mean she's my wife. If she don't come with me, I can get it annulled, the marriage."

"Good. C'mon, dolly," said Mrs. Cooney, and led the way out.

"G'by, Teddy," Elaine said in a friendly way, over her shoulder.

"Listen," began Teddy again, trying to imply imminent danger to the Cooney party.

"Let 'em go!" shrieked his mother. "Let the riffraff go!"

When they were outside in the street, Mrs. Cooney dismissed Freedlander with a minimum of tact. "You go ahead, Mort," she said. And Freedlander, looking hurt, went ahead.

Bride, mother, and grandmother moved up the street. They turned the corner in silence, moved half way up the next block, then Mrs. Cooney made a little announcement which seemed to please all three.

"We'll go to a movie. A nice movie," she said.

They walked on.

"Henry Fonda's playing at the Troc," commented Mrs. Hoover, who didn't like to walk too far.

Elaine

"Let Elaine say where she wants to go," snapped Mrs. Cooney.

Elaine was looking down at her gladioli corsage. "Gee," she said. "They're all dying. They were so *beautiful*." She looked up. "Who's at the Troc, Grandma?"

"Henry Fonda."

"Ooh, I like him," said Elaine, skipping ecstatically.

This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise

Esquire - October 1945

I AM inside the truck, too, sitting on the protection strap, trying to keep out of the crazy Georgia rain, waiting for the lieutenant from Special Services, waiting to get tough. I'm scheduled to get tough any minute now. There are thirty-four men in this here veehickle, and only thirty are supposed to go to the dance. Four must go. I plan to knife the first four men on my right, simultaneously singing *Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder* at the top of my voice, to drown out their silly cries. Then I'll assign a detail of two men (preferably college graduates) to push them off this here veehickle into the good wet Georgia red clay. It might be worth forgetting that I'm one of the Ten Toughest Men who ever sat on this protection strap. I could lick my weight in Bobbsey Twins. Four must go. From the truck of the same name....Choose yo' pahtnuhs for the Virginia Reel!...

And the rain on the canvas top comes down harder than ever. This rain is no friend of mine. It's no friend of mine and these other gents (four of whom must go). Maybe it's a friend of Katharine Hepburn's, or Sarah Palfrey Fabyan's, or Tom Heeney's, or of all the good solid Greer Garson fans waiting in line at Radio City Music Hall. But it's no buddy of mine, this rain. It's no buddy of the other thirty-three men (four of whom must go).

The character in the front of the truck yells at me again.

"What?" I say. I can't hear him. The rain on the top is killing me. I don't even want to hear him.

He says, for the third time, "Let's get this show on the road! Bring on the women!"

"Gotta wait for the lieutenant," I tell him. I feel my elbow getting wet and bring it in out of the downpour. Who swiped my raincoat? With all my letters in the left-hand pocket. My letters from Red, from Phoebe, from Holden. From Holden. Aw, listen, I don't care about the raincoat being swiped, but how about leaving my letters alone? He's only nineteen years old, my brother is, and the dope can't reduce a thing to a humor, kill it off with a sarcasm, can't do anything but listen hectically to the maladjusted little apparatus he wears for a heart. My missing-in-action brother. Why don't they leave people's raincoats alone?

I've got to stop thinking about it. Think of something pleasant. Vincent old troll. Think about this truck. Make believe this is not the darkest, wettest, most miserable Army truck you have ever ridden in. This truck, you've got to tell yourself, is full of roses and blondes and vitamins. This here is a real pretty truck. This is a swell truck. You were lucky to get this job tonight. When you get back from the dance...Choose yo' pahtnuhs, folks!...you can write an immortal poem about this truck. This truck is a potential poem. You can call it, *Trucks I Have Rode In*, or *War and Peace*, or *This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise*. Keep it simple.

Aw, listen... Listen, rain. This is the ninth day you've been raining. How can you do this to me and these thirty-three men (four of whom must go). Let us alone. Stop making us sticky and lonely.

Somebody is talking to me. The man is within knifing distance (four must go).

"What?" I say to him.

"Where ya from, Sarge?" the boy asks me.

"Your arms gettin' wet."

I take it in again. "New York," I tell him.

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"So'm I! Whereabouts?"

"Manhattan. Just a couple of blocks from the Museum of Art."

"I live on Valentine Avenue," the boy says. "Know where that is?"

"In The Bronx, isn't it?"

"Naa! *Near* The Bronx. *Near* The Bronx, but it ain't in it. It's still Manhattan."

Near The Bronx, but it isn't in it. Let's remember that. Let's not go around telling people they live in The Bronx when in the first place they don't live there, they live in Manhattan. Let's use our heads, buddy. Let's get on the ball, buddy.

"How long have you been in the Army?" I ask the boy. He is a private. He is the soakingest wettest private in the Army.

"Four months! I come in through Dix and then they ship me down to Mee-ami. Ever been in Mee-ami?"

"No," I lie. "Pretty good?"

"Pretty *good*?" He nudges the guy on his right. "Tell 'im, Fergie."

"What?" says Fergie, looking wet, frozen and fouled.

"Tell the Sarge about Mee-ami. He wantsa know if it's any good or not. Tell 'im."

Fergie looks at me. "Ain'tya never been there, Sarge?" - You poor miserable sap of a sergeant.

"No. Pretty good down there?" I manage to ask.

"What a town," says Fergie softly.

"You could get anything you want down there. You could really amuse yourself. I mean you could really amuse yourself. Not like this here hole. You couldn't amuse yourself in the here hole if you tried."

"We lived in a hotel," the boy from Valentine Avenue says. "Before the War you probly paid five, six dollars a day for a room in the hotel we was at. *One room*."

"Showers," says Fergie, in a bittersweet tone which Abelard, during his last years, might have used to mention Heloise's handle. "You were all the time as clean as a kid. Down there you had four guys to a room and you had these showers in between. The soap was free in the hotel. Any kinda soap you wanted. Not G.I."

"*You're alive, ain'tcha?*" the character in the front of the truck yells at Fergie. I can't see his face.

Fergie is above it all. "Showers," he repeats. "Two, three times a day I took 'em."

"I used to sell down there," a guy in the middle of the truck announces. I can barely see his face in the darkness. "Memphis and Dallas are the best towns in Dixie, for my dough. In the wintertime Miami gets too crowded. It used to drive you crazy. In the places it was worth goin', you could hardly get a seat or anything."

"It wasn't crowded when we were there - was it, Fergie?" asks the kid from Valentine Avenue.

Fergie won't answer. He's not altogether with us on this discussion. He's not giving us his all.

The man who likes Memphis and Dallas sees that, too. He says to Fergie, "Down here at this Field I'm lucky if I get a shower once a day. I'm in the new area on the west side of the Field. All the showers aren't built yet."

Fergie is not interested. The comparison is not apt. The comparison, I might and will say, stinks, Mae.

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From the front of the truck comes a dynamic and irrefutable observation: "Not flying again tonight! Them cadets won't be flyin' again tonight, all right. The eighth day no night flyin'."

Fergie looks up, with a minimum of energy. "I ain't hardly seen a plane since I'm down here. My wife thinks I'm flyin' myself nuts. She writes and tells me I should get outta the Air Corps. She's got me on a B-17 or something. She reads about Clark Gable and she's got me a gunner or something on a bomber. I ain't got the heart to tell her all I do is empty out stuff."

"What stuff?" says Memphis and Dallas, interested.

"Any stuff. Any stuff that gets filled up." Fergie forgets Mee-ami for a minute and shoots Memphis and Dallas a withering look.

"Oh," says Memphis and Dallas, but before he could continue Fergie turns to me. "You shoulda seen them showers in Mee-ami, Sarge. No kiddin'. You'd never wanna take a bath in your own tub again." And Fergie turns away, losing interest in my fact, which is altogether understandable.

Memphis and Dallas leans forward, anxiously, addressing Fergie. "I could get you a ride," he tells Fergie. "I work at Dispatchers. These here lieutenants, they take cross-countries about once a month and sometimes they don't already have a passenger in the back. I been lotsa times. Maxwell Field. Everywhere." He points a finger at Fergie, as though accusing him of something. "Listen. If you wanna go sometime, gimme a ring. Call Dispatchers and ask for me. Porter's the name."

Fergie looks phlegmatically interested.

"Yeah? Ask for Porter, huh? Corporal or something?"

"Private," says porter, just short of stiffly.

"Boy," says the kid from Valentine Avenue, looking past my head into the teeming blackness. "Look at it come down!"

Where's my brother? Where's my brother Holden? What is this missing-in-action stuff? I don't believe it. I don't understand it. I don't believe it. The United States Government is a liar. The Governments is lying to me and my family.

I never heard such crazy, liar's news.

Why, he came through the war in Europe without a scratch, we all saw him before he shipped out to the Pacific last summer, and he looked fine. Missing.

Missing, missing, missing. Lies! I'm being lied to. He's never been missing before. He's one of the least missing boys in the world. He's here in this truck; he's home in New York; he's at Pentey Preparatory School ("You send us the Boy. We'll mold the man - All modern fireproof buildings..."); yes, he's at Pentey, he never left school; and he's at Cape Cod, sitting on the porch, biting his fingernails; and he's playing doubles with me, yelling at me to stay back at the baseline when he's at the net. Missing! Is that missing? Why lie about something as important as that? How can the Government do a thing like that? What can they get out of it, telling lies like that?

"Hey, Sarge!" yells the character in the front of the truck. "Let's get this show on the road! Bring on the dames!"

"How are the dames, Sarge? They good-lookin'?"

"I don't really know what this thing is tonight," I say. "Usually they're pretty nice girls." That is to say, in other words, by the same token, usually they're usually. Everybody tries very, very hard. Everybody is in there pitching. The girls ask you where you come from, and you tell them, and they repeat the name of the city, putting an exclamation point at the end of it. Then they tell you about Douglas Smith, Corporal, AUS. Doug lives in New York, and do you know

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him? You don't believe so, and you tell her about New York being a very big place. And because you didn't want Helen to marry a soldier and wait around for a year or six, you go on dancing with this strange girl who knows Doug Smith, this strange nice girl who's read every line Lloyd C. Douglas has written. While you dance and the band plays on, you think about everything in the world except music and dancing. You wonder if your little sister Phoebe is remembering to take your dog out regularly, if she's remembering not to jerk Joey's collar - the kid'll kill the dog someday.

"I never saw rain like this," the boy from Valentine Avenue says. "You ever see it like this, Fergie?"

"See what?"

"Rain like this."

"Naa."

"*Let's get this show on the road! Bring on the dames!*" The noisy guy leans forward and I can see his face. He looks like everybody else in the truck. We all look alike.

"What's the looey like, Sarge?" It was the boy from near the Bronx.

"I don't really know," I say. "He just hit the Field a couple of days ago. I heard that he lived right around here somewhere when he was a civilian."

"What a break. To live right near where you're at," says the boy from Valentine Avenue. "If I was only at Mitchel Field, like. Boy. Half hour and I'm home."

Mitchel Field. Long Island. What about that Saturday in the summer at Port Washington? Red said to me, *It won't hurt you to see the Fair either. It's very pretty.* So I grabbed Phoebe, and she had some kid with her named Minerva (which killed me), and I put them both in the car and then I looked around for Holden. I couldn't find him; so Phoebe and Minerva and I left without him... At the Fair we went to the Bell Telephone Exhibit, and I told Phoebe that *This Phone* was connected with the author of the *Elsie Fairfield* books. So Phoebe, shaking like Phoebe, picked up the phone and trembles into it, *Hello, this is Phoebe Caulfield, and child at the World's Fair. I read your books and think they are very excellent in spots. My mother and father are playing in Death Takes a Holiday in Great Neck. We go swimming a lot, but the ocean is better in Cap Cod. Good bye!*... And then we came out of the building and there was Holden, with Hart and Kirky Morris. He had my terry-cloth shirt on. No coat. He came over and asked Phoebe for her autograph and she socked him in the stomach, happy to see him, happy he was her brother. Then he said to me, *Let's get out of this educational junk. Let's go on one of the rides or something. I can't stand this stuff.*... And now they're trying to tell me he's missing. Missing. Who's missing? Not him. He's at the World's Fair. I know just where to find him. I know exactly where he is. Phoebe knows, too. She would know in a minute. What is this missing, missing, missing stuff?

"How long's it take you to get from your house to Forty Second Street?" Fergie wants to know from the Valentine Avenue kid.

Valentine Avenue thinks it over, a little excitedly. "From my house," he informs intensely, "to the Paramount Theayter takes exactly forty four minutes by subway. I nearly won two bucks betting with my girl on that. Only I wouldn't take her dough."

The man who likes Memphis and Dallas better than Miami speaks up:

"I hope all these girls tonight ain't chicken. I mean kids. They look at me like I was an old guy when they're chicken."

"I watch out that I don't perspire too much," says Fergie. "these her G.I. dances are really hot. The women don't like it if you perspire too much. My wife don't eve like it when I perspire too much. It's all right when *she* perspires - that's different!... Women. They drive ya nuts."

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A colossal burst of thunder. All of us jump - me nearly falling off the truck. I get off the protection strap, and the boy from Valentine Avenue squeezes against Fergie to make room for me....A very drawly voice speaks up from the front of the truck:

"Y'all ever been to Atlanta?"

Everybody is waiting for more thunder. I answer. "No," I say.

"Atlanta's a good town."

- Suddenly the lieutenant from Special Services appears from nowhere, soaking wet, sticking his head inside the truck - *four of these men must go*. He wears oilskin covers on his visored cap: it looks like a unicorn's bladderie. His face is even wet. It is a small-featured, young face, not yet altogether sure of the new command in it issued to him by the Government. He sees my stripes where the sleeves of my swiped raincoat (with all my letters) should be.

"You in charge heah, Sahgeant?"

Wow. Choose yo' pahtnuhs...

"Yes, sir."

"How many men in heah?"

"I'd better take a re-count, sir." I turn around, and say, "All right, all you men with matches handy, light 'em up-I wanna count heads." And four or five of the men manage to burn matches simultaneously. I pretend to count heads. "Thirty-Four including me, sir," I tell him finally.

The young lieutenant in the rain shakes his head. "Too many," he informs me-and I try to look very stupid. "I called up every orderly room myself," he reveals for my benefit, "and distinctly gave orduhs that only fahve men from each squadron were supposed to go." (I pretend to see the gravity of the situation for the first time. I might suggest that we shoot four of the men. We might ask for a detail of men experienced in shooting people who want to go to dances.)...The lieutenant asks me, "Do you know Miz Jackson, Sahgeant?"

"I know who she is," I say as the men listen-without taking drags on their cigarettes.

"Well, Miz Jackson called me this mawnin' and asked for just thi'ty men even. I'm afraid Sahgeant, we'll have to ask four of the men to go back to their areas." He looks away from me, looks deeper into the truck, establishing a neutrality for himself in the soaking dark. "I don't care how it's done."

I look cross-eyed at the men. "How many of you did not sign up for this dance?"

"Don't look at me," says Valentine Avenue. "I signed up."

"Who didn't sign up?" I say. "Who just came along because somebody told him about it?" - That's cute sergeant. Keep it up.

"Make it snappy, Sahgeant," says the lieutenant, letting his head drip inside the truck.

"C'mon now. Who didn't sign up?" - C'mon now, who didn't sign up. I never heard such a gross question in my life.

"Heck, we all signed up, Sarge," says Valentine Avenue. "The thing is, around seven guys signed up in my squadron."

All right, I'll be brilliant. I'll offer a handsome alternative.

"Who's willing to take in a movie on the Field instead?"

No response.

Response.

Silently, Porter (the Memphis-Dallas man) gets up and moves toward the way out. The men adjust their legs to let him go by. I move aside, too....None of us tells Porter, as he passes, what relatively big, important stuff he is.

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More response... "One side," says Fergie, getting up. "So the married guys'll write letters t'night." He jumps out of the truck quickly.

I wait. We all wait. No one else comes forward. "Two more," I croak. I'll hound them. I'll hound these men because I hate their guts. They're all being insufferably stupid. What's the matter with them? Do they think they'll have a terrific time at this sticky little dance? Do they think they're going to hear a fine trumpet take a chorus of "Marie"? What's the matter with these idiots? What's the matter with *me*? Why do I want them all to go? Why do I sort of want to go myself? Sort of! What a joke. You're aching to go, Caulfield...

"All right," I say coldly. "The last two men on the left. C'mon out. I don't know who you are." - I don't know who you are. - Phew!

The noisy guy, who has been yelling at me to get the show on the road, starts coming out. I had forgotten he was sitting just there. But he disappears awkwardly into the India ink storm. He is followed, as though tentatively, by a smaller man-a boy, it proves in the light.

His overseas cap on crooked and limp with wet, his eyes on the lieutenant, the boy waits in the rain-as though obeying an order. He is very young, probably eighteen, and he doesn't look like the tiresome sort of kid who argues and argues after the whistle's blown. I stare at him, and the lieutenant turns around and stares at him, too.

"I was on the list. I signed up when the fella tacked it up. Right when he tacked it up."

"Sorry, soldier," says the lieutenant, " - Ready, Sahgeant?"

"You can ask Ostrander," the boy tells the lieutenant, and sticks his head in the truck. "Hey, Ostrander! Wasn't I the first fella on the list?"

The rain comes down harder than ever, it seems. The boy who wants to go to the dance is getting soaked. I reach out a hand and flip up his raincoat collar.

"Wasn't I first on the list?" the boy yells at Ostrander.

"What list?" says Ostrander.

"The list for fellas that wanna go to the dance!" yells the boy.

"Oh," says Ostrander. "What about it? I was on it."

Oh, Ostrander, you insidious bore!

"Wasn't I the first fella on it?" says the boy, his voice breaking.

"I don't know," says Ostrander. "How should I know?"

The boy turns wildly to the lieutenant. "I was the first one on it sir. Honest. This fella in our squadron This foreign guy, like, that works in the orderly room - he tacked it up and I signed it right off. The first fella."

The lieutenant says, dripping: "Get in. Get in the truck boy." The boy climbs back into the truck and the men quickly make room for him. The lieutenant turns to me and asks, "Sahgeant, wheah can I use a telephone around heah?"

"Well, Post Engineers' sir. I'll show you." We wade through the rivers of red bog over to Post Engineers. "Mama?" the lieutenant says into the mouthpiece. "Buddy...I'm fine...Yes, mama. Yes, mama. I'm fixin' to be. Maybe Sunday if I get off like they said. Mama, is Sarah Jane home?... Well, how 'bout lettin' me talk to her?... Yes, mama. I will if I can, mama; maybe Sunday." The lieutenant talks again. "Sarah Jane?...Fine. Fine...I'm fixin' to. I told mama maybe Sunday if I get off. - Listen Sarah Jane. You got a date t'night?...It sure is pretty bad. It sure is. - Listen, Sarah Jane. How's the car? You get that thing fixed? That's fine, that's fine; That's mighty cheap with the plugs and all." The lieutenant's voice changes. It becomes casual. "Sarah Jane, listen. I want you to drive oveh to Miz Jackson's t'night...Well it's like this: I got these boys heah for one of those pahties Miz Jackson gives. You know?...Only this is what I

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want to tell you: they's one boy too many...Yes...Yes...Yes...I know that, Sarah Jane; I know that; I know it's rainin'...Yes...Yes..." The lieutenant's voice gets very sure and hard suddenly. He says into the mouthpiece, "I ain't *askin'* you, girl. I'm *tellin'* you. Now I want you to drive ovuh to Miz Jackson's right quick - *heah?*...I don't care...All right. All right...I'll see y'all later." He hangs up.

Drenched to the bone, the bone of loneliness, the bone of silence, we plod back to the truck.

Where are you Holden? Never mind the Missing stuff. Stop playing around. Show up. Show up somewhere. Hear me? It's simply because I remember everything. I can't forget anything that's good, that's why. So listen. Just go up to somebody, some officer or some G.I., and tell them you're Here - not Missing, not dead, not anything but Here. Stop kidding around. Stop letting people think you're Missing. Stop wearing my robe to the beach. Stop taking the shots on my side of the court. Stop whistling. Sit up to the table...

The Stranger

Collier's - December 1, 1945

THE maid at the apartment door was young and snippy and she had a part-time look about her. "Who'd ya wanna see?" she asked the young man hostilely.

The young man said, "Mrs. *Polk*." He had told her four times over the squawky house phone whom he wanted to see.

He should have come on a day when there wouldn't be any idiots to answer the house phones and doors. He should have come on a day when he didn't feel like gouging his eyes out, to rid himself of hay fever. He should have come - he shouldn't have come at all. He should have taken his sister Mattie straight to her beloved, greasy chop suey joint, then straight to a matinee, then straight to the train - without stopping once to take out his messy emotions, without forcing them on strangers. Hey! Maybe it wasn't too laugh like a moron, lie and leave.

The maid stepped out of the way, mumbling something about maybe she was out of the tub and maybe not, and the young man with the red eyes and the leggy little girl with him entered the apartment.

It was an ugly, expensive little New York apartment of the kind which seems to rent mostly to newly married couples - possibly because the bride's feet began to kill her at the last renting agency, or because she loves to distraction the way her new husband wears his wrist watch.

The living room, in which the young man and the little girl were ordered to wait, had one Morris chair too many, and it looked as though the reading lamps had been breeding at night. Ah, but over the crazy artificial fireplace there were some fine books.

The young man wondered who owned and cared about Rainer Maria Rilke and *The Beautiful and the Damned* and *A High Wind in Jamaica*, for instance. Did they belong to Vincent's girl or Vincent's girl's husband?

He sneezed, and walked over to an interesting, messy stack of phonograph records, and picked up the top record. It was an old Bakewell Howard - before Howard had gone commercial - playing *Fat Boy*. Who owned it? Vincent's girl or Vincent's girl's husband? He turned the record over, and through his leaky eyes he looked at a patch of dirty white adhesive tape fastened to the title sticker. Printed on the tape in green ink were the identification and warning: *Helen Beebers - Room 202, Rudenweg - Stop Thief!*

The young man grabbed his hip pocket handkerchief and sneezed again; then he turned the record back to the *Fat Boy* side. His mind began to hear the old Bakewell Howard's rough, fine horn playing. Then he began to hear the music of the unrecoverable years: the little, unhistorical, pretty good years when all the dead boys in the 12th Regiment had been living and cutting in on other dead boys on lost dance floors: the years when no one who could dance worth a damn had ever heard of Cherbourg or Saint-Lo, or Hurtgen Forest or Luxembourg.

He listed to this music until behind him his little sister started practicing belching; then he turned around and said, "Cut it out, Mattie."

At that instant a grown girl's harsh, childish, acutely lovely voice came into the room, followed by the girl herself.

"Hey," she said. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting. I'm Mrs. Polk. I don't know how you're going to get them into this room. The windows are all funny. But I can't stand looking at that dirty

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old building across the wuddaya call-it." She caught sight of the little girl, who was sitting in one of the extra Morris chairs with her legs crossed. "Oh!" she cried ecstatically. "Who's this? Your little girl? *Pussy cat!*"

The young man had to make an emergency snatch at his pocket-handkerchief, and he sneezed four times before he could reply. "That's my sister Mattie," he told Vincent's girl. "I'm not the window man, if that's - "

"You aren't the curtain man?...What's the matter with your eyes?"

"I have hay fever. My name is Babe Gladwaller. I was in the Army with Vincent Caulfield." He sneezed. "We were very good friends....Don't stare at me when I sneeze, please. Mattie and I came in town to have lunch and see a show, and I thought I'd drop by to see you; take a chance on your being in. I should have telephoned or something." He sneezed again, and when he looked up, Vincent's girl was staring at him. She looked fine. She probably could have lighted up a cigar and looked fine.

"Hey," she said, quietly for her; she was a shouter. "This room is dark as glop. Let's go in my room." She turned around and started to lead the way. With her back turned she said, "You're in the letter he wrote me. You live in a place starting with a 'V.'"

"Valdosta, New York."

They entered a lighter, better room; obviously Vincent's girl's and her husband's room.

"Listen. I hate that living room. Sit in the chair. Just throw that glop on the floor. *Pussy cat*, baby, you sit here on the bed with me - oh, sweetie, what a beautiful dress! Oh, why did you come to see me? No, I'm glad. Go ahead. I won't look at you when you sneeze."

There was never a way, even back in the beginning, that a man could condition himself against the lethal size and shape and melody of beauty by chance. Vincent could have warned him. Vincent *had* warned him. Sure he had.

Babe said, "Well, I thought - "

"Listen, why aren't you in the *Army*?" Vincent's girl said. "Aren't you in the Army? Hey? Are you out on that new points thing?"

"He had a hundred and seven points," Mattie said. "He has five battle stars, but you only wear a little silver one if you have five. You can't get five of the little gold ones on the ribbon thing. Five would look better. They'd look more. But he doesn't wear his uniform anymore, anyway. I got it. I got it in a box."

Babe crossed his legs as most tall men do, laying the ankle on the knee. "I'm out. I got out," he said. He looked at the clock in his sock, one of the most unfamiliar things in the new, combat-bootless world, then up at Vincent's girl. Was she real? "I got out last week," he said.

"Gee, that's swell."

She didn't care much one way or the other. Why should she? So Babe just nodded, and said, "You, uh....You know Vincent's - you know he was killed, don't you?"

"Yes."

Babe nodded again, and reversed the position of his legs, laying the other ankle on the other knee.

"His father phoned and told me," Vincent's girl said, "when it happened. He called me Miss Uhhh. He's known me all my life and he couldn't think of my first name. Just that I loved Vincent and that I was Howie Beeber's daughter. He thought we were still engaged, I guess. Vincent and I."

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She put her hand on the back of Mattie's neck, and stared at Mattie's right arm, which was nearest her. Not that there was anything the matter with Mattie's right arm. It was just bare and brown and young."

"I thought you might want to know a little about it all," Babe said, and sneezed about six times. When he put away his handkerchief, Vincent's girl was looking at him, but she didn't say anything. Very confusing and annoying. Maybe she wanted him to quit his introductions. He thought, and said, "I can't tell you he was happy or anything when he died. I'm sorry. I can't think of anything good. Yet I want to tell you the whole business."

"Don't lie to me at all. I want to know," Vincent's girl said. She let go of Mattie's neck. Then she just sat and didn't especially look at, or do, anything.

"Uh, he died in the morning. He and four other G.I.s and I were standing around a fire we made. In Hurtgen Forest. Some mortar dropped in suddenly - it didn't whistle or anything - and it hit Vincent and three of the other men. He died in the medics' CP tent about thirty yards away, not more than about three minutes after he was hit." Babe had to sneeze several times at that point.

He went on, "I think he had too much pain in too large an area of his body to have realized anything but blackness. I don't think it hurt. I swear I don't. His eyes were open. I think he recognized me and heard me when I spoke to him, but he didn't say anything to me at all. The last thing he said was about one of us was going to have to get some wood for the lousy fire - preferably one of the younger men, he said - you know how he talked." Babe stopped there because Vincent's girl was crying and he didn't know what to do about it.

Mattie spoke up, telling Vincent's girl: "He was a witty guy. He was at our house. Gee!"

Vincent's girl went on crying with her face in one hand, but she heard Mattie. Babe looked at the low-cut shoe on his foot, and waited for something quiet and sensible and easier to happen - such as Vincent's girl, Vincent's swell girl, not crying anymore.

When that happened - and it happened quickly, too - he talked again. "You're married and I didn't come here to torture you. I just thought, from stuff that Vincent told me, that you used to love him a lot and that you'd want to hear this stuff. I'm sorry I have to be a stranger with hay fever and on my way to lunch and a matinee. I didn't think it would be any good, but I came anyway. I don't know what's wrong with me since I'm back."

Vincent's girl said, "What's a mortar? Like a cannon?"

How could you ever tell what girls were going to say or do?... "Well, sort of. The shell drops in without whistling. I'm sorry." He was apologizing too much, but he wanted to apologize to every girl in the world whose lover had been hit by mortar fragments because the mortars hadn't whistled. He was very afraid now, that he had told Vincent's girl too much too coldly. The hay fever, the dirty hay fever, certainly was no help. But the thing that was really terrible was the way your mind wanted to tell civilians these things - that was much more terrible than what your voice said.

Your mind, your soldier's mind, wanted accuracy above all else. So far as details went, you wanted to the bull's-eye kid: Don't let any civilian leave you, when the story's over, with any comfortable lies. Shoot down all the lies. Don't let Vincent's girl think that Vincent asked for a cigarette before he died. Don't let her think that he grinned gamely, or said a few choice last words.

These things didn't happen. These things weren't done outside movies and books except by a very, very few guys who were unable to fasten their last thoughts to the depleting joy of being alive. Don't let Vincent's girl fool herself about Vincent, no matter how much she loved him. Get

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your sight picture on the nearest, biggest lie. That's why you're back, that's why you were lucky. Don't let anybody good down. Fire! Fire, buddy! *Now!*

Babe uncrossed his legs, briefly squeezed his forehead with the heels of his hands, then he sneezed about a dozen times. He used a fourth, fresh handkerchief on his burning, watery eyes, put it away, and said, "Vincent loved you something terrific. I don't know exactly why you broke up, but I do know it wasn't anybody's fault. I got that feeling about it when he talked about you - that your breaking up wasn't anybody's fault. Was it anybody's fault? I oughtn't to ask you that. Your being married. Was it anybody's fault?"

"It was his fault."

"How come you married Mr. Polk, then?" Mattie demanded.

"It was his fault. Listen. I loved Vincent. I loved his house and I loved his brothers and I loved his mother and father. I loved everything. Listen, Babe. Vincent didn't believe *anything*. If it was summer he didn't believe it; if it was winter he didn't believe it. He didn't believe anything from the time little Kenneth Caulfield died. His brother."

"That the little one, the younger one he was so crazy about?"

"Yes. I loved everything. I swear to you," Vincent's girl said, touching Mattie's arm almost vaguely.

Babe nodded. Without sneezing first, he reached into his inside coat pocket and took out something. "Uh," he said to Vincent's girl. "This is a poem he wrote. No kidding. I borrowed some air-mail envelopes from him and it was written on one of the backs. You can have it if you want it." He reached his long arm forward, unable to avoid being fascinated by the shiny links in his shirt cuffs, and handed her a mud-dirty G.I. air-mail envelope. It was folded once the short way, and slightly torn.

Vincent's girl looked at the face of it, and read the title with her lips moving. She looked at Babe. "Oh, Lord! Miss Beebers! He called me Miss Beebers!"

She looked down at the poem again, and read it through to herself, moving her lips. She shook her head when she reached the end, but not as though she were denying anything. Then she read the poem through again. Then she folded the poem into a very small size, as though concealment was necessary. She put her hand with the poem in it into her jacket pocket and left it there.

"Miss Beebers," she said, looking up as if someone had come in the room.

Babe, who had his legs crossed again, uncrossed them, as an overture to getting up.

"Well," he said. "The poem, is all." He stood up and so did Mattie. Then Vincent's girl stood up.

Babe extended his hand, which Vincent's girl duly clasped. "I probably shouldn't have come," he said. "I had the best and the worst motives...and I'm acting very peculiarly. I don't know what's the matter. Goodbye."

"I'm very glad you came, Babe."

That made him cry and he turned around and walked quickly out of the room towards the front door. Mattie went out behind him, and Vincent's girl slowly followed. When he turned around in the hall outside the apartment, he was all right again.

"Can we get a cab or something?" he asked Vincent's girl. "Are there cabs running? I didn't even notice."

"Maybe you can get one. It's a good time."

"Would you like to go to lunch and theater with us?" he asked her.

"I can't. I have to - I can't. Ring the 'Up' bell, Mattie. The 'Down' one doesn't work."

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Babe took her hand again. "Goodbye, Helen," he said, and released it. He walked over and stood beside Mattie in front of the closed elevator doors.

"What are you going to do now?" Vincent's girl almost shouted at him.

"I told you, we're going - "

"I mean now that you're back."

"Oh!" He sneezed. "I don't know. Is there something to do? No, I'm kidding. I'll do something. I'll probably get an M.A. and teach. My father's a teacher."

"Hey. Go see some girl dance with a big bubble or something tonight, huh?"

"I don't know any girls who dance with big bubbles. Ring the bell again, Mattie."

"Listen, Babe," Vincent's girl said intensely. "Call me sometime, willya? Please. I'm in the book."

"I know some girls," Babe said.

"I know, but we could have lunch or something and see a show. Wuddaya-call-it can get tickets to anything. Bob. My husband. Or come to dinner."

He shook his head and rang the elevator bell himself.

"Please."

"I'm all right. Don't be that way...I'm just not used to things yet."

The elevator doors slammed open. Mattie hollered "Goodbye," and followed her brother into the elevator. The doors slammed shut.

There weren't any taxis down in the street. They both walked west, toward the Park. The three long blocks between Lexington and Fifth were dull and noonish, as only that stretch can be in late August. A fat, apartment-house doorman, cupping a cigarette in his hand, was walking a wire-haired along the curb between Park and Madison.

Babe figured that during the whole time of the Bulge, the guy had walked that dog on this street every day. He couldn't believe it. He could believe it, but it was still impossible. He felt Mattie put her hand in his. She was talking a blue streak.

"Mamma said we ought to see that play, *Harvey*. She said you like Frank Fay. It's about this man who talks to a rabbit. When he's drunk and everything, he talks to this rabbit. Or *Oklahoma!* Mamma said you'd like *Oklahoma!*, too. Roberta Cochran saw it and she said it was swell. She said - "

"Who saw it?"

"Roberta Cochran. She's in my class. She's a dancer. Her father thinks he's a funny guy. I was over at her house and he tries to make a lot of wisecracks. He's a dope." Mattie was quiet for a second. "Babe," she said.

"What?"

"Are you glad to be home?"

"Yes, baby."

"Ow! You're hurting my hand."

He relaxed his grip. "Why do you ask me that?"

"I don't know. Let's sit on top of the bus. An open one."

"All right."

The sun was brilliant and hot as they crossed over to the Park side of Fifth Avenue. At the bus stop, Babe lighted a cigarette and took off his hat. A tall blond girl carrying a hatbox walked zippily along the other side of the street. In the middle of the broad avenue a small boy in

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a blue suit was trying to get his small, relaxed dog, probably named Theodore or Waggy, to get up and finish walking across the street like someone named Rex or Prince or Jim.

"I can eat with chopsticks, " Mattie said. "This guy showed me. Vera Weber's father. I'll show you."

The sun was full warm on Babe's pale face. "Kiddo," he said to Mattie, tapping her on the shoulder, "that's something I have to *see*."

"Okay. You'll see," said Mattie. With her feet together she made the little jump from the curb to the street surface, then back again. Why was it such a beautiful thing to see?

I'm Crazy

Collier's - December 22, 1945

IT was about eight o'clock at night, and dark, and raining, and freezing, and the wind was noisy the way it is in spooky movies on the night the old slob with the will gets murdered. I stood by the cannon on the top of Thomsen Hill, freezing to death, watching the big south windows of the gym - shining big and bright and dumb, like the windows of a gymnasium, and nothing else (but maybe you never went to a boarding school).

I just had on my reversible and no gloves. Somebody had swiped my camel's hair the week before, and my gloves were in the pocket. Boy, I was cold. Only a crazy guy would have stood there. That's me. Crazy. No kidding, I have a screw loose. But I had to stand there to feel the good-by to the youngness of the lace, as though I were an old man. The whole school was down below in the gym for the basketball game with the Saxon Charter slob, and I was standing there to feel the good-by.

I stood there - boy, I was freezing to death - and I kept saying good-by to myself. "Good-by, Caulfield. Good-by, you slob." I kept seeing myself throwing a football around, with Buhler and Jackson, just before it got dark on the September evenings, and I knew I'd never throw a football around ever again with the same guys at the same time. It was as though Buhler and Jackson and I had done something that had died and been buried, and only I knew about it, and no one was at the funeral but me. So I stood there, freezing.

The game with the Saxon Charter slob was in the second half, and you could hear everybody yelling: deep and terrific on the Pentey side of the gym, and scrawny and faggoty on the Saxon Charter side, because the Saxon bunch never brought more than the team with them and a few substitutes and managers. You could tell all right when Schutz or Kinsella or Tuttle had sunk one on the slob, because then the Pentey side of the gym went crazy.

But I only half cared who was winning. I was freezing and I was only there anyway to feel the good-by, to be at the funeral of me and Buhler and

Jackson throwing a football around in the September evenings - and finally on one of the cheers I felt the good-by like a real knife. I was strictly at the funeral.

So all of a sudden, after it happened, I started running down Thomsen Hill, with my suitcases banging the devil out of my legs. I ran all the way down to the Gate; then I stopped and got my breath; then I ran across Route 202 - it was icy and I fell and nearly broke my knee - and then I disappeared into Hessey Avenue. Disappeared. You disappeared every time you crossed a street that night. No kidding.

When I got to old Spencer's house - that's where I was going - I put down my bags on the porch, rang the bell hard and fast and put my hands on my ears - boy, they hurt. I started talking to the door. "C'mon, c'mon!" I said. "Open up. I'm freezing." Finally Mrs. Spencer came.

"Holden!" she said. "Come *in*, dear!" She was a nice woman. Her hot chocolate on Sundays was strictly lousy, but you never minded.

I got inside the house fast.

"Are you frozen to death? You must be soaking wet," Mrs. Spencer said. She wasn't the kind of woman that you could just be a little wet around: you were either real dry or soaking. But she didn't ask me what I was doing out of bounds, so I figured old Spencer had told her what happened.

I'm Crazy

I put down my bags in the hall and took off my hat - boy, I could hardly work my fingers enough to grab my hat. I said, "How are you, Mrs. Spencer? How's Mr. Spencer's grippe? He over it okay?"

"Over it!" Mrs. Spencer said. "Let me take your coat, dear. Holden he's behaving like a perfect I-don't-know-what. Go right in, dear. He's in his room."

Old Spencer had his own room next to the kitchen. He was about sixty years old, maybe even older, but he got a kick out of things in a half-shot way. If you thought about old Spencer you wondered what he was living for, everything about over for him and all. But if you thought about him that way, you were thinking about him the wrong way: you were thinking too much. If you thought about him just enough, not too much, you knew he was doing all right for himself. In a half-shot was he enjoyed almost everything all the time. I enjoy things terrifically, but just once in a while. Sometimes it makes you think maybe old people get a better deal. But I wouldn't trade places. I wouldn't want to enjoy almost everything all the time if it had to be in just a half-shot way.

Old Spencer was sitting in the big easy chair in his bedroom, all wrapped up in the Navajo blanket he and Mrs. Spencer bought in Yellowstone Park about eighty years ago. They probably got a big bang out of buying it off the Indians.

"Come in, Caulfield!" old Spencer yelled at me. "Come in, boy!"

I went in.

There was an opened copy of *The Atlantic Monthly* face down on his lap, and pills all over the place and bottles and a hot-water bottle. I hate seeing a hot-water bottle, especially an old guy's. That isn't nice, but that's the way I feel....Old Spencer certainly looked beat out. He certainly didn't look like a guy who ever behaved like a perfect I-don't-know-what. Probably Mrs. Spencer just like to think he was acting that way, as if she wanted to think maybe the old guy was still full of beans.

"I got your note, sir," I told him. "I would have come over anyway before I left. How's your grippe?"

"If I felt any better, boy, I'd have to send for the doctor," old Spencer said. That really knocked him out. "Sit down, boy," he said, still laughing. "Why in the name of Jupiter aren't you down at the game?"

I sat down on the edge of the bed. It sort of looked like an old guy's bed. I said, "Well, I was at the game a while, sir. But I'm going home tonight instead of tomorrow. Dr. Thurmer said I could go tonight if I really wanted to. So I'm going."

"Well, you certainly picked a honey of a night," old Spencer said. He really thought that over. "Going home tonight, eh?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

He said to me, "What did Dr. Thurmer say to you, boy?"

"Well, he was pretty nice in his way, sir," I said. "He said about life being a game. You know. How you should play it by the rules and all. Stuff like that. He wished me a lot of luck. In the future and all. That kind of stuff."

I guess Thurmer really was pretty nice to me in his sloppy way, so I told old Spencer a few other things Thurmer had said to me. About applying myself in life if I wanted to get ahead and all. I even made up some stuff, old Spencer was listening so hard and nodding all the while.

Then old Spencer asked me, "Have you communicated with your parents yet?"

"No, sir," I said. "I haven't communicated with them because I'll see them tonight."

I'm Crazy

Old Spencer nodded again. He asked me, "How will they take the news?"

"Well," I said, "they hate this kind of stuff. This is the third school I've been kicked out of. Boy! No kidding," I told him.

Old Spencer didn't nod this time. I was bothering him, poor guy. He suddenly lifted the Atlantic Monthly off his lap, as though it had got too heavy for him, and chucked it towards the bed. He missed. I got up and picked it up and laid it on the bed. All of a sudden I wanted to get the heck out of there.

Old Spencer said, "What's the matter with you, boy? How many subjects did you carry this term?"

"Four," I said.

"And how many did you flunk?" he said.

"Four," I said.

Old Spencer started staring at the spot on the rug where the Atlantic Monthly had fallen when he tried to chuck it on the bed. He said, "I flunked you in history because you knew absolutely nothing. You were never once prepared, either for examinations or for daily recitations. Not once. I doubt if you opened your textbook once during the term; *did* you?"

I told him I'd glanced through it a couple of times, so's not to hurt his feelings. He thought history was really hot. It was all right with me if he thought I was a real dumb guy, but I didn't want him to think I'd given his book the freeze.

"Your exam paper is on my chiffonier over there," he said. "Bring it over here."

I went over and got it and handed it to him and sat down on the edge of the bed again.

Old Spencer handled my exam paper as though it were something catching that he had to handle for the good of science or something, like Pasteur or one of those guys.

He said, "We studied the Egyptians from November 3rd to December 4th. You *chose* to write about them for the essay question, from a selection of twenty-five topics. This is what you had to say:

The Egyptians were an ancient race of people living in one of the northernmost sections of North Africa, which is one of the largest continents in the Eastern Hemisphere as we all know. The Egyptians are also interesting to us today for numerous reasons. Also, you read about them frequently in the Bible. The Bible is full of amusing anecdotes about the old Pharaohs. They were all Egyptians, as we all know.

Old Spencer looked up at me. "New paragraph," he said.

What is most interesting about the Egyptians was their habits. The Egyptians had many interesting ways of doing things. Their religion was also very interesting. They buried their dead in tombs in a very interesting way. The dead Pharaohs had their faces wrapped up in specially treated cloths to prevent their features from rotting. Even to this day physicians don't know what that chemical formula was, thus all our faces rot when we are dead for a certain length of time.

Old Spencer looked over the paper at me again. I stopped looking at him. If he was going to look up at me every time he hit the end of a paragraph, I wasn't going to look at him.

"Do you blame me for flunking you, boy?" old Spencer asked me. "What would you have done in my place?"

"The same thing," I said. "Down with the morons." But I wasn't giving it much thought at the minute. I was sort of wondering if the lagoon in Central Park would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was frozen over would everybody be ice skating when you looked out the window in the morning, and where did the ducks go, what happened to the ducks when the lagoon was frozen over. But I couldn't have told all that to old Spencer.

I'm Crazy

He asked me, "How do you feel about all this, boy?"

"You mean my flunking out and all, sir?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

Well, I tried to give it some thought because he was a nice guy and because he kept missing the bed all the time when he shucked something at it.

"Well, I'm sorry I'm flunking out, for lots of reasons," I said. I knew I could never really get it over to him. Not about standing on Thomsen Hill and thinking about Buhler and Jackson and me. "Some of the reasons would be hard to explain right off, sir," I told him. "But tonight, for instance," I said. "Tonight I had to pack my bags and put my ski boots in them. The ski boots made me sorry I'm leaving. I could see my mother chasing around stores, asking the salesmen a million dumb questions. Then she bought me the wrong kind anyway. Boy, she's nice, though. No kidding. That's mostly why I'm sorry I'm flunking out. On account of my mother and the wrong ski boots." That's all I said. I had to quit.

Old Spencer was nodding the whole time, as though he understood it all, but you couldn't tell whether he was nodding because he was going to understand anything I might tell him, or if he was only nodding because he was just a nice old guy with the grippe and a screwball on his hands.

"You'll miss the school, boy," he said to me.

He was a nice guy. No kidding. I tried to tell him some more. I said, "Not exactly, sir. I'll miss some stuff. I'll miss going and coming to Pentey on the train; going back to the dining car and ordering a chicken sandwich and a Coke, and reading five new magazines with all the pages slick and new. And I'll miss the Pentey stickers on my bag. Once a lady saw them and asked me if I knew Andrew Warbach. She was Warbach's mother, and you know Warbach, sir. Strictly a louse. He's the kind of a guy, when you were a little kid, that twisted your wrist to get the marbles out of your hand. But his mother was all right. She should have been in a nut house, like most mothers, but she loved Warbach. You could see in her nutty eyes that she thought he was hot stuff. So I spent nearly an hour on the train telling her what a hot shot Warbach is at school, how none of the guys ever make a move and all without going to Warbach first. It knocked Mrs. Warbach out. She nearly rolled in the aisle. She probably half knew he was a louse in her heart, but I changed her mind. I like mothers. They give me a terrific kick."

I stopped. Old Spencer wasn't following. Maybe he was a little bit, but not enough to make me want to get into it deep. Anyway, I wasn't saying much that I wanted to say. I never do. I'm crazy. No kidding.

Old Spencer said: "Do you plan to go to college, boy?"

"I have no plans, sir," I said. "I live from one day to the next." It sounded phony, but I was beginning to feel phony. I was sitting there on the edge of that bed too long. I got up suddenly.

"I guess I better go, sir," I said. "I have to catch a train. You've been swell. No kidding."

Well, old Spencer asked me if I didn't want a cup of hot chocolate before I left, but I said no thanks. I shook hands with him. He was sweating pretty much. I told him I'd write him a letter sometime, that he shouldn't worry about me, that he oughtn't to let me get him down. I told him that I knew I was crazy. He asked me if I were sure I didn't want any hot chocolate, that it wouldn't take long.

"No," I said, "good-by, sir. Take it easy with your grippe now."

"Yes," he said, shaking hands with me again. "Good-by, boy."

He called something after me while I was leaving, but I couldn't hear him. I think it was good luck. I really felt sorry for him. I knew what he was thinking: how young I was, how I didn't know anything about the world and all, what happened to guys like me and all. I probably got him down for a while after I left, but I'll bet later on he talked me over with Mrs. Spencer and felt better, and he probably had Mrs. Spencer hand him his Atlantic Monthly before she left the room.

