



TARTU STATE UNIVERSITY

A COLLECTION OF MODERN SHORT STORIES

**Compiled by
A. Kriit**

TARTU 1973

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The present collection of modern short stories is meant for senior students of English. It provides material for either additional home reading or for developing speech habits in class. As the collection includes short stories by various English and American authors it can also be used for the purpose of stylistic analysis in classes of stylistics.

A. K.

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THE MUSIC ON THE HILL

H.H. Munro ('Saki') (1870-1916)

Sylvia Seltoun ate her breakfast in the morning-room at Yessney with a pleasant sense of ultimate victory, such as a fervent Ironside might have permitted himself on the morrow of Worcester fight. She was scarcely pugnacious by temperament, but belonged to that more successful class of fighters who are pugnacious by circumstance. Fate had willed that her life should be occupied with a series of small struggles, usually with the odds slightly against her, and usually she had just managed to come through winning. And now she felt that she had brought her hardest and certainly her most important struggles to a successful issue. To have married Mortimer Seltoun, 'Dead Mortimer' as his more intimate enemies called him, in the teeth of the cold hostility of his family, and in spite of his unaffected indifference to women, was indeed an achievement that had needed some determination and adroitness to carry through; yesterday she had brought her victory to its concluding stage by wrenching her husband away from Town and its group of satellite watering-places and 'settling him down', in the vocabulary of her kind, in this remote wood-girt manor farm which was his country home.

'You will never get Mortimer to go,' his mother had said carpingly, 'but if he once goes he'll stay; Yessney throws almost as much spell over him as Town does. One can understand what holds him to Town, but Yessney -' and the dowager had shrugged her shoulders.

There was a sombre almost savage wildness about Yessney that was certainly not likely to appeal to town-bred tastes, and Sylvia, notwithstanding her name, was accustomed to nothing much more sylvan than 'leafy Kensington'. She looked on the country as something excellent and wholesome in its

way, which was apt to become troublesome if you encouraged it overmuch. Distrust of town-life had been a new thing with her, born of her marriage with Mortimer, and she had watched with satisfaction the gradual fading of what she called 'the Jermyn-Street-look' in his eyes as the woods and heather of Yessney had closed in on them yesternight. Her will-power and strategy had prevailed; Mortimer would stay.

Outside the morning-room windows was a triangular slope of turf, which the indulgent might call a lawn, and beyond its low hedge of neglected fuchsia bushes a steeper slope of heather and bracken dropped down into cavernous combs overgrown with oak and yew. In its wild open savagery there seemed a stealthy linking of the joy of life with the terror of unseen things. Sylvia smiled complacently as she gazed with a School-of-Art appreciation at the landscape, and then of a sudden she almost shuddered.

'It is very wild,' she said to Mortimer, who had joined her; 'one could almost think that in such a place the worship of Pan had never quite died out.'

'The worship of Pan never has died out,' said Mortimer. 'Other newer gods have drawn aside his votaries from time to time, but he is the Nature-God to whom all must come back at last. He has been called the Father of all the Gods, but most of his children have been stillborn.'

Sylvia was religious in an honest, vaguely devotional kind of way, and did not like to hear her beliefs spoken of as mere aftergrowths, but it was at least something new and hopeful to hear Dead Mortimer speak with such energy and conviction on any subject.

'You don't really believe in Pan?' she asked incredulously.

'I've been a fool in most things,' said Mortimer quietly, but I'm not such a fool as not to believe in Pan when I'm down here. And if you're wise you won't disbelieve in him too boastfully while you're in his country.'

It was not till a week later, when Sylvia had exhausted the attractions of the woodland walks round Yessney, that she ventured on a tour of inspection of the farm buildings. A farm-yard suggested in her mind a scene of cheerful bustle, with churns and flails and smiling dairy-maids, and teams of horses drinking knee-deep in duck-crowded ponds. As she wandered among the gaunt grey buildings of Yessney manor farm her first impression was one of crushing stillness and desolation, as though she had happened on some lone deserted homestead long given over to owls and cobwebs; then came a sense of furtive watchful hostility, the same shadow of unseen things that seemed to lurk in the wooded combs and coppices. From behind heavy doors and shuttered windows came the restless stamp of hoof or rasp of chain halter, and at times a muffled bellow from some stalled beast. From a distant corner a shaggy dog watched her with intent unfriendly eyes; as she drew near it slipped quietly into its kennel, and slipped out again as noisily when she had passed by. A few hens, questing for food under a rick, stole away under a gate at her approach. Sylvia felt that if she had come across any human beings in this wilderness of barn and byre they would have fled wraith-like from her gaze. At last, turning a corner quickly, she came upon a living thing that did not fly from her. Astretch in a pool of mud was an enormous sow, gigantic beyond the town-woman's wildest computation of swine-flesh, and speedily alert to resent and if necessary repel the unwonted intrusion. It was Sylvia's turn to make an unabtrusive retreat. As she threaded her way past rickyards and cowsheds and long blank walls, she started suddenly at a strange sound - the echo of a boy's laughter, golden and equivocal. Jan, the only boy employed on the farm, a tow-headed, wizen-faced yokel, was visibly at work on a potato clearing half-way up the nearest hillside, and Mortimer, when questioned, knew of no other probable or possible beggetter of the hidden mockery that had ambushed Sylvia's re-

treat. The memory of that untraceable echo was added to her other impressions of a furtive sinister 'something' that hung around Yessney.

Of Mortimer she saw very little; farm and woods and trout-streams seemed to swallow him up from dawn to dusk. Once, following the direction she had seen him take in the morning, she came to an open space in a nut copse, further shut in by huge yew trees, in the centre of which stood a stone pedestal surmounted by a small bronze figure of a youthful Pan. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, but her attention was chiefly held by the fact that a newly cut bunch of grapes had been placed as an offering at its feet. Grapes were none too plentiful at the manor house, and Sylvia snatched the bunch angrily from the pedestal. Contemptuous annoyance dominated her thoughts as she strolled slowly homeward, and then gave way to a sharp feeling of something that was very near fright; across a thick tangle of undergrowth a boy's face was scowling at her, brown and beautiful, with unutterably evil eyes. It was a lonely pathway, all pathways round Yessney were lonely for the matter of fact, and she sped forward without waiting to give a closer scrutiny to this sudden apparition. It was not until she had reached the house that she discovered that she had dropped the bunch of grapes in her flight.

'I saw a youth in the wood to-day,' she told Mortimer that evening, 'brown-faced and rather handsome, but a scoundrel to look at. A gipsy lad, I suppose.'

'A reasonable theory,' said Mortimer. 'only there aren't any gipsies in these parts at present.'

'Then who was he?' asked Sylvia, and as Mortimer appeared to have no theory of his own, she passed on to recount her finding of the votive offering.

'I suppose it was your doing,' she observed; 'It's a harmless piece of lunacy, but people would think you dreadfully silly if they knew of it.'

'Did you meddle with it in any way?' asked Mortimer.

'I - I threw the grapes away. It seemed so silly,' said Sylvia, watching Mortimer's impassive face for a sign of annoyance.

'I don't think you were wise to do that,' he said reflectively. 'I've heard it said that the Wood Gods are rather horrible to those who molest them.'

'Horrible perhaps to those that believe in them, but you see I don't.' retorted Sylvia.

'All the same,' said Mortimer in his even, dispassionate tone, 'I should avoid the woods and orchards if I were you, and give a wide berth to the horned beasts on the farm.'

It was all nonsense, of course, but in that lonely wood-girt spot nonsense seemed able to rear a bastard brood of uneasiness.

'Mortimer,' said Sylvia suddenly, 'I think we will go back to Town some time soon.'

Her victory had not been so complete as she had supposed; it had carried her on to ground that she was already anxious to quit.

'I don't think you will ever go back to Town,' said Mortimer. He seemed to be paraphrasing his mother's prediction as to himself.

Sylvia noted with dissatisfaction that the course of her next afternoon's ramble took her instinctively clear of the network of woods. As to the horned cattle, Mortimer's warning was scarcely needed, for she had always regarded them as of doubtful neutrality at the best: her imagination unsexed the most matronly dairy cows and turned them into bulls liable to 'see red' at any moment. The ram who fed in the narrow paddock below the orchards she had adjudged, after ample and cautious probation, to be of docile temper; to-day, however, she decided to leave his docility untested, for the usually tranquil beast was roaming with every sign of restlessness from corner to corner of his meadow. A low, fitful piping, as of some reedy flute, was coming from the depth of a neighbouring copse, and there seemed to be

some subtle connection between the animal's restless pacing and the wild music from the wood. Sylvia turned her steps in an upward direction and climbed the heather-clad slopes that stretched in rolling shoulders high above Yessney. She had left the piping notes behind her, but across the wooded combs at her feet the wind brought her another kind of music, the straining bay of hounds in full chase. Yessney was just on the outskirts of the Devon-and-Somerset country, and the hunted deer sometimes came that way. Sylvia could presently see a dark body, breasting hill after hill, and sinking again and again out of sight as he crossed the combs, while behind him steadily swelled that relentless chorus, and she grew tense with the excited sympathy that one feels for any hunted thing in whose capture one is not directly interested. And at last he broke through the outermost line of oak scrub and fern and stood panting in the open, a fat September stag carrying a well-furnished head. His obvious course was to drop down to the brown pools of Undercombe, and thence make his way towards the red deer's favourite sanctuary, the sea. To Sylvia's surprise, however, he turned his head to the upland slope and came lumbering resolutely onward over the heather. 'It will be dreadful,' she thought, 'the hounds will pull him down under my very eyes.' But the music of the pack seemed to have died away for a moment, and in its place she heard again that wild piping, which rose now on this side, now on that, as though urging the failing stag to a final effort. Sylvia stood well aside from his path, half hidden in a thick growth of whortle bushes, and watched him swing stiffly upward, his flanks dark with sweat, the coarse hair on his neck showing light by contrast. The pipe music shrilled suddenly around her, seeming to come from the bushes at her very feet, and at the same moment the great beast slewed round and bore directly down upon her. In an instant her pity for the hunted animal was changed to wild terror at her own danger; the thick heather roots mocked her scrambling efforts at flight,

and she looked frantically downward for a glimpse of on-coming hounds. The huge antler spikes were within a few yards of her, and in a flash of numbing fear she remembered Mortimer's warning, to beware of horned beasts on the farm. And then with a quick throb of joy she saw that she was not alone; a human figure stood a few paces aside, knee-deep in the whortle bushes.

'Drive it off!' she shrieked. But the figure made no answering movement.

The antlers drove straight at her breast, the acrid smell of the hunted animal was in her nostrils, but her eyes were filled with the horror of something she saw other than her oncoming death. And in her ears rang the echo of a boy's laughter, golden and equivocal.

THE POET

W. Somerset Maugham (1876-1965)

I am not much interested in the celebrated and I have never had patience with the passion that afflicts so many to shake hands with the great ones of the earth. When it is proposed to me to meet some person distinguished above his fellows by his rank or his attainments, I seek for a civil excuse that may enable me to avoid the honour; and when my friend Diego Torre suggested giving me an introduction to Santa Ana I declined. But for once the excuse I made was sincere; Santa Ana was not only a great poet but also a romantic figure and it would have amused me to see in his decrepitude a man whose adventures (in Spain at least) were legendary; but I knew that he was old and ill and I could not believe that it would be anything but a nuisance to him to meet a stranger and foreigner. Caliste de Santa Ana was the last descendant of the Grand School; in a world unsympathetic to Byronism he had led a Byronic existence and he had narrated his hazardous life in a series of poems that had brought him a fame unknown to his contemporaries. I am no judge of their value, for I read them first when I was three-and-twenty and then was enraptured by them; they had a passion, a heroic arrogance and a multi-coloured vitality that swept me off my feet, and to this day, so intermingled are those ringing lines and haunting cadences with the charming memories of my youth, I cannot read them without a beating heart. I am inclined to think that Caliste de Santa Ana deserves the reputation he enjoys among the Spanish-speaking peoples. In those days his verses were on the lips of all young men and my friends would talk to me endlessly of his wild ways, his vehement speeches (for he was a politician as well as a poet), his incisive wit, and his amours. He was a rebel and sometimes an outlaw, daring and adven-

turous; but above all he was a lover. We knew all about his passion for this great actress or that divine singer - had we not read till we knew them by heart the burning sonnets in which he described his love, his anguish, his wrath - and we were aware that an infanta of Spain, the proudest descendant of the Bourbons, having yielded to his entreaties, had taken the veil when he ceased to love her. When the Philips, her royal ancestors, tired of a mistress she entered a convent, for it was unfitting that one whom the King had loved should be loved by another, and was not Caliste de Santa Ana greater than any earthly king? We applauded the lady's romantic gesture; it was creditable to her and flattering to our poet.

But all this took place many years ago and for a quarter of a century Don Caliste, disdainfully withdrawing from a world that had nothing more to offer, had lived in seclusion in his native town of Eciija. It was when I announced my intention of going there (I had been spending a week or two in Seville) not because of him, but because it is a charming little Andalusian town with associations that endear it to me, that Diego Torre offered me this introduction. It appeared that Don Caliste allowed the younger men of letters occasionally to visit him and now and then would talk to them with the fire that electrified his hearers in the great days of his prime.

'What does he look like now?' I asked.

'Magnificent.'

'Have you a photograph of him?'

'I wish I had. He has refused to face the camera since he was thirty-five. He says he does not wish posterity to know him other than young.'

I confess that I found this suggestion of vanity not a little touching. I knew that in early manhood he was of extraordinary beauty, and that moving sonnet of his written when he grew conscious that youth had forever left him shows with what a bitter and sardonic pang he must have

watched the passing of those looks that had been so fantastically admired.

But I refused my friend's offer; I was quite satisfied to read once more the poems I had known so well and for the rest I preferred to wander about the silent and sunswept streets of Ecija in freedom. It was with some consternation therefore that on the evening of my arrival I received a note from the great man himself. Diego Torre had written to him of my visit, he said, and it would give him great pleasure if I would call on him at eleven next morning. In the circumstances there was nothing for me to do but to present myself at his house at the appointed hour.

My hotel was in the Plaza and on that spring morning it was animated, but as soon as I left it I might have walked in a deserted city. The streets, the tortuous white streets, were empty but for a woman in black now and then who returned with measured steps from her devotions. Ecija is a town of churches and you can seldom go far without seeing a crumbling façade or a tower in which storks have built their nests. Once I paused to watch a string of little donkeys pass by. Their red caparisons were faded and they carried I know not what in their panniers. But Ecija has been a place of consequence in its day and many of these white houses have gateways of stone surmounted by imposing coats of arms, for to this remote spot flowed the riches of the New World and adventurers who had gathered wealth in the Americas spent here their declining years. It was in one of these houses that Don Caliste lived and as I stood at the *r e j a* after pulling the bell, I was pleased to think that he lived in such a fitting style. There was a dilapidated grandeur about the massive gateway that suited my impression of the flamboyant poet. Though I heard the bell peal through the house no one answered it and I rang a second and then a third time: at last an old woman with a heavy moustache came to the gate.

'What do you want?' she said.

She had fine black eyes, but a sullen look, and I supposed that it was she who took care of the old man. I gave her my card.

'I have an appointment with your master.'

She opened the iron gateway and bade me enter. Asking me to wait she left me and went upstairs. The patio was pleasantly cool after the street. Its proportions were noble and you surmised that it had been built by some follower of the conquistadores; but the paint was tarnished, the tiles on the floor broken, and here and there great flakes of plaster had fallen away. There was about everything an air of poverty but not of squalor. I knew that Don Caliste was poor. Money had come to him easily at times but he had never attached any importance to it and had spent it profusely. It was plain that he lived now in a penury that he disdained to notice. In the middle of the patio was a table with a rocking-chair on each side of it, and on the table newspapers a fortnight old. I wondered what dreams occupied his fancy as he sat there on the warm summer nights, smoking cigarettes. On the walls under the colonnade were Spanish pictures, dark and bad, and here and there stood an ancient dusty *bargueno* and on it a mended lustre plate. By the side of a door hung a pair of old pistols, and I had a pleasant fancy that they were the weapons he had used when in the most celebrated of his many duels, for the sake of Pepa Montanez the dancer (now, I suppose, a toothless and raddled hag), he had killed the Duke of Dos Hermanos.

The scene, with its associations which I vaguely divined, so aptly fitted the romantic poet that I was overcome by the spirit of the place. Its noble indigence surrounded him with a glory as great as the magnificence of his youth; in him too there was the spirit of the old conquistadores, and it was becoming that he should finish his famous life in that ruined and magnificent house. Thus surely should a poet live and die. I had arrived cool enough and even somewhat bored at the prospect of my meet-

ing, but now I began to grow a trifle nervous. I lit a cigarette. I had come at the time appointed and wondered what detained the old man. The silence was strangely disturbing. Ghosts of the past thronged the silent patio and an age dead and gone gained a sort of shadowy life for me. The men of that day had a passion and a wildness of spirit that are gone out of the world for ever. We are no longer capable of their reckless deeds or their theatrical heroics.

I heard a sound and my heart beat quickly. I was excited now and when at last I saw him coming slowly down the stairs I caught my breath. He held my card in his hand. He was a tall old man and exceedingly thin, with a skin the colour of old ivory; his hair was abundant and white, but his bushy eyebrows were dark still; they made his great eyes flash with a more sombre fire. It was wonderful that at his age those black eyes should still preserve their brilliance. His nose was aquiline, his mouth close-set. His unsmiling eyes rested on me as he approached and there was in them a look of cool appraisal. He was dressed in black and in one hand held a broad-brimmed hat. There was in his bearing assurance and dignity. He was as I should have wished him to be and as I watched him I understood how he had swayed men's minds and touched their hearts. He was every inch a poet.

He had reached the patio and came slowly towards me. He had really the eyes of an eagle. It seemed to me a tremendous moment, for there he stood, the heir of the great old Spanish poets, the magnificent Herrera, the nostalgic and moving Fray Luis, Juan de la Cruz, the mystic, and the crabbed and obscure Gongora. He was the last of that long line and he trod in their steps not unworthily. Strangely in my heart sang the lovely and tender song which is the most famous of Don Caliste's lyrics.

I was abashed. It was fortunate for me that I had prepared beforehand the phrases with which I meant to greet him.

'It is a wonderful honour, Maestro, for a foreigner such as I to make the acquaintance of so great a poet.'

A flicker of amusement passed through those piercing eyes and a smile for an instant curved the lines of that stern mouth.

'I am not a poet, Senor, but a bristle merchant. You have made a mistake, Don Caliste lives next door.'

I had come to the wrong house.

THE HAPPY MAN

It is a dangerous thing to order the lives of others and I have often wondered at the self-confidence of politicians, reformers and suchlike who are prepared to force upon their fellows measures that must alter their manners, habits, and points of view. I have always hesitated to give advice, for how can one advise another how to act unless one knows that other as well as one knows oneself? Heaven knows, I know little enough of myself: I know nothing of others. We can only guess at the thoughts and emotions of our neighbours. Each one of us is a prisoner in a solitary tower and he communicates with the other prisoners, who form mankind, by conventional signs that have not quite the same meaning for them as for himself. And life, unfortunately, is something that you can lead but once; mistakes are often irreparable, and who am I that I should tell this one and that how he should lead it? Life is a difficult business and I have found it hard enough to make my own a complete and rounded thing; I have not been tempted to teach my neighbour what he should do with his. But there are men who flounder at the journey's start, the way before them is confused and hazardous, and on occasion, however, unwillingly, I have been forced to point the finger of fate. Sometimes men have said to me, what shall I do with my life? and I have seen myself for a moment wrapped in the dark cloak of Destiny.

I was a young man and I lived in a modest apartment in London near Victoria Station. Late one afternoon, when I was beginning to think that I had worked enough for that day, I heard a ring at the bell. I opened the door to a total stranger. He asked me my name; I told him. He asked if he might come in.

'Certainly.'

I led him into my sitting-room and begged him to sit down. He seemed a trifle embarrassed. I offered him a cigarette and he had some difficulty in lighting it without letting go of his hat. When he had satisfactorily achieved this feat I asked him if I should not put it on a chair for him. He quickly did this and while doing it dropped his umbrella.

'I hope you don't mind my coming to see you like this,' he said. 'My name is Stephens and I am a doctor. You're in the medical, I believe?'

'Yes, but I don't practise.'

'No, I know. I've just read a book of yours about Spain and I wanted to ask you about it.'

'It's not a very good book, I'm afraid.'

'The fact remains that you know something about Spain and there's no one else I know who does. And I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me some information.'

'I shall be very glad.'

He was silent for a moment. He reached out for his hat and holding it in one hand absent-mindedly stroked it with the other. I surmised that it gave him confidence.

'I hope you won't think it very odd for a perfect stranger to talk to you like this.' He gave an apologetic laugh. 'I'm not going to tell you the story of my life.'

When people say this to me I always know that it is precisely what they are going to do. I do not mind. In fact I rather like it.

'I was brought up by two old aunts. I've never been anywhere. I've never done anything. I've been married for six years. I have no children. I'm a medical officer at the Camberwell Infirmary. I can't stick it any more.'

There was something very striking in the short, sharp sentences he used. They had a forcible ring. I had not given him more than a cursory glance, but now I looked at him with curiosity. He was a little man, thickset and stout, of thirty perhaps, with a round red face from which shone small,

dark and very bright eyes. His black hair was cropped close to a bullet-shaped head. He was dressed in a blue suit a good deal the worse for wear. It was baggy at the knees and the pockets bulged untidily.

'You know what the duties are of a medical officer in an infirmary. One day is pretty much like another. And that's all I've got to look forward to for the rest of my life. Do you think it's worth?'

'It's a means of livelihood,' I answered.

'Yes, I know. The money's pretty good.'

'I don't exactly know why you've come to me.'

'Well, I wanted to know whether you thought there would be any chance for an English doctor in Spain?'

'Why Spain?'

'I don't know, I just have a fancy for it.'

'It's not like C a r m e n , you know.'

'But there's sunshine there, and there's good wine, and there's colour, and there's air you can breathe. Let me say what I have to say straight out. I heard by accident that there was no English doctor in Seville. Do you think I could earn a living there? Is it madness to give up a good safe job for an uncertainty?'

'What does your wife think about it?'

'She's willing.'

'It's a great risk.'

'I know. But if you say take it, I will: if you say stay where you are, I'll stay.'

He was looking at me intently with these bright dark eyes of his and I knew that he meant what he said. I reflected for a moment.

'Your whole future is concerned: you must decide for yourself. But this I can tell you: if you don't want money but are content to earn just enough to keep body and soul together, then go. For you will lead a wonderful life.'

He left me. I thought about him for a day or two, and then forgot. The episode passed completely from my memory.

Many years later, fifteen at least, I happened to be in Seville and having some trifling indisposition asked the hotel porter whether there was an English doctor in the town. He said there was and gave me the address. I took a cab and as I drove up to the house a little fat man came out of it. He hesitated when he caught sight of me.

'Have you come to see me?' he asked. 'I'm the English doctor.'

I explained my errand and he asked me to come in. He lived in an ordinary Spanish house, with a patio, and his consulting room which led out of it was littered with papers, books, medical appliances, and lumber. The sight of it would have startled a squeamish patient. We did our business and then I asked the doctor what his fee was. He shook his head and smiled.

'There's no fee.'

'Why on earth not?'

'Don't you remember me? Why, I'm here because of something you said to me. You changed my whole life for me. I'm Stephens.'

I had not the least notion what he was talking about. He reminded me of our interview, he repeated to me what we had said, and gradually, out of the night, a dim recollection of the incident came back to me.

'I was wondering if I'd ever see you again,' he said, 'I was wondering if ever I'd have a chance of thanking you for all you've done for me.'

'It's been a success then?'

I looked at him. He was very fat now and bald, but his eyes twinkled gaily and his fleshy, red face bore an expression of perfect good-humour. The clothes he wore, terribly shabby they were, had been made obviously by a Spanish tailor and his hat was the wide-brimmed sombrero of the Spaniard. He looked to me as though he knew a good bottle of wine when he saw it. He had a dissipated, though entirely sympathetic, appearance. You might have hesitated

to let him remove your appendix, but you could not have imagined a more delighted creature to drink a glass of wine with.

'Surely you were married?' I asked.

'Yes. My wife didn't like Spain, she went back to Camberwell, she was more at home there.'

'Oh, I'm sorry for that.'

His black eyes flashed a bacchanalian smile. He really had somewhat the look of a young Silenus.

'Life is full of compensations,' he murmured.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a Spanish woman, no longer in her first youth, but still boldly and voluptuously beautiful, appeared at the door. She spoke to him in Spanish, and I could not fail to perceive that she was the mistress of the house.

As he stood at the door to let me out he said to me:

'You told me when last I saw you that if I came here I should earn just enough money to keep body and soul together, but that I should lead a wonderful life. Well, I want to tell you that you were right. Poor I have been and poor I shall always be, but by heaven I've enjoyed myself. I wouldn't exchange the life I've had with that of any king in the world.'

MISS BRILL

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)

Although it was so brilliantly fine - the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques - Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now again a leaf came drifting - from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes. "What has been happening to me?" said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown! ... But the nose, which was of some black composition, wasn't at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind - a little dab of black sealing-wax when the time came - when it was absolutely necessary... Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. She could have taken it off and laid it on her lap and stroked it. She felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came from walking, she supposed. And when she breathed, something light and sad - no, not sad, exactly - something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the bands sounded louder and gay-er. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing

a new coat, too? She was sure it was new. He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little "Flutey" bit - very pretty! - a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

Only two people shared her "special" seat: a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands clasped over a huge carved walking-stick, and a big old woman, sitting upright, with a roll of knitting on her embroidered apron. They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become really quite expert, she thought, at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her.

She glanced, sideways, at the old couple. Perhaps they would go soon. Last Sunday, too, hadn't been as interesting as usual. An Englishman and his wife, he wearing a dreadful Panama hat and she button boots. And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles; she knew she needed them; but that it was no good getting any; they'd sure to break and they'd never keep on, And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything - gold rims, the kind that curved round your ears, little pads inside the bridge. No, nothing would please her. "They'll always be sliding down my nose!" Miss Brill had wanted to shake her.

The old people sat on the bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To and fro, in front of the flower-beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to buy a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railings. Little children ran among them, sweeping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny staggerer came

suddenly rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down "flop", until its small high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and - Miss Brill had often noticed - there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even - even cupboards!

Behind the rotunda the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping, and through them just a line of sea, and beyond the blue sky with gold-veined clouds.

Tum-tum-tum tiddle-um! tiddle-um! tum tiddle-um tum ta! blew the band.

Two young girls in red came by and two young soldiers in blue met them, and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm. Two peasant women with funny straw hats passed, gravely, leading beautiful smoke-coloured donkeys. A cold, pale nun hurried by. A beautiful woman came along and dropped her bunch of violets, and a little boy ran after to hand them to her, and she took them and threw them away as if they'd been poisoned. Dear me! Miss Brill didn't know whether to admire that or not! And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in gray met just in front of her. He was tall, stiff, dignified, and she was wearing the ermine toque she'd bought when her hair was yellow. Now everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes, was the same color as the shabby ermine, and her hand, in its cleaned glove, lifted to dab her lips, was a tiny yellowish paw. Oh, she was so pleased to see him delighted! She rather thought they were going to meet that afternoon. She described where she'd been - everywhere, here, there, along by the sea. The day was so charming - didn't he agree? And wouldn't he, perhaps? ... But he shook his head, lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and, even while she was

still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on. The ermine toque was alone; she smiled more brightly than ever. But even the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat, 'The Brute! The Brute!' ever and ever. What would she do? What was going to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered, the ermine toque turned, raised her hand as though she'd seen some one else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away. And the band changed again and played more quickly, more gayly than ever, and the old couple on Miss Brill's seat got up and marched away, and such a funny old man with long whiskers hobbled along in time to the music and was nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast.

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? But it wasn't till a little brown dog trotted on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little "Theatre" dog, a little dog that had been drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting. They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before! And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time every week - so as not to be late for the performance - and it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage. She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head upon the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have no-

ticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded. But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress - are ye?" And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently: "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill - a something, what was it? - not sadness - no, not sadness a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin, and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she, too, she too, and the others on the benches - they would come in with a kind of accompaniment - something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful - moving... And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought - though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and a girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all - who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl, "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chere - "

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not y e t ."

