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John Steinbeck

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OF EDEN

JOHN

STEINBECK

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PASCAL COVICI

Dear Pat,

You came upon me

carving some kind of little

figure out of wood and you

said, “Why don’t you make

something for me?”

I asked you what you

wanted, and you said, “A

box.”

“What for?”

“To put things in.”

“What things?”

“Whatever you have,”

you said.

Well, here’s your box.

Nearly everything I have is in

it, and it is not full. Pain and

excitement are in it, and

feeling good or bad and evil

thoughts and good thoughts

— the pleasure of design and

some

despair

and

the

indescribable joy of creation.

And on top of these are

all the gratitude and love I

have for you.

And still the box is not

full.

JOHN

PART ONE

Chapter 1

1

The Salinas Valley is in

Northern California. It is a

long narrow swale between

two ranges of mountains, and

the Salinas River winds and

twists up the center until it

falls at last into Monterey

Bay.

I

remember

my

childhood names for grasses

and

secret

flowers.

I

remember where a toad may

live and what time the birds

awaken in the summer—and

what

trees

and

seasons

smelled like—how people

looked

and

walked

and

smelled even. The memory of

odors is very rich.

I remember that the

Gabilan Mountains to the east

of the valley were light gay

mountains full of sun and

loveliness and a kind of

invitation, so that you wanted

to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains with a brown grass love. The Santa Lucias stood up against the sky to the west and kept the valley from the open sea, and they were dark and brooding —unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I cannot say, unless it could be that the morning came over the peaks of the Gabilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias. It may be that the birth and death of the day had some part in my feeling

about the two ranges of
mountains.
From both sides of the
valley little streams slipped
out of the hill canyons and
fell into the bed of the Salinas
River. In the winter of wet
years the streams ran full-freshet, and they swelled the
river until sometimes it raged
and boiled, bank full, and
then it was a destroyer. The
river tore the edges of the
farm lands and washed whole
acres down; it toppled barns
and houses into itself, to go
floating and bobbing away. It
trapped cows and pigs and
sheep and drowned them in
its muddy brown water and
carried them to the sea. Then
when the late spring came,
the river drew in from its

edges and the sand banks
appeared. And in the summer
the river didn’t run at all
above ground. Some pools
would be left in the deep
swirl places under a high
bank. The tules and grasses
grew back, and willows
straightened up with the flood
debris
in
their
upper
branches. The Salinas was
only a part-time river. The
summer
sun
drove
it
underground. It was not a fine
river at all, but it was the only
one we had and so we

boasted
about
it—how
dangerous it was in a wet
winter and how dry it was in
a dry summer. You can boast
about anything if it's all you
have. Maybe the less you
have, the more you are
required to boast.
The floor of the Salinas
Valley, between the ranges
and below the foothills, is
level because this valley used
to be the bottom of a
hundred-mile inlet from the
sea. The river mouth at Moss
Landing was centuries ago
the entrance to this long
inland water. Once, fifty
miles down the valley, my
father bored a well. The drill

came up first with topsoil and
then with gravel and then
with white sea sand full of
shells and even pieces of
whalebone.
There
were
twenty feet of sand and then
black earth again, and even a
piece
of
redwood,
that
imperishable wood that does
not rot. Before the inland sea
the valley must have been a
forest. And those things had
happened right under our feet.
And
it
seemed
to

me

sometimes at night that I

could feel both the sea and

the redwood forest before it.

On the wide level acres

of the valley the topsoil lay

deep and fertile. It required

only a rich winter of rain to

make it break forth in grass

and flowers. The spring

flowers in a wet year were

unbelievable.

The

whole

valley floor, and the foothills

too, would be carpeted with

lupins and poppies. Once a

woman told me that colored

flowers would seem more

bright if you added a few

white flowers to give the

colors definition. Every petal

of blue lupin is edged with
white, so that a field of lurins
is more blue than you can
imagine. And mixed with
these
were
splashes
of
California poppies. These too
are of a burning color—not
orange, not gold, but if pure
gold were liquid and could
raise a cream, that golden
cream might be like the color
of the poppies. When their
season was over the yellow
mustard came up and grew to
a great height. When my
grandfather came into the
valley the mustard was so tall
that a man on horseback
showed only his head above

the yellow flowers. On the

uplands the grass would be

strewn with buttercups, with

hen-and-chickens, with black-centered yellow violets. And

a little later in the season

there would be red and

yellow stands of Indian

paintbrush. These were the

flowers of the open places

exposed to the sun.