It was after one that night when I got home, because I shot the bull for around a half-hour with Pete, the elevator boy. He was telling me all about his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law is a cop, and he shot a guy; he didn't need to, but he did it to be a big shot, and now Pete's sister didn't like to be around Pete's brother-in-law any more. It was tough. I didn't feel so sorry for Pete's sister, but I felt sorry for Pete's brother-in-law, the poor slob.

Jeannette, our colored maid, let me in. I lost my key somewhere. She was wearing one of those aluminum jobs in her hair, guaranteed to remove the kink.

"What choo doin' home, boy?" she said. "What choo doin' home, boy?" She says everything twice.

I was pretty sick and tired of people calling me "boy," so I just said, "Where are the folks?"

"They playin' bridge," she said. "They playin' bridge. What choo doin' home, boy?"

"I came home for the race," I said.

"What race?" the dope said.

"The human race. Ha, ha, ha," I said. I dropped my bags and coat in the hall and got away from her. I shoved my hat on the back of my head, feeling pretty good for a change, and walked down the hall and opened Phoebe and Viola's door. It was pretty dark, even with the door open, and I nearly broke my neck getting over to Phoebe's bed.

I sat down on her bed. She was asleep, all right.

"Phoebe," I said. "Hey, Phoebe!"

She waked up pretty easily.

"Holden!" she said anxiously. "What are you doing home? What's the matter? What happened?"

"Aah, the same old stuff," I said.

"What's new?"

"Holdie, what are you doing home?" she said. She's only ten, but when she wants an answer she wants an answer.

"What's the matter with your arm?" I asked her. I noticed a hunk of adhesive tape on her arm.

"I banged it on the wardrobe doors," she said. "Miss Keefe made me Monitor of the Wardrobe. I'm in charge of everybody's garments." But she got right back to it again. "Holdie," she said, "what are you doing home?"

She sounds like a goody-good, but it was only when it came to me. That's because she likes me. She's no goody-good, though. Phoebe's strictly one of us, for a kid.

"I'll be back in a minute," I told her, and I went back in the living room and got some cigarettes out of one of the boxes, put them in my pocket; then I went back. Phoebe was sitting up straight, looking fine. I sat down on her bed again.

"I got kicked out again," I told her.

"Holden!" she said, "Daddy'll *kill* you."

I'm Crazy

"I couldn't help it, Phoeb," I said. "They kept shoving stuff at me, exams and all, and study periods, and everything was compulsory all the time. I was going crazy. I just didn't like it."

"But, Holden," Phoebe said, "you don't like *anything*." She really looked worried.

"Yes, I do. Yes, I do. Don't say that, Phoeb," I said. "I like a heck of a lot of stuff."

Phoebe said, "What? Name one thing."

"I don't know. Gosh, I don't know," I told her. "I can't think anymore today. I like girls I haven't met yet, girls that you can just see the backs of their heads, a few seats ahead of you on the train. I like a million things. I like sitting here with you. No kidding, Phoeb. I like just sitting her with you."

"Go to bed, Viola," Phoebe said. Viola was up. "She squeezes right out through the bars," Phoebe told me.

I picked up Viola and sat her on my lap. A crazy kid if ever there was one, but strictly one of us.

"Holdie," Viola said, "make Jeannette give me Donald Duck."

"Viola insulted Jeannette, and Jeannette took away her Donald Duck," Phoebe said.

"Her breath is always all the time bad," Viola told me.

"Her *breath*," Phoebe said. "She told Jeannette her breath was bad. When Jeannette was putting on her leggings."

"Jeannette *breathes* on me all the time," Viola said, standing on me.

I asked Viola if she had missed me, but she looked as though she weren't sure whether or not I'd been away.

"Go on back to bed no, Viola," Phoebe said. "She squeezes right out through the bars."

"Jeannette breathes on me all the time and she took away Donald Duck," Viola told me again.

"Holden'll get it back," Phoebe told her. Phoebe wasn't like other kids. She didn't take sides with the maid.

I got up and carried Viola back to her crib and put her in it. She asked me to bring her something, but I couldn't understand her.

"Ovvels," Phoebe said. "Olives. She's crazy about olives now. She wants to eat olives all the time. She rang the elevator bell when Jeannette was out this afternoon and had Pete open up a can of olives for her."

"Ovvels," Viola said. "Bring ovvels, Holdie."

"Okay," I said.

"With the red in them," Viola said.

I told her okay, and said to go to sleep. I tucked her in, then I started to go back where Phoebe was, only I stopped so short it almost hurt. I heard them come in.

"That's *them*!" Phoebe whispered. "I can hear *Daddy*!"

I nodded, and walked toward the door. I took off my hat.

"*Holdie*!" Phoebe whispered at me.

"Tell 'em how sorry you are. All that stuff. And how you'll do better next time!"

I just nodded.

"Come back!" Phoebe said. "I'll stay awake!"

I'm Crazy

I went out and shut the door. I wished I had hung up my coat and put away my bags. I knew they'd tell me how much the coat cost and how peoples tripped over bags and broke their necks.

When they were all done with me I went back to the kids' room. Phoebe was asleep, and I watched her awhile. Nice kid. Then I went over to Viola's crib. I lifted her blanket and put her Donald Duck in there with her; then I took some olives I had in my left hand and laid them on by one in a row along the railing of her crib. One of them fell on the floor. I picked it up, felt dust on it, and put it in my jacket pocket. Then I left the room.

I went into my own room, turned the radio on, but it was broken. So I went to bed.

I lay awake for a pretty long time, feeling lousy. I knew everybody was right and I was wrong. I knew that I wasn't going to one of those successful guys, that I was never going to be like Edward Gonzales or Theodore Fisher or Lawrence Meyer. I knew that this time when Father said that I was going to work in that man's office that he meant it, that I wasn't going back to school again ever, that I wouldn't like working in an office. I started wondering again where the ducks in Central Park went when the lagoon was frozen over, and finally I went to sleep.

Slight Rebellion Off Madison

The New Yorker - December 21, 1946

ON vacation from Pencey Preparatory School for Boys ("An Instructor for Every Ten Students"), Holden Morrissey Caulfield usually wore his chesterfield and a hat with a cutting edge at the "V" in the crown. While riding in Fifth Avenue buses, girls who knew Holden often thought they saw him walking past Saks' or Altman's or Lord & Taylor's, but it was usually somebody else.

This year, Holden's Christmas vacation from Pencey Prep broke at the same time as Sally Hayes' from Mary A. Woodruff School for Girls ("Special Attention to Those Interested in Dramatics"). On vacation from Mary A. Woodruff, Sally usually went hatless and wore her new silver-blue muskrat coat. While riding in Fifth Avenue, boys who knew Sally often thought they saw her walking past Saks' or Altman's or Lord & Taylor's. It was usually somebody else.

As soon as Holden got into New York, he took a cab home, dropped his Gladstone in the foyer, kissed his mother, lumped his hat and coat into a convenient chair, and dialed Sally's number.

"Hey!" he said into the mouthpiece. "Sally?"

"Yes. Who's that?"

"Holden Caulfield. How are ya?"

"Holden! I'm fine! How are you?"

"Swell," said Holden. "Listen. How are ya, anyway? I mean how's school?"

"Fine," said Sally. "I mean - you know."

"Swell," said Holden. "Well, listen. What are you doing tonight?"

Holden took her to the Wedgwood Room that night, and they both dressed, Sally wearing her new turquoise job. They danced a lot. Holden's style was long, slow wide steps back and forth, as though he were dancing over an open manhole. They danced cheek to cheek, and when their faces got sticky from contact, neither of them minded. It was a long time between vacations.

They made a wonderful thing out of the taxi ride home. Twice, when the cab stopped short in traffic, Holden fell off the seat.

"I love you," he swore to Sally, removing his mouth from hers.

"Oh, darling, I love you, too," Sally said, and added less passionately, "Promise me you'll let your hair grow out. Crew cuts are corny."

The next day was a Thursday and Holden took Sally to the matinee of "O Mistress Mine," which neither of them had seen. During the first intermission, they smoked in the lobby and vehemently agreed with each other that the Lunts were marvelous. George Harrison, of Andover, also was smoking in the lobby and he recognized Sally, as she hoped he would. They had been introduced once at a party and had never seen each other since. Now, in the lobby at the Empire, they greeted each other with the gusto of two who might have taken baths together as small children. Sally asked George if he didn't think the show was marvelous. George gave himself some room for his reply, bearing down on the foot of the woman behind him. He said that the play itself certainly was no masterpiece, but that the Lunts, of course, were absolute angels.

"Angels," Holden thought. "Angels. For Chrissake. *Angels*."

Slight Rebellion Off Madison

After the matinee, Sally told Holden that she had a marvelous idea. "Let's go ice skating at Radio City tonight."

"All right," Holden said. "Sure."

"Do you mean it?" Sally said. "Don't just *say* it unless you mean it. I mean I don't give a darn, one way or the other."

"No," said Holden. "Let's go. It might be fun."

Sally and Holden were both horrible ice skaters. Sally's ankles had a painful, unbecoming way of collapsing towards each other and Holden's weren't much better. That night there were at least a hundred people who had nothing better to do than watch the skaters.

"Let's get a table and have a drink," Holden suggested suddenly.

"That's the most marvelous idea I've heard all day," Sally said.

They removed their skates and sat down at a table in the warm inside lounge. Sally took off her red woolen mittens. Holden began to light matches. He let them burn down until he couldn't hold them, then he dropped what was left into an ashtray.

"Look," Sally said, "I have to know - are you or aren't you going to help me trim the tree Christmas Eve?"

"Sure," said Holden, without enthusiasm.

"I mean I have to know," Sally said.

Holden suddenly stopped lighting matches. He leaned forward over the table. "Sally, did you ever get fed up? I mean did you ever get so scared that everything was gonna go lousy unless you did something?"

"Sure," said Sally.

"Do you like school?" Holden inquired.

"It's a terrific bore."

"Do you hate it, I mean?"

"Well, I don't hate it."

"Well, I hate it," said Holden. "Boy, do I hate it! But it isn't just that. It's everything. I hate living in New York. I hate Fifth Avenue buses and Madison Avenue buses and getting out at the center doors. I hate the Seventy-second Street movie, with those fake clouds on the ceiling, and being introduced to guys like George Harrison, and going down in elevators when you wanna go out, and guys fitting your pants all the time at Brooks." His voice got more excited. "Stuff like that. Know what I mean? You know something? You're the only reason I came home this vacation."

"You're sweet," Sally said, wishing he'd change the subject.

"Boy, I hate school! You oughta go to a boys' school sometime. All you do is study, and make believe you give a damn if the football team wins, and talk about girls and clothes and liquor, and -"

"Now, *listen*," Sally interrupted. "Lots of boys get more out of school than that."

"I agree," said Holden. "But that's all *I* get out of it. See? That's what I mean. I don't get anything out of anything. I'm in bad shape. I'm in lousy shape. Look, Sally. How would you like to just beat it? Here's my idea. I'll borrow Fred Halsey's car and tomorrow morning we'll drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont and around there, see? It's beautiful. I mean it's wonderful up there, honest to God. We'll stay in these cabin camps and stuff like that till my money runs out. I have a hundred and twelve dollars with me. Then, when the money runs out, I'll get a job and we'll live somewhere with a brook and stuff. Know what I mean? Honest to God, Sally, we'll

Slight Rebellion Off Madison

have a swell time. Then, later on, we'll get married or something. Wuddaya say? C'mon! Wuddaya say? C'mon! Let's do it, huh?"

"You can't just *do* something like that," Sally said.

"Why not?" Holden asked shrilly. "Why the hell not?"

"Because you can't," Sally said. "You just can't, that's all. Supposing your money ran out and you didn't get a job - then what?"

"I'd get a job. Don't worry about that. You don't have to worry about that part of it. What's the matter? Don't you wanna go with me?"

"It isn't that," Sally said. "It's not that at all. Holden, we'll have lots of time to do those things - *all* those things. After you go to college and we get married and all. There'll be oodles of marvelous places to go to."

"No, there wouldn't be," Holden said. "It'd be entirely different."

Sally looked at him; he had contradicted her so quietly.

"It wouldn't be the same at all. We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to call up everyone and tell 'em goodbye and send 'em postcards. And I'd have to work at my father's and ride in Madison Avenue buses and read newspapers. We'd have to go to the Seventy-second Street all the time and see newsreels. Newsreels! There's always a dumb horse race and some dame breaking a bottle over a ship. You don't see what I mean at all."

"Maybe I don't. Maybe *you* don't, either," Sally said.

Holden stood up, with his skates swung over one shoulder. "You give me a royal pain," he announced quite dispassionately.

A little after midnight, Holden and a fat, unattractive boy named Carl Luce sat at the Wadsworth Bar, drinking Scotch-and-sodas and eating potato chips. Carl was at Pencey Prep, too, and led his class.

"Hey, Carl," Holden said, "you're one of these intellectual guys. Tell me something. Supposing you were fed up. Supposing you were going stark, staring mad. Supposing you wanted to quit school and everything and get the hell out of New York. What would you do?"

"Drink up," Carl said. "The hell with that."

"No, I'm serious," Holden pleaded.

"You've always got a bug," Carl said, and got up and left.

Holden went on drinking. He drank up nine dollars' worth of Scotch-and-sodas and at 2 A.M. made his way from the bar into the little anteroom, where there was a telephone. He dialed three numbers before he got the proper one.

"Hullo!" Holden shouted into the phone.

"Who is this?" inquired a cold voice.

"This is me, Holden Caulfield. Can I speak to Sally, please?"

"Sally's asleep. This is Mrs. Hayes. Why are you calling up at this hour? Holden?"

"Wanna talk Sally, Mrs. Hayes. Very 'portant. Put her on."

"Sally's *asleep*, Holden. Call tomorrow. Good night."

"Wake 'er up. Wake 'er up, huh? Wake 'er up, Mis' Hayes."

"Holden," Sally said, from the other end of the wire. "This is me. What's the idea?"

"Sally? Sally, that you?"

"Yes. You're drunk."

"Sally, I'll come over Christmas Eve. Trim the tree for ya. Huh? Wuddaya say? Huh?"

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"Yes, go to bed now. Where are you? Who's with you?"

"I'll trim the tree for ya. Huh? Wuddaya say? Huh?"

"Yes, go to bed now. Where are you? Who's with you?"

"I'll trim the tree for ya. Huh? Wuddaya say? Huh? O.K?"

"Yes! Good night!"

"G'night. G'night, Sally baby. Sally sweetheart, darling."

Holden hung up and stood by the phone for nearly fifteen minutes. Then he put another nickel in the slot and dialed the same number again.

"*Hullo!*" he yelled into the mouthpiece. "Speak to Sally, please."

There was a sharp click as the phone was hung up, and Holden hung up, too. He stood swaying for a moment. Then he made his way into the men's room and filled one of the washbowls with cold water. He immersed his head to the ears, after which he walked, dripping, to the radiator and sat down on it. He sat there counting the squares in the tile floor while the water dripped down his face and the back of his neck, soaking his shirt collar and necktie. Twenty minutes later the barroom piano player came in to comb his wavy hair.

"Hiya, boy!" Holden greeted him from the radiator. "I'm on the hot seat. They pulled the switch on me. I'm getting fried."

The piano player smiled.

"Boy, you can play!" Holden said. "You really can play the piano. You oughta go on the radio. You know that? You're damned good, boy."

"You wanna towel, fella?" asked the piano player.

"Not me," said Holden.

"Why don't you go home, kid?"

Holden shook his head. "Not me," he said. "Not me."

The piano player shrugged and replaced the lady's comb in his inside pocket. When he left the room, Holden stood up from the radiator and blinked several times to let the tears out of his eyes. Then he went to the cloakroom. He put on his chesterfield without buttoning it and jammed his hat on the back of his soaking-wet head.

His teeth chattering violently, Holden stood on the corner and waited for a Madison Avenue bus. It was a long wait.

A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist At All

Mademoiselle - May 1947

THE young man in the seat behind Barbara at the jai alai games had leaned forward finally and asked if she were ill and if she would like to be escorted back to the ship. Barbara had looked up at him, had looked at his looks, and said yes, she thought she would, thank you, that she did have kind of a headache, and that it was certainly was awfully nice of him. Then they had stood up together and left the stadium, returning to the ship by taxi and tender. But before she had gone into her cabin on B deck, Barbara had said nervously to the young man: "Hey. I could just take an aspirin or something. I could meet you on the deck where the shuffleboard stuff is. You know who you look like? You look like a boy who was in a lot of West Pointy pictures with Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler and - when I was little. Never see him anymore. Listen. I could just take an aspirin. Unless you have something else - " The young man had interrupted her, saying, in so many words, that he had nothing else to do. Then Barbara had walked quickly forward to her cabin. She was wearing a red-and-blue striped evening gown, and her figure was very young and sassy. There were several years to go before her figure stopped being sassy and just became a very pretty figure.

The young man - his name was Ray Kinsella, and he was a member of the ship's Junior Entertainment Committee-waited for Barbara at the railing on the portside of the promenade deck. Nearly all the passengers were ashore and, in the stillness and moonlight, it was a powerful place to be. The only sound in the night came from the Havana harbor water slucking gently against the sides of the ship. Through the moon mist the *Kungsholm* could be seen, anchored sleepy and rich, just a few hundred feet aft. Farther shoreward a few small boats corked about.

"I'm back," said Barbara.

The young man, Ray, turned. "Oh. You changed your dress."

"Don't you like white?" - quickly.

"Sure. It's fine," said Ray. She was looking at him a little nearsightedly, and he guessed she probably wore glasses when she was home. He looked at his wristwatch now. "Listen. A tender's going to leave in a minute. Would you like to go ashore again and horse around a little? I mean do you feel all right?"

"I took an aspirin. Unless *you* have something else to do," said Barbara. "I don't want to stay on the ship very much."

"Let's hurry, then," said Ray, and took her arm.

Barbara had to run to keep up with him. "Golly," she said, "how tall are you anyway?"

"Six-four. Hurry a little."

The tender bobbed only slightly in the calm water. Ray slipped his hands under Barbara's arms, eased her down to the tender pilot and then jumped into the boat himself. The little action disordered a single lock of his dark hair and hiked up the back of his dinner jacket. He pulled down his jacket, and a pocket comb immediately found its way to his hand; he passed it just once, brought up in the rear by the careful flat of his other hand, through his hair. Then he looked around. Besides Barbara and himself and the pilot there were only three people in the tender. One of them he identified as a A-deck stewardess-she probably had a shore date with one of the crew. The other two people, a couple in their late forties, were familiar-faced passengers whom

Ray didn't know by name-they were regulars at the horse-racing game each afternoon, he knew though. He lost interest at that point and steadied Barbara as the little craft shoved off.

The wife, however, was beginning to look interested in Barbara and Ray. She was a beautifully, a perfectly, gray-haired woman in a long sleeved evening gown with Thurber dogs in the pattern. She was wearing a pear shaped diamond ring and a diamond bracelet. Just on sight no one very sensible would have laid bets on her background. She might, years ago, have walked very erectly across a Broadway stage, with an ostrich fan, singing *A Pretty Girl Is Like A Melody*, or something similarly ostrich fan-ish. She might have been an ambassador's daughter or a fireman's daughter. She might have been her husband's secretary for years. As only second class beauty can be identified, there is no way of telling.

She spoke to Barbara and Ray suddenly.

"Isn't it a heavenly night?"

"It certainly is," Ray said.

"Don't you just feel wonderful?" the woman asked Barbara.

"I do now. I didn't before," Barbara answered politely.

"Oh," said the woman, smiling, "I just feel wonderful." She slipped her arm through her husband's. Then for the first time she noticed the stewardess from A deck, who was standing beside the pilot. She called to her: "Don't you just feel marvelous tonight?"

The stewardess turned. "I beg your pardon?" Her tone was that of an off-duty snob.

"I said don't you feel just wonderful. Isn't it a heavenly night?"

"Oh," said the stewardess, smiling briefly, "I guess so."

"Oh, it is," said the woman emphatically. "One would never know it was nearly December." She visibly squeezed her husband's hand and addressed him in the same ecstatic tones she had been using. "You do feel marvelous, don't you darling?"

"Sure do," said her husband and winked at Barbara and Ray. He wore a wine-colored dinner jacket that was cut very full, letting him look huge rather than overweight. The woman turned and looked out over the water.

"Heavenly," she said softly. She touched her husband's sleeve. "Darling, look at those sweet little boats."

"Where?"

"There. Over there."

"Oh yeah. Nice."

The woman spoke suddenly to Barbara. "I'm Diane Woodruff and this is my husband Fielding." Barbara and Ray in turn introduced themselves "Of course!" said Mrs. Woodruff to Ray. "You're the boy who runs all the tournaments. Lovely." She again looked out over the water. "Those poor little boats. They all belong in bathtubs." She looked at Barbara and Ray. "Where are you both going? Why don't you come along with us? Of course! You must. Say you will. Please do."

"Well, I - it's very nice of you," answered Ray. "I don't know what Barbara had - "

"I'd love to," said Barbara. "Where are you going? I mean, I've never been to Havana before."

"Everywhere!" said Mrs. Woodruff roundly. "Well, isn't this just perfect?" She leaned forward and called again to the stewardess. "Dear, wouldn't you like to join us? Please do."

"I'm sorry. I hafta meet somebody. Thanks just the same, though."

"What a pity. Fielding, darling, you look like a college boy, so young. It's indecent."

"Me? An old punk like me?"

A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist At All

"Where are you from dear?" Mrs. Woodruff asked Barbara.

"Coopersburg, Pennsylvania. It's near Pittsburgh."

"Oh, how nice. And you?"

"Salt Lake City," said Ray.

"We're from San Francisco. Isn't it wonderful? Do you think we'll be in the war soon, Mr. Walters? My husband doesn't think so."

"Kinsella," corrected Ray. "I don't know. I go in the Army anyway when the cruise is over."

Mrs. Woodruff put a hand to her mouth.... "Oh!" she said. "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Oh, It won't be too bad," Ray explained. "I have a commission in the artillery from R.O.T.C. I'll have my own battery and all. I mean I won't have to take anybody's guff."

As the tender bumped gently into port, Ray put his arm around Barbara's waist to steady her.

"She has no waist at all," said Mrs. Woodruff and looked gently at Ray. "How perfect it must be for you to be out on a night like this with somebody who has absolutely no waist at all."

Ray, who had recommended it, led the way into Viva Havana. It was chiefly a tourist spot, but with money and highhandedness behind it. There was nothing inside except the waiters. The owner was Irish, the menu was French, the headwaiter was Swiss, the orchestra was mostly Brooklyn, the chorus girls were former citizens of Shubert's alley, and Scotch sold better than any other drink. The jai alai games over, the crowd from the ship had already arrived at Viva Havana and were distributed sunburntly around the vast, noisy room. Ray immediately noticed the young lady whom he and the other Junior Committeemen had intimately voted Miss Latex Bathing Suit of 1941. She was swaying, half in and half out of her partner's arms, near the orchestra stand, talking to the leader, probably asking him to play Stardust. Ray also spotted the governor elect - the ship's celebrity - on his way to the game room, wearing a white dinner jacket, not his usual man-of-the-people skimpy black suit. The Masterson Twins, Ray also noticed, were at a table with - in the parlance of the ship's employees - the Chicago Catch and the Cleveland Outfumbler, was just unquestionably tight. Mr. Woodruff attended to the ordering when they were all seated. Then he and Mrs. Woodruff pried their way to the dance floor.

"Would you like to dance?" Ray asked Barbara.

"Not right away. I don't know how to rumba. I need something very slow, anyway. Look at Mrs. Woodruff. She's very good."

"She's not bad," conceded Ray.

Barbara said excitedly, "Isn't she nice? Isn't she beautiful? She's so - so I don't know what. Golly!"

"She certainly talks a lot," Ray said, stirring his highball.

"You must meet a lot of people, going on these cruises all the time," Barbara said.

"This is only the second time. I just quit college. Yale. I was going in the army anyway, so I figured I might as well have a little fun." He lit a cigarette. "What do you do?" he asked.

"I used to work. I don't do anything now. I didn't go to college."

I haven't seen your mother anywheres around tonight," said the Yale man.

"The lady traveling with me?" said Barbara. "She isn't my mother."

"She isn't?"

"No. My mother's dead. She's my mother-in-law-to-be."

"Oh."

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Barbara reached forward for the centerpiece matchbox. She struck a match, blew it out, struck another, blew it out and drew back her hands to her lap. "I was sick for a while," she said, "and my fiance wanted me to go away for a rest. Mrs. Odenhearn said she'd take me on a cruise or something. So we went."

"Well!" said Ray, who was watching Miss Latex Bathing Suit of 1941 perform on the dance floor.

"It's like being with a girl my own age, almost," Barbara said. "She's very nice. She was a great athlete when she was young."

"She seems very nice. Drink your drink, why don't you?" Barbara picked up her drink and sipped a sixteenth of an inch of it. "I can dance to what they're playing now," she said.

"Fine." They stood up and worked their way to the dance floor. Barbara danced rigidly and without any perceptible feeling for rhythm. In her nervousness she got Ray's arm into a peculiar position, locked it just enough to give him trouble leading her.

"I'm an awful dancer."

"You certainly are not," said Ray.

"My brother tried to teach me when I was little."

"Oh?"

"He's about your size. He used to play football in high school. Only he hurt his knee and had to stop. He could've had a scholarship to almost any college if he hadn't hurt himself."

The floor was so crowded that it mattered relatively little how poorly they danced together.

Ray suddenly noticed how blond, how corn yellow, Barbara's hair was. "What's your fiance like?" he asked.

"Carl? Oh, he's very nice. He sounds lovely over the telephone. He's very - very considerate about stuff."

"What stuff?"

"Oh...stuff. I don't know. I don't understand boys. I never know what they're talking about."

Ray suddenly lowered his head and kissed Barbara on the forehead. It tasted sweet and left him feeling unsteady.

"Why did you do that?" Barbara said, not looking up at him.

"I don't know. Are you sore?"

"It's so *warm* in here," Barbara said. "*Golly*."

"How old are you, Barbara?"

"Eighteen. How old are you?"

"Well, actually I'm twenty-two."

They went on dancing.

"My father had a cerebral hemorrhage and died last summer," Barbara said.

"Oh! That's tough."

"I live with my aunt. She's a teacher at Coopersburg High. Did you ever read *Green Light* by Lloyd C. Douglas?"

"I don't get much time for books. Why? Is it good?"

"I didn't read it. My aunt wants me to read it. I'm stepping all over your feet."

"No, you're not."

"My aunt's very nice," Barbara said.

"You know," said Ray, "it's very hard to follow your conversation sometimes."

She didn't answer, and for a moment he was afraid he had offended her. He felt a slight panic rise in his head at the thought: he still tasted her forehead on his lips. But, below his chin, Barbara's voice spoke up again. "My brother had a car accident just before I left." It was a great relief to hear.

The Woodruffs were already seated at the table. Their shot glasses of bourbon were empty and their chasers barely sipped.

"I waved to you," Mrs. Woodruff lightly accused Barbara. "You didn't even wave back."

"Why, I certainly did wave back to you," Barbara said.

"Did you watch us rumba?" asked Mrs. Woodruff. "Weren't we marvelous? Fielding's a Latin at heart. We're both Latins. I'm going to the powder room ... Barbara?"

"Not just now. I'm watching a drunken man," Barbara said.

As Mrs. Woodruff left the table, almost simultaneously her husband leaned forward and addressed the two young people.

"I'm trying to keep something from her. Our son's going to join the Army while we're gone, I think. He wants to be a flier. It would kill Mrs. Woodruff if she knew." Mr. Woodruff then sat back, sighed heavily and catching the waiter's eye, he signaled for another round of drinks. Then he stood up, used his handkerchief forcibly and wandered away from the table. Barbara watched him until he disappeared: then she turned and spoke to Ray:

"Do you like clams and oysters and stuff?" Ray started slightly.

"Well, yes. Sort of."

"I don't like any kinds of shell food," Barbara said nervously. "Do you know what I heard today? I heard the ship may not make any more cruises till after the war."

"It's just a rumor," said Ray casually. "Don't look so sad about it. You and what's-his-name - Carl - can take this same cruise after the war," Ray said, watching her.

"He's going in the Navy."

"After the war, I said."

"I know," said Barbara, nodding, "but - everything's so funny. I *feel* so funny." She stopped short, unable or unwilling to express herself. Ray moved a little closer to her.

"You have nice hands, Barbara," he said. She removed them from the table.

"They're terrible now. I couldn't get the right polish."

"They're *not* terrible." Ray picked up one of her hands - and immediately let go of it. He stood up and drew Mrs. Woodruff's chair for her. Mrs. Woodruff smiled, lit a cigarette and looked alertly at them both.

"I want you both to leave very shortly," she said smiling. "This place isn't at all right for you."

"Why?" asked Barbara, with wide eyes.

"Really. This is the sort of place to go when the very best things are over and there's mostly money left. We don't even belong here - Fielding and I. Please. Take a lovely walk somewhere." Mrs. Woodruff appealed to Ray. "Mr. Walters," she said, "aren't there any not-too-well-organized clambakes or hayrides tonight?"

"Kinsella," corrected Ray, rather curtly. "Afraid not."

"I've never been to a clambake or a hayride," Barbara said.

"Oh! Oh, what bad news! They're so nice. Oh, how I hate 1941."

Mr. Woodruff sat down.

"What's that, dear?" he asked.

A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist At All

"I said I hate 1941," said his wife peculiarly. And without moving she broke into tears, smiling at all of them. "I do," she said. "I detest it. It's full of armies waiting to fill up with boys, and girls and mothers waiting to live in mailboxes and smirking old headwaiters who don't have to go anywhere. I detest it. It's a rotten year."

"We're not even in the war yet, dear," said Mr. Woodruff. Then he said: "Boys have always had to go to war. I went. Your brothers went."

"It's not the same. It's not rotten in the same way. Time isn't any good anymore. You and Paul and Freddy left relatively nice things behind you. Dear God. Bobby won't even go on a date if he hasn't any money. It's entirely different. It's entirely rotten."

"Well," said Ray awkwardly. He looked at his wristwatch: then at Barbara. "Like to take in a few sights?" he asked her.

"I don't know," said Barbara, still staring at Mrs. Woodruff.

Mr. Woodruff leaned forward toward his wife. "Like to play a little roulette, honey?"

"Yes. Yes, of course, darling." Mrs. Woodruff looked up. "Oh, are you leaving, children?" she asked.

It was a little after four in the morning. At one o'clock the portside deck steward had set up some of his deck chairs to accommodate the nondissipating crowd who would, a few hours later, use the post-breakfast sunshine. There are many things you can do in a deck chair: eat hot hors d'oeuvres when a man passes with them on a tray, read a magazine or a book, show snapshots of your grandchildren, knit, worry about money, worry about a man, worry about a woman, get seasick, watch the girls on their way to the swimming pool, watch for flying fish... But two people in the deck chairs, drawn however closely together, can't kiss each other very comfortably. Either the arms of a deck chair are too high or the persons involved are seated too deeply.

Ray was seated on Barbara's left. His right arm, resting on the hard wood of her chair, was sore from pressure.

Both of their voices had struck four.

"How're you feeling now?" Ray asked.

"Me? I feel fine."

"No, I mean do you still feel a little tight? Maybe we shouldn't have gone to that last place."

"Me? I wasn't tight." Barbara thought a minute, then asked: "Were you?"

"Heck no, I never get tight." This inaccurate piece of intelligence seemed automatically to renew Ray's visa to advance over the unguarded frontier of Barbara's deck chair.

After two hours of kissing, Barbara's lips were a little chapped, but still tender and earnest and interested. Ray could not have remembered, even if he had tried, when he had been comparably affected by another girl's kiss. As he kissed her again now, he was reupset by the sweetness, the generously qualified and requalified innocence of her kiss.

When the kiss ended - he could never unconditionally concede to the ending of one of Barbara's kisses - he drew back a very little and began to speak with a hoarseness unnatural even to the hours and the highballs and cigarettes consumed. "Barbara. No kidding. We'll do it, huh? We'll get married, huh?"

Barbara, beside him in the dark, was still.

"No, really," Ray begged, as though he had been contradicted. "We'll be damn happy. Even if we get in the war I'll probably never be sent overseas or anything. I'm lucky that way. We'd - we'd have a swell time." He searched her still face in the moonlight. "Wouldn't we?"

A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist At All

"I don't know," said Barbara.

"Sure you know! Sure you know! I mean, hell. We're *right* for each other."

"I keep even forgetting your name," Barbara said practically. "*Golly*. We hardly know each other."

"Listen. We know each other a lot better than most people that know each other for months!" Ray informed recklessly.

"I don't know. I wouldn't know what to tell Mrs. Odenhearn."

"His mother? Just tell her the *truth*, is all!" was Ray's advice.

Barbara made no reply. She bit nervously at the cuticle of her thumb. Finally she spoke. "Do you think I'm dumb?"

"Do I *what*? Do I think you're *dumb*? I certainly don't!"

"I'm considered dumb," said Barbara slowly. "I am a little dumb. I guess."

"Now stop that talk. I mean, stop it. You're not dumb. You're - smart. Who said you're dumb? That guy Carl?"

Barbara was vague about it. "Oh, not exactly. Girls, more. Girls I went to school with and go around with."

"They're crazy."

"How am I smart?" Barbara wanted to know. "You said I was smart."

"Well, you - you just are, that's all!" said Ray. "Please." And equipped only for the most primary kind of eloquence, he leaned over and kissed her at great length - persuasively, he hoped.

At last Barbara gently interrupted him by removing her lips from his. Her face in the moonlight was troubled, but slackly, with her mouth slightly open, without consciousness of being watched.

"I wish I weren't dumb," she said to the night.

Ray was impatient - but careful.

"Barbara. I told you. You're *not* dumb...Please. You're not at all dumb. You're very - intelligent." He looked at her very possessively, jealously. "What are you thinking about?" he demanded. "That Carl guy?"

She shook her head.

"Barbara. Listen. We'll be happy as anything. No kidding. I know we haven't known each other very long. That's probably what you're thinking about. But this is a lousy time. I mean with the Army and all, and everybody upside down. In other words, if two people love each other they oughtta stick together." He searched her face, less desperately, bolstered by what he considered to be his sudden insight and eloquence. "Don't you think so?" he asked moderately.

"I don't know," said Barbara and began to cry.

She cried painfully, with double-edged gulps from the diaphragm. Alarmed by the violence of her sorrow and by being a witness to it, but impatient with the sorrow itself, Ray was a poor pacifier. Barbara finally emerged from the private accident entirely on her own.

"I'm all right," she said. "I think I better go to bed." She stood up unsteadily.

Ray jumped up and took her arm.

"I'll see you in the morning, won't I?" he asked. "You're playing off the finals in the doubles tournament, aren't you? The deck tennis tournament?"

"Yes," said Barbara. "Well, good night."

"Don't say it like that," said Ray, reprovingly.

A Young Girl in 1941 With No Waist At All

"I don't know how I said it," said Barbara.

"Well. I mean, heck. You said it as though you didn't even know me or anything. Gosh, I've asked you to marry me about twenty times."

"I told you I was dumb," Barbara explained simply.

"I wish you'd stop saying that."

"Good night," said Barbara. "Thank you for a lovely time. Really." She extended her hand.

The Woodruffs were the only passengers on the last tender from shore to ship. Mrs. Woodruff was in her stockinged feet, having given her shoes to the taxi driver for his lovely driving. They were now ascending the narrow, steep ladder which stretched flimsily between the tender platform and the B deck port door. Mrs. Woodruff preceded her husband, several times swinging precariously around to see if her husband was obeying the rules she had imposed on them both.

"You're holding the thing. The rope," she accused, looking down now at her husband.

"Not," denied Mr. Woodruff indignantly. His bow tie was undone. The collar of his dinner jacket was half turned up in the back.

"I distinctly said *no one* was to hold on to the rope," pronounced Mrs. Woodruff. Wavering she took another step. Mr. Woodruff stared back at her, his face teetering between confusion and abysmal melancholy. Abruptly, he turned his back on his wife and sat down where he was. He was almost precisely at the middle of the ladder. The drop to the water was at least thirty feet.

"Fielding! Fielding, you come up here instantly!"

For answer, Mr. Woodruff placed his chin on his hands. Mrs. Woodruff weaved dangerously, then she lifted her skirts and successful, if inexplicably, made the descent to the rung just above her husband's seat. She embraced him with a half Nelson, which nearly capsized them both.

"Oh, my baby," she said. "Are you angry with me?"

"You said I was using the rope," said Mr. Woodruff, his voice breaking slightly.

"But, baby mouse, you were!"

"Was not," said Mr. Woodruff.

Mrs. Woodruff kissed the top of her husband's head, where the hair was thinnest. "Of course you weren't," she said. She locked her hands ecstatically around Mr. Woodruff's throat. "Do you love me mouse?" she asked, practically cutting off his respiration.

His reply was unintelligible.

"Too tight?" asked Mrs. Woodruff. She relaxed her hold, looked out over the shimmering water and answered her own question. "Of course you love me. It would be unforgivable of you not to love me. Sweet boy, please don't fall; put *both* feet on the rung. How did you get so tight dear? I wonder why our marriage has been such a joy. We're so stinking rich. We should have, by all the rules, drifted continents apart. You do love me so much it's almost unbearable, don't you? Sweet, put *both* feet on the rung, like a good boy. Isn't it nice here? We're defying Magellan's law. Darling, put your arms around me - *no, don't move!* You can't where you're sitting. I'll make believe your arms are around me. What did you think of that little boy and that little girl? Barbara and Eddie. They were - unequipped. Didn't you think? She was lovely. He was full of baloney. I do hope she behaves sensibly. Oh, this crazy year. It's a devil. I pray the child uses her head. Dear God, make all the children use their heads now - You're making the

years so horrible now, dear God." Mrs. Woodruff poked her husband in the back. "Fielding, you pray, too."

"Pray what?"

"Pray that the children use their heads now."

"What children?"

"All of them darling. Bobby. Our little gorgeous Bobby. The Freemont girls with their candy ears. Betty and Donald Mercer. The Croft children. All of them. Especially that little girl who was with us tonight. Barbara. I can't get her out of my mind. Pray, darling boy."

"All right."

"Oh, you're so sweet." Mrs. Woodruff stroked the back of her husband's neck. Suddenly, but slowly, she said: "*I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the roes, and by the hinds of the field, That ye stir not up, nor awaken love, Until it please.*"

Mr. Woodruff had heard her. "What's 'at from?" he asked.

"*The Song of Songs*. The Bible. Darling, don't turn around. I'm so afraid you'll fall."

"You know everything," said Mr. Woodruff solemnly. "You know everything."

"Oh, you sweet! Pray a little for the children, my sweet boy. Oh, what a detestable year!"

"Barbara? Is that you dear?"

"Yes, it is, Mrs. Odenhearn."

"You can turn on the light, dear. I'm awake."

"I can undress in the dark. Really." Of course you can't. Turn them on dear." Mrs. Odenhearn had been a deadly serious tennis player in her day, had even once opposed Helen Wills in an exhibition match. She still had two rackets restrung annually, in New York, by a "perfect little man" who happened to be six feet tall. Even now, in bed at 4:45 A.M., a "Yours, partner!" quality rang in her voice. "I'm wide awake," she announced. "Been awake for hours. They've been so many drunken people passing the cabin. Absolutely no consideration for others. Turn on the light, dear."

Barbara turned on the lights. Mrs. Odenhearn, to shield herself from the glare, put thumb and forefinger to her eyes, then dropped her hand away and smiled strongly. Her hair was in curlers, and Barbara didn't look at her very directly.

"There's a different class of people, these days," Mrs. Odenhearn observed. "This ship really used to be quite nice. Did you have a nice time, dear?"

"Yes, I did, thank you. It's too bad you didn't go. Is your foot any better?" Mrs. Odenhearn, with mock seriousness, raised an index finger and wagged it at Barbara. "Now listen to me, young lady. If we lose our match today it's not going to be on my account. Put *that* in your pipe and smoke it. So there!"

Barbara smiled and slid her suitcase out from under the unoccupied twin bed - her bed. She placed it on the bed and began to look for something in it.

Mrs. Odenhearn was thinking.

"I saw Mrs. Helger and Mrs. Ebers in the lounge after you left tonight."

"Oh?" said Barbara.

"They're out for our blood tomorrow, I don't mind telling you. You *must* play just a little closer to the net when I'm serving, dear."

"I'll try to," Barbara said, and went on looking through her suitcase, turning over soft things.

"Hurry to bed, dear. Hippity Hop," said Mrs. Odenhearn.

"I can't find my - oh, here they are." Barbara withdrew a pair of pajamas.

"Peter Rabbit," said Mrs. Odenhearn warmly.

"I beg your pardon?" "Carl used to love Peter when he was a child." Mrs. Odenhearn raised her voice an octave or so: " 'Mummy, wead me Peatie Wabbit,' he used to say. Over and over again. I just wish I had a penny for every time that child had to have Peter read to him."

Barbara smiled again and started for the adjoining bathroom with her pajamas under her arm. She was briefly arrested by Mrs. Odenhearn's raised voice.

"Someday *you* 'll be reading Peter to *your* little boy."

Barbara didn't have to smile, as she was already in the bathroom. She closed the door. When she came out in her pajamas a moment later, Mrs. Odenhearn, who didn't inhale, was smoking a cigarette through her holder - one of the kind advertised to be a denicotinizer. She was also in the act of reaching for her ship's library novel, which stood on the night table.

"All ready for bed, dear? I just thought I'd read one little chapter of my book. It may just make me sleepy. So many, many things running through my poor old head."

Barbara smiled and got into bed.

"Will the light bother you, dear?"

"Not at all. I'm awfully tired." Barbara turned over on her side, away from the light and Mrs. Odenhearn. "Good night," she said.

"Sleep tight, dear... Oh, I think I'll try to sleep too! It's a very silly book, anyway. Honestly, I never read charming books anymore. The authors nowadays seem to *try* to write about unattractive things. I think if I could read just one more book by Sarah Milford Pease I'd be happy. She's dead, poor soul, though. Cancer." Mrs. Odenhearn snapped off the table light.

Barbara lay several minutes in the darkness. She knew she ought to wait until next week or next month or next - something. But her heart was nearly pounding her out of bed. "Mrs. Odenhearn." The name was out. It stood upright in the darkness.

"Yes, dear?"

"I don't want to get married."

"What's that?"

"I don't want to get married." Mrs. Odenhearn sat up in bed. She fished competently for the table light switch. Barbara shut her eyes before the room could be lighted and prayed without words and without thoughts. She felt Mrs. Odenhearn speak to the back of her head.

"You're very tired. You don't mean what you're saying, dear." The word "dear" whisked into position - upright in the darkness beside Mrs. Odenhearn's name.

"I just don't want to get married to anybody yet."

"Well! This is certainly very - unusual - Barbara. Carl loves you a great, great deal, dear."

"I'm sorry. Honestly." There was a very brief silence. Mrs. Odenhearn shattered it.

"You must do," she said suddenly, "what you think right, dear. I'm sure that if Carl were here he'd be a very, very hurt boy. On the other hand-"

Barbara listened. It amounted to an interruption, she listened so intently.

"On the other hand," said Mrs. Odenhearn, "It's always the best way to rectify a mistake *before* it's made. If you've given this matter a great, great deal of thought I'm sure Carl will be the last to blame you, dear."

The ship's library novel, upset by Mrs. Odenhearn's vigorous elbow, fell from the night table to the floor. Barbara heard her pick it up.

"You sleep now, dear. We'll see when the sun's shining beautifully how we feel about things. I want you to think of me as you would of your own mother if she were alive. I want so to

help you understand your own mind," said Mrs. Odenhearn, and added: "Of course, I know that one can't alter children's minds so easily these days, once they're made up. And I *do* know you have a great, great character."

When Barbara heard the light snap off, she opened her eyes. She got out of bed and went into the bathroom. She came out almost at once, wearing a robe and slippers, and spoke to Mrs. Odenhearn in the darkness. "I'm just going on the deck for a little while."

"What do you have on?"

"My robe and slippers. It's all right. Everyone's asleep."

Mrs. Odenhearn flicked on the table light again. She looked at Barbara acutely, neither approving nor disapproving. Her look said, "All right. It's over. I can hardly contain myself, I'm so happy. You're on your own for the rest of the cruise. Just don't disgrace or embarrass me."

Barbara read the look faultlessly.

"Good-by."

"Don't catch cold, dear."

Barbara shut the door behind her and began to walk through the silent, lighted passages. She climbed the steps to A deck and walked through the concert lounge, using the aisle a cleaning squad had left between the stacked bodies of easy chairs. In less than four months' time there would be no easy chairs in the concert lounge. Instead, more than three hundred enlisted men would be arranged wakefully on their backs across the floor. High above on the promenade deck, for nearly an hour Barbara stood at the portside rail. Despite her cotton pajamas and rayon robe there was no danger of her catching cold. The fragile hour was a carrier of many things, but Barbara was now exclusively susceptible to the difficult counterpoint sounding just past the last minutes of her girlhood.

The Inverted Forest

Cosmopolitan - December 1947

THE following diary extract is dated December 31, 1917. It was written in Shoreview, Long Island, by a little girl named Corinne von Nordhoffen.

She was the daughter of Saray Keyes Montross von Nordhoffen, the Montross Orthopedic Appliances heiress, who had committed suicide in 1915, and Baron Otho von Nordhoffen, who was still alive, or at least, under his gray mask of expatriation, was still breathing. Corinne entered this chapter in her diary on the night before her eleventh birthday.

Tomorrow is my birthday party and I am going to have a party. I have invited Raymond Ford and Miss Aigletinger and Lorraine Pederson and Dorothy Wood and Marjorie Pheleps and Lawrence Pheleps and Mr. Miller. Miss Aigletinger said I had to invite Lawrence Pheleps on account of Marjorie is coming. I have to invite Mr. Miller on account of he works for Father now. Father said Mr. Miller will drive to New York in the morning and bring back 2 cowboy movies and shoe them in the library after dinner. I got Raymond a real cow boy hat to wear just like that cowboy he likes wears. I got everybody else hats also only paper ones. Miss Aigletinger is going to give me Parade Prejudice by Jane Orsten she said. She is also going to give me the elsie I don't have. She is the most adorable teacher I have had since Miss Calahan. Father is also going to give me more room in the kennels for Sandys puppys and I already saw the doll house from Wanamakers. Dorothy Wood is going to give me an autograph album and gave it to me already 3 weeks ago. She wrote in the front of it In your golden chain of friendship consider me a link. I nearly cried. Dorothy is so adorable. I don't know what Lorraine and Marjorie are going to give me. I wish that mean Lawrence Pheleps did not have to come to my party. I don't want Raymond Ford to give me anything for my birthday just as long as he comes is all. He is so poor and not rich at all and you can tell by his cloths. I wish Dorothy had not written on the first page of the album because I wanted Raymond. Mr. Miller is going to give me an alligator. He had this brother in Florida that has alligators and T.B. like Miss Calahan had. I love Raymond Ford. I love him better than my father. Anybody that opens this diary and reads this page will drop dead in 24 hours. Tomorrow night!!! Please dear lord don't let Lawrence Pheleps be mean at my party and don't let Father and Mr. Miller talk German at the table or anything because I just know they would all go home and tell their parents about it except Raymond and Dorothy. I love you Raymond because you are the nicest boy in the world and I am going to marry you. Anybody that reads this without my permission will drop dead in 24 hours or get sick.