. - . - . - .

On her way home she usually bought a slice of honey-cake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present - a surprise - something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room - her room like a cupboard - and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

JOINING CHARLES

Elizabeth Bowen (1899 -)

Everybody in the White House was awake early that morning, even the cat. At an unprecedented hour in the thick gray dusk Polyphemus slipped upstairs and began to yowl at young Mrs. Charles's door, under which came out a pale yellow line of candlelight. On an ordinary morning he could not have escaped from the kitchen so easily, but last night the basement door had been left unbolted; all the doors were open downstairs, for the household had gone to bed at a crisis of preparation for the morrow. Sleep was to be no more than an interim, and came to most of them thinly and interruptedly. The rooms were littered with objects that had an air of having been put down momentarily, corded boxes were stacked up in the hall, and a spectral breakfast table waiting all night in the parlor reappeared slowly as dawn came in through the curtains.

Young Mrs. Charles came across to the door on her bare feet and, shivering, let in Polyphemus. She was still in pajamas, but her two suitcases were packed to the brim, with tissue paper smoothed on the tops of them: she must have been moving about for hours. She was always, superstitiously, a little afraid of Polyphemus and made efforts to propitiate him on all occasions; his expression of omniscience had imposed upon her thoroughly. His coming in now made her a little conscious; she stood still, one hand on the knob of the dressing-table drawer, and put the other hand to her forehead - what must she do? Between the curtains, drawn a little apart, light kept coming in slowly, solidifying the objects round her, which till now had been uncertain wavering silhouettes in candlelight. So nightfears gave place to the realities of daytime.

Polyphemus continued to melt round the room, staring

malignly at nothing. Presently Agatha tapped and came in in her dressing gown; her plaits hung down each side of her long, kind face, and she carried a cup of tea.

"Better drink this," said Agatha. "What can I do?" She drew back the curtains a little more in her comfortable, common-sense way to encourage the daylight, leaning for a moment out of the window she breathed in critically the morning air; the bare upland country was sheathed but not hidden by mist. "You're going to have a beautiful day," said Agatha.

Mrs. Charles shivered, then began tugging a comb through her short hair. She had been awake a long time and felt differently from Agatha about the day; she looked at her sister-in-law haggardly. "I dreamed and dreamed," said Mrs. Charles. "I kept missing my boat, saw it sliding away from the quay; and when I turned to come back to you all England was sliding away too, in the other direction, and I don't know where I was left - and I dreamed, too, of course, about losing my passport."

"One would think you had never travelled before," said Agatha tranquilly. She sat down on the end of the narrow bed where Mrs. Charles had slept for the last time, and shaking out Mrs. Charles's garments, passed them to her one by one, watching her dress as though she had been a child. Mrs. Charles felt herself being marveled at; her own smallness and youth had become objective to her at the White House; a thing, all she had, to offer them over again every day to be softened and pleased by.

As she pulled on the clothes she was to wear for so long she began to feel formal and wary, the wife of a competent banker going to join him in Lyon. The expression of her feet in those new brogues was quite unfamiliar; the feet of a "nice little woman". Her hair, infected by this feeling of strangeness that flowed to her very extremities, lay in a different line against her head. For a moment the face of a ghost from the future stared at her out of the look-

ing-glass. She turned quickly to Agatha, but her sister-in-law had left her while she was buttoning her jumper at the neck and had gone downstairs to print some more labels. It had occurred to Agatha that there would be less chance of losing the luggage (a contingency by which this untraveled family seemed to be haunted) if Louise were to tie on new labels, with more explicit directions, at Paris, where she would have to reregister. Agatha was gone, and the cup of tea, untasted, grew cold on the dressing-table.

The room looked bare without her possessions and withdrawn, as though it had already forgotten her. At this naked hour of parting she had forgotten it also; she supposed it would come back to her in retrospect so distinctly as to be a kind of torment. It was a smallish room with sloping ceilings, and a faded paper rambled over by roses. It had white curtains and was never entirely dark; it had so palpably a life of its own that she had been able to love it with intimacy and a sense of return, as one could never have loved an inanimate thing. Lying in bed one could see from the one window nothing but sky or sometimes a veil of rain; when one got up and looked out there were fields, wild and bare, and an unbroken skyline to emphasize the security of the house.

The room was up on the top floor, in one of the gables; a big household cannot afford a spare bedroom of any pretensions. To go downstairs one had to unlatch the nursery gate at the head of the top flight. Last time Charles was home it had been very unfortunate; he had barked his shins on the gate and shouted angrily to his mother to know what the thing was still there for. Louise fully realized that it was being kept for Charles's children.

During that first visit with Charles she had hardly been up to the second floor, where the younger girls slept in the old nursery. There had been no confidences; she and Charles occupied very connubially a room Mrs. Ray gave up to them that had been hers since her marriage. It was not till Louise came back here alone that the White House open-

ed its arms to her and she began to be carried away by this fullness, this intimacy and queer seclusion of family life. She and the girls were in and out of each other's rooms; Doris told sagas of high school, Maisie was always just on the verge of a love affair, and large grave Agatha began to drop the formality with which she had greeted a married woman and sister-in-law. She thought Agatha would soon have forgotten she was anything but her own child if it had ever been possible for Agatha to forget Charles.

It would have been terrible if Louise had forgotten, as she so nearly had, to pack Charles's photograph. There it had stood these three months, propped up on the mantelpiece, a handsome convention in sepia, becomingly framed, from which the young wife, falling asleep or waking, had turned away her face instinctively. She folded back a layer of tissue paper before shutting her suitcase and poked down a finger to feel the edge of the frame and reassure herself. There it was, lying face down, wrapped up in her dressing gown, and she would have seen Charles before she looked again at his photograph. The son and brother dominating the White House would be waiting on the Lyon platform to enfold her materially.

Mrs. Charles glanced round the room once more, then went downstairs slowly. Through the house she could hear doors opening and shutting and people running about because of her. She felt ashamed that her packing was finished and there was nothing for her to do. Whenever she had pictured herself leaving the White House it had been in the evening, with curtains drawn, and they had all just come out to the door for a minute to say good-bye to her, then gone back to the fire. It had been more painful but somehow easier. Now she felt lonely; they had all gone away from her, there was nobody there.

She went shyly into the morning room as though for the first time and knelt down on the rug in front of a young fire. There was a sharp smell of wood smoke; thin little flames twisted and spat through the kindling. A big look-

ing-glass, down to the ground, reflected her kneeling there; small and childish among the solemn mahogany furniture; more like somebody sent back to school than someone rejoining a virile and generous husband who loved her. Her cropped hair turned under against her cheek and was cut in a straight line over the eyebrows. She had never had a home before, and had been able to boast till quite recently that she had never been homesick. After she married there had been houses in which she lived with Charles, but still she had not known what it meant to be homesick.

She hoped that, after all, nobody would come in for a moment or two; she had turned her head and was looking out at the lawn with its fringe of trees not yet free from the mist, and at the three blackbirds hopping about on it. The blackbirds made her know all at once what it meant to be going away; she felt as though someone had stabbed her a long time ago but she were only just feeling the knife. She could not take her eyes from the blackbirds till one with a wild fluty note skimmed off into the trees and the others followed it. Polyphemus had come in after her and was looking out at them, pressing himself against the windowpane.

"Polyphemus," said Mrs. Charles in her oddly unchildish voice, "have you any illusions?" Polyphemus lashed his tail.

By midday (when she would be nearly at Dover) the fire would be streaming up briskly, but by that time the sun would be pouring in at the windows and no one would need a fire at all. The mornings were not cold yet, the girls were active, and it was only because of her going away that the fire had been lighted. Perhaps Agatha, who never hurt anything's feelings, would come in and sit not too far away from it with her basket of mending, making believe to be glad of the heat. "I don't suppose there'll be fires at Lyon," thought Mrs. Charles. Somewhere, in some foreign room, tomorrow evening when the endearments were over or there was a pause in them, Charles would lean back in his chair with a gusty sigh, arch his chest up, stretch out his legs and say: "Well, come on. Tell me about the family."

Then she would have to tell him about the White House. Her cheeks burned as she thought how it would all come out. There seemed no chance yet of Agatha or Maisie getting married. That was what Charles would want to know chiefly about his sisters. He had a wholesome contempt for virginity. He would want to know how Doris was "coming along". He rather admired her. Those sisters of Charles's always sounded rather dreadful young women, not the sort that Agatha, Maisie, or Doris would care to know. It seemed to Charles funny - he often referred to it - that Agatha wanted babies so badly and went all tender and conscious when babies were mentioned.

"She'll make no end of a fuss over our kids," Charles would say. The White House seemed to Charles, all the same, very proper as an institution; it was equally proper that he should have a contempt for it. He helped to support the girls and his mother, for one thing, and that did place them all at a disadvantage. But they were dear, good souls. Mrs. Charles knelt with her hands on her knees and the hands clenched slowly from anger and helplessness.

Mrs. Ray, the mother of Charles, suddenly knelt down by his wife and put an arm around her shoulders without saying a word. She did these impulsive things gracefully. Mrs. Charles relaxed and leaned sideways a little against the kind shoulder. She had nothing to say, so they watched the fire struggle and heard the hall clock counting away the seconds.

"Have you got enough clothes on?" said Mother after a minute. "It's cold in trains, I never do think you wear enough clothes."

Mrs. Charles, nodding, unbuttoned her coat and showed a ribbed sweater, pulled on over her jumper. "Sensible of me!" she proudly remarked.

"You're learning to be quite a sensible little thing," Mother said lightly. "I expect Charles will notice a difference. Tell Charles not to let you go out in the damp in

your evening shoes. But I expect he knows how to take care of you."

"Indeed, yes," said Mrs. Charles, nodding.

"You're precious, you see." Mother smoothed back the hair from against Mrs. Charles's cheek to look at her thoughtfully, like a gentle skeptic at some kind of miracle. "Remember to write me about the flat; I want to know everything: wallpapers, view from the windows, sizes of rooms - We'll be thinking about you both tomorrow."

"I'll be thinking of you."

"Oh, no, you won't," Mother said, with perfect finality.

"Perhaps not," Mrs. Charles quickly amended.

Mother's son Charles was generous, sensitive, gallant, and shrewd. The things he said, the things he had made, his imprint, were all over the White House. Sometimes he looked out at Louise with bright eyes from the family talk, so striking, so unfamiliar that she fell in love with the stranger for moments together as a married woman should not. He was quiet and never said much, but he noticed; he had an infallible understanding and entered deeply, it seemed, into the sisters' lives. He was so good; he was so keen for them all to be happy. He had the strangest way of anticipating one's wishes. He was master of an inimitable drollery - to hear him chaff Agatha! Altogether he was a knightly person, transcending modern convention. His little wife had come to them all in a glow from her wonderful lover. No wonder she was so quiet; they used to try and read him from her secret, sensitive face.

A thought of their Charles without his Louise troubled them all with a pang when Louise was at her dearest. Charles in Lyon, uncomplaining, lonely, tramping the town after business to look for a flat. The return of Louise to him, to the home he had found for her, her room upstairs already aghast and vacant, the emptiness that hung over them, gave them the sense of pouring out an oblation. The girls were

heavy, with the faces of Flemish Modonnas; Doris achieved some resemblance to Charles, but without being handsome. They had cheerful dispositions, but were humble when they considered themselves; they thought Louise must have a great deal of love in her to give them so much when there was a Charles in her life.

Mrs. Ray, with a groan at her "old stiff bones", got up from the hearthrug and sat on a chair. She thought of something to say, but was not quite ready to say it till she had taken up her knitting. She had hoped to have finished this pair of socks in time to send out by Louise with his others; she hadn't been able to - Mrs. Ray sighed. "You're making my boy very happy," she said, with signs in her manner of the difficulty one has in expressing these things.

Louise thought: "Oh, I love you!" There was something about the hands, the hair, the expression, the general being of Mother that possessed her entirely, that she did not think she could live without. She knelt staring at Mother, all in a tumult. Why be so lonely, why never escape? She was too lonely, it couldn't be borne; not even for the sake of the White House. Not this morning, so early, with the buffeting strangeness of travel before her, with her wrists so chilly and the anticipation of seasickness making her stomach ache. The incommunicableness of even these things, these little ills of the body, bore Mrs. Charles down. She was tired of being brave alone, she was going to give it up.

It is with mothers that understanding and comfort are found. She wanted to put down her head on a bosom, this bosom, and say: "I'm unhappy. Oh, help me! I can't go on. I don't love my husband. It's death to be with him. He's grand, but he's rotten all through ---" She needed to be fortified.

"Mother ---" said Louise.

"Mm-mm?"

"If things were not a success out there --- If one weren't a good wife always ---" Mother smoothed her knit-

ting out and began to laugh; an impassable resolute chuckle.

"What a thing ----" she said. "What an idea!"

Louise heard steps in the hall and began kneading her hands together, pulling the fingers helplessly. "Mother," she said, "I feel ----"

Mother looked at her; out of the eyes looked Charles. The steady, gentle look, their interchange, lasted moments. Steps came hurrying over the flags of the hall.

"I can't go ----"

Doris came in with the teapot. She wasn't grown up, her movements were clumsy and powerful, more like a boy's. She should have been Charles. Her heavy plait came tumbling over her shoulders as she bent to put down the teapot - round and brown with a bluish glaze on it. Sleep and tears in the dark had puffed up her eyelids, which seemed to open with difficulty: her small eyes dwindled into her face. "Breakfast," she said plaintively.

Rose, the servant, brought in a plate of boiled eggs - nice and light for the journey - and put them down compassionately.

"Even Rose," thought Mrs. Charles, getting up and coming to the table obediently because they all expected her to, "even Rose ----" She looked at the breakfast cups with poppies scattered across them as though she had not seen them before or were learning an inventory. Doris had begun to eat as though nothing else mattered. She took no notice of Louise, pretending, perhaps, to make things easier for herself, that Louise were already gone.

"Oh, Doris, not the tussore tie with the red shirt." Whatever White House might teach Mrs. Charles about common sense, it was her mission to teach them about clothes. "Not," said Mrs. Charles, with bravado rising to an exaggeration of pathos, "not on my last day!"

"I dressed in the dark; I couldn't see properly," said Doris.

"You won't get eggs for breakfast in France," said Mai-

sie with a certain amount of triumph as she came in and sat down.

"I wonder what the flat'll be like?" said Maisie. "Do write and tell us about the flat - describe it, the wall-papers and everything."

"Just think," Doris said, "of Charles buying the furniture! 'Donnez-mois une chaise!' 'Bien, Monsieur,' 'Non. Ce n'est pas assez confortable pour ma femme.'"

"Fancy!" said Maisie, laughing very much. "And fancy if the flat's high up."

"There'll be central heating and stoves. Beautiful fag. She actually won't be chilly," Mrs. Charles was always chilly: this was a household joke.

"Central heating is stuffy ---"

Doris broke away suddenly from the conversation. "Oh!" said she violently. "Oh, Louise, you are lucky!"

A glow on the streets and on the pale, tall houses: Louise walking with Charles, Frenchmen running in blousy overalls (Doris saw), French poodles, French girls in plaid skirts putting the shutters back, French ladies on iron balconies, leaning over, watching Charles go up the street with Louise and help Louise over the crossings; Charles and Louise together. A door, a lift, a flat, a room, a kiss! "Charles, Charles, you are so splendid! Mother loves you and the girls love you and I love you ---" "Little woman!" A French curtain fluttering in the high, fresh wind, the city under the roofs - forgotten. All this Doris watched: Louise watched Doris.

"Yes," smiled Louise. "I am lucky."

"Even to be going to France," said Doris, and stared with her dog's eyes.

Louise wanted to take France in her two hands and make her a present of it. "You'll be coming out soon, Doris, someday." (It was not likely that Charles would have her - and did one, anyhow, dare let the White House into the flat?

"Do you really think so?"

"Why not, if Mother can spare you?"

"Louise!" cried Maisie reproachfully - she had been sitting watching - "you aren't eating."

Agatha, sitting next to her, covered up her confusion with gentle comforting noises, cut the top off an egg and advanced it coaxingly. That was the way one made a child eat; she was waiting to do the same for Charles's and Louise's baby when it was old enough. Louise now almost saw the baby sitting up between them, but it was nothing to do with her.

"You'll be home in less than the two years, I shouldn't be surprised," said Mother startingly. It was strange, now one came to think of it, that any question of coming back to the White House had not been brought up before. They might know Mrs. Charles would be coming back, but they did not (she felt) believe it. So she smiled at Mother as though they were playing a game.

"Well, two years at the very least," Mother said with energy.

They all cast their minds forward. Louise saw herself in the strong pale light of the future walking up to the White House and (for some reason) ringing the bell like a stranger. She stood ringing and ringing and nobody answered or even looked out of a window. She began to feel that she had failed them somehow, that something was missing. Of course it was. When Louise came back next time she must bring them a baby. Directly she saw herself coming up the steps with a child in her arms, she knew at once what was wanted. Wouldn't Agatha be delighted? Wouldn't Maisie "run on"? Wouldn't Doris hang awkwardly round and make jokes, poking her big finger now and then between the baby's curling pink ones? As for Mother - at the supreme moment of handing the baby to Mother, Louise nearly had a spasm of horror and nearly dropped it. For the first time she looked at the baby's face and saw it was Charles's.

"It would do no good," thought Mrs. Charles, cold all

of a sudden and hardened against them all, "to have a baby of Charles's."

They all sat looking not quite at each other, not quite at her. Maisie said (thinking perhaps of the love affair that never completely materialized): "A great deal can happen in two years," and began to laugh confusedly in an emotional kind of way. Mother and Agatha looked across at each other. "Louise, don't forget to send us a wire," said Mother, as though she had been wondering all this time she had sat so quietly behind the teapot whether Louise would remember to do this.

"Or Charles might send the wire."

"Yes," said Louise, "that would be better."

Polyphemus, knowing his moment, sprang up on to Mrs. Charles's knee. His black tail, stretched out over the table-cloth, lashed sideways, knocking the knives and forks crooked. His one green eye sardonically penetrated her. He knew. He had been given to Charles as a dear little kitten. He pressed against her, treading her lap methodically and mewing soundlessly, showing the purple roof of his mouth. "Ask Charles," suggested Polyphemus, "What became of my other eye." "I know," returned Mrs. Charles silently. "They don't, they haven't been told; you've a voice, I haven't - what about it?" "Satan!" breathed Mrs. Charles, and caressed fascinatedly the fur just over his nose.

"Funny," mused Agatha, watching, "you never have cared for Polyphemus, and yet he likes you. He's a very transparent cat; he is wonderfully honest."

"He connects her with Charles," said Maisie, also enjoying this interchange between the wife and the cat. "He's sending some kind of message - he's wonderfully clever."

"Too clever for me," said Mrs. Charles, and swept Polyphemus off her knee with finality. Agatha was going as far as the station; she went upstairs for her hat and coat. Mrs. Charles rose also, picked up her soft felt hat from a chair and pulled it on numbly, in front of the long

glass, arranging two little bits of hair at the sides against her cheeks. "Either I am dreaming," she thought, "or someone is dreaming me."

Doris roamed round the room and came up to her. "A book left behind, Louise; Framley Parsonage, one of your books."

"Keep it for me."

"For two years - all that time?"

"Yes, I'd like you to."

Doris sat down on the floor and began to read "Framley Parsonage". She went into it deeply - she had to go somewhere; there was nothing to say; she was suddenly shy of Louise again as she had been at first, as though they had never known each other - perhaps they never had.

"Haven't you read it before?"

"No, never, I'll write and tell you, shall I, what I think of it?"

"I've quite forgotten what I think of it," said Louise, standing above her, laughing and pulling on her gloves. She laughed as though she were at a party, moving easily now under the smooth compulsion of Somebody's dreaming mind. Agatha had come in quietly. "Hush!" she said in a strained way to both of them, standing beside the window in hat and coat as though she were the traveler. "Hush!" She was listening for the taxi. Mother and Maisie had gone.

Wouldn't the taxi come, perhaps? What if it never came? An intolerable jar for Louise, to be deprived of going; a tear in the mesh of the dream that she could not endure. "Make the taxi come soon!" she thought, praying now for departure. "Make it come soon!"

Being listened for with such concentration must have frightened the taxi, for it didn't declare itself; there was not a sound to be heard on the road. If it were not for the hospitality of "Framley Parsonage" where, at this moment, would Doris have been? She bent to the pages absordedly and did not look up; the leaves of the book were thin

and turned over noisily. Louise fled from the morning room into the hall.

Out in the dark hall Mother was bending over the pile of boxes, reading and rereading the labels upside down and from all aspects. She often said that labels could not be printed clearly enough. As Louise hurried past she stood up, reached out an arm and caught hold of her. Only a little light came down from the staircase window; they could hardly see each other. They stood like two figures without understanding, created to face one another.

"Louise," whispered Mother, "if things should be difficult --- Marriage isn't easy. If you should be disappointed - I know, I feel - you do understand? If Charles --- "

"Charles?"

"I do love you, I do. You would tell me?"

But Louise, kissing her coldly and gently, said: "Yes, I know. But there isn't really, Mother, anything to tell."

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Stella Gibbons (1902 -)

One o'clock on Saturday afternoon.

Suddenly the sirens began. Their sound swooped into the basement kitchen at 46 Marling Street, Camden Town, and put Mrs. Spenk in mind of an air-raid, as they did every Saturday. She was scuttling round the kitchen laying the stained cloth with three places when the noise began, and when she heard the first uncouth howl from Sheer's Tobacco Works just round the corner she glanced despairingly at the clock and darted across to the stove, and thrust a knife down into the potatoes.

They were not done. Nor was the cabbage. Nor was the stew. And in ten minutes Spenk would be home from Sheer's wanting his dinner, and young Cissie too. Oh, what was the matter with Saturday, that everything went wrong and made you want to scream the place down? It was the same every Saturday (slap! went the vinegar down on the table beside the crusted egg-cup that held the mustard) - try as she might, nothing would go right of a Saturday.

'All be'ind, like the cow's tail, I am this morning,' muttered Mrs. Spenk, rummaging in the bread crock under the mangle. She looked like a cross goblin in the dim kitchen, with her hair lifted off her worried little face and her hollow temples, and coiled on the top of her head in the style of thirty years ago.

'Eat - eat - eat - like a lot of 'orses. Cloth never gets off the table, Saturdays.'

She shoved a vase of marigolds, withering in stale water, into the middle of the table. Even the flowers looked dull in the kitchen, where the only vivid thing was the beautiful red and gold fire, roaring proudly behind its

bars like a lusty lion. The shiny brown walls, brown oil-cloth, and grey ceiling were nets for darkness, and outside there was no sunlight.

To and fro scurried Mrs. Spenk, pitching wet potato peelings into the dustbin, opening a tin of peaches. In the midst of her dartings (and the cabbage stems still hard as wood!) slow steps began descending the area steps, and glancing angrily out between the lace curtains, she saw the large silhouette that was more completely familiar to her than any other in her narrow world.

He came into the kitchen, and his experienced eye took in the bare table, the agitated saucepans, and his wife's angry face. His own, tired and dirty and already sullen, became lowering.

'Ain't it ready yet, then?'

'No, it isn't. I'm all be'ind this morning. You know I 'ad to take Georgie down to the Ear 'ospital and they kept me there the best part of an hour. You're early, aren't you? 'Tisn't more than ten pars'.'

'I'm orlright. You 'urry up them saucepans.'

He pushed past her across the room, and went into the little scullery, where she heard him having a bit of a wash while she slopped some stew onto a half-warm plate.

The sound of his leisurely preparations made her furious.

She called sharply:

'Where are you off to, s'afternoon?'

'Down to the Bridge with Charlie Ford.' His sullen voice beat back with irritation with a flat wall of secrecy. She muttered something about a waste of money, but he pretended not to hear.

He came back into the room with his face washed clean and looking startlingly different. He was fifty, and flabbily stout, but his unfulfilled youth seemed petrified in the immature curves of the lips behind his moustache and in the uncertain expression of his eyes.

He glanced furtively across at his wife as he sat down to his plate of stew, but said no more. He kept looking up at the alarm clock on the mantelpiece between his half-masticated mouthfuls, for the match began at 3.15, and it took a good hour to get down to Stamford Bridge. At twenty to two he got up, putting on his bowler. Mrs. Spenk, who had started on her own stew, neither looked up nor spoke. The air of the kitchen was charged with waves of resentment that rolled from the taut, raging woman to the big sullen man.

The monotonous hours of the week, spent by him in a vast air-cooled impersonal room shaken by machines, and by her in a little underground room smelling of stale food, had fused once again into the mutual nervous hatred of Saturday afternoon. Every week it was the same. Neither knew what was the matter. They only felt angry and tired out. By Saturday afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Spenk were no longer a man and a woman. They were the result of a fact called the social system.

Another piece of the system came slowly down the steps as Mr. Spenk was going up; his daughter Cissie, aged sixteen, who earned thirty shillings a week as a junior-typist-cum-switchboard-operator in a paper-pattern shop in the Strand. Usually Cissie was cheerful, but now Saturday afternoon had got her too. She was coiled in on herself in a satisfying fit of temper about nothing.

'Ullo, Dad.'

'Ullo. You been sacked yet?' asked he, disagreeably.

This was a sore point, for Cissie was impertinent, and seldom kept a job longer than three months. But she was too depressed to flare back at him. She turned her face away, muttering, 'Oh, shut up, do,' and slouched past him down the steps and in at the dark door.

Outside the light was so lowering that dusk seemed only just round the corner. The pavements were greasy. The sticks of celery in the baskets at street corners shone

white as bones. Mr. Spenk bought a paper, and settled down to half an hour's strap-hanging in a carriage full of men in spotty suits and cloth caps. Charlie Ford had failed to turn up; and he was alone. He felt no better. His pipe tasted sour, and there was nothing much in the paper. ▲ A fool trod on his corn in the scramble at Charing Cross. He hated everybody.

His face was set in sullen lines as he climbed the grass-grown steps to the shilling tiers. He felt that if he didn't get a good position against the barriers he would kick up a shine, demand his money back, raise blasted hell. But he got a good place all right, plumb opposite the grandstand.

A huge, massed semicircle of pink dots curved away from him on either side, topped by thousands of cloth caps of pinkish-grey, greeny-brown, speckled grey. The air was warm and heavy, and did not carry the flat roar of thirty-five thousand voices.

After an unseeing stare round, Mr. Spenk settled down to his paper, and to wait.

Cissie went straight over to the glass by the window and began squeezing earnestly at an invisible spot on her white chin, staring into her face with passionate interest as though she had not seen it for six months.

She was still staring, and pawing the spot discontentedly with one finger, when her mother came in, dressed to go out. Cissie did not turn round.

'Well, my lady! What's the matter with you? Get out of bed the wrong side this morning, like your father? Don't you want no dinner?'

'Don't fancy stew. 'S always stew, Saturdays. I'm not hungry.'

'Go without, then. Only don't go pickin' about in the safe after I'm gone out. I want this 'ere for supper.'

Cold stew and vegetables were being slammed into the safe.

'Where's Georgie?' asked Cissie, who wanted to be sure the house would be empty that afternoon.

'Upstairs with Mrs. P. 'E don't want no dinner, neither. 'Is ear's too bad, he says.'

Coals were shot noisily into the range and damped down with the colander of tea-leaves from the sink, while Cissie stood in maddening idleness with all this energy whirling round her, trying how her hair looked with a centre parting.

Not until she heard the door slam, and her mother running angrily up the area steps, did she turn round. Then she turned suddenly, staring at the kitchen already settling into winter twilight, with the red eye of the fire now burning sulkily. Cissie gave a loud and animal yawn, stretched, stared again, and suddenly tore across the kitchen and upstairs into the bathroom which the Spinks shared with the rest of the house.

She began to let hot water furiously into the bath, twizzling the taps round and round, using up the Saturday night bath water. Her round face was youthful and tired as a cross fairy's under its paint. Every few minutes she yawned extravagantly, and the steam, which was already warming the tiny, dank cell deliciously, was drawn down into her lungs.