Under the live oaks,

shaded

and

dusky,

the

maidenhair flourished and

gave a good smell, and under

the mossy banks of the water

courses whole clumps of five-fingered ferns and goldy-backs hung down. Then there

were harebells, tiny lanterns,

cream white and almost sinful

looking, and these were so
rare and magical that a child,
finding one, felt singled out
and special all day long.
When June came the
grasses headed out and turned
brown, and the hills turned a
brown which was not brown
but a gold and saffron and red
—an indescribable color. And
from then on until the next
rains the earth dried and the
streams
stopped.
Cracks
appeared on the level ground.
The Salinas River sank under
its sand. The wind blew down
the valley, picking up dust
and straws, and grew stronger
and harsher as it went south.
It stopped in the evening. It

was a rasping nervous wind,
and the dust particles cut into
a man's skin and burned his
eyes. Men working in the
fields wore goggles and tied
handkerchiefs around their
noses to keep the dirt out.
The valley land was
deep and rich, but the
foothills wore only a skin of
topsoil no deeper than the
grass roots; and the farther up
the hills you went, the thinner
grew the soil, with flints
sticking through, until at the
brush line it was a kind of dry
flinty gravel that reflected the
hot sun blindingly.
I have spoken of the rich
years when the rainfall was
plentiful. But there were dry
years too, and they put a

terror on the valley. The water came in a thirty-year cycle. There would be five or six wet and wonderful years when there might be nineteen to twenty-five inches of rain, and the land would shout with grass. Then would come six or seven pretty good years of twelve to sixteen inches of rain. And then the dry years would come, and sometimes there would be only seven or eight inches of rain. The land dried up and the grasses headed out miserably a few inches high and great bare scabby places appeared in the valley. The live oaks got a crusty look and the sagebrush was gray. The land cracked and the springs dried up and

the cattle listlessly nibbled
dry twigs. Then the farmers
and the ranchers would be
filled with disgust for the
Salinas Valley. The cows
would
grow
thin
and
sometimes starve to death.
People would have to haul
water in barrels to their farms
just
for
drinking.
Some
families would sell out for
nearly nothing and move
away. And it never failed that
during the dry years the
people forgot about the rich
years, and during the wet

years they lost all memory of
the dry years. It was always
that way.

2

And that was the long Salinas
Valley. Its history was like
that of the rest of the state.
First there were Indians, an
inferior breed without energy,
inventiveness, or culture, a
people that lived on grubs and
grasshoppers and shellfish,
too lazy to hunt or fish. They
ate what they could pick up
and planted nothing. They
pounded bitter acorns for
flour. Even their warfare was
a weary pantomime.
Then the hard, dry
Spaniards came exploring
through, greedy and realistic,
and their greed was for gold

or God. They collected souls
as they collected jewels. They
gathered
mountains
and
valleys, rivers and whole
horizons, the way a man
might now gain title to
building lots. These tough,
dried-up
men
moved
restlessly up the coast and
down. Some of them stayed
on
grants
as
large
as
principalities, given to them
by Spanish kings who had not
the faintest idea of the gift.

These first owners lived in poor feudal settlements, and their cattle ranged freely and multiplied. Periodically the owners killed the cattle for their hides and tallow and left the meat to the vultures and coyotes.

When the Spaniards came they had to give everything they saw a name. This is the first duty of any explorer—a duty and a privilege. You must name a thing before you can note it on your hand-drawn map. Of course they were religious

people, and the men who could read and write, who kept the records and drew the maps, were the tough untiring priests who traveled with the soldiers. Thus the first names of places were saints' names or religious holidays celebrated at stopping places. There are many saints, but they are not inexhaustible, so that we find repetitions in the first namings. We have San Miguel, St. Michael, San Ardo, San Bernardo, San Benito, San Lorenzo, San Carlos, San Francisquito. And then the holidays—Natividad, the Nativity; Nacimiente, the Birth; Soledad, the Solitude.

But places were also named
from the way the expedition
felt at the time: Buena
Esperenza, good hope; Buena
Vista because the view was
beautiful;
and
Chualar
because it was pretty. The
descriptive names followed:
Paso de los Robles because of
the oak trees; Los Laureles
for the laurels; Tularcitos
because of the reeds in the
swamp; and Salinas for the
alkali which was white as
salt.
Then places were named
for animals and birds seen—
Gabilanes for the hawks
which
flew

in
those
mountains; Topo for the
mole; Los Gatos for the wild
cats.
The
suggestions
sometimes came from the
nature of the place itself:
Tassajara, a cup and saucer;
Laguna Seca, a dry lake;
Corral de Tierra for a fence of
earth; Paraiso because it was
like Heaven.
Then
the
Americans
came—more greedy because
there were more of them.
They took the lands, remade
the laws to make their titles
good. And farmholds spread

over the land, first in the
valleys and then up the
foothill slopes, small wooden
houses roofed with redwood
shakes, corrals of split poles.
Wherever a trickle of water
came out of the ground a
house sprang up and a family
began to grow and multiply.
Cuttings of red geraniums
and rosebushes were planted
in the dooryards. Wheel
tracks of buckboards replaced
the trails, and fields of corn
and barley and wheat squared
out of the yellow mustard.
Every ten miles along the
traveled routes a general store
and
blacksmith
shop
happened, and these became

the nuclei of little towns,
Bradley,
King
City,
Greenfield.
The Americans had a
greater tendency to name
places for people than had the
Spanish. After the valleys
were settled the names of
places refer more to things
which happened there, and
these to me are the most
fascinating of all names
because each name suggests a
story that has been forgotten.
I think of Bolsa Nueva, a new
purse; Morocojo, a lame
Moor (who was he and how
did he get there?); Wild
Horse Canyon and Mustang
Grade and Shirt Tail Canyon.