Close to nine o'clock on the night of Corinne's birthday party, Mr. Miller, the Baron's new secretary, leaned forward and volunteered down-table straight at Corinne, "Well, let's go get this boy. No use sittin' around moping' about it all night. Where's he live, birthday girl?"

Corinne, at the end of the table, shook her head and blinked violently. Under the table her hands were caught hard between her knees.

"He lives right on Winona," spoke up Marjorie. "His mother's a waiter at the Lobster Palace. They live over the restaurant." She looked around, pleased.

"Waitress," corrected her brother Lawrence, with contempt.

Little Dorothy Wood, at Corinne's right, shot one of her high-strung glances up-table toward the baron. But the old gentleman was busy examining, somewhat morosely, the cuff of his dinner jacket—he had just brushed his sleeve into his ice cream—the sort of thing that often happened to him. Dorothy's high-strung glances in his direction were unnecessary, any way. The baron's hearing device was seldom aimed at table talk, birthday parties not excepted, and all evening he had been missing Lawrence Phelps's smart-boy alto.

"Well, waitress," conceded Marjorie Phelps. "Anyways, he lives where I said, because Hermine Jackson's cousin followed him home once."

"Winona Avenue." Mr. Miller stood up confidently. He dropped his napkin of the table and removed his pale green, unfestive-looking paper hat. He was a bald-headed man with a jolly, humorless face. "Let's go, birthday kiddo," he said.

Again the hostess shook her head and blinked—wildly, this time.

Miss Aigletinger leaned forward, a committee-of-one for smooth-running birthday parties. "Corinne, dear. Go with Mr. Mueller, why don't you, honey?"

"Miller," corrected Miller.

"Miller, excuse me. . . Go with Mr. Miller, dear, why don't you? It'll only take a teensy minute. And we'll all be right here when you get back." Miss Aigletinger turned rather coyly to the baron, on whose left she was sitting. "Won't we, Baron?" she asked.

"He isn't a baron anymore. He's an American citizen. Corinne said so." Dorothy Wood stated firmly—and immediately blushed.

"What is it, please?" inquired the baron, aiming his hearing apparatus at Miss Aigletinger.

To the never-stale of all the children present—except Corinne—Miss Aigletinger picked up the baron's speaking tube and shouted thinly into it, "I say we'll all be right here when they get back, won't we? They're going into town to look for the Ford boy." She started to relinquish the tube but instead took a firmer hold on it. "Very strange child. Came to us in October," she shouted elaborately. "Not a good mixer."

Though he hadn't understood a word, the baron nodded pleasantly.

Dispirited, Miss Aigletinger placed a protective hand to her throat where all he volume had passed through, and willingly gave over to Mr. Miller, who was standing ready beside his chair. Miller picked up the tube and shouted into it, "*Wir werden sofort zurück—*"

"Kindly speak English," interrupted the baron.

Miller flushed slightly but shouted, "We'll be right back. We're going to look for the youngster who didn't come to the party."

The baron understood Miller and nodded; then he glared down-table at Dorothy Wood, a favorite of his, whom he regularly frightened to death. "You didn't eat anything," he accused her. "Eat."

Dorothy was too rattled to do anything but blush.

"She doesn't eat anything," the baron complained to no one in particular.

"Get your coat, birthday girl," Miller said to Corinne, standing over her.

"No," said Corinne. "Please."

"Corinne, dear," intervened Miss Aigletinger, "it's just possible that Raymond Ford forgot your party. Those things happen in the best of families. There's no harm, surely, if you don't just remind—"

"I reminded him this morning. I told him at recess." It was the longest remark Corinne had made all evening.

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"Yes, dear, but he may not be well. He may be ill. He might just be in bed. You could—you could take him a lovely piece of birthday cake—couldn't she, Mr. Miller?"

"Sure." Miller placed a hand on the back of Miss Aigletinger's chair. "Must be quite a youngster," he mused, sucking his tooth. "What is he, the Frank Merriwell of his class or something?"

"The who?" coolly inquired Miss Aigletinger, addressing the hand on the back of her chair.

"The school athlete. You know. All the gals after him. The demon of the cinder path, the—"

"Him an athlete?" interrupted Lawrence Phelps. "He can't even catch a football. You know what? Robert Selridge saw Ford coming across the playground and yelled at him and chucked a football at him, not even fast, and you know what Ford did?"

Mr. Miller, inserting the nail of his little finger between two molars, shook his head.

"He jumped out of the way. Honest! He wouldn't even chase it afterwards. Boy, Robert Selridge nearly socked him one." Lawrence Phelps turned his burly little face toward his hostess. "Where'd Ford come from anyways, Corinne? He didn't come from around here anywheres."

"Mmm," Corinne replied inaudibly.

"What?" said Lawrence.

"She said none of your beeswax," Dorothy Wood translated loyally.

"Corinne," rebuked Mr. Miller, removing his finger from his mouth. "Is 'at nice?"

"Tell 'em about his back," Marjorie Phelps suggested to her brother. She turned brightly to the others, informing them, "Lawrence saw his back at Doctor's Hour. It's got all *things* over it. Big awful marks, like."

"Oh, that. Yeah," said her brother. "His mother beats him up."

The hostess stood up. "You're a liar," she accused, trembling. "He *hurt* himself. He fell and *hurt* himself."

"Children, children!" This from Miss Aigletinger, with a nervous glance at the baron, who, undisturbed, went on staring profoundly at an embroidered pattern in the tablecloth.

"All right, all right, he fell and hurt himself," Lawrence Phelps said.

Corinne sat down, still trembling.

"Lawrence, I don't ever want to hear you say anything like that again," Miss Aigletinger said. "It does not happen to be true, in the first place. The school board investigates those things—all those things. If that boy's mother—"

"Oh, I know why she likes Ford," Lawrence interrupted ambiguously. "I don't wanna tell, though." He glanced over at his hostess's suddenly upjerked, burning little face. Then, efficiently, as though he were dealing with butterfly wings, he tore his hostess's horror apart on the spot. "Because Louise Selridge was sore Corinne won the elocution and—right in front of everybody in the wardrobe closet—Louise called Corinne a Heinie spy. And Louise said even her father said why don't Corinne and her father go to Germany where all the Heinies are—the Kaiser and all. And Corinne started to cry. And Raymond Ford was wardrobe monitor that day, and he chucked Louise Selridge's coat out in the aisle," Lawrence said, taking a breath, but not quite finished. "And last week Corinne brought her dog after school to show Ford. And she wrote his name on the blackboard at recess and tried to erase it, but everybody saw it." No more butterfly wings on hand, Lawrence looked vaguely in the direction of the footman behind him. "Can't we please have another spoon? Mine fell."

"Lawrence! We don't repeat those things."

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"Honest!" said Lawrence, as though his integrity were in jeopardy. "You can ask my sister. Ask anybody. Ford was giving Louise Selridge her coat when she said it. Only he didn't give it to her. He chucked it right out in the aisle. Everybody—"

"What time is it, Miller?" the baron asked suddenly.

"Twenty past nine, baron." Miller turned to Corinne. "What's it gonna be, kiddo? You wanna look for this boy or not?"

"Yes," said Corinne, and walked with adult dignity out of the dining room.

The dark road was icy and there were no skid chains on Mr. Miller's automobile—he didn't believe in 'em.

"Yours'll be here tomorrow," he promised Corinne in the unfraternal darkness. He was speaking incessantly of his brother's alligators. "Little bit of a fella. But he'll grow. He'll grow all right." He chuckled, tobacco-breathily, toward Corinne.

"Please don't *go* so fast."

"What's 'at? Somebody scared?"

"It's this street," Corinne said excitedly. "Right *here*, please—"

"Where?" said Miller.

"You *passed* it!"

"Well, we can fix that," said Miller.

The car skidded, selected its own direction, and came to a stop with its forewheels on the sidewalk.

Corinne, shivering, let herself out of the car and ran the slippery quarter of a block to the place where the Lobster Palace should have been shining yellowly.

Something was wrong. The Lobster Palace wasn't shining at all. Both the front show window and the electric sign were as black as the night itself.

"Closed, 'eh?" Miller said, reaching Corinne. His breath in the sub-zero air was almost more visible than he was.

"The house can't be closed. The restaurant maybe, but the *house* can't be. People live upstairs. Raymond Ford lives upstairs."

Instantly, as though in proof of part of Corinne's remark, a woman carrying two suitcases charged out of the black doorway, brushing past Corinne. No kind of hall light preceded or followed her. She snorted visibly over to the curb, dropped her tow suitcases on the icy walk, and faced the doorway from which she had emerged. Then, just as Corinne felt Mr. Miller pull her neutrally out of the way, another, that of a small boy, came out of the building. Corinne excitedly called his name, but the boy didn't seem to hear her. He went directly to the woman with the suitcases, stood beside her, and faced as she was facing. He took something out of his pocked, unfolded it, put it on his head, and pulled it down over his ears. Corinne knew that it was his aviator's cap.

"Listen," said the lady with Raymond Ford harshly. "I'm entitled to my galoshes."

Corinne saw with a start that the lady was not addressing Raymond Ford, but something in the doorway—a glowing cigar.

"I *toldya*," said the cigar. "The restront's locked. And it's gonna stay locked the whole time the boss is at his brudda's funeral. Listen. You had all afternoona pick up ya galoshes."

"Yeah?" said the lady with Raymond Ford.

"Yeah," said the cigar, and got even redder. "You ain't supposa leave no galoshes in no kitchen. *You* know that."

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"Listen," said the lady with Raymond Ford. "I'm gonna stop at the damn pleece station on my way to the station, hear me? A person's entitled a their property."

"Let's go. Please," Raymond Ford said, taking the lady's arm. "Please. He's not gonna give ya the galoshes; can'tcha see?"

"Leggo, you. Don't rush me," the lady said. "I'm not leavin' the vicinity *without them galoshes*."

Something like laughter came from the doorway.

"If ya feet get cold, break open one of them bagsa yours," suggested the cigar. "You got plenty t'keep ya warm. You got *plenty* to keep *you* warm."

"Mother, c'mon. Please," Raymond Ford said. "Can'tcha see he's not gonna give 'em to ya."

"I want them galoshes."

A door banged. Frightened, Corinne looked and saw that the cigar was gone.

Raymond Ford's mother ran a few wild steps on the ice, stopped perilously short, recovered her balance, and began to pound with her fist against the dark show window of the restaurant—at the place where normally the lobsters could be seen winking on cracked ice. She screamed as she pounded, articulating words that Corinne had nervously read from walls and fences. Corinne felt Mr. Miller's grip tighten on her arm, but Corinne stayed where she was, because Raymond Ford was now standing before her.

He spoke to Corinne just loud enough to be heard over his mother's activities directly behind her.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party."

"That's all right."

"How's your dog?" said Raymond Ford.

"He's fine."

"That's good," said Raymond Ford, and went over to his mother and began to pull her by the arm. But she wrenched successfully away from him, scarcely losing the rhythm of her violence.

Mr. Miller came forward, cupping his cold ears with his hands. "I'd be glad to drive you people to the station if that's where you're going," he shouted.

Raymond Ford's mother stopped pounding and shouting. She turned away from the show window, glanced briefly at Miller in the darkness, then at Corinne, then back at Miller. Raymond Ford indicated Corinne with his thumb. "She's a friend of mine," he said.

"You got a car?" Mrs. Ford asked Miller.

"How could I take you to the station if I didn't?"

"Where is it?"

Miller pointed. "Right there."

Mrs. Ford nodded, absently. She then turned around and, using an Anglo-Saxon verb, gave the dark show window a snort, obscene command. She turned back to Miller. "Let's get otta here before I go mad," she told him. She sat beside Miller in the front seat, and the two children sat in the back with the suitcases. The car moved off on a slippery tangent, straightened out, and went on.

"He wasn't the guy that engaged me for the position," Mrs. Ford announced suddenly. "The guy that engaged me was a gentleman." She was addressing Miller's profile. "Hey, haven't I seen you in the restront?"

"I don't believe so," Miller said stiffly.

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"Live in this lousy burg?"

"No, I do not."

"Just work here, ah?"

"Mother, don't ask the man so many questions. Why do you wanna ask the man so many questions?"

She turned savagely around in her seat. "Listen, you. Stay otta the discussion," she ordered. "When I'm innarested in your two cents I'll letcha—"

"I'm Baron von Nordhoffen's secretary," Miller said quickly, to keep peace in the automobile.

"Yeah? The Heinie on the hill?" She sounded suspicious. "How come you're ridin' around in this lizzy tin? Where's all the lemazeens?"

"This happens to my own car," Miller said coldly.

"That's different. I *wondered*," Mrs. Ford seemed to reflect for a moment, then sharply and hostilely spoke to Miller's profile. "Don't you high-hat me, Charlie. I don't feel like bein' high-hatted, the mood I'm in."

Miller, a little frightened, cleared his throat. "I can assure you," he said, "nobody's high-hatting anybody."

Mrs. Ford abruptly lowered her window, removed something from her mouth, and flicked it into the night. Closing the window, she said, "I come from a damn good family. I had everything. Money. Social position. Class." She looked at Miller. "You happen to have any cigarettes with ya, by any chance?"

"I'm afraid not."

She shrugged. "Listen, I could go home right now and say to Dad, 'Dad, I'm tired of bein' an adventuress. I wanna settle down and take it easy for a while.' He's be tickleda death. I'd make him the happiest dad in the world."

Raymond Ford's mother was silent for a moment. When she spoke again her voice sounded more glum than inflamed.

"My trouble is, I married beneath me, I married a chap that was way beneath me, was my trouble. Every way you look at it."

Miller's curiosity got the better of him. "Your husband dead?" he asked coldly.

"It was just a beautiful, dumb kid," Raymond Ford's mother mused with affection.

Miller repeated his question.

"I don't know what the hell he is, dead or what," she said. Then, abruptly, she sat up straight in her seat and began to clear away frost from her window, using the heel of her hand. "We're here," she announced dispassionately, and turned in her seat to address her son. "Now listen," she said to him. "I mean what I toleya. You let that bag flop open like last time, and I'll break your back."

"The straps broke," Raymond Ford said.

"You heard me. I'll break your back," said his mother, working the handle of the door. She turned to Miller, saying, "Thanks for the ride, snob," and got out of the car. Without another glance toward the car or her son or her luggage she began to walk toward the glowing station waiting room.

Raymond Ford opened his door and got out. He then lifted out the two suitcases, one at a time.

Corinne let down her window. "You want me to tell Miss Aigletinger you won't be in school tomorrow?"

"You can if you want to, I guess."

"Where are you *going*?"

"I don't know," Raymond Ford said. "Good-by."

He picked up the tow suitcases and began to walk after his mother, who had already disappeared. The suitcases were huge and looked dead weight. Corinne saw him fall once on the snow. Then he disappeared.

Corinne's father died, with equal parts of courage and an alien's confusion, when she was sixteen. When she was seventeen the Shoreview estate was sold, and Eric, the chauffeur, performed his last duty for the von Nordhoffen menage by driving Corinne to Wellesley.

At seventeen Corinne was nearly six feet tall with low heels. She walked rather like an umpire measuring out yards on a football field. You had to get right up close to her to see that she was a beauty. Actually, her long legs were very interesting-looking. But not only her legs; all of her.

Although her fair hair was just a little anemic—it would later call for tact on the part of her hairdresser, if Madame's suggestions were a little too fashionable it didn't really matter. It was the kind of hair that lets the ears be visible now and then, and Corinne's ears happened to be extraordinary: delicate, almost sweet, in formation and position, with bladethin edges. Her nose was long, but very slender and very high-bridged, it looked lovely even on the coldest day. Her eyes were hazel and, though not enormous, enormously kind. When her lips were ajar—which was seldom, as her face was nearly always caught tight in some private insecurity—but when they were ajar you saw that they were not thin at all; you saw that the middle of her lower lip was full and round. She was a wonderful-looking girl.

When she was seventeen, though, most boys she knew found her anything but wonderful. For one reason, her speech was rapid and uncloying to the point of being brusque, and to go with it, unfortunately, her conversation stuck very close to the facts. While some boy, for example, was giving her the exact figures on the number of highballs he had consumed just the other night, Corinne was entirely apt to break in with some terrible remark, like "If we hurry we can catch the twelve thirty-one instead of the twelve forty. Do you feel like running?"

There was something else. Young men sensed, or actually found out, that

Corinne did not like to be touched unnecessarily. When she was, she either jumped or apologized. It was the sort of thing that can play hell with a man-going-to-Yale-next-year's Saturday night. So Corinne went right on jumping or apologizing for a long time. Perhaps none of her young men could have helped her anyway. It takes a certain amount of genius to touch anybody properly, let alone a mixed-up young girl.

In college Corinne came out of herself a little bit. Not much, but a little bit. The girls discovered behind her diffidence a sense of humor, and they made her use it; but that wasn't all. It gradually leaked out all over the dormitory that Corinne could keep a secret, and very early in her freshman year she was unofficially elected Dormitory Kid. On many a cold Massachusetts night, consequently, she was obliged to get out of a warm bed to put out somebody else's cat of guilt or innocence. To some extent the functions of her office were good for her own well-being. Giving out midnight advice can be highly instructive after it comes poisonously home a few times. But if you're kept at the job too long—straight through your senior year, say—all the knowledge you pick up finally turns academic and useless.

After graduating from Wellesley she went to Europe. She preferred doing that to going straight to Philadelphia to live with her maternal second cousin. Besides, she had an old, undisciplined urge to visit her dead father's estate in Germany. She had a feeling that on arriving

there she would respond more poignantly to the memory of things long over and ungracefully done with.

Although nothing daughter-sized turned up for her when she did finally see her father's estate, she stayed on in Europe for three years. She studied and played, more or less after a fashion, in Paris, in Vienna, Rome, Berlin, St. Anton, Cannes, Lausanne. She prescribed for herself some of the usual American-in-Europe neurotic fun, plus some accessible exclusively to girls who happen to be millionairesses. Over a period of thirty-odd months she bought herself nine cars. Not all of them bored her. Some she gave away. Nobody, of course, can make the American rich feel quite as filthy as can a poor-but-clean European.

Corinne knew a great number of men and boys during her three years in Europe, but her only real friend was a young man from Detroit. His name was Pat, but I don't know whether it stood for Patrick or Patterson. Anyway he was very probably the first young man who had ever successfully ordered Corinne to close her eyes while she was being kissed. He most certainly was the first person whom Corinne had ever allowed to pass vicariously along the streets of her childhood to see a small boy in a woolen aviator's cap.

The young man from Detroit was no fool. When he found out just how regularly Corinne was making private trips back to her childhood, he tried to do something about it. With the best intentions he tried to set up some kind of detour in Corinne's mind. But he never really got a chance. He fell off the running board of Corinne's ninth car, in his swimming trunks, and was killed.

Corinne went back to America after his death. She went to Philadelphia, to her cousin's house, where she had spent all her college vacations. But she stayed only a month. A girl from Wellesley told her over the telephone about a darling, oversized, overpriced apartment in the East Sixties in New York. The girl said it was just perfect for Corinne.

Corinne took the apartment in New York and sat in it for nearly six months. She read a great deal. The young man from Detroit had first approached her on a like-me-like-the-books-I-read basis, and she was now a heavy reader. She met a few ex-Wellesley girls for lunch or theater. She signed a few papers when her late father's lawyer asked her to. But she had been a New Yorker almost seven months before anything significant happened to her.

She was having a few dates with the brother of her last roommate in college. The young man was one of the most successful tomcats in town, and Corinne was young enough to inform him one evening that he had a simply terrible Oedipus complex. Displeased with the information, the young gentleman threw his highball at her, catching her in the right eye with a fresh ice cube. The shiner that developed started Corinne off as a career girl, because when it disappeared she felt she ought to do something constructive by way of celebration. So she telephoned Robert Waner, had lunch with him, and asked him if he could get her a job on the newsmagazine he was working for.

I think I'll say here, and then let it go, that I am Robert Waner. I don't really have a good reason for taking myself out of the third person.

Corinne had not seen Waner in nearly four years. During her college years she had seen more of him than any other boy. She had thought he was funny. When Waner had finally found that out, of course, he had begun to get even funnier. He'd got so funny at Senior Prom at Wellesley that Corinne had broken into tears and asked him to please go back to his own college. Waner, in love with Corinne, had left Wellesley immediately. He had written to her while she had been in Europe, sending her as many letters as he could salvage from his wastebasket.

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Waner's boss at the magazine liked Corinne immediately and gave her a job pinning news items together for a rewrite man. Corinne did that for about a year. Then, when the rewrite man wrote a hot novel and went to Hollywood, she took over his job stringing adjectives: tall, gaunt, left-handed Anthony Creep, accompanied by his wife-ninety-three-year-old, web-footed, ex-manicurist, etc. Thereafter, Corinne's name began to move up the masthead quite steadily until, in another four years, it was on a line with only four other names. Which meant, roughly, that less than forty people on the magazine had a right to push her copy around.

Her career was entirely remarkable. She had started out on it unable to understand just what she had to lose were she to fail as a career girl. In consequence, she was so cool about the whole setup that, in an office full of tense, ambitious people, she was taken at face value for efficient. It wasn't hard for her later to live up to her own reputation. She happened to be a really good magazine woman. She was not only a competent all-round reporter and editor, but she developed also into a good, if not brilliant, drama critic.

As for Corinne's personal life during the first five years she worked for the magazine, I guess it could be recorded on a single sheet of any interoffice memo pad:

Her wire-haired terrier, Malcolm, isn't properly housebroken and probably never will be. She is an easy, anonymous touch for any institution or individual depending upon charity. She likes cherrystone clams and usually takes a double order. She does not lie.

She is very likely to turn around in a taxicab to watch a child cross a street. She will not discuss the idiosyncrasy.

She regularly renews her subscription to *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, a publication she barely glances through. She herself has never been psychoanalyzed.

Her legs grow lovelier each year.

Robert Waner bought two things to give to Corinne on her thirtieth birthday. One of them, an engagement ring, Corinne retreated from, and Waner (still the funnyman) tried to drop it into the fare box of a Madison Avenue bus. The other gift—a book of poems, called, *The Cowardly Morning*—Waner put on Corinne's desk at the office, with a note saying, "This man is Coleridge and Blake and Rilke all in one, and more." Corinne took the book home with her in a taxi and tossed it on her bedspread.

She didn't pick up the book again until she was in bed, late that night. Then she glanced at the cover and opened the book with a dim impression that she was about to read some poems by someone who was not T. S. Eliot or Marianne Moore; someone named Fane or Flood or Wilson.

She raced through the first two poems in the book, both of which happened to be cerebral enough to require the reader's co-operation, and started emptily on the third poem. But she suddenly felt sorry for the poet for having her as a reader, and she politely turned back to the first poem. She had once done the same thing to Marianne Moore.

The first poem was the title poem. This time Corinne read it through aloud. But still she didn't hear it. She read it through a third time, and heard some of it. She read it through a fourth time, and heard all of it. It was the poem containing the lines:

Not wasteland, but a great inverted forest/with all foliage underground.

As though it might be best to look immediately for shelter, Corinne had to put the book down. At any moment the apartment building seemed liable to lose its balance and topple across Fifth Avenue into Central Park. She waited. Gradually the deluge of truth and beauty abated.

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Then she glanced at the cover of the book. She began to stare at it. Then suddenly she got out of bed and dialed Robert Waner's number on the telephone.

"Bobby?" she said. "Corinne."

"It's all right. I wasn't asleep. It isn't even four o'clock."

"Bobby, who is this Ray Ford?"

"Who?"

"Ray Ford. The man who wrote the poems you gave me."

"Lemme sleep over it awhile. I'll see ya at the office."

"Bobby, please. I think I know him. I may know him. I knew someone named Ray Ford—Raymond Ford. Really."

"Good. I'll wait for you at the office. Good ni---"

"Bobby, wake up. Please. This is terribly important. Don't you know anything about him?"

"I only read the blurb on the back flap. That's all I---"

Corinne hung up. In her excitement she hadn't thought of looking at the back flap of the dust jacket. She rushed back to her bed and read the few notes on Ray Ford.

She read that this Ray Ford was twice the winner of the Rice Fellowship for Poetry and three times the winner of the Annual Strauss and that he now divided his time "between his creative work and his duties as an instructor at Columbia University in New York." He was born in Boise, Idaho—an upsetting fact, as it should have been a decisive one, but Corinne had no idea where "her" Ray Ford had been born.

But the notes said that he was thirty years old. Which was exactly, electrically, right.

Corinne looked to see if there were a dedication. There was. The book was dedicated to the memory of a Mrs. Rizzio. This piece of information might have been a little puncturing, but Corinne's imagination was already off the ground. It was very simple. Mrs. Rizzio was Raymond Ford's mother remarried. Corinne didn't even bother to consider, much less get around, the unlikelihood of an author (or anybody else), referring to his mother in the third person. She didn't need logic. She needed more excitement. She jumped back into bed with her book.

Sitting erectly in bed, without lighting cigarettes, Corinne read *The Cowardly Morning* until the maid came in to wake her for breakfast. And even all the while she was getting dressed she felt Ray Ford's poems standing upright all over her room. She even kept an eye on them in her dressing-table mirror, lest they escape into their natural vertical ascent. And when she left for her office, she closed her door securely.

From her office, later that morning, she twice telephoned Columbia, but didn't get to speak to the author of *The Cowardly Morning*. He was either in class or "not in the building just now."

At noon she quit work and went home and slept until four o'clock. Then she called the Columbia number again. This time she spoke to Ray Ford.

Corinne began with a good strong apology. "I hope I'm not taking you away from something," she said rapidly, "but my name is Corinne von Nordhoffen and I used to know someone—"

"Who?" interrupted the voice on the other end.

She said her name again.

"Oh! How are you, Corinne?"

Corinne said she was fine and then supplied quite a gap in the conversation. She was much less taken aback by the fact that this was actually "her" Ray Ford than she was by the fact

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that her Ray Ford remembered her at all. After all, he was not salvaging her name out of an old cocktail party, but out of a childhood partitioned off by nineteen years.

She became very nervous. "I never expected you to remember me," she said. She began to think and talk in jumps. "I read your book of poems last night. I'd like to tell you how—beautiful—I thought they were. I know that isn't the right word. I mean, the *right* word."

"It's very nice," said Ford evenly. "Thank you, Corinne."

"I live in New York," Corinne said.

"I was just wondering about that. You don't live in Bayonne anymore?"

"Shoreview, Long Island," she quickly corrected.

"Shoreview—of course! Don't you live there anymore?"

"No. My father died and I sold the house," Corinne said, finding her own voice dissonant.

"How's your mother?"

"She died a long time ago, Corinne."

"I'm not keeping you from a class or something, am I?" Corinne demanded abruptly.

"No, no."

Corinne stood up, as though someone wanted her seat. "Well, I just wanted to tell you how much I loved them—your poems"

"It's very nice of you, Corinne. Really."

She sat down again. She laughed. "It certainly is remarkable that you're the same Ray Ford. I mean who wrote those poems. It isn't an extraordinary name."

"No. No, it isn't."

"Where—where did you go after you left Shoreview?" Without wanting a cigarette she reached for a cigarette box.

"I don't remember, Corinne. It's such a long time ago."

"It certainly is," she agreed and stood up. "I'm probably taking your time. I just wanted to tell you how—"

"Will you have lunch with me one day next week, Corinne?" Ford asked her.

Corinne fumbled with a cigarette lighter. "I'd love to," she said.

Ford said, "There's a little Chinese restaurant very near here. Do you like Chinese food?"

"I love it." The lighter slipped out of her hand and fell on the telephone table.

They arranged for lunch the following Tuesday at one o'clock. Then Corinne had a chance to run to her photograph, flick it on, and turn the volume knob all the way to the right.

She listened ecstatically as the music—the Moldau—flowed into the room, very sensibly drawing everything in sight.

January 9, 1937 was a sharp, raw day. The Chinese restaurant was four blocks from Columbia—not, as Corinne had imagined, around the corner from it. Her cab driver had trouble finding it. It was off Broadway and squeezed between a delicatessen and a hardware store. The driver, sounding tricked and annoyed, kept saying that he didn't know the neighborhood. Finally Corinne told him to pull over to the curb. She got out and, on foot, found the restaurant herself.

Inside the restaurant Corinne selected a boothed-in table opposite the door. She sat down, aware that she was probably the only person in the place who hadn't either a textbook or a notebook within reach. She felt conspicuous, mink-coatish. Her face ached from the January weather. Her table, just vacated by a couple of beefy students, was wet with spilled tea.

Although she was ten minutes early she began at once to watch the door. She and Ford had not described themselves over the telephone, and all she had to go on was Robert Waner's melba-toast remark about poets almost never looking like poets because they would be infringing

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on the rights of all chiropodists who are dead ringers for Byron—this and a badly lighted image in her mind of a small-featured, light-haired little boy. She nervously began unsnapping and snapping the silver catch on her wristwatch band. Finally she broke the thing. While she was trying to fix it, a man's voice spoke over her head. "Corinne?"

"Yes."

She pushed her disabled wristwatch into her handbag and quickly extended her hand to a man in a gray overcoat.

Ford was suddenly seated and smiling directly at her. She had to look at him squarely now. There wasn't even a glass for her to reach for.

Even if Ford had been a cyclops, Corinne probably would have flinched a kind of happy, integrating flinch. Actually, the other extremity was the case. Ford was a man. Only the glassed he wore saved him from gorgeousness. I won't attempt to estimate the head-on effect of his looks on Corinne's unused secret equipment. She was badly rattled, certainly, and immediately had to use her social wits. "I almost thought I'd better wear my middie blouse," she said.

Ford started to make some comment, but he didn't get a chance. The Chinese waiter, clinging to some greasy mimeographed menus, was suddenly hanging over him. The waiter knew Ford and immediately made some report to him about a book that had been left at the table the day before. Ford spoke to the waiter at some length, explaining that the book was not his, that it belonged to the *other* man and that the other man would be in later. Before the waiter could pass this bit of information along to the boss, Ford ordered lunch for Corinne and himself. Then Ford turned to Corinne, smiling kindly and with real warmth. "That certainly was quite right," he said to Corinne—as though resuming an interrupted discussion of last Saturday night at the Smiths'. "What ever happened to that man? Your father's secretary. Or whatever he was."

"Mr. Miller? He stole a lot of money from Father and went to Mexico. I guess his case is outlawed by now."

Ford nodded. "And your dog?" he asked.

"He died when I was in college."

"He was a nice dog. Are you doing anything now, Corinne? Some kind of work, I mean? You were a very rich little girl, weren't you?"

They began to talk—that is, Corinne began to talk. She told Ford about her job, about Europe, about college, about her father. She suddenly told him all she knew about her lovely, wild mother, who had, in 1912, in full evening dress, climbed over the promenade deck railing of the *S.S. Majestic*. She told him about the Detroit boy who had fallen off the running board of her car in Cannes. She told him about her sinus operation. She told him—just about everything. Ordinarily Corinne was not a talker but nothing could have stopped her that afternoon. She had whole years and even days full of information which suddenly seemed transferable. Apropos, Ford happened to have a high talent for listening.

"You're not eating," Corinne observed suddenly. "You haven't touched your food at all!"

"Yes, I have. I'm listening to you."

Corinne's mind jumped happily to something else.

"A friend of mine, Bobby Waner—he's my boss at the magazine—told me something yesterday. He said there are two lines in American poetry which regularly blow off the top of his head. That's the way Bobby talks."

"What are the lines?"

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"Uh—Whitman's *I am the man, I suffered, I was there* and one of yours, but I won't say it in front of—I don't know—the chow mein and stuff. But the one about the man on the island inside the other island."

Ford nodded. He was quite a nodder as a matter of fact. It was a defense mechanism, surely, but a nice one.

"How—how did you become a poet?" Corinne asked—and stopped to qualify her excited question. "I don't mean that. How did you get an education? You were—you weren't exactly on the right track when I last saw you."

Ford removed his glasses, and, squinting, cleaned them with his pocket handkerchief.

"No, I wasn't," he agreed.

"You went to college. What did you do, work your way through?" Corinne pressed innocently.

"No, no. I'd already made enough money to go, before that. When I was in high school, in Florida, I worked for a bookmaker."

"A bookie? Really? Horse races and all?"

"Dog races. They were at night, and I could go to school during the day."

"But isn't there a law preventing minors from working for bookies?"

Ford smiled. "I wasn't a minor, Corinne. I didn't go to high school until I was nineteen. I'm thirty now and I'm only of college three years."

"Do you like teaching?"

He took his time answering.

"I can't write poetry all day long. When I'm not writing it, I suppose I like to talk about it."

"Don't you have any other interests? I mean—don't you have any other interests?"

This time he took even more time answering.

"I don't think so," he said carefully. "I used to. But I've lost them. Or used them up. Or just got rid of them. I don't know anymore. Not exactly anyway."

Corinne thought she understood and nodded appreciatively, but her mind was still clicking like a lover's. Her next question was entirely uncharacteristic of her—but it was that kind of afternoon.

"Have you ever been in love or anything?" she asked him, suddenly wanting to know about the women he had known, how many and what kinds.

One can guess, however, that she put the question to Ford less inexcusably than it records. Some of her lovely lopsided charm must have come through with it, because Ford responded to the question with a real laugh.

He shifted a little in his seat—the booth was narrow and hard—and replied, "No, I've never been in love." But he frowned over his own statement, as though his craftsman's mind suspected itself of oversimplifying—or of having bad material to work with. He looked up at Corinne, as though he hoped she was already losing interest in her question. She wasn't. His handsome face frowned again. Then, he undoubtedly took a guess at what Corinne really wanted to know—or what she ought to have wanted to know. At any rate, his mind began to select and juxtapose its own facts. At last, perhaps solely for Corinne's benefit, he began to talk. Ford's voice was not very good. It was overly husky and just missed being monotonous.

"Corinne, until I was eighteen I had never even had a date with a girl—except when I was a child and you invited me to your party. And that time you brought your dog to show me—you remember that?"

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Corinne nodded. She was very excited. But Ford frowned again. He seemed dissatisfied with the way he was beginning. For a moment he seemed likely to chuck the whole idea. . . . Probably, Corinne's immodestly responsive face helped lead him through his own strange story.

"Until I was almost twenty-three," he said abruptly, "the only books I had read—outside school—were the *Rover Boys* and *Tom Swift* series." The sound of italics was in this sentence, but he was speaking with a subsurface equanimity now, as though things were going in the right direction. "The only poems I knew," he told Corinne, "were the chanting little ballads I'd had to memorize in grade school. When I was in high school, somehow Milton and Shakespeare never quite got over the teacher's desk." He smiled. "Anyway, they never got to my aisle."

The waiter came and picked up their half-full bowls and plates of chow mein and fried rice. Corinne asked him to leave the tea.

I was a grown man a long time before I knew that real poetry even exists." Ford said, when the waiter had left. "I'd nearly died looking for it. It's—It's a legitimate enough death, incidentally. It'll get you into some kind of cemetery." He smiled at Corinne—not self-consciously—and added, "They may write on your tombstone that you fell off a girl's running board in Cannes, for example. Or that you climbed over the railing of a transatlantic liner. I'm sure, though, the real cause of death is accurately recorded in more intelligent circles." He interrupted himself. "You feel cold, Corinne?" he asked solicitously.

"No."

"Do you want to hear all this? It's long"

"Yes," she said.

Ford nodded. He blew into his hands and then set them on the table.

"There was a woman," he told Corinne. "who used to come to the track every evening, in Florida. Woman in her late sixties. She had bright henna hair and wore a lot of make-up. Her face was pretty jaded and all that, but you could tell that she had once been very wonderful-looking." He blew into his hands again. "Her name was Mrs. Rizzio. She was a widow. She always wore silver foxes, no matter how hot it was. I saved her a lot of money at the track one evening—several thousand dollars. She was a heavy, crazy better. She was very grateful to me and wanted to do something about it. First she wanted to send me to her dentist. (My mouth was full of gaps in those days. I'd had some dental work done, but not much. When I was fourteen some two-dollar dentist in Racine had pulled nearly all my teeth.) But I just thanked her and told her I went to high school during the day and that I didn't have the time to go to the dentist. She seemed very disappointed. She sort of wanted me to become a movie actor. I think. I thought that was the end of it. But it wasn't. She had another way of showing her gratitude." Ford said. "Are you sure you're not cold, Corinne?"

Corinne shook her head.

He nodded, and took what seemed to be an extraordinarily deep breath. Exhaling, he said, "She began to push little white slips of paper into my hand every evening when she saw me at the track. She always wrote me in green ink, and in a small but very legible handwriting. She printed. The first slip of paper she gave me had "William Butler Yeats" written at the top of it, and under Yeats' name the title, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*. Under the title, the complete poem was written out for me. I didn't think it was a gag. I just thought she was nuts. But I read the poem," he told Corinne, looking at her. "I read it under the arc lights. And then, just for the hell of it, I memorized it. I started reciting it to myself under my breath while I waited for the first race to start. And suddenly the beauty of it caught on. I got very excited. I had to leave the track after the first race. I went straight to the drugstore where I knew they had dictionaries. I wanted

to find out what "wattles" were and what a "glide" was and what a "linnet" was. I couldn't wait to know.

For the third time Ford blew into his long hands.

"Mrs. Rizzio gave me a poem every evening," he said. "I memorized, and learned, all of them. Everything she gave me was fine. I've never really reconciled her taste in poetry with her idea about my going into the movies. Maybe she just approved of money. Anyway, she gave me the best of Coleridge, Yeats, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley. Some Whitman. A little Eliot.

"I never once thanked her for the poems. Or even told her what they were meaning to me. I was afraid of breaking the spell—the whole thing seemed magic to me. I knew I'd have to take some kind of action before the season was over. I didn't want the poems to stop reaching me because the season was over. I didn't have sense enough to do any investigating at a public library on my own. I could very well have used our high school library, for that matter, but somehow I didn't connect our high school library with poetry.

"I waited till the last evening of the season. Then I asked her where she was getting the poems. She was very kind. She invited me to her house to see her library. I went along with her that same night. My heart nearly pounded me out of the cab.

"The day after she showed me her library I was supposed to tell my boss whether I'd join him in Miami after my graduation from high school. Graduation was only a week away. I made up my mind not to go to Miami. Mrs. Rizzio had told me I could use her library whenever I wanted. She lived in Tallahassee, and I figured I could hitchhike there in less than an hour, any time of the day. So I quit my job.

"As soon as I got my high school diploma, I started spending eighteen, nineteen hours a day in Mrs. Rizzio's library. Never less. I did that for two months, until my eyes finally gave out under the strain. I didn't wear glasses in those days, and my eyes were very bad. The left eye, particularly; I don't see much of anything out of it.

"But I kept coming to her library anyway. I was afraid she'd stop letting me use it if she knew I could no longer read the print in her books. So I didn't say anything to her at all about my eyes. For about three weeks I sat in her library from early morning until late at night, with a book in front of me, pretending to be reading, in case anyone came into the room.

"That was how I began to write poetry myself.

"I began writing eight or ten words of my own on a sheet of paper, in very large letters that I could read without any trouble. I did that for over a month, filling a couple of small, dime-store writing tablets. Then suddenly I quit. For no particular reason. Chiefly, I was saddened by my own ignorance, I think. Then, too, I was a little afraid I was going blind. There's never just one reason for anything. But anyway I quit. It happened to be October. So I went to college."

His voice now clearly implied that he was either coming to an end or had already reached it. He smiled at Corinne.

"You look as though you're still in school, Corinne. Look at your hands."

Corinne's hands were folded on the table, classroom style.

"The point is—" he said suddenly—and broke off.

Corinne didn't prompt him. He began again at his own convenience.

"The point is," he said, looking at Corinne's folded hands, "that for seven and a half years I've had nothing in my life except poetry. And the years before that I had nothing but,"—he hesitated—"well, discord. And malnutrition. And—well, the *Rover Boys*." He stopped dead again and Corinne thought he was going to tell her point-blank how his equipment for survived

differed from that of other men. But when he spoke again there still was mostly organized information in his voice. He still was not really using his own poetry for the occasion.

"I've never taken a drink in my life," he said very quietly, as though to take the edge of confession off his statement. "And not because my mother was an alcoholic. I've never smoked either. It's just that somebody told me when I was a small boy that drinking and smoking would dull my sense of taste. I still think that, in a way, I can't get past half my childhood dogmas." At this point Ford sat back rather stiffly in his seat. The little movement was quite unobtrusive. But Corinne caught it. It was the first time he had shown ever the very slightest need for self-control of any kind. But he continued—easily enough it seemed. "Every time I buy a ticket on a train I wonder that I have to pay full price. I feel momentarily cheated—gypped—when I see an ordinary, adult's ticket in my hand. Until I was fifteen my mother used to tell conductors I was under twelve."

Casually, Ford looked at his wristwatch, saying, "I really have to get back, Corinne. It's been nice seeing you."

Corinne cleared her throat. "Will you—can you come up to my apartment Friday night?" she asked rapidly, "I'm having a few very good friends," she said.

If he hadn't already seen, Ford saw now that Corinne was in love with him and he gave her a brief look that is fairly difficult to describe yet extremely easy to overanalyze. It had in it nothing quite so melodramatic as a naked warning, but surely a strong suggestion of, "Why don't you try to be very careful? That is, about me and all." The admonition of a man who either is in love with someone or something he doesn't happen to be regarding at the moment or who suspects himself of having, at some time in his life, either lost or forfeited some natural interior dimension of mysterious importance.

Corinne pushed the book away and fumbled in her handbag. "I'll give you my address," she said. "Please try to come. I mean, if you can."

"I certainly will," he said.

The week Corinne looked forward to seeing Ford again was an unfamiliar, rather awful week in which she—nervously, willfully—reclassified her whole person, calling her beautiful, high-bridged nose too big and her symmetrical, tall body big-boned and hideous. She read Ford's poetry constantly. In her lunch hours she wandered intensely through Brentano's basement, searching literary magazines for poems by, or articles about, her love. Evenings, she went so far as to get out her dictionary to translate Gide's now well-known essay on Ford, "*Chanson...enfin*" (which first appeared, rather incongruously, in a *Harper's Bazaar*-ish French magazine called *Madam Chic*.)

At ten o'clock on the evening Ford was expected, Corinne's telephone rang. She had somebody turn down the volume of her phonograph while she was listened to Ford apologize for not having arrived. He explained he was working.

"I understand," Corinne said. Then, immediately, "How long do you think you'll be working?"

"I don't know, Corinne. I'm just in the middle of something."

"Oh," she said.

Ford said, "How long do you think your party will keep going?"

"It isn't a party," she denied.

"Well, your friends. How long will they be there?"

She made her friends stay until four in the morning, but Ford didn't show up.

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He did telephone her again, though, at noon the next day. He tried her apartment first, where the maid gave him her office number.

"Corinne, I'm terribly sorry about last night. I worked all night."

"That's all right."

"Can you have dinner with me tonight, Corinne?"

"Yes."

At this point I could very nicely use two old Hollywood characters. The calendar that gets its days blown off by an unseen electric fan. And the glorious studio tree that bursts, in about two seconds, out of the bitterest winter into the lushest early spring.

During the next four months Corinne saw Ford at least three times a week. Always uptown. Always surrounded by the marquees of third-run movie houses, and nearly always over bowls of Chinese food. But she didn't mind. Neither did she especially mind that her evenings with him seldom—if at all—lasted until later than eleven, at which hour Ford, who imposed deadlines on himself, felt that he had to go back to work.

Sometimes they went to a movie, but usually they stayed in the Chinese restaurant until it closed.

She did almost all the talking. If he talked at any length at all he talked about poetry or poets. On a couple of rare evenings he talked whole essays away. One on Rilke, one on Eliot. But nearly all of the time he listened to Corinne, who had her life to talk away.

He took her home every evening—via subway and crosstown bus—but he came up to her apartment only once. He looked at Corinne's Rodin (which had once belonged to Clara Rilke), and he looked at her books. She played two records for him on the phonograph. Then he went home.

Although Corinne was accustomed to moderate drinking—most of her friends were either middling-heavy or downright heavy drinkers—she never ordered even one cocktail in Ford's company. Or near it, for that matter. She was afraid he might have a sudden, untimely impulse to take her in his arms—perhaps in the shadow of some familiar uptown landmark: a haberdashery or an optometrist's shop, for example—and find her breath repulsive to some degree.

When he finally did kiss she had, inevitably, just arrived from a cocktail party at the office.

The kiss happened in the Chinese restaurant. About ten weeks after they had first met there. Corinne was reading proof on some of her own copy for the magazine—waiting for Ford. He came up to her, kissed her, took off his overcoat, and sat down. It was the average, disenchanted kiss of the average disenchanted husband just checked into the living room straight from the office. Corinne, however, was much too happy with it to wonder just when he passed through a period of enchantment. Later, when she gave the incident a little thought, she arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that the evolution of *their kisses* was going to take place backwards.

The same evening he kissed her, she asked him whether he couldn't find time to meet some of her friends.

"I have such nice friends," she told him enthusiastically. "They all know your poetry. Some even live on it."

"Corinne, I don't mix too well—"

Corinne leaned forward joyfully, remembering something.

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"That's what Miss Aigletinger once yelled about you into my father's thing. Do you remember Miss Aigletinger?"

Ford nodded unnostagically. "What would I have to do if I met them?" he asked.

"My friends?" said Corinne. But she saw that he was serious. So she wasn't. "Oh, just juggle a couple of Indian clubs, tell 'em who your favorite movie stars are."

But her jokes around Ford never had any follow-through. She reached for his hand across the table. "Darling, you wouldn't have to do anything. These people just want to see you."

A thought struck her—fell across her. "You don't realize, do you, what your poetry means to people?"

"Yes, I guess I do." But he had hesitated. Anyway, it wasn't Corinne's idea of a good answer.