She locked the door. She lit the gas. She crumbled a twopenny packet of bath salts into the discoloured bath, and began to undress.

Mrs. Spenk, fussing up the steps of the house next door, found Mrs. Judd waiting; dark, severe, and like a gipsy.

'There you are,' she exclaimed, 'I was just wondering if I wouldn't come along and fetch you. But there, I said to myself, I expect she's been kept. I know what Saturday is.'

They ran down the steps rapidly together, as though no precious second must be wasted.

'There's a 47,' said Mrs. Spenk, as they crossed the road. 'We'd better take it. The big picture starts at a

quarter to three, and if there's anything I do hate it's coming in in the middle of the big picture.'

The Majestic Cinema was already lit up when they arrived; and the lights were on inside the hall, diffusing the languid, warmly coloured glow which prepares the mind of the audience to receive dreams. Outside, the greasy streets were lost in cold shadows. Inside, the tall gold curtains streamed to meet the benign glow and the walls were stippled with a gold on whose bland expanse shone ruby and amber lights.

Mrs. Spenk and Mrs. Judd were shown into two good seats in the middle of the hall, and they sat down. Mrs. Spenk, with lips pressed bitterly together, sat upright in her ruby-covered seat. Nevertheless, its curves caressed her taut spine. Neither woman spoke as they sat waiting for the lights to fade; and they both turned their eyes upwards to the rich, mysterious folds of the curtain hiding the screen.

Mr. Spenk, waiting under a lead-coloured sky with fifty thousand other spectators (for the ground had filled rapidly) still felt no better. He huddled himself up with his pipe and stared sourly in front of him. The idle roar from the crowd poured up to the dim clouds; it was waiting, no more; relaxed as an enormous animal.

Suddenly, at ten past three, there was a satisfied stirring and a murmuring. The teams were running down the sloping alley-way underneath the grand-stand, pretty as a ballet in their blue and red and white shirts, and white shorts. They scattered across the grass, livid green in the lowering light, and began to punt the ball about. The satisfying dull 'ponk!' as they kicked it whetted the crowd's appetite; it was in the very mood that once presaged gladiatorial combats.

The visiting team won the toss. Mr. Spenk stolidly watched the preliminary punting, saw even the kick-off without settling down comfortably to a critical absorption in the game, as he usually did at once. Play began badly. It

was not good foot-ball. Lowther, the squat, dark Scotsman in whom the crowd was most interested, scurried down the field like a crab, hugging the ball when he should have passed and passing when he should have shot.

Backwards and forwards swayed the crowd, following the ball. Now the bright figures clotted in front of one goal, now in front of the other; now they spread out along the grass; but still the play did not improve. The crowd began to feel famished, like an animal with forbidden food dangled before its eyes. It wanted the food of swift, accurate, triumphant action expressed through the bodies of the players. It could feed on such action, and release through it the energy imprisoned in its own myriad devitalized bodies. Still such action did not come.

But suddenly the game improved. The crowd began to rock faster. Loud, short roars broke its watching silence. The crowd-animal was at last eating its food of swift, fierce action. Excitement began to pump into the dead air, striking the ball yards out of the net.

Mr. Spenk was really watching now. He was eating his food with the rest of the crowd. Presently he, like the rest of the crowd, would begin to feel better.

The lights were fading. A long beam shot across the darkness and ghostly words shone suddenly behind the curtains, which parted with a rippling noise. Dreams were about to be made.

Neither Mrs. Spenk nor Mrs. Judd saw the notice of the censor's approval, the names of the author, director, and photographers, or the names of the cast. For them the big picture did not begin until a lovely giantess appeared on the screen, petulantly asleep in a billowing bed. Gerda Harbor in 'Gay Lady'.

Their eyes followed her awakening as solemnly as the eyes of children, while their ears accepted without offence the disdainful nasal cadences of her voice. The luxury of her bedroom, which their eyes had scarcely time to absorb, pointed no contrast between itself and the rooms

in which they slept. They were like two children listening to a story.

Mrs. Judd, better informed, nudged Mrs. Spenk when the hero appeared.

'That's Orme Roland. 'E always acts with Gerda Harbor. Isn't 'e a lovely feller?

'Nice-lookin', but a bit thin on top, ain't 'e?' objected Mrs. Spenk. In spite of the dream-weaving silver beam and the shadows that were created to absorb into themselves all the tiredness and vague discontent in the audience, the taint of Saturday morning still soured Mrs. Spenk's tongue. But her pose was less rigid in her seat. No one else was sitting upright. The audience was chiefly young men and women; and each girl rested her head on the thin shoulder of her boy. Darkness, lies and dreams fed these children of the machine age like the pictures in the crystal of a Persian magician. The machines wove dreams; their children watched; and forgot their slavery to the weavers.

'E's been married three times,' observed Mrs. Judd.

'As 'e now? Fancy! It's a wonder any one in 'Ollywood would 'ave 'im, after that. Still, I suppose it don't mean the same to Americans as it does to us. 'E is a nice-lookin' feller, and no mistake. She's lovely, too. I like that way of doin' 'er hair.'

Mrs. Spenk, also, was beginning to feel better.

Just before half-time, United equalized. Now at twenty past four, the Pensioners wanted a goal to win. They attacked like vigorous yet cold-thinking demons. Each rush was planned. Lowther, at last, was awake. His crab-like scurries, in which the ball seemed tied by an invisible wire to his toes or his hell, brought roars of ecstasy from the crowd. Mr. Spenk roared with the rest. He stood up on tiptoe to roar and see the better. When Fordy, the visiting team's inside-right, steadied himself - shot - shot too high and struck the bar, Mr. Spenk joined in the terrible impatient groan that went up.

"Ow's Lowther doin' now?" asked a voice, triumphantly.

"E ain't doing so badly," admitted another voice. "Seems a bit too fond of the ball, though. Might 'ave treacle all over it, the way it sticks to 'im."

"Half an hour ago you said 'e was afraid of it. Cor! there ain't no pleasin' some people."

"Orlright, don't upset yerself. Fact is, you take football too seriously. It ain't like 'orse-racin'."

The moonlight rippled on the lake in the millionaire's garden. There was a party, and the house was lit up, and distant music in the ballroom floated from the windows. But outside on the terrace they were alone - those two - the mocking beauty in black velvet and the tall man in faultless evening dress. His hand slipped over hers - he bent towards her ... but she slipped from him, lightly as her own scarf that waved in the moonlit air.

"Shall we dance?"

"I never cared for dancing - until now."

Arm in arm, they passed into the great house, the woman smiling dazzlingly into the man's eager eyes.

"Leadin' 'im up the garden," murmured Mrs. Spenk, and Mrs. Judd, watching raptly, nodded.

At last! Over his head and slam into the net! The visiting goalkeeper sprawled on his face; and then, across the dusky field, skirled the whistle for 'time'. The crowd rocked and roared for nearly a minute while the teams were going off the field, but already people were working their way towards the exits.

Mr. Spenk, having re-lit his cold pipe (it tasted good again), ambled up the tiers and joined the slowly swaying herds of people on their way to the gate. He stopped for a moment or two at the stone barrier along the top tier and stood looking down on the crowd; a large, amiable chap at whom no one would look twice. He had seen some good football. That was worth seeing, that was.

He sleepily adjusted his bowler and pipe, and stumped down the steps. The satisfied crowd-animal, swaying home under the darkening sky into the lit streets, ate him up.

They began to kiss.

Slowly, very slowly, so that the audience might savour in its full strength this moment for which it had been unconsciously longing, his hands fell upon her shoulders. She stared up into his suffering face, with a tender smile at the corners of her lips. Tears brightened her great eyes, and her hair was adorably disordered. She had been crying. He had been mad with rage. Now he was angry no longer. The strain between them had relaxed, deliciously, and the audience relaxed as well. He drew her close to him. Her head went tilting back, with its fleece of fairest angel hair. His arms drew her closer, closer. Slowly, in deliberate ecstasy, their lips touched at last. The curtains swung together to a burst of music as the two figures faded out.

'Lovely!' sighed Mrs. Spenk, groping for her hat. 'I did enjoy that. 'Aven't enjoyed anything so much for months.'

Back through the streets where the mud now shone in the lamp-light like a paste churned from jewels came Mr. and Mrs. Spenk by their separate ways, both soothed, rather sleepy, and amiable.

But as Mrs. Spenk and Mrs. Judd turned out of the jolly rattle of Camden Town High Street into Marling Street, where it was darker and quieter, Mrs. Spenk's spirits fell. She remembered that Cissie was sulky, and Tom had the rats, and there was the tea to get. There was no end to it. Whenever you had a bit of fun, you had to pay for it. Oh, well, it was all in the day's work.

She said good night to Mrs. Judd at the top of the area steps and ran down. A light shone in the kitchen, and the blind had been pulled down over the lace curtains.

Cissie was standing exactly where she had stood three hours ago, in the same position; in front of the glass,

with her face screwed sideways the better to pick at the invisible spot on her chin.

'Ave you been there all the afternoon?' asked her mother, good-naturedly, hanging up her coat and hat behind the door. 'You won't 'ave no face left if you pull it about much longer; you'll wear it away.'

Cissie did not turn round. But her thin back, whose shoulder-blades showed under a clean pink blouse, looked friendly. She said, mildly:

'The kettle's boiling. I got tea for you.'

'That's a good girl. Dad 'ome? Where's Georgie?'

'Still upstairs with Mrs. P. He says his ear's better. Dad won't be home for another half an hour, I shouldn't think. The paper says there was nearly fifty thousand down at the Bridge this afternoon.'

Mrs. Spenk was putting four heaped spoonfuls of tea into the brown pot, and glancing critically over the table to see if Cissie had forgotten anything. The table looked nice. Cissie had put on a clean cloth and fresh water in the marigold. There was a new pot of jam and half a pound of yellow cake. The gaslight softened the rusty colours in the kitchen into warmth, and the kettle was singing. The fire was gold.

Mrs. Spenk poured water on the tea, murmuring: 'We won't wait for Dad,' and sat down opposite Cissie, kicking off her shoes. She stared across at her daughter.

'Well - you a r e all dressed up like a dog's dinner. Where are you off to, to-night?'

'Nowhere, realy,' putting up a small red hand, with pointed shiny nails, to her hair. 'I may be goin' out with Millie Thomson a bit later.'

'Your eyebrows, Cissie Spenk! 'Oo are you supposed to look like - Anna May Wong or what?'

'Oh, I wish they'd grow quicker so's I could pluck 'em more often,' said Cissie, earnestly. 'I love pluckin' 'em. I like to make 'em so thin you can't hardly see I've got any at all.'

Mrs. Spenk's caustic rattle of laughter was interrupted by Mr. Spenk.

'Ready for tea, Dad?'

'I could do with a cup. You never saw such a sight as there was down at the Bridge; must have been over sixty thousand down there. Took me the best part of an hour, getting away.'

Mrs. Spenk and Cissie looked interested, but each woman wondered how men could so waste their time and money.

Tea was then eaten, in a warm, comfortable silence. It was half-past six. The nervous misery of Saturday morning had gone over into the repose of Saturday night. In front of the Spenk family lay a fair prospect twenty-four hours long, called 'termorrer's-Sunday'; a day on which no one need get up early, and huge meals were eaten all day.

After tea Cissie went off mysteriously to meet Millie Thomson. Mrs. Spenk piled the dishes up in the scullery with one eye on the clock, for her shopping was not yet done. The second kettle had boiled while they finished tea, and she now splashed the water over the dirty dishes.

Mr. Spenk had drawn his chair to the fire, with a paper and his pipe. But there was an uneasy thought at the back of his mind which interrupted his comfort. He tried to ignore it, but it came back. It was the memory of Saturday morning, blent with another emotion too vague to name.

At last he got up heavily, and went out into the scullery. He held out his hand to his wife for the drying-cloth. She, flushed and busy in the candle-light and the steam, stared at him blankly.

'Give you a 'and,' said Mr. Spenk.

'Well, I never! Miracles will never cease!' cried Mrs. Spenk ironically.

But she smiled at him as she flipped across the drying-cloth.

THE REVELATION

H.E. Bates (1905 -)

My great-uncle Silas was a man who never washed himself. 'God A'mighty,' he would say, 'why should I? It's a waste o' time. I got summat else to do 'sides titivate myself wi' soap.' The housekeeper washed him instead.

Every morning, winter and summer, he sat in the high-backed chair under the window of geraniums waiting for that inexorable performance. He would sit there in a pretence of being engrossed in the newspaper of the day before, his waistcoat on but undone over his collarless shirt, his red neckerchief dangling on the arm of the chair, his face gloomy and long with the wretchedness of expectation. Sometimes he would lower the corner of the newspaper and squint out in the swift but faint hope that she had forgotten him. She never did. She would come out at last with the bowl of water and the rank cake of yellow soap that he would say she had been suckled on, and the rough hand-flannel that she had made up from some staunch undergarment she had at last discarded. In winter the water, drawn straight from the well, would be as bitter and stinging as ice. She never heated it. And as though her own hands had lost all feeling she would plunge them straight into it, and then rub the soap against the flannel until it lathered thinly, like snow. All the time he sat hidden behind the newspaper with a kind of dumb hope, like an ostrich. At last, before he knew what was happening, the paper would be snatched from his hands, the flannel, like a cold compress, would be smacked against his face, and a shudder of utter misery would pass through his body before he began to pour forth the first of his blasphemous protestations. 'God damn it, woman! You want to finish me, don't you? You want to finish me! You want me to catch me death, you old nanny-goat! I know. You want me...'

The words and their effect would be drowned and smothered by the renewed sopping of the flannel and he would be forced at last into a miserable acquiescence. It was the only time when the look of devilish vitality and wickedness left his face and never seemed likely to return.

Once a week, also, she succeeded in making him take a bath. She gave him that too.

The house was very old and its facilities for bathing and washing were such that it might have been built expressly for him. There was no bathroom. My uncle Silas had instead a small iron bath, once painted cream and never repainted after the cream had turned to the colour of earth, which resembled some ancient coracle. And once a week, generally on Fridays, and always in the evening, the house-keeper would drag out the bath from among the wine-bottles in the cellar and bring it up and get it before the fire in the living-room. Once, early summer, as though hoping it might make that miserable inquisition of bathing impossible, he had filled the bath with a pillowcase of cowslip heads and their own wine-yellow liquor. It did not deter her. She gave him his bath in a pudding-basin instead, sponging him down with water that grew cooler and colder as he stood there blaspheming and shivering.

Very often on fine winter evenings I would walk over to see him, and once, half-forgetting that it was his bath-night, I went over on a Friday.

When I arrived the house was oppressively warm with the heat and steam from the copper boiling up the bath-water in the little kitchen. I went in, as I always did, without knocking, and I came straight upon my Uncle Silas taking off his trousers unconcerned, before a great fire of hazel-faggots in the living-room.

'Oh it's you,' he said. 'I thought for a minute it might be a young woman.'

'You ought to lock the door,' I said.

'God A'mighty, I ain't frit at being looked at in me

bath.' He held his trousers momentarily suspended, as though in deference to me. 'Never mattered to me since that day when...'

He broke off suddenly as the housekeeper came running in with the first bucket of boiling water for the bath, elbowing us out of her way, the water falling into the bath like a scalding waterfall. No sooner had the great cloud of steam dispersed than she was back again with a second bucket. It seemed better than the first.

'Out of my way!' she ordered,

'Git us a glass of wine,' said Silas, 'and don't va-pour about so much.'

'You'll have no wine,' she said, 'until you've been in that bath.'

'Then git us a dozen taters to roast. And look slippy.'

She was already out of the room with the empty bucket.

'Get 'em yourself!' she flashed.

'I got me trousers off!' he half-shouted.

'Then put them on again!'

This relentless exchange of words went on all the time she was bringing the remaining buckets of water in and he was undoing the tapes of his pants, he shouting for the wine and the potatoes and she never wavering in her tart refusals to get them. Finally, as he began to roll down his pants and she began to bring in the last half-buckets of water, he turned to me and said:

'Git a light and go down and fetch that bottle o' wine and the taters. Bring a bottle of elderberry. A quart.'

While I was down in the cellar, searching with a candle in the musty wine-odoured corners for the potatoes and the bottle, I could hear the faint sounds of argument and splashing water from above. I was perhaps five minutes in the cellar, and when I went back up the stone steps, with the wine in one hand and the candle in the other and the potatoes in my pockets, the sound of voices seemed to have increased.

When I reached the living-room Silas was standing up in the bath, stark naked, and the housekeeper was shouting:

'Sit down, man, can't you? Sit down! How can I bath you if YOU don't sit down?'

'Sit down yourself! I don't want to burn the skin off me behind, if you do!'

While he protested she seized his shoulders and tried to force him down in the bath, but his old and rugged body, looking even stronger and more imperishable in its nakedness than ever, was stiff and immovable, and he never budged except to dance a little as the water stung the tender parts of his feet.

'Git the taters under!' he said to me at last. 'God A'might, I'll want summat after this.'

Gradually, as I was putting the potatoes in the ashes under the fire, the arguments quietened a little, and finally my Uncle Silas stooped, half-knelt in the water and then with a brief mutter of relief sat down. Almost in silence the housekeeper lathered the flannel she had made from her petticoat and then proceeded to wash his body, scrubbing every inch of it fiercely, taking no more notice of his nakedness than if he had been a figure of wood. All the time he sat there a little abjectly, his spirit momentarily subdued, making no effort to wash himself except sometimes to dabble his hands and dribble a little water over his bony legs. He gave even that up at last, turning to me to say:

'I never could see a damn lot o' use in water.'

Finally, when she had washed him all over, she seized the great coarse towel that had been warming on the clothes-horse by the fire.

'You're coming out now,' she said.

'I don't know as I am.'

'Did you hear what I said? You're coming out!'

'Damn, you were fast enough gittin' me in - you can wait a minute. I just got settled.'

Seizing his shoulders she began to try to force him to stand up just as she had tried to force him, only a minute or two ago, to sit down. And as before he would not budge. He sat there luxuriously, not caring, some of the old devilish look of perversity back in his face, his hands playing with the water.

'He's just doing it on purpose,' she said to me at last. 'Just because you're here. He wants us to sit here and admire him. That's all. I know.'

'Don't talk so much! he said. 'I'm getting out as fast as you'll let me.'

'Come on, then, come on!' she insisted. 'Heaven knows we don't want to look at you all night.'

The words seemed to remind my Uncle Silas of something, and as he stood up in the bath and she began towelling his back he said to me:

'I recollect what I was going to tell you now. I was having a swim with a lot o' chaps, once, in the mill-brook at ...'

'We don't want to hear your old tales, either!' she said. 'We heard 'em all times anew.'

'Not this one,' he said.

Nevertheless her words silenced him. He stood there dumb and almost meek all the time she was towelling him dry and it was only when she vanished into the kitchen to fetch a second towel for him to dry his toes that he recollected the story he had been trying to tell me, and came to life.

'I was swimming with these chaps, in the mill-brook, and we left all our clothes on the bank...'

'Mind yourselves!'

The housekeeper had returned with the towel, and my Uncle Silas, as though he had never even heard of the tale he was so anxious to tell and I was so anxious to hear, said solemnly to me:

'Next year I'll have peas where I had taters, and taters where I had carrots ...'

'Dry your toes!' said the housekeeper.

'Dry 'em yourself and don't talk so much!'

At the same time she thrust the towel in his hand and then began to scoop the water out of the bath with an enamel basin and put it into a bucket. When the bucket was full she hastened out of the room with it, her half-laced shoes slopping noisily in her haste. Almost before she had gone through the door and long before we heard the splash of water in the sink my Uncle Silas said swiftly, 'Tot out,' and I uncorked the wine-bottle while he found the glasses in the little cupboard above the fire.

We were standing there drinking the wine, so red and rich and soft, Silas in nothing but his shirt, when the housekeeper returned. She refilled the bucket quickly and hastened out again. No sooner had she gone than he turned to me to continue the story, and standing there, his thick blue-striped flannel shirt reaching below his knees, the hairs on his thin gnarled legs standing out as stiff as the bristles on his own gooseberries, the wine glass in one hand and the towel in the other, he looked more wicked and devilish and ugly than I ever remembered him. Going on with the story, he had reached the point where the men, coming out of the mill-brook, had found their clothes gone, when the housekeeper returned.

'I think I s'll have peas along the side o' the wood,' he said, serenely, while she refilled the bucket, 'and perhaps back o' the well.'

'You get your toes dried and get dressed!' she ordered.

'And you mind your own business and get the supper. And look slippy!'

As soon as she had left the room again he resumed the tale, but no sooner had he begun than she returned. It went on like this, he telling a sentence of the tale and she returning and he interspersing some angelic and airy remark about his peas and potatoes until at last she came in to spread the cloth on the table and lay the supper. She was

in the room for so long, laying out the plates and the cutlery, that at last he gave up, turning to me with an air of satanic innocence to say:

'I'll tell you the name o' the tater when I can think of it. My memory ain't so good as it was.'

After that he proceeded meekly to put on his pants, tucking in the voluminous folds of his shirt before tying up the tapes. While the tail of his shirt was still hanging loose he remembered the potatoes I had put in the hot ashes under the fire and seizing the toasting-fork he began to prod their skins. 'Damn, they'll be done afore I get my trousers on,' he said. And standing there, with the toasting-fork in his hand, his pants tight against his legs and the tail of his shirt protruding, he looked more than anything else like the devil of tradition, prodding the roasting sinners.

That veritable air of devilishness was still about him when, finding a moment later that the housekeeper had left the room again, he turned swiftly to me to say:

'Give us another mouthful o' wine. I'll tell you what happened.'

I had hardly begun to pour the wine into his glass before he began to say, in a devilish, husky voice that was hardly more than a whisper: 'Some gals had got the clothes. They stood up on the bridge and dangled our trousers over and threatened to drop 'em in the mill-pond. What d'ye think of that? There we were swimming about wi' nothing on and they wouldn't give us the clothes.'

He went on to tell me how gradually they grew tired and desperate and at last angry at the three girls dangling over the bridge while they grew colder and colder in the deep mill-pond and how finally he himself climbed out of the water and ran up to the bridge, stark naked, and frightened the girls into dropping the clothes and retreating. Long before he had finished I noticed that the housekeeper had returned and was standing in the doorway, unseen by my Uncle Silas, attentively listening.

'God A'mighty, you should have seen 'em drop the clothes and run when they see me. All except one.'

'What did she do?'

'Run off across the meadow with my clothes under her arms. What d'ye think o'that?'

'What did you do?'

'Run after her.'

He ceased speaking, and taking a slow drink of his wine he moistened his thick red lips with his tongue, as though the tale were not finished and he were trying to remember its end. A strange almost soft expression of reminiscence came over his face, flushed with the bath and the wine, as though he could see clearly the river, the meadow, and he himself running across the summer grass, naked, pursuing the girl running away with his clothes.

'Run un,' he said at last. 'I never did find out who she was. Never did find out.'

At that moment the housekeeper came in from the doorway, moving so quietly for once that he scarcely heard her, the sound of the cheese-dish being laid on the table startling him so much that he could only turn and stare at her, fingering the tapes of his pants and at a loss for words.

'Didn't you ever find out?' she said.

'No. I was just telling the boy. It's been so damn long ago.'

She looked at him for a moment and then said: 'I know who she was. And so do you.'

It was the only time I ever saw him at a loss for an answer and it was almost the only time I ever saw her smile. He stood there slowly licking his lips in uneasy silence until at last she snapped at him with all the old habitual tartness:

'Get yourself dressed, man! I ain't running away with your clothes now, if I did then.'

She began to help him on with his clothes. He still had nothing to say, but once, as she was fastening the

back buttons of his trousers and he stood with his face
turned away from her, he gave me a half-smiling but in-
scrutable look, rich with devilry, his eyelids half-
lowered and his lips shining wet with the wine.

And I began to understand then something I had not
understood before.

BEWARE OF THE DOG

Roald Dahl (1916 -)

Down below there was only a vast white undulating sea of cloud. Above there was the sun, and the sun was white like the clouds, because it is never yellow when one looks at it from high in the air.

He was still flying the Spitfire. His right hand was on the stick, and he was working the rudder bar with his left leg alone. It was quite easy. The machine was flying well, and he knew what he was doing.

Everything is fine, he thought. I'm doing all right. I'm doing nicely. I know my way home. I'll be there in half an hour. When I land I shall taxi in and switch off my engine and I shall say, help me to get out, will you. I shall make my voice sound ordinary and natural and none of them will take any notice. Then I shall say, someone help me to get out. I can't do it alone because I've lost one of my legs. They'll all laugh and think that I'm joking, and I shall say, all right, come and have a look, you unbelieving bastards. Then Yorky will climb up onto the wing and look inside. He'll probably be sick because of all the blood and the mess. I shall laugh and say, for God's sake, help me out.

He glanced down again at his right leg. There was not much of it left. The cannon shell had taken him on the thigh, just above the knee, and now there was nothing but a great mess and a lot of blood. When he looked down, he felt as if he were seeing something that did not belong to him. It had nothing to do with him. It was just a mess which happened to be there in the cockpit; something strange and unusual and rather interesting. It was like finding a dead cat on the sofa.

He really felt fine, and because he still felt fine, he felt excited and unafraid.

I won't even bother to call up on the radio for the blood wagon, he thought. It isn't necessary. And when I land I'll sit there quite normally and say, some of you fellows come and help me out, will you, because I've lost one of my legs. That will be funny. I'll laugh a little while I'm saying it; I'll say it calmly and slowly, and they'll think I'm joking. When Yorky comes up onto the wing and gets sick, I'll say, Yorky, you old son of a bitch, have you fixed my car yet? Then when I get out I'll make my report and later I'll go up to London. I'll take that half bottle of whisky with me and I'll give it to Bluey. We'll sit in her room and drink it. I'll get the water out of the bathroom tap. I won't say much until it's time to go to bed, then I'll say, Bluey, I've got a surprise for you. I lost a leg today. But I don't mind so long as you don't. It doesn't even hurt. We'll go everywhere in cars. I always hated walking, except when I walked down the street of the coppersmiths in Bagdad, but I could go in a rickshaw. I could go home and chop wood, but the head always flies off the ax. Hot water, that's what it needs; put it in the bath and make the handle swell. I chopped wood last time I went home, and I put the ax in the bath...

Then he saw the sun shining on the engine cowling of his machine. He saw the rivets in the metal, and he remembered where he was. He realized that he was no longer feeling good; that he was sick and giddy. His head kept falling forward onto his chest because his neck seemed no longer to have any strength. But he knew that he was flying the Spitfire, and he could feel the handle of the stick between the fingers of his right hand.

I'm going to pass out, he thought. Any moment now I'm going to pass out.

He looked at his altimeter. Twenty-one thousand. To test himself he tried to read the hundreds as well as the thousands. Twenty-one thousand and what? As he looked the dial became blurred, and he could not even see the needle.

He knew then that he must bail out; that there was not a second to lose, otherwise he would become unconscious. Quickly, frantically, he tried to slide back the hood with his left hand, but he had not the strength. For a second he took his right hand off the stick, and with his both hands he managed to push the hood back. The rush of cold air on his face seemed to help. He had a moment of great clearness, and his actions became orderly and precise. That is what happens with a good pilot. He took some quick deep breaths from his oxygen mask, and as he did so, he looked out over the side of the cockpit. Down below there was only a vast white sea of cloud, and he realized that he did not know where he was.

It'll be the Channel, he thought. I'm sure to fall in the drink.

He throttled back, pulled off his helmet, undid his straps, and pushed the stick hard over to the left. The Spitfire dripped its port wing, and turned smoothly over on to its back. The pilot fell out.

As he fell he opened his eyes, because he knew that he must not pass out before he had pulled the cord. On one side he saw the sun; on the other he saw the whiteness of the clouds, and as he fell, as he somersaulted in the air, the white clouds chased the sun and the sun chased the clouds. They chased each other in a small circle; they ran faster and faster, and there was the sun and the clouds and the clouds came nearer until suddenly there was no longer any sun, but only a great whiteness. The whole world was white, and there was nothing in it. It was so white that sometimes it looked black, but mostly it was white. He watched it as it turned from white to black, and then back to white again, and the white stayed for a long time, but the black lasted only for a few seconds. He got into the habit of going to sleep during the white periods, and of waking up just in time to see the world when it was black. But the black was very quick. Sometimes it was only a flash, like someone switching off the light, and switching it on again at once,

and so whenever it was white, he dozed off.