The names of places carry a
charge of the people who
named them, reverent or
irreverent, descriptive, either
poetic or disparaging. You
can
name
anything
San
Lorenzo,
but
Shirt
Tail
Canyon or the Lame Moor is
something quite different.
The wind whistled over
the
settlements
in
the
afternoon, and the farmers
began to set out mile-long

windbreaks of eucalyptus to keep the plowed topsoil from blowing away. And this is about the way the Salinas Valley was when my grandfather brought his wife and settled in the foothills to the east of King City.

Chapter 2

1

I must depend on hearsay, on old photographs, on stories told, and on memories which are hazy and mixed with fable in trying to tell you about the Hamiltons. They were not eminent people, and there are few records concerning them except for the usual papers on

birth,
marriage,
land
ownership, and death.
Young Samuel Hamilton
came from the north of
Ireland and so did his wife.
He was the son of small
farmers, neither rich nor poor,
who had lived on one
landhold and in one stone
house for many hundreds of
years.
The
Hamiltons
managed to be remarkably
well educated and well read;
and, as is so often true in that
green country, they were
connected and related to very
great people and very small
people, so that one cousin

might be a baronet and
another cousin a beggar. And
of
course
they
were
descended from the ancient
kings of Ireland, as every
Irishman is.
Why Samuel left the
stone house and the green
acres of his ancestors I do not
know. He was never a
political man, so it is not
likely a charge of rebellion
drove him out, and he was
scrupulously honest, which
eliminates the police as prime
movers. There was a whisper
—not even a rumor but rather
an unsaid feeling—in my
family that it was love drove

him out, and not love of the wife he married. But whether it was too successful love or whether he left in pique at unsuccessful love, I do not know. We always preferred to think it was the former.

Samuel had good looks and charm and gaiety. It is hard to imagine that any country Irish girl refused him.

He came to the Salinas Valley full-blown and hearty, full of inventions and energy. His eyes were very blue, and when he was tired one of them wandered outward a little. He was a big man but delicate in a way. In the dusty business of ranching he seemed always immaculate. His hands were clever. He

was a good blacksmith and
carpenter and woodcarver,
and he could improvise
anything with bits of wood
and metal. He was forever
inventing a new way of doing
an old thing and doing it
better and quicker, but he
never in his whole life had
any talent for making money.
Other men who had the talent
took Samuel's tricks and sold
them and grew rich, but
Samuel barely made wages
all his life.
I don't know what
directed his steps toward the
Salinas Valley. It was an
unlikely place for a man from
a green country to come to,
but he came about thirty years
before the turn of the century

and he brought with him his tiny Irish wife, a tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.

I do not know where Samuel met her, how he wooed her, married. I think there must have been some other girl printed somewhere in his heart, for he was a man of love and his wife was not a woman to show her feelings. And in spite of this, in all the years from his youth to his death in the Salinas Valley, there was no hint that Samuel ever went to any other

woman.

When Samuel and Liza

came to the Salinas Valley all

the level land was taken, the

rich bottoms, the little fertile

creases in the hills, the

forests, but there was still

marginal

land

to

be

homesteaded, and in the

barren hills, to the east of

what is now King City,

Samuel

Hamilton

homesteaded.

He followed the usual

practice. He took a quarter-section for himself and a

quarter-section for his wife,

and since she was pregnant he

took a quarter-section for the

child. Over the years nine
children were born, four boys
and five girls, and with each
birth another quarter-section
was added to the ranch, and
that makes eleven quarter-sections,
or
seventeen
hundred and sixty acres.
If the land had been any
good the Hamiltons would
have been rich people. But
the acres were harsh and dry.
There were no springs, and
the crust of topsoil was so
thin that the flinty bones
stuck through. Even the
sagebrush struggled to exist,
and the oaks were dwarfed
from lack of moisture. Even
in reasonably good years
there was so little feed that

the cattle kept thin running
about looking for enough to
eat. From their barren hills
the Hamiltons could look
down to the west and see the
richness of the bottom land
and the greenness around the
Salinas River.
Samuel built his house
with his own hands, and he
built a barn and a blacksmith
shop. He found quite soon
that even if he had ten
thousand acres of hill country
he could not make a living on
the bony soil without water.
His clever hands built a well-boring rig, and he bored wells
on the lands of luckier men.
He invented and built a
threshing machine and moved
through the bottom farms in
harvest time, threshing the