She began rather intensely. "Darling, you can't pick up a literary magazine in Brentano's without seeing your name. And that man you introduced me to? The trustee or something? He said he knows three people who are writing books about *The Cowardly Morning*. One man in England." She ran her fingers through the knuckle-grooves of Ford's hand. "Thousands of people are waiting for Wednesday," she said tenderly. (Ford's second book of poems was due to come out, she meant by that.)

He nodded. Something else was on his mind, however. "There won't be any dancing at your party, will there? I can't dance."

A week or so later a tableful of Corinne's best friends met Ford at Corinne's apartment. Robert Wager arrived first. Then came Louise and Elliot Seermeyer. Corinne's sensible Tuckahoe friends. Then came Alice Hepburn, who taught something at Wellesly—or had. Seymour and Frances Hertz. Corinne's intellectual friends, arrived next, in the same elevatorload with Ginnie and Wesley, Corinne's badminton friends. At least five of these people had read both of Ford's books. (The brand-new one, *Man on a Carousel*, had just come out.) And at least three of the five were honestly and permanently excited by Ford's genius.

Ford arrived nearly an hour late, and his shyness lasted almost to the dessert course. Then all of a sudden his guest-of-honor behavior turned gently perfect.

For a full hour he spoke to—and with—Robert Waner and Elliot Seermeyer on Hopkins' poetry.

He gave Sy Hertz not only the right attitude for Sy's book (then in preparation) on the Wordworths, but the title and the first three chapters, too.

He took on without batting an eyelash all of Alice Hepburn's strident, suffragette-ish interruptions.

He very kindly and uselessly explained to Wesley Fowler why Walt Whitman isn't "dirty."

Nothing he said or did during the evening even faintly smacked of performance. He simply was a great man whose greatness had been cornered at a dinner party, and who fought his way out not with theatrical aphorisms or with boorish taciturnity, but—generously, laboriously—with himself. It was a great evening. If not everyone actually knew it, everyone at least felt it.

The next day, at the magazine office, Corinne had an interoffice telephone call from Robert Waner.

As generally happens to people who overload themselves with any one virtue, Waner's voice over the phone was so full of control that some of it could not help but leak out.

"It was a very nice party," he began.

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"Bobby, you were wonderful!" Corinne responded ecstatically. "Everybody was wonderful. Listen. Speak to the operator. Find out if I can kiss you."

"Nothing doing." Waner cleared his throat. "Here on a mission for my government."

"No kidding!" Corinne felt almost sick with affection for Bobby. He was really wonderful. "What government?" she demanded happily.

"He doesn't love you, Corinne."

"What?" Corinne said. She had heard Waner perfectly.

"He doesn't love you," Waner courageously repeated. "He isn't even considering loving you."

"Shut up." Corinne said.

"All right."

There was a long pause. But Waner's voice came in again. It sounded quite far off.

"Corinne, I remember, a long time ago, kissing you in a cab. When you first got back from Europe. It was sort of an unfair, Scotch-and-soda kiss—maybe you remember. I bumped your hat." Waner cleared his throat again. But he put the whole thing through. "There was something about the way you raised your arms to straighten your hat, and the way your face looked in the mirror over the driver's photograph. I don't know. The way you looked and all. You're the greatest hat-straightener that ever lived."

Corinne broke in coldly. "What's the point?" Nevertheless, Waner had touched her, probably deeply.

"None, I guess." Then: "Yes, there is a point. Of course there's a point. I'm trying to tell you that Ford's long past noticing that you're the greatest hat-straightener that ever lived. I mean a man just can't reach the kind of poetry Ford's reaching and still keep intact the normal male ability to spot a fine hat-straightener—"

"You sound rehearsed," Corinne interrupted cruelly.

"Maybe I am."

"What makes you think—" She broke off; started over. "I thought poets were supposed to know more about those things than anyone else"—defiantly.

"They do if they feel like writing verse. They don't if they stick to poetry," Waner said. "Listen, Corinne. In both of Ford's books there's hardly a line of verse. It's nearly all poetry. Do you have any idea what that means?"

"You tell me," Corinne said coldly.

"All right. It means that he writes under pressure of dead-weight beauty. The only kind of men who write that way—"

"You *are* rehearsed," Corinne cut in.

"I wasn't going to phone you without having something to say. If I were—"

"Listen," Corinne said. "You're implying that he's some kind of psychotic. I won't *have* it, Bobby. In the first place it isn't true. He's—he's serene. He's kind, he's gentle, he's—"

"Don't be a fool, Corinne. He's the most gigantic psychotic you'll ever know. He *has* to be. Don't be a fool. He's standing up to his eyes in psychosis."

"What makes you think he doesn't like me?" Corinne demanded ambiguously. "He likes me very much."

"Sure he does. But he doesn't love you."

"You said that. Please shut up."

But Waner distinctly ordered, "Corinne, don't marry him."

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"Now, listen." She was very angry. "If he doesn't love me—as you've so *gallantly* pointed out—my chances of marrying him aren't very hot, are they?"

Waner tried to avoid sounding smug, but his text was against him. "He'll marry you," he said.

"*Really*. Why?"

"Because he just will, that's all. He likes you and he's cold, and he won't be able to think of any reason why he shouldn't—or he'll refuse to think of a reason why he shouldn't. At any rate—"

"He's *not* cold," Corinne interrupted angrily.

"Of course he's cold. I don't care how tender you find him. Or how kind. He's cold. He's cold as ice."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Corinne. Please. Stay out of it. Don't try to find out if it makes sense."

Corinne and Ford were married on April 20, 1937 (about four months after they had met as adults), in the chapel at Columbia. Corinne's matron-of-honor was Ginnie Fowler, and Dr. Funk, of the English Department, stood up for Ford. About sixty of Corinne's friends came to the wedding. Only two people besides Funk came expressly to watch Ford get married: his publisher, Rayburn Clapp, and a very tall, very pale man, an instructor of Elizabethan Literature of Columbia, who remarked at least three times that the flowers bothered his "nasal passages."

Dr. Funk cancelled Ford's lectures for ten days, insisting that Ford and Corinne take a short honeymoon.

They drove to Canada, in Corinne's car. They returned to New York, to Corinne's apartment, on the first Sunday in May.

I know nothing at all about their honeymoon.

That's a statement, not an apology, I'd like to point out. If I had really needed the facts, I probably would have been able to get them.

The Monday morning following their return to New York, Corinne got a letter in the first mail, which she considered rather touching. It read as follows:

32 MacReady Road
Harkins, Vermont
April 30, 1937

Dear Mrs. Ford,

I saw last week in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* that you and Mr. Ford were married, and I am taking the liberty of writing to you, hoping that Columbia will know your home address and forward this letter accordingly.

I have read Mr. Ford's new book of poems, *Man on a Carousel*, and feel that I must somehow ask him for advice. But rather than risk disturbing him at his work I am writing first to you.

I am twenty and a junior at Creedmore College here in Harkins. My parents are dead, and since early childhood I have lived with my aunt in what is probably the oldest, largest, and ugliest house in America.

To be brief as possible, I have written some poems that I would very much like Mr. Ford to see, and I am enclosing them. I beg you to show them to him, as I feel I need his advice so badly. I know I haven't the right to ask Mr. Ford to sit down and write me a letter of detailed criticism, but if he could possibly just read or even look through my poems, that would be enough. You see, our spring vacation begins next Friday, and my aunt and I are coming to New York City next Saturday, May eighth, on the

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way to attend my cousin's wedding in Newport. I could very easily speak to you on the telephone about the poems.

I shall be everlastingly grateful to you both for any kind of guidance, and may I, at this time, wish you both all happiness for your married life?

Yours Sincerely,
Mary Gates Croft

If it were said now that Corinne pushed the verses over to Ford because she had been touched by the young-sounding appeal of the letter and because she wanted her qualified, brand-new husband to meet the appeal, the greatest part of the truth would be told. But the truth in its entirety seldom comes in one big neat piece. She had another reason. Ford was eating his corn flakes without cream or sugar. Absolutely dry and unsweetened. Corinne wanted a legitimate excuse to make him look up so that she could suggest, preferably in a casual voice, that he try eating his corn flakes with cream and sugar.

"Darling," she said.

The groom looked up politely from his dry corn flakes and his lecture notes.

"If you have any time today, would you read this?"

Corinne felt like hearing her own voice in the quiet breakfast room. She went into details: "It's a letter and some poems from a college girl in Vermont. The letter's sweet. You can see she spent hours and hours writing it. Anyway, if you can possibly decipher her handwriting and can read the verses, you're to make some comment to me..." As she looked at her new husband's handsome, Monday-morning-go-to-work-for-the-first-time face, her trend of thought drifted away from her. She reached across the table, stroked his hand, and finished weakly, "She's coming to New York and plans to phone me for your criticism. All very complicated."

Ford nodded. "Be glad to," he said, and stuffed the letter and verses into his jacket pocket.

But it was a much too simple and final reply. Corinne wanted to draw him closer, physically and otherwise, to her. She wanted the oblique shafts of breakfast-table sunshine to fall on them together, not singly, not one at a time.

"Wait a minute, darling. Just give me her address for a second. I'll drop her a line and ask her to tea Sunday."

"All right. Fine." Ford handed over the envelope, smiled, and finished his corn flakes.

But as late as the following Sunday noon Ford still hadn't read the verses. Corinne finally rapped on his door.

"Ray. Darling. That girl I wrote to is coming here in a couple of hours," she said gently. "Do you think you could just glance through her verses? Just so you can say a few words to her?"

"Sure! I was just looking at some things here. Where are they?"

"You have them, darling. They're probably still in the coat of your blue suit."

"I'll get dressed and look at them right away," he said efficiently.

But he stayed at his desk, working, until at three o'clock the front doorbell rang.

Corinne rushed back to his study, "Darling, have you read the poems yet?"

"Is she here already?" Ford asked incredulously.

"I'll entertain her. You read. Come out when you're finished," Corinne closed the door hurriedly. Rita, the maid, had already answered the doorbell.

"How do you do, Miss Croft," Corinne said—all hostess—moving forward toward her guest in the living room.

She was addressing a slight, fair-haired girl with a receding chin, who might almost have passed for eighteen instead of twenty. She was hatless and wearing a good gray flannel suit—very new.

"It's awfully nice of you to let me come, Mrs. Ford."

"Won't you sit down? I'm afraid my husband will be a little late."

Both women sat down, Miss Croft saying, "I think I'll recognize him. I saw his picture in *Poetry Survey*. Wasn't it a wonderful picture? I never say anyone so handsome." Her voice wasn't giddy, but it had in it all the reputed frankness of youth. She looked at her hostess enthusiastically.

Corinne laughed. "I never did either," she said. "How do you like New York, Miss Croft?"

Corinne sat with her guest for an hour and a half without any appearance by Ford.

Conversation was not difficult, however. On the contrary, Miss Croft seemed to have arrived forewarned of the deadly platitudes usually exchanged between out-of-towners and resident New Yorkers. It seemed she had brought her own fresh dialogue. She confessed to Corinne, to begin with, that she liked New York, but only to live here, not to visit. Corinne was genuinely amused—as had been intended—and began to feel sorry for her guest's little receding chin and to notice that her calves and ankles were really quite nice.

"I'm trying," Miss Croft suddenly confided, a little glumly, "to persuade my aunt to let me stay in New York to study. I don't have much hope, though. Especially after last night. A drunken man came into the dining room at the hotel." She grinned. "I'm not even allowed to wear lipstick."

Corinne leaned forward on an impulse. "Look. Would you really like to stay and study?"

"More than anything else in the world, I guess."

"What about Creedmore? You'd want to finish there, wouldn't you?"

"I could go to Barnard. Then I could study at Columbia in the evening," Miss Croft said readily.

"Do you think it would help if I spoke with your aunt? I mean, an older woman? I'd be very glad to, if it's what you really want," Corinne offered with characteristic kindness.

"Oh, golly, that's awful nice!" said Miss Croft. But she shook her head immediately.

"But, thanks. I think I'd better fight it out alone for the few more days we're here. You couldn't help anyway. I'm afraid. You don't know Aunt Cornelia." She looked down self-consciously at her hands. "I've never really been away from home. I live in a way that—" She broke off with a smile Corinne found extremely winning. "What's the difference? I'm really very grateful to be here at all."

Corinne asked quietly, "Where are you staying, dear?"

"At the Waldorf. I think we're going back next Sunday." Miss Croft giggled. "Aunt Cornelia doesn't trust the servants with the silver. Especially the 'new' cook—she's only been with us nine years and hasn't really proved herself."

Corinne laughed—*really* laughed. She suddenly disapproved the possibility of this bright small person going back to Vermont with all or surely most of her challenges unmet.

"Mary—may I call you Mary?" Corinne began.

"Bunny. Nobody calls me Mary."

"Bunny, you're perfectly welcome to stay *here* for a while after your aunt leaves. If she'll let you. Really. We have a lovely room that we don't even—"

Emotionally, Bunny Croft pressed Corinne's hand. Then she placed both her hands into the side pockets of her suit. Her fingernails were bitten down to the quick.

"I'll work out something," she said with confidence, and smiled.

Apparently it was not her nature to be hopelessly depressed by adverse circumstances. With considerable tea-table enterprise she began, verbally, to conduct Corinne around her home in Vermont, pointing out with mixed affection and abhorrence things that had stood of greenly stretched or lay unrepaired all through her childhood. Aunt Cornelia came into focus: a funny, humorless spinster who evidently was carrying on a private war on many fronts, chiefly against progress and dust and fun. Corinne listened attentively, sometimes laughing out loud, sometimes vicariously oppressed, shaking her head.

But it was when the servants began to move through the house that Corinne was most personally moved. As Bunny began to speak tenderly and inclusively of an old butler named Harry, whom she had unqualifiedly loved and depended upon, Corinne was acutely, almost painfully reminded of Eric, her father's old chauffeur, so long dead.

"And Ernestine!" Bunny exclaimed with great warmth. "Golly, I wish you could meet Ernestine. She's Aunt Cornelia's maid. She's a terrible kleptomaniac," she fondly classified. "Has been ever since I can remember. But when I first came to Aunt Cornelia's. Ernestine was the only one in the house—except Harry—who had any idea that a little girl wasn't just a young, *short* adult." She giggled. A gleam of real mischief came into her eyes—her eyes were very pretty: gray-green, and quite large. "For years I confessed to all kinds of petty thefts around the house. I still do. Golly. Aunt Cornelia would discharge Ernestine in a minute if she knew about her—her 'trouble'." She grinned.

"What did your aunt do—I mean when you were a child—when you took the blame for Ernestine?" Corinne asked, amused and interested. Interested in, and somewhat envious of, the apparent resourcefulness by which her guest (apparently unscathed) had passed through childhood.

"What would she do?" Bunny shrugged her shoulders—a gesture curiously immature for her age, Corinne thought. Bunny grinned. "She wouldn't do much about it. Forbid me the use of the library. Ernestine would get the key for me anyway. Or tell me I couldn't ride in the horse show. Something like that."

Corinne looked at her wristwatch suddenly. "Ray should be here," she apologized. "I'm awful sorry he's so late."

"Sorry!" Bunny looked shocked. "Golly, Mrs. Ford. To think that he'd—I mean, that he'd find the time to see me at *all* . . ." Self-consciously she scratched her frail wrist, but asked, "Has he had a chance at all to look at my poems? I mean, had he had the time at all?"

"Well, so far as I know—" Corinne started to stall, but turned in her chair gratefully, as she heard the double doors to the living room open. "Ray! Finally. Come in, darling."

Corinne attended to the introductions. Bunny Croft was visibly flustered.

"Sit down, darling," the bride addressed the groom. "You look a little dragged. Have some tea."

Ford sat down on the chair between the two women, pushed it back a little, and immediately asked, "Have you tried to have published any of these poems you have written, Miss Croft?"

Involuntarily Corinne arched her back a little. Her husband's question was ice-cold.

"Well, no, Mr. Ford—I don't know. I just thought—well, I thought I ought to find out whether I'm any good or not. . . I don't know." Bunny's eyes flashed Corinne an appeal for help.

"Darling, have some tea," Corinne suggested, confused. Her husband had not come into the room altogether intact. He had brought his handsome head. And probably all of his genius. But where was his kindness?

"No tea, Corinne, thank you," Ford declined, looking a little naked without his kindness.

Corinne handed Bunny Croft a fresh cup of tea, and looked at her husband evenly. "Are the poems interesting, darling?" she asked.

"How do you mean, interesting?"

Corinne carefully put cream in her own cup of tea. "Well, I mean are they lovely?"

"Are your poems lovely, Miss Croft?" Ford asked.

"Well—I—I hope so, Mr. Ford."

"No, you don't," Ford contradicted quietly. "Don't say that."

"Ray," Corinne said, upset. "What's the matter darling?"

But Ford was looking at Bunny Croft. "Don't say that," he said to her again.

"Gol-lee, Mr. Ford, if my poems aren't—well, at all lovely—I don't know what they are. I mean—golly!" Bunny Croft flushed and put her hands into her jacket pockets, out of sight.

Ford abruptly stood up. He looked down at Corinne. "I have to go, Corinne. I'll be back in an hour."

"Go?" Corinne said.

"I promised Dr. Funk I'd drop by if we got back today."

It was a lie, however unelaborate. It waylaid deftly any oral response from Corinne. She looked up at her husband and just nodded. Ford turned to Bunny Croft, saying, "Good-by" and sounded curiously logical.

The groom bent over and kissed the bride, who immediately got her voice back. "Darling. If you could just give Miss Croft a little constructive criticism that might..."

"Oh, no!" Bunny Croft protested. "Please. It isn't—I mean it isn't at all necessary—really!"

Ford, who had caught a head cold during the drive back from Canada, used his handkerchief. He replaced it, saying slowly, "Miss Croft, I've read every one of the poems you sent to me. I can't tell you you're a poet. Because you're not. And I'm not saying that because your language is dissonant, or because your metaphors are either hackneyed or false, or because your few attempts to write are so flashy that I have a splitting headache. Those things can happen sometimes."

He sat down suddenly—as though he had been waiting for hours for a chance to sit down.

"But you're inventive," he informed his guest—without a perceptible note of accusation in his voice.

He looked at the carpet, concentrating, and pushed back the hair at his temples with his finger tips.

"A poet doesn't invent his poetry—he finds it," he said, to no one in particular. "The place," he added slowly, "where Alph, the sacred river ran—was found out, not invented."

He looked out the window from where he sat. He seemed to look as far out of the room as he could. "I can't stand any kind of inventiveness," he said.

Nothing led away from this statement.

He sat still for a moment. Then, as abruptly as he had sat down, he stood up. He took Miss Croft's sheaf of poems out of his jacket pocket and rather anonymously placed them on the

tea table, not directly in front of anyone. He then removed his reading glasses, narrowing his eyes as people with extremely bad eyesight usually do when they undress their eyes. He put on his other pair of glasses, his street glasses. Then one more he bent over and kissed his bride good-by.

"Ray, darling. Miss Croft is terribly young. Isn't it possible that—"

"Corinne, I'm late now," Ford said, and stood up straight. "Good-by," he said inclusively. He left the room, looking pressed for time.

Corinne's right-and-wrong reflexes had been uncomfortably overactive most of her life, and at four-thirty in the afternoon her husband's walkout, his general behavior toward his guest, his unelaborate but obvious lie—all had, to her, a very high unacceptableness, whether taken singly or collectively. But around six in the evening, one of those connubial accidents happened to her which disable a wife—sometimes for months—from speaking up. She happened to open a closet door and one of Ford's suit jackets—one she had never seen—fell across her face. Besides having a certain natural olfactory value to her, the jacket had two great holes at the elbows. Either hole alone could have pledged her to loving silence. At any rate, when at seven Ford came home, she had been ready for at least an hour to be the last person in the world to ask him for an explanation.

Not once all evening did Ford himself allude to the afternoon in any way. He was quiet at dinner but, as he was often reflectively quiet, he quietness at dinner wasn't obtrusive, didn't necessarily imply that he was carrying around some new X-quantity.

After dinner the Fowlers dropped by—unannounced and disconcertingly tight—to see the returned newlyweds. They stayed until after midnight, Wesley Fowler incessantly one-fingering the keyboard of the piano, and Ginnie Fowler, obviously postponing a crying jag by smoking handfuls of cigarettes. By the time the Fowlers had pulled out Corinne had half forgotten the afternoon, or had informally convinced herself that there is nothing real about a Sunday afternoon, anyway.

Monday noon, when Bunny Croft telephoned Corinne at the magazine, the call came almost as a surprise. But her second reaction was annoyance. Annoyance with herself for having asked Bunny Croft to meet her. "Look, why don't you call me at the magazine tomorrow, and let's have lunch together," and annoyance with Bunny Croft not only for taking advantage of yesterday's invitation, but for still being in New York. Trying people's loyalty to their husbands, keeping people from running over to Saks' Fifth Avenue in their lunch hours.

"Do you know where the Colony is?" Corinne asked Bunny over the telephone—aware that there was something unkind about the question.

"No, I don't. I can find it though."

Corinne gave directions. But she suddenly didn't like the way her own voice was sounding, and broke in with, "Do you think your Aunt Cornelia would like to join us? I'd love to meet her."

"She would I know, but she's in Poughkeepsie. She's visiting somebody she used to go to Vassar with, that has to be fed through tubs or something."

"Oh—well . . ."

"Mrs. Ford, are you sure I'm not inconveniencing you? I mean I don't want—"

"No, no! Not at all. One o'clock then?"

In the taxi, on the way to the Colony, Corinne planned to be perfectly pleasant at lunch, but at the same time to let it be known that once dessert was over her term of hospitality would naturally expire.

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Lunch, however, was different from what Corinne had vaguely expected of allowed for. Lunch was nice. Lunch was really quite nice, Corinne had to admit. Lunch was gay—lunch was really quite gay. On the first Martini, Bunny Croft began describing with mixed indifference and penetration, two of her young men callers in Harkins, Vermont, one of them a medical student, the other a dramatics student. Both young men sounded extremely young and serious and funny to Corinne and several times she laughed out loud. And as Bunny's casual, superior dormitory talk kept coming across the table, and as the waiter brought a third round of Martinis, Corinne herself began to feel distinctly collegiate. Characteristically, she looked around for something generous to say in repayment.

"Let me get you a date while you're here," she offered abruptly. "The magazine staff is full of young men. Some of them quite nice and bright. . . I'm getting tight."

Bunny looked on the verge of showing interest in Corinne's offer. But she shook her head. "I don't think so," she said thoughtfully. "I want to go to some lectures while I'm here. And—well, I write a little when I don't have to chase around looking at lamps or something with Aunt Cornelia. Thank you, though." She looked down at her Martini glass, then up at the table. "I suppose if I had any sense," she said uncomfortably, "I'd quit writing altogether. I mean—well, *golly*. After what Mr. Ford said."

Corinne sat up straighter, in her seat. "You mustn't feel that way," she ordered uneasily. "Ray has a nasty cold he caught on the drive back to Canada. He's not at all himself. It's all in his chest. He really feels quite horrible."

"Oh, I guess I won't really *quit*. I mean, not really." Bunny smiled, but averted her eyes self-consciously.

Corinne gave in to the nearest impulse.

"Come to the theatre with us tonight. I have to see this play, for the magazine. I have a ticket for my husband, and I'm sure I can get another. The show's lovely in places."

She saw that Bunny, though attracted to the idea, was going to make the proper gesture under the circumstances.

"Do you think Mr. Ford would—" Bunny broke off awkwardly. "Since yesterday I've been feeling like—*golly*, I don't know. Like an old crone that goes around with a sack of poisoned apples."

Corinne laughed. "Now stop that. You just come along with us. We'll pick you up at the Waldorf?"

"Are you sure it's all right?" Bunny asked anxiously. "I mean I don't have to go."

"Of course you have to go." Corinne's voice lowered itself to fill up with love. "Really," she said. "You're very mistaken. My husband is the kindest man in the world."

"I'd love to come," Bunny responded simply.

"Good. We'll pick you up at the Waldorf. Let's eat. I'm getting tight as a coat. I must say you seem to be able to hold your liquor like an old trooper."

"Could I meet you at the theatre? I have to see somebody with my aunt at six."

"Certainly, if you like."

Here is a note Corinne sent to me:

Bobby,

I didn't mean to hold out on you when I came to the Big Business. It was just that I didn't feel up to talking about it. I've written it down for you, though. I've written it down in the form of a private detective's log, a technique straight out of a Freshman English Comp I wrote at Wellesley when I thought it might be nice to become a lady detective later on. I got a C-plus for the comp along with an infuriating

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note from the instructor saying I was quite original, but a little precious, and that we don't really "tail" a scarlet tanager, do we, Miss von Nordhoffen. . . I'll take the same grade and a similar remark from you, and gladly, in exchange for the comfortable delusion that I couldn't possibly have known—in person, I mean—any of the ladies mentioned in the report. Anyway, here it is. Sleep no more.

Love,
C.

On Monday evening, May 10, 1937, Mr. and Mrs. Ford—who had been married three weeks to the day—met Miss Croft outside the Alvin Theatre and the three went inside together to attend the performance of *Hiya, Broadway, Hiya*. After the theatre the three went to the bar of the Weylin Hotel, where just after the midnight performance of some singers known as The Rancheros, Mr. Ford leaned across the table and in a very cordial manner invited Miss Croft to attend his lecture at the institute the following morning. Mrs. Ford impulsively reached forward and pressed her husband's hand. The three people remained at the Weylin bar until approximately one A.M., speaking together in a most friendly manner and watching the entertainment. Mr. and Mrs. Ford dropped Miss Croft off at The Waldorf-Astoria at approximately one-ten A.M. Emotionally, almost at the point of tears, Miss Croft thanked both Mr. and Mrs. Ford for "the loveliest evening of my life."

Mrs. Ford held her husband's hand as the taxi continued on its way to their apartment house. Mr. Ford remarked, as they ascended in the elevator to their apartment, that he had a splitting headache. Once they were inside their apartment Mrs. Ford insisted that Mr. Ford take two aspirins: one for being the "best boy in the world" and one to make him eligible to kiss his wife.

On Tuesday morning, May eleventh, Miss Croft attended Mr. Ford's eleven-o'clock lecture, sitting in the rearmost seat in the lecture hall. She then accompanied Mr. Ford to lunch at a Chinese-type restaurant located three blocks south of the university. Mr. Ford quietly mentioned this fact to Mrs. Ford at dinner. Mrs. Ford asked Mr. Ford which table he and Miss Croft had sat at. Mr. Ford said he didn't remember; near the door he believed. Mrs. Ford asked Mr. Ford what he and Miss Croft had talked about at lunch. Mr. Ford replied quietly that he was sorry, but that he really hadn't brought along a Dictaphone for lunch.

After dinner Mrs. Ford informed her husband that she was going to take the dog for a walk. She asked Mr. Ford if he would like to join her, but he declined, saying that he had a great deal of work to look over.

When Mrs. Ford returned to the apartment two hours later—from a walk up Park Avenue almost as far as the Spanish Quarter—the lights were out both in Mr. Ford's study and in his bedroom.

Mrs. Ford sat alone in the living room until shortly after two A.M., at which time she heard Mr. Ford screaming in his bedroom. She then burst into Mr. Ford's bedroom, where she found Mr. Ford apparently asleep in his bed. He continued to scream although Mrs. Ford shook him as violently as she was able. His pajamas and sheets were wringing wet with perspiration.

When Mr. Ford came to, he reached at once for his glasses on the night table. Even with his glasses on he seemed unable for several seconds to recognize his wife, although Mrs. Ford frantically continued to identify herself. At last, staring at her evenly, he spoke her name; but with great difficulty, like a man physically and emotionally exhausted.

Mrs. Ford, stammering badly, told Mr. Ford that she was going to get him a cup of hot milk. She then moved unsteadily out to the kitchen, poured some milk into a pot, searched rather wildly for the Magic Ignition Light, finally found it. She heated the milk and returned with a cup

of it to her husband's room. Mr. Ford was now asleep again, with his hands clenched at his sides. Mrs. Ford set the cup of milk of the night table and climbed into bed beside Mr. Ford. She lay awake the rest of the night. Mr. Ford did not scream again in his sleep, but between the hours of four and five A.M., he wept. Mrs. Ford maneuvered her whole body as close as possible to Mr. Ford's, but there seemed to be no way of relieving him of his sorrow or even reaching it.

Wednesday morning, May twelfth, at breakfast, Mrs. Ford casually (so she thought) asked Mr. Ford what he had dreamed during the night. Mr. Ford looked up from his dry corn flakes and replied unelaborately that last night he had dreamed his first "unpleasant dream" in a long time. Mrs. Ford asked him again what he had dreamed. Mr. Ford replied quietly that nightmares are nightmares and that he could get along without a Freudian analysis. Mrs. Ford said equally quietly (so she thought) that she didn't want to give Mr. Ford a Freudian analysis even were she qualified to do so. She said she was merely Mr. Ford's wife and that she wanted to make Mr. Ford happy. She began to cry. Mr. Ford placed his face between his hands, but after a moment he stood up and left the room. Mrs. Ford rushed after him and found him standing in the outer hall, holding his briefcase, but without a hat. He was waiting for the elevator. Mrs. Ford asked Mr. Ford whether he loved her. But at that instant the elevator doors opened, and Mr. Ford, entering the car without his hat, said he would see Mrs. Ford at dinner.

Mrs. Ford dressed and went to her office. Her behavior at the magazine offices, that Wednesday afternoon, might be called "erratic." She was observed to slap the face of Mr. Robert Waner, when the latter lightly addressed her, at an editor's meeting, as "Mary Sunshine." After the said act, Mrs. Ford apologized to Mr. Waner, but she did not accept his invitation to accompany him to Maxie's Bar for a drink.

At seven P.M. Mr. Ford telephoned his apartment and told Mrs. Ford that he would not be home to dine as he was obliged to attend a faculty meeting at the university.

Mr. Ford did not come home until eleven-fifteen P.M. at which time Mrs. Ford, who was out walking her wire-haired terrier, encountered him on the street. Mr. Ford objected when the dog attempted to greet him by jumping on his person. Mrs. Ford pointed out that Mr. Ford ought to be flattered that Malcolm (the dog) had learned to love him in such a short time. Mr. Ford said he could get along without having Malcolm jump all over him with his filthy paws. They then went up in the elevator together. Mr. Ford remarked that he had a great deal of work to look over and went into his study. Mrs. Ford went into her own room and closed the door.

At breakfast Thursday morning, May thirteenth, Mrs. Ford remarked to her husband that she wished she hadn't made a theatre date with the little Croft girl for that night. Mrs. Ford said she was tired and didn't care to see the play a second time, but that Miss Croft ought to see Bankhead if she had never seen her. Mr. Ford nodded. Then Mrs. Ford asked him if by chance he had seen Bunny Croft again. Mr. Ford asked, in reply, how in the world could he possibly have seen Miss Croft. Mrs. Ford said she didn't know; she said she just thought Miss Croft might have attended his lecture again. Mr. Ford finished his breakfast, kissed Mrs. Ford good-by, and left.

Thursday evening Mrs. Ford waited outside the Morosco Theatre until eight-fifty P.M., at which time she went to the box office, left a ticket in Miss Croft's name, and entered the theatre all alone.

At the end of the first act of the play she went directly home, arriving there at approximately nine-forty P.M. She learned at the door from Rita, the maid, that Mr. Ford had not yet come home from his Thursday-evening class and that his dinner was getting "ice-cold." She instructed Rita to clear the table.

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Mrs. Ford stayed in a hot bath until she felt a little faint. Then she dressed herself for the street, leashed Malcolm, and took him out for a walk.

Mrs. Ford and Malcolm walked five blocks north and one block west, and entered a popular restaurant. Mrs. Ford left Malcolm in the checkroom; then she sat down at the bar and, in the course of an hour, drank three Scotch old-fashioned. Then she and the dog returned to the apartment, arriving there approximately eleven forty-five P.M. Mr. Ford still had not arrived home.

Mrs. Ford immediately left her apartment again—leaving Malcolm behind.

She went down in the elevator and the apartment-house doorman got her a taxi. She ordered the driver to stop at Forty-second Street and Broadway. There she got out of the taxi and proceeded west on foot. She entered the De Luxe Theatre, and all-night movie house, and stayed there throughout one complete performance, seeing two full-length films, four short subjects, and a newsreel.

She then left the De Luxe Theatre and went by taxi directly home, arriving there at three-forty A.M. Mr. Ford still had not arrived home.

Mrs. Ford immediately went down in the elevator again with Malcolm. At approximately four A.M., having twice walked completely around the block, Mrs. Ford encountered Mr. Ford under the canopy of their apartment-house as he was getting out of a taxi. He was wearing a new hat. Mrs. Ford said hello to Mr. Ford and asked him where did he get the hat. Mr. Ford did not seem to hear the question.

As Mr. and Mrs. Ford ascended in the elevator together, Mrs. Ford's knees suddenly buckled. Mr. Ford tried to draw Mrs. Ford up to a normal standing position, but his attempt was strangely incompetent, and it was the elevator operator who lent Mrs. Ford real assistance.

Mr. Ford seemed to have a great difficulty inserting his key into the lock of his apartment door. He suddenly turned and asked Mrs. Ford if she thought he was drunk. Somewhat inarticulately, Mrs. Ford replied that she did think Mr. Ford had been drinking. Mr. Ford asked her to speak more distinctly. Mrs. Ford said again that she thought Mr. Ford had been drinking. Mr. Ford, successfully unlocking his front door, stated in a loud voice that he had eaten an olive from "her" Martini. Mrs. Ford, trembling, asked from whose Martini. "From *her* Martini," Mr. Ford repeated.

As the two entered their apartment together, Mrs. Ford, still trembling, asked her husband whether he knew that Miss Croft had left her standing at the Morosco Theatre. Mr. Ford's reply was unintelligible. He walked, swayed perceptibly, toward his bedroom.

At approximately five A.M. Mrs. Ford heard Mr. Ford get out of his bed, and apparently ill, go into his bathroom.

With the use of sedatives Mrs. Ford managed to fall asleep at approximately seven A.M.

She awoke at approximately eleven-ten A.M., at which time she rang for her maid, who informed her that Mr. Ford had left the apartment more than an hour ago.

Mrs. Ford immediately dressed and without eating breakfast went by taxi to her office.

At approximately one-ten P.M. Mr. Ford telephoned Mrs. Ford at her office to say that he was at Pennsylvania Station and that he was leaving New York with Miss Croft. He said that he was very sorry and then hung up.

Mrs. Ford carefully replaced her phone and then fainted, loosening one of her front teeth against a filing cabinet.

As she was alone in her office and no one had heard her fall she remained unconscious for several minutes.

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She regained consciousness by herself. She then drank a quarter of a glass of brandy and went home.

At home she found Mr. Ford's bedroom and closets completely empty of his few personal effects. She then rushed into Mr. Ford's study—followed by Rita, the maid, who explained rather laconically that Mr. Ford himself had pushed the desk back against the wall. Mrs. Ford looked slowly around the freshly reconverted playroom, then again fainted.

On May twenty-third—another Sunday—Rita, the maid, rapped imperiously on the door of Corinne's bedroom. Corinne told her to come in.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. Corinne was lying on her bed, fully dressed. Her window blinds were drawn down. She knew, vaguely, that she was a fool not to let the sunshine into the room, but in nine days she had grown to hate the sight of it.

"I can't hear you," she said, without turning over to face Rita's unattractive voice.

"I said, Chick the doorman's on the house-phone," Rita said. "He says there's a gentleman in the lobby wansta see you."

"I don't want to see anybody, Rita. Find out who it is."

"Yes, ma'am." Rita went out and came in again. "You know a Miss Craft or somebody?" she demanded.

Corinne's body jumped under the bedspread she had drawn over her. "Tell whoever it is to come up."

"Now?"

"Yes, Rita. Now." Corinne stood up unsteadily. "And will you please show him into the living room?"

"I was just gonna clean in there. I haven't cleaned in there yet."

"Show him into the living room, Rita, please."

Rita walked sullenly out of the room.

As people do who have chosen to live in a supine position, once she was on her feet Corinne went into action a little crazily. It seemed of prime importance to her to take out from under her night table Ford's two books of poems and walk up and down the room with them for a little while.

She suddenly replaced the books under her night table. Then she combed her hair and put on lipstick. Her dress was badly wrinkled, but she didn't change it.

As she walked carefully into the living room, a man with wavy blond hair stood up. The man was in his early thirties, with a physique that was turning fat, but which had a look of tremendous animal power. He was wearing a pale green sports coat and a yellow polo shirt open at the collar. Several inches of white handkerchief drooped out of his breast pocket.

"Mrs. Ford?"

"Yes..."

"My card." He pushed something into Corinne's hand.

Corinne slanted the card toward the daylight:

I'M HOWIE CROFT

Who the Hell

Are you, Bud?

She started to return the card, but Mr. Howie Croft sank away from her into the upholstery of the couch, waving a hand. "Keep it," he said generously.

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Framing the card in her hand, Corinne herself sat down in the red damask chair opposite her visitor.

She asked a little stiffly, "Are you closely related to Miss Croft?"

"Are you kidding?"

Corinne's reply was delivered down her handsome nose: "Mr. Croft, I'm not especially in the habit of—"

"Look, hey. I'm Howie Croft. I'm Bunny's husband."

Impressed, Corinne immediately fainted.

When she came to, she had a choice of looking into either or both of the alarmed, faintly inconvenienced faces of Howie Croft and Rita. She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them. Howie Croft and Rita placed her feet up on the couch. She swung then now, a trifle arrogantly, to the floor. "I'm all right, Rita," she said. "I'll take some of that, thought." She drank half a pony of brandy. "You can go, Rita. I'm all right. I'm damned sick and tired of fainting..."

As Rita left the room, Howie Croft moved uneasily over to the red damask chair Corinne had vacated. He sat down and crossed his legs—which were huge; each thigh a whole athlete in itself.

"I'm sure sorry to of scared you that way, Mrs. Field."

"Ford."

"I meant Ford—I know a coupla people named Field." Howie Croft uncrossed his legs.

"Uh—so you didn't know I and Bunny were married?"

"No. No. I did not."

Howie Croft laughed. "Sure. We been married eleven years," he said. "Cigarette?" He snapped the bottom of a fresh pack to cigarettes with his finger, then sociably, without getting up, extended the pack to Corinne.

"What do you *mean* you've been married eleven years?" Corinne demanded coldly.

For a split second Howie Croft looked like a schoolboy unjustly accused of chewing gum in class, but whose involuntary reaction is to swallow when challenged.

"Well, ten years and eight months, if you wanna be so eggzact," he said. "Cigarette?"

Something in Corinne's face told him to stop offering her a cigarette. He shrugged his forehead, lighted his own cigarette, put the pack back in his breast pocket, and carefully rearranged his handkerchief.

Corinne spoke to him.

"I beg your pardon?" Howie Croft said politely.

Corinne repeated her question, in a harsh voice.

"What girl's twenty years old?" Howie Croft inquired.

"Your wife."

"Bunny?" Howie Croft snorted. "You're nuts. She's older'n me and *I'm* thirty-one."

Swiftly Corinne wondered whether doormen and people had sense enough to cover up immediately the bodies of people who jumped out of apartment-house windows. She didn't want to jump without a guarantee that somebody would cover her up *immediately*. . . She forced herself to pick up Howie Croft's voice.

"She looks a lot younger," Howie Croft was analyzing, "because she's got small bones. People with small bones don't get old the way people like you and I. Know what I mean?"

Corinne didn't reply to this question, but asked a question of her own.

Howie Croft didn't hear her. "I don't getcha," he said, and cupped his ear. "Say that again."

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She repeated her question—louder.

Before replying, Howie Croft got rid of a troublesome bit of tobacco on his tongue. Then he said, not impatiently, "Look, hey. She *can't* be twenty. We got a *kid* eleven years old."

"Mr. Croft—"

"Call me Howie," he suggested. "Unless you wanna stand on this ceremonies stuff."

With a shiver Corinne asked him if he were telling her the complete truth.

"Look, hey. What would I lie for? I mean what would I lie for? How old did *she* tell you she was?" But he waved away his interest in a reply. "She's nuts," he pronounced rather cheerfully. "She was always nuts."

He settled back comfortably on the lower part of his spine and assumed the kind of philosophical countenance available to him.

"Look, hey. I come home on Thursday. From this special trip I hadda make for the firm. I look around the house. No Bunny anywheres. Even though she was supposta be back at least a week awreddy. So I call up my mom. My mom tells me Bunny hasn't got back yet. She starts yellin' her head off on the phone. She tells me the kid's broken—*broken*—his leg climbin' on some roof. She keeps yellin' over the phone about how she hasn't strength enough to take care of the kid and where's his mother anyways, and so finly I hang up. I can't stand somebody yellin' in my ear over the phone.

"So I spend around an hour tryin' to put two-in-two together, like. So I knew where I'm at, at least. And so finly I look in the mailbox and I see a letter from Bunny. She tells me her and this Ford guy are goin' away somewheres together. What a screwball!" He shook his head.

Corinne took a cigarette from the box on the table beside her and lighted it. She then cleared her throat, as though to make sure her voice still functioned.

"Thursday. This is Sunday. It took you a long time to get here."

Howie Croft finished what he was doing—he was blowing a smoke ring at the ceiling—then he answered. "Look, I don't live on Park Avenue or somewheres. I work for a living. I go where the firm sends me."

Corinne took her time. "You mean you're here on business?"

"Certainly I'm here on business!" Howie Croft said indignantly.

"You let her come to New York? You knew she was coming here?" Corinne asked dizzily.

"Certainly I knew she was comin' here. You don't think I'd let her come all the ways to New York without knowin' what's what, do ya?"

It took him a moment to smooth out his feathers.

"She told me she wanted to meet this Ford guy—this Ford chap—your husband. So I figure: Let her get it out of her system. She's drivin' me nuts; he's drivin' me nuts—" He interrupted himself. "Your husband makes a lot of dough writin' books, don't he?"

"He's only written two books of poems, Mr. Croft."

"I don't know about *that*, but . . . he makes a lot of dough on what he writes, don't he?"

"No."

"No?"—incredulously.

"There is no money in poetry, Mr. Croft."

Howie Croft looked suspiciously around him.

"Who pays the rent here?" he demanded.

"I do,"—shortly. "Mr. Croft, must we—"

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"I don't get it." He turned to Corinne, a real appeal in his rather sizeless eyes. "He's a big shot, isn't he?"

"He's probably the finest poet in America."

But her shook his head. "If I'd known this I wouldn'ta let her come," he said bitterly. He looked at Corinne accusingly, as though she were personally responsible for his private dilemma. "I thought your husband could kinda show her the ropes."

"What ropes?"

"The ropes, the ropes!" Howie Croft said impatiently. "She keeps writin' these books. . . You know how many books she's wrote since we been married? Twelve. I read 'em all. The last one she wrote for Gary Cooper. For a picture with Gary Cooper in it. She sent it out to the movies, and they didn't even send it back. She's had some tough breaks."

"What?" Corinne asked sharply.

"I said she's had some tough breaks."

Corinne felt her cigarette burning hotly close to her finger. She unloosened the cigarette over an ashtray.

"Mr. Croft. How did your wife hear of my husband?"

"From Miss Durant," was the brief answer. Howie Croft was deep in thought.

"Who," Corinne said, "is Miss Durant?"

"Her drinkin' buddy. Teaches at the high school. Durant and Bunny talk about all that kinda stuff."

"Would you like a drink?" Corinne asked abruptly.

Howie Croft looked up. "You're not kiddin'," he said. "Say. What's your first name anyways?"

Corinne stood up and rang for Rita. By the time she sat down, his question had sufficiently cleared the room.

With a drink in his hand, Howie Croft suddenly asked a question. "What'd she do here in New York, anyways?"

Corinne drank part of her drink. Then she told him what she knew—or what she was able to bring herself to relate. He listened to her in a way that, at first, she thought was disconcertingly alert. Then, abruptly, it occurred to her that he was examining her legs. She crossed her legs and tried to bring her account to a rapid close, but he interrupted her.

"Who's this 'Aunt Cornelia' you're talking about?"

Corinne stared at him. Her hands began to tremble, and she wonder-ed if it might not be best to sit on them.

She managed to ask the obvious question.

Howie Croft concentrated briefly, but shook his head.

"She's got an Aunt *Agnes*," he suggested constructively. "Got a lotta dough, too. Runs the movie house over at Cross Point."

As though there were some manual way to stop the horrible ceremony beginning to take place inside her head, Corinne put her hand to her forehead. But it was too late. Already a gallant single file of people was approaching the precipice of her brain. One by one—she couldn't stop them—they dived off. First came lovable but eccentric, faintly mustached Aunt Cornelia. Then came Harry, the sweet old kite-building butler. Then came dear old kleptomaniacal Ernestine. Then came the funny medical student and the funny drama-tics student. Then came to Poughkeepsie friend of Aunt Cornelia's who was being fed through tubes. Then at last The Waldorf-Astoria itself was moved into position, given a competent push and sent hurtling after

the others . . . "I think I'm going to faint again," she informed Howie Croft. "Would you hand me that glass of Brandy?"

Howie Croft rushed forward, semi-alarmed again, and Corinne drank what was left in the pony of brandy.

When things looked all right, Howie Croft backed off toward the couch and re-ensconced himself. He gulped down the last of his high-ball. Then, with an ice cube clicking in the side of his mouth, inquired, "Wuss you firs' 'ame, anyways?"

Corinne lighted another cigarette without answering. Her guest watched her, unaffronted.

"Mr. Croft, had your wife ever gone off like this before?"

"Hoddaya mean?" he asked, beginning to chew the ice cube in his mouth.

"I mean," Corinne said with control, "has she ever gone on trips with men?"

"*Lis-sen*. Wuddaya think I am—a fool?"

"Of course not," Corinne said quickly, politely.

"I let her go on trips once in a while. Just to break up the monotony, like. But if you're inferring-like that I let her chase around—"

"I didn't really mean that," Corinne hastily lied, in spite of herself.

Howie Croft started to work on the other ice cud in his glass.

"Mr. Croft, what do you intend to do about all this?"

"About all what?"—sociably.

Corinne took a deep breath. "About your wife and my husband going away together."

Howie Croft held up his reply until he had finished crunching his second ice cube into liquid. When he finished he looked at Corinne, oozing with confidential confidence. "Well, I tellya—what's your first name anyways?"

"Corinne," Corinne said dully.

"Corinne. Well, I tellya, Corinne. Strickly between you and I and the lamppost, I and Bunny haven't been getting' along so good. We haven't been getting along so good in the last coupla years. Know what I mean? . . . I don't know. Maybe she's had a little too much dough to spend. I'm makin' one-ten a week now—*plus* expenses, *plus* a darn good bonus every Christmas. It's maybe gone to her head, kinda. Know what I mean?"