One day, when it was white, he put out a hand and he touched something. He took it between his fingers and crumpled it. For a time he lay there, idly letting the tips of his fingers play with the thing which they had touched. Then slowly he opened his eyes, looked down at his hand and saw that he was holding something which was white. It was the edge of a sheet. He knew it was a sheet because he could see the texture of the material and the stitchings on the hem. He screwed up his eyes, and opened them again quickly. This time he saw the room. He saw the bed in which he was lying; he saw the gray walls and the door and the green curtains over the window. There were some roses on the table by his bed.

Then he saw the basin on the table near the roses. It was a white enamel basin, and beside it there was a small medicine glass.

This is a hospital, he thought. I am in a hospital. But he could remember nothing. He lay back on his pillow, looking at the ceiling and wondering what had happened. He was gazing at the smooth grayness of the ceiling, which was so clean and gray, and then suddenly he saw a fly walking upon it. The sight of this fly, the suddenness of seeing this small black speck on a sea of gray, brushed the surface of his brain, and quickly, in that second, he remembered everything. He remembered the Spitfire and he remembered the altimeter showing twenty-one thousand feet. He remembered the pushing back of the hood with both hands, and he remembered his leg.

It seemed all right now. He looked down at the end of the bed, but he could not tell. He put one hand underneath the bedclothes and felt for his knees. He found one of them, but when he felt for the other, his hand touched something which was soft and covered in bandages.

Just then the door opened and a nurse came in.

"Hello," she said. "So you've waked up at last."

She was not good-looking, but she was large and clean. She was between thirty and forty and she had fair hair. More than that he did not notice.

"Where am I?"

"You're a lucky fellow. You landed in a wood near the beach. You're in Brighton. They brought you in two days ago, and now you're all fixed up. You look fine."

"I've lost a leg," he said.

"That's nothing. We'll get you another one. Now you must go to sleep. The doctor will be coming to see you in about an hour." She picked up the basin and the medicine glass and went out.

But he did not sleep. He wanted to keep his eyes open because he was frightened that if he shut them again everything would go away. He lay looking at the ceiling. The fly was still there. It was very energetic. It would run forward very fast for a few inches, then it would stop. Then it would run forward again, stop, run forward, stop, and every now and then it would take off and buzz around viciously in small circles. It always landed back in the same place on the ceiling and started running and stopping all over again. He watched it for so long that after a while it was no longer a fly, but only a black speck upon a sea of gray, and he was still watching it when the nurse opened the door, and stood aside while the doctor came in. He was an Army doctor, a major, and he had some last war ribbons on his chest. He was a small man. He was bald, but he had a kind face and cheerful eyes.

"Well, well," he said. "So you've decided to wake up at last. How are you feeling?"

"I feel all right,"

"That's the stuff. You'll be up and about in no time."

The doctor took his wrist to feel his pulse.

"By the way," he said, "some of the lads from your squadron were ringing up and asking about you. They wanted to come along and see you, but I said that they'd better

wait a day or two. Told them you were all right, and that they could come and see you a little later on. Just lie quiet and take it easy for a bit. Get something to read?" He glanced at the table with the roses. "No. Well, nurse will look after you. She'll get you anything you want." With that he waved his hand and went out, followed by the large clean nurse.

When they had gone, he lay back and looked at the ceiling again. The fly was still there and as he lay watching it he heard the noise of an airplane in the distance. He lay listening to the sound of the engines. It was a long way away. I wonder what it is, he thought. Let me see if I can place it. Suddenly he jerked his head sharply to one side. Anyone who has been bombed can tell the noise of a Junkers 88. They can tell most other German bombers for that matter, but especially a Junkers 88. The engines seem to sing a duet. There is a deep vibrating bass voice and with it there is a high pitched tenor. It is the singing of the tenor which makes the sound of a Junkers 88 something which one cannot mistake.

He lay listening to the noise, and he felt quite certain about what it was. But where were the sirens, and where the guns? That German pilot certainly had a nerve coming near Brighton alone in broad daylight.

The aircraft was always far away, and soon the noise faded away into the distance. This one, too, was far away, but there was the same deep undulating bass and the high singing tenor, and there was no mistaking it. He had heard that noise every day during the battle.

He was puzzled. There was a bell on the table by the bed. He reached out his hand and rang it. He heard the noise of footsteps down the corridor, and the nurse came in.

"Nurse, what were those airplanes?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I didn't hear them. Probably fighters or bombers, I expect they were returning from France. Why, what's the matter?"

"They were JU-88's. I'm sure they were Ju-88's. I know the sound of the engines. There were two of them. What were they doing over here?"

The nurse came up to the side of his bed and began to straighten out the sheets and tuck them in under the mattress.

"Gracious me, what things you imagine. You mustn't worry about a thing like that. Would you like me to get you something to read?"

"No, thank you."

She patted his pillow and brushed back the hair from his forehead with her hand.

"They never come over in daylight any longer. You know that. Probably they were Lancasters or Flying Fortresses."

"Nurse."

"Yes."

"Could I have a cigarette?"

"Why, certainly you can."

She went out and came back almost at once with a packet of Players and some matches. She handed one to him and when he had put it in his mouth, she struck a match and lit it.

"If you want me again," she said, "you ring the bell," and she went out.

Once toward evening he heard the noise of another aircraft. It was far away, but even so he knew that it was a single-engined machine. But he could not place it. It was going fast; he could tell that. But it wasn't a Spit, and it wasn't a Hurricane. It did not sound like an American engine either. They make more noise. He did not know what it was, and it worried him greatly. Perhaps I am very ill, he thought. Perhaps I am imagining things. Perhaps I am a little delirious. I simply do not know what to think.

That evening the nurse came in with a basin of hot water and began to wash him.

"Well," she said, "I hope you don't still think that we're being bombed."

She had taken off his pajama top and was soaping his right arm with a flannel. He did not answer.

She rinsed the flannel in the water, rubbed more soap on it, and began to wash his chest.

"You're looking fine this evening," she said. "They operated on you as soon as you came in. They did a marvelous job. You'll be all right. I've got a brother in the RAF," she added. "Flying bombers."

He said, "I went to school in Brighton."

She looked up quickly. "Well, that's fine," she said. "I expect you'll know some people in the town."

"Yes," he said, "I know quite a few."

She had finished washing his chest and arms, and now she turned back the bedclothes, so that his left leg was uncovered. She did it in such a way that his bandaged stump remained under the sheets. She undid the cord of his pajama trousers and took them off. There was no trouble because they had cut off the right trouser leg, so that it could not interfere with the bandages. She began to wash his left leg and the rest of his body. This was the first time that he had had a bed bath, and he was embarrassed. She laid a towel under his leg, and she was washing his foot with the flannel. She said, "This wretched soap won't lather at all. It's the water. It's as hard as nails."

He said, "None of the soap is very good now and, of course, with hard water it's hopeless." As he said this he remembered something. He remembered the baths which he used to take at school in Brighton, in the long stone-floored bathroom which had four baths in a room. He remembered how the water was so soft that you had to take a shower afterwards to get all the soap off your body, and he remembered how the foam used to float on the surface of the water, so that you could not see your legs underneath. He remembered that sometimes they were given calcium tablets because the school doctor used to say that soft water was bad for the teeth.

"In Brighton," he said, "the water isn't..."

He did not finish the sentence. Something had occurred to him; something so fantastic and absurd that for a moment he felt like telling the nurse about it and having a good laugh.

She looked up. "The water isn't what?" she said.

"Nothing," he answered. "I was dreaming."

She rinsed the flannel in the basin, wiped the soap off his leg, and dried him with a towel.

"It's nice to be washed," he said. "I feel better." He was feeling his face with his hand. "I need a shave."

"We'll do that tomorrow," she said. "Perhaps you can do it yourself then."

That night he could not sleep. He lay awake thinking of the Junkers 88's and of the hardness of the water. He could think of nothing else. They were JU-88's, he said to himself. I know they were. And yet it is not possible, because they would not be flying around so low over here in broad day-light. I know that it is true, and yet I know that it is impossible. Perhaps I am ill. Perhaps I am behaving like a fool and do not know what I am doing or saying. Perhaps I am delirious. For a long time he lay awake thinking these things, and once he got up in bed and said aloud, "I will prove that I am not crazy. I will make a little speech about something complicated and intellectual. I will talk about what to do with Germany after the war." But before he had time to begin, he was asleep.

He woke just as the first light of day was showing through the slit in the curtains over the window. The room was still dark, but he could tell that it was already beginning to get light outside. He lay looking at the gray light which was showing through the slit in the curtain, and as he lay there he remembered the Junkers 88's and the hardness of the water; he remembered the large pleasant nurse and the kind doctor, and now the small grain of doubt took root in his mind and it began to grow.

He looked around the room. The nurse had taken the

roses out the night before, and there was nothing except the table with a packet of cigarettes, a box of matches and an ash tray. Otherwise it was bare. It was no longer warm or friendly. It was not even comfortable. It was cold and empty and very quiet.

Slowly the grain of doubt grew, and with it came fear, a light, dancing fear that warned but did not frighten; the kind of fear that one gets not because one is afraid, but because one feels that there is something wrong. Quickly the doubt and the fear grew so that he became restless and angry, and when he touched his forehead with his hand, he found that it was damp with sweat. He knew then that he must do something; that he must find some way of proving to himself that he was either right or wrong, and he looked up and saw again the window and the green curtains. From where he lay, that window was right in front of him, but it was fully ten yards away. Somehow he must reach it and look out. The idea became an obsession with him, and soon he could think of nothing except the window. But what about his leg? He put his hand underneath the bedclothes and felt the thick bandaged stump which was all that was left on the right-hand side. It seemed all right. It didn't hurt. But it would not be easy.

He sat up. Then he pushed the bedclothes aside and put his left leg on the floor. Slowly, carefully, he swung his body over until he had both hands on the floor as well; and then he was out of bed, kneeling on the carpet. He looked at the stump. It was very short and thick, covered with bandages. It was beginning to hurt and he could feel it throbbing. He wanted to collapse, lie down on the carpet and do nothing, but he knew that he must go on.

With two arms and one leg, he crawled over towards the window. He would reach forward as far as he could with his arms, then he would give a little jump and slide his left leg along after them. Each time he did, it jarred his wound so that he gave a soft grunt of pain, but he continued to

crawl across the floor on two hands and one knee. When he got to the window he reached up, and one at a time he placed both hands on the sill. Slowly he raised himself up until he was standing on his left leg. Then quickly he pushed aside the curtains and looked out.

He saw a small house with a gray tiled roof standing alone beside a narrow lane, and immediately behind it there was a plowed field. In front of the house there was an untidy garden, and there was a green hedge separating the garden from the lane. He was looking at the hedge when he saw the sign. It was just a piece of board nailed to the top of a short pole, and because the hedge had not been trimmed for a long time, the branches had grown out around the sign so that it seemed almost as though it had been placed in the middle of the hedge. There was something written on the board with white paint, and he pressed his head against the glass of the window, trying to read what it said. The first letter was a G, he could see that. The second was an A, and the third was an R. One after another he managed to see what the letters were. There were three words, and slowly he spelled the letters out aloud to himself as he managed to read them. G-A-R-D-E A-U C-H-I-E-N. Garde au chien. That is what it said.

He stood there balancing on one leg and holding tightly to the edges of the window sill with his hand, staring at the sign and at the white-washed lettering of the words. For a moment he could think of nothing at all. He stood there looking at the sign, repeating the words over and over to himself, and then slowly he began to realize the full meaning of the thing. He looked up at the cottage and at the plowed field. He looked at the small orchard on the left of the cottage and he looked at the green countryside beyond. "So this is France," he said. "I am in France."

Now the throbbing in his right thigh was very great. It felt as though someone was pounding the end of his stump with a hammer and suddenly the pain became so intense that

it affected his head and for a moment he thought he was going to fall. Quickly he knelt down again, crawled back to the bed and hoisted himself in. He pulled the bedclothes over himself and lay back on the pillow, exhausted. He could still think of nothing at all except the small sign by the hedge, and the orchard. It was the words on the sign that he could not forget.

It was some time before the nurse came in. She came carrying a basin of hot water and she said, "Good morning, how are you today?"

He said, "Good morning, nurse."

The pain was still great under the bandages, but he did not wish to tell this woman anything. He looked at her more carefully now. Her hair was very fair. She was tall and big-boned, and her face seemed pleasant. But there was something a little uneasy about her eyes. They were never still. They never looked at anything for more than a moment and they moved too quickly from one place to another in the room. There was something about her movements also. They were too sharp and nervous to go well with the casual manner in which she spoke.

She set down the basin, took off his pajama top and began to wash him.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes."

"Good," she said. She was washing his arms and his chest.

"I believe there's someone coming down to see you from the Air Ministry after breakfast," she went on. "They want a report or something. I expect you know all about it. How you got shot down and all that. I won't let him stay long, so don't worry."

He did not answer. She finished washing him, and gave him a toothbrush and some tooth powder. He brushed his teeth, rinsed his mouth and spat the water out into the basin.

Later she brought him his breakfast on a tray, but he did not want to eat. He was still feeling weak and sick, and he wished only to lie still and think about what had happened. And there was a sentence running through his head. It was a sentence which Johnny, the Intelligence Officer of his squadron, always repeated to the pilots every day before they went out. He could see Johnny now, leaning against the wall of the dispersal hut with his pipe in his hand, saying, "And if they get you, don't forget, just your name, rank and number. Nothing else. For God's sake, say nothing else."

"There you are," she said as she put the tray on his lap. "I've got you an egg. Can you manage all right?"

"Yes."

She stood beside the bed. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes."

"Good. If you want another egg I might be able to get you one."

"This is all right."

"Well, just ring the bell if you want any more." And she went out.

He had just finished eating, when the nurse came in again.

She said, "Wing Commander Roberts is here. I've told him that he can only stay for a few minutes."

She beckoned with her hand and the Wing Commander came in.

"Sorry to bother you like this," he said.

He was an ordinary RAF officer, dressed in a uniform which was a little shabby, and he wore wings and a DFC. He was fairly tall and thin with plenty of black hair. His teeth, which were irregular and widely spaced, stuck out a little even when he closed his mouth. As he spoke he took a printed form and a pencil from his pocket, and he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"How are you feeling?"

There was no answer.

"Tough luck about your leg. I know how you feel. I hear you put up a fine show before they got you."

The man in the bed was lying quite still, watching the man in the chair.

The man in the chair said, "Well, let's get this stuff over. I'm afraid you'll have to answer a few questions so that I can fill in this combat report. Let me see now, first of all, what was your squadron?"

The man in the bed did not move. He looked straight at the Wing Commander and said, "My name is Peter Williamson. My rank is Squadron Leader and my number is nine seven two four five seven."

THE OLD DEMON

Pearl S. Buck (1892 -)

Old Mrs. Wang knew of course that there was a war. Everybody had known for a long time that there was war going on and that Japanese were killing Chinese. But still it was not real and no more than hearsay since none of the Wangs had been killed. The Village of Three Mile Wangs on the flat banks of The Yellow River, which was old Mrs. Wang's clan village, had never even seen a Japanese. This was how they came to be talking about Japanese at all.

It was evening and early summer, and after her supper Mrs. Wang had climbed the dike steps, as she did every day, to see how high the river had risen. She was much more afraid of the river than of the Japanese. She knew what the river would do. And one by one the villagers had followed her up the dike, and now they stood staring down at the malicious yellow water, curling along like a lot of snakes, and biting at the high dike banks.

"I never saw it as high as this so early," Mrs. Wang said. She sat down on a bamboo stool that her grandson, Little Pig, had brought for her, and spat into the water.

"It's worse than the Japanese, this old devil of a river," Little Pig said recklessly.

"Fool!" Mrs. Wang said quickly. "The river god will hear you. Talk about something else."

So they had gone on talking about the Japanese... How, for instance, asked Wang, the baker, who was old Mrs. Wang's nephew twice removed, would they know the Japanese when they saw them?

Mrs. Wang at this point said positively, "You'll know them. I once saw a foreigner. He was taller than the eaves of my house and he had mud-colored hair and eyes the color of a fish's eyes. Anyone who does not look like us - that is a Japanese."

Everybody listened to her since she was the oldest woman in the village and whatever she said settled something.

Then Little Pig spoke up in his disconcerting way. "You can't see them, Grandmother. They hide up in the sky in airplanes."

Mrs. Wang did not answer immediately. Once she would have said positively, "I shall not believe in an airplane until I see it." But so many things had been true which she had not believed - the Empress, for instance, whom she had not believed dead, was dead. The Republic, again, she had not believed in because she did not know what it was. She still did not know, but they said for a long time there had been one. So now she merely stared quietly about the dike where they all sat round her. It was very pleasant and cool, and she felt nothing mattered if the river did not rise to flood.

"I don't believe in the Japanese," she said flatly.

They laughed at her a little, but no one spoke. Someone lit her pipe - it was Little Pig's wife, who was her favourite, and she smoked it.

"Sing, Little Pig!" someone called.

So Little Pig began to sing an old song in a high, quavering voice, and old Mrs. Wang listened and forgot the Japanese. The evening was beautiful, the sky so clear and still that the willows overhanging the dike were reflected in the muddy water. Everything was at peace. The thirty-odd houses which made up the village straggled along beneath them. Nothing could break this peace. After all, the Japanese were only human beings.

"I doubt those airplanes," she said mildly to Little Pig when he stopped singing.

But without answering her, he went on to another song.

Year in and year out she had spent the summer evenings like this on the dike. The first time she was seventeen and a bride, and her husband had shouted to her to come out of the house and up the dike, and she had come, blushing and

twisting her hands together, to hide among the women while the men roared at her and made jokes about her. All the same, they had liked her. "A pretty piece of meat in your bowl," they had said to her husband. "Feet a trifle big," he had answered deprecatingly. But she could see he was pleased, and so gradually her shyness went away.

He, poor man, had been drowned in a flood when he was still young. And it had taken her years to get him prayed out of Buddhist purgatory. Finally she had grown tired of it, what with the child and the land all on her back, and so when the priest said coaxingly, "Another ten pieces of silver and he'll be out entirely," she asked, "What's he got in there yet?"

"Only his right hand," the priest said, encouragingly.

Well, then, her patience broke. Ten dollars! It would feed them for the winter. Besides, she had had to hire labor for her share of repairing the dike, too, so there would be no more floods.

"If it's only one hand, he can pull himself out," she said firmly.

She often wondered if he had, poor silly fellow. As like as not, she had often thought gloomily in the night, he was still lying there, waiting for her to do something about it. That was the sort of man he was. Well, some day, perhaps, when Little Pig's wife had had the first baby safely and she had a little extra, she might go back to finish him out of purgatory. There was no real hurry, though....

"Grandmother, you must go in," Little Pig's wife's soft voice said. "There is a mist rising from the river now that the sun is gone."

"Yes, I suppose I must," old Mrs. Wang agreed. She gazed at the river a moment. That river - it was full of good and evil together. It would water the fields when it was curbed and checked, but then if an inch were allowed it, it crashed through like a roaring dragon. That was how her husband had been swept away - careless, he was, about his

bit of the dike. He was always going to mend it, always going to pile more earth on top of it, and then in a night the river rose and broke through. He had run out of the house, and she had climbed on the roof with the child and had saved herself and it while he was drowned. Well, they had pushed the river back again behind its dikes, and it had stayed there this time. Every day she herself walked up and down the length of the dike for which the village was responsible and examined it. The men laughed and said, "If anything is wrong with the dikes, Granny will tell us."

It had never occurred to any of them to move the village away from the river. The Wangs had lived there for generations, and some had always escaped the floods and had fought the river more fiercely than ever afterwards.

Little Pig suddenly stopped singing.

"The moon is coming up!" he cried. "That's not good. Airplanes come out on moonlight nights."

"Where do you learn all this about airplanes?" old Mrs. Wang exclaimed. "It's tiresome to me," she added, so severely that no one spoke. In this silence, leaning upon the arm of Little Pig's wife, she descended slowly the earthen steps which led down into the village, using her long pipe in the other hand as a walking stick. Behind her the villagers came down, one by one, to bed. No one moved before she did, but none stayed longer after her.

And in her own bed at last, behind the blue cotton mosquito curtains which Little Pig's wife fastened securely, she fell peacefully asleep. She had lain awake a little while thinking about the Japanese and wondering why they wanted to fight. Only very coarse persons wanted wars. In her mind she saw large coarse persons. If they came one must wheedle them, she thought, invite them to drink tea, and explain to them, reasonably - only why should they come to a peaceful farming village?

So she was not in the least prepared for Little Pig's wife screaming at her that the Japanese had come. She sat up in bed muttering, "The tea bowls - the tea -"

"Grandmother, there's no time!" Little Pig's wife screamed. "They're here - they're here!"

"Where?" old Mrs. Wang cried, now awake.

"In the sky!" Little Pig's wife wailed.

They had all run out at that, into the clear early dawn, and gazed up. There, like wild geese flying in autumn, were great birdlike shapes.

"But what are they?" old Mrs. Wang cried.

And then, like a silver egg dropping, something drifted straight down and fell at the far end of the village in a field. A fountain of earth flew up, and they all ran to see it. There was a hole thirty feet across, as big as a pond. They were so astonished they could not speak, and then, before anyone could say anything, another and another egg began to fall and everybody was running, running...

Everybody, that is, but Mrs. Wang. When Little Pig's wife seized her hand to drag her along, old Mrs. Wang pulled away and sat down against the bank of the dike.

"I can't run," she remarked. "I haven't run in seventy years, since before my feet were bound. You go on. Where's Little Pig?" She looked around. Little Pig was already gone. "Like his grandfather," she remarked, "always the first to run."

But Little Pig's wife would not leave her, not, that is, until old Mrs. Wang reminded her that it was her duty.

"If Little Pig is dead," she said, "then it is necessary that his son be born alive." And when the girl still hesitated, she struck at her gently with her pipe. "Go on - go on," she exclaimed.

So unwillingly, because now they could scarcely hear each other speak for the roar of the dipping planes, Little Pig's wife went on with the others.

By now, although only a few minutes had passed, the village was in ruins and the straw roofs and wooden beams were blazing. Everybody was gone. As they passed they had shrieked at old Mrs. Wang to come on, and she had called back pleasantly:

"I'm coming - I'm coming!"

But she did not go. She sat quite alone watching now what was an extraordinary spectacle. For soon other planes came, from where she did not know, but they attacked the first ones. The sun came up over the fields of ripening wheat, and in the clear summery air the planes wheeled and darted and spat at each other. When this was over, she thought, she would go back into the village and see if anything was left. Here and there a wall stood, supporting a roof. She could not see her own house from here. But she was not unused to war. Once bandits had looted their village, and houses had been burned then, too. Well, now it happened again. Burning houses one could see often, but not this darting silvery shining battle in the air. She understood none of it - not what those things were, nor how they stayed up in the sky. She simply sat, growing hungry, and watching.

"I'd like to see one close," she said aloud. And at that moment, as though in answer, one of them pointed suddenly downward, and, wheeling and twisting as though it were wounded, it fell head down in a field which Little Pig had ploughed only yesterday for soybeans. And in an instant the sky was empty again, and there was only this wounded thing on the ground and herself.

She hoisted herself carefully from the earth. At her age she need be afraid of nothing. She could, she decided, go and see what it was. So, leaning on her bamboo pipe, she made her way slowly across the fields. Behind her in the sudden stillness two or three village dogs appeared and followed, creeping close to her in their terror. When they drew near to the fallen plane, they barked furiously. Then she hit them with her pipe.

"Be quiet," she scolded, "there is already been noise enough to split my ears!"

She tapped the airplane.

"Metal," she told the dogs. "Silver, doubtless," she added. Melted up, it would make them all rich.

She walked around it, examining it closely. What made it fly? It seemed dead. Nothing moved or made sound within it. Then, coming to the side to which it tipped, she saw a young man in it, slumped into a heap in a little seat. The dogs growled, but she struck at them again and they fell back.

"Are you dead?" she inquired politely.

The young man moved a little at her voice, but did not speak. She drew nearer and peered into the hole in which he sat. His side was bleeding.

"Wounded!" she exclaimed. She took his wrist. It was warm, but inert, and when she let it go, it dropped against the side of the hole. She stared at him. He had black hair and a dark skin like a Chinese and still he did not look like a Chinese.

"He must be a Southerner," she thought. Well, the chief thing was, he was alive.

"You had better come out," she remarked. "I'll put some herb plaster on your side."

The young man muttered something dully.

"What did you say?" she asked. But he did not say it again.

"I'm still quite strong," she decided after a moment. So she reached in and seized him about the waist and pulled him out slowly, panting a good deal. Fortunately he was rather a little fellow and very light. When she had him on the ground, he seemed to find his feet; and he stood shakily and clung to her, and she helped him up.

"Now if you can walk to my house," she said, "I'll see if it is there."

Then he said something, quite clearly. She listened and could not understand a word of it. She pulled away from him and stared.

"What's that?" she asked.

He pointed at the dogs. They were standing growling, their ruffs up. Then he spoke again, and as he spoke he

crumpled to the ground. The dogs fell on him, so that she had to beat them off with her hands.

"Get away!" she shouted. "Who told you to kill him?"

And then, when they had slunk back, she heaved him somehow onto her back; and, trembling, half carrying, half pulling him, she dragged him to the ruined village and laid him in the street while she went to find her house, taking the dogs with her.

Her house was quite gone. She found the place easily enough. This was where it should be, opposite the water gate herself. Miraculously it was not injured now, nor was the dike broken. It would be easy enough to rebuild the house. Only, for the present, it was gone.

So she went back to the young man. He was lying as she had left him, propped against the dike, panting and very pale. He had opened his coat and he had a little bag from which he was taking out strips of cloth and a bottle of something. And again he spoke, and again she understood nothing. Then he made signs and she saw it was water he wanted, so she took up a broken pot from one of many blown about the street, and, going up the dike, she filled it with river water and brought it down again and washed his wound, and she tore off the strips he made from the rolls of bandaging. He knew how to put the cloth over the gaping wound and he made signs to her, and she followed these signs. All the time he was trying to tell her something, but she could not understand anything.

"You must be from the South, sir," she said. It was easy to see that he had education. He looked very clever. "I have heard your language is different from ours." She laughed a little to put him at his ease, but he only stared at her somberly with dull eyes. So she said brightly, "Now if I could find something for us to eat, it would be nice."

He did not answer. Indeed he lay back, panting still more heavily, and stared into space as though she had not spoken.

"You would be better with food," she went on. "And so would I," she added. She was beginning to feel unbearably hungry.

It occurred to her that in Wang, the baker's, shop there might be some bread. Even if it were dusty with fallen mortar, it would still be bread. She would go and see. But before she went she moved the soldier a little so that he lay in the edge of shadow cast by a willow tree that grew in the bank of the dike. Then she went to the baker's shop. The dogs were gone.

The baker's shop was, like everything else, in ruins. No one was there. At first she saw nothing but the mass of crumpled earthen walls. But then she remembered that the oven was just inside the door, and the door frame still stood erect, supporting one end of the roof. She stood in this frame, and, running her hand in underneath the fallen roof inside, she felt the wooden cover of the iron caldron. Under this there might be steamed bread. She worked her arm delicately and carefully in. It took quite a long time, but even so, clouds of lime and dust almost choked her. Nevertheless she was right. She squeezed her hand under the cover and felt the firm smooth skin of the big steamed bread rolls, and one by one she drew out four.

"It's hard to kill an old thing like me," she remarked cheerfully to no one, and she began to eat one of the rolls as she walked back. If she had a bit of garlic and a bowl of tea - but one couldn't have everything in these times.

It was at this moment that she heard voices. When she came in sight of the soldier, she saw surrounding him a crowd of other soldiers, who had apparently come from nowhere. They were staring down at the wounded soldier, whose eyes were now closed.

"Where did you get this Japanese, Old Mother?" they shouted at her.