grain his own farm would not raise. And in his shop he sharpened plows and mended harrows and welded broken axles and shod horses. Men from all over the district brought him tools to mend and to improve. Besides, they loved to hear Samuel talk of the world and its thinking, of the poetry and philosophy that were going on outside the Salinas Valley. He had a rich deep voice, good both in song and in speech, and while he had no brogue there was a rise and a lilt and a cadence to his talk that made it sound sweet in the ears of the taciturn farmers from the valley bottom. They brought whisky too, and out of sight

of the kitchen window and
the disapproving eye of Mrs.
Hamilton they took hot nips
from the bottle and nibbled
cuds of green wild anise to
cover the whisky breath. It
was a bad day when three or
four men were not standing
around the forge, listening to
Samuel's hammer and his
talk. They called him a
comical genius and carried
his stories carefully home,
and they wondered at how the
stories spilled out on the way,
for they never sounded the
same repeated in their own
kitchens.
Samuel
should
have
been rich from his well rig

and his threshing machine
and his shop, but he had no
gift
for
business.
His
customers, always pressed for
money, promised payment
after harvest, and then after
Christmas, and then after—
until at last they forgot it.
Samuel had no gift for
reminding them. And so the
Hamiltons stayed poor.
The children came along
as regularly as the years. The
few overworked doctors of
the county did not often get to
the ranches for a birth unless
the joy turned nightmare and
went on for several days.
Samuel Hamilton delivered

all his own children and tied
the cords neatly, spanked the
bottoms and cleaned up the
mess. When his youngest was
born
with
some
small
obstruction and began to turn
black, Samuel put his mouth
against the baby's mouth and
blew air in and sucked it out
until the baby could take over
for himself. Samuel's hands
were so good and gentle that
neighbors from twenty miles
away would call on him to
help with a birth. And he was
equally good with mare, cow,
or woman.
Samuel had a great black
book on an available shelf

and it had gold letters on the cover— *Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine.* Some pages were bent and beat up from use, and others were never opened to the light. To look through *Dr. Gunn* is to know the Hamiltons' medical history. These are the used sections— broken bones, cuts, bruises, mumps, measles, backache, scarlet fever, diphtheria, rheumatism, female complaints, hernia, and of course everything to do with pregnancy and the birth of children. The Hamiltons must have been either lucky or moral for the sections on

gonorrhea and syphilis were
never opened.
Samuel had no equal for
soothing
hysteria
and
bringing quiet to a frightened
child. It was the sweetness of
his tongue and the tenderness
of his soul. And just as there
was a cleanness about his
body,
so
there
was
a
cleanness in his thinking.
Men
coming
to
his
blacksmith shop to talk and

listen dropped their cursing
for a while, not from any kind
of restraint but automatically,
as though this were not the
place for it.
Samuel kept always a
foreignness. Perhaps it was in
the cadence of his speech,
and this had the effect of
making men, and women too,
tell him things they would not
tell to relatives or close
friends. His slight strangeness
set him apart and made him
safe as a repository.
Liza Hamilton was a
very different kettle of Irish.
Her head was small and
round and it held small round
convictions. She had a button
nose and a hard little set-back
chin, a gripping jaw set on its

course even though the angels
of God argued against it.
Liza was a good plain
cook, and her house—it was
always
her
house—was
brushed and pummeled and
washed. Bearing her children
did not hold her back very
much—two weeks at the
most she had to be careful.
She must have had a pelvic
arch of whalebone, for she
had big children one after the
other.
Liza
had
a
finely
developed
sense

of

sin.

Idleness was a sin, and card

playing, which was a kind of

idleness to her. She was

suspicious of fun whether it

involved dancing or singing

or even laughter. She felt that

people having a good time

were wide open to the devil.

And this was a shame, for

Samuel was a laughing man,

but I guess Samuel was wide

open to the devil. His wife

protected him whenever she

could.

She

wore

her

hair

always pulled tight back and

bunned behind in a hard knot.

And since I can’t remember
how she dressed, it must have
been that she wore clothes
that matched herself exactly.
She had no spark of humor
and only occasionally a blade
of cutting wit. She frightened
her grandchildren because she
had
no
weakness.
She
suffered
bravely
and
uncomplainingly through life,
convinced that that was the
way
her
God
wanted
everyone to live. She felt that

rewards came later.

2

When people first came to the
West, particularly from the
owned
and
fought-over
farmlets of Europe, and saw
so much land to be had for
the signing of a paper and the
building of a foundation, an
itching land-greed seemed to
come
over
them.
They
wanted more and more land
—good land if possible, but
land anyway. Perhaps they
had filaments of memory of
feudal Europe where great
families

became

and

remained great because they

owned things. The early

settlers took up land they

didn’t need and couldn’t use;

they took up worthless land

just to own it. And all

proportions changed. A man

who might have been well-to-do on ten acres in Europe was

rat-poor on two thousand in

California.