Corinne nodded intelligently.

"And that year she went to *college* didn't do her no good—*any* good," Howie Croft pointed out. "Her Aunt Agnes never shoulda let her go. It warped her mind, like."

Then something strange happened. Howie Croft suddenly took off the fullback's shoulder pads he was wearing under his sports jacket. Without them he looked like a different man and required fresh observation.

"Somethin' else, too," the new man said, uneasily. "She kinda drove me nuts."

"What?" said Corinne with respect.

"She kinda drove me nuts," he repeated. "Know what I mean?"

Corinne shook her head and said, "No."

"Say 'Howie'."

"Howie," Corinne said.

"Atta girl. Yeah. She kinda drove me nuts sometimes." He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "It wasn't too bad when we first got married. But—I don't know. She got funny pretty quick. Mean. Mean with me. Mean with the kid, even. I don't know." He suddenly blushed.

"Once she—" But he broke off. He shook his head.

"Once she what?" Corinne demanded.

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"I don't know. It don't matter anymore, anyways. I've forgot about it already. She just changed a lot. I mean she just changed a lot. Boy! I can remember how she used to come to all the games when I was playin'. Football. Basketball. Baseball. She never missed a one." His mouth tightened; he was almost finished. "I don't know. She just changed a lot."

He was finished. He could look over at Corinne easily now. Some trusty interior whistle had blown just in time. The molly-coddle, for some reason, had been taken off the scrimmage line and Good old Hammerhead Dukes was back in his old position. "This is darn good bourbon ya got, Corinne," he said brandishing his empty glass.

But Corinne stood up. She said something about a previous appointment. She thanked him for dropping by.

Howie Croft looked disappointed by the abrupt termination of his visit. But he obediently stood up and allowed Corinne to lead him to the front door. On the way he turned to address her.

"I'm gonna be in town a coupla days. Okay if I give ya a ring? How 'bout us doin' the town?"

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid not."

He shrugged, undeflated. He put on a light gray hat in front of the hall mirror and creased it tenderly.

"Maybe you could tell me a coupla shows I oughta see while I'm in town. Stage shows. This *Hiya, Broadway, Hiya!* any good?"

"Yes."

Howie Croft, his hat finally set satisfactorily on his head, turned in the doorway. He grinned at Corinne. "Don't look so worried-like," he recommended. "You're better off. You're better off, in the long run. If your husband's as nuts as my wife is."

At that point Corinne let go of the doorknob—and everything else. She informed Howie Croft at the top of her voice that she wanted her husband back.

Howie Croft fled into the elevator when it arrived, and Corinne went inside her apartment and closed the door. Her legs then dissolved and she slipped to the floor, sobbing. Later, she went to her bedroom and at once took some sedative capsules.

When she awoke—at one of timeless hours people awake from strong sedatives—she felt something crushed damply in her hand. She pressed the object into shape, then turned on her bed lamp. Howie Croft's personal card was in her hand. She stared at it. Then she lay still for several minutes, looking at her dim reflection in her dressing-table mirror across the room. Suddenly she asked herself aloud: "Who the hell are you, Bud?" The question struck her as very funny and she laughed for a quarter of an hour.

Corinne never stopped trying to find out where Ford had run off to. Neither did Ford's publishers stop trying. Neither did Columbia.

Often they all thought they had a lead, but invariably it faded way over a long-distance telephone call, or died between the simple declarative sentences of some hotel manager's letter.

At one time Corinne even considered hiring a private detective. She even had one report to her apartment for instructions. But she sent him back to his office unused. She was afraid he would give her a lot of dirt and no husband . . . Corinne's search for Ford was an intense one, but a curiously legitimate one.

We know now that the itinerary of Ford and Bunny Croft, once they had left New York together, was rather like that of two quarter-blooded gypsies. We know that they turned back

North when they reached Charleston, West Virginia, and back East when they reached Chicago, and that after only ten weeks of wandering they settled down in a Middle Western city. A city that obscured their liaison under a natural screen of smoke and grit.

It was Robert Waner who found out where they were living. It took him about eighteen months to find out. When he did he phoned Corinne's apartment, and by the way he began, "Corinne? . . . Now Listen. Don't get excited—" Corinne knew what was coming.

Waner knew that Corinne would want to go to see Ford. It was his intention to go along with her. But it didn't work out that way. She lifted the facts from him over the phone, then packed a bag and an hour later boarded a train alone.

Her train got into the city Waner had named at six in the morning. It was November, as she walked down the gray empty platform toward the taxi stand she felt sleet on her face and down her neck. Monday sleet, at that.

She checked into a hotel, took a hot bath, dressed herself again, and proceeded to sit in her room for the next seventeen hours. She looked at five magazines. She counted bricks in the office building across the street; vertical patterns, horizontal and diagonal patterns. When it got dark outside she put three coats of polish on her nails.

While she was waiting for her third coat of polish to dry she suddenly stood up from her chair, walked over to the telephone, and placed a hand on it. But there was an electric shock on the same table with the phone. She saw almost with delight that it was eleven o'clock at night. She felt saved. It was much too late to do any phoning. It was much too late to tell her husband all she had learned about Bunny from Howie Croft. It was much too late to find out if her husband needed any money. It was exactly the right time to take another hot bath.

She did so. But with the bath towel still wrapped around her she suddenly walked straight to the telephone and asked the operator for the number she knew by heart.

This is the extraordinary conversation that followed:

"Hello." Bunny's voice.

"Hello. I know it's late. This is Corinne Ford."

"Who?"

"Corinne For—"

"*Corinne!* Well, *golly!* I can't *believe* it!" A voice full of rich, creamy delight. "Are you in town?"

"Yes. I'm in town," Corinne said. Her own voice didn't sound like her voice; it sounded like a man's—as though all her glands were through with her.

"Well, *golly*, Corinne! I don't know *what* to say! This is wonderful. We've been meaning to get in touch with you for ages and *ages*. This is wonderful." Then, a little shyly, a little ashamedly: "Corinne, I feel just awful about what's happened and stuff."

"Yes." Corinne said.

It was any apology. A rather wonderful one, in a way. It wasn't delivered like any apology at all that a woman of thirty-three might essay while standing up to her ears in richly assorted, connubial garbage. It was the apology of a very young salesgirl who has buttonheadedly sent the blue curtains instead of the red.

"Yes," Corinne said.

"Golly, where *are* you anyway, Corinne?"

"I'm at the Hotel King Cole."

"Well, *look*, now." Warm, chocolate plans on the way. "It's not at all late. You've got to come over here this minute. You're not in bed or anything."

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"No."

"Good. Ray's in the other room, working. But listen. You hop in a cab—you know our address, Corinne?"

"Yes."

"Swell . . . Well, we're dying to see you. You hurry up, now."

For a few seconds Corinne didn't talk at all.

"Corinne? You there?"

"Yes."

"Well, you hurry up, now. We'll be waiting. G'by!"

Corinne replaced the phone on its hook.

She then went into the bathroom and got back into the tub for a few minutes to get warm. But all the hot water in the hotels in the world couldn't have warmed her. She got out of the tub and dried and dressed herself.

She put on her hat and coat and looked around the room to see whether she had left several cigarettes burning. Then she left her room and rang the elevator bell. She could feel her pulse beating close to her ear, the way it does when the face is pressed against the pillow in a certain way.

The sleet had turned to snow during the seventeen hours she had spent in her room, probably since darkness, and part of an inch of slush covered the walk outside the hotel. A neon sign across the un-New York-looking street cast its ugly blue reflection on the black wet street. The hotel doorman who got her a cab needed to use his handkerchief.

Corinne rode for nearly fifteen minutes; then the cab stopped and she asked animatedly, "Is this the place?" and got out and paid her fare.

She found herself standing on an empty, dark, slushy street of rebuilt tenements.

But she walked up the stone steps and went through the first double door. She searched in her handbag, found her cigarette lighter, and flicked it on. A panel of names and buttons were before her. She found the name FORD, written in green ink, and she pushed the corresponding button casually, like a salesman or a friend.

A buzzing sound followed, and the inner door opened. Almost at once Corinne heard her own name, with a gay question mark trailing from it, ring down a dark spiral staircase. And Bunny Croft scampered down to meet her.

Bunny slipped her arm through Corinne's and said things to her and continued to say things to her as they climbed the stairs together. Corinne heard nothing. Suddenly Corinne's coat was being taken from her and she was being seated in a room and she was being asked by Bunny Croft which she'd rather have: rye or bourbon. But Corinne just looked down at her own legs. She saw that her stockings didn't match. This seemed a very strange and highly provocative fact to her, and she resisted a strong temptation to lift her legs hip-high, knees together, and remark to anyone within hearing distance, "*Look. My stockings don't match.*" But she only said, "What?"

"I said, you look cold, Corinne. Brrr! I'm going to make you a drink whether you want it or not. No arguments. Go in and see Ray while I'm doing stuff. He's working, but he won't care. Right through that door." Bunny disappeared on the run, through a kitchen push door.

Corinne stood up and walked over to and through the door that Bunny pointed to.

Ford was sitting at a small bridge table, with his back to the door. He was in his short sleeves. An undressed watty little bulb burned over his head. Corinne neither touched him nor

even walked directly toward him, but she said his name. Without perceptibly staring, Ford turned around in the wooden restaurant chair he was sitting on and looked at his visitor. He looked confused.

Corinne went over and sat down on the chair close to his table, within touching distance of him. She already knew that everything was wrong with him. The wrongness was so heavy in the room she could hardly breathe.

"How are you, Ray?" she asked, without crying.

"I'm fine. How are you, Corinne?"

Corinne touched his hand with hers. Then she withdrew her hand and placed it on her lap. "I see you're working," she said.

"Oh, yes. How've you been, Corinne?"

"I've been fine," Corinne said. "Where are your glasses?"

"My glasses?" Ford said. "I'm not allowed to use them. I'm taking eye exercises. I'm not allowed to use them." He turned around in his seat and looked at the door Corinne had entered through. "From her cousin," he said.

"Her cousin? Is he a doctor?"

"I don't know what he is. He lives on the other side of town. He gave her some eye exercises to give me."

Ford cupped his eyes with his right hand, then put down his hand and looked at Corinne. For the first time since she had entered the room, he looked at her with some kind of real interest.

"You in town, Corinne?"

"Yes. I'm at the Hotel King Cole. Didn't she tell you I phoned?"

Ford shook his head. He pushed some papers around on his bridge table. "You in town, eh?"

Corinne saw now that he was drunk. Under his awareness, her knees began to knock together uncontrollably.

"I'm just going to stay overnight."

Ford seemed to give this remark a great deal of concentration. "Just overnight?"

"Yes."

Narrowing his eyes painfully, Ford looked down at the papers strewn messily all over the bridge table. "I have a lot of work here, Corinne," he said confidentially.

"I see, I see you have," Corinne said, without crying.

Ford again turned around to glance at the door to the room—this time almost falling off his chair. Then he leaned forward toward Corinne, warily, like a man in a crowded, decorous room who is about to risk telling someone at his table a bit of choice gossip or an off-color joke.

"She doesn't like my work," he said, in a surreptitious voice. "Can you imagine that?"

Corinne shook her head. She was now half-blinded with tears.

"She didn't like it when she first came to New York. She thinks I'm not meaty enough."

Corinne was now crying without making any attempt to control herself.

"She's writing a novel."

He drew himself back from his confidential position and began again to push papers around on his bridge table. His hands stopped suddenly. He spoke to Corinne in a stage whisper. "She saw my picture in the *Times* book section before she came to New York. She thinks I look like somebody in the movies. When I don't wear my glasses."

Then, fairly quietly, Corinne lost her head. She begged him to come home with her. She wildly touched his face with her hand.

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But he suddenly interrupted her, blinking painfully, but sounding like the soberest, most rational man in the world. "Corinne, *you* know I can't get away."

"What?"

"I'm with the Brain again," Ford explained briefly.

Corinne shook her head, choked with despair and incomprehension.

"The Brain, the Brain," he said rather impatiently. "*You* saw the original. Think back. Think of somebody pounding on the window of a restaurant on a dark street. *You* know the one I mean."

Corinne's mind traveled anfractuously back, reached the place, then partially blacked out. When she looked at her husband again he had picked up a movie magazine, and was squinting at its cover. She turned away.

"Staying in town, Corinne?" he asked politely, putting down the magazine.

Corinne didn't have to answer, because her hostess's voice suddenly called—hollered—from the other side of the door. "Hey, open up, you two! My hands are full."

Ford rushed awkwardly to open the door. A highball was suddenly deposited in Corinne's boneless hand.

The other two people, with glasses of their own, sat down—Ford at his messy little bridge table, Bunny Croft on the bare floor on the other side of the table.

She was wearing blue jeans, a man's t-shirt and a red handkerchief knotted cowboy-style around her throat.

She stretched out her legs pleurably, as though a good bull-session were about to begin.

"You're *terrific* to come and see us, Corinne. It's marvelous. We *were* going to go to New York last spring, but somehow we never did." She pointed a moccasined foot at Corinne's husband. "If this big lug would stoop to writing for money once in a while we might be able to do a *couple* of ambitious things." She broke off. "I love your suit. You didn't have that when I saw you in New York, did you?"

"Yes."

Corinne wet her lips with her highball. The glass was filthy.

"Well, you didn't wear it. At least I didn't see it." Bunny crossed her legs lithely. "How do you like our dive? I call it the Rat's Nest. I may have to sublet one room. Then Ray'll have to sleep in the medicine cabinet—won't you darling?"

"What?" Ford said, looking up from his drink.

"If we sublet this room, you'll have to sleep in the medicine cabinet."

Ford nodded.

Bunny turned to Corinne, asking, "Where are you *staying* in town, anyway, Corinne?"

"At the Hotel King Cole."

"Oh, you told me. I *love* that little bar downstairs. With all the swords and stuff on the wall? Have you been in it?"

"No."

"The barkeep there looks exactly like some guy who's in the movies. Some new guy. But *exactly*. I never can think of his name."

Ford stirred in his chair, and looked over at Bunny Croft. "Let's have another drink," he said. His glass was empty.

Bunny looked back at him. "What am I supposed to do? Jump?" she inquired. "You have the combination to the bottle."

Ford stood up, holding onto the back of his chair, and left the room.

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He was gone about five minutes—or five days, so far as Corinne knew. Bunny spoke to her steadily in his absence, but she missed nearly all of it except about the novel. Bunny said she hoped Corinne would have time while she was in town to at least take a look at her novel.

Ford came back into the room with about four fingers of undiluted whisky in his glass. Then Corinne stood up and said she had to go.

"Right *now*?" Bunny wailed. "Well, look. What about having lunch with us tomorrow or something?"

"I'm leaving on an early train," Corinne said, starting to walk out of the room unescorted. She heard her hostess spring to her moccasined feet, heard her say, "Well, *golly* . . ."

All of them—Ford, too—filed toward the front door of the apartment. Corinne first, Bunny at her heels, Ford in the rear.

At the door, Corinne abruptly turned around—in such a way that her shoulder was adjacent to Bunny's face, partially blocking off Bunny's view.

"Ray. Will you come home with me?"

Ford did not hear her. "I beg your pardon?" he said politely, unforgivably.

"Will you come home with me?"

Ford shook his head.

The action over, Bunny came briskly out from behind Corinne's shoulder, and as though no entreaty of *real* significance had just been made and rejected, took Corinne's hand. "Corinne. It's really been terrific seeing you. I wish we could all write to each other or something. I mean, *you* know. Are you still at the same place in New York?"

"Yes."

"Swell."

Corinne took back her hand and extended it to her husband. He half pressed it; then she took it away from him.

"Golly, I hope you get a cab all right, Corinne. In this weather. Oh, you'll get one . . . Turn on the hall light for Corinne, *stupid*."

Without looking back Corinne went as quickly as she could down the stairs, and broke into an awkward, knock-kneed kind of run when she reached the street.

A Girl I Knew

Good Housekeeping - February 1948

AT the end of my freshman year of college, back in 1936, I flunked five out of five subjects. Flunking three out of five would have made me eligible to report for an invitation to attend some other college in the fall. But men in this three-out-of-five category sometimes had to wait outside the Dean's office as long as two hours. Men in *my* group--some of whom had big dates in New York that same night--weren't kept waiting a minute. It went one, two, three, the way most men in my group like things to go.

The particular college I had been attending apparently does not simply mail people's grades home, but prefers to shoot them out of some kind of gun. When I got home to New York, even the butler looked tipped off and hostile. It was a bad night altogether. My father informed me quietly that my formal education was formally over. In a way, I felt like asking for a crack at summer school or something. But I didn't. For one reason, my mother was in the room, and she kept saying that she just knew I should have gone to see my faculty adviser more regularly, that that was what he was there for. This was the kind of talk that made me want to go straight to the Rainbow Room with a friend. At any rate, one thing leading to another, when the familiar moment came to me to advance one of my fragile promises to *really* apply myself this time, I let it go by unused.

Although my father announced the same night that he was going to put me directly into his business, I felt confident that nothing wholly unattractive would happen for at least a week or so. I knew it would take a certain amount of deep, constructive brooding on my father's part to figure out a way of getting me into the firm in broad daylight--I happened to give both his partners the willies on sight.

I was taken a little aback, four or five evenings later, when my father suddenly asked me at dinner how I would like to go to Europe to learn a couple of languages the firm could use. First to Vienna and then maybe to Paris, he said unelaborately.

I replied in the effect that the idea sounded all right to me. I was breaking off anyway with a certain girl on Seventy-Fourth Street. And I very clearly associated Vienna with gondolas. Gondolas didn't seem like too bad a setup.

A few weeks later, in July of 1936, I sailed for Europe. My passport photograph, it might be worth mentioning, looked exactly like me. At eighteen. I was six feet two, weighed 119 pounds with my clothes on, and was a chain smoker. I think that if Goethe's Werther and all his sorrows had been placed on the promenade deck of the *S.S. Rex* beside me and all *my* sorrows, he would have looked by comparison, like a rather low comedian.

The ship docked at Naples, and from there I took a train to Vienna. I almost got off the train at Venice, when I found out just who had the gondolas, but two people in my compartment got off instead--I had been waiting too long for a chance to put my feet up, gondolas or no gondolas.

Naturally, certain when-you-get-to-Vienna rules had been laid down before my ship sailed from New York. Rules about taking at least three hours of language lessons daily; rules about not getting too friendly with people who take advantage of other, particularly younger, people; rules about not spending money like a drunken sailor; rules about the wearing of clothes

in which a person wouldn't catch pneumonia; and so on. But after a month or so in Vienna I had most of that taken care of: I was taking three hours of German lesson every day--from a rather exceptional young lady I had met in the lounge of the Grand Hotel. I had found, in one of the far-outlying districts, a place that was cheaper than the Grand Hotel--the trolleys didn't run to my place after ten at night, but the taxis did. I was dressing warm--I had bought myself three pure wool Tyrolean hats. I was meeting nice people--I had lent three hundred shillings to a very distinguished-looking guy in the bar of the Bristol Hotel. In short, I was in a position to cut my letter home down to the bone.

I spent a little more than five months in Vienna. I danced. I went ice-skating and skiing. For strenuous exercise, I argued with an Englishman. I watched operations at two hospitals and had myself psychoanalyzed by a young Hungarian woman who smoked cigars. My German lessons never failed to hold my unflagging interest. I seemed to move, with all the luck of the undeserving, from *gemutlichkeit* to *gemutlichkeit*. But I mention these only to keep the Baedeker straight.

Probably for every man there is at least one city that sooner or later turns into a girl. How well or how badly the man actually knew the girl doesn't necessarily affect the transformation. She was there, and she was the whole city, and that's that.

Leah was the daughter in the Viennese-Jewish family who lived in the apartment below mine--that is, below the family I was boarding with. She was sixteen, and beautiful in an immediate yet perfectly slow way. She had very dark hair that fell away from the most exquisite pair of ears I have ever seen. She had immense eyes that always seemed in danger of capsizing in their own innocence. Her hands were very pale brown, with slender, actionless fingers. When she sat down, she did the only sensible thing with her beautiful hands there was to be done: she placed them on her lap and left them there. In brief, she was probably the first appreciable thing of beauty I had seen that struck me as wholly legitimate.

For about four months I saw her two or three evenings a week, for an hour or so at a time. But never outside the apartment house in which we lived. We never went dancing; we never went to a concert; we never even went for a walk. I found out soon after we met that Leah's father had promised her in marriage to some young Pole. Maybe this fact had something to do with my not quite palpable, but curiously steady disinclination to give our acquaintanceship the run of the city. Maybe I just worried too much about things. Maybe I consistently hesitated to risk letting the thing we had together deteriorate into a romance. I don't know any more. I used to know, but I lost the knowledge a long time ago. A man can't go along indefinitely carrying around in his pocket a key that doesn't fit anything.

I met Leah a nice way.

I had a phonograph and two American phonograph records in my room. The two American records were a gift from my landlady--one of those rare, drop-it-and-run gifts that leave the recipient dizzy with gratitude. On one of the records Dorothy Lamour sang *Moonlight and Shadows*, and on the other Connie Boswell sang *Where Are You?* Both girls got pretty scratched up, hanging around my room, as they had to go to work whenever I heard my landlady's step outside my door.

One evening I was in my sitting room, writing a long letter to a girl in Pennsylvania, suggesting that she quit school and come to Europe to marry me--a not infrequent suggestion of mine in those days. My phonograph was not playing. But suddenly the words to Miss Boswell's song floated, just slightly damaged, through my open window:

"Where are you?"

Where have you gone wissout me?
I sought you cared about me.
Where are you?"

Thoroughly excited, I sprang to my feet, then rushed to my window and leaned out.

The apartment below mine had the only balcony of the house. I saw a girl standing on it, completely submerged in the pool of autumn twilight. She wasn't doing a thing that I could see, except standing there leaning on the balcony railing, holding the universe together. The way the profile of her face and body refracted in the soupy twilight made me feel a little drunk. When a few seconds had throbbed by, I said hello to her. She then looked up at me, and though she seemed decorously startled, something told me she wasn't too surprised that I had heard her doing the Boswell number. This didn't matter, of course. I asked her, in murderous German, if I might join her on the balcony. The request obviously rattled her. She replied, in English, that she didn't think her "fahzzzer" would like me to come down to see her. At this point, my opinion of girls' fathers, which had been low for years, struck bottom. But nevertheless I managed a drab little nod of understanding.

It turned out all right, though. Leah seemed to think it would be perfectly all right if she came up to see *me*. Entirely stupefied with gratitude, I nodded, then closed my window and began to wander hurriedly through my room, rapidly pushing things under other things with my foot.

I don't really remember our first evening in my sitting room. All our evenings were pretty much the same. I can't honestly separate one from another; not anymore, anyway.

Leah's knock on my door was always poetry--high, beautifully wavering, absolutely perpendicular poetry. Her knock started out speaking of her own innocence and beauty, and accidentally ended speaking of the innocence and beauty of all very young girls. I was always half-eaten away by the respect and happiness when I opened the door for Leah.

We would solemnly shake hands at my sitting-room door. Then Leah would walk, self-consciously but beautifully, to my window seat, sit down, and wait for our conversation to begin.

Her English, like my German, was nearly all holes. Yet invariably I spoke her language and she mine, although any other arrangement at all might have made for a less perforated means of communication.

"Uh. *Wie geht es Ihnen?* I'd start out. (How are you?) I never used the familiar form in addressing Leah.

"I am very well, sank you very much," Leah would reply, never failing to blush. It didn't help much to look at her indirectly; she blushed anyway.

"*Schon hinaus, nicht wahr?*" I'd ask, rain or shine. (Nice out, isn't it?)

"Yes," she'd answer, rain or shine.

"Uh. *Waren Sie heute in der Kino?*" was a favorite question of mine. (Did you go to the movies today?) Five days a week Leah worked in her father's cosmetics plant.

"No. I was today working by my fahzzzer."

"Oh, *dass ist recht!* Uh. *Ist es schon dort?*" (Oh, that's right. Is it nice there?)

"No. It is a very big fabric, with very many people running around about."

"Oh. *Dass ist schlecht.*" (That's bad.)

"Uh. *Wollen Sie haben ein Tasse von Kaffee mit mir haben?*" (Will you have a cup of coffee with me?)

"I was already eating."

"*Ja, aber Haben Sie ein Tasse anyway.*" (Yes, but have a cup anyway.)

"Sank you."

At this point I would remove my notepaper, shoe trees, laundry, and other unclassifiable articles from the small table I used as a desk and a catchall. Then I would plug in my electric percolator, often commenting sagely, "*Kaffee ist gut.*" (Coffee is good.)

We usually drank two cups of coffee apiece, passing each other the cream and sugar with all the drollery of fellow pallbearers distributing white gloves among themselves. Often Leah brought along some kuchen or torte, wrapped rather inefficiently--perhaps surreptitiously--in waxed paper. This offering she would deposit quickly and insecurely in my left hand as she entered my sitting room. It was all I could do to swallow the pastry Leah brought. First, I was never at all hungry while she was around; second, there seemed to be something unnecessarily, however vaguely, destructive about eating anything that came from where she lived.

We usually didn't talk while we drank our coffee. When we had finished, we picked up our conversation where we had left it--on its back, more often than not.

"Uh. *Ist die Fenster--uh--Sind Sie sehr kalt dort?*" I would ask solicitously. (Is the window--uh--Are you very cold there?)

"No! I feel very warmly, sank you."

"*Dass ist gut. Uh. Wie geht's Ihre Eltern?*" (That's good. How are your parents?) I inquired regularly after the health of her parents.

"They are very well, sank you very much." Her parents were always enjoying perfect health, even when her mother had pleurisy for two weeks.

Sometimes Leah introduced a subject for conversation. It was always the same subject, but probably she felt she handled it so well in English that repetition was little or no drawback. She often inquired, "How was your hour today morning?"

"My German lesson? Oh. Uh. *Sehr gut. Ja. Sehr gut.*" (Very good. Yes. Very good.)

"What were you learning?"

"What did I learn? Uh. *Die, uh wuddayacallit. Die starke verbs. Sehr interessant.*" (The strong verbs. Very interesting.)

I could fill several pages with Leah's and my terrible conversation. But I don't see much point to it. We just never said anything to each other. Over a period of four months, we must have talked for thirty or thirty-five evenings without saying a word. In the long shadow of this small, obscure record, I've acquired a dogma that if I should go to Hell, I'll be given a little inside room--one that is neither hot nor cold, but extremely drafty--in which all my conversations with Leah will be played back to me, over an amplification system confiscated from Yankee Stadium.

One evening I named for Leah, without the slightest provocation, all the Presidents of the United States, in as close order as possible: Lincoln, Grant, Taft, and so on.

Another evening I explained American football to her. For at least an hour and a half. In German.

On another evening I felt called on to draw her a map of New York. She certainly didn't ask me to. And Lord knows I never *feel* like drawing maps for anybody, much less have any aptitude for it. But I drew it--the U.S Marines couldn't have stopped me. I distinctly remember putting Lexington Avenue where Madison should have been--and leaving it that way.

Another time I read a new play I was writing, called *He Was No Fool*. It was about a cool, handsome, casually athletic young man--very much my own type--who had been called from Oxford to pull Scotland Yard out of an embarrassing situation: One Lady Farnsworth, who

was a witty dipsomaniac, was being mailed one of her abducted husband's fingers every Tuesday. I read the play to Leah in one sitting, laboriously editing out all the sexy parts--which, of course, ruined the play. When I had finished reading, I hoarsely explained to Leah that the play was "*Nicht fertig yet.*" (Not finished yet.) Leah seemed to understand perfectly. Moreover, she seemed to convey to me a certain confidence that perfection would somehow overtake the final draft of whatever the thing was I had just read to her.... She *sat* so well on a window seat.

I found out entirely by accident that Leah had a fiance. It wasn't the kind of information that stood a chance of coming up in our conversation.

On a Sunday afternoon, about a month after Leah and I had become acquainted, I saw her standing in the crowded lobby of the Schwedenkino, a popular movie house in Vienna. It was the first time I had seen her either off the balcony or outside my sitting room. There was something fantastic and extremely heady about seeing her standing in the pedestrian lobby of the Schwedenkino, and I readily gave up my place in the box-office queue to go to speak to her. But as I charged across the lobby toward her over a number of innocent feet, I saw that she was neither alone nor with a girl friend or someone old enough to be her father.

She was visibly flustered to see me, but managed to make introductions. Her escort, who was wearing his hat down over one of his ears, clicked his heels and crushed my hand. I smiled patronizingly at him--he didn't look like much competition, grip of steel or no grip of steel; he looked too much like a foreigner.

For a few minutes the three of us chatted unintelligibly. Then I excused myself and got back on the end of the line. During the showing of the film, I went up the aisle several times, carrying myself as erectly and dangerously as possible; but I didn't see either of them. The film itself was one of the worst I'd seen.

The next evening, when Leah and I had coffee in my sitting room, she stated, blushing, that the young man I had seen her with in the lobby of the Schwedenkino was her fiance.

"My fahzzzer is wedding us when I have seventeen years," Leah said, looking at a doorknob.

I merely nodded. There are certain foul blows, notably in love and soccer, that are not immediately followed by audible protest. I cleared my throat. "Uh. *Wie heisst er*, again?" (What's his name, again?)

Leah pronounced once more--not quite phonetically enough for me--a violently long name, which seemed to me predestined to belong to somebody who wore his hat down over one ear. I poured more coffee for both of us. Then, suddenly, I stood up and went to my German-English dictionary. When I had consulted it, I sat down again and asked Leah, "*Lieben Sie Ehe?*" (Do you love marriage?)

She answered slowly, without looking at me, "I don't know."

I nodded. Her answer seemed the quintessence of logic to me. We sat for a long moment without looking at each other. When I looked at Leah again, her beauty seemed too great for the size of the room. The only way to make room for it was to speak of it. "*Sie sind sehr schon. Wissen Sie dass?*" I almost shouted at her. (You're very pretty, you know that?)

But she blushed so hard I quickly dropped the subject--I had nothing to follow up with, anyway.

That evening, for the first and last time, something more physical than a handshake happened to our relationship. About nine-thirty, Leah jumped up from the window seat, saying it was becoming very late, and rushed to get downstairs. At the same time, I rushed to escort her

A Girl I Knew

out of the apartment to the staircase, and we squeezed together through the narrow doorway of my sitting room--facing each other. It nearly killed us.

When it came time for me to go to Paris to master a second European language, Leah was in Warsaw visiting her fiance's family. I didn't get to say good-bye to her, but I left a note for her, the next-to-last draft of which I still have:

Wien

December 6, 1936

Liebe Leah,

Ich muss fahren nach Paris nun, und so ich sage auf wiedersehen. Es war sehr nett zu kennen Sie. Ich werde schreiben zu Sie wenn ich bin in Paris. Hoffentlich Sie sind haben eine gute Ziet in Warsaw mit die familie von ihre fiance. Hoffent- lich wird die Ehe gehen gut. Ich werde Sie schicken das Buch ich habe ges-prochen iiber, Gegangen mit der Wind. Mit beste Grussen,

Ihre Freund

John

Taking this note out of Jack-the-Ripper German, it reads:

Vienna

December 6, 1936

Dear Leah,

I must go to Paris now, and so I say good-bye. It was very nice to know you. I hope you're having a good time in Warsaw with your fiance's family. I hope the marriage goes all right. I will send you that book I was talking about, *Gone with the Wind*. With best greetings,

Your friend,

John

But I never did write to Leah from Paris. I never wrote to her again at all. I didn't send a copy of *Gone with the Wind*. I was very busy in those days. Late in 1937, when I was back in college in America, a round, flat package was forwarded to me from New York. A letter was attached to the package:

Vienna

October 14, 1937

Dear John,

I have many times thought of you and wondered what is become of you. I myself am now married and am living in Vienna with my husband. He sends you his great regards. If you can recall, you and he made each other's acquaintance in the hall of the Schweden Cinema.

My parents are still living at 18 Stiefel Street, and often I visit them, because I am living in the near. Your landlady, Mrs. Schlosser, has died in the summer with cancer. She requested me to send you these gramophone records, which you forgot to take when you departed, but I did not know your address for a long time. I have now made the acquaintance of an English girl named Ursula Hummer, who has given to me your address.

My husband and I would be extremely pleased to hear from you frequently.

With very best greetings,

Your friend,

Leah

Her married name and new address were not given.

A Girl I Knew

I carried the letter with me for months, opening and reading it in bars, between halves of basketball games, in Government classes, and in my room, until finally it began to get stained, from my wallet, the color of cordovan, and I had to put it away somewhere.

About the same hour Hitler's troops were marching into Vienna, I was on reconnaissance for geology 1-b, searching perfunctorily, in New Jersey, for a limestone deposit. But during the weeks and months that followed the German takeover of Vienna, I often thought of Leah. Sometimes just thinking of her wasn't enough. When, for example, I had examined the most recent newspaper photographs of Viennese Jewesses on their hands and knees scrubbing the sidewalks, I quickly stepped across my dormitory room, opened a desk drawer, slipped an automatic into my pocket, then dropped noiselessly from my window to the street, where a long-range monoplane, equipped with a silent engine, awaited my gallant, foolhardy, hawklike whim. I'm not the type that just sits around.

In late summer of 1940, at a party in New York, I met a girl who not only had known Leah in Vienna, but had gone all through school with her. I pulled up a chair, but the girl was determined to tell me about some man in Philadelphia, who looked exactly like Gary Cooper. She said I had a weak chin. She said she hated mink. She said that Leah had either got out of Vienna or hadn't got out of Vienna.

During the war in Europe, I had an Intelligence job with a regiment of an infantry division. My work called for a lot of conversation with civilians and Wehrmacht prisoners. Among the latter, sometimes there were Austrians. One feldwebel, a Viennese, whom I secretly suspected of wearing lederhosen under his field-gray uniform, gave me a little hope: but it turned out he had known not Leah, but some girl with the same last name as Leah's. Another Wiener, an unteroffizier, standing at strict attention, told me what terrible things had been done to the Jews in Vienna. As I had rarely, if ever, seen a man with a face quite so noble and full of vicarious suffering as this unteroffizier's was, just for the devil of it I had him roll up his left sleeve. Close to his armpit he had the tattooed blood-type marks of an old SS man. I stopped asking personal questions after a while.

A few months after the war in Europe had ended, I took some military papers to Vienna. In a jeep with another man, I left Nurnburg on a hot October morning and got into Vienna the next, even hotter, morning. In the Russian Zone we were detained five hours while two guards made passionate love to our wristwatches. It was mid-afternoon by the time we entered the American Zone of Vienna, in which Stiefelstrasse, my old street, was located.

I talked to the Tabak-Trafik vendor on the corner of Stiefelstrasse, to the pharmacist in the near-by Apotheke, to a neighborhood woman, who jumped at least an inch when I addressed her, and to a man who insisted that he used to see me on the trolley car in 1936. Two of these people told me that Leah was dead. The pharmacist suggested that I go to see a Dr. Weinstein, who had just come back from Vienna from Buchenwald, and gave me his address. I then got back into the jeep, and we cruised through the streets toward G-2 Headquarters. My jeep partner tooted his horn at the girls in the streets and told me at great length what he thought of Army dentists.

When we had delivered the official papers, I got back into the jeep alone and went to see Dr. Weinstein. It was twilight when I drove back to Stiefelstrasse. I parked the jeep and entered my old house. It had been turned into living quarters for field-grade officers. A red-haired staff sergeant was sitting at an Army desk on the first landing, cleaning his fingernails. He looked up, and, as I didn't outrank him, gave that long Army look that holds no interest or curiosity at all. Ordinarily I would have returned it.

"What's the chances of my going up to the second floor just for a minute?" I asked. "I used to live here before the war."

"This here's officers' quarters, Mac," he said.

"I know. I'll only be a minute."

"Can't do it. Sorry." He went on scraping the insides of his fingernails with the big blade of his pocketknife.

"I'll only be a minute," I said again.

He put down his knife, patiently. "Look, Mac. I don't wanna sound like a bum. But I ain't lettin' nobody go upstairs unless they belong there. I don't give a damn if it's Eisenhower himself. I got my--" He was interrupted by the sudden ringing of a telephone on his desk. He picked up the phone, keeping an eye on me, and said, "Yessir, Colonel, sir. This is him on the phone.... Yessir.... Yessir.... I got Corporal Santini puttin' 'em on the ice right now, right this minute. They'll be good and cold.... Well, I figured we'd put the orchestra right out on the balcony, like. Account of there's only three of 'em.... Yessir.... Well, I spoke to Major Foltz, and he said the ladies could put their coats and stuff in his room.... Yessir. Right, sir. Ya wanna hurry up, now. Ya don't wanna miss any of that moonlight.... Ha,ha,ha!... Yessir. G'bye, sir." The staff sergeant hung up, looking stimulated.

"Look," I said, distracting him, "I'll only be a minute."

He looked at me. "What's the big deal, anyhow, up there?"

"No big deal." I took a deep breath. "I just wanted to go up to the second floor and look at the balcony. I used to know a girl who lived in the balcony apartment."

"Yeah? Where's she at now?"

"She's dead."

"Yeah? How come?"

"She and her family were burned to death in an incinerator, I'm told."

"Yeah? What was she, a Jew or something?"

"Yes. Can I go up a minute?"

Very visibly, the sergeant's interest in the affair waned. He picked up a pencil and moved it from the left side of the desk to the right. "Christ, Mac. I don't know. It'll be my ass if you're caught."

"I'll just be a minute."

"Okay. Make it snappy."

I climbed the stairs quickly and entered my old sitting room. It had three single bunks in it, made up Army style. Nothing in the room had been there in 1936. Officer's blouses were suspended on hangers everywhere. I walked to the window, opened it, and looked down for a moment at the balcony where Leah had once stood. Then I went downstairs and thanked the staff sergeant. He asked me, as I was going out the door, what the hell you were supposed to do with champagne--lay it on its goddam side or stand it up. I said I didn't know, and left the building.

Blue Melody

Cosmopolitan - September 1948

IN mid-winter of 1944 I was given a lift in the back of an overcrowded G.I. truck, going from Luxembourg City to the front at Halzhoffen, Germany--a distance of four flat tires, three (reported) cases of frozen feet, and at least one case of incipient pneumonia.

The forty-odd men jammed in the truck were nearly all infantry replacements. Many of them had just got out of hospitals in England, where they had been treated for wounds received in action somewhat earlier in the war. Ostensibly rehabilitated, they were on their way to join rifle companies of a certain infantry division which, I happened to know, was commanded by a brigadier general who seldom stepped into his command car without wearing a Luger and a photographer, one on each side; a fighting man with a special gift for writing crisp, quotable little go-to-hell notes to the enemy, invariably when outnumbered or surrounded by a latter. I rode for hours and hours without looking anybody in the truck straight in the eye.

During daylight hours the men made an all-out effort to suppress or divert their eagerness to get another crack at the enemy. Charade groups were formed at either end of the truck. Favorite statesmen were elaborately discussed. Songs were started up--spirited war songs, chiefly, composed by patriotic Broadway songwriters who, through some melancholy, perhaps permanently embittering turn of the wheel of fortune, had been disqualified from taking their places at the front. In short, the truck fairly rocked with persiflage and melody, until the night abruptly fell and the black-out curtains were attached. Then all the men seemed to go to sleep or freeze to death, except the original narrator of the following story and myself. He had the cigarettes, and I had the ears.

This is all I know about the man who told me the story:

His first name was Rudford. He had a very slight Southern accent and a chronic, foxhole cough. The bars and red cross of a captain in the medics were painted, as fashion had it, on his helmet.

And that's *all* I know about him except for what comes naturally out of his story. So please don't anybody write in for additional information--I don't even know if the man is alive today. This request applies particularly to readers who may sooner or later think that this story is a slam against one section of this country.

It isn't a slam against anybody or anything. It's just a simple little story of Mom's apple pie, ice-cold beer, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the Lux Theater of the Air--the things we fought for, in short. You can't miss it, really.

Rudford came from a place called Agersburg, Tennessee. He said it was about an hour's drive from Memphis. It sounded to me like a pretty little town. For one thing, it had a street called Miss Packer's Street. Not just Packer Street or Packer's street, but Miss Packer's street. Miss Packer had been an Agersburg schoolteacher who, during the Civil War, had taken a few pot shots at some passing Union troops, from the window of the principal's office. None of this flag-waving, Barbara Fritchie stuff for Miss Packer. She had just taken aim and let go, knocking off five boys of in blue before anybody could get to her with an axe. She was then nineteen.

Rudford's father originally had been a Bostonian, a salesman for a Boston typewriter company. On a business trip to Agersburg, just before the first World War, he had met--and within two weeks married--a well-heeled local girl. He never returned either to the home office or to Boston, apparently X-ing both out of his life without a jot of regret. He was quite a number altogether. Less than an hour after his wife died giving birth to Rudford, he got on a trolley going to the outskirts of Agersburg and bought out a rocky, but reputable, publishing house. Six months later he published a book he had written himself, entitled, *Civics for Americans*. It was followed, over a period of a few years, by a highly successful series of highly unreadable textbooks known--only too widely, even today--as *The Intelligence Series for Progressive High-School Students of America*. I certainly know for a fact that his *Science for Americans* paid the public high schools of Philadelphia a visit around 1932. The book was rich with baffling little diagrams of simple little fulcrums.

The boy Rudford's early home life was unique. His father evidently detested people who just read his books. He grilled and quizzed the boy even at the height of marble season. He held them up on the suitcase for a definition of a chromosome. He passed him the lima beans on condition that the planets were named--in order of size. He gave the boy his ten-cent weekly allowance in return for the date of some historical personage's birth or death or defeat. To be brief, at the age of eleven Rudford knew just about as much, academically, as the average high-school freshman. And in an extracurricular sense, more. The average high-school freshman doesn't know how to sleep on a cellar floor without using a pillow and blankets.

There were, however, two important footnotes in Rudford's boyhood. They weren't in his father's books, but they were close enough to make a little quick sense in an emergency. One of them was a man named Black Charles, and the other was a little girl named Peggy Moore.

Peggy was in Rudford's class at school. For more than a year, though, he had taken little notice of her beyond the fact that she was usually the first one eliminated in a spelling bee. He didn't begin to assess Peggy's true value until one day he saw her, across the aisle from him, insert her chewing gum into the hollow of her neck. It struck Rudford as a very attractive thing for anybody to do--even a girl. Doubling up under his desk, pretending to pick up something from the floor, he whispered to Peggy, "Hey! That where you put your gum?"

Turning, her lips ajar, the young lady with the gum in her neck nodded. She was flattered. It was the first time Rudford had spoken to her out of the line of duty.

Rudford felt around the floor for a nonexistent ink eraser. "Listen. You wanna meet a friend of mine after school?"

Peggy put a hand over her mouth and pretended to cough. "Who?" she asked.

"Black Charles."

"Who's he?"

"He's a fella. Plays the piano on Willard Street. He's a friend of mine."

"I'm not allowed on Willard Street."

"Oh!"

"When are you going?"

"Right after she lets us out. She's not gonna keep us in today. She's too bored....Okay?"

"Okay"

That afternoon the two children went down to Willard Street, and Peggy met Black Charles and Black Charles met Peggy.

Black Charles's cafe was a hole-in-the-wall hamburger joint, a major eyesore on a street that was regularly torn down, on paper, whenever Civic Council convened. It was, perhaps, the

paragon of all restaurants classified by parents--usually through the side window of the family car--as unsanitary-looking. It was a swell place to go, in short. Moreover, it is very doubtful if any of Black Charles's young patrons had ever got sick from any of the delicious, greasy hamburgers he served. Anyway, almost nobody went to Black Charles's to eat. You ate after you got there, naturally, but that wasn't why you went.

You went there because Black Charles played the piano like somebody from Memphis--maybe even better. He played hot or straight and he was always there when you had to go home. But not only that. (After all, it stood to reason that Black Charles, being a wonderful piano player, would be wonderfully indefatigable.) He was something else--something few white piano players are. He was kind and interested when young people came up to the piano to ask him to play something, or just to talk to him. He looked at you. He listened.

Until Rudford started bringing Peggy with him he was probably the youngest habitue of Black Charles's cafe. For over two years he had been going there alone two or three afternoons a week; never at night, for the very good reason that he wasn't allowed out at night. He missed out on the noise and smoke and jump indigenous to Black Charles's place after dark, but he got something, afternoons, equally or more desirable. He had the privilege of hearing Charles play all the best numbers without interruption. All he had to do to get in on this deal was to wake the artist up. That was the catch. Black Charles slept in the afternoon, and he slept like a dead man.

Going down to Willard Street to hear Black Charles play was even better with Peggy along, Rudford found out. She was not only somebody good to sit on the floor with; she was somebody good to listen with. Rudford liked the way she drew up her racy, usually bruised legs and locked her fingers around her ankles. He liked the way she set her mouth hard against her knees, leaving teeth marks, while Charles was playing. And the way she walked home afterwards; not talking, just now and then kicking a stone or a tin can, or reflectively cutting a cigar butt in two with her heel. She was just right, though, of course, Rudford didn't tell her so. She had an alarming tendency to get lovey-dovey, with or without provocation.

You had to hand it to her, though. She even learned how to wake Black Charles up.

One three-thirtyish afternoon, just after the two children had let themselves in, Peggy said, "Can I wake him up this time? Huh, Rudford?"

"Sure. Go ahead. If you *can*."

Black Charles slept, fully dressed except for his shoes, on a bumpy, ratty-looking settee, a few stacked tables away from his beloved piano.

Peggy circled the problem academically.

"Well, go ahead and *do* it," Rudford said.

"I'm fixin' to; I'm fixin' to. Go away."

Rudford watched her a trifle smugly. "Naa. You can't just shove him around and get anywhere. You've seen me," he said. "You gotta really haul off. Get him right under the kidneys. You've seen me."

"Here?" said Peggy. She had her finger on the little island of nerves set off by the dorsal fork of Charles's lavender suspenders.

"Go ahead."

Peggy wound up and delivered.

Black Charles stirred slightly, but slept on without even seriously changing his position.

"You missed. You gotta hit him harder than that anyway."

The aspirant tried to make a more formidable weapon of her right hand. She sandwiched her thumb between her fist and second fingers, held it away from her and looked at it admiringly.

"You'll break your thumb that way. Get your thumb out of--"

"Oh, be quiet," said Peggy, and let go with a haymaker.

It worked. Black Charles let out an awful yell, and went all of two feet up in the stale, cafe air. As he came down, Peggy put in a request: "Charles, will you play *Lady, Lady* for me, please?"

Charles scratched his head, swung his immense, stockinged feet to the cigarette-butt-specked floor, and squinted. "That you, Margar-reet?"