"What Japanese?" she asked, coming to them.

"This one!" they shouted.

"Is he a Japanese?" she cried in the greatest astonishment. "But he looks like us - his eyes are black, his skin - "

"Japanese!" one of them shouted at her.

"Well," she said quietly, "he dropped out of the sky."

"Give me the bread!" another shouted.

"Take it," she said, "all except this one for him."

"A Japanese monkey eat good bread?" the soldier shouted.

"I suppose he is hungry also," old Mrs. Wang replied. She began to dislike these men. But then, she had always disliked soldiers.

"I wish you would go away," she said. "What are you doing here? Our village has always been peaceful."

"It certainly looks very peaceful now," one of the men said, grinning, "as peaceful as a grave. Do you know who did that, Old Mother? The Japanese!"

"I suppose so," she agreed. Then she asked, "Why? That's what I don't understand."

"Why? Because they want our land, that's why!"

"Our land!" she repeated. "Why, they can't have our land!"

"Never!" they shouted.

But all this time while they were talking and chewing the bread they had divided among themselves, they were watching the eastern horizon.

"Why do you keep looking east?" old Mrs. Wang now asked.

"The Japanese are coming from there," the man replied who had taken the bread.

"Are you running away from them?" she asked, surprised.

"There are only a handful of us," he said apologetically. "We were left to guard a village - Pao An, in the county of - "

"I know that village," old Mrs. Wang interrupted. "You needn't tell me. I was a girl there. How is the old Pao

who keeps the teashop in the main street? He's my brother."

"Everybody is dead there," the man replied. "The Japanese have taken it - a great army of men came with their foreign guns and tanks, so what could we do?"

"Of course, only run," she agreed. Nevertheless she felt dazed and sick. So he was dead, that one brother she had left! She was now the last of her father's family.

But the soldiers were straggling away again leaving her alone.

"They'll be coming, those little black dwarfs," they were saying. "We'd best go on."

Nevertheless, one lingered a moment, the one who had taken the bread, to stare down at the young man, who lay with his eyes shut, not having moved at all.

"Is he dead?" he inquired. Then, before Mrs. Wang could answer, he pulled a short knife out of his belt. "Dead or not, I'll give him a punch or two with this - "

But old Mrs. Wang pushed his arm away.

"No, you won't," she said with authority. "If he is dead, then there is no use in sending him into purgatory all in pieces. I am a good Buddhist myself."

The man laughed. "Oh well, he is dead," he answered; and then, seeing his comrades at a distance, he ran after them.

A Japanese, was he? Old Mrs. Wang, left alone with this inert figure, looked at him tentatively. He was very young, she could see, now that his eyes were closed. His hand, limp in unconsciousness, looked like a boy's hand, unformed and still growing. She felt his wrist but could discern no pulse. She leaned over him and held to his lips the half of her roll which she had not eaten.

"Eat," she said very loudly and distinctly. "Bread!"

But there was no answer. Evidently he was dead. He must have died while she was getting the bread out of the oven.

There was nothing to do then but to finish the bread

herself. And when that was done, she wondered if she ought not to follow after Little Pig and his wife and all the villagers. The sun was mounting and it was growing hot. If she were going, she had better go. But first she would climb the dike and see what the direction was. They had gone straight west, and as far as eye could see there was a great plain westward. She might even see a good-sized crowd miles away. Anyway, she could see the next village, and they might all be there.

So she climbed the dike slowly, getting very hot. There was a slight breeze on top of the dike and it felt good. She was shocked to see the river very near the top of the dike. Why, it had risen in the last hour!

"You old demon!" she said severely. Let the river god hear it if he liked. He was evil, that he was - so to threaten flood when there had been all this other trouble.

She stooped and bathed her cheeks and her wrists. The water was quite cold, as though with fresh rains somewhere. Then she stood up and gazed around her. To the west there was nothing except in the far distance the soldiers still half-running, and beyond them the blur of the next village, which stood on a long rise of ground. She had better set out for that village. Doubtless Little Pig and his wife were there waiting for her.

Just as she was about to climb down and start out, she saw something on the eastern horizon. It was at first only an immense cloud of dust. But, as she stared at it, very quickly it became a lot of black dots and shining spots. Then she saw what it was. It was a lot of men - an army. Instantly she knew what army.

"That's the Japanese," she thought. Yes, above them were the buzzing silver planes. They circled about, seeming to search for someone.

"I don't know who you're looking for," she muttered, "unless it's me and Little Pig and his wife. We're the only ones left. You've already killed my brother Pao."

She had almost forgotten that Pao was dead. Now she remembered it acutely. He had such a nice shop - - always clean, and the tea good and the best meat dumplings to be had and the price always the same. Pao was a good man. Besides, what about his wife and his seven children? Doubtless they were all killed, too. Now these Japanese were looking for her. It occurred to her that on the dike she could easily be seen. So she clambered hastily down.

It was when she was about halfway down that she thought of the water gate. This old river - it had been a curse to them since time began. Why should it not make up a little now for all the wickedness it had done? It was plotting wickedness again, trying to steal over its banks. Well, why not? she wavered a moment. It was a pity, of course, that the young dead Japanese would be swept into the flood. He was a nice looking boy, and she had saved him from being stabbed. It was not quite the same as saving his life, of course, but still it was a little the same. If he had been alive, he would have been saved. She went over to him and tugged at him until he lay well near the top of the bank. Then she went down again.

She knew perfectly well how to open the water gate. Any child knew how to open the sluice for crops. But she knew also how to swing open the whole gate. The question was, could she open it quickly enough to get out of the way?

"I'm only one old woman," she muttered. She hesitated a second more. Well, it would be a pity not to see what sort of a baby Little Pig's wife would have, but one could not see everything. She had seen a great deal in this life. There was an end to what one could see, anyway.

She glanced again to the east. There were the Japanese coming across the plain. They were a long clear line of black, dotted with thousands of glittering points. If she opened this gate, the impetuous water would roar toward them, rushing into the plains, rolling into a wide lake, drowning them, maybe. Certainly they could not keep on

marching nearer and nearer to her and to Little Pig and his wife who were waiting for her. Well, Little Pig and his wife - they would wonder about her - but they would never dream of this. It would make a good story - she would have enjoyed telling it.

She turned resolutely to the gate. Well, some people fought with airplanes and some with guns, but you could fight with a river, too, if it were a wicked one like this one. She wrenched out a huge wooden pin. It was slippery with silvery green moss. The rill of water burst into a strong jet. When she wrenched one more pin, the rest would give way themselves. She began pulling at it, and felt it slip a little from its hole.

"I might be able to get myself out of purgatory with this," she thought, "and maybe they'll let me have that old man of mine, too. What's a hand of his to all this? Then we'll - "

The pin slipped away suddenly, and the gate burst flat against her and knocked her breath away. She had only time to gasp, to the river:

"Come on, you old demon!"

Then she felt it seize her and lift her up to the sky. It was beneath her and around her. It rolled her joyfully hither and thither, and then, holding her close and enfolded, it went rushing against the enemy.

CLOTHE THE NAKED

Dorothy Parker (1893 -)

Big Lannie went out by the day to the houses of secure and leisured ladies, to wash their silks and their linens. She did her work perfectly; some of the ladies even told her so. She was a great, slow mass of a woman, colored a sound brown-black save for her palms and the flat of her fingers that were like gutta-percha from steam and hot suds. She was slow because of her size, and because the big veins in her legs hurt her, and her back ached much of the time. She neither cursed her ills nor sought remedies for them. They had happened to her; there they were.

Many things had happened to her. She had had children, and the children had died. So had her husband, who was a kind man, cheerful with the little luck he found. None of their children had died at birth. They had lived to be four or seven or ten, so that they had had their ways and their traits and their means of causing love; and Big Lannie's heart was always wide for love. One child had been killed in a street accident and two others had died of illnesses that might have been no more than tedious, had there been fresh food and clear spaces and clean air behind them. Only Arlene, the youngest, lived to grow up.

Arlene was a tall girl, not so dark as her mother but with the same flatness of color. She was so thin that her bones seemed to march in advance of her body. Her little pipes of legs and her broad feet with jutting heels were like things a child draws with crayons. She carried her head low, her shoulders scooped around her chest, and her stomach slanted forward.

Big Lannie did not know it, when Arlene was going to have a baby. Arlene had not been home in nearly half a year; Big Lannie told the time in days. There was no news at all

of the girl until the people at the hospital sent for Big Lannie to come to her daughter and grandson. She was there to hear Arlene say the baby must be named Raymond, and to see the girl die.

He was a long light-colored baby, with big, milky eyes that looked right back at his grandmother. It was several days before the people at the hospital told her he was blind.

Big Lannie went to each of the ladies who employed her and explained that she could not work for some while; she must take care of her grandson. The ladies were sharply discommoded after her steady years, but they dressed their outrage in shrugs and cool tones. Each arrived, separately, at the conclusion that she had been too good to Big Lannie, and had been imposed upon, therefore. "Honestly, those people!" each said to her friends. "They're all alike."

Big Lannie sold most of the things she lived with, and took one room with a stove in it. There, as soon as the people at the hospital would let her, she brought Raymond and tended him. He was all her children to her.

She had always been a saving woman, with few needs and no cravings, and she had been long alone. Even after Arlene's burial, there was enough left for Raymond and Big Lannie to go on for some time. Big Lannie was slow to be afraid of what must come; fear did not visit her at all, at first, and then it slid in only when she waked, when night hung motionless before another day.

Raymond was a good baby, a quiet, patient baby, lying in his wooden box and stretching out his delicate hands to the sounds that were light and color to him. It seemed but a little while, so short to Big Lannie, before he was walking about the room, his hands held out, his feet quick and sure. Those of Big Lannie's friends who saw him for the first time had to be told that he could not see.

Then, and it seemed again such a little while, he could dress himself, and open the door for his granny, and

unlace the shoes from her tired feet, and talk to her in his soft voice. She had occasional employment - now and then a neighbor would hear of a day's scrubbing she could do, or sometimes she might work in the stead of a friend who was sick - infrequent, and not to be planned on. She went to the ladies for whom she had worked, to ask if they might not want her back again; but there was little hope in her, after she had visited the first one. Well, now, really, said the ladies; well really, now.

The neighbors across the hall watched over Raymond while Big Lannie looked for work. He was no trouble to them, nor to himself. He sat and crooned at his chosen task. He had been given a wooden spool around the top of which were driven little brads, and over these with a straightened hairpin he looped bright worsted, working faster than sight until a long tube of woven wool fell through the hole in the spool. The neighbors threaded big, blunt needles for him, and he coiled the woolen tubes and sewed them into mats. Big Lannie called them beautiful, and it made Raymond proud to have her tell him how readily she sold them. It was hard for her, when he was asleep at night, to unravel the mats and wash the worsted and stretch it so straight that even Raymond's shrewd fingers could not tell, when he worked with it next day, that it was not new.

Fear stormed in Big Lannie and took her days and nights. She might not go to any organization dispensing relief for fear that Raymond would be taken from her and put in - she would not say the word to herself, and she and her neighbors lowered their voices when they said it to one another - an institution. The neighbors wove lingering tales of what happened inside certain neat, square buildings on the cindery skirts of the town, and, if they must go near them, hurried as if passing graveyards, and came home heroes. When they got you in one of those places, whispered the neighbors, they laid your spine open with whips, and then when you dropped, they kicked your head in. Had anyone

come into Big Lannie's room to take Raymond away to an asylum for the blind, the neighbors would have fought for him with stones and rails and boiling water.

Raymond did not know about anything but good. When he grew big enough to go alone down the stairs and into the street, he was certain of delight each day. He held his head high, as he came out into the little yard in front of the flimsy wooden house, and slowly turned his face from side to side, as if the air were soft liquid in which he bathed it. Trucks and wagons did not visit the street, which ended in a dump for rusted bedsprings and broken boilers and staved-in kettles; children played over it cobbles, and men and women sat talking in open windows and called across to one another in gay, rich voices. There was always laughter for Raymond to hear, and he would laugh back, and hold out his hands to it.

At first, the children stopped their play when he came out, and gathered quietly about him, and watched him, fascinated. They had been told of his affliction, and they had a sort of sickened pity for him. Some of them spoke to him, in soft, careful tones. Raymond would laugh with pleasure, and stretch his hands, the curious smooth, flat hands of the blind, to their voices. They would draw sharply back, afraid that his strange hands might touch them. Then, somehow ashamed because they had shrunk from him and he could not see that they had done so, they said gentle good-bys to him, and backed away into the street again, watching him steadily.

When they were gone, Raymond would start on his walk to the end of the street. He guided himself lightly touching the broken fences along the dirt sidewalk, and as he walked he crooned little songs with no words to them. Some of the men and women at the windows would call hello to him, and he would call back and wave and smile. When the children, forgetting him, laughed again at their games, he stopped and turned to the sound as if it were the sun.

In the evening, he would tell Big Lannie about his walk, slapping his knee and chuckling at the memory of the laughing voices he had heard. When the weather was too hard for him to go out in the street, he would sit at his worsted work, and talk all day of going out the next day.

The neighbors did what they could for Raymond and Big Lannie. They gave Raymond clothes their own children had not yet worn out, and they brought food, when they had enough to spare and other times. Big Lannie would get through a week, and would pray to get through the next one and so the months went. Then the days on which she could find work fell farther and farther apart, and she could not pray about the time to come because she did not dare to think of it.

It was Mrs. Ewing who saved Raymond's and Big Lannie's lives, and let them continue together. Big Lannie said that then and ever after; daily she blessed Mrs. Ewing and nightly she would have prayed for her, had she not known, in some dimmed way, that any intercession for Mrs. Delabarre Ewing must be impudence.

Mrs. Ewing was a personage in the town. When she went to Richmond for a visit, or when she returned from viewing the azalea gardens in Charleston, the newspaper always printed the fact. She was a woman rigorously conscious of her noble obligation; she was prominent on the Community Chest committee, and it was she who planned and engineered the annual Bridge Drive to raise funds for planting salvia around the cannon in front of the D.A.R. headquarters. These and many others were her public activities, and she was no less exacting of herself in her private life. She kept a model, though childless, house for her husband and herself, relegating the supervision of details to no domestic lieutenant, no matter how seemingly trustworthy.

Back before Raymond was born, Big Lannie had worked as laundress for Mrs. Ewing. Since those days, the Ewing wash tubs had witnessed many changes, none for the better. Mrs. Ewing took Big Lannie back into her employment. She apolo-

gizing for this step to her friends by the always winning method of self-deprecation. She knew she was a fool, she said, after all that time, and after the way that Big Lannie had treated her. But still, she said, and she laughed a little at her own ways. Anyone she felt kind of sorry for could always get around her, she said. She knew it was awful foolish, but that, she said, was the way she was. Mr. Ewing, she said outside her husband's hearing, always called her just a regular little old easy mark.

Two days' work in the week meant money for rent and stovewood and almost enough food for Raymond and Big Lannie. She must depend, for anything further, on whatever odd jobs she could find, and she must not stop seeking them. Pressed on by fear and gratitude, she worked so well for Mrs. Ewing that there was sometimes expressed satisfaction at the condition of the lady's household linen and her own and her husband's clothing. Big Lannie had a glimpse of Mr. Ewing occasionally, leaving the house as she came, or entering it as she was leaving. He was a bit of a man, not much bigger than Raymond.

Raymond grew so fast that he seemed to be taller each morning. Every day he had his walk in the street to look forward to and experience and tell Big Lannie about at night. He had ceased to be a sight of the street; the children were so used to him that they did not even look at him, and the men and women at the windows no longer noticed him enough to hail him. He did not know. He would wave to any gay cry he heard, and go on his way, singing his little songs and turning toward the sound of laughter.

Then his lovely list of days ended as sharply as if ripped from some bright calendar. A winter came, so suddenly and so savage as to find no comparison in the town's memories, and Raymond had no clothes to wear out in the street. Big Lannie mended his outgrown garments as long as she could, but the stuff had so rotted with wear that it split in new places when she tried to sew together the ragged edges of rents.

The neighbors could give no longer; all they had they must keep for their own. A demented colored man in a nearby town had killed the woman who employed him, and terror had spread like brush fire. There was a sort of panic in reprisal; colored employees were dismissed from their positions, and there was no new work for them. But Mrs. Ewing, admittedly soft-hearted certainly to a fault and possibly to a peril, kept her black laundress on. More than ever Big Lannie had reason to call her blessed.

All winter, Raymond stayed indoors. He sat at his spool and worsted, with Big Lannie's old sweater about his shoulders and, when his tattered knickerbockers would no longer hold together, a calico skirt of hers lapped around his waist. He lived, at his age, in the past; in the days when he had walked, proud and glad, in the street, with laughter in his ears. Always, when he talked of it, he must laugh back at that laughter.

Since he could remember, he had not been allowed to go out when Big Lannie thought the weather unfit. This he had accepted without question, and so he accepted his incarceration through the mean weeks of winter. But then one day it was spring, so surely that he could tell it even in the smoky, stinking rooms of the house, and he cried out with joy because now he might walk in the street again. Big Lannie had to explain to him that his rags were too thin to shield him, and that there were no odd jobs for her, and so no clothes and shoes for him.

Raymond did not talk about the street any more, and his fingers were slow at his spool.

Big Lannie did something she had never done before; she begged of her employer. She asked Mrs. Ewing to give her some of Mr. Ewing's old clothes for Raymond. She looked at the floor and mumbled so that Mrs. Ewing requested her to talk up. When Mrs. Ewing understood, she was, she said, surprised. She had, she said, a great, great many demands on her charity, and she would have supposed that Big Lannie,

of all people, might have known that she did everything she could, in fact, a good deal more. She spoke of inches and ells. She said that if she found she could spare anything, Big Lannie was kindly to remember it was to be just for this once.

When Big Lannie was leaving at the end of her day's work, Mrs. Ewing brought her a package with her own hands. There, she said, was a suit and a pair of shoes; beautiful, grand things that people would think she was just crazy to be giving away like that. She simply didn't know, she said, what Mr. Ewing would say to her for being such a crazy. She explained that that was the way she was when anyone got around her, all the while Big Lannie was trying to thank her.

Big Lannie had never before seen Raymond behave as he did when she brought him home the package. He jumped and danced and clapped his hands, he tried to squeak and squealed instead, he tore off the paper himself, and ran his fingers over the close-woven cloth and held it to his face and kissed it. He put on the shoes and clattered about in them, digging with his toes and heels to keep them on; he made Big Lannie pin the trousers around his waist and roll them up over his shins. He bubbled of the morrow when he would walk in the street, and could not say his words for laughing.

Big Lannie must work for Mrs. Ewing the next day, and she had thought to bid Raymond wait until she could stay at home and dress him herself in his new garments. But she heard him laugh again; she could not tell him he must wait. He might go out at noon next day, she said, when the sun was so warm that he would not take cold at his first outing; one of the neighbors across the hall would help him with the clothes. Raymond chuckled and sang his little songs until he went to sleep.

After Big Lannie left in the morning, the neighbor came in to Raymond, bringing a pan of cold pork and corn bread for his lunch. She had a call for a half-day's work, and

she could not stay to see him start out for his walk. She helped him to put on the trousers and pinned and rolled them for him, and she laced the shoes as snug as they would go on his feet. Then she told him not to go out till the noon whistles blew, and kissed him, and left.

Raymond was too happy to be impatient. He sat and thought of the street and smiled and sang. Not until he heard the whistles did he go to the drawer where Big Lannie had laid the coat, and take it out and put it on. He felt it soft on his bare back, he twisted his shoulders to let it fall warm and loose from them. As he folded the sleeves back over his thin arms, his heart beat so that the cloth above it fluttered.

The stairs were difficult for him to manage, in the big shoes, but the very slowness of the descent was delicious to him. His anticipation was like honey in his mouth.

Then he came out into the yard, and turned his face in the gentle air. It was all good again; it was all given back again. As quickly as he could, he gained the walk and set forth, guiding himself by the fence. He could not wait; he called out, so that he would hear gay calls in return, he laughed so that laughter would answer him.

He heard it. He was so glad that he took his hand from the fence and turned and stretched out his arms and held up his smiling face to welcome it. He stood there, and his smile died on his face, and his welcoming arms stiffened and shook.

It was not the laughter he had known; it was not the laughter he had live on. It was like great flails beating him flat, great prongs tearing his flesh from his bones. It was coming at him to kill him. It drew slyly back, and then it smashed against him. It swirled around and over him, and he could not breathe. He screamed and tried to run through it, and fell, and it licked over him, howling higher. His clothes unrolled, and his shoes flapped on his feet. Each time he could rise, he fell again. It was as if the street

were perpendicular before him, and the laughter leaping at his back. He could not find the fence, he did not know which way he was turned. He lay screaming, in blood and dust and darkness.

When Big Lannie came home, she found him on the floor in a corner of the room, moaning and whimpering. He still wore his new clothes, cut and torn and dusty, and there was dried blood on his mouth and his palms. Her heart had leapt in alarm when he had not opened the door at her footstep, and she cried out so frantically to ask what had happened that she frightened him into wild weeping. She could not understand what he said; it was something about the street, and laughing at him, and make them go away, and don't let him go in the street no more, never in the street no more. She did not try to make him explain. She took him in her arms and rocked him, and told him, over and over, never mind, don't care, everything's all right. Neither he nor she believed her words.

But her voice was soft and her arms warm. Raymond's sobs softened, and trembled away. She held him, rocking silently and rhythmically, a long time. Then gently she set him on his feet, and took from his shoulders Mr. Ewing's old full-dress coat.

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

James Thurber (1894 - 1961)

"We're going through!" The Commander's voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold gray eye. "We can't make it, sir. It's spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me." "I'm not asking you, Lieutenant Berg," said the Commander. "Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8500! We're going through!" The pounding of the cylinders increased: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot window. He walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!"- he shouted. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!" repeated Lieutenant Berg. "Full strength in No. 8 turret!" shouted the Commander. "Full strength in No. 8 turret!" The crew, bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. "The Old Man'll get us through," they said to one another. "The Old Man ain't afraid of hell!"...

"Not so fast! You're driving too fast!" said Mrs. Mitty. "What are you driving so fast for?"

"Hmm?" said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd. "You were up to fifty-five," she said. "You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five." Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind. "You're tensed up again," said Mrs. Mitty. "It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Renshaw look you over."

Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done. "Remember to get those overshoes while I'm having my hair done," she said. "I don't need overshoes," said Mitty. She put her mirror back into her bag. "We've been all through that," she said, getting out of the car. "You're not a young man any longer." He raced the engine a little. "Why don't you wear your gloves? Have you lost them?" Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after she had turned and gone into the building and he had driven on to a red light, he took them off again. "Pick it up, brother!" a cop snapped as the light changed, and Mitty hastily pulled on his gloves and lurched ahead. He drove around the streets aimlessly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

... "It's the millionaire banker, Wellington McMillan," said the pretty nurse. "Yes?" said Walter Mitty, removing his gloves slowly. "Who has the case?" "Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Remington from New York and Dr. Pritchard-Mitford from London. He flew over." A door opened down a long, cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard. "Hello, Mitty," he said. "We're having the devil's own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and close personal friend of Roosevelt. Obstreosis of the ductal tract. Tertiary. Wish you could take a look at him." "Glad to," said Mitty.

In the operating room there were whispered introductions; "Dr. Remington, Dr. Mitty, Dr. Pritchard-Mitford, Dr. Mitty." "I've read your book on streptothricosis," said Pritchard-Mitford, shaking hands. "A brilliant performance, sir." "Thank you," said Walter Mitty. "Didn't know you were in the States, Mitty," grumbled Remington. "Coals to Newcastle, bringing Mitford and me up here for a tertiary." "You are very kind," said Mitty. A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires,

began at this moment to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. "The new anesthetizer is giving away!" shouted an intern. "There is no one in the East who knows how to fix it!" "Quiet, man!" said Mitty, in a low, cool voice. He sprang to the machine, which was now going pocketa-pocketa-queep-pocketa-queep. He began fingering delicately a row of glistening dials. "Give me a fountain pen!" he snapped. Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piston out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place. "That will hold for ten minutes," he said. "Get on with the operation." A nurse hurried over and whispered to Renshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale. "Coreopsis has set in," said Renshaw nervously. "If you would take over, Mitty?" Mitty looked at him and at the craven figure of Benbow, who drank, and at the grave, uncertain faces of the two great specialists. "If you wish," he said. They slipped a white gown on him; he adjusted a mask and drew on thin gloves; nurses handed him shining ...

"Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!" Walter Mitty jammed on the brakes. "Wrong lane, Mac," said the parking-lot attendant, looking at Mitty closely. "Gee. Yeh," muttered Mitty. He began cautiously to back out of the lane marked "Exit only." "Leave her sit there," said the attendant. "I'll put her away." Mitty got out of the car. "Hey, better leave the key." "Oh," said Mitty, handing the man the ignition key. The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged.

They're so damn cocky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; they think they know everything. Once he had tried to take his chains off, outside New Milford, and he had got them wound around the axles. Aman had had to come out in a wrecking car and unwind them, a young, grinning garageman. Since then Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to a garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, I'll wear my right arm in a sling; they

won't grin at me then. I'll have my right arm in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself. He kicked at the slush on the sidewalk. "Overshoes," he said to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store.

When he came out into the street again, with the overshoes in a box under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get. She had told him, twice before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these weekly trips to town - he was always getting something wrong. Kleenex, he thought, Squibb's razor blades? No. Tooth paste, toothbrush, bicarbonate, carborundum, initiative and referendum? He gave it up. But she would remember it. "Where's the what's-it's-name?" she would ask. "Don't tell me you forgot the what's-it's-name." A newsboy went by shouting something about the Waterbury trial.

... "Perhaps this will refresh your memory." The District Attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand. "Have you ever seen this before?" Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it expertly. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80," he said calmly. An excited buzz ran around the courtroom. The Judge rapped for order. "You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?" said the District Attorney, insinuatingly. "Objection!" shouted Mitty's attorney. "We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that the defendant wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the fourteenth of July." Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled. "With any known make of gun," he said evenly, "I could have killed Gregory Fitzhurst at three hundred feet with my left hand." Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A woman's scream rose above the bedlam and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl was in Walter Mitty's arms. The District Attorney struck at her savagely. Without rising from his chair, Mitty let the man have it on the point of the chin. "You miserable cur!" ...

"Puppy biscuit," said Walter Mitty. He stopped walking and the buildings of Waterbury rose up out of the misty courtroom and surrounded him again. A woman who was passing laughed. "He said 'Puppy biscuit,'" she said to her companion. "That man said 'Puppy biscuit' to himself." Walter Mitty hurried on. He went into an A. & P., not the first one he came to but a smaller one farther up the street. "I want some biscuit for small, young dogs," he said to the clerk. "Any special brand, sir?" The greatest pistol shot in the world thought a moment. "It says 'Puppies Bark for It' on the box," said Walter Mitty.

His wife would be through at the hairdresser's in fifteen minutes, Mitty saw in looking at his watch, unless they had trouble drying it; sometimes they had trouble drying it. She didn't like to get to the hotel first; she would want him to be there waiting for her as usual. He found a big leather chair in the lobby, facing a window, and he put the overshoes and the puppy biscuit on the floor beside it. He picked up an old copy of *Liberty* and sank down into the chair. "Can Germany Conquer the World Through the Air?" Walter Mitty looked at the pictures of bombing planes and of ruined streets....

..."The cannonading has got the wind up in young Raleigh, sir," said the sergeant. Captain Mitty looked up at him through tousled hair. "Get him to bed," he said wearily, "with the others. I'll fly alone." "But you can't, sir," said the sergeant anxiously. "It takes two men to handle that bomber and the Archies are pounding hell out of the air. Von Richtman's circus is between here and Saulier." Somebody's got to get that ammunition dump," said Mitty. "I'm going over. Spot of brandy?" He poured a drink for the sergeant and one for himself. War thundered and whined around the dugout and battered at the door. There was a rending of wood and splinters flew through the room. "A bit of a near thing," said Captian Mitty carelessly. "The box barrage is closing in," said the sergeant. "We only live

once, Sergeant," said Mitty, with his faint, fleeting smile. "Or do we?" He poured another brandy and tossed it off. "I never see a man could hold his brandy like you, sir," said the sergeant. "Begging your pardon, sir." Captain Mitty stood up and strapped on his huge Webley-Vickers automatic. "It's forty kilometers through hell, sir," said the sergeant. Mitty finished one last brandy. "After all," he said softly, "what isn't?" The pounding of the cannon increased; there was the rat-tat-tatting of machine guns, and from somewhere came the menacing pocketa-pocketa-pocketa of the new flame-throwers. Walter Mitty walked to the door of the dugout humming "Après de Ma Blonde." He turned and waved to the sergeant. "Cheerio!" he said, ...