It wasn’t very long until

all the land in the barren hills

near King City and San Ardo

was taken up, and ragged

families

were

scattered

through the hills, trying their

best to scratch a living from

the thin flinty soil. They and

the coyotes lived clever,
despairing, submarginal lives.
They landed with no money,
no equipment, no tools, no
credit, and particularly with
no knowledge of the new
country and no technique for
using it. I don't know
whether it was a divine
stupidity or a great faith that
let them do it. Surely such
venture is nearly gone from
the world. And the families
did survive and grow. They
had a tool or a weapon that is
also nearly gone, or perhaps it
is only dormant for a while. It
is argued that because they
believed thoroughly in a just,
moral God they could put
their faith there and let the
smaller securities take care of

themselves. But I think that
because
they
trusted
themselves
and
respected
themselves as individuals,
because they knew beyond
doubt that they were valuable
and potentially moral units—
because of this they could
give God their own courage
and dignity and then receive
it back. Such things have
disappeared perhaps because
men do not trust themselves
any more, and when that
happens there is nothing left
except perhaps to find some
strong sure man, even though
he may be wrong, and to

dangle from his coattails.
While
many
people
came to the Salinas Valley
penniless, there were others
who,
having
sold
out
somewhere else, arrived with
money to start a new life.
These usually bought land,
but good land, and built their
houses of planed lumber and
had carpets and colored-glass
diamond
panes
in
their
windows.
There

were

numbers of these families and

they got the good land of the

valley and cleared the yellow

mustard away and planted

wheat.

Such a man was Adam

Trask.

Chapter 3

1

Adam Trask was born on a

farm on the outskirts of a

little town which was not far

from

a

big

town

in

Connecticut. He was an only

son, and he was born six

months after his father was

mustered into a Connecticut

regiment in 1862. Adam's mother ran the farm, bore Adam, and still had time to embrace a primitive theosophy. She felt that her husband would surely be killed by the wild and barbarous rebels, and she prepared herself to get in touch with him in what she called the beyond. He came home six weeks after Adam was born. His right leg was off at the knee. He stumped in on a crude wooden leg he himself had carved out of beechwood. And already it was splitting. He had in his pocket and placed on the parlor table the lead bullet

they had given him to bite
while they cut off his frayed
leg.
Adam's father Cyrus
was something of a devil—
had always been wild—drove
a two-wheeled cart too fast,
and managed to make his
wooden leg seem jaunty and
desirable. He had enjoyed his
military career, what there
was of it. Being wild by
nature, he had liked his brief
period of training and the
drinking and gambling and
whoring that went with it.
Then he marched south with a
group of replacements, and he
enjoyed that too—seeing the
country and stealing chickens
and chasing rebel girls up into
the haystacks. The gray,

despairing
weariness
of
protracted maneuvers and
combat did not touch him.
The first time he saw the
enemy was at eight o’clock
one spring morning, and at
eight-thirty he was hit in the
right leg by a heavy slug that
mashed and splintered the
bones beyond repair. Even
then he was lucky, for the
rebels retreated and the field
surgeons
moved
up
immediately. Cyrus Trask did
have his five minutes of
horror while they cut the
shreds away and sawed the
bone off square and burned

the
open
flesh.
The
toothmarks in the bullet
proved that. And there was
considerable pain while the
wound healed under the
unusually septic conditions in
the hospitals of that day. But
Cyrus
had
vitality
and
swagger.
While
he
was
carving his beechwood leg
and hobbling about on a
crutch,
he

contracted

a

particularly virulent dose of

the clap from a Negro girl

who whistled at him from

under a pile of lumber and

charged him ten cents. When

he had his new leg, and

painfully knew his condition,

he hobbled about for days,

looking for the girl. He told

his bunkmates what he was

going to do when he found

her. He planned to cut off her

ears and her nose with his

pocketknife

and

get

his

money back. Carving on his

wooden leg, he showed his

friends how he would cut her.

“When I finish her she’ll be a funny-looking bitch,” he said. “I’ll make her so a drunk Indian won’t take out after her.” His light of love must have sensed his intentions, for he never found her. By the time Cyrus was released from the hospital and the army, his gonorrhea was dried up.