"Yes. We just got here. The whole class was kept in," she explained. "Would you please play *Lady, Lady* Charles?"

"Summer vacation starts Monday," Rudford enthusiastically put in. "We can come around every afternoon."

"My, my! Ain't that fine!" Charles said--and meant it. He got to his feet, a gentle giant of a man, towing a hook-and-ladder gin hangover. He began to move in the general direction of his piano.

"We'll come earlier, too," Peggy promised.

"Ain't that fine!" Charles responded.

"*This* way, Charles," Rudford said. "You're going right into the ladies room."

"He's still sort of asleep. Hit him just once, Rudford...."

I guess it was a good summer--the days full of Charles's piano--but I can't say for sure. Rudford told me a story; he didn't give me his autobiography.

He told me next about a day in November. It was still a Coolidge year, but which one I don't know, exactly. I don't think those Coolidge years come apart anyway.

It was afternoon. A half-hour after the pupils of the Agersburg Elementary School had pushed and shoved and punched their way out of the exit doors. Rudford and Peggy were sitting high in the rafters of the new house that was being built on Miss Packer's Street. There wasn't a carpenter in sight. The highest, narrowest, weakest beam in the house was theirs to straddle without annoying interference.

Sitting on a beauty, a story above the ground, they talked about the things that counted: the smell of gasoline, Robert Hermanson's ear, Alice Caldwell's teeth, rocks that were all right to throw at somebody, Milton Sills, how to make cigarette smoke come out your nose, men and ladies who had bad breath, the best size knife to kill somebody with.

They exchanged ambitions. Peggy decided that when she grew up she would be a war nurse. Also a movie actress. Also a piano player. Also a crook--one that swiped a lot of diamonds and stuff, but gave some of it to poor people; *very* poor people. Rudford racer--he already had a pretty good pair of goggles.

A spitting contest followed, at a heated moment of which the losing side dropped a valuable, mirrorless powder compact out of her cardigan pocket. She started to climb a horrible thud on the new, white pine floor.

"You okay?" her companion inquired, not budging from the rafters.

"My head. Rudford, I'm dyin'!"

"Naa, you're not."

"I am, too. Feel."

"I'm not comin' all the way down just to *feel*."

"*Please*," the lady entreated.

Muttering cynical little observations about people who don't watch where they're even *going*, Rudford climbed down.

He pushed back a hank or two of the patient's lovely black-Irish hair. "Where's it hurt?" he demanded.

"All *over*..."

"Well, I don't see anything. There isn't any abrasion at all."

"Isn't any what?"

"Abrasion. Blood or anything. There isn't even any swelling." The examiner drew back suspiciously. "I don't even think you fell on your head."

"Well, I did. Keep looking... There. Right where your hand--"

"I don't see a thing. I'm going back up."

"Wait!" said Peggy. "Kiss it first. Here. Right here."

"I'm not gonna kiss your old head. Wuddaya think I am?"

"Please! Just right here." Peggy pointed to her cheek.

Bored and enormously philanthropic, Rudford got it over with.

A rather sneaky announcement followed: "Now we're engaged."

"Like fun we are!... I'm leaving. I'm going down to old Charles's."

"You can't. He said not to come today. He said he was gonna have a guest today."

"He won't care. Anyway, I'm not gonna stay here with *you*. You can't spit. You can't even sit still. And when I feel sorry for you or something, you try to get lovey-dovey."

"I don't get lovey-dovey much."

"So long," Rudford said.

"I'll go with you!"

They left the sweet smelling empty house and moped along the four o'clock autumn streets toward Black Charles's. On Spruce Street they stopped for fifteen minutes to watch two irate firemen trying to get a young cat out of a tree. A woman wearing a Japanese kimono directed the operations, in an unpleasant, importunate voice. The two children listened to her, watched the firemen, and silently pulled for the cat. She didn't let them down. Suddenly she leaped from the high branch, landing on the hat of one of the firemen, and springboarded instantly into an adjacent tree. Rudford and Peggy moved on, reflective and permanently changed. The afternoon now contained forever, however suspensory, one red and gold tree, one fireman's hat and one cat that really knew how to jump.

"We'll ring the bell when we get there. We won't just walk right in," Rudford said.

When Rudford had rung the bell, Black Charles himself, not only awake but shaven, answered the door. Peggy immediately reported to him, "You said for us not to come today, but Rudford wanted to."

"Y'all come on in," Black Charles invited cordially. He wasn't sore at them.

Rudford and Peggy followed him self-consciously, looking for the guest.

"I got my sister's chile here," Black Charles said. "Her and her mammy just come up from 'gator country."

"She play the piano?" Rudford asked.

"She's a singer, boy. She a singer."

"Why are the shades down?" Peggy asked. "Why don't you have the shades up, Charles?"

"I was cookin' in the kitchen. You chillern can he'p me pull 'em up," Black Charles said, and went out into the kitchen.

The two children each took a side of the room and began to let daylight in. They both felt more relaxed. The Guest discomfort was over. If there were somebody strange, some non-member, hovering about Black Charles's place, it was only his sister's child--practically nobody.

But Rudford, over on the piano side of the cafe, suddenly took in his breath. Somebody was sitting on the piano, watching him. He let go the blind string in his hand, and the blind snapped to the top; it slattered noisily for a moment, then came to a stop.

"*And the Lord said, Let there be light,*" said a grown-up girl as black as Charles, sitting in Charles's place at the piano. "Yeah man," she added moderately. She was wearing a yellow dress and a yellow ribbon in her hair. The sunshine that Rudford had let in fell across her left hand; with it she was tapping out something slow and personal on the wood of Charles's piano. In her hand, between long, elegant fingers, she had a burning stub of a cigarette. She wasn't a pretty girl.

"I was just pulling up the shades," Rudford said finally.

"I see that," said the girl. Her foot was tapping, too, Rudford noticed.

"We come here a lot," Peggy said. "We're Charles's best friends."

"Well, ain't that glad news!" said the girl, winking at Rudford.

Black Charles came in from the kitchen, drying his huge, slender hands on a towel.

"Lida Louise," he said, "these here's my friends, Mr. Rudford and Miss Margar-reet." He turned to the children. "This here's my sister's chile, Miss Lida Louise Jones."

"We met," said his niece. "We all met at Lord Pluchbottom's last fortnight." She pointed at Rudford. "Him and me was playin' mahjong out on the piazza."

"How 'bout you singin' somethin' for these here children?" Black Charles suggested.

Lida Louise passed over it. She was looking at Peggy. "You and him sweeties?" she asked her.

Rudford said quickly, "No."

"Yes," said Peggy.

"Why you like this little ole boy like you do?" Lida Louise asked Peggy.

"I don't know," Peggy said. "I like the way he stands at the blackboard."

Rudford considered the remark disgusting, but Lida Louise's thenodic eyes picked it up and looked away with it. She said to Black Charles, "Uncle, you hear what this little ole Margareet say?"

"No. What she say?" said Black Charles. He had the cover of his piano raised and was looking for something in the strings--a cigarette butt, perhaps, or the top of a catsup bottle.

"She say she like this ole boy on accounta the say he stands at the blackboard."

"That right?" said Black Charles, taking his head out of the piano. "You sing somethin' for these here chillern Lida Louise," he said.

"Okay. What song they like?... Who stole my cigarettes? I had 'em right here by my side."

"You smoke too much. You a too-much gal. Sing," said her uncle. He sat down at his piano. "Sing *Nobody Good Around*."

"That ain't no song for kiddies."

"These here kiddies like that kinda song real good."

"Okay," said Lida Louise. She stood up, in close to the piano. She was a very tall girl. Rudford and Peggy, already sitting on the floor, had to look way up at her.

"What key you want it?"

Lida Louise shrugged. "A, B, C, D, E, F," she said winking at the children. "Who cares? Gimme a green one. Gotta match my shoes."

Black Charles struck a chord, and his niece's voice slipped into it. She sang *Nobody Good Around*. When she was finished, Rudford had gooseflesh from his neck to his waist. Peggy's fist was in his coat pocket. He hadn't felt it go in, and he didn't make her take it out.

Now, years later, Rudford was making a great point of explaining to me that Lida Louise's voice can't be described, until I told him that I happened to own most of her records and knew what he meant. Actually, though, a fair attempt to describe Lida Louise's voice can be made. She had a powerful, soft voice. Every note she sang was detonated individually. She blasted you tenderly to pieces. In saying her voice can't be described, Rudford probably meant that it can't be classified. And that's true.

Finished with *Nobody Good Around*. Lida Louise stooped over and picked up her cigarettes from under her uncle's bench. "Where have you been?" she asked them, and lit one. The two children didn't take their eyes off her.

Black Charles stood up. "I got spareribs," he announced. "Who want some?"

During Christmas week Lida Louise began singing nights at her Uncle Charles's. Rudford and Peggy both got permission, on her opening night, to attend a hygiene lecture at school. So they were there. Black Charles gave them the table nearest the piano and put two bottles of sarsaparilla on it, but they were both too excited to drink. Peggy nervously tapped the mouth of her bottle against her front teeth; Rudford didn't even pick his bottle up. Some of the high school and college crowd thought the children were cute. They were dealt with. Around nine o'clock, when the place was packed, Black Charles suddenly stood up from his piano and raised a hand. The gesture, however, had no effect on the noisy, home-for-Christmas crowd, so Peggy turned around in her seat and, never a lady, yelled at them, "Y'all be quiet!" and finally the room quieted down. Charles's announcement was to the point. "I got my sister's chile, Lida Louise, here t'night and she gonna sing for you." Then he sat down and Lida Louise came out, in her yellow dress, and walked up to her uncle's piano. The crowd applauded politely, but clearly expected nothing special. Lida Louise bent over Rudford and Peggy's table, snapped her finger against Rudford's ear, and asked, "*Nobody Good Around*?" They both answered, "Yes!"

Lida Louise sang that, and turned the place upside down. Peggy started to cry so hard that when Rudford had asked her, "What's the matter?" and she had sobbed back, "I don't know," he suddenly assured her, himself transported, "I love you good, Peggy!" which made the child cry so uncontrollably he had to take her home.

Lida Louise sang nights at Black Charles's for about six months straight. Then, inevitably, Lewis Harold Meadows heard her and took her back to Memphis with him. She went without being perceptively thrilled over the Great Opportunity. She went without being visibly impressed by the sacred words, *Beale Street*. But she went. In Rudford's opinion, she went

because she was looking for somebody, or because she wanted somebody to find her. It sounds very reasonable to me.

But as long as Agersburg could hold her, she was adored, deified, by the young people there. They knew, most of them, just how good she was, and those who didn't know pretended to. They brought their friends home for the weekend to have a look at her. The ones who wrote for their college papers sanctified her in glorious prose. Others grew smug or blase when foreigners turned dormitory conversation around to Violet Henry or Alice Mar Starbuck or Priscella Jordan, blues singers who were killing other foreigners in Harlem or New Orleans or Chicago. If you didn't have Lida Louise where you lived, you didn't have anybody.

In return for all this love and deification, Lida Louise was very, very good with the Agersburg kids. No matter what they asked her to sing, or how many times they asked her to sing it, she gave them what there was of her smile, said, "Nice tune," and gave.

One very interesting Saturday night a college boy in a Tuxedo--somebody said he was a visiting Yale man--came rather big-time-ily up to the piano and asked Lida Louise, "Do you know *Slow Train to Jacksonville* by any chance?"

Lida Louise looked at the boy quickly, then carefully, and answered, "Where you hear that song, boy?"

The boy who was supposed to be a visiting Yale man said, "A fella in New York played it for me."

Lida Louise asked him, "Colored man?"

The boy nodded impatiently.

Lida Louise asked, "His name Endicott Wilson? You know?"

The boy answered, "I don't know. Little guy. Had a mustache."

Lida Louise nodded. "He in New York now?" she asked.

The boy answered, "Well, I don't know if he's there *now*. I guess so...How 'bout singin' it if you know it?"

Lida Louise nodded and sat down at the piano herself. She played and sang *Slow Train to Jacksonville*.

According to those who heard it, it was a very good number, original at least in melody, about an unfortunate man with the wrong shade of lipstick on his collar. She sang it through once and, so far as Rudford or I know, never again. Nor has the number ever been recorded by anybody, to my knowledge.

Here we go into jazz history just a little bit. Lida Louise sang at Lewis Harold Meadow's famous Jazz Emporium, on Beale Street in Memphis, for not quite four months. (She started there in late May of 1927 and quit early in September of the same year.) But time, or the lack of it, like everything else, depends entirely upon who's using it. Lida Louise hadn't been singing on Beale Street more than two weeks before the customers started lining up outside Meadow's an hour before Lida Louise went on. Record companies got after her almost immediately. A month after she had hit Beale Street she had made eighteen sides, including *Smile Town*, *Brown Gal Blues*, *Rainy Day Boy*, *Nobody Good Around* and *Seems Like Home*.

Everybody who had anything to do with jazz--anything straight, that is--somehow got to hear her while she was there. Russel Hopton, John Raymond Jewel, Izzie Feld, Louis Armstrong, Much McNeill, Freddie Jenks, Jack Teagarden, Bernie and Mortie Gold, Goodman, Beiderbecke, Johnson, Earl Slagle--all the boys.

One Saturday night a big sedan from Chicago pulled up in front of Meadow's. Among those who piled out of it were Joe and Sonny Varioni. They didn't go back with the others, the next morning. They stayed at the Peabody for two nights, writing a song. Before they went back to Chicago they gave Lida Louise *Soupy Peggy*. It was about a sentimental little girl who falls in love with a boy standing at the blackboard in school. (You can't buy a copy of Lida Louise's record of *Soupy Peggy* today, for any price. The other side of it had a fault, and the record company only turned out very few copies.)

Nobody knew for certain why Lida Louise quit Meadow's and left Memphis. Rudford and a few others reasonably suspected that her quitting had something--or everything to do--with the corner-of-Beale-Street incident.

Around noon on the day she quit Meadow's, Lida Louise was seen talking in the street with a rather short well-dressed colored man. Whoever he was, she suddenly hit him full in the face with her handbag. Then she ran into Meadow's, whizzed past a crew of waiters and orchestra boys, and slammed her dressing-room door behind her. An hour later she was packed and ready to go.

She went back to Agersburg. She didn't go back with a new, flossy wardrobe, and she and her mother didn't move into a bigger and better apartment. She just went back.

On the afternoon of her return she wrote a note to Rudford and Peggy. Probably on Black Charles's say-so--like everybody else in Agersburg, he was terrified of Rudford's father--she sent the note around to Peggy's house. It reads:

Dear Kittys
I am back and got some real nice new songs for you so you come around quick and see me.
Yours sincerely,
(Miss) Lida Louise Jones

The same September that Lida Louise returned to Agersburg, Rudford was sent away to boarding school. Before he left, Black Charles, Lida Louise, Lida Louise's mother and Peggy gave him a farewell picnic.

Rudford called for Peggy around eleven on a Saturday morning. They were picked up in Black Charles's bashed-in old car and driven out to a place called Tuckett's Creek.

Black Charles, with a fascinating knife, cut the strings on all the wonderful-looking boxes. Peggy was a specialist on cold spareribs. Rudford was more of a fried-chicken man. Lida Louise was one of those people who take two bites out of a drumstick, then light a cigarette.

The children ate until the ants got all over everything, then Black Charles, keeping out a last spare rib for Peggy and a last wing for Rudford, neatly retied all the boxes.

Mrs. Jones stretched out on the grass and went to sleep. Black Charles and Lida Louise began to play casino. Peggy had with her some sun-pictures of people like Richard Barthelmess and Richard Dix and Reginald Denny. She propped them up against a tree in the bright light and watched possessively over them.

Rudford lay on his back in the grass and watched great cotton clouds slip through the sky. Peculiarly, he shut his eyes when the sun was momentarily clouded out; opened them when the sun returned scarlet against his eyelids. The trouble was, the world might end while his eyes were shut.

It did. His world, in any case.

He suddenly heard a brief, terrible woman's scream behind him. Jerking his head around, he saw Lida Louise writhing in the grass. She was holding her flat, small stomach. Black Charles was trying awkwardly to turn her toward him, to get her somehow out of the frightening, queer position her body assumed in its apparent agony. His face was gray.

Rudford and Peggy both reached the terrible spot at the same time.

"What she et? What she done et?" Mrs. Jones demanded hysterically of her brother.

"Nothin'! She done et hardly nothin'," Black Charles answered, miserable. He was still trying to do something constructive with Lida Louise's twisting body.

Something came to Rudford's head, something out of his father's *First Aid for Americans*. Nervously he dropped to his knees and pressed Lida Louise's abdomen with two fingers. Lida Louise responded with a curling scream.

"It's her appendix. She's busted her appendix. Or it's gonna bust," Rudford wildly informed Black Charles. "We gotta get her to a *hospital*."

Understanding, at least in part, Black Charles nodded. "You take her foots," he directed his sister.

Mrs. Jones, however, dropped her end of the burden on the way to the car. Rudford and Peggy each grabbed a leg and with their help Black Charles hoisted the moaning girl into the front seat. Rudford and Peggy also climbed in the front. Peggy held Lida Louise's head. Mrs. Jones was obliged to sit alone in the back. She was making far more anguishing sounds than those coming from her daughter.

"Take her to Samaritan. On Benton Street," Rudford told Black Charles.

Black Charles's hands were shaking so violently he couldn't get the car going. Rudford pushed his hand through the spokes of the driver's wheel and turned on the ignition. The car started up.

"That there Samaritan's a private hospital," Black Charles said, grinding his gears.

"What's the difference? Hurry up. Hurry *up*, Charles," Rudford said, and he told the older man when to shift into second and when to shift into third. Charles knew enough, though, to make good, unlawful time.

Peggy stroked Lida Louise's forehead. Rudford watched the road. Mrs. Jones, in the back, whimpering unceasingly. Lida Louise lay across the children's laps with her eyes shut, moaning intermittently. The car finally reached Samaritan Hospital, about a mile and a half away.

"Go in the front way," Rudford prompted.

Black Charles looked at him. "The front way, boy?" he said.

"The front way, the *front* way," Rudford said, and excitedly punched the older man on the knee.

Black Charles obediently semi-circled the gravel driveway and pulled up in front of the great white entrance.

Rudford jumped out of the car without opening the door, and rushed into the hospital.

At the reception desk a nurse sat with earphones on her head.

"Lida Louise is outside, and she's dying," Rudford said to her. "She's gotta have her appendix out right away."

"Shhh," said the nurse, listening to her earphones.

"Please. She's dying, I tellya."

"Shhh," said the nurse, listening to her earphones.

Rudford pulled them off her head. "Please," he said. "You've gotta get a guy to help us get her in and everything. She's *dying*."

"The singer?" said the nurse.

"Yes! Lida Louise!" said the boy, almost happy and making it strong.

"I'm sorry, but the rules of the hospital do not permit Negro patients. I'm very sorry."

Rudford stood for a moment with his mouth open.

"Will you please let go of my phones?" the nurse said quietly. A woman who controlled herself under all circumstances.

Rudford let go of her phones, turned, and ran out of the building.

He climbed back into the car, ordering, "Go to Jefferson. Spruce and Fenton."

Black Charles said nothing. He started up the motor--he had turned it off--and jerked the car to a fast start.

"What's the matter with Samaritan? That's a good hospital," Peggy said, stroking Lida Louise's forehead.

"No, it isn't," Rudford said, looking straight ahead, warding off any possible side glance from Black Charles.

The car turned into Fenton Street and pulled up in front of Jefferson Memorial Hospital. Rudford jumped out again, followed this time by Peggy.

There was the same kind of reception desk inside, but there was a man instead of a nurse sitting at it--an attendant in a white duck suit. He was reading a newspaper.

"Please. Hurry. We got a lady outside in the car that's dying. Her appendix is busted or something. Hurry, will ya?"

The attendant jumped to his feet, his newspaper falling on the floor. He followed right on Rudford's heels.

Rudford opened the front door of the car, and stood away. The attendant looked in at Lida Louise, pale and in agony, lying across the front seat with her head on Black Charles's head.

"Oh. Well, I'm not a doctor myself. Wait just a second."

"Help us carry her *in*!" Rudford yelled.

"Just be a minute," the attendant said. "I'll call the resident surgeon." He walked off, entering the hospital with one hand in his pocket--for poise.

Rudford and Peggy let go of the awkward carry-hold they already had on Lida Louise. Rudford leading, they both ran after the attendant. They reached him just as he got to his switchboard. Two nurses were standing around, and a woman with a boy who was wearing a mastoid dressing.

"Listen. I know *you*. You don't wanna take her. Isn't that right?"

"Wait just a min-ute, now. I'm callin' up the resident surgeon... Let go of my coat, please. This is a *hospital*, sonny."

"*Don't* call him up," Rudford said through his teeth. "Don't call up *anybody*. We're gonna take her to a *good* hospital. In *Memphis*." Half-blinded, Rudford swung crazily around. "C'mon, Peggy."

But Peggy stood some ground, for a moment. Shaking violently, she addressed everybody in the reception lobby: "*Damn you! Damn you all!*"

Then she ran after Rudford.

The car started up again. But it never reached Memphis. Nor even halfway to Memphis.

It was like this: Lida Louise's head was on Rudford's lap. So long as the car kept moving, her eyes were shut.

Then abruptly, for the first time, Black Charles stopped for a red light. While the car was motionless, Lida Louise opened her eyes and looked at Rudford. "Endicott?" she said.

The boy looked down at her and answered, almost at the top of his voice, "I'm right here, Honey!"

Lida Louise smiled, closed her eyes, and died.

A story never ends. The narrator is usually provided with a nice, artistic spot for his voice to stop, but that's about all.

Rudford and Peggy attended Lida Louise's funeral. The following morning Rudford went away to boarding school. He didn't see Peggy again for fifteen years. During his first year at boarding school, his father moved to San Francisco, re-married and stayed there. Rudford never returned to Agersburg.

He saw Peggy again early summer of 1942. He had just finished a year of internship in New York. He was waiting to be called into the Army.

One afternoon he was sitting in the Palm Room of the Biltmore Hotel, waiting for his date to show up. Somewhere behind him a girl was very audibly giving away the plot to a Taylor Caldwell novel. The girl's voice was Southern, but not swampy and not blue-grass and not even particularly drawly. It sounded to Rudford very much like a Tennessee voice. He turned to look. The girl was Peggy. He didn't even have to take a second look.

He sat for a minute wondering what he would say to her; that is, if he were to get up and go over to her table--a distance of fifteen years. While he was thinking, Peggy spotted *him*. No planner, she jumped up and went over to his table. "Rudford?"

"Yes..." He stood up.

Without embarrassment, Peggy gave him a warm, if glancing kiss.

They sat down for a minute at Rudford's table and told each other how incredible it was that they had recognized each other, and how *fine* they both looked. Then Rudford followed her back to her table. Her husband was sitting there.

Her husband's name was Richard something, and he was a Navy flier. He was eight feet tall, and he had some theater tickets or flying goggles or a lance in one of his hands. Had Rudford brought a gun along, he would have shot Richard dead on the spot.

They all sat down at an undersized table and Peggy asked ecstatically, "Rudford, do you remember that house on Miss Packer's Street?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, *who* do you think's living in it now? Iva Hubbel and her husband."

"Who?" said Rudford.

"Iva *Hubbel*! You remember *her*. She was in our class. No chin? Always snitched on everybody?"

"I *think* I do," Rudford said. "Fifteen years though," he added pointedly.

Peggy turned her husband and lengthily brought him up to date on the house on Miss Packer's Street. He listened with an iron smile.

"Rudford," Peggy said suddenly. "What about Lida Louise?"

"How do you mean, Peggy?"

"I don't know. I think about her all the time." She didn't turn to her husband with an explanation. "Do you too?" she asked Rudford.

He nodded. "Sometimes, anyway."

"I played her records all the time when I was in college. Then some crazy drunk stepped on my *Soupy Peggy*. I cried all night. I met a boy, later, that was in Jack Teagarden's band, and he had one, but he wouldn't sell it to me or anything. I didn't even get to hear it again."

"I have one."

"Honey," Peggy's husband interrupted softly, "I don't wanna interrupt, but you know how Eddie gets. I told him we'd be there and all."

Peggy nodded. "Do you have it with you?" she asked. "In New York?"

"Well, yes, it's at my aunt's apartment. Would you like to hear it?"

"When?" Peggy demanded.

"Well, whenever you--"

"Sweetie. Excuse me. Look. It's three thirty now. I mean--"

"Rudford," Peggy said, "we have to run. Look. Could you call me tomorrow? We're staying here at the hotel. Could you? Please," Peggy implored, slipping into the jacket her husband was crowding around her shoulders.

Rudford left Peggy with a promise to phone her in the morning.

He never phoned her, though, or saw her again.

In the first place, he almost never played the record for *anybody* in 1942. It was terribly scratchy now. It didn't even sound like Lida Louise anymore.

Hapworth 16, 1924

The New Yorker - June 19, 1965

SOME comment in advance, as plain and bare as I can make it: My name, first, is Buddy Glass, and for a good many years of my life,--very possibly, all forty-six--I have felt myself installed, elaborately wired, and, occasionally, plugged in, for the purpose of shedding some light on the short, reticulate life and times of my late, eldest brother, Seymour Glass, who died, committed suicide, opted to discontinue living, when he was thirty-one.

I intend, right now, probably on this same sheet of paper, to make a start at typing up an exact copy of a letter of Seymour's that, until four hours ago, I had never read before in my life. My mother, Bessie Glass, sent it up by registered mail.

This is Friday. Last Wednesday night, over the phone, I happened to tell Bessie that I had been working for several months on a long short story about a particular party, a very consequential party, that she and Seymour and my father and I all went to one night in 1926. This last fact has some small but, I think, rather marvelous relevance to the letter at hand. Not a nice word, I grant you, "marvelous," but it seems to suit.

No further comment, except to repeat that I mean to type up an exact copy of the letter, word for word, comma for comma. Beginning here.

May 28, 1965

Camp Simon Hapworth

Hapworth Lake Hapworth, Maine Hapworth 16, 1924, or quite in the lap of the gods!!

DEAR BESSIE, LES, BEATRICE, WALTER, AND WAKER:

I WILL write for us both, I believe, as Buddy is engaged elsewhere for an indefinite period of time. Surely sixty to eighty per cent of the time, to my eternal amusement and sorrow, that magnificent, elusive comical lad is engaged elsewhere! As you must know in your hearts and bowels, we miss you all like sheer hell. Unfortunately, I am far from above hoping the case is vice versa. This is a matter of quite a little humorous despair to me, though not so humorous. It is entirely disgusting to be forever achieving little actions of the heart or body and then taking recourse to reaction. I am utterly convinced that if A's hat blows off while he is sauntering down the street, it is the charming duty of B to pick it up and hand it to A without examining A's face or combing it for gratitude! My God, let me achieve missing my beloved family without yearning that they miss me in return! It requires a less wishy-washy character than the one available to me. My God, however, on the other side of the ledger, it is a pure fact that you are utterly haunting persons in simple retrospect! How we miss every excitable, emotional face among you! I was born without any great support in the event of continued absence of loved ones. It is a simple, nagging, humorous fact that my independence is skin deep, unlike that of my elusive, younger brother and fellow camper.

While bearing in mind that my loss of you is very acute today, hardly bearable in the last analysis, I am also snatching this stunning opportunity to use my new and entirely trivial mastery of written construction and decent sentence formation as explained and slightly enriched upon in that small book, alternately priceless and sheer crap, which you saw me poring over to excess during the difficult days prior to our departure for this place. Though this is quite a terrible bore

for you, dear Bessie and Les, superb or suitable construction of sentences holds some passing, amusing importance for a young fool like myself! It would be quite a relief to rid my system of fustian this year. It is in danger of destroying my possible future as a young poet, private scholar, and unaffected person. I beg you both, and perhaps Miss Overman, should you drop by at the library or run into her at your leisure, to please run a cold eye over all that follows and then notify me immediately if you uncover any glaring or merely sloppy errors in fundamental construction, grammar, punctuation, or excellent taste. Should you indeed run into Miss Overman quite by accident or design, please ask her to be merciless and deadly toward me in this little matter, assuring her amiably that I am sick to death of the wide gap of embarrassing differences, among other things, between my writing and speaking voices! It is rotten and worrisome to have two voices. Also please extend to that gracious, unsung woman my everlasting love and respect. Would to God that you, my acknowledged loved ones, would cease and cut out thinking of her in your minds as a fuddy duddy. She is far from a duffy duddy. In her disarming, modest way, that little bit of a woman has quite a lot of the simplicity and dear fortitude of an unrecorded heroine of the Civil or Crimean War, perhaps the most moving wars of the last few centuries. My God, please take the slight trouble to remember that this worthy woman and spinster has no comfortable home in the present century! The current century, unfortunately, is a vulgar embarrassment to her from the word go! In her heart of hearts, she would zestfully live out her remaining years as a charming, intimate neighbor of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, continually being approached by those unequally delicious heroines of *Pride and Prejudice* for sensible and worldly advice. She is not even a librarian at heart, unfortunately. At all events, please offer her any generous specimen of this letter that does not look too personal or vulgar to you, prevailing upon her at the same time not to pass too heavy judgment on my penmanship again. Frankly, my penmanship is not worth the wear and tear on her patience, dwindling energies, and very shaky sense of reality. Also frankly, while my penmanship will improve a little as I grow older, looking less and less like the expression of a demented person, it is mostly beyond redemption. My personal instability and too much emotion will ever be plainly marked in every stroke of the pen, quite unfortunately.

Bessie! Les! Fellow children! God Almighty, how I miss you on this pleasant idle morning! Pale sunshine is streaming through a very pleasing, filthy window as lie forcibly abed here. You humorous, excitable, beautiful faces, I can assure you, are suspended above me as perfectly as if they were on delightful strings from the ceiling! We are both in very satisfactory health, Bessie sweetheart. Buddy is eating quite beautifully when the meals are stomachable. While the food itself is not atrocious, it is cooked without a morsel of affection or inspiration, each string bean and simple carrot arriving on the camper's plate quite stripped of its tiny, vegetal soul. The food situation could change in a trice, to be sure, if Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, the cooks, man and wife, a very hellish marriage from casual appearances, would only dare to imagine that every boy who comes into their mess hall is their own beloved child, regardless of from whose loins he sprang in this particular appearance. However, if you had the racking opportunity of chatting for a few minutes with these two persons, you would quite know this is like asking for the moon. A nameless inertia hangs over those two, alternating with fits of unreasonable wrath, stripping them of any will or desire to prepare creditable, affectionate food or even to keep the bent silverware on the tables spotless and clean as a whistle. The sight of the forks alone often whips Buddy into a raw fury. He is working on this tendency, but a revolting fork is a revolting fork. Also, past a certain important, touching point, I am far from at liberty to tamper with that splendid lad's furies, considering his age and stunning function in life.

On second thought, please do not say anything to Miss Overman about my penmanship. It is best for her daily and hourly position to dwell or harp on my rotten penmanship to her heart's content. I am inutterably in that good woman's debt! She has been meticulously trained by the Board of Education. Quite unfortunately, my rotten penmanship, coupled with the subject of the late hours I enjoy keeping, are very often the only grounds for discussion she finds thoroughly comfortable and familiar. I do not know where I have failed her in this respect. I suspect I got us off on quite the wrong foot when I was younger by allowing her to think I am a very serious boy simply because I am an omnivorous reader. Unwittingly, I have left her no decent, human notions that ninety-eight percent of my life, thank God, has nothing to do with the dubious pursuit of knowledge. We sometimes exchange little persiflages at her desk or while we are stepping over to the card catalogues, but they are very false persiflages, quite without decent bowels. It is very burdensome to us both to have regular communication without bowels, human silliness, and the common knowledge, quite delightful and enlivening in my opinion, that everybody seated in the library has a gall bladder and various other, touching organs under their skin. There is much more to the question than this, but I cannot pursue it profitably today. My emotions are too damnably raw today, I fear. Also the precious five of you are innumerable miles from this place and it is always too damned easy to fail to remember how little I can stand useless separations. While this is often a very stimulating and touching place, I personally suspect that certain children in this world, like your magnificent son Buddy as well as myself, are perhaps best suited to enjoying this privilege only in a dire emergency or when they know great discord in their family life. But let me quickly pass on to more general topics. On my God, I am relishing this leisurely communication!

The majority of young campers here, you will be glad to know, could not possibly be nicer or more heartrending from day to day, particularly when they are not thriving with suspicious bliss in cliques that insure popularity or dubious prestige. Few boys, thank God with a bursting heart, that we have run into here are not the very salt of the earth when you can exchange a little conversation with them away from their damn intimates. Unfortunately, here as elsewhere on this touching planet, imitation is the watchword and prestige the highest ambition. It is not my business to worry about the general situation, but I am hardly made of steel. Few of these magnificent, healthy, sometimes remarkably handsome boys will mature. The majority, I give you my heartbreaking opinion, will merely senesce. Is that a picture to tolerate in one's heart? On the contrary, it is a picture to rip the heart to pieces. The counselors themselves are counselors in name only. Most of them appear slated to go through their entire lives, from birth to dusty death, with picayune, stunted attitudes towards everything in the universe and beyond. This is a cruel and harsh statement, to be sure. It fails to be harsh enough! You think I am a kind fellow at heart, is that not so? God reward me with hailstones and rocks, I am no! No single day passes that I do not listen to the heartless indifferences and stupidities passing from the counselor's lips without secretly wishing I could improve matters quite substantially by bashing a few culprits over the head with an excellent shovel or stout club! I would be less heartless, I am hoping, if the young campers themselves were not so damned heartrending and thrilling in their basic nature. Perhaps the most heartrending boy within sound of my ridiculous voice is Griffith Hammersmith. Oh, what a heartrending boy he is! His very name brings the usual fluid to my eyes when I am not exercising decent control over my emotions; I am working daily on this emotional tendency while I am here, but am doing quite poorly. Would to God that loving parents would wait and see their children at a practical age before they name them Griffith or something else that will by no means ease the little personality's purpose in life. My own first

name "Seymour" was quite a gigantic, innocent mistake, for some attractive diminutive like "Chuck" or even "Tip" or "Connie" might have been more comfortable for adults and teachers wont to address me in casual conversation; so I have some acquaintance with this petty problem. He, young Griffith Hammersmith, is also seven; however, I am his senior by a brisk and trivial matter of three weeks. In physical bulk, he is the smallest boy in the entire camp, being still smaller, to one's amazement and sadness, than your magnificent son Buddy, despite the gross age difference of two years. His load in this appearance in the world is staggering. Please consider the following crosses this excellent, droll, touching, intelligent lad has to bear. Resign yourselves to ripping your hearts out by the roots!

A) He has a severe speech impediment. It amounts to far more than a charming lisp, his entire body stumbling at the brink of conversation, so counselors and other adults are not pleasantly diverted.

B) This little child has to sleep with a rubber sheet on his bed for obvious reasons, similar to our own dear Waker, but quite different in the last analysis. Young Hammersmith's bladder has given up all hope of soliciting any interest or favor.

C) He has had nine (9) different toothbrushes since camp quite opened. He buries or hides them in the woods, like a chap of three or four, or conceals them beneath the leaves and other crap under his bungalow. This he does without humor or revenge or private relish. There is quite an element of revenge in it, but he is not at liberty to enjoy his revenge to the hilt or get any keen satisfaction out of it, so totally has his spirit been dampened or quite smothered by his relatives. The situation is thoroughly stubborn and rotten, I assure you. He, young Griffith Hammersmith, follows you two eldest dons around quite a bit, often pursuing us into every nook and cranny. He is excellent, touching, intelligent company when he is not being hounded by his past and present. His future, I am fairly sick to death to say, looks abominable. I would bring him home with us after camp is over in a minute, with complete confidence, joy and abandon, were he an orphan. He has a mother, however, a young divorcee with an exquisite, swanky face slightly ravaged by vanity and self-love and a few silly disappointments in life, though not silly to her, we may be sure. One's heart and purse sensuality go out to her, we have found, though she does such maddening, crappy job as a mother and woman. Last Sunday afternoon, a stunning day, utterly cloudless, she popped by and invited us to join her and Griffith for a spin in their imposing, ritzy Pierce-Arrow, to be followed by a snack at the Elms before returning. We regretfully declined the invitation. Jesus, it was a frigid invitation! I have heard some stunning, frigid invitations in my time, but this one quite took the cake! I am hoping you would have been slightly amused by her utterly false, friendly gesture, Bessie, but I doubt it; you are not old enough, sweetheart! Not too deep in Mrs. Hammersmith's transparent, slightly comical heart, she was keenly disappointed that we are Griffith's best friends in camp, her mind an admirably quick eye instantaneously preferring Richard Mace and Donald Wiegmueller, two members of Griffith's own bungalow and more to her taste. The reasons were quite obvious, but I will not go into them in an ordinary, sociable letter to one's family. With the passage of time, I am getting used to this stuff; and your son Buddy, as you have very ample reason to know, is no man's fool, despite his charming, tender age on the surface. However, for a young, attractive, bitter lonely mother with all the municipal advantages of swanky, patrician facial features, great monetary wealth, unlimited entree, and bejeweled fingers to show this kind of social disappointment in full view of her young son, a callow child already cursed with a nervous and lonely bladder, is fairly inexcusable and hopeless. Hopeless is too broad, but I see no solution on the horizon to

damnable and subtle matters of this kind. I am working on it, to be sure, but one must of necessity consider my youth and quite limited experience in this appearance.

At first, as you know, they put us in different bungalows in their folly, advancing on the premise that it is quite sound and broadening to separate brothers and various members of the same family. However, acting upon a casual, comical remark made by your incomparable son Buddy, with which I heartily concurred, we had a damned pleasant chat with Mrs. Happy on the third or fourth ridiculous day, pointing out to her how completely easy it is to forget Buddy's absurd, budding age and delightfully human need for conversation and lightening riposte, with the lively result that Buddy got permission to move his personal effects as well as his fine, puny humorous body in here the following Saturday after inspection. We both continue to find relief, pleasure and simple justice in this turn of affairs. I am hoping to hell you get to know Mrs. Happy quite intimately when or if you get an opportunity to come up or resourcefully make one. Picture to yourselves a gorgeous brunette, perky, quite musical, with a very nice little sense of humor! It requires all one's powers of self-control to keep from taking her in one's arms when she is strolling about on the grass in one of her tasteful frocks. Her appreciation and fairly spontaneous love for your son Buddy is a handsome bonus to me, making tears spring to the eyes when least expected. One of the many thrills of my existence is to see a young, gorgeous girl or woman from sheer instinct recognize this young lad's worth within a quarter of an hour of casual conversation beside a charming brook that is drying up. Jesus, life has its share of honorable thrills if one but keeps one's eyes open! She, Mrs. Happy, is also a big fan of yours, Bessie and Les, having seen you many times before the footlights in Gotham, usually at the Riverside, near their residence. She unwittingly shares with you, Bessie, a touching heritage of quite perfect legs, ankles, saucy bosoms, very fresh, cute, hindquarters, and remarkable little feet with quite handsome, small toes. You know yourselves what an unexpected bonus it is to run into a fully grown adult with splendid or even quite presentable toes in the last analysis; usually, disastrous things happen to the toes after they leave a darling child's body, you would agree. God bless this gorgeous kid's heart! It is sometimes impossible to believe that this haunting, peppy beauty is fifteen (15) years my senior! I leave it to your own fine and dear judgment, Bessie and Les, whether to allow the younger children to get wind of this, but if perfect frankness is to pass between parent and child as freely by mail as in loving person, which is the relationship I have striven for during my entire life with increasing slight success, then I must admit, in all joviality, to moments when this cute, ravishing girl, Mrs. Happy, unwittingly rouses all my unlimited sensuality. Considering my absurd age, the situation has its humorous side, to be sure, but merely in simple retrospect, I regret to say. On two or three haunting occasions when I have accepted her kind invitation to stop by at the main bungalow for some cocoa or cold beverage after Aquatics Period, I have looked forward with mounting pleasure to the possibility, all too slight for words, of her opening the door, quite unwittingly, in the raw. This is not a comical tumult of emotions while it is going on, I repeat, but merely in simple retrospect. I have not yet discussed this indelicate matter with Buddy, whose sensuality is beginning to flower at the same tender and quite premature age that mine did, but he has already quite guessed that this lovely creature has me in sensual thrall and he has made several humorous remarks. Oh, my God, it is an honor and privilege to be connected to this arresting young lad and secret genius who will not accept my conversational ruses for the truth! The problem of Mrs. Happy will pass into oblivion as the summer draws to a close, but it would be a great boon, dear Les, if you would recognize that we share your heritage of sensuality, including the telltale ridge of carnality just below your own heavy, sensual, bottom lip, as does our own marvelous, youthful brother, the splendid Walter F.

Glass, young Beatrice and Waker Glass, those sterling personages, being comparatively free of the telltale ridge in question. Usually, I think you will agree, I freely trample on signs to go by in the human face, for they are absolutely unreliable or may be obliterated or altered by Father Time, but I never trample on the ridge below the bottom lip, usually a darker shade of red than the rest of the lips. I will not harp on the subject of karma, knowing and quite sympathizing with your disdain for my absorbing and accidental interest in this subject, but I give you my word of honor that the ridge in question is little more than a karmic responsibility; one meets it, one conquers it, or if one does not conquer it, one enters into honorable contest with it, seeking and giving no quarter. I for one do not look forward to being distracted by charming lusts of the body, quite day in and day out, for the few, blissful, remaining years allotted to me in this appearance. There is monumental work to be done in this appearance, of partially undisclosed nature, and I would cheerfully prefer to die an utter dog's death rather than be distracted at crucial moments by a gorgeous, appealing plane or rolling contour of goodly flesh. My time is too limited, quite to my sadness and amusement. While I intend, to be sure, to work on this sensual problem without ceasing, it would be quite a little windfall if you, dear Les, as my dear father and hearty friend, would be a complete, shameless, open book with regard to your own pressing sensuality when you were our ages. I have had the opportunity of reading one or two books dealing with sensuality, but they are either inflaming or inhumanly written, yielding little food for thought. I am not asking to know what sensual acts you performed when you were our ages; I am asking something worse; I am asking to know what imaginary sensual acts gave lively, unmentionable entertainment to your mind. Without the mind, sensuality quite has no organs to call her own! I fervently urge you to be shameless in this matter. We are human boys and would not love or respect you the less, quite the contrary, if you laid bare your earliest and worst sensual thoughts before us; I am certain we would find them very touching and moving. A decent, utterly frank criterion is always of splendid, temporary use to a young person. In addition, it is not in your son Buddy's nature or mine or your son Walter's to be in the least shocked or disgusted by any sweet, earthly side of humankind. Indeed, all forms of human folly and bestiality touch a very sympathetic chord within our breasts!

Ye gods and little fishes! How cheerful and rewarding it is to have a little leisure for communication with one's family during one's busy camp life! You can easily fail to suspect how damn much blessed time I have on my hands today to attend to the needs of the heart and mind; full explanation to follow shortly.

Continuing my description, confidential and quite presumptuous, of Mrs. Happy, whom I know you could learn to love or pity, she is at great pains in private not to let her rather rotten married life spoil the happiness and sweet burden of having a baby. She is currently pregnant, though having at least six or seven months to go before the event which she understands so badly takes place. It is an up hill struggle for her all the way. She is verily a poor kid with a tiny, distended stomach and a head full of very touching crap based on confusion, maddening books by doctors who share the same popular, narrow horizons, and the information supplied by a dear friend, with whom she roomed at college, a superb bridge player, I understand, named Virginia. Unfortunately, this whole camp is loaded with heartrending, rotten marriages, but she, Mrs. Happy, is the only pregnant person abroad, to my knowledge. Hence, in the absence of the above Virginia, Mrs. Happy has enrolled my services as a conversationalist, these being the services of a child of seven, mind you! It affords me unlimited worry, also trivial amusement on occasion, I am ashamed to say, that she is practically unconscious that she is freely employing a child my age as an audience; however, she is a shy, tremendous talker; if she were not spilling these sad

beans to me, to be sure, she would be spilling them to some other emotional face that came along. One is obliged to take everything she says with innumerable grains of salt. She is really a foreigner, though a cute one, to absolute honesty of conversation. She believes that she is a very affectionate person and that Mr. Happy is an unaffectionate person. It is a very conversational theory, but sheer crap, unfortunately. As God is my judge, Mr. Happy is no prize package, but he is quite definitely an affectionate person. At the other end of the pole, unfortunately, Mrs. Happy is a very tenderhearted, quite unaffectionate person. One burns with impatience toward her delusions when one is not secretly coveting her beauty! She does not even know enough on occasion to pick up a little child like your son Buddy, far from his mother and other loved ones, and give him a decent kiss that will resound through the surrounding forest! She so easily has no human idea of the terrible need for ordinary kissing in this wide, ungenerous world! A flashing, charming smile is quite insufficient. A delicious cup of cocoa, decorated with a thoughtful marshmallow, is no decent substitute for a kiss or hearty embrace where a child of five is concerned. She is in more hot water than she knows, I freely suspect. If I am powerless to be of slight use to her as conversationalist before the summer is over, this lovely beauty is in future danger of immorality; a quite subtle downfall and degrading slide from mere flirtation and girlish conversation is foreseeable. With her unaffection and great depths of ungenerosity, she is growing prepared to make delirious, sensual love to an attractive stranger, being too proud and hemmed in by self-love to share her countless charms with a real intimate. I am very alarmed. Unfortunately, my position is utterly false at moments of conversational crisis, being torn between good, sensible, merciless advice and corrupting desire to have her open the door in the raw. If you have a moment, dear Les and Bessie, and the younger children as well, pray for an honorable way for me out of this ridiculous and maddening wilderness. Pray quite at your leisure, using your own good, charming words, but stress the point that I cannot achieve an even keel while being torn between quite sound and perfect advice and simple lusts of the body and genitals, despite their youthful size. Please be confident that your prayers will not go down the drain, in my opinion; merely form them in words and they will be absorbed very nicely in the way I mentioned to you at dinner last winter. Should God choose to see me instrumental in this affair, I can be of quite unlimited help to this beautiful, touching kid. The whole root of Mrs. Happy's and Mr. Happy's private evil is that they have failed to become one flesh quite to perfection. With daring and a careful explanation of the proper, courageous method required, it can be achieved quite briskly and in a comparative jiffy. I could demonstrate very easily if Desiree Green were here, who is exceptionally daring and open at the mind for a young girl of eight, but I can manage quite nicely without a demonstration also. Do not hesitate to pray for me in this delicate matter! Waker, old man, I particularly appeal to your thrilling, innocent powers of prayer! Remember that I am not at liberty to excuse myself from keen responsibility because I am a mere boy of seven. If I excuse myself on such flimsy, rotten grounds, then I am a liar or a cowardly fraud and maker of cheap, normal excuses. Unfortunately, I cannot approach Mr. Happy, the husband, in this matter. He is not too approachable in this or any other matter under the sun. Should the proper time come for approachment, I will practically have to strap him to a convenient chair to get his entire attention. He made ropes in his previous appearance, but not very well, somewhere in Turkey or Greece, but I know not which. He was executed for making a defective rope, resulting in the deaths of some influential climbers; however, it was really incredible stubbornness and conceit, joined with neglect, at the root of the matter. As I told you before we left, I am trying like hell to cut down on getting any glimpses while we are up here for a pleasant, ordinary summer. Nine times out of ten, it is an utter waste of time anyhow to let

them pass freely through the mind, whether or not the person involved would find an open discussion of the matter helpful, quite spooky, or openly distasteful.