Something struck his shoulder. "I've been looking all over this hotel for you," said Mrs. Mitty. "Why do you have to hide in this old chair? How did you expect me to find you?" "Things close in," said Walter Mitty vaguely. "What?" Mrs. Mitty said. "Did you get the what's-it's-name? The puppy biscuit? What's in that box?" "Overshoes," said Mitty. "Couldn't you have put them on in the store?" "I was thinking," said Mitty. "Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?" She looked at him. "I'm going to take your temperature when I get you home," she said.

They went out through the revolving doors that made a faintly derisive whistling sound when you pushed them. It was two blocks to the parking lot. At the drugstore on the corner she said, "Wait here for me. I forgot something. I won't be a minute." She was more than a minute. Walter Mitty lighted a cigarette. It began to rain, rain with sleet in it. He stood up against the wall of the drugstore, smoking. ...

He put his shoulders back and his heels together. "To hell with the handkerchief," said Walter Mitty scornfully. He took one last drag on his cigarette and snapped it away. Then, with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last.

THE BABY PARTY

P. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 - 1940)

When John Andros felt old he found solace in the thought of life continuing through his child. The dark trumpets of oblivion were less loud at the patter of his child's feet or at the sound of his child's voice babbling mad non-sequiturs to him over the telephone. The latter incident occurred every afternoon at three when his wife called the office from the country, and he came to look forward to it as one of the vivid minutes of his day.

He was not physically old, but his life had been a series of struggles up a series of rugged hills, and here at thirty-eight having won his battles against ill-health and poverty he cherished less than the usual number of illusions. Even his feeling about his little girl was qualified. She had interrupted his rather intense love-affair with his wife, and she was the reason for their living in a suburban town, where they paid for country air with endless servant troubles and the weary merry-go-round of the commuting train.

It was little Ede as a definite piece of youth that chiefly interested him. He liked to take her on his lap and examine minutely her fragrant, downy scalp and her eyes with irises of morning blue. Having paid this homage John was content that the nurse should take her away. After ten minutes the very vitality of the child irritated him; he was inclined to lose his temper when things were broken, and one Sunday afternoon when she had disrupted a bridge game by permanently hiding up the ace of spades, he had made a scene that had reduced his wife to tears.

This was absurd and John was ashamed of himself. It was inevitable that such things would happen, and it was impossible that little Ede should spend all her indoor hours in

the nursery upstairs when she was becoming, as her mother said, more nearly a "real person" every day.

She was two and a half, and this afternoon, for instance, she was going to a baby-party. Grown-up Edith, her mother, had telephoned the information to the office, and little Ede had confirmed the business by shouting "I yam going to a p a n t r y !" into John's unsuspecting left ear.

"Drop in at the Markeys' when you get home, won't you, dear?" resumed her mother. "It'll be funny. Ede's going to be all dressed up in her new pink dress —"

The conversation terminated abruptly with a squawk which indicated that the telephone had been pulled violently to the floor. John laughed and decided to get an early train out; the prospect of a baby party in some one else's house amused him.

"What a peach of a mess!" he thought humorously. "A dozen mothers, and each looking at nothing but her own child. All the babies breaking things and grabbing at the cake, and each mama going home thinking about the subtle superiority of her own child to every other child there."

He was in a good humour to-day - all these things in his life were going better than they had ever gone before. When he got off the train at his station he shook his head at an importunate taxi man, and began to walk up the long hill toward his house through the crisp December twilight. It was only six o'clock but the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin sugary snow that lay over the lawns.

As he walked along drawing his lungs full of cold air his happiness increased, and the idea of a baby party appealed to him more and more. He began to wonder how Ede compared to other children of her own age, and if the pink dress she was to wear was something radical and mature. Increasing his gait he came in sight of his own house, where the lights of a defunct Christmas-tree still blossomed in

the window, but he continued on past the walk. The party was at the Markeys' next door.

As he mounted the brick step and rang the bell he became aware of voices inside, and he was glad he was not too late. Then he raised his head and listened - the voices were not children's voices, but they were loud and pitched high with anger; there were at least three of them and one, which rose as he listened to a hysterical sob, he recognized immediately as his wife's.

"There's been some trouble," he thought quickly.

Trying the door, he found it unlocked and pushed it open.

The baby party began at half past four, but Edith Andros, calculating shrewdly that the new dress would stand out more sensationally against vestments already rumped, planned the arrival of herself and little Ede for five. When they appeared it was already a flourishing affair. Four baby girls and nine baby boys, each one curled and washed and dressed with all the care of a proud and jealous heart, were dancing to the music of a phonograph. Never more than two or three at once, but as all were continually in motion running to and from their mothers for encouragement, the general effect was the same.

As Edith and her daughter entered, the music was temporarily drowned out by a sustained chorus, consisting largely of the word C U T E and directed toward little Ede, who stood looking timidly about and fingering the edges of her pink dress. She was not kissed - this is the sanitary age - but she was passed along a row of mamas each one of whom said "cu-u-ute" to her and held her pink little hand before passing her on to the next. After some encouragement and a few mild pushes she was absorbed into the dance, and became an active member of the party.

Edith stood near the door talking to Mrs. Markey, and keeping one eye on the tiny figure in the pink dress. She did not care for Mrs. Markey; she considered her both snip-

py and common, but John and Joe Markey were congenial and went in together on the commuting train every morning, so the two women kept up an elaborate pretense of warm amity. They were always reproaching each other for "not coming to see me," and they were always planning the kind of parties that began with "You'll have to come to dinner with us soon, and we'll go in to the theatre," but never matured further.

"Little Ede looks perfectly darling," said Mrs. Markey, smiling and moistening her lips in a way that Edith found particularly repulsive. "So grown-up - I can't believe it!"

Edith wondered if "little Ede" referred to the fact that Billy Markey, though several months younger, weighed almost five pounds more. Accepting a cup of tea she took a seat with two other ladies on a divan and launched into the real business of the afternoon, which of course lay in relating the recent accomplishments and insouciances of her child.

An hour passed. Dancing palled and the babies took to sterner sport. They ran into the dining-room, rounded the big table, and essayed the kitchen door, from which they were rescued by an expeditionary force of mothers. Having been rounded up they immediately broke loose, and rushing back to the dining-room tried the familiar swinging door again. The word "overheated" began to be used, and small white brows were dried with small white handkerchiefs. A general attempt to make the babies sit down began, but the babies squirmed off laps with peremptory cries of "Down!" "Down!" and the rush into the fascinating dining-room began anew.

This phase of the party came to an end with the arrival of refreshments, a large cake with two candles, and saucers of vanilla ice-cream. Billy Markey, a stout laughing boy with red hair and legs somewhat bowed, blew out the candles, and placed an experimental thumb on the white

frosting. The refreshments were distributed, and the children ate, greedily but without confusion - they had behaved remarkably well all afternoon. They were modern babies who ate and slept at regular hours, so their dispositions were good, and their faces healthy and pink - such a peaceful party would not have been possible thirty years ago.

After the refreshments a gradual exodus began. Edith glanced anxiously at her watch - it was almost six, and John had not arrived. She wanted him to see Ede with other children - to see how dignified and polite and intelligent she was, and how the only ice-cream spot on her dress was some that had dropped from her chin when she was joggled from behind.

"You're a darling," she whispered to her child, drawing her suddenly against her knee. "Do you know you're a darling? Do you know you're a darling?"

Ede laughed. "Bow-wow," she said suddenly.

"Bow-wow?" Edith looked around. "There isn't any bow-wow."

"Bow-wow," repeated Ede. "I want a bow-wow."

Edith followed the small pointing finger.

"That isn't a bow-wow, dearest, that's a teddy-bear."

"Bear?"

"Yes, that's a teddy-bear, and it belongs to Billy Markey. You don't want Billy Markey's teddy-bear, do you?"

Ede did want it.

She broke away from her mother and approached Billy Markey, who held the toy closely in his arms. Ede stood regarding him with inscrutable eyes, and Billy laughed.

Grown-up Edith looked at her watch again, this time impatiently.

The party had dwindled until, besides Ede and Billy, there were only two babies remaining - and one of the two remained only by virtue of having hidden himself under the dining-room table. It was selfish of John not to come. It showed so little pride in the child. Other fathers had come,

half a dozen of them, to call for their wives, and they had stayed for a while and looked on.

There was a sudden wail. Ede had obtained Billy's teddy-bear by pulling it forcibly from his arms, and on Billy's attempt to recover it, she had pushed him casually to the floor.

"Why, Ede!" cried her mother, repressing an inclination to laugh.

Joe Markey, a handsome, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five, picked up his son and set him on his feet. "You're a fine fellow," he said jovially. "Let a girl knock you over! You're a fine fellow."

"Did he bump his head?" Mrs. Markey returned anxiously from bowing the next to last remaining mother out the door.

"N-o-o-o," exclaimed Markey. "He bumped something else, didn't you, Billy? He bumped something else."

Billy had so far forgotten the bump that he was already making an attempt to recover his property. He seized a leg of the bear which projected from Ede's enveloping arms and tugged at it but without success.

"No," said Ede emphatically.

Suddenly, encouraged by the success of her former half-accidental manoeuvre, Ede dropped the teddy-bear, placed her hands on Billy's shoulders and pushed him backward off his feet.

This time he landed less harmlessly; his head hit the bare floor just off the rug with a dull hollow sound, whereupon he drew in his breath and delivered an agonized yell.

Immediately the room was in confusion. With an exclamation Markey hurried to his son, but his wife was first to reach the injured baby and catch him up into her arms.

"Oh, Billy," she cried, "what a terrible bump! She ought to be spanked."

Edith, who had rushed immediately to her daughter, heard this remark, and her lips came sharply together.

"Why, Ede," she whispered perfunctorily, "you bad girl!"

Ede put back her little head suddenly and laughed. It was a loud laugh, a triumphant laugh with victory in it and challenge and contempt. Unfortunately it was also an infectious laugh. Before her mother realized the delicacy of the situation, she too had laughed, an audible, distinct laugh not unlike the baby's, and partaking of the same overtones.

Then, as suddenly, she stopped.

Mrs. Markey's face had grown red with anger, and Markey, who had been feeling the back of the baby's head with one finger, looked at her, frowning.

"It's swollen already," he said with a note of reproof in his voice. "I'll get some witch-hazel."

But Mrs. Markey had lost her temper. "I don't see anything funny about a child being hurt!" she said in a trembling voice.

Little Ede meanwhile had been looking at her mother curiously. She noted that her own laugh had produced her mother's and she wondered if the same cause would always produce the same effect. So she chose this moment to throw back her head and laugh again.

To her mother the additional mirth added the final touch of hysteria to the situation. Pressing her handkerchief to her mouth she giggled irrepressibly. It was more than nervousness - she felt that in a peculiar way she was laughing with her child - they were laughing together.

It was in a way a defiance - those two against the world.

While Markey rushed upstairs to the bathroom for ointment, his wife was walking up and down rocking the yelling boy in her arms.

"Please go home!" she broke out suddenly, "The child's badly hurt, and if you haven't the decency to be quiet, you'd better go home."

"Very well," said Edith, her own temper rising. "I've never seen any one make such a mountain out of —"

"Get out!" cried Mrs. Markey frantically. "There's the

door, get out -- I never want to see you in our house again. You or your brat either!"

Edith had taken her daughter's hand and was moving quickly toward the door, but at this remark she stopped and turned around, her face contracting with indignation.

"Don't you dare call her that!"

Mrs. Markey did not answer but continued walking up and down, muttering to herself and to Billy in an inaudible voice.

Edith began to cry.

"I will get out!" she sobbed, "I've never heard anybody so rude and c-common in my life. I'm glad your baby did get pushed down -- he's nothing but a f-fat little fool anyhow."

Joe Markey reached the foot of the stairs just in time to hear this remark.

"Why, Mrs. Andros," he said sharply, "can't you see the child's hurt? You really ought to control yourself."

"Control m-myself!" exclaimed Edith brokenly. "You better ask her to c-control herself. I've never heard anybody so c-common in my life."

"She's insulting me!" Mrs. Markey was now livid with rage. "Did you hear what she said, Joe? I wish you'd put her out. If she won't go just take her by the shoulders and put her out!"

"Don't you dare touch me!" cried Edith. "I'm going just as quick as I can find my coat!"

Blind with tears she took a step toward the hall. It was just at this moment that the door opened and John Andros walked anxiously in.

"John!" cried Edith, and fled to him wildly.

"What's the matter? Why, what's the matter?"

"They're -- they're putting me out!" she wailed, collapsing against him. "He'd just started to take me by the shoulders and put me out. I want my coat!"

"That's not true," objected Markey hurriedly. "No--

body's going to put you out." He turned to John. "Nobody's going to put her out," he repeated. "She's ---"

"What do you mean 'put her out'?" demanded John abruptly. "What's all this talk, anyhow?"

"Oh, let's go!" cried Edith. "I want to go. They're so common, John!"

"Look here!" Markey's face darkened. "You've said that about enough. You're acting sort of crazy."

"They called Ede a brat!"

For the second time that afternoon little Ede expressed emotion at an inopportune moment. Confused and frightened at the shouting voices, she began to cry, and her tears had the effect of conveying that she felt the insult in her heart.

"What's the idea of this?" broke out John. "Do you insult your guests in your own house?"

"It seems to me it's your wife that's done the insulting!" answered Markey crisply. "In fact, your baby there started all the trouble."

John gave a contemptuous snort. "Are you calling names at a little baby?" he inquired. "That's a fine manly business!"

"Don't talk to him, John," insisted Edith. "Find my coat!"

"You must be in a bad way," went on John angrily, "if you have to take out your temper on a helpless little baby."

"I never heard anything so damn twisted in my life!" shouted Markey. "If that wife of yours would shut her mouth for a minute ---"

"Wait a minute! You're not talking to a woman and child now ---"

There was an incidental interruption. Edith had been fumbling on a chair for her coat, and Mrs. Markey had been watching her with hot, angry eyes. Suddenly she laid Billy down on the sofa, where he immediately stopped crying and pulled himself upright, and coming into the hall she quickly found Edith's coat and handed it to her without a word. Then she went back to the sofa, picked up Billy, and rocking him

in her arms looked again at Edith with hot, angry eyes. The interruption had taken less than half a minute.

"Your wife comes in here and begins shouting around about how common we are!" burst out Markey violently. "Well, if we're so damn common, you'd better stay away! And, what's more, you'd better get out now!"

Again John gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

"You're not only common," he returned, "you're evidently an awful bully - when there's any helpless women around." He felt for the knob and swung the door open. "Come, on Edith."

Taking up her daughter in her arms, his wife stepped outside and John, still looking contemptuously at Markey, started to follow.

"Wait a minute!" Markey took a step forward; he was trembling slightly, and two large veins on his temple were suddenly full of blood. "You don't think you can get away with that, do you? With me?"

Without a word John walked out the door, leaving it open.

Edith, still weeping, had started for home. After following her with his eyes until she reached her own walk, John turned back toward the lighted doorway where Markey was slowly coming down the slippery steps. He took off his overcoat and hat, tossed them off the path onto the snow. Then, sliding a little on the iced walk, he took a step forward.

At the first blow, they both slipped and fell heavily to the sidewalk, half rising then, and again pulling each other to the ground. They found a better foothold in the thin snow to the side of the walk and rushed at each other, both swinging wildly and pressing out the snow into a pasty mud underfoot.

The street was deserted, and except for their short tired gasps and the padded sound as one or the other slipped down into the slushy mud, they fought in silence, clearly defined to each other by the full moonlight as well as by the amber glow that shone out of the open door. Several times

they both slipped down together, and then for a while the conflict threshed about wildly on the lawn.

For ten, fifteen, twenty minutes they fought there senselessly in the moonlight. They had both taken off coats and vests at some silently agreed interval and now their shirts dripped from their backs in wet pulpy shreds. Both were torn and bleeding and so exhausted that they could stand only when by their position they mutually supported each other - the impact, the mere effort of a blow, would send them both to their hands and knees.

But it was not weariness that ended the business, and the very meaninglessness of the fight was a reason for not stopping. They stopped because once when they were straining at each other on the ground, they heard a man's footsteps coming along the sidewalk. They had rolled somehow into the shadow, and when they heard these footsteps they stopped fighting, stopped moving, stopped breathing, lay huddled together like two boys playing Indian until the footsteps had passed. Then, staggering to their feet, they looked at each other like two drunken men.

"I'll be damned if I'm going on with this thing any more," cried Markey thickly.

"I'm not going on any more either," said John Andros. "I've had enough of this thing."

Again they looked at each other, sulkily this time, as if each suspected the other of urging him to a renewal of the fight. Markey spat out a mouthful of blood from a cut lip; then he cursed softly, and picking up his coat and vest, shook off the snow from them in a surprised way, as if their comparative dampness was his only worry in the world.

"Want to come in and wash up?" he asked suddenly.

"No, thanks," said John. "I ought to be going home - my wife'll be worried."

He too picked up his coat and vest and then his overcoat and hat. Soaking wet and dripping with perspiration, it seemed absurd that less than half an hour ago he had been wearing all these clothes.

"Well - good night," he said hesitantly.

Suddenly they both walked toward each other and shook hands. It was no perfunctory hand-shake: John Andros's arm went around Markey's shoulder, and patted him softly on the back for a little while.

"No harm done," he said brokenly.

"No - you?"

"No, no harm done."

"Well," said John Andros after a minute, "I guess I'll say good night."

Limping slightly and with his clothes over his arm, John Andros turned away. The moonlight was still bright as he left the dark patch of trampled ground and walked over the intervening lawns. Down at the station, half a mile away, he could hear the rumble of the seven o'clock train.

"But you must have been crazy," cried Edith brokenly. "I thought you were going to fix it all up there and shake hands. That's why I went away."

"Did you want us to fix it up?"

"Of course not, I never want to see them again. But I thought of course that was what you were going to do." She was touching the bruises on his neck and back with iodine as he sat placidly in a hot bath. "I'm going to get the doctor," she said insistently. "You may be hurt internally."

He shook his head. "Not a chance," he answered. "I don't want this to get all over town."

"I don't understand yet how it all happened."

"Neither do I." He smiled grimly. "I guess these baby parties are pretty rough affairs."

"Well, one thing ----" suggested Edith hopefully, "I'm certainly glad we have beefsteak in the house for to-morrow's dinner."

"Why?"

"For your eye, of course. Do you know I came within an ace of ordering veal? Wasn't that the luckiest thing?"

Half an hour later, dressed except that his neck would

accommodate no collar, John moved his limbs experimentally before the glass. "I believe I'll get myself in better shape," he said thoughtfully. "I must be getting old."

"You mean so that next time you can beat him?"

"I did beat him," he announced. "At least, I beat him as much as he beat me. And there isn't going to be any next time. Don't you go calling people common any more. If you get in any trouble, you just take your coat and go home. Understand?"

"Yes, dear," she said meekly. "I was very foolish and now I understand."

Out in the hall, he paused abruptly by the baby's door.

"Is she asleep?"

"Sound asleep. But you can go in and peek at her - just to say good night."

They tiptoed in and bent together over the bed. Little Ede, her cheeks flushed with health, her pink hands clasped tight together, was sleeping soundly in the cool, dark room. John reached over the railing of the bed and passed his hand lightly over the silken hair.

"She's asleep," he murmured in a puzzled way.

"Naturally, after such an afternoon."

"Miz Andros," the colored maid's stage whisper floated in from the hall, "Mr. and Mrs. Markey downstairs an' want to see you. Mr. Markey he's all cut up in pieces, mam'n. His face look like a roast beef. An' Miz Markey she 'pear mighty mad."

"Why, what incomparable nerve!" exclaimed Edith. "Just tell them we're not home. I wouldn't go down for anything in the world."

"You most certainly will," John's voice was hard and set.

"What?"

"You'll go down right now, and, what's more, whatever that other woman does, you'll apologize for what you said this afternoon. After that you don't ever have to see her again."

"Why - John, I can't."

"You've got to. And just remember that she probably hated to come over here just twice as much as you hate to go downstairs."

"Aren't you coming? Do I have to go alone?"

"I'll be down - in just a minute."

John Andros waited until she had closed the door behind her; then he reached over into the bed, and picking up his daughter, blankets and all, sat down in the rocking-chair holding her tightly in his arms. She moved a little, and he held his breath, but she was sleeping soundly, and in a moment she was resting quietly in the hollow of his elbow. Slowly he bent his head until his cheek was against her bright hair. "Dear little girl," he whispered. "Dear little girl, dear little girl."

John Andros knew at length what it was he had fought for so savagely that evening. He had it now, he possessed it forever, and for some time he sat there rocking very slowly to and fro in the darkness.

A MOTHER IN MANNVILLE

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (1896 -)

The orphanage is high in the Carolina mountains. Sometimes in winter the snowdrifts are so deep that the institution is cut off from the village below, from all the world. Fog hides the mountain peaks, the snow swirls down the valleys, and a wind blows so bitterly that the orphanage boys who take the milk twice a day to the baby cottage reach the door with fingers stiff in an agony of numbness.

"Or when we carry trays from the cookhouse for the ones that are sick," Jerry said, "we get our faces frostbit, because we can't put our hands over them. I have gloves," he added. "Some of the boys don't have any."

He liked the late spring, he said. The rhododendron was in bloom, a carpet of color, across the mountainsides, soft as the May winds that stirred the hemlocks. He called it laurel.

"It's pretty when the laurel blooms," he said. "Some of it's pink and some of it's white."

I was there in the autumn. I wanted quiet, isolation, to do some troublesome writing. I wanted mountain air to blow out the malaria from too long a time in the subtropics. I was homesick, too, for the flaming maples in October, and for corn shocks and pumpkins and black walnut trees and the lift of hills. I found them all, living in a cabin that belonged to the orphanage, half a mile beyond the orphanage farm. When I took the cabin, I asked for a boy or man to come and chop wood for the fireplace. The first few days were warm, I found what wood I needed about the cabin, no one came, and I forgot the order.

I looked up from my typewriter one late afternoon, a little startled. A boy stood at the door, and my pointer dog, my companion, was at his side and had not barked to warn me.

The boy was probably twelve years old, but undersized. He wore overalls and a torn shirt, and was barefooted.

He said, "I can chop some wood today."

I said, "But I have a boy coming from the orphanage."

"I'm the boy."

"You? But you're small."

"Size don't matter, chopping wood," he said. "Some of the big boys don't chop good. I've been chopping wood at the orphanage a long time."

I visualized mangled and inadequate branches for my fires. I was well into my work and not inclined to conversation. I was a little blunt.

"Very well. There's the ax. Go ahead and see what you can do."

I went back to work, closing the door. At first the sound of the boy dragging brush annoyed me. Then he began to chop. The blows were rhythmic and steady, and shortly I had forgotten him, the sound no more of an interruption than a consistent rain. I suppose an hour and a half passed, for when I stopped and stretched, and heard the boy's steps on the cabin stoop, the sun was dropping behind the farthest mountain, and the valleys were purple with something deeper than the asters.

The boy said, "I have to go to supper now, I can come again tomorrow evening."

I said, "I'll pay you now for what you've done," thinking I should probably have to insist on an older boy. "Ten cents an hour?"

"Anything is all right."

We went together back of the cabin. An astonishing amount of solid wood had been cut. There were cherry logs and heavy roots of rhododendrons and blocks from the waste pine and oak left from the building of the cabin.

"But you've done as much as a man," I said. "This is a splendid pile."

I looked at him, actually, for the first time. His hair

was the color of the corn shocks, and his eyes, very direct, were like the mountain sky when rain is pending - gray, with a shadowing of that miraculous blue. As I spoke a light came over him, as though the setting sun had touched him with the same suffused glory with which it touched the mountains. I gave him a quarter.

He looked at me, and at the coin, and seemed to want to speak, but could not, and turned away.

"I'll split kindling tomorrow," he said over his thin ragged shoulder. "You'll need kindling and medium wood and logs and backlogs."

At daylight I was half wakened by the sound of chopping. Again it was so even in texture that I went back to sleep. When I left my bed in the cool morning, the boy had come and gone, and a stack of kindling was neat against the cabin wall. He came again after school in the afternoon and worked until time to return to the orphanage. His name was Jerry; he was twelve years old, and he had been at the orphanage since he was four. I could picture him at four, with the same grave gray-blue eyes and the same - independence? No, the word that comes to me is "integrity."

The word means something very special to me, and the quality for which I use it is a rare one. My father had it - there is another of whom I am almost sure - but almost no man of my acquaintance possess it with the clarity, the purity, the simplicity of a mountain stream. But the boy Jerry had it. It is bedded on courage, but it is more than brave. It is honest, but it is more than honesty. The ax handle broke one day. Jerry said the woodshop at the orphanage would repair it. I brought money to pay for the job and he refused it.

"I'll pay for it," he said. "I broke it. I brought the ax down careless."

"But no one hits accurately every time," I told him. "The fault was in the wood of the handle. I'll see the man from whom I bought it."

It was only then that he would take the money. He was

standing back of his own carelessness. He was a free-will agent and he chose to do careful work, and if he failed, he took the responsibility without subterfuge.

And he did for me the unnecessary thing, the gracious thing, that we find done only by the great of heart. Things no training can teach, for they are done on the instant, with no predicated experience. He found a cubbyhole beside the fireplace that I had not noticed. There, of his own accord, he put kindling and "medium" wood, so that I might always have dry fire material ready in case of sudden wet weather. A stone was loose in the rough walk to the cabin. He dug a deeper hole and steadied it, although he came, himself, by a short cut over the bank. I found that when I tried to return his thoughtfulness with such things as candy and apples, he was wordless. "Thank you" was, perhaps, an expression for which he had had no use, for his courtesy was instinctive. He only looked at the gift and at me, and a curtain lifted, so that I saw deep into the clear well of his eyes, and gratitude was there, and affection, soft over the firm granite of his character.

He made simple excuses to come and sit with me. I could no more have turned him away than if he had been physically hungry. I suggested once that the best time for us to visit was just before supper, when I left off my writing. After that, he waited always until my typewriter had been some time quiet. One day I worked until nearly dark. I went outside the cabin, having forgotten him. I saw him going up over the hill in the twilight toward the orphanage. When I sat down on my stoop, a place was warm from his body where he had been sitting.

He became intimate, of course, with my pointer, Pat. There is a strange communion between a boy and a dog. Perhaps they possess the same singleness of spirit, the same kind of wisdom. It is difficult to explain, but it exists. When I went across the state for a week-end, I left the dog in Jerry's charge. I gave him the dog whistle and the key

to the cabin, and left sufficient food. He was to come two or three times a day and let out the dog, and feed and exercise him. I should return Sunday afternoon and then leave the key under an agreed hiding place.

My return was belated and fog filled the mountain passes so treacherously that I dared not drive at night. The fog held the next morning, and it was Monday noon before I reached the cabin. Jerry came early in the afternoon, anxious.

"The superintendent said nobody would drive in the fog," he said. "I came just before bedtime last night and you hadn't come. So I brought Pat some of my breakfast this morning. I wouldn't have let anything happen to him."

"I was sure of that. I didn't worry."

"When I heard about the fog, I thought you'd know."

He was needed for work at the orphanage and he had to return at once. I gave him a dollar in payment, and he looked at it and went away. But that night he came in the darkness and knocked at the door.

"Come in, Jerry," I said, "if you're allowed to be away this late."

"I told maybe a story," he said. "I told them I thought you would want to see me."

"That's true," I assured him, and I saw his relief. "I want to hear about how you managed with the dog."