When he got home to Connecticut there remained only enough of it for his wife. Mrs. Trask was a pale, inside-herself woman. No heat of sun ever reddened her cheeks, and no open laughter raised the corners of her mouth. She used religion as a therapy for the ills of the world and of herself, and she changed the religion to fit the

ill. When she found that the
theosophy she had developed
for communication with a
dead
husband
was
not
necessary, she cast about for
some new unhappiness. Her
search was quickly rewarded
by
the
infection
Cyrus
brought home from the war.
And as soon as she was aware
that a condition existed, she
devised a new theology. Her
god
of
communication
became a god of vengeance—

to her the most satisfactory
deity she had devised so far—
and, as it turned out, the last.
It was quite easy for her to
attribute her condition to
certain
dreams
she
had
experienced
while
her
husband was away. But the
disease was not punishment
enough for her nocturnal
philandering. Her new god
was an expert in punishment.
He demanded of her a
sacrifice. She searched her
mind
for
some

proper

egotistical

humility

and

almost happily arrived at the

sacrifice—herself. It took her

two weeks to write her last

letter with revisions and

corrected spelling. In it she

confessed to crimes she could

not possibly have committed

and

admitted

faults

far

beyond her capacity. And

then, dressed in a secretly

made shroud, she went out on

a

moonlight

night

and

drowned herself in a pond so
shallow that she had to get
down on her knees in the mud
and hold her head under
water. This required great
will power. As the warm
unconsciousness finally crept
over her, she was thinking
with some irritation of how
her white lawn shroud would
have mud down the front
when they pulled her out in
the morning. And it did.
Cyrus Trask mourned
for his wife with a keg of
whisky and three old army
friends who had dropped in
on their way home to Maine.
Baby Adam cried a good deal
at the beginning of the wake,
for
the

mourners,
not
knowing about babies, had
neglected to feed him. Cyrus
soon solved the problem. He
dipped a rag in whisky and
gave it to the baby to suck,
and after three or four
dippings young Adam went
to sleep. Several times during
the mourning period he
awakened and complained
and got the dipped rag again
and went to sleep. The baby
was drunk for two days and a
half. Whatever may have
happened in his developing
brain, it proved beneficial to
his metabolism: from that two
and a half days he gained an
iron health. And when at the
end of three days his father

finally went out and bought a
goat, Adam drank the milk
greedily,
vomited,
drank
more, and was on his way.
His father did not find the
reaction alarming, since he
was doing the same thing.
Within a month Cyrus
Trask's choice fell on the
seventeen-year-old daughter
of a neighboring farmer. The
courtship was quick and
realistic. There was no doubt
in anybody's mind about his
intentions.
They
were
honorable and reasonable.
Her
father

abetted
the
courtship.
He
had
two
younger daughters, and Alice,
the eldest, was seventeen.
This was her first proposal.
Cyrus wanted a woman
to take care of Adam. He
needed someone to keep
house and cook, and a servant
cost money. He was a
vigorous man and needed the
body of a woman, and that
too cost money—unless you
were married to it. Within
two weeks Cyrus had wooed,
wedded,
bedded,
and

impregnated
her.
His
neighbors did not find his
action hasty. It was quite
normal in that day for a man
to use up three or four wives
in a normal lifetime.
Alice
Trask
had
a
number
of
admirable
qualities. She was a deep
scrubber and a corner-cleaner
in the house. She was not
very pretty, so there was no
need to watch her. Her eyes
were pale, her complexion
sallow, and her teeth crooked,

but
she
was
extremely
healthy and never complained
during
her
pregnancy.
Whether she liked children or
not no one ever knew. She
was not asked, and she never
said anything unless she was
asked. From Cyrus's point of
view this was possibly the
greatest of her virtues. She
never offered any opinion or
statement, and when a man
was talking she gave a vague
impression of listening while
she went about doing the
housework.
The youth, inexperience,

and taciturnity of Alice Trask all turned out to be assets for Cyrus. While he continued to operate his farm as such farms were operated in the neighborhood, he entered on a new career—that of the old soldier. And that energy which had made him wild now made him thoughtful. No one now outside of the War Department knew the quality and duration of his service. His wooden leg was at once a certificate of proof of his soldiering and a guarantee that he wouldn't ever have to do it again. Timidly he began to tell Alice about his campaigns,

but

as

his
technique grew so did his
battles. At the very first he
knew he was lying, but it was
not long before he was
equally sure that every one of
his stories was true. Before he
had entered the service he had
not been much interested in
warfare; now he bought every
book about war, read every
report, subscribed to the New
York papers, studied maps.
His knowledge of geography
had been shaky and his
information about the fighting
nonexistent; now he became
an authority. He knew not
only the battles, movements,
campaigns, but also the units
involved,
down

to
the
regiments, their colonels, and
where they originated. And
from
telling
he
became
convinced that he had been
there.
All of this was a gradual
development, and it took
place
while
Adam
was
growing to boyhood and his
young half-brother behind
him. Adam and little Charles
would sit silent and respectful
while their father explained
how every general thought

and planned and where they had made their mistakes and what they should have done. And then—he had known it at the time—he had told Grant and McClellan where they were wrong and had begged them to take his analysis of the situation. Invariably they refused his advice and only afterward was he proved right.

There was one thing Cyrus did not do, and perhaps it was clever of him. He never once promoted himself to noncommissioned rank.