This is going to be a very long letter! Stiff upper lip, Les! I humorously give you my permission to read only one quarter of the entire communication. Freely attribute the longness of the letter to an unexpected bonus of leisure time, which I shall relate shortly. Temporarily explained, I wounded my leg quite badly yesterday and am confined to bed for a change, windfall of windfalls! Guess who skillfully got permission to keep me company and attend to my personal needs! Your our beloved son Buddy! He should be returning at any moment now!

We have received quite a few more demerits since your thrilling call from the LaSalle Hotel, which was an unspeakable pleasure for us, despite the rotten connection. I have also mislaid my handsome, new wrist watch during a recent Aquatics Period; however, everybody is going to dive for it again tomorrow or this afternoon, so have no fear, unless it is too hopelessly saturated. Returning to the subject of the demerits, we got most of them for continuously sloppy bungalow, followed by quite a few more in a neat bunch for not singing at pow pow and leaving pow pow without permission. So it goes. Jesus, I hope you can freely sense at this distance how much we miss you, dear Bessie and Les and those other three peanuts after my own heart! Would to God a simple letter were less fraught with the burdens of superb written construction! One begins to despair of sounding quite like oneself, your son and brother, and yet quite uphold the excellent and touching demands of splendid construction. This has the earmarks of being one of the future despairs of my life, but I shall give all my consuming attention to it and hope for an honorable, humorous truce.

A thousand thanks for your amusing and delightful letter and several postcards! We were relieved and overjoyed to hear Detroit and Chicago were not too tough, Les. We were equally delighted to hear that young Mr. Fay was on the same bill in the Windy City; quite juicy news for you, Bessie, if you still have a harmless, social passion for that remarkable chap. I have been meaning to write to that chap out of the blue for a whole year, dating from our rewarding and comical chat together when we shared a taxi during that beautiful downpour; he is a clever and mercifully original fellow and will be widely imitated and stolen from before he is through, mark my words. Close on the heels of kindness, originality is one of the most thrilling things in the world, also the most rare! Kindly give us all the news in your future letters, the more trivial and sweetly unimportant, the more readable. The news about "Bambalina" is excellent and more than arresting! Give it all you have, I beg you! It is a charming tune. If you do it before camp is over, hastily send us one of the first records, as there is a Victrola in poor condition in Mrs. Happy's pleasant quarters and I would gladly impose upon our peculiar friendship in such a case. Keep up the good work! Jesus, you are a talented, cute, magnificent couple! My admiration for you would be measureless were we not even related, be assured. Bessie, we hope to hell you are enjoying magnificent spirits again, sweetheart, and are not too discontent with being on the road so quickly again. If you have not got around to doing what you faithfully swore up and down you would do to ease my ridiculous mind, please hurry and do it. It is definitely a cyst, in my unhumorous opinion, and some respectable physician should burn or cut it off post haste. I spoke to a personable physician when we were on the train coming up and he said it is quite fairly painless when they remove it, a gentle lop doing the trick very nicely. Oh, God, the human body is so touching, with its countless blemishes and cysts and despised, touching pimples arriving and departing, on adult bodies, when least expected. It is just one more pressing temptation to take off one's hat to God during the distracting day; I personally cannot and will not see Him dispense with human cysts, blemishes, and the odd facial pimple or touching boil! I have never

seen Him do anything that is not magnificently in the cards! I pass over this delicate matter and merely send all five of you about 50,000 kisses. Buddy would readily join me in this if he were here. This leads to another delicate matter, I am afraid. Bessie and Les, I soberly address you. Take no offense, but you are both entirely, absolutely, and very painfully wrong about his never missing anybody but me; I refer, of course, to Buddy. You would make me a lot happier, quite frankly spoken, if you didn't press that kind of painful and erroneous crap on me over the phone again, dear Les. It is very hard to leave the phone on your own two feet when your own beloved and talented father says something that damaging, wrong, and quite stupid. The magnificent person in question does not wear his heart on his damnable sleeve like most people, including you and myself. The very first and last thing you must remember about this small, haunting chap is that he will be in a terrible rush all his life to get the door nicely slammed behind him in any room where there is a striking and handsome supply of good, sharp pencils and plenty of paper. I am quite powerless as well as dubiously inclined to alter his course; it is an old affair, hanging upon innumerable points of honor, be assured! As his beloved parents, you may not humanly be expected to lighten his load, but you must not, I beg you, deliberately throw weights of reproof on his little back. Beyond these subtle matters, he is privately the most resourceful creation of God I have ever run into, forever striving not to live a second-hand existence on the fervent recommendation of practically everybody one runs into. He will be swiftly and subtly guiding every child in the family long after I am quite burned out and useless or out of the picture. It is disrespectful and inexcusable for a young boy my age to address his lovable father this way, but Buddy is the one thing you don't know anything about. Let us quickly pass on to more unticklish topics.

A certain United States congressman, a war buddy of Mr. Happy's, visited the camp last weekend. As he was one of the most unwatchable figures I have watched in many years, it would be wise to skip over his name in this personal letter. A breath of insincerity and personable corruption passed through the camp; the air still stinks to high heaven. The kowtowing and artificial laughing on Mr. Happy's part was beyond earthly description. In the privacy of an impromptu meeting on the porch of her bungalow, I asked Mrs. Happy to take careful pains not to allow the congressman and Mr. Happy's quite sickening responses to him to upset her and that marvelous little embryo while all this unamiable crap is going on. She quite concurred. Later in the day, for her sake, I painfully accepted Mr. Happy's request and command that Buddy and I come to their bungalow after third mess and sing and do a few routines for his guest, the congressman in question, I have no right whatever to accept a corrupt invitation for my beloved younger brother; I am quite hoping, secretly, that the Almighty will take me to task, quite harshly, for this criminal presumption; I have no business making snap decisions without consulting this brilliant youth. However, we went into consultation after the invitation was accepted, privately agreeing not to wear our taps when we went over, but this was a very false and self-deceptive relief for us. In the heat of the evening, we consented to do a soft-shoe! In all irony, we were in superb form, as Mrs. Happy played her accordion for accompaniment; it is very hard for us not to be in superb form if a gorgeous, untalented creature accompanies us rottenly on the accordion; it touches us to the quick, amusing us quite a bit, too. For all our extreme youth, we remain quite vulnerable, amusing foils where gorgeous, untalented girls are concerned. I am working on it, but it is a fairly severe problem.

Please, please, PLEASE do not grow impatient and ice cold to this letter because of its gathering length! When you are ready to despair, swiftly recall how much leisure I have on my hands today and how needful I am to have some pleasant communication with the five absent

family members of my heart! I am not constructed for continued absences; I have never claimed to be constructed for them. Also, much of my news and general communication promises to be very absorbing, delightful, and emollient.

As you damned well know, we never change much in our hearts. However, we are getting slightly tan and looking quite a lot like healthy children and campers. We may need all the damnable health we can get, to be sure. An unengaging incident recently occurred. In addition to the common information that we are the children of the esteemed Gallagher & Glass and that we are fairly experienced and skilled entertainers in our own right, thanks to your touching and thrilling example, news has traveled round about the camp that the both of us, your small son Buddy and I, have been notorious, heavy readers from a tender age and in addition have certain abilities, prowesses, knacks, and facilities of very uncertain value and the gravest responsibility, the latter being warmly attached to us like cement from previous appearances, particularly the last two, tough ones. Your son Buddy is currently taking most of it at the flood. It requires broad shoulders, I can assure you. Consider, if you have a minute, the sheer, juicy novelty and food for gossip and malice of a chap of five who is an experienced reader and writer, daily increasing in fluency by leaps and bounds, and who is also, despite his ridiculous age on the surface, an exciting authority on the human face with all its touching masks, vanities, spurts of pure courage, and frightening deceits! That is the small fellow's present position. Continue to imagine what would inevitably blossom out if some of this confidential information leaked out and became common fact or rumor among campers and counselors alike. That is quite what has happened. Unfortunately, as he well knows, most of the recent commotion is his own reckless fault. Oh, my God, this is a droll and thrilling companion to have on life's bumpy road! Here is the entire crappy incident in a nut shell, as follows: Mr. Nelson, a born neophile and enthusiastic talebearer and gossip, is in utter charge of the mess hall, as already related, along with Mrs. Nelson, a termagant, unhappy woman, and inspired trouble maker. When nobody is in the mess hall, it is the only charming place in camp where one can get any blissful privacy whatsoever. Buddy has had his eye on this haven from the word go. On Tuesday afternoon, a sultry day, he bet Mr. Nelson that he could memorize the book Mr. Nelson chanced to be reading within the space of twenty minutes to a half-hour. If he did it perfectly, then Mr. Nelson in his turn, to show his appreciation for the controversial accomplishment, would let us, the Glass brothers, use the empty, pleasant mess hall in our spare time for reading, writing, language study, and other aching, private needs, such as evacuating our heads of second-hand and third-hand opinions and views that are buzzing around this camp like flies. My God, how I deplore and uncounenance bargains of any kind, be they with responsible adults or adults without honor! Without my knowledge of this quite terrible fact, this astounding, independent chap went ahead and made this bargain with Mr. Nelson, despite our countless discussions, in the wee hours, on the desirability of keeping our mouths firmly shut on the subject of some of our endowments and peculiarities. Fortunately, the incident was not a total loss or debacle. The book itself chanced to be *Hardwoods of North America*, by Foley and Chamberlin, two magnificently modest and quiet men, long admired by me from my reading experience, with very infectious love for trees, especially beech and white oak; they have a charming, unreasonable preference for beech trees! So the exchange of words between Buddy and me was not too unbearably harsh or unpleasant; no tears, thank God, were spent. However, Whitey Pittman, the bead counselor, hailing from Baltimore, Md., quite a laughing intimate of Mr. Nelson's, got wind of the accomplishment when it was completed and freely plucked the opportunity to cash in on it in conversation. In all fairness and fascination, he has a remarkable gift for increasing his own prestige at some child's

expense; an intelligent scavenger and conversational parasite. He is the same person, a fellow twenty-six years of age, no spring chicken to be sure, who said to Buddy in the midst of a throng of strangers: "I thought you were supposed to be such a witty kid." Is that a conscientious remark to make to a little fellow of five? Thank God for the avoidance of shame and embarrassment to the whole family, I had no decent weapon on my person when this revolting, crappy remark was made; however, quite afterwards, I embraced an opportunity to tell Roger Pittman, the full name his hapless parents gave him, that I would kill him or myself, possibly before nightfall, if he spoke to this chap again in that manner, or any other five-year-old chap, in my presence. I believe I could have curbed this criminal urge at the crucial moment, but one must painfully remember that a vein of instability runs through me quite like some turbulent river; this cannot be overlooked; I have left this troublesome instability uncorrected in my previous two appearances, to my folly and disgust; it will not be corrected by friendly, cheerful prayer. It can only be corrected by dogged effort on my part, thank God; I cannot honorably or intimately pray to some charming, divine weakling to step in and clean my mess up after me; the very prospect turns my stomach. However, the human tongue could all too easily be the cause of my utter degrading in this appearance, unless I get a move on. I have been trying like hell since our arrival to leave a wide margin for human ill-will, fear, jealousy, and gnawing dislike of the uncommonplace. Do not read this rash remark out loud to the twins or possibly let it fall on Boo Boo's ears prematurely, but I admit, with maddening tears coursing down my unstable face, that I do not in my heart hold out unlimited hope for the human tongue as we know it to day.

If the above paragraph is too illegible and irksome, try to recall that I am writing at a swift, terrible rate of speed, with admirable penmanship quite out of the question. In another handful of minutes or quarter hours, it will be time for supper; I am writing against time. In the Midget bungalow, one is required to sleep like a dog for ten, exasperating hours every night, the bungalow being plunged into darkness at nine o'clock sharp. I have approached Mr. Happy in this matter several times, but to no avail. My God, he is a maddening man; if he does not move one to wrath, he moves one to hysterical laughter, an equal waste of time. If you could possibly write a short, amiable, crisp letter, dear Les, if I may address you personally, advising him that if one knows even the very rudiments of sensible breathing, ten hours of sleep is sheer folly and imposition. We have our flashlights, to be sure, but the arrangement remains a striking inconvenience to us, entangling us in bad light and ill humor.

My contempt for myself for showing you merely the black and quite dank side of camp life is immeasurable. In this rotten attitude, I have failed to mention the countless things that are zipping along with smoothness and beauty; despite my gloomy remarks in the above paragraphs, each day has been generously studded with happiness, sensuous pleasure, rejoicing, and fairly explosive laughter. Many sweet animals loom into view when least expected, such as chipmunks, unpoisonous snakes, but no deer. I am taking the dubious liberty, Les, of sending you a few quills from a porcupine, dead but not diseased; they may be a perfect answer to your old problem with the softness and breakability of toothpicks. The general scenery is spellbinding, both underfoot as well as to the sides. To my joy and sheer wonder, your son Buddy has turned out to be utterly and thrillingly nemophilous! It is an unexpected revelation to me to see him shape up in this manner. While I take keen relish in country affairs, too, it is merely up to a point; in my heart of hearts, I am outside my true element when away from cold, heartrending cities of ludicrous size after the manner of New York or London. Buddy, on the other hand, will forever break loose from city connections, it is quite plain to see; we will not be able to restrain him in another mere handful of years. I wish you could see him striking through the dense forest here,

when the powers that be are not minding everybody's business for them, moving with heartrending stealth, like a magnificent, amusing, berserk, Indian messenger. Each night, to our entertainment and equal chagrin, I put untold quantities of iodine on his stubborn, funny body, mutilated from the blackberry thorns and other damnable outgrowths. Our pleasant consumption of possibly a dozen books, excellent as well as mediocre, before departure, on the subject of plants, edible and otherwise, has been a superb boon to us, allowing us to cook many decent meals, under the rose, of steamed pigweed, young nettles, purslane, as well as the last of the tender fiddle heads, using the canteen cup as cooking receptacle and frequently being joined by that heartrending little peanut, Griffith Hammersmith, whose appetite in congenial surroundings is quite stupefying and thrilling. Lest it slip my vacant mind, Buddy asked me to tell you, Bessie sweetheart, to send him some more tablets without lines, also some apple butter and corn meal, as he is practically living on the latter, I daresay, when we are able to prepare a pleasant, leisurely meal in peace. Be assured that the corn meal is very nutritive for him; his little body is unusually suited to corn and barley, if the truth be known. He will write to you very soon, given the right opportunity and inclination. My God, is he a busy boy! I have never known him busier, to the best of my recollection. He has written 6 new stories, entirely humorous in places, about an English chap recently returned from some stimulating adventures abroad. It is an indescribable reward to see a person five years of age sit back on his dear, comical, fleshless haunches and dash off an engaging yarn with zest and no little acumen! I give you my word of honor you will hear from this chap one day; no nightfall passes that I do not mentally take off my hat to you for bringing him into the world; your loving, charming agency in this lad's general birth remains unspeakably moving to me; the picture is even more moving and rewarding when one considers the abominable glimpse I had at recess period after Christmas vacation, revealing that our intimacy with you, dear Les, if you are still there, in our last appearance, was fairly slight and fraught with discordancy. Continuing at leisure, as for my own writing, I have completed about twenty-five (25) reasonable poems for which I have a low regard, followed by 16 poems that have some merit but no enduring generosity, as well as about 10 others that have turned out to be in unconscious, disastrous imitation of William Blake, William Wordsworth, and one or two other dead geniuses whose sudden passing never ceases to cut me like a knife. With regard to my poetry, the general picture is poor and gnawing. It is my absolute opinion that the only poem of personal, haunting interest to me that I have written so far this summer is one I have not written at all. During your expensive phone call from the La Salle, you will recall, I mentioned that we and the other campers had spent the entire day at the Wahl Fisheries. On the way there, a lunch of sandwiches, quite filling, was prepared for us at Kallborn Hotel, a well-bred, popular hotel frequented by loving, young couples on their honeymoons. Strolling by the lake with Buddy and Hammersmith, I saw a couple sporting and laughing. Putting two and two together, and suddenly feeling disposed, from head to toe, to feel harmony with those two unknown, young lovers, I wished to write a poem intimating that the one millionth groom at the Kallborn Hotel had just playfully splashed the millionth bride; I have personally witnessed young lovers doing the same thing at Long Beach and other popular resorts. Bessie dear, it is a little sight you would enjoy, thrill to, and faintly smile at with a portion of your brain and heart; however, there is no demand for this in any immortal poetry I have run into. One is left holding the bag. Let us pass over this prickly topic. For your private information and possibly Miss Overman's, but draw the line a bit firmly there as she has no great gift for not repeating a confidence, I regret to say, we are continuing to master Italian and reviewing Spanish after taps. It is a broad, rotten hint, but some new batteries would be a windfall.

Les, it is such a relief and pleasure to dash off a few lines without listening for the damnable strains of the bugle that my ardor is running away with me. If you are tired or frankly bored reading, stop instantaneously, with my heartfelt permission. I am admittedly taking advantage of your good will, fatherhood, and notorious, humorous patience. Bessie, I know, will kindly give you the gist of any communication that follows; light a cigarette with abandon, drop my damn letter like a hot potato, and go down to the lobby of whatever hotel you are staying at and enjoy yourself with a free conscience and my undying love; a game of pool or pinochle might be refreshing! Continuing at blissful random, we are not too popular with the other campers in the same bungalow as yet, principally Douglas Folsom, Barry Sharfman, Derek Smith, Jr., Tom Lantern, Midge Immington, and Red Silverman. Tom Lantern! Is that or is that not an appealing name to go through life with? Unfortunately, this youth seems determined not to turn on any of his lights, so his delightful name is in danger of going down the drain. This opinion is too harsh. My opinions are all too frequently too damn harsh for words. I am working on it, but I have given way to harshness too often this summer to stomach. God speed you, Tom Lantern, with or without your lights turned on! There is one boy on the top floor of this poorly constructed bungalow who is the very salt of the earth; no compliment heaped upon him would be too lavish be assured. He is often dashing freely clown the flimsy stairs in his leisure moments and passing the time of day with your unworthy sons, discussing with a humorous and open heart his friends, acquaintances, and foes in Troy, New York, a large hamlet beyond Albany, and generally finding life and humanity magnificent under the deceptive surfaces. His valiance would break your heart, I trust, or painfully chip it; an immeasurable amount is required just to say a hearty hello to us; I have neglected to say that we are currently being ostracized. His name is John Kolb, 8 years of age, by rights an Intermediate, but there was no room for him in the Intermediates, so we are privileged to have his chivalrous company in this crowded building. I beg you to write that valiant, good-humored name upon your memory for now and all future time!

Unfortunately, anything over five minutes of conversation bores this dauntless, active boy to tears, and one looks up, to one's touching amusement, to find his winning, kind face gone from the premises! I would give countless years of my life to be of some future help to this lad. He kindly gave me his word of honor, quite blind to the reasons that made me ask him, that he would never swallow whiskey or any other liquors on reaching adulthood, but I have damnable, sad doubts that he will keep his word. He has a waiting tendency to drink himself into a soothing stupor; it can be defeated utterly if he uses his entire mind, with a few lights turned on, but I am afraid he is too kind and impatient a boy to use his entire mind for anything. We have his address in Troy, New York. If I am alive when the crucial years arrive, I shall rush to Troy, New York, without a second's delay and if necessary act in his splendid behalf; it would slightly require drinking the cup that stupefies myself, but you have to understand that we have quite lost our hearts to this boy without a shred of prejudice in his heart. My God, a valorous boy, 8½ years of age, is a moving thing! It is too ironical to bear, but I give you my word that valorous people require far more protection than meets the eye. I kiss your noble, unsung feet, John Kolb, native of Troy, brother of an uncruel Hector!

As for other matters, we are mixing admirably when opportunity allows, joining in all the incessant sports and other activities, enjoying many of them to the hilt. It is a break for us that we are fairly magnificent, limited athletes; at baseball, perhaps the most heartrending, delicious sport in the Western Hemisphere, even our worst foes would not deny our unassuming prowess. This is no conceit or credit to us, being a humorous bonus from the last appearance; any game

with a ball we achieve easy excellence with a little application; any game without a ball we tend, unfortunately, to stink. Apart from games and activities, we are making a handful of lifelong friends quite by accident. You, however, in the strenuous position of being our beloved parents, Bessie, must try quite hard to look at certain matters straight in the face with utter refusal to flinch as one or two factors loom large. I tell you now, this very moment, to please tuck away someplace utterly unmelancholy in your memory against a rainy day, that until the hour we finish our lives there will always be innumerable chaps who get very seething, and thoroughly inimical even when they see our bare faces alone coming over the horizon. Mark you, I am saying our faces alone, independent of our peculiar and often offensive personalities! There would be a fairly humorous side to the matter if I had not watched it happen with sickening dismay too many hundred times in my brief years. I am hoping, however, that as we continue to improve and refine our characters by leaps and bounds, striving each day to reduce general snottiness, surface conceits, and too damn much emotion, coupled with several other qualities quite rotten to the core, we will antagonize and inspire less murder, on sight or repute alone, in the hearts of fellow human beings. I expect good results from these measures, but not thrilling results; I do not honestly see thrilling results in the general picture. However, don't let this place too large a shadow on your hearts! Joys, consolations, and amusing compensations are manifold! Have you ever personally seen two such maddening, indomitable chaps as your absent sons? In the midst and heat of fury and gathering adversity, do our young lives not remain an unforgettable waltz? Indeed, perhaps, if you perversely use your imagination, perhaps the only waltz Ludwig van Beethoven ever wrote on his deathbed! I will stand without shame on this presumptuous thought. My God, what thunderous, thrilling liberties it is possible to take with the simple, misunderstood waltz if only man dares! In my whole life, I give you my word, I have never risen from bed in the morning without hearing two splendid taps of the baton in the distance! In addition to distant music, adventure and romance press us hard; absorbing interests and diversions kindly prevail; not once have I seen us unprotected, thank God, against half-heartedness. One has no business spitting at these hopeful blessings. Piled on top of all this good fortune, what else does one find? A capacity to make many wonderful friends in small numbers whom we will love passionately and guard from uninstructional harm until our lives are finished and who, in turn, will love us, too, and never let us down without very great regret, which is a lot better, more guerdoning, more humorous than being let down without any regret at all, be assured. I merely mention some of this painful crap to you, need I say, so that it will be available to your sweet memories either before or after our untimely departures; do not let it get you down in the meantime. Also on the hearty, revitalizing side of the ledger, bear in mind, with good cheer and amusement, that we were quite firmly obliged, as well as often dubiously privileged, to bring our creative genius with us from our previous appearances. One hesitates to suggest what we will do with it, but it is incessantly at our side, though slow as hell in development. It is insuperably strong after taps up here, I find, when one's ridiculous brains finally lie down and behave themselves and the entire, decent mind is at long last quiet and not racing around in the slightest; in that interlude, one watches it play in the magnificent light I mentioned to you privately last May, Bessie, when we were chatting back and forth affably in the kitchen. I am also watching the same heartening action take place in the mind of that magnificent person and companion you gave me for a brother. When the light mentioned above is insuperably strong, I go to sleep in absolute assurance that we, your son Buddy and I, are every bit as decent, foolish, and human as every single boy or counselor in this camp, quite tenderly and humorously equipped with the same likable, popular, heartbreaking blindnesses. My God, think of the

opportunities and thrusts that lie ahead when one knows without a shred of doubt how commonplace and normal one is at heart! With just a little steadfast devotion to uncommon beauty and passing rectitudes of the heart, combined with our dead certainty that we are as normal and human as anybody else, and knowing it is not just a question of sticking out our tongues, like other boys, during the first, beautiful snowfall of the year, who can prevent us from doing a little good in this appearance? Who, indeed, I say, provided we draw on all our resources and move as silently as possible "Silence! Go forth, but tell no man!" said the splendid Tsiang Samdup. Quite right, though very difficult and widely abhorred.

While I am quite frankly skimming over on the debit side, I ought to point out, regretfully, that the great percentage of your children, Bessie and Les, if you have not already repaired to the diversions of the lobby, have a fairly terrible capacity for experiencing pain that does not always properly belong to them. Sometimes this very pain has been shirked by a total stranger, perhaps a lazy chap in California or Louisiana, whom we have not even had the pleasure of meeting and exchanging words with. Speaking for your absent son Buddy as well as myself, I see no way to quit experiencing a little pain, here and there, till we have fulfilled our opportunities and obligations in the present, interesting, humorous bodies. Half the pain around, unfortunately, quite belongs to somebody else who either shirked it or did not know how to grasp it firmly by the handle! However, when we have fulfilled our opportunities and obligations. Dear Bessie and Les, I give you my word that we will depart in good conscience and humor for a change, which we have never entirely done in the past. Again speaking for your beloved son Buddy, who should be back any moment, I also give you my word of honor that one of us will be present at the other chap's departure for various reasons; it is quite in the cards, to the best of my knowledge. I am not painting a gloomy picture! This will not be tomorrow by a long shot! I personally will live at least as long as a well-preserved telephone pole, a generous matter of thirty (30) years or more, which is surely nothing to snicker at. Your son Buddy has even longer to go, you will freely rejoice to know. In the happy interim, Bessie, please ask Les to read these next remarks when or if he returns from the lobby or any other enjoyable place of his choice. Les, I beg you to be patient with us in your leisure time. Try your utmost not to mind too much and get very blue when we don't remind you very freely and movingly of other regular boys, perhaps boys from your own childhood. At frequent black moments, swiftly recall in your heart that we are exceedingly regular boys from the word go, merely ceasing to be very regular when something slightly important or crucial comes up. My God, I utterly refuse to wound you with further discussion of this kind, but I cannot honestly erase any of the previous, sweeping, tasteless remarks. I am afraid they must stand. Also, it would not be doing you a true favor if I did erase them. Largely through my own cheap softness and cowardice, you have twice before in previous appearances gently neglected to face up to similar issues; I have no idea if I could stand to see you repeat this pain. Postponed pain is among the most abominable kind to experience. For a pleasant change, here is a cheerful and quite uplifting bit of news to put under your belts. It quite takes my own personal breath away. Either this coming winter or the winter which briskly follows, you, Bessie, Les, Buddy, and the undersigned will all be going to one of the most pregnant and important parties that Buddy and I will ever attend, either in each other's harmonious company or quite alone. At this party, entirely in the night time, we will meet a man, very over weight, who will make us a slightly straightforward business and career offer at his leisure; it will involve our easy, charming prowess as singers and dancers, but this is very far from all it will involve. He, this corpulent man, will not too seriously change the regular, normal course of our childhood and early, amusing youth by this business offer, but I can assure you that

the surface upheaval will be quite enormous. However, that is only half my glimpse. Personally speaking, quite from a full heart, the other half is more after my own heart and comfort. The other half presents a stunning glimpse of Buddy, at a later date by innumerable years, quite bereft of my dubious, loving company, writing about this very party on a very large, jet-black, very moving, gorgeous typewriter. He is smoking a cigarette, occasionally clasping his hands and placing them on the top of his head in a thoughtful, exhausted manner. His hair is gray; he is older than you are now, Les! The veins in his hands are slightly prominent in the glimpse, so I have not mentioned the matter to him at all, partially considering his youthful prejudice against veins showing in poor adults' hands. So it goes. You would think this particular glimpse would pierce the casual witness's heart to the quick, disabling him utterly, so that he could not bring himself to discuss the glimpse in the least with his beloved, broadminded family. This is not exactly the case; it mostly makes me take an exceedingly deep breath as a simple, brisk measure against getting dizzy. It is his room that pierces me more than anything else. It is all his youthful dreams realized to the full! It has one of those beautiful windows in the ceiling that he has always, to my absolute knowledge, fervently admired from a splendid reader's distance! All round about him, in addition, are exquisite shelves to hold his books, equipment, tablets, sharp pencils, ebony, costly typewriter, and other stirring, personal effects. Oh, my God, he will be overjoyed when he sees that room, mark my words! It is one of the most smiling, comforting glimpses of my entire life and quite possibly with the least strings attached. In a reckless manner of speaking, I would far from object if that were practically the last glimpse of my life. However, those two, tantalizing, tiny portals in my mind I mentioned last year are still far from closed; another brisk year or so will probably turn the tide. If it were up to me, I would gladly shut the portals myself; in only three or four cases, such as the present one, is the nature of the glimpse worth the wear and tear on one's normalness and blessed peace of mind, as well as the unembarrassment of one's parents. I quite ask you, though, to imagine how marvelous it is to see this chap, your son Buddy, spring in a trice from a lad of five, who has already lost his heart to every pencil in the universe, into a mature, swarthy author! How I wish I could lie on a pleasant cloud in the distant future, perhaps with a good, firm, Northern Spy apple, and read every single word he writes about this eventful, pregnant party in the offing! The first thing I hope this gifted chap describes, as a quite mature, swarthy author, is the beautiful positions of the bodies in the living room before we leave the house on the night in question. The most beautiful thing in the world, in a fairly large family going out to a party or even a casual restaurant, is the easy going, impatient positions of all the bodies in the living room while everybody is waiting for some slowpoke to get ready! I mentally implore the touching, gray-haired author of the distant future to begin with the beautiful positions of the bodies in the living room; in my opinion, it is the most beautiful place to begin! I give you my word of honor that I find the entire glimpse of the evening quite a sober joy to behold, from start to finish. I find it magnificent how beautiful, loose ends find each other in the world if one only waits with decent patience, resilience, and quite blind strength. Les, if you have returned from the lobby, I know you toy honorably with disbelief in God or Providence, or which ever word you find less maddening or embarrassing, but I give you my word of honor, on this sultry, memorable day of my life, that one cannot even light a casual cigarette unless the artistic permission of the universe is freely given! Permission is too broad, but somebody's head must freely nod before the cigarette can be touched to the flame of the match. This is also too broad, I regret with my entire body to say. I am convinced God will kindly wear a human head, quite capable of nodding, for the benefit of some admirer who enjoys picturing Him that way, but I personally am not partial to His wearing a human head and would

perhaps turn on my heel and walk away if He put one on for my dubious benefit. This is an exaggeration, to be sure; I would be powerless to walk away from Him, of all people, even if my life depended on it. To my amusement, I am sitting here, quite suddenly, alone in the abandoned bungalow, crying or weeping, which ever you prefer to say. It will pass in a trice, I don't doubt but it is saddening and exhausting to realize in unguarded interludes what a young bore I am, seventy-five to eighty per cent of my life so far. I am freely saddling you, one and all, parent and child, with a very long, boring letter, quite filled to the brim with my stilted flow of words and thoughts. Speaking in my own behalf, it is less my fault than quickly meets the eye; among many, onerous things, it is all too easy for a boy of my dubious age and experience to fall easy prey to fustian, poor taste, and unwanted spurts of showing off. As God is my judge I am working on it, but it is a taxing struggle without a magnificent teacher I can turn to with absolute abandon and trust. If one has no magnificent teacher, one is obliged to install one in one's mind; it is a perilous thing to do if you were born cravenhearted, as I was. In my own, transparent defense, however, I have been lying here all day picturing your faces, Bessie and Les, combined with the haunting, fresh faces of the children, so the need to be in excessive touch with you is circumstantial. "Damn braces, bless relaxes!" cried the splendid William Blake. This is quite right, but it is not very easy on splendid families and nice people who get a little nervous or worn to a frazzle when their loving, eldest son and brother is damning braces all over the place.

The reason I am in bed is fairly amusing, and I have delayed all too long in mentioning it, but it does not consume my personal interest as much as it might. Yesterday was rife with one trivial misfortune after another. After breakfast, every Midget and Intermediate in the entire camp was obliged to go strawberrying, possibly the last dubious opportunity of the season. In the course of the morning, I wounded my damned leg. We drove miles and miles to where the strawberry patches were in a little, ramshackle, old-fashioned, maddening cart, quite fake, drawn by two horses where at least four were required. The cart had a ridiculous piece of iron sticking out of the hub of one of the wooden wheels, penetrating my thigh or femur a good inch and three-quarters or two inches as we were pushing the God forsaken cart out of the mud; it had rained cats and dogs previously, on the day before, making the road entirely crappy for a strawberry expedition. With a dash of maddening melodrama, I was rushed to the infirmary, possibly three miles to the rear, on the back of Mr. Happy's also God forsaken motorcycle. It had several fleeting, humorous moments. Quite in the first place, 'it is very hard for me, I regret to say, to be less than contemptuous and scathing around Mr. Happy personally. I am working on it, but that man brings to the fore supplies of hidden malice I thought I had worked out of my system years ago. In my own, flimsy defense, let me suggest that a man thirty years of age has no earthly business forcing small, useless boys to push a damnable, fake cart out of the mud where a veritable team of four or six, young, stalwart horses was really required. My malice shot forward like a snake. I told him on the motorcycle before we started back that Buddy and I, as he well knew, were experienced, fairly talented singers and dancers, like our parents, though still amateurs. I suggested that you would probably sue him, Les, for every dime he had in the event that I lost my ridiculous leg from infection, loss of blood, or gangrene. He pretended not to mind or heed this utter nonsense, which it was; nevertheless, it didn't do his driving any good, twice nearly killing us before we reached our destination. Although, from my point of view entirely, it was risible situation from the word go. Fortunately, I find that if a situation is funny or risible enough, I tend to bleed less profusely. On the other hand, while I personally enjoy attributing the stopping of the bleeding to the humor of the situation, it is possible that the damnable motorcycle seat was resting against a pressure point; my pressure points are usually quite springy, with a

pleasant pulse. What is beyond debate is that Mr. Happy was far from delighted to see the blood of a young camper, connected with him merely by enrollment and money, distributed on the back of his new motorcycle, seat, wheel, fender, and tire sides. There was no question of regarding it as his own; he would not even regard Mrs. Happy's blood as his own, so how would he feel a human connection with the blood of a strange child with prominent, quite ugly, ludicrous features?

At the infirmary, a comical shambles, though possibly clean as a whistle in the last analysis, Miss Culgerry cleaned the wound and bandaged me. She is a young girl and registered nurse, age unknown to me, far from gorgeous or lovely, but with a trim, superb body, which most of the counselors and one or two of the Seniors are trying very hard to make physical love to before they have to go back to college. It is the old story, I am afraid. She is a quiet person without any private resources or ability to make sound, first-hand decisions. Under the countless surfaces, she is confused and disastrously excited to be the only available, female beauty in the camp, Mrs. Happy being out of the picture. A sober, passive girl with a voice that sounds very competent in the infirmary, she gives the impression of always keeping her head in a ticklish situation, but it is merely a heartrending pose. In a cruel manner of speaking, this young woman may well have lost her head before she was born; it is certainly not on her shoulders at this stage of the game. Only her deceptive voice, which sounds quite cool and competent, in the mess hall as well as the infirmary, is keeping her out of the complete clutches of the counselors and Seniors mentioned above, who are all young, very healthy, very gross in safe numbers, and quite cruelly attentive to susceptible girls, particularly if they are not of classic beauty. The situation is alarming and worrisome, but my hands are tied. One knows at first glance that she has never discussed anything quite frankly with either child or adult acquaintances, so there is no approaching her in this matter; however, with another full month of camp life to go, I personally would not answer for her safety if she were my child. The question of virginity, to be sure, is a ticklish one; what criteria I have carefully read on the subject are quite open to question and heated debate, but that is not the point in question here. The point in question here is that this lass, Miss Culgerry, perhaps twenty-five years old, with no true, private head on her shoulders, coupled with a voice that deceptively sounds competent and full of excellent horse sense, is in no position to decide with intensive, personal honor and forethought about such an important matter as her own pretty maidenhead; this is my forward opinion. It is, of course, no better or more final, to my regret, than the forward opinion of any other person on the face of the earth. Without keeping up a merciless guard, day and night, the variety of forward opinions in this world could easily destroy one's sanity; I am not exaggerating; in the last analysis, how long can one carry on with rotten, unreliable criteria, very touching and human to examine, respect, and uphold, but entirely liable to go to pieces with a sharp change of company or passing scenery? You ask me many times in the course of my life, Bessie dear, why I drive myself like a humorous dog; in a fragmentary sense, that is exactly why I drive myself. Quite in the first place, I am the eldest boy in our personal family. Think how practical, pleasant, and thrilling it would be if one could open one's mouth, from time to time, and something other than sheer, forward, unreliable opinion came out! Unfortunately, a young jackass of the first water, I am weeping slightly as I make this remark. There is quite a bit of cause to weep, fortunately. If you jump to the conclusion that I regard one thing as personal opinion, such as the loss or preservation of a damsel's virginity, and some other thing as quite unassailable, respectable fact, you will be jumping to a very pleasant, easy going conclusion, but you will be bitterly wrong. Bitterly is too broad, but you will miss the terrible mark by a mile. I have never seen a quite unassailable, respectable fact that was not the

first cousin, at least, if not closer, to personal opinion. Let us say, if you can stomach a small, passing explanation, that you leisurely come home from a matinee performance, dear Bessie, and soberly ask the person who opened the door for you, myself, your crazy son, Seymour Glass, if the twins have had their bath yet. I will heartily reply yes. My firm, personal opinion is that I have personally deposited their wiry, elusive bodies in the tub and have personally insisted that they use the soap and not just get water all over the floor and generally squirt around. My young hands are even still wet from my offices! One is tempted to say that this is unassailable, respectable fact that the twins have been bathed, as desired! It is not! It is not even unassailable respectable fact that the twins are home! There is even quite a question of pressing doubt, in the last analysis, I daresay that any marvelous twins, with snappy tongues and amusing ears, have ever joined our family at any time in the past! For the dubious satisfaction of calling anything in this beautiful, maddening world an unassailable, respectable fact, we are quite firmly obliged, like good-humored prisoners, to fall back on the flimsy information offered in excellent faith by our eyes, hands, ears, and simple, heartrending brains. Do you call that a superb criterion? I do not! It is very touching, without a shadow of a doubt, but it is far, far from superb. It is utter, blind reliance on heartrending, personal agencies. You are familiar with the expression "go-between;" even the human brain is a charming go-between! I was born without any looming confidence in any go-between on the face of the earth, I am afraid, an unfortunate situation, to be sure, but I have no business failing to take a moment to tell you the cheerful truth of the matter. Here, however, we move quite closer to the crux of the constant turmoil in my ridiculous breast. While I have no confidence whatsoever in go-betweens, personal opinion, and unassailable, respectable facts, I am also, in my heart, exceedingly fond of them all; I am hopelessly touched to the quick at the bravery of every magnificent human being accepting this charming, flimsy information every heartrending moment of his life! My God, human beings are brave creatures! Every last, touching coward on the face of the earth is unspeakably, brave! Imagine accepting all these flimsy, personal agencies at charming, face value! Quite at the same time, to be sure, it is a vicious circle. I am sadly convinced that it would be a gentle, durable favor to everybody if someone broke through this vicious circle. One often wishes, however, there were not such a damn rush about it. One is never more separated from one's charming, loved ones than when one even ponders this delicate matter.

Unfortunately, there is a great rush about it in my own case; I am quite referring to the shortness of this appearance. What I am seeking, with the very ample but in some ways quite scrawny amount of time left in this appearance, is a solution to the problem that is both honorable and unheartless. Here, however, I drop the subject like a hot potato; I have merely scratched one of its myriad surfaces. Upon bandaging my leg very badly and amusingly, as well as keeping up a cool, falsely competent conversation that could drive one to drink if unsupported by a little self-control, Miss Culgerry sent me back to my bungalow, with an amusing crutch, to wait for the doctor to come from the town of Hapworth, where he lives and has his dubious practice. He, the doctor, arrived shortly after third mess, transporting me back to the infirmary to take eleven (11) stitches in my leg. A disagreeable problem arose in this connection, quite damnable. I was offered a touch of anesthesia, which I politely declined. Quite in the first place, way back on Mr. Happy's damnable motorcycle, I had snapped the communication of pain between the leg and the brain, sheerly for my own convenience. I had not used the method since the little accident involving my jawbone and lips last summer. One sometimes despairs that anything peculiar one learns will ever come in handy more than once or even just once, but it surely does, with a little patience; I have even used the clove knot on two occasions since we got

here, which I thought would surely go down the drain! When I politely declined the anesthesia, the doctor assumed I was showing off, Mr. Happy, at his side, sharing this maddening opinion. Like a born fool, which I can assure you I am, I foolishly demonstrated that I had snapped the communication of pain utterly. It would have been more foolish and quite offensive to tell them straight to their falsely patient faces that I prefer not to allow myself or any child in the family to give up his or her state of consciousness for flimsy reasons; until I get further word on the subject, the human state of consciousness is dubiously precious to me. After several minutes of heated, rotten debate with Mr. Happy, I exacted the doctor's consent to sew up the wound while I was pleasantly conscious. This is a ridiculously painful subject to you, dear Bessie, I know from previous experience, but I can assure you that it is a splendid convenience for me, from time to time, to have a face humorously speaking, that only a mother could love, with a foul nose and a chin as weak as water. If I had been a fairly handsome boy, with fairly charming features, I am quite convinced they would have made me take the anesthesia. This is nobody's fault, swiftly be assured; being human beings with personal opinions and brains, we are respondent to any shreds of beauty we can get; I myself am hopelessly respondent to it!

After my leg was sewed up, which Buddy was not permitted to watch, because of his age, or to remain at my side, I was briskly carried back to the bungalow and placed in my bunk. By a stroke of good fortune, all the beds in the infirmary were taken; several boys with high temperatures and myself are being allowed to stay in their own bungalows till they get some empty beds again. I consider the bed situation quite a windfall. This is the first utterly restful, leisurely, fulfilling day I have had, in several ways, since getting off the train, the case being exactly the same for Buddy, his having got permission from Mr. Happy to be absent from all formations throughout the day to attend to my wants. He nearly did not get permission, but Mr. Happy would rather give him permission, in the last analysis, than have to chat with him face to face, being far from completely at his ease in his presence. There is a wealth of humorous, bad blood between those two, partially stemming from Monday inspection. At Monday inspection, which I myself regard as an inexcusable and insulting imposition on every boy in this place, Mr. Happy came in the bungalow when we were standing at attention and started giving Buddy holy hell for not making his bed the way he, Mr. Happy, did when he was a doughboy and quite miraculously managed not to lose the whole, damnable war for us. He unleashed several, unnecessary insults at Buddy in my presence. Watching your son Buddy's face, quite able, I assure you, to fend for itself, I did not step in or interfere with these bullying insults. I have complete confidence in this young lad's ability to fend for himself at all times, and this moment was no exception. Quite coolly, right while Mr. Happy was bawling him out and embarrassing him in front of his bungalow mates and fellow campers, Buddy did that humorous business with his marvelous, expressive eyes, letting them slip away toward his pretty, black eyebrows, quite lifeless, white, and fairly spooky from the point of view of anyone who has never seen him do it. I doubt if Mr. Happy ever saw anybody do that before in his life. Alarmed and disconcerted, to say the least, he instantaneously went over and inspected Midge Immington's bunk instead, leaving the immediate vicinity entirely, even forgetting to give your self-reliant son any fresh demerits! Oh, my God, he is a resourceful, entertaining chap for five years of age! Gather up your pride, I beg you, and freely lavish it on this little boy! He should be in any minute now and will possibly be very eager to add a few lines of his own. In the interim, please do not ask me to prevail upon him to be nicer to Mr. Happy or to treat Mr. Happy with kid gloves; it is not a question of kid gloves; it is a question of knowing when to use his ingenuity to protect himself and his entire life's work from passing foes, short of doing them any serious harm.

Goodbye for a short interlude of days or hours! I will have the simple mercy and courtesy to finish writing to you; I can assure you, parent and child alike, that you are all too good and worthy to have such a consuming son, but I can't help it. We miss you far more than words can tell. There you have one of the few, worthwhile opportunities for the human tongue. Bessie, please attend to that little matter already discussed. Also, please, utterly collapse more between performances when you are on the road; among other reasons, which I have no right to discuss quite freely right now, when you are unrested and very tired is when you long most bitterly to quit being on the stage. I beseech you not to rush it. I beseech you to strike only when the iron we discussed at an earlier date is perfectly hot. Otherwise, if you forsake a remarkable career at the chipper age of 28, no matter how many illustrious years you already have under your belt, you will be tampering with fate out of season. In season, to be sure, fate can be dealt stunning blows, but out of season, regrettably, mistakes are quite usual and costly. Remember our sober and intimate discussion the day the new, beautiful stove arrived, as follows: Except when performing on the stage or engaged in fairly rough stuff during the span of hours I mentioned, please try very hard to breathe through the left nostril exclusively, at other times going back swiftly to the right nostril. To get the breath started in the proper nostril, to review slightly, warmly lock your fist in the opposing armpit, bearing down with friendly pressure, or simply lie down for several minutes on the desired nostril. I assure you again that there is no rule against doing all this with quite utter distaste but try, while the distaste is mounting high, to take your hat off to God, quite mentally, for the magnificent complications of the human body. Should it be so difficult to offer a brief, affectionate salute to this unfathomable artist? Is it not highly tempting to take off one's hat to someone who is both free to move in mysterious ways as well as in perfectly unmysterious ways? Oh, my God, this is some God we have! As I mentioned while we were taking our first pleasure in the new kitchen equipment, this nostril business can be abandoned in a trice at the very instant that one takes utter and complete reliance upon God with regard to breathing, seeing, hearing, and the other maddening functions; however, we are all merely human beings, damnably remiss about this kind of reliance at all undesperate hours and situations of the day. To make up for this neglect, quite touching as well as shoddy, to rely on God utterly, we must fall back on embarrassing, sensible devices of our own; however, they are not our own, which is another humorous, wondrous side of the matter; the embarrassing, sensible devices are His, too! This is merely my forward opinion in the matter, but it is far from merely impulsive.