He sat by the fire with me, with no other light, and told me of their two days together. The dog lay close to him, and found a comfort there that I did not have for him. And it seemed to me that being with my dog, and caring for him, had brought the boy and me, too, together, so that he felt that he belonged to me as well as to the animal.

"He stayed right with me," he told me, "except when he ran in the laurel. He likes the laurel. I took him up over the hill and we both ran fast. There was a place where the grass was high and I lay down in it and hid. I could hear Pat hunting for me. He found my trail and he barked. When

he found me, he acted crazy, and he ran around and around me, in circles."

We watched the flames.

"That's an apple log," he said, "It burns the prettiest of any wood."

We were very close.

He was suddenly impelled to speak of things he had not spoken of before, nor had I cared to ask him.

"You look a little bit like my mother," he said. Especially in the dark, by the fire."

"But you were only four, Jerry, when you came here. You have remembered how she looked, all these years?"

"My mother lives in Mannville," he said.

For a moment, finding that he had a mother shocked me as greatly as anything in my life has ever done, and I did not know why it disturbed me. Then I understood my distress. I was filled with a passionate resentment that any woman should go away and leave her son. A fresh anger added itself. A son like this one - The orphanage was a wholesome place, the executives were kind, good people, the food was more than adequate, the boys were healthy, a ragged shirt was no hardship, nor the doing of clean labor. Granted, perhaps, that the boy felt no lack, what blood fet the bowels of a woman who did not yearn over this child's lean body? At four he would have looked the same as now. Nothing, I thought, nothing in life could change those eyes. His quality must be apparent to an idiot, a fool. I burned with questions I could not ask. In any, I was afraid, there would be pain.

"Have you seen her, Jerry - lately?"

"I see her every summer. She sends for me."

I wanted to cry out. "Why are you not with her? How can she let you go away again?"

He said, "She comes up here from Mannville whenever she can. She doesn't have a job now."

His face shone in the firelight.

"She wanted to give me a puppy, but they can't let any one boy keep a puppy. You remember the suit I had on last Sunday?" He was plainly proud. "She sent me that for Christmas. The Christmas before that" - he drew a long breath, savoring the memory - "she sent me a pair of skates."

"Roller skates?"

My mind was busy, making pictures of her, trying to understand her. She had not, then, entirely deserted or forgotten him. But why, then - I thought, "I must not condemn her without knowing."

"Roller skates. I let the other boys use them. They're always borrowing them. But they're careful of them."

What circumstance other than poverty ---

"I'm going to take the dollar you gave me for taking care of Pat," he said, "and buy her a pair of gloves."

I could only say, "That will be nice. Do you know her size?"

"I think it's eight and a half," he said.

He looked at my hands.

"Do you wear eight and a half?" he asked.

"No, I wear a smaller size, a six."

"Oh! Then I guess her hands are bigger than yours."

I hated her. Poverty or no, there was other food than bread, and the soul could starve as quickly as the body. He was taking his dollar to buy gloves for her big stupid hands, and she lived away from him, in Mannville, and contented herself with sending him skates.

"She likes white gloves," he said. "Do you think I can get them for a dollar?"

"I think so." I said.

I decided that I should not leave the mountains without seeing her and knowing for myself why she had done this thing.

The human mind scatters its interests as though made of thistledown, and every wind stirs and moves it. I finished my work. It did not please me, I gave my thoughts

to another field. I should need some Mexican material.

I made arrangements to close my Florida place. Mexico immediately, and doing the writing there, if conditions were favorable. Then, Alaska with my brother. After that, heaven knew what or where.

I did not take time to go to Mannville to see Jerry's mother, nor even to talk with the orphanage officials about her. I was a trifle abstracted about the boy, because of my work and plans. And after my first fury at her - we did not speak of her again - his having a mother, any sort at all, not far away, in Mannville, relieved me of the ache I had had about him. He did not question the anomalous situation. He was not lonely. It was none of my concern.

He came every day and cut my wood and did small helpful favors and stayed to talk. The days had become cold, and often I let him come inside the cabin. He would lie on the floor in front of the fire, with one arm across the pointer, and they would both doze and wait quietly for me. Other days they would run with a common ecstasy through the laurel, and since the asters were now gone, he brought me back vermillion maple leaves, and chestnut boughs dripping with imperial yellow. I was ready to go.

I said to him, "You have been my good friend, Jerry. I shall often think of you and miss you. Pat will miss you too. I am leaving tomorrow."

He did not answer. When he went away, I remember that a new moon hung over the mountains, and I watched him go in silence up the hill. I expected him the next day, but he did not come. The details of packing my personal belongings loading my car, arranging the bed over the seat, where the dog would ride, occupied me until late in the day. I closed the cabin and started the car, noticing that the sun was in the west and I should do well to be out of the mountains by nightfall. I stopped by the orphanage and left the cabin key and money for my light bill with Miss Clark.

"And will you call Jerry for me to say good-by to him?"

"I don't know where he is," she said. "I'm afraid he's not well. He didn't eat his dinner this noon. One of the boys saw him going over the hill into the laurel. He was supposed to fire the boiler this afternoon. It's not like him; he's unusually reliable."

I was almost relieved, for I knew I should never see him again, and it would be easier not to say good-bye to him.

I said, "I wanted to talk with you about his mother - why he's here - but I'm in more of a hurry than I expected to be. It's out of the question for me to see her now too. But here's some money I'd like to leave with you to buy things for him at Christmas and on his birthday. It will be better than for me to try to send him things. I could so easily duplicate - skates, for instance."

She blinked her honest spinster's eyes.

"There's not much use for skates here," she said.

Her stupidity annoyed me.

"What I mean," I said, "is that I don't want to duplicate things his mother sends him. I might have chosen skates if I didn't know she had already given them to him."

She stared at me.

"I don't understand," she said. "He has no mother. He has no skates."

A ROSE FOR EMILY

William Faulkner (1897 - 1962)

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant - a combined gardener and cook - had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps - an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor - he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron - remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and

thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse - a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in a heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered - a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump

dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff... I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the..."

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily --"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobel!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart - the one we believed would marry her - had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man - a young man then - going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man - any man - could keep a kitchen

properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me to do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met - three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't ..."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry

for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Grierasons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows - sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paying the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee - a big dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and then the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget 'noblesse oblige' - without calling it 'noblesse oblige'. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could..." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jealousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough - even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthousekeeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom-"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is-"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is ... arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want-"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked - he liked men, and it was known that he drank with younger men in the Elk's Club - that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily," behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister - Miss Emily's people were Episcopal - to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H.B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron - the streets had been finished some time since - was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the

cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw her Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at the window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning grayer. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent on Sundays with a twenty-five cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the met-

al numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow gray-er and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows - she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house - like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation - dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a heavy curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old man - some in their brushed Confederate uniforms - on the porch

and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road, but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottleneck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-grey hair.

THE INHABITANTS OF VENUS

Irwin Shaw (1913 -)

He had been skiing since early morning, and he was ready to stop and have lunch in the village, but Mac said, "Let's do one more before eating," and since it was Mac's last day, Robert agreed to go up again. The weather was spotty, but there were occasional clear patches of sky, and the visibility had been good enough to make for decent skiing for most of the morning. The téléferique was crowded and they had to push their way in among the bright sweaters and anoraks and the bulky packs of the people who were carrying picnic lunches and extra clothing and skis for climbing. The doors were closed, and the cabin swung out of the station, over the belt of pine trees at the base of the mountain.

The passengers were packed in so tightly that it was hard to reach for a handkerchief or light a cigarette. Robert was pressed, not unpleasurably, against a handsome young Italian woman with a dissatisfied face, who was explaining to someone over Robert's shoulder why Milan was such a miserable city to live in in the winter time. "Milano si trova in un bacino deprimente," the woman said, "bagnato dalla pioggia durante tre mesi all'anno. E, nonostante il loro gusto per l'opera, i Milanosi non sono altro che volgari materialisti che solo il denaro interessa," and Robert knew enough Italian to understand that the girl was saying that Milan was in a dismal basin which was swamped by rain for three months a year and that the Milanese, despite their taste for opera, were crass and materialistic and interested only in money.

Robert smiled. Although he had not been born in the United States, he had been a citizen since 1944, and it was

pleasant to hear, in the heart of Europe, somebody else beside Americans being accused of materialism and a singular interest in money.

"What's the Contessa saying?" Mac whispered, across the curly red hair of a small Swiss woman who was standing between Robert and Mac. Mac was a lieutenant on leave from his outfit in Germany. He had been in Europe nearly three years and to show that he was not just an ordinary tourist, called all pretty Italian girls Contessa. Robert had met him a week before, in the bar of the hotel where they were both staying. They were the same kind of skiers, adventurous and looking for difficulties; they had skied together every day, and they were already planning to come back at the same time for the next winter's holiday, if Robert could get over again from America.

"The Contessa is saying that in Milan all they're interested in is money," Robert said, keeping his voice low, although in the babble of conversation in the cabin there was little likelihood of being overheard.

"If I was in Milan," Mac said, "and she was in Milan, I'd be interested in something else beside money." He looked with open admiration at the Italian girl. "Can you find out what run she's going to do?"

"What for?" Robert asked.

"Because that's the run I'm going to do," Mac said, grinning. "I plan to follow her like her shadow."

"Mac," Robert said, "Don't waste your time. It's your last day."

"That's when the best things always happen," Mac said. "The last day." He beamed, huge, overt, uncomplicated, at the Italian girl. She took no notice of him. She was busy now complaining to her friend about the natives of Sicily.

The sun came out for a few minutes, and it grew hot in the cabin, with some forty people jammed, in heavy clothing, in such a small space, and Robert half-dozed, not bothering to listen any more to the voices speaking in

French, Italian, English, Schweizerdeutsch and German, on all sides of him. Robert liked being in the middle of this informal congress of tongues. It was one of the reasons that he came to Switzerland to ski, whenever he could take the time off from his job. In the angry days through which the world was passing, there was ray of hope in this good-natured, polyglot chorus of people who were not threatening each other, who smiled at strangers, who had collected in these shining white hills merely to enjoy the innocent pleasures of sun and snow.

The feeling of generalized cordiality that Robert experienced on these trips was intensified by the fact that most of the people on the lifts and on the runs seemed more or less familiar to him. Skiers formed a kind of loose international club and the same faces kept turning up year after year in Mégève, Davos, St. Anton, Val d'Isere, so that after a while you had the impression that you knew almost everybody on the mountain. There were four or five Americans whom Robert was sure he had seen at Stowe at Christmas and who had come over in one of the chartered ski-club planes that Swiss Air ran every winter on a cut-rate basis. The Americans were young and enthusiastic, and none of them had ever been in Europe before and they were rather noisily appreciative of everything - the Alps, the food, the snow, the weather, the appearance of the peasants in their blue smocks, the chic of some of the lady skiers and the skill and good looks of the instructors. They were popular with the villagers because they were so obviously enjoying themselves. Besides, they tipped generously, in the American style, with what was, to Swiss eyes, an endearing disregard of the fact that a service charge of fifteen per cent was added automatically to every bill that was presented to them. Two of the girls were very attractive in a youthful, prettiest-girl-at-the-prom, way, and one of the young men, a lanky boy from Philadelphia, the informal leader of the group, was a beautiful skier, who guided the others down the runs and helped the duds when they ran into difficulties.

The Philadelphian, who was standing near Robert, spoke to him as the cabin swung high over a steep snowy face of the mountain. "You've skied here before, haven't you?" he said.

"Yes," said Robert, "a few times."

"What's the best run down this time of day?" the Philadelphian asked. He had the drawling, flat tone of the good New England schools that Europeans use in their imitations of upper-class Americans when they wish to make fun of them.

"They're all okay today," Robert said.

"What's this run everybody says is so good?" the boy asked. "The - the Kaiser something or other?"

"The Kaisergarten," Robert said. "It's the first gully to the right after you get out of the station on top."

"The Kaisergarten. Is it tough?" the boy asked.

"It's not for beginners," Robert said.

"You've seen this bunch ski, haven't you?" The boy waved vaguely to indicate his friends. "Do you think they can make it?"

"Well," Robert said doubtfully, "There's a narrow steep ravine full of bumps halfway down, and there're one or two places where it's advisable not to fall, because you're liable to keep on sliding all the way, if you do ..."

"Aah, we'll take a chance," the Philadelphian said.

"It'll be good for their characters. Boys and girls," he said, raising his voice, "the cowards will stay on top and have lunch, the heroes will come with me. We're going to do the Kaisergarten ..."

"Francis," one of the pretty girls said, "I do believe it is your sworn intention to kill me on this trip."

"It's not as bad as all that," Robert said, smiling at the girl, to reassure her.

"Say," the girl said, looking interestedly at Robert, "haven't I seen you before?"

"On this lift, yesterday," Robert said.

"No." The girl shook her head. She had on a black, fur-

zy, lambakin hat, and she looked like a high-school drum majorette pretending to be Anna Karenina. "Before yesterday. Some place."

"I saw you at Stowe," Robert confessed. "At Christmas."

"Oh, that's where," she said. "I saw you ski. Oh, my, you're silk y."

Mac broke into a loud laugh at this description of Robert's skiing style.

"Don't mind my friend," Robert said, enjoying the girl's admiration. "He's a coarse soldier who is trying to beat the mountain to his knees by brute strength."

"Say," the girl said, looking a little puzzled, "you have a funny little way of talking. Are you American?"

"Well, yes," Robert said. "I am now. I was born in France."

"Oh, that explains it," the girl said. "You were born among the crags."

"I was born in Paris," Robert said.

"Do you live there now?"

"I live in New York," Robert said.

"Are you married?" the girl asked anxiously.

"Barbara," the Philadelphian protested, "Behave yourself."

"I just asked the man a simple, friendly question," the girl protested. "Do you mind, Monsieur?"

"Not at all."

"Are you married?"

"Yes," Robert said.

"He has three children," Mac added helpfully. "The oldest one is going to run for president at the next election."

"Oh, isn't that too bad," the girl said. "I set myself a goal on this trip. I was going to meet one unmarried Frenchman."

"I'm sure you'll manage it," Robert said.

"Where is your wife? Now?" the girl said.

"In New York."

"Pregnant," Mac said, more helpful than ever.

"And she lets you run off and ski all alone like this?" the girl asked, incredulously.

"Yes," Robert said. "Actually, I'm in Europe on business, and I sneaked off for ten days."

"What business?" the girl asked.

"I'm a diamond merchant," Robert said. "I buy and sell diamonds."

"That's the sort of man I'd like to meet," the girl said. "Somebody awash with diamonds. But unmarried."

"Barbara!" the Philadelphian said.

"I deal mostly in industrial diamonds," Robert said.

"It's not exactly the same thing."

"Even so," the girl said.

"Barbara," the Philadelphian said, "pretend you're a lady."

"If you can't speak candidly to a fellow American," the girl said, "who can you speak candidly to?" She looked out the Plexiglass window of the cabin. "Oh, dear," she said, "it's a perfect monster of a mountain, isn't it? I'm in a fever of terror." She turned and regarded Robert carefully. "You do look like a Frenchman," she said. "Terribly polished. You're definitely sure you're married?"

"Barbara," the Philadelphian said, forlornly.

Robert laughed and Mac and the other Americans laughed and the girl smiled under her fuzzy hat, amused at her own clowning and pleased at the reaction she was getting. The other people in the car, who could not understand English, smiled good-naturedly at the laughter, happy, even though they were not in on the joke, to be the witness of this youthful gaiety.

Then, through the laughter Robert heard a man's voice near by, saying, in quiet tones of cold distast, "Schaut

euch diese dummen amerikanischen Gesichter an! Und diese Leute bilden sich ein, sie waren berufen, die Welt zu regieren."

Robert had learned German as a child, from his Alsatian grandparents, and he understood what he had just heard, but he forced himself not to turn round to see who had said it. His years of temper, he liked to believe, were behind him, and if nobody else in the cabin had overheard the voice or understood the words that had been spoken, he was not going to be the one to force the issue. He was here to enjoy himself and he didn't feel like getting into a fight or dragging Mac and the other youngsters into one. Long ago, he had learned the wisdom of playing deaf when he heard things like that, or worse. If some bastard of a German wanted to say, "Look at those stupid American faces. And these are the people who think they have been chosen to rule the world," it made very little real difference to anybody, and a grown-up man ignored it if he could. So he didn't look to see who had said it, because he knew that if he picked out the man, he wouldn't be able to let it go. This way, as an anonymous, though hateful voice, he could let it slide, along with many of the other things that Germans had said during his life-time.

The effort of not looking was difficult, though, and he closed his eyes, angry with himself for being so disturbed by a scrap of overheard malice like this. It had been a perfect holiday up to now, and it would be foolish to let it be shadowed, even briefly, by a random voice in a crowd. If you came to Switzerland to ski, Robert told himself, you had to expect to find some Germans. Though each year now there were more and more of them, massive, prosperous-looking men and sulky-looking women with the suspicious eyes of people who believe they are in danger of being cheated. Men and women both pushed more than was necessary in the lift lines, with a kind of impersonal egotism, a racial, unquestioning assumption of precedence. When they skied, they did it grimly, in large groups, as if under military order. At

night, when they relaxed in the bars and s t u b l i s ,
their merriment was more difficult to tolerate than their
dedicated daytime gloom and Junker arrogance. They sat in
red-faced platoons, drinking gallons of beer, volleying out
great bursts of heavy laughter and roaring glee-club arrange-
ments of students' drinking songs. Robert had not yet heard
them sing the 'Horst Wessel' song, but he noticed that they
had long ago stopped pretending that they were Swiss or Aus-
trian or that they had been born in Alsace. Somehow, to the
sport of skiing, which is, above all, individual and light
and an exercise in grace, the Germans seemed to bring the no-
tion of the herd. Once or twice, when he had been trampled
in the téléférique station, he had shown some of his dis-
taste to Mac, but Mac, who was far from being a fool under
his puppy-fullback exterior, had said, "The trick is to iso-
late them, lad. It's only when they're in groups that they
get on your nerves. I've been in Germany for three years and
I've met a lot of good fellows and some s m a s h i n g
girls."

Robert had agreed that Mac was probably right. Deep in
his heart, he wanted to believe that Mac was right. Before
and during the war the problem of the Germans had occupied
so much of his waking life, that VE Day had seemed to him
a personal liberation from them, a kind of graduation cere-
mony from a school in which he had been forced to spend long
years trying to solve a single, boring, painful problem. He
had reasoned himself into believing that their defeat had re-
turned the Germans to rationality. So, along with the belief
he felt because he no longer ran the risk of being killed by
them, there was almost as intense relief that he no longer
had especially to t h i n k about them.

Once the war was over, he had advocated re-establishing
normal relations with the Germans as quickly as possible,
both as good politics and simple humanity. He drank German
beer and even bought a Volkswagen, although if it were up to
him, given the tastes for catastrophe that was latent in the
German soul, he would not equip the German army with the hyd-

rogen bomb. In the course of his business he had very few dealings with Germans and it was only here, in this village in the Graubunden, where their presence was becoming so much more visible each year, that the idea of Germans disturbed him any more. But he loved the village, and the thought of abandoning his yearly vacation there because of the prevalence of licence plates from Munich and Dusseldorf was repugnant to him. Maybe, he thought, from now on he would come at a different time, in January, instead of late in February. Late February and early March was the German season, when the sun was warmer and shone until six o'clock in the evening. The Germans were sun gluttons and could be seen all over the hills, stripped to the waist, sitting on rocks, eating their picnic lunches, greedily absorbing each precious ray of sun-light. It was as though they came from a country perpetually covered in mist, like the planet Venus, and had to soak up as much brightness and life as possible in the short periods of their holidays, to be able to endure the harshness and gloom of their homeland and the conduct of the other inhabitants of Venus for the rest of the year.

Robert smiled to himself at this tolerant concept and felt better disposed towards everyone around him. Maybe, he thought, if I were a single man, I'd find a Bavarian girl and fall in love with her and finish the whole thing off then and there.

"I warn you, Francis," the girl in the lambskin hat was saying, "if you do me to death on this mountain, there are three Juniors at Yale who will track you down to the ends of the earth."

Then he heard the German again. "Warum haben die Amerikaner nicht genügend Verstand," the voice said, low but distinctly, near him, the accent clearly Hochdeutsch and not Zürichoish or any of the other variations of Schweizerdeutsch, "ihre dumme kleinen Nutten zu Hause zu lassen, wo sie hingehören?"

Now, he knew there was no avoiding looking and there was no avoiding doing something about it. He glanced at Mac first, to see if Mac, who understood a little German, had heard. Mac was huge and could be dangerous, and for all his easy good nature, if he had heard the man say, "Why don't the Americans have the sense to leave their silly little whores at home where they belong?" the man was in for a beating. But Mac was still beaming placidly at the Contessa. That was all to the good, Robert thought, relieved. The Swiss police took a dim view of fighting, no matter what the provocation and Mac, enraged, was likely to wreak terrible damage in a fight, and would more than likely wind up in jail. For an American career soldier on duty in Frankfurt, a brawl like that could have serious consequences. The worst that can happen to me, Robert thought, as he turned to find the man who had spoken, is a few hours in the pokey and a lecture from the magistrate about abusing Swiss hospitality.

Almost automatically, Robert decided that when they got to the top, he would follow the man who had spoken out of the car, tell him, quietly, that he, Robert, had understood what had been said about Americans in the car, and swing immediately. I just hope, Robert thought, that whoever it is isn't too damned large. For a moment, Robert couldn't pick out his opponent-to-be. There was a tall man with his back to Robert on the other side of the Italian woman, and the voice had come from that direction. Because of the crowd, Robert could only see his head and shoulders, which were bulky and powerful under a black parka. The man had on a white cap of the kind that had been worn by the Afrika Corps during the war. The man was with a plump, hard-faced woman who was whispering earnestly to him, but not loudly enough for Robert to be able to hear what she was saying. Then the man said, crisply, in German, replying to the woman, "I don't care how many of them understand the language. Let them understand," and Robert knew that he had found his man.

An exhilarated tingle of anticipation ran through Robert, making his hands and arms feel tense and jumpy. He regretted that the cabin wouldn't arrive at the top for another five minutes. Now that he had decided the fight was inevitable, he could hardly bear waiting. He stared fixedly at the man's broad, black nylon back, wishing the fellow would turn round so that he could see his face. He wondered if the man would go down with the first blow, if he would try to apologize, if he would try to use his ski sticks. Robert decided to keep his own sticks handy, just in case, although Mac could be depended upon to police matters thoroughly if he saw weapons being used. Deliberately Robert took off his heavy leather mittens and stuck them in his belt. The correction would be more effective with bare knuckles. He wondered, fleetingly, if the man was wearing a ring. He kept his eyes fixed on the back of the man's neck, willing him to turn round. Then the plump woman noticed his stare. She dropped her eyes and whispered something to the man in the black parka and after several seconds, he finally turned round, pretending that it was a casual, unmotivated movement. The man looked squarely at Robert and Robert thought, If you ski long enough you meet every other skier you've ever known. At the same moment, he knew that it wasn't going to be a nice simple fist-fighting on the top of the mountain. He knew that somehow he was going to have to kill the man whose icy-blue eyes, fringed with pale, blond lashes, were staring challengingly at him from under the white peak of the Afrika Corps cap.

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It was a long time ago, the winter of 1938, in the French part of Switzerland, and he was fourteen years old and the sun was setting behind another mountain and it was ten below zero and he was lying in the snow, with his foot turned in that funny, unnatural way, although the pain hadn't really begun yet, and the eyes were looking down at him ...

He had done something foolish, and at the moment he was more worried about what his parents would say when they found out that about the broken leg. He had gone up, alone, late in the afternoon, when almost everybody else was off the mountain, and even so he hadn't stayed on the normal piste, but had started bushwacking through the forest, searching for powder snow that hadn't been tracked by other skiers. One ski had caught on a hidden root and he had fallen forward, hearing the sickening dry cracking sound from his right leg, even as he pitched into the snow.

Trying not to panic, he had sat up, facing in the direction of the piste, whose markers he could see some hundred yards away, through the pine forest. If any skiers happened to come by, they might just, with luck, be able to hear him if he shouted. For the moment, he did not try to crawl towards the line of sticks, because when he moved, a very queer feeling flickered from his ankle up his leg to the pit of his stomach, making him want to be sick.

The shadows were very long now in the forest, and only the highest peaks were rose-coloured against a frozen green sky. He was beginning to feel the cold and from time to time he was shaken by acute spasms of shivering.

"I'm going to die here," he thought, "I'm going to die here tonight. He thought of his parents and his sister probably having tea, comfortably seated this moment in the warm dining room of the chalet two miles down the mountain, and he bit his lips to keep back the tears. They wouldn't start to worry about him for another hour or two yet, and then when they did, and started to do something about finding him, they wouldn't know where to begin. He had known none of the seven or eight people who had been on the lift with him on his last ride up and he hadn't told anybody what run he was going to take. There were three different mountains, with their separate lifts, and their numberless variations of runs, that he might have taken, and finding him in the dark would be an almost hopeless task. He looked up at the

sky. There were clouds moving in from the east, slowly, a black high wall, covering the already darkened sky. It it snowed that night, there was a good chance they wouldn't even find his body before spring. He had promised his mother that no matter what happened, he would never ski alone, and he had broken the promise and this was his punishment.

Then he heard the sound of skis, coming fast, making a harsh, metallic noise on the iced snow of the piste. Before he could see the skier, he began to shout, with all the strength of his lungs, frantically, "Au secours! Au secours!"

A dark shape, going very fast, appeared high up for a second, disappeared behind a clump of trees, then shot into view much lower down, almost on a level with the place where Robert was sitting. Robert shouted wildly, hysterically, not uttering words any more, just a senseless, passionate, throat-bursting claim on the attention of the human race, represented, for this one instant at sunset on this cold mountain, by the dark, expert figure plunging swiftly, with a harsh scraping of steel edges and a w h o o s h of wind, towards the village below.

Then, miraculously, the figure stopped, in a swirl of snow. Robert shouted wordlessly, the sound of his voice echoing hysterically in the forest. For a moment the skier didn't move and Robert shook with the fear that it was all a hallucination, a mirage of sight and sound, that there was no one there on the beaten snow at the edge of the forest, that he was only imagining that he was shouting, that with all the fierce effort of his throat and lungs, he was mute, unheard.

Suddenly, he couldn't see anything more. He had the sensation of a curtain sinking somewhere within him, of a wall of warm liquid inundating the ducts and canals of his body. He waved his hands weakly and toppled slowly over in a faint.

When he came to, a man was kneeling over him, rubbing his cheeks with snow. "You heard me," Robert said in French

to the man. "I was afraid you wouldn't hear me," Robert repeated, in German.

"You are a stupid little boy," the man said severely, in clipped, educated German. "And very lucky. I am the last man on the mountain." He felt Robert's ankle, his hands hard but deft. "Nice," he said ironically, "very nice. You're going to be in plaster for at least three months. Here - lie still. I am going to take your skis off. You will be more comfortable." He undid the long leather thongs, working swiftly, and stood the skis up in the snow. Then he swept the snow off a stump a few yards away and got around behind Robert and put his hands under Robert's armpits. "Relax," he said. "Do not try to help me." He picked Robert up. "Luckily," he said, "you weigh nothing. How old are you - eleven?"

"Fourteen." Robert said.

"What's the matter?" the man said, laughing. "Don't they feed you in Switzerland?"

"I'm French," Robert said.

"Oh," the man said. His voice went flat. "French." He half-carried, half-dragged Robert over to the stump and sat him down gently on it. "There," he said, "at least you're out of the snow. You won't freeze - for the time being. Now, listen carefully. I will take your skis down with me to the ski-school and I will tell them where you are and tell them to send a sledge for you. They should get to you in less than an hour. Now, whom are you staying with in town?"

"My mother and father. At the Chalet Montana."

"Good." The man nodded. "The Chalet Montana. Do they speak German, too?"

"Yes."

"Excellent," the man said. "I will telephone them and tell them their foolish son has broken his leg and that the patrol is taking him to the hospital. What is your name?"

"Robert."

"Robert what?"

"Robert Rosenthal," Robert said. "Please don't say I'm hurt too badly. They'll be worried enough as it is."