Private Trask he began, and Private Trask he remained. In the total telling, it made him at once the most mobile and

ubiquitous private in the history of warfare. It made it necessary for him to be in as many as four places at once. But perhaps instinctively he did not tell those stories close to each other. Alice and the boys had a complete picture of him: a private soldier, and proud of it, who not only happened to be where every spectacular and important action was taking place but who wandered freely into staff meetings and joined or dissented in the decisions of general officers.

The death of Lincoln caught Cyrus in the pit of the stomach.

Always he

remembered how he felt
when he first heard the news.
And he could never mention
it or hear of it without quick
tears in his eyes. And while
he never actually said it, you
got
the
indestructible
impression that Private Cyrus
Trask was one of Lincoln's
closest, warmest, and most
trusted friends. When Mr.
Lincoln wanted to know
about the army, the real army,
not those prancing dummies
in gold braid, he turned to
Private Trask. How Cyrus
managed
to
make
this

understood without saying it was a triumph of insinuation. No one could call him a liar. And this was mainly because the lie was in his head, and any truth coming from his mouth carried the color of the lie.

Quite early he began to write letters and then articles about the conduct of the war, and his conclusions were intelligent and convincing. Indeed, Cyrus developed an excellent military mind. His criticisms both of the war as it had been conducted and of the army organization as it persisted were irresistibly penetrating. His articles in various magazines attracted attention. His letters to the

War
Department,
printed
simultaneously
in
the
newspapers, began to have a
sharp effect in decisions on
the army. Perhaps if the
Grand Army of the Republic
had not assumed political
force and direction his voice
might not have been heard so
clearly in Washington, but the
spokesman for a block of
nearly a million men was not
to be ignored. And such a
voice in military matters
Cyrus Trask became. It came
about that he was consulted in
matters of army organization,
in officer relationships, in

personnel and equipment. His expertness was apparent to everyone who heard him. He had a genius for the military. More than that, he was one of those responsible for the organization of the G.A.R. as a cohesive and potent force in the national life. After several unpaid offices in that organization, he took a paid secretaryship which he kept for the rest of his life. He traveled from one end of the country to the other, attending conventions, meetings, and encampments. So much for his public life.

His private life was also

laced through with his new profession. He was a man devoted. His house and farm he organized on a military basis. He demanded and got reports on the conduct of his private economy. It is probable that Alice preferred it this way. She was not a talker. A terse report was easiest for her. She was busy with the growing boys and with keeping the house clean and the clothes washed. Also, she had to conserve her energy, though she did not mention this in any of her reports. Without warning her energy would leave her, and

she would have to sit down
and wait until it came back.
In the night she would be
drenched with perspiration.
She knew perfectly well that
she had what was called
consumption, would have
known even if she was not
reminded
by
a
hard,
exhausting cough. And she
did not know how long she
would live. Some people
wasted on for quite a few
years. There wasn’t any rule
about it. Perhaps she didn’t
dare to mention it to her
husband. He had devised a
method for dealing with
sickness which resembled

punishment. A stomach ache
was treated with a purge so
violent that it was a wonder
anyone survived it. If she had
mentioned
her
condition,
Cyrus might have started a
treatment which would have
killed her off before her
consumption could have done
it. Besides, as Cyrus became
more
military,
his
wife
learned the only technique
through which a soldier can
survive. She never made
herself
noticeable,
never

spoke unless spoken to,
performed what was expected
and no more, and tried for no
promotions. She became a
rear rank private. It was much
easier that way. Alice retired
to the background until she
was barely visible at all.
It was the little boys who
really caught it. Cyrus had
decided that even though the
army was not perfect, it was
still
the
only
honorable
profession for a man. He
mourned the fact that he
could not be a permanent
soldier because of his wooden
leg, but he could not imagine
any career for his sons except

the army. He felt a man should learn soldiering from the ranks, as he had. Then he would know what it was about from experience, not from charts and textbooks. He taught them the manual of arms when they could barely walk. By the time they were in grade school, close-order drill was as natural as breathing and as hateful as hell. He kept them hard with exercises, beating out the rhythm with a stick on his wooden leg. He made them walk for miles, carrying knapsacks loaded with stones to make their shoulders strong. He worked constantly on their marksmanship in the woodlot behind the house.

2

When a child first catches
adults out—when it first
walks into his grave little
head that adults do not have
divine intelligence, that their
judgments are not always
wise, their thinking true, their
sentences just—his world
falls into panic desolation.
The gods are fallen and all
safety gone. And there is one
sure thing about the fall of
gods: they do not fall a little;
they crash and shatter or sink
deeply into green muck. It is
a tedious job to build them up
again; they never quite shine.
And the child's world is
never quite whole again. It is
an aching kind of growing.
Adam found his father

out. It wasn't that his father changed but that some new quality came to Adam. He had always hated the discipline, as every normal animal does, but it was just and true and inevitable as measles, not to be denied or cursed, only to be hated. And then—it was very fast, almost a click in the brain—Adam knew that, for him at least, his father's methods had no reference to anything in the world but his father. The techniques and training were not designed for the boys at all but only to make Cyrus a great man. And the same

click in the brain told Adam
that his father was not a great
man, that he was, indeed, a
very
strong-willed
and
concentrated
little
man
wearing a huge busby. Who
knows what causes this—a
look in the eye, a lie found
out, a moment of hesitation?
—then god comes crashing
down in a child's brain.
Young
Adam
was
always an obedient child.
Something in him shrank
from
violence,

from
contention, from the silent
shrieking tensions that can rip
at a house. He contributed to
the quiet he wished for by
offering no violence, no
contention, and to do this he
had to retire into secretness,
since there is some violence
in everyone. He covered his
life with a veil of vagueness,
while behind his quiet eyes a
rich full life went on. This did
not protect him from assault
but it allowed him an
immunity.
His half-brother Charles,
only a little over a year
younger, grew up with his
father’s assertiveness. Charles
was a natural athlete, with
instinctive

timing
and
coordination
and
the
competitor’s will to win over
others, which makes for
success in the world.
Young Charles won all
contests with Adam whether
they
involved
skill,
or
strength,
or
quick
intelligence, and won them so
easily that quite early he lost
interest and had to find his
competition
among

other
children. Thus it came about
that a kind of affection grew
up between the two boys, but
it
was
more
like
an
association between brother
and sister than between
brothers. Charles fought any
boy
who
challenged
or
slurred Adam and usually
won. He protected Adam
from his father’s harshness
with lies and even with
blame-taking. Charles felt for
his brother the affection one

has for helpless things, for
blind puppies and new babies.
Adam looked out of his
covered brain—out the long
tunnels of his eyes—at the
people of his world: His
father, a one-legged natural
force at first, installed justly
to make little boys feel littler
and stupid boys aware of their
stupidity; and then—after god
had crashed—he saw his
father as the policeman laid
on by birth, the officer who
might be circumvented, or
fooled, but never challenged.
And out of the long tunnels of
his eyes Adam saw his half-brother Charles as a bright
being of another species,
gifted with muscle and bone,
speed and alertness, quite on
a different plane, to be

admired as one admires the
sleek lazy danger of a black
leopard, not by any chance to
be compared with one's self.
And it would no more have
occurred to Adam to confide
in his brother—to tell him the
hunger, the gray dreams, the
plans and silent pleasures that
lay at the back of the tunneled
eyes—than
to
share
his
thoughts with a lovely tree or
a pheasant in flight. Adam
was glad of Charles the way a
woman is glad of a fat
diamond, and he depended on
his brother in the way that
same woman depends on the
diamond's glitter and the self-security tied up in its worth;

but love, affection, empathy,

were beyond conception.

Toward Alice Trask,

Adam concealed a feeling

that was akin to a warm

shame. She was not his

mother—that

he

knew

because he had been told

many times. Not from things

said but from the tone in

which other things were said,

he knew that he had once had

a mother and that she had

done some shameful thing,

such

as

forgetting

the

chickens or missing the target

on the range in the woodlot.

And as a result of her fault she was not here. Adam thought sometimes that if he could only find out what sin it was she had committed, why, he would sin it too—and not be here.

Alice treated the boys equally, washed them and fed them, and left everything else to their father, who had let it be known clearly and with finality that training the boys physically and mentally was his exclusive province. Even praise and reprimand he would not delegate. Alice never complained, quarreled, laughed, or cried. Her mouth was trained to a line that concealed nothing

and

offered nothing too. But once

when Adam was quite small

he wandered silently into the

kitchen. Alice did not see

him. She was darning socks

and she was smiling. Adam

retired secretly and walked

out of the house and into the

woodlot to a sheltered place

behind a stump that he knew

well. He settled deep between

the protecting roots. Adam

was as shocked as though he

had come upon her naked. He

breathed

excitedly,

high

against his throat. For Alice

had been naked—she had

been smiling. He wondered

how she had dared such

wantonness. And he ached
toward her with a longing that
was passionate and hot. He
did not know what it was
about, but all the long lack of
holding,
of
rocking,
of
caressing, the hunger for
breast and nipple, and the
softness of a lap, and the
voice-tone
of
love
and
compassion, and the sweet
feeling of anxiety—all of
these were in his passion, and
he did not know it because he
did not know that such things
existed, so how could he miss

them?
Of course it occurred to
him that he might be wrong,
that
some
misbegotten
shadow had fallen across his
face and warped his seeing.
And so he cast back to the
sharp picture in his head and
knew that the eyes were
smiling too. Twisted light
could do one or the other but
not both.
He stalked her then,
game-wise, as he had the
wood-chucks on the knoll
when day after day he had
lain lifeless as a young stone
and watched the old wary
chucks bring their children
out to sun. He spied on Alice,

hidden