If the rest of my letter seems a little too brisk and impersonal, please excuse it; I am going to devote the remainder of the letter to economy of words and phraseology, quite my weakest point in written construction. If I sound quite cold and brisk, remember it is for my own practice and that I am not feeling cold and brisk where you, parent and child alike, are concerned; far from it!

Lest it slip my mind during the curt remainder of the letter, I practically beg you on bended knee, Bessie, to sing in your own abandoned voice when making *Bambalina* with Les! I beg you not to take the safe, customary way and sound like you are sitting in a damn swing, in the center of the stage, bearing a charming parasol aloft; this comes very gently and naturally to somebody like Julia Sanderson, a pleasant performer, to be sure, but you are at heart a tempestuous, disturbing person, with deep springs of highly likable and touching coarseness and attractive passion! Les, if you are on the premises again, I beg you about something, too. Please strive very hard to do what I asked you to do the next time you make a record. Any words or hold notes that freely rhyme with "Try" or "my" or "by" are very tricky and dangerous in the

circumstances! Rough shoals 'ahead there! Except when you are singing in public or engaged in heated or angry discussion around the family hearth, your accent, I assure you, is no longer detectable, quite possibly, to anybody but myself or Buddy or Boo Boo or some person with the curse of unsparing ears. Please do not misunderstand these remarks. Personally, I am hopelessly attached to your accent; it is utterly moving. However, this is a question of how your accent sounds to myriad people with ears that have no time or inclination to listen with unprejudice; audiences in general find French, Irish, Scotch, Southern Dixie, Swedish, Yiddish, and several other accents comfortably diverting and likable in themselves, but a fine, undisguised Australian accent does not seem to lend itself quite freely to arousing affectionate regard; it is practically fool-proof against pleasing or diverting for its own sake. This is a sad state of affairs, with general stupidity and snobbery at its backbone, but should be faced at record time! If you can possibly do it without unhappiness, excessive strain, or the feeling that you are slighting or offending the decent, charming Australian people of your childhood, please keep your accent off the record, even though we, your relatives, enjoy it to the very hilt! Are you furious at me? Please don't get furious at me. My only selfish interest at heart in this grave matter is your own deep, torturous desire for a smash hit finally. With due apologies, I gratefully steer away from this pre-sumptuous subject; I love you, old man.

The following brisk messages are for the twins and Boo Boo. However, kindly ask Boo Boo to read them by herself, absolutely without help from her parents, which she is perfectly capable of doing! That marvelous, black-eyed girl can do it if she tries!

Boo Boo, practice your writing of complete words! I am not interested in the alphabet in itself! Do not fall back on conventional excuses! Do not take any more crafty refuge in your tender age, I beg you! Do not throw it in our face again that Martine Brady or Lotta Davilla or any other child of four of your acquaintance is not required to read and write fluently. I am not their mean brother; I am your mean brother. On several occasions, I have given you my word of honor that you are by nature an exhaustive reader, quite like Buddy and myself; if you were not, I would gladly throw my meanness to the wind, with good riddance! For an exhaustive reader, an early start with pen as well as eye is very desirable. On the immediate, credit side, think what untold pleasure you will give your astonishing brother and myself, temporarily in exile, with an occasional postcard! If you but knew how much we admire and relish your handwriting and unimaginable choice of words! Just print two or three words in your customary fashion on the card and then race it to the mailbox in the lobby or give it to a chambermaid of your choice. Also, my dear, darling, unforgettable Miss Beatrice Glass, please work harder on your manners and etiquette in private as well as in public. I am far less concerned about how you behave in public than how you behave when you are absolutely alone in a solitary room; when you accidentally look deep into a lonely mirror, let a girl with stunning tact, as well as flashing, black eyes, reflect!

Walt, we received your message from Bessie. We were delighted to get it, though it was frankly crap from the word go. We are all too damnably prone to take refuge in our tender ages. The age of three is no earthly, damn excuse for not doing the simple things we discussed in the taxi on the way to the train; I laugh hollowly down the years at the trite reports and customs firmly connected with the tender age of three! At the roots, you yourself are perhaps more capable of a healthy, hollow laugh at these prejudiced reports than anybody I have ever met! If it is too "damn hot" to practice as reported, then at least wear your tap shoes fairly constantly, such as at meals, on your feet under the table, or while strolling about the room or the lobby of which

ever hotel you are staying; however, keep them on your haunting, magical feet for at least 2 hours per day!

Waker, the same request, utterly mean and tyrannical, goes for juggling in this heat! If it is too damn hot for juggling, at least carry some of your favorite juggling objects, those of reasonable size, about with you in your pockets during the stifling day. I know Buddy would heartily join me in being content if you incomparable boys should decide, quite overnight, to quit your chosen careers utterly. However, you have not yet come to that decision; until you do, it is terribly necessary that you do not estrange yourselves utterly from your chosen career for more than 2 or 2½ hours in a row! Your tap shoes and juggling objects must be treated like unreasonable, jealous sweethearts that cannot bear any form of estrangement from your person for even 24 hours in a row. Your splendid, elder brother and I, God knows, are keeping our own hand in at this place, despite countless impediments and embarrassments. If this is bragging, let God have the simple, rudimentary courtesy to chastise me in the severest manner, but it is not dirty bragging; I am merely saying that both you boys can do anything your elder brothers can do; our own instability. I assure you, will match anybody's on earth!

Boo Boo, I am more than disgusted with myself for saying just one thing to you and having that one thing sound unfavorable and quite ugly. The partial truth is, as follows: Your manners and etiquette are getting more and more marvelous every day. If I slightly harp on one or two discrepancies, it is only because you love pleasant, ritzy things so much and have always preferred myself or Bessie to read you books with well-bred, aristocratic, uncrude children and adults in them, usually English persons with excellent manners on the surface, tasteful clothes and interiors, as well as unassailably high class in every visible respect. Oh, my God, you are a risible, amusing kid! You quite take your elder brothers' hearts by storm! You are one of a precious handful of persons I have met in my time, here and there, who probably have God's entire permission not to think anything out! It is a charming, magnificent blessing, and I have no intention of spitting in its beautiful face, but you are also stuck with me as your brother; I have no natural course but to assure you that if you grew up and knew in your heart that your excellent, ritzy manners in public were merely skin deep, leaving you free to be quite a dirty pig when alone in a room, with no one watching but yourself, you would be far from pleased; it would quite corrode you, in a subtle manner.

I will tyrannize no one any further! Goodbye for the interlude! We send you our naked hearts!

To my relief and utter amusement, I have another pad of paper that I didn't know I had, together with the pleasure of realizing that Griffith Hammersmith's clock, which Buddy kindly borrowed for my convenience, has not been wound up and is recording the time of yesterday or the sultry day before! I will be quite brisk about it, however. As well as yourselves, I assure you, my hand and finger are beginning to rebel against the length of this letter, begun shortly after dawn with only a tray or two of food for interruption, to my delight. My God, I love a decent stretch of leisure! Quite rare, as things go.

Les, while this opportunity is at hand, as well as quite before the damnable bugle quite blows for third mess-and confusion reigns, allow me to make one last request on behalf of both your eldest sons. I will be entirely brisk about it. Should my written construction, as follows, prove to be quite curt, pauciloquent, and too cold or chilly in general impression, merely realize I have already consumed too much of your time; I am now bending over backwards to save you further wear and tear on the nerves.

Your road schedule, old man, has not been separated from my ridiculous body since you entrusted it to me. At this very moment in time, I am placing it on the counterpane before me for careful examination. On the 19th of the current month, you and the intoxicating Mrs. Glass, demon of the cinder path and toast of a thousand continents, to give that cute devil her due, will leave the Cort Theatre, long may it flourish, and leave for New York to fill an engagement at the Albee, one reads, in Brooklyn. Would to God we, your son Buddy and I, could be with you and two other, quite unknown boys had this opportunity to stay off the streets and out of the stifling heat of trains, hotel rooms, and other cramped accommodations all summer. Here, free from banterous remarks, is my bare request. When you are comfortably settled back in Manhattan, please stop by at the library, customary annex branch, and offer our compliments, as well as our love, to the incomparable Miss Overman. At your leisure, please ask her to get in touch with Mr. Wilfred G.L. Fraser at the library council for us so that we may take him up on his friendly, spontaneous, possibly rash offer to send us any required reading material while we are away. I utterly dislike to ask Miss Overman, quite a busy person, to go to this trouble, but she has his personal address for the summer; he neglected to give it to us before we left, perhaps from humorous design! If I could avoid asking Miss Overman to step into this breach, I would gladly do so; I am not happy about taking advantage of her leisure time; always friendship in this world is being corrupted by countless strings attached and personal interests, quite a vicious dilemma, despite the pronounced, humorous side. However, perhaps you will briefly remind her that Mr. Fraser, quite in person, offered this uncommon service to us, quite out of the blue, flabbergasting us, I can assure you. He said he would send any requested books personally or on his authority, should he be out of town, no doubt assuming that friend or trusty relative would defray mailing costs. Without further sparring around, here is a rough list of books for your convenience and Miss Overman's that we would relish having passed in this dubious direction. Mr. Fraser did not mention how many books he would consent to send to us, so if I have taken too many liberties with quantity, please ask Miss Overman to step in and cut down the number, using her touching discretion. Tersely put, as follows:

Conversational Italian, by R.J. Abraham. He is a likable, exacting person, our good friend from the old days in Spanish.

Any unbigoted or bigoted books on God or merely religion, as written by persons whose last names begin with any letter after H; to stay on the safe side, please include H itself, though I think I have mostly exhausted it.

Any marvelous, very good, merely interesting, or regrettably mediocre poems that are not already too familiar and haunting to us, regardless of the poet's nationality. There is a decent list of exhausted poems in my drawer in N.Y. incorrectly marked athletic equipment, unless you did finally let the apartment go and put everything in cold storage at the last minute; you quite forgot to tell us in your correspondence and I neglected to ask you in the heat of the delicious phone call from the LaSalle.

The complete works again of Count Leo Tolstoy. This will be no inconvenience for Mr. Fraser; this will be an inconvenience for Miss Overman's cordial sister, also a damned beautifully self-reliant spinster, whom Miss Overman refers to, very touchingly, as her "baby sister," though past the flush of youth by many years. She, the younger Miss Overman, owns the Count's complete works and may quite consent to re-lend them to us, knowing by now that we take very passionate and suitable care of books entrusted by friends. Please accentuate, without rubbing any of these sensitive ladies the wrong way, not to send *Resurrection* or *The Kreutzer Sonata* or possibly even *The Cossacks* again, an intensive, second reading of these masterpieces

not being necessary or desired. Do not pass it along, as it is not entirely up their alley, but we particularly wish to remake the acquaintance of Stepan and Dolly Oblonsky, who quite captured our hearts, humanity, and amusement when last we met; these are characters, man and wife, in *Anna Karenina*, magnificent in entirety. To be sure, the young, thoughtful hero of the book is utterly absorbing, too, as well as his sweetheart and future wife, an adorable kid in the last analysis; however, they are very callow; we are much more in need of the company of a charming rogue at this place, with straightforward kindness in his heart and bowels.

The Gayatri Prayer, by unknown author, preferably with original, rolling words attached to English translation; utterly beautiful, sublime, and refreshing. Incidentally, here is an important matter for Boo Boo, lest I forget to include it. Boo Boo, my marvelous kid! Discard entirely the temporary prayer you asked me to give you before going to bed! If it takes your immediate fancy, substitute this new one, which quite gets around your objections to the word "God." There is no excusable law that says you have to use the word if it is currently a stumbling block. Try this, as follows: "I am a young child about to go to sleep, as usual. The word God is currently a thorn in my side, being habitually used and reversed, perhaps in superb faith, by two girl friends of mine, young Lotta Davilla and Marjorie Herzberg, whom I consider appreciably mean, as well as liars from the word go. I address the nameless hallmark, preferably without shape or ridiculous attributes, who has always been kind and charming enough to guide my destiny both between and during the splendid, touching use of human bodies. Dear hallmark, give me some decent, reasonable instructions for tomorrow, quite while I am sleeping. It is not necessary that I know what these instructions are, pending development of understanding, but I would be delighted and grateful to have them under my belt nevertheless. I will assume temporarily that these instructions will prove potent, effective, encouraging, and quite intensive, provided I hold my mind quite still and empty, in the manner suggested by my presumptuous, elder brother." At conclusion, say "Amen" or merely "Good night," which ever takes your fancy or strikes you as sincere and spontaneous. That is all I was able to think of on the train, but I tricked it away to pass on at my earliest convenience. However, use it only if you find it undistasteful! Tamper with it as freely and ardently as you choose! If it is distasteful or embarrassing, discard it without a particle of regret and wait till I get home and can freely reconsider the issue! Do not think me infallible! I am utterly fallible!

The list for Mr. Fraser now continues at random:

Don Quixote, by Cervantes, both volumes again if not too much trouble; this man is a genius beyond easy or cheap compare! I am hopeful that Miss Overman will send this personally and not Mr. Fraser personally, as he is quite unable to pass on to us a work of genius without personal comment and maddening evaluation and condescension, I am afraid. In tribute to Cervantes, I would prefer to receive these works in the mail without useless discussion and other needless crap. *Raja-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga*, two heartrending, handy, quite tiny volumes, perfect for the pockets of any average, mobile boys our age, by Vivekananda of India. He is one of the most exciting, original, and best equipped giants of this century I have ever run into; my personal sympathy for him will never be outgrown or exhausted as long as I live, mark my words; I would easily give ten years of my life, possibly more, if I could have shaken his hand or at least said a brisk, respectful hello to him on some busy street in Calcutta or elsewhere. He was fully acquainted with the lights I mentioned earlier, far in ore than I! One hopes that he would have not found me too worldly and sensual a person! This devilish thought often haunts me when his gigantic name passes through my mind; a very enigmatic and saddening experience; would to God there were a better footing between the unsensual and the sensual persons of this universe. I

have no stomach for gaps of that kind; I personally can't stand it, which is another looming sign of instability.

For first acquaintance or renewed acquaintance, as in all-size editions as possible of the following writers of genius or talent: Charles Dickens, either in blessed entirety or in any touching shape or form. My God, I salute you, Charles Dickens!

George Eliot; however, not in her entirety. Please leave this question to Miss Overman or Mr. Fraser to decide. As Miss Eliot is not too dear to my heart or mind in the last analysis, leaving the question to Miss Overman or Mr. Fraser also gives me a sorely needed chance to be courteous and respectful, as becomes my ridiculous age, without paying a very heavy price for it. This is a fairly disgusting thought, quite bordering on the calculating, but I can't help it. I am ashamed of it, but I am very worried by my inhumane attitude towards unreliable advice. I am striving very hard to find a course of action in a matter of this kind which is both humane and acceptable.

William Makepeace Thackeray, not in entirety. Please ask Miss Overman to let Mr. Fraser deal with this personally. No harm involved, mindful of the two books by William Makepeace Thackeray I have already read. As in the case of Miss Eliot, he is excellent, but I cannot take my hat off to him in utter gratitude, I find, so this is another good, disgusting chance to fall back on Mr. Fraser's personal taste. I am now exposing rotten weaknesses and calculations right in front of my beloved parents and young brothers and sister, I realize, but my hands are tied; also I have no excusable right to appear a stronger person or youth than I really am, which is not damnably strong, by any human taken!

Jane Austen, in entirety or in any shape or form, discounting *Pride and Prejudice*, which is already in possession. I will not disturb this incomparable girl's genius with dubious remarks; I have already hurt Miss Overman's feelings inexcusably by refusing to discuss this girl, but I lack even the slight decency to regret it very much. Quite in a pinch, I would be willing to meet somebody at Rosings, but I cannot enter into a discussion of a womanly genius this humorous, magnificent, and personal to me; I have made some feeble, human attempts, but nothing at all meritorious.

John Bunyan. If I am getting too curt or terse, please excuse it, but I am racing to a brisk conclusion of this letter. All too frankly, I did not give this man a fair chance when I was younger, finding him too unwilling to give a few personal weaknesses, such as sloth, greed, and many others, the benefit of a few prickly, quite torturous doubts; I personally have met dozens upon dozens of splendid, touching human beings on the road of life who enjoy sloth to the hilt, yet remain human beings one would turn to in need, as well as excellent, beneficial company for children, such as the slothful, delightful Herb Cowley, fired from one menial, theatrical job after another! Does the slothful Herb Cowley ever fail his friends in need? Are his humor and jolliness not a subtle support to passing strangers? Does John Bunyan think God has some maddening prejudice against taking these things into very pleasant consideration on Judgement Day, which, in my forward opinion, quite regularly occurs between human bodies? Upon re-reading John Bunyan this time, I am aiming to give his natural, touching genius more recognition and admiration, but his general attitude is a permanent thorn in my side, I am afraid. He is too damnably harsh for my taste. Here is where a decent, private re-reading of the touching, splendid Holy Bible comes in very handy, freely preserving one's precious sanity on a rainy day, the incomparable Jesus Christ freely suggesting, as follows: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Quite right; I do not find one thing unreasonable there, far from it; however, John Bunyan, a baptized Christian warrior, to be sure, seems to think the noble

Jesus Christ said, as follows: "Be ye therefore flawless, even as your Father which is in heaven is flawless!" My God, here is inaccuracy incarnate! Did anybody say anything about being flawless? Perfection is an absolutely different word, magnificently left hanging for the human being's kind benefit throughout the ages! That is what I call thrilling, sensible leeway. My God, I am frilly in favor of a little leeway or the damnable jig is tip! Fortunately, in my own forward opinion, based on the dubious information of the unreliable brain, the jig is never damnable and never up; when it maddeningly appears to be, it is merely time to rally one's magnificent forces again and review the issue, if necessary, quite tip to one's neck in blood or deceptive, ignorant sorrow, taking plenty of decent time to recall that even our magnificent God's perfection allows for a touching amount of maddening leeway, such as famines, untimely deaths, on the surface, of young children, lovely women and ladies, valiant, stubborn men, and countless other, quite shocking discrepancies in the opinion of the human brain. However, if I keep this tip, I will firmly decline to give this immortal author, John Bunyan, a quite decent re-reading this summer. I swiftly pass on to the next author on the disorderly list.

Warwick Deeping; not too hopeful, but strongly recommended by very nice, chance acquaintance at the main library. While the consequences are often quite hellish, I am absolutely and perhaps permanently against ignoring books recommended from the heart by very nice people and strangers; it is too risky and inhuman; also the consequences are often painful in a fairly charming way.

The Bronte sisters again; here are ravishing girls! Please bear in mind that Buddy was in the middle of *Villette*, a softly gripping book, when the time drew near to embark for camp; this zealous reader, as you know quite well, brooks no interruptions that are not entirely unavoidable! It may be remembered, as well, that his sensuality is awakening at a very early date; one is at a human loss, at moments, not to reach out to these doomed girls carnally. In the past, I personally never reached out to Charlotte in a carnal manner; however, in retrospect, her attractions are quite a damned pleasant surprise. *Chinese Materia Medica*, by Porter Smith; here is an ancient book, quite out of circulation, possibly unsound and annoying; however, I would like to go through it under the rose and, if worthy, give it to your magnificent son Buddy as a little surprise. You can easily have no idea how much unawakened knowledge of weeds and splendid flora this lad brought with him, principally in his spatulate fingers, from previous appearances; unless it interferes with his life's work, this unawakened knowledge must not go down the drain! I, his senior by two years, am his earnest, ignorant pupil in these matters! Quite apart from the delicious meals he has offered Griffith Hammersmith and myself he is absolutely powerless to pluck an innocent flower without examining and smelling its roots, dampening them with a little saliva to remove the soil; they are crying out to this boy, awaiting the return of his splendid ears! Unfortunately, the paltry number of books on this subject, usually English, are fraught with inaccuracy, wishful folly, and deplorable superstition, with gross exaggeration the reigning hallmark! Let us, his loving family, turn with some hope and good cheer to the wondrous Chinese, freely sharing with the noble Hindus a wide, open mind on the subject of the body, the human breath, and the staggering differences between the left and right sides of the body. This leaves some refreshing hope to go on, provided the author, Porter Smith, has given body and soul to the unlimited subject and is not another maddening, pretentious dabbler merely keen on making a pleasant niche for himself in the field, but do not let me castigate this fellow without a handsome, decent trial!

In convenient amounts, suitable for the wear and tear of camp life, please send the following Frenchmen, for practice or pure pleasure, depending upon the magnetism of the

individual French in an involved. In fairly large amounts, please send books by Victor Hugo, Gustave Flaubert, Honore' de Balzac or merely Honore-Balzac, as the latter freely gave himself the aristocratic "de" from a touching, humorous motive, quite unlicensed. The humorous lust for aristocracy in this world is unending! It is not too humorous in the last analysis, in my forward opinion. Some pleasant, rainy day, when you have the stomach for it, examine the bowels of any effective revolution since history began; deep in the heart of every outstanding reformer, if you do not find personal envy, jealousy, hunger for personal aristocracy, in a new, clever disguise, running a very close race with desire for more food and less poverty, I will gladly answer to God for this entire, cynical attitude. Unfortunately, I see no immediate solution to the situation.

In smaller amounts, also in French for practice or pure pleasure, diverse selections from the works of Guy de Maupassant, Anatole France, Martin Leppert, Eugene Sue. Please ask Miss Overman to ask Mr. Fraser not to insert any biographies of Guy de Maupassant by mistake or design, quite particularly those by Elise Suchard, Robert Kurz, and Leonard Beland Walker, which I have already read with untold pain and sorrow and do wish Buddy to read at such a tender age. As sensualists from the word go, I am afraid, we need every decent, thoroughgoing warning sign we can get on the subject of sensuality, but neither your son Buddy nor I have the slightest intention of dying by the phallus as surely as the sword; we fully intend to come to grips with the subject of sensuality, I give you my word of honor; however, I absolutely decline to accept Guy de Maupassant as a good illustration of abuse of sensuality, though it is very tempting. Had he not abused his male organ, he would have abused something else. I do not trust you, Monsieur de Maupassant! I do not trust you or any other monumental author who thrives, day in, day out, on lowly irony! My inexcusable ill will freely extends to you as well, Anatole France, great ironist! My brother and I, as well as myriad human readers, come to you in superb faith and you give us a slap in the face! If that is the best you can do, have the rudimentary courtesy to kill yourselves or kindly burn your magnificent pens!

Please forgive the above, deplorable outburst; it is sorely inexcusable, no apology being acceptable, but my attitude towards universal irony and slaps in the face is admittedly harsh; I am working on it, I assure you, but making fairly rotten progress. Let us change to a less hopeless topic, returning to the list. Please ask Miss Overman to send Marcel Proust, as a final Frenchman, in entirety. Buddy has not yet had the onslaught of meeting this uncomfortable, devastating genius of modern times, but is now swiftly approaching readiness, his tender age quite aside; I have already prepared him slightly, in the bowels of the main library, with many magnificent passages, such as the following, from the tantalizing *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, which this remarkable reader has preferred to remember by heart, as follows: "On ne trouve jamais aussi hauts qu'on avait esperes, une cathedrale, une vague dans la tempete, le bond d'un danseur." In a trice, this lad instantaneously translated every word to perfection except "vague," which quite means an ocean wave, as well as being captivated by the beauty of this incomparable, decadent genius, he should be quite prepared to take the rampant perversion and homosexuality in his stride; there is quite a bit of it going on here anyway, particularly in the Intermediates. I see no earthly point in approaching these matters with false, blind, kid gloves. However, do not, tinder any human condition, advance the impression to Mr. Fraser that I am offering any Proust book for Buddy's benefit. Very dangerous shoals ahead! Considering Buddy's youthful age, Mr. Fraser is not in the least above using things like this to amuse or greatly interest his friends in casual conversation, having a fairly violent passion for being the center of interest in conversational matters! Such an event, I assure you, would slowly work evil on us, quite undermining all our private, confidential training in behaving as inoffensive, regular

boys in quite dangerous, heartless, public places! Although entirely kind at heart, helpful, and educated widely, Mr. Fraser has quite a big mouth, be utterly assured. Vanity plays a small part in this; forfeit of individuality at an early age plays a much larger part. This thoughtful, widely educated man is unscrupulous about using an independent child as a conversational highlight, the sad, unrelenting factor being that good people who do not strive hard enough to uncover their own destinies and incessant responsibilities in life content themselves with parasitic occupations, feeding upon other chaps' lives to the marrow. Mr. Fraser, a damned charming person at frequent intervals, has my sympathy from the word go, but I absolutely decline to allow him to use my junior brother, as well as any other hopeful, secret genius of remarkably tender age, to serve as host fish to Mr. Fraser! Only harm without measure can come from this crap! At all costs, as long as humanly possible, let this young boy keep his precious shares in the divinely human state of nobodiness!

The list now continues at random.

The complete works, quite in full, of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, with the exception of any books that are not utterly concerned with Sherlock Holmes, such as *The White Company*. Oh, here is cause for mental frolic and amusement when I tell you what happened to me in this regard one day quite recently! I was quietly swimming in the lake during Aquatics Period, quite without a thought in my head, merely recalling sympathetically to myself the pleasant passion of Miss Constable, at the main library, for the great Goethe's works in full. At this quiet moment, a thought occurred to me which raised my eyebrows unmercifully! It was suddenly borne in upon me, utterly beyond dispute, that I love Sir Arthur Conan Doyle but do not love the great Goethe! As I darted idly through the water, it became crystal clear that it is far from an established fact that I am even demonstrably fond of the great Goethe, in my heart, while my love for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, via his contributions, is an absolute certainty! I have rarely ever had a more revealing incident in any body of water. I daresay I shall never get any closer to drowning in sheer gratitude for a passing portion of truth. Think for a stunning moment what this means! It means that every man, woman, and child over the age, let us say, of twenty-one or thirty, at the very outside, should never do anything extremely important or crucial in their life without first consulting a list of persons in the world, living or dead, whom he loves. Remember, I implore you, that he has no right whatever to include on this list anybody he merely admires quite to distraction! If the person or the person's contributions have not roused his love and unexplainable happiness or eternal warmth, that person must be ruthlessly severed from the list! There may be another list for that person, and quite a pleasant one, let us presume, but this list I have in mind is exclusively for love. My God, it could be the finest, most terrible, personal guard against deceit and lies both to oneself and to any friends or acquaintances in casual or heated conversation with oneself. I have already made quite a number of such lists in my leisure time, for private consultation, embracing many types of people on earth. As a very revealing example of where this can lead, and which I think you "ill enjoy to the hilt, who would you say casually is the only singer on my list whose voice is represented either on Victrola record or personal appearance? Enrico Caruso? I am quite afraid this is not the case. Excluding family members, whose voices have never failed to charm me, to be sure, the only singer I am utterly prepared to say I love his singing voice, without fear of lying or quite intelligently deceiving myself, is my incomparable friend Mr. Bubbles, of Buck & Bubbles, merely singing softly to himself in his dressing room next to yours in Cleveland! This is not to disparage Enrico Caruso or Al Jolson, but facts heartlessly remain facts! I cannot help it! If you make a terrible list of this kind, you are quite stuck with it. For my own part, I give you my word of honor that when I return to New York I

will never again leave my room for a moment without a very telling few of my lists on my person, saving a simple trip to the living room or bathroom. I do not know where it will all lead to, I can freely confess to you, but if it does not lead to more lies in the world, it is something. The worst it can do is to show that I am a stupid boy, quite without any impeccable taste in the last analysis, but this may not be exactly the case, thank God.

Moving rapidly along, kindly send any unflinching book on the World War, in its shameful, exploitive entirety, preferably unwritten by vainglorious or nostalgic veterans or enterprising journalists of slight ability or conscience. I would greatly appreciate anything not containing excellent photographs. The older one gets, the more inclined one is to trample on excellent photographs.

Please send me the following, choice, foul books, perhaps coupled together for convenient packaging, also that they may avoid contaminating any books by men or woman of genius, talent, or thrilling, modest scholarship: *Alexander*, by Alfred Erdonna, and *Origins and Speculations*, by Theo Acton Baum. Quite without exerting yourselves or my good friends at the library, please do your utmost to drop these in the earliest mail at your convenience. These are invaluable stupid books that I would like Buddy to have under his belt before entering school next year for the first time in this appearance. Do not trample too quickly on stupid books! One of the swiftest ways, though very enervating and torturous, to have a young, utterly competent boy like Buddy avoid shutting his eyes to daily stupidity and foulness in the world is to offer him an excellent, stupid, foul book. Perhaps in utter silence one can then say to him, avoiding emotional sorrow or rank fury in the voice, merely handing over the invaluable books on a silver platter: "Here, young man, are two books both of which are subtle, admirably unemotional, and unnoticeably rotten to the core. Both are written by distinguished, false scholars, men of condescension, exploitation, and quiet, personal ambition. I have personally finished reading their books with tears of shame and anger. Without another word, I give you two, godsent models of the feculent curse of intellectuality and smooth education running rampant without talent or penetrating humanity." I would not say a single, additional syllable to the young man in question. You may quite think this sounds very harsh again. It would be only foolish and humorous to deny it' it is very harsh. On the other side of the ledger, you may not know the dangers of these men. Let us clear the air momentarily by examining them with simple brevity, proceeding with Alfred Erdonna first. A professor at a leading university in England, he has written this biography of Alexander the Great in a leisurely, readable fashion, despite its size, frequently making references to his wife, also a distinguished professor at a leading university, and to his charming dog, Alexander, and his former, old professor, Professor Heeder, who also lived off Alexander the Great for a number of years. Between the two of them, they have made an excellent living off Alexander the Great, quite in their spare time, if not in monetary gain certainly in fame and prestige. Despite this, Alfred Erdonna treats Alexander the Great like just another charming dog in his damned possession! I am personally not crazy about Alexander the Great or any incurably, militant person, but how dare Alfred Erdonna finish his book quite giving you the subtle, unfair impression that he, Alfred Erdonna, is superior to Alexander the Great in the last analysis merely because he and his wife, and possibly dog, are in a very cozy position to exploit and patronize Alexander the Great! He is not even in the least bit grateful to Alexander the Great for having existed so that he, Alfred Erdonna, could have the privilege of quite sponging off him in a leisurely, distinguished way. I am not even taking this false, scholarly personage to task because he quite personally dislikes heroes and heroism from the word go, even devoting a chapter to Alexander and Napoleon, in similar capacities, to show what

harm and bloodful nonsense heroes have wrought upon the world. The germ of this is very sympathetic to me, in acknowledge frankness, but two things are necessary to write such a daring, unoriginal chapter. Surely it is worth a moment's casual discussion; I beg you to be patient and blindly affectionate with me till it is over! There is also a third thing necessary.

1. You are in a much stabler position to dislike heroes and heroism utterly if you yourself are quite equipped to do something heroic. If you are not equipped to do anything heroic, you may still enter the discussion honorably, but with terrible caution and reasonableness, very deliberately and painstakingly turning on every single light in your body, also perhaps redoubling your fervent prayers to God not to go astray in any cheap way.

2. You must have a model of the human brain handy for general reasons. If you do not have a model of the human brain handy, a peeled chestnut will do only too damn well! But it is quite necessary to see with your own eyes, in a matter of this kind, involving such matters as heroes and heroism, that the human brain is just a charming, likable, quite dissectible agency, without a shred of reliable ability to understand human history in full or what temporary role, heroic or unheroic, it is time to play with all one's heart and conscience.

3. He, Alfred Erdonna, freely acknowledges that Alexander the Great's personal teacher, when a lad, was Aristotle. Not once, at any decent time, does Alfred Erdonna sadly take Aristotle to task for failing to teach Alexander the Great to avoid becoming great! There is utterly no mention, in any book on this interesting subject I have ever read, that Aristotle ever even at least begged Alexander to accept only the mantle of accidental greatness and refuse, quite like excrement, if you will pardon me briefly, any other kind of greatness whatsoever.

I will gladly close the damnable subject here. My nerves are quite raw now; also I have quite forfeited the decent time I was going to give to Theo Acton Baum's dubious and very dangerous, untalented, coldhearted work of literature. However, to repeat, I will not answer for my peace of mind if Buddy is allowed to enter school and the long, utterly complicated road of formal education until he has had these perilous, conceited, utterly commonplace books under his belt.

Moving along quite at a trot now, humorously speaking, please send me any thoughtful books on human whirling or spinning. You will recall, quite with my undying, humorous sympathy, that at least three of your children, in sheer independence of each other, and utterly untaught, have picked up the delicate custom of spinning the body around with alarming speed, after which regrettably ostentatious experience the person who does the whirling can often, though not always, by any means, arrive at a decision or an impressive answer to a problem, usually quite sin all. The practice, to be sure, has been invaluable to me on more than one trivial occasion in the library, provided one can find a place unseen by the naked eye. To date, of course, I have discovered a few people spread widely throughout the world who have used this practice with success, even the touching Shakers, to a sin all extent. Also, there is an impressive rumor that St. Francis of Assisi, a marvelous person, once asked a fellow monk to do a little spinning when they were on an important crossroad with hesitation which direction to take. There, to be sure, you have the Byzantine influence on the Troubadours, but I am far from convinced that the practice can be limited to one corner of this thrilling globe. While I am very shortly going to give tip the practice for the rest of my life, leaving more responsibility on another portion of my mind, the fact quite remains that copious information on the subject will be very welcome, as the other children may, for personal reasons, prefer to continue the practice well into maturity, though I doubt it.

To continue and mercifully conclude this list, I would be thankful to read anything in English written by the tolerable Cheng brothers or anybody else passably gifted and heartrendingly ambitious who had the disagreeable luck to do any religious writing in China after the two geniuses of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse, not to mention Gautama Buddha! One need not approach Miss Overman or Mr. Fraser with kid gloves on this subject, as I have already broken the ice repeatedly, but delicacy of approach is still quite advisable! Neither Miss Overman nor Mr. Fraser has ever been even slightly bitten by the subject of God or essential chaos in the universe, therefore casting quite a cool, dissembling countenance on my consuming interest in such affairs. Their concern, thank God, is far from petty or unaffectionate, the distinguished Edgar Semple having told Mr. Fraser that I have the makings of a splendid American poet, which is quite true in the last analysis. They are quite fearful, one and all, that my consuming admiration for God, straight-forward and shapeless, will upset the delightful apple cart of my poetry; this is not stupid; there is always a slight, magnificent, utterly worthy risk that I will be a crashing failure from the word go, disappointing all my friends and loved ones, a very sober, rotten possibility that brings the usual fluid to my eyes as I bring the matter into the open. It would be quite a moving, humorous boon, to be sure, if one knew quite well, every single day of one's splendid current appearance, exactly where one's everlasting duty lies, obvious and concrete! Quite to my regret and secret delight, my glimpses are ludicrously helpless to aid me in such matters! While there is always a flimsy possibility that one's beloved, shapeless God will surprise one out of the blue with a charming, useful command, such as "Seymour Glass, do this," or "Seymour Glass, my young foolish son, do that," I utterly fail to warm up to this possibility. This is quite a gross exaggeration, to be sure. I am utterly warming up to the possibility when I am freely and deliciously pondering it, but I am also utterly and eternally abhorring it, from the very roots of my dubious soul! Vulgarly speaking, the whole possibility of getting charming, personal commands from God, quite shapeless or adorned with an impressive, charming beard, stinks to high heaven of sheer favoritism! Let God raise one human being up over another, lavishing handsome favors upon him, and the hour has struck to leave His charming service forever, and quite good riddance! This sounds very harsh, but I am an emotional youth, frankly mortal, with innumerable experiences under my belt of mortal favoritism; I cannot stand the sight of it; let God favor us all with charming, personal commands or none of us! If You have the stomach to read this letter, dear God, be assured that I am meaning what I say! Do not sprinkle any dubious sugar on my destiny! Do not favor me with charming, personal commands and magnificent short cuts! Do not ask me to join any elite organization of mortals that is not widely open to all and sundry! Recall quite fervently that I have felt equipped to love Your astonishing noble Son, Jesus Christ, on the acceptable basis that you did not play favorites with Him or give Him carte blanche throughout his appearance! Give me one, single inkling that You gave Him carte blanche and, I will regretfully wipe His name from the slim list of those human beings I respect without countless reservations, despite His many and diverse miracles, which were perhaps necessary in the general circumstance but remain a dubious feature, in my forward opinion, as well as a nasty stumbling block for decent, likable atheists, such as Leon Sundheim and Mickey Waters, the former an elevator operator at the Hotel Alamac, the latter a charming drifter without employment. Foolish tears are coursing down my face, to be sure; there is no decent alternative. It is humorous and kindly of you, Your Grace, to allow rue to remain absorbed in my own dubious methods, such as industrious absorption with the human heart and brain. My God, you are a hard one to figure out, thank God! I love you more than ever! Consider my dubious services everlastingly at your disposal!

I am freely resting for a moment, dear Les and Bessie and other loving victims of the above onslaught. Across the empty bungalow, through the view offered by the window above Tom Lantern's fortunate bunk, the afternoon sun is shining in a very moving manner, provided my brain is not merely shining in a very moving manner. With or without absolute proof, it is sometimes folly not to accept the happiness of which ever is shining.

I will conclude the interrupted list of books for Miss Overman and Mr. Fraser with a few, brisk strokes:

Please send anything on the colorful and greedy Medicis, as well as anything on the touching Transcendentalists, quite in our own backyard. Also send copies, preferably without exhibitionistic pencil marks on the page, of both the French edition and Mr. Cotton's translation of Montaigne's essays. There is a charming, shallow, delightful Frenchman! Let one's hat be doffed to any gifted, charming fellows; my God, they are rare and impressive!

Please send anything interesting on human civilization well before the Greeks, although quite after the list of civilizations in the pocket of my raincoat with the unfortunate gash in the shoulder, which Walt humorously declined to wear in public.

This is of unspeakable importance. Please send any books on the structure of the human heart that I have not read; a fairly compact list last lay in the top drawer of my chiffonnier, either beneath my handkerchiefs or in the vicinity of Buddy's guns. Unusual, accurate drawings of the heart are always welcome, as any well-meaning, crude likeness of this incomparable organ, the finest of the body, is a pleasure to see; however, drawings are not essential in the last analysis, merely covering the pure, physical characteristics, leaving out the uncharted, best parts entirely! Unfortunately, quite to one's eternal chagrin, the best parts can only be viewed at very odd, thrilling, unexpected seconds when one's lights are quite definitely turned on; without a healthy talent for drawing, which I utterly lack, one is at a terrible loss to share the view with one's intimate and interested acquaintances. This is an unpretty state of affairs, to say the least! The entire view of this magnificent organ, without compare in the human body, should be in the possession of everyone and not merely of dubious young fellows like the undersigned!

Conveniently on the subject of the body, seen or unseen by the naked eye, please send any book devoted exclusively to the formation of callus. It will be very difficult or impossible, so please do not ask Miss Overman or Mr. Fraser to strain. However, if a book on this compelling subject should be found, be assured that it will be consumed eagerly around here, particularly any discussion of callus that unites a broken, human bone while it is healing, its intelligence being quite staggering and delightful, quite knowing when to begin and cease, without intentional assistance from the brain of the injured person. Here is another magnificent accomplishment that is maddeningly attributed to "Mother Nature." With all quite due respect, I have been sick, for many years, of hearing her dubious name.

In February of this memorable year, I had the unspeakable pleasure of chatting back and forth, for a delicious quarter of an hour, with a handsome woman hailing from Czechoslovakia, a figure in somber costly clothes, yet with interesting, touching, dirty fingernails. The incident occurred in the main library, a month or so after the Honorable Louis Benford, in reply to my letter, swiftly and humorously made my dubious presence possible. Professing to be the mother of a young diplomat, which had a comfortable ring of truth to it, she softly introduced the subject of her favorite poet, Otakar Brezina, a Czech, urging me to read him. Perhaps Mr. Fraser can find one of his works for me, in English translation, I am afraid. The possibilities are quite hopeful, as this stunning woman, though very nervous and unbalanced in the last analysis, had a marvelous, lonely spark! Mr. Brezina has a stunning champion there! God bless ladies with costly, tasteful

clothes and touching, dirty fingernails that champion gifted, foreign poets and decorate the library in beautiful, melancholy fashion! My God, this universe is nothing to snicker at!

In conclusion, quite absolutely final, I would greatly appreciate it if you would ask Miss Overman to ask Mrs. Hunter, possibly on the phone if it is convenient, to please track down the January, 1842, issue of Dublin University Magazine, the January, 1866, issue of the Gentleman's Magazine, and the September, 1866, number of the North British Review, as all these unrecent magazines contain articles about a very dear friend of mine, purely by correspondence, in my last appearance, quite frankly, Sir William Rowan Hamilton! I am very seldom able to do this, which is quite a blessing in disguise, but I can still see his friendly, lonely, sociable face before me, at wide intervals! Do not, however, mention any of these personal connections to Miss Overman, I beg you! Her set of automatic revisions on this subject is perfectly normal; she is invariably taken aback with alarm and disappointment on the rare occurrences when I am damn foolish and thoughtless enough to introduce the unpopular subject of appearances. There is also another reason for not going into dubious details with her, as follows: It is, unfortunately, a subject that makes quite a rotten subject for casual, social conversation. Although Miss Overman does not generally use us, your son Buddy and myself, as dubious subjects of conversation to entertain her friends or associates, being an honorable lady and wont to consider other people's feelings and dubious positions, she is utterly incapable of withholding peculiar or slightly novel information from Mr. Fraser or any well-dressed, cultured gentleman with distinguished, white hair; they are her permanent weakness, being inclined to fall slightly in love with them if they are kind and attentive to her or use conversational persiflage with her, with or without sincerity. This is quite a gentle, humorous fault, to be sure, but it would be very expensive to indulge too freely. Please just ask her to phone Mrs. Hunter and see if the magazines in question can be tracked down without great inconvenience, mentioning no reasons, perhaps requesting in the same breath, quite casually, that she, Miss Overman, pass on to us any delightful light reading that she has enjoyed lately. This stinks to high heaven of rank duplicity, but her taste in light reading is also often delightful, so I regretfully recommend the ruse. I trust your discretion in this and all affairs completely, needless to say, Bessie sweetheart. Also we would appreciate it if you would casually slip Mr. and Mrs., Moon Mullins, and perhaps a few copies of Variety into a convenient envelope when you are done with them. Jesus, what a millstone, bore, and general nuisance I am becoming in your lives! No day passes that I am not mindful of my rotten, demanding traits of character. Also, quite by the way, I think I should warn you to warn Miss Overman that Mr. Fraser may well be vexed and quite floored at the number of books requested, though he himself failed to mention the maximum number he would be willing to send us while we were away. Please ask Miss Overman to impress upon him that we are both reading with increased, incredible rapidity every day of our lives and can return any very valuable books in a trice, where speed of return is essential and we can get stamps. Difficulties, I am afraid, will be myriad. He, Mr. Fraser, is really a very generous, kind man, with an astonishingly high tolerance for my rotten traits, but there is also a small catch in his generosity, as he likes to see the grateful recipients' faces in person when he does them a favor of this magnitude. This is entirely human and cannot be expected or uselessly desired to disappear from the earth overnight but please keep the warning under your belts anyway. In my private, humorous opinion, we will be very damn lucky if Mr. Fraser sends us as much as two or three books on the entire list! Oh, my God, there is a maddening, comical thought!

Guess who entered the bungalow with a broad smile on his face! Your son Buddy! Also known as W.G. Glass, the superb author! What an inexpugnable lad he is! He has obviously had

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a productive day's work! I wish to God you were all here, quite in the flesh, to see his stunning, appealing, slightly tanned face; in more ways than one, dear Bessie and Les, you are paying a very exorbitant price for our frivolous summer's enjoyments and recreations. Au revoir! Buddy joins me in every sincere wish for your continued health and happy existence in our prolonged absence. We remain,

Your loving sons and brothers,

Seymour and W.C. Glass;

united forever by spirit and blood and uncharted depths and chambers of the heart.

In my haste to bring this letter to a swift termination, as well as my joy to see your astounding son pop into the bungalow, following an absence of seven and one half hours, I am in danger of overlooking a small cluster of final requests, quite slight, let us hope. As already mentioned, the chances are blackly excellent that Mr. Fraser will fall into a pit of dejection upon receiving this list of books, utterly regretting his sociable, spontaneous offer to me; however, I may be doing him quite a grave injustice with this thought; in the hopeful event that I am, which I sadly doubt, please ask Miss Overman to remind him that this will be absolutely our last fling for 6 long months at the very least! With summer's glorious end, we will be devoting the remainder of this memorable year to dictionary consultation entirely; we will avoid even poetry during the critical period in the offing; this freely means that Mr. Fraser will not have the experience, more trouble than rewarding, of seeing our young, exasperating faces in any public library in Gotham for the entire, comfortable period of six, full months! Who will not be quite relieved to hear this, with the heartening exception of perhaps no one! Quite in connection with the 6 months just mentioned, I am freely asking you, as our beloved parents and brothers and sister, to issue a few, crisp, earnest prayers in our behalf. I am personally very hopeful that great layers of unnatural, affected, stilted fustian and rotten, disagreeable words will drop off my young body like flies during the crucial period to come! It is worth every effort, my future sentence construction quite hanging in the balance!

Please do not get annoyed with me, Bessie; however, here is my absolutely last word on the subject of retirement from the stage at an uncommonly early age. I beg you again not to do anything out of season. At least wait, quite patiently, till October and then keep your eyes very peeled for retirement opportunities; October could be very clean sailing! Also, lest I forget, Buddy requests that you be sure to send him some of those very big tablets, quite without lines, for his haunting stories. Absolutely do not send him the kind with lines, such as I am using up for this day of pleasant communication, as he despises them. Also, though I haven't dared to discuss the matter with him in a frank manner, I think he would enjoy it very much if you sent him middle bunny, having lost big bunny when the porter on the train made the bed in the morning; please, however, do not refer to this matter in your future correspondence, merely placing middle bunny silently in a convenient package, perhaps an empty shoe box or container, and dispatching it in the mail. I know I can leave this or any other matter quite to your discretion, Bessie; my God, you are as admirable as you are lovable! As well as not sending him any more tablets with lines for his stories, also absolutely do not send him any tablets with very flimsy paper, such as onion skin, as he merely drops this kind in the garbage can for general disposal outside the bungalow. This is wasteful, to be sure, but I would appreciate it if you did not ask me to step in a delicate matter of this kind. I am hesitant to say that certain kinds of waste do not offend me; indeed, certain kinds of waste tend to thrill me to the marrow. Also worth keeping in mind, it is this chap's leonine devotion to his literary implements, I give you my word of honor, that will be

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the eventual cause of his utter release, with honor and happiness, from this enchanting vale of tears, laughter, redeeming human love, affection, and courtesy.

With 50,000 additional kisses from the two looming pests of Bungalow 7 who love you,

Most cordially,
S.G.