The man didn't answer immediately. He busied himself tying Robert's skis together and slung them over his shoulder. "Do not worry, Robert Rosenthal," he said, "I will not worry them more than is necessary." Abruptly, he started off, sweeping easily through the trees, his sticks held in one hand, Robert's skis balanced across his shoulders with his other hand.

His sudden departure took Robert by surprise, and it was only when the man was a considerable distance away, already almost lost among the trees, that Robert realized he hadn't thanked the man for saving his life. "Thank you," he shouted into the growing darkness. "Thank you very much."

The man didn't stop and Robert never knew whether he had heard his cry of thanks or not. Because after an hour, when it was completely dark, with the stars covered by the cloud that had been moving in at sunset from the east, the patrol had not yet appeared. Robert had a watch with a radium dial. Timing himself by it, he waited exactly one hour and a half, until ten minutes past seven, and then decided that nobody was coming for him and that if he hoped to live through the night he would somehow have to crawl out of the forest and make his way down to the town himself.

He was rigid with cold by now, and suffering from shock. His teeth were chattering in a frightening way, as though his jaws were part of an insane machine over which he had no control. There was no feeling in his fingers any more, and the pain in his leg came in ever-enlarging waves of metallic throbbing. He had put up the hood of his parka and sunk his head as low down on his chest as he could and the cloth of the parka was stiff with his frosted breath. He heard a whimpering sound was coming from him and that there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Stiffly, with exaggerated care, he tried to lift himself off the tree stump and down into the snow without put-

ting any weight on his injured leg, but at the last moment he slipped and twisted the leg as he went down. He screamed twice and lay with his face in the snow and thought of just staying that way and forgetting the whole thing, the whole intolerable effort of remaining alive. Later on, when he was much older, he came to the conclusion that the one thing that made him keep moving was the thought of his mother and father waiting for him, with anxiety that would soon grow into terror, in the town below him.

He pulled himself along on his belly, digging at the snow in front of his face with his hands, using rocks, low-hanging branches, snow-covered roots, to help him, yard by yard, out of the forest. His watch was torn off somewhere along the way and when he finally reached the line of sticks that marked the packed snow and ice of the piste he had no notion of whether it had taken him over five minutes or five hours to cover the hundred yards from the place he had fallen. He lay, panting, sobbing, staring at the lights of the town far below him, knowing that he could never reach them, knowing that he had to reach them. The effort of crawling through the deep snow had warmed him again, and his face was streaming with sweat and the blood coming back into his numbed hands and feet jabbed him with a thousand needles of pain.

The lights of the town guided him now and here and there he could see the marker sticks outlined against their small, cosy, Christmassy glow. It was easier going, too, on the packed snow of the piste and from time to time he managed to slide ten or fifteen yards without stopping, tobogganing on his stomach, screaming occasionally when the foot on his broken leg banged loosely against an icy bump or twisted as he went over a steep embankment to crash against a level spot below. Once he couldn't stop himself and he fell into a swiftly rushing, small stream and pulled himself out of it five minutes later with his gloves and stomach and knees soaked with icy water. And still the lights of the town seemed as far away as ever.

Finally, he felt he couldn't move any more. He was exhausted and he had had to stop twice to vomit and the vomit had been a gush of blood. He tried to sit up, so that if the snow came that night, there would be a chance that somebody would see the top of his head sticking out of the new cover in the morning. As he was struggling to push himself erect, a shadow passed between him and the lights of the town. The shadow was very close and with his last breath he called out. Later on, the peasant who rescued him said that what he called out was 'Excuse me.'

The peasant was moving hay on a big sled from one of the hill barns down to the valley, and he rolled the hay off and put Robert on instead. Then, carefully braking and taking the sled on a path that cut back and forth across the piste, he brought Robert down to the valley and the hospital.

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By the time his mother and father had been notified and had reached the hospital, the doctor had given him a shot of morphine and was in the middle of setting the leg. So it wasn't until the next morning, as he lay in the grey hospital room, sweating with pain, with his leg in traction, that he could get out any kind of coherent story and tell his parents what had happened.

"Then I saw this man skiing very fast, all alone," said Robert, trying to speak normally, without showing how much the effort was costing him, trying to take the look of shock and agony from his parents' set faces by pretending that his leg hardly hurt him at all, and the whole incident was of small importance. "He heard me and came over and took off my skis and made me comfortable on a tree stump and he asked me what my name was and where my parents were staying and he said he'd go to the ski-school and tell them where I was and to send a sled for me and then he'd call you at the

Chalet and tell you they were bringing me down to the hospital. Then, after more than an hour, it was pitch dark already, nobody came and I decided I'd better not wait any more and I started down and I was lucky and I saw this farmer with a sled and ..."

"You were very lucky," Robert's mother said flatly. She was a small, neat, plump woman, with bad nerves, who was only at home in cities. She detested the cold, detested the mountains, detested the idea of her loved ones running what seemed to her the senseless risk of injury that skiing involved, and came on these holidays only because Robert and his father and sister were so passionate about the sport. Now she was white with fatigue and worry and if Robert had not been immobilized in traction she would have had him out of the accursed mountains that morning on the train to Paris.

"Now, Robert," his father said, "is it possible that when you hurt yourself, the pain did things to you, and that you just imagined you saw a man, and just imagined he told you he was going to call us and get you a sled from the ski-school?"

"Because," said his father, "nobody called us last night until ten o'clock, when the doctor telephoned from the hospital. And nobody called the ski-school, either."

"I didn't imagine him," Robert repeated. He was hurt that his father perhaps thought he was lying. "If he came into this room I'd know him all right. He was wearing a white cap, he was a big man with a black anorak, and he had blue eyes, they looked a little funny, because his eyelashes were almost white, and from a little way off it looked as though he didn't have any eyelashes at all ..."

"How old was he, do you think?" Robert's father asked. "As old as I am?" Robert's father was nearly fifty.

"No," Robert said. "I don't think so."

"Was he as old as your Uncle Jules?" his father asked.

"Yes," Robert said. "Just about." He wished his father and mother would leave him alone. He was all right now. His

His leg was in plaster and he wasn't dead and in three months, the doctor said, he'd be walking again, and he wanted to forget everything that had happened last night in the forest.

"So," Robert's mother said, "he was a man of about twenty-five, with a white cap and blue eyes." She picked up the phone and asked for the ski-school.

Robert's father lit a cigarette and went over to the window and looked out. It was snowing. It had been snowing since midnight, heavily, and the lifts weren't running today, because a driving wind had sprung up with the snow and there was danger of avalanches on top.

"Did you talk to the farmer who picked me up?" Robert asked.

"Yes," said his father. "He said you were a very brave little boy. He also said that if he hadn't found you you couldn't have gone on more than another fifty yards. I gave him two hundred francs, Swiss."

"Sssh," Robert's mother said. She had the connexion with the ski-school now. "This is Mrs. Rosenthal again. Yes, thank you, he's doing as well as can be expected," she said, in her precise, melodious French. "We've been talking to him and there's one aspect of his story that's a little strange. He says a man stopped and helped him take off his skis last night after he'd broken his leg, and promised to go to the ski-school and leave the skis there and ask for a sled to be sent to bring him down. We'd like to know if, in fact, the man did come into the office and report the accident. It would have been somewhere around six o'clock." She listened for a moment, her face tense. "I see," she said. She listened again. "No," she said, "we don't know his name. My son says he was about twenty-five years old, with blue eyes and a white cap. Wait a minute. I'll ask." She turned to Robert. "Robert," she said, "what kind of skis did you have? They're going to look and see if they're out front in the rack."

"Attenhoffer's," Robert said, "one metre seventy. And they have my initials in red up on the tips."

"Attenhoffer's," his mother repeated over the phone. "And they have his initials on them R.R., in red. Thank you. I'll wait."

Robert's father came back from the window, stubbing out his cigarette in an ashtray. Underneath the holiday tan of his skin, his face looked weary and sick. "Robert," he said, with a rueful smile, "you must learn to be a little more careful. You are my only male heir and there is very little chance that I shall produce another."

"Yes, Papa," Robert said. "I'll be careful."

His mother waved impatiently at them to be quiet and listened again at the telephone. "Thank you," she said. "Please call me if you hear anything." She hung up. "No," she said to Robert's father, "the skis aren't there."

"It can't be possible," Robert's father said, "that a man would leave a little boy to freeze to death just to steal a pair of skis."

"I'd like to get my hands on him," Robert's mother said. Just for ten minutes. Robert, darling, think hard. Did he seem ... well ... did he seem normal?"

"He seemed all right," Robert said. "I suppose."

"Was there any other thing about him that you noticed? Think hard. Anything that would help us find him. It's not only for us, Robert. If there's a man in this town who would do something like that to you, it's important that people know about him, before he does something even worse to other boys."

"Mama," Robert said, feeling close to tears under the insistence of his mother's questioning. "I told you just the way it was. Everything. I'm not lying, Mama."

"What did he sound like, Robert?" his mother said. "Did he have a low voice, did he sound like us, as though he lived in Paris, did he sound like any of your teachers, did he sound like the other people from around here, did he ...?"

"Oh ..." Robert said, remembering.

"What is it? What do you want to say?" his mother said sharply.

"I had to speak to him in German," Robert said. Until now, with the pain and the morphine, it hadn't occurred to him to mention that.

"What do you mean, you had to speak to him in German?"

"I started to speak to him in French and he didn't understand me. We spoke in German."

His father and mother exchanged glances. Then his mother said, gently, "Was it real German? Or was it Swiss-German? You know the difference, don't you?"

"Of course," Robert said. One of his father's parlour tricks was giving imitations of Swiss friends in Paris speaking in French and then in Swiss-German. Robert had a good ear for languages, and apart from having heard his Alsatian grandparents speaking German since he was an infant, he was studying German literature in school and knew long passages of Goethe and Schiller and Heine by heart. "It was German, all right," he said.

There was silence in the room. His father went over to the window again and looked out at the snow falling in a soft blurred curtain outside. "I knew," his father said quietly, "That it couldn't just have been for the skis."

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In the end, his father won. His mother wanted to go to the police and get them to try to find the man, even though his father pointed out that there were perhaps ten thousand skiers in the town for the holidays, a good percentage of them German-speaking and blue-eyed, and trainloads arriving and departing five times every day. Robert's father was sure that the man had left the very night Robert had broken his leg, although all during the rest of his stay in the town, Mr. Rosenthal prowled along the snowy streets and in and out of bars searching among the faces for one that an-

swered Robert's description of the man on the mountain. But he said it would do no good to go to the police and might do harm, because once the story got out there would be plenty of people to complain that this was just another hysterical Jewish fantasy of invented injury. "There's plenty of Nazis in Switzerland, of all nationalities," Robert's father told his mother, in the course of an argument that lasted weeks, "and this will just give them more ammunition, they'll be able to say, "See, wherever the Jews go they start trouble."

Robert's mother, who was made of sterner stuff than her husband, and who had relatives in Germany who smuggled out disturbing letters to her, wanted justice at any cost, but after a while even she saw the hopelessness of pushing the matter any further. Four weeks after the accident, when Robert could finally be moved, as she sat beside her son in the ambulance that was to take them both to Geneva and then on to Paris, she said, in a dead voice, holding Robert's hand, "Soon, we must leave Europe. I cannot bear to live on a continent where things like this are permitted to happen."

Much later, during the war, after Mr. Rosenthal had died in Occupied France and Robert and his mother and sister were in America, a friend of Robert's, who had also done a lot of skiing in Europe, heard the story of the man in the white cap, and told Robert he was almost sure he recognized the man from the description Robert gave of him. It was a ski-instructor from Garmisch, or maybe from Obersdorf or Freudenstadt, who had a couple of rich Austrian clients with whom he toured each winter from one ski station to another. The friend didn't know the man's name, and the one time Robert had been in Garmisch, it had been with French troops in the closing days of the war, and of course nobody was skiing then.

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Now the man was standing just three feet from him, his face, on the other side of the pretty Italian woman, framed by straight black lines of skis, his eyes looking coolly, with insolent amusement, but without recognition, at Robert, from under the almost albino eyelashes. He was approaching fifty now and his face was fleshy but hard and healthy, with a thin, set mouth that gave a sense of control and self-discipline to his expression.

Robert hated him. He hated him for the attempted murder of a fourteen-year-old boy in 1938; he hated him for the acts that he must have condoned or collaborated in during the war; he hated him for his father's disappearance and his mother's exile; he hated him for what he had said about the pretty little American girl in the lambskin hat; he hated him for the confident impudence of his glance and the healthy, untouched robustness of his face and neck; he hated him because he could look directly into the eyes of a man he had tried to kill and not recognize him; he hated him because he was here, bringing the idea of death and shamefully unconsummated vengeance into this silvery holiday bubble climbing the placid air of a kindly, welcoming country.

And most of all he hated the man in the white cap because the man betrayed and made a sour joke of the precariously achieved peace that Robert had built for himself, with his wife, his children, his job, his comfortable, easy-going, generously forgetful Americanism, since the war.

The German deprived him of his sense of normality. Living with a wife and three children in a clean, cheerful house was not normal; having your name in the telephone directory was not normal; lifting your hat to your neighbor and paying your bills was not normal; obeying the law and depending upon the protection of the police was not normal. The German sent him back through the years to an older and truer normality - murder, blood, flight, conspiracy, pillage and ruins. For a while Robert had deceived himself in-

to believing that the nature of everyday could change. The German in the crowded cabin had put him to rights. Meeting the German had been an accident, but the accident had revealed what was permanent and non-accidental in his life and the life of the people around him.

Mac was saying something to him, and the girl in the lambskin hat was singing an American song in a soft, small voice, but he didn't hear what Mac was saying, and the words of the song made no sense to him. He had turned away from looking at the German and was looking at the steep stone face of the mountain, now almost obscured by a swirling cloud, and he was trying to figure out how he could get rid of Mac, escape the young Americans, follow the German, get him alone, and kill him.

He had no intention of making it a duel. He did not intend to give the man a chance to fight for his life. It was punishment he was after, not a symbol of honour. He remembered other stories of men who had been in concentration camps during the war who had suddenly confronted their torturers later on and had turned them in to the authorities and had the satisfaction of witnessing their execution. But whom could he turn the German over to - the Swiss police? For what crime that would fit into what criminal code?

Or he could do what an ex-prisoner had done in Budapest three or four years after the war, when he had met one of his jailors on a bridge over the Danube and had simply picked the man up and thrown him into the water and watched him drown. The ex-prisoner had explained who he was and who the drowned man was and had been let off and had been treated as a hero. But Switzerland was not Hungary, the Danube was far away, the war had finished a long time ago.

No, what he had to do was follow the man, stay with him, surprise him alone somewhere on the slopes, contrive a murder that would look like an accident, be out of the country before anyone asked any questions, divulge nothing to anyone, leave the body, if possible, in an isolated place

where the snow would cover it and where it would not be found till the farmers drove their herds up into the mountains for the summer pasturage. And he had to do it swiftly, before the man realized that he was the object of any special attention on Robert's part, before he started to wonder about the American on his tracks, before the process of memory began its work and the face of the skinny fourteen-year-old boy on the dark mountain in 1938 began to emerge from the avenging face of the grown man.

Robert had never killed a man. During the war, he had been assigned by the American Army as part of a liaison team to a French division, and while he had been shot at often enough, he had never fired a gun after arriving in Europe. When the war was over, he had been secretly thankful that he had been spared the necessity of killing. Now he understood - he was not to be spared; his war was not over.

"Say, Robert ..." It was Mac's voice finally breaking through into his consciousness. "What's the matter? I've been talking to you for thirty seconds and you haven't heard a word I said. Are you sick? You look awfully queer, lad."

"I'm all right," Robert said, "I have a little headache. That's all. Maybe I'd better eat something, get something warm to drink. You go ahead down by yourself."

"Of course not," Mac said. "I'll wait for you."

"Don't be silly," Robert said, trying to keep his tone natural and friendly. "You'll lose the Contessa. Actually, I don't feel much like skiing any more today. The weather has turned lousy ..." He gestured at the cloud that was enveloping them. "You can't see a thing. I'll probably take the lift back down."

"Hey, you're beginning to worry me," Mac said anxiously. "I'll stick with you. You want me to take you to a doctor?"

"Leave me alone, please, Mac," Robert said. He had to get rid of Mac and if it meant hurting his feelings now, he would make it up to him somehow, but later. "When I get one of these headaches I prefer being alone."

"You're sure now?" Mac asked.

"I'm sure."

"Okay. See you at the hotel for tea."

"Yes," Robert said. After murder, Robert thought, I always have a good tea. He prayed that the Italian girl would put her skis on immediately and move off quickly once they got to the top, so that Mac would be gone before Robert had to start off after the man in the white cap.

The cabin was swinging over the last pylon now and slowing down to come into the station. The passengers were stirring a bit, arranging clothes, testing bindings, in preparation for the descent. Robert stole a quick glance at the German. The woman with him was knotting a silk scarf around his throat, with little wifely gestures. She had the face of a cook. Neither she nor the man looked in Robert's direction. I will face the problem of the woman when I come to it, Robert thought.

The cabin came to a stop and the skiers began to disembark. Robert was close to the door and was one of the first people out. Without looking back, he walked swiftly out of the station and into the shifting greyness of the mountain top. One side of the mountain dropped off in a sheer, rocky face next to the station and Robert went over and stood on the edge, looking out. If the German, for any reason, happened to come over near him, to admire the view or to judge the condition of the piste of the Kaisergarten, which had to be entered some distance farther on, but which cut back under the cliff much lower down, where the slope became more gradual, there was a possibility that one quick move on Robert's part would send the man crashing down to the rocks some hundred yards below, and the whole thing would be over. Robert turned and faced the exit of the station, searching the crowd of brightly dressed skiers for the white cap.

He saw Mac come out with the Italian girl. He was talking to her and carrying her skis and the girl was smil-

ing warmly. Mac waved at Robert and then knelt to help the girl put on her skis. Robert took a deep breath. Mac, at least, was out of the way. And the American group had decided to have lunch on top and had gone into the restaurant near the station.

The white cap was not to be seen. The German and the woman had not yet come out. There was nothing unusual about that. People often waxed their skis in the station, where it was warm, or took time to go to the washrooms downstairs before setting out on their runs. It was all to the good. The longer the German took, the fewer people there would be hanging around to notice Robert when he set out after him.

Robert waited on the cliff's edge. In the swirling, cold cloud, he felt warm, capable, powerful, curiously light-headed. For the first time in his life he understood the profound, sensual pleasure of destruction. He waved gaily at Mac and the Italian girl as they moved off together on the traverse to one of the easier runs on the other side of the mountain.

Then the door to the station opened again and the woman who was with the German came out. She had her skis on and Robert realized that they had been so long inside because they had put their skis on in the waiting room. In bad weather people often did that, so that they wouldn't freeze their hands on the icy metal of the bindings in the biting wind outside. The woman held the door open and Robert saw the man in the white cap coming through the opening. But he wasn't coming out like everybody else. He was hopping, with great agility, on one leg. The other leg was cut off in mid-thigh and to keep his balance the German had miniature skis fixed on the end of his sticks, instead of the usual thonged baskets.

Through the years, Robert had seen other one-legged skiers, veterans of Hitler's armies, who had refused to allow their mutilations to keep them off the mountains they loved, and he had admired their fortitude and skill. But he

felt no admiration for the man in the white cap. All he felt was a bitter sense of loss, of having been deprived at the last moment, of something that had been promised to him and that he had wanted and desperately needed. Because he knew he was not strong enough to murder a cripple, to punish the already punished, and he despised himself for his weakness.

He watched as the man made his way across the snow with crab-like cunning, hunched over his sticks with their infants' skis on the ends. Two or three times, when the man and the woman came to a rise, the woman got silently behind the man and pushed him up the slope until he could move under his own power again.

The cloud had been swept away and there was a momentary burst of sunlight, and in it Robert could see the man and the woman traverse to the entrance to the run, which was the steepest one on the mountain. Without hesitation, the man plunged into it, skiing skilfully, courageously, overtaking more timid or weaker skiers who were picking their way cautiously down the slope.

Watching the couple, who soon became tiny figures on the white expanse below him, Robert knew there was nothing more to be done, nothing more to wait for, except a cold, hopeless, everlasting forgiveness.

The two figures disappeared out of the sunlight into the solid bank of cloud that cut across the lower part of the mountain. Then Robert went over to where he had left his skis and put them on. He did it clumsily. His hands were cold because he had taken off his mittens in the téléphérique cabin, in that hopeful and innocent past, ten minutes ago, when he had thought the German insult could be paid for with a few blows of the bare fist.

He went off, fast, on the run that Mac had taken with the Italian girl, and he caught up with them before they were halfway down. It began to snow when they reached the village and they went into the hotel and had a hilarious lunch with a lot of wine, and the girl gave Mac her address and said he should be sure to look her up the next time he came to Rome.

C O M M E N T S

Pages:

sylvan /'silvən/ - of trees and woodland

Fuchsia /'fju:ʒə/ - a shrub with bell-like drooping flowers, pink, red, or purple

a combe /ku:m/ - a narrow valley, or deep hollow, especially one enclosed on all sides but one

Pan - (Greek mythology) the god of forests, pastures, flocks, and shepherds, represented with the head, chest, and arms of a man, and the legs, and sometimes the horns and ears of a goat

astretch /ə'stretʃ/ - lying stretched out, limbs extended to the full length

a votive offering - something offered in worship or devotion, as to a deity

a shoulder - a shoulder-like part of a mountain

to slew /slu:/ - to force or turn round in a new direction

infanta /in'fæntə/ - a daughter of the king of Spain
or Portugal

caparisons /kə'pærɪsənz/ - an ornamental covering
for a horse

a pannier /'pʌniə/ - one of a pair of baskets placed
across the back of a horse or
ass for carrying things in

plaza /'pla:zə/ - a public square in a city

the Americas - North and South America

reja - (Spanish) a grille /gril/ , a screen of parallel bars used to close an open space, especially one in a door for observing callers

patio /'pa:tiou/ - a courtyard open to the sky, with-
in the walls of a Spanish house

conquistadores /kən'kwistədɔz/ - the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru in the 16th century

colonnade /kɒlə'neɪd/ - a row of columns set at equal distances

bargueno - (Spanish) - a writing-desk

a raddled hag - a repulsive old woman, wearing coarse make-up

a sombrero /sɒm'brɛɔrou/ - a broad-brimmed hat worn in Spain

a Silenus /sai'li:nɔs/ - (Greek mythology), a woodland god, companion of the god of wine, represented as a fat drunken old man

Jardines Publique - (French), public gardens

rotunda /rou'tʌndə/ - a round building, especially one with a domed roof

toque /tɒk/ - a woman's small, close-fitting hat

a whiting /'waɪtɪŋ/ - small sea-fish

ma petite chère - (French), my little darling

interim /'ɪntərɪm/ - a temporary arrangement

Donnez-mois une chaise! 'Bion, Monsieur.' 'Non. Ce n'est pas assez confortable pour ma femme.'" -

'Give me a chair!' 'Here you are, Sir.' 'No. This is not comfortable enough for my wife.'" -

kick up a shine - kick up a row

twizzle /'twɪzl/ - spin, whirl, turn round quickly

Cor! /kɔ:/ - (British slang), an exclamation of surprise

Tom had the rats - Tom was irritable

a coracle /'kɒrəkl/ - a small light boat made of wicker, covered with watertight material, used by fishermen on Welsh and Irish rivers and lakes

frit - fit

taters /'teitəz/ - potatoes

And look slippy! - And be quick about it!

to tot out - to pour out drink in a small portion

to fall in the drink - in the sea

the RAF - the Royal Air Force

a DFC - a Distinguished Flying Cross

Buddhism - the cult, founded by Buddha, which teaches
that life is intrinsically full of suffer-
ing and that the supreme felicity (Nirvana)
is to be striven for by psychological and
ethical self-culture

Community Chest - the funds of a public institution

hydroplane /'haɪdrəpleɪn/ - a speedboat, a motor-boat
with a flat bottom, able
to skim very fast over
the surface

streptothricosis /'streptouθraɪ'kəʊsɪs/ - a chronic
suppurative process attacking mainly
the mucous surface

coreopsis /kɔ:'ri'ɔpsɪs/ - a plant with yellow, brown-
ish, or parti-coloured flow-
ers

Kleenex /'kli:nəks/ - (Trademark), a soft clothlike
tissue, used especially as a
disposable handkerchief

an A & P - a supermarket

the Archies - anti-aircraft guns

"Aupres de ma Blonde" - (French), "Near my blonde"

non-sequiturs /nɒn'sekwɪtəz/ - (Latin), inferences or
conclusions which do
not follow from the
premises

insouciance /ɪn'su:siəns/ - (French), the quality of
being free from anxiety,
concern, care

téléphérique /tele'ferik/ - a telpher, high-voltage
 electric cable railway
 anorak /'æ nərɔk/ - windcheater, a jacket with a
 hood
 the Contessa - (Italian), the countess
 prom - short for promenade /prɒmi'na:d/ - a students'
 dance or
 ball in
 America
 a drum majorette - a woman leader of a drum corps or
 band in marching
 you're silky - you're a skilful skier
 Plexiglass - (Trademark), a thermoplastic notable for
 its permanent transparency, light weight,
 and resistance to weathering
 the 'Horst Wessel' song - the party hymn of fascists
 VE Day - the day of victory in Europe for the Allies
 in World War II
 Yale /jeil/ - Yale University in America; 1701
 a pokey /'pouki/ - a jail, prison; a jug, a clink
 piste - (French), a track
 au secours! - (French), help!
 liaison /li'eizən/ - linkage between two different
 armies or between two separated
 parts of an army
 a pylon /'pailən/ - a tower for carrying high-voltage
 electric cables

Proper Names Pronunciations

Munro /mən'rou, 'mʌnrou/, 'Saki' /'sa:ki/
 Somerset Maugham /'sʌməsɪt 'mɔ:m/
 Katherine Mansfield /'kæθrɪn 'mænsfi:ld/
 Elizabeth Bowen /i'lizəbəθ 'bəʊɪn/
 Stella Gibbons /'stɛlə 'gɪbənz/
 Bates /beɪts/
 Roald Dahl /'rouəld 'da:l/
 Pearl Buck /'pɜ:l 'bʌk/
 Dorothy Parker /'dɔrəθi 'pa:kə/
 James Thurber /'dʒeɪmz 'θɜ:bə/
 F. Scott Fitzgerald /'skɒt fɪts'dʒerəld/
 Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings /'ma:dʒɪri 'kɪnən 'rɔ:lɪnz/
 William Faulkner /'wɪljəm 'fɔ:knə/
 Irwin Shaw /'ɜ:win 'ʃɔ:ʃ/

Alaska /ə'lxskə/
 Alsace /'ɒlsəs/
 Alsatian /ə'l'seɪʃjən/
 Arlene /a:'li:n/
 Andalusian /ændə'lu:zjən/
 Austrian /'ɔstriən/
 Bagdad /bæɡ'dæd/
 Barron /'bærən/
 Bavarian /bə'vɛəriən/
 Brighton /'braɪtn/
 Budapest /'bjʊ:də'pest/
 Buddha /'budə/
 Carolina /kærə'laɪnə/
 Cissie /'sɪsi/
 Devon /'devn/
 Dover /'dʌvə/

Bde /i:d/
Flemish /'flemiʃ/
Geneva /dʒi'ni:və/
Grierson /grɪəsn/
Jermyn /'dʒɜ:min/
Lancaster /'læŋkəstə/
Louise /lu'i:z/
Lowther /'laʊðə/
Maisie /'meizi/
Milan /mi'læn/
Munich /'mju:nɪk/
Orme /ɔ:m/
Panama /pænə'ma:/
Persian /'pɜ:ʃən/
Polyphemus /pɒli'fi:məs/
Raymond /'reɪmənd/
Roland /'rəʊlənd/
Roosevelt /'ru:svelt/, /'rouzəvelt/
Seville /'sevil/
Silas /'saɪləs/
Stephens /'sti:vnz/
Stevens /'sti:vnz/
Vickers /'vɪkəz/
Webley /'weblei/
Worcester /'wʊstə/
Yessney /'jesnei/

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ РАССКАЗЫ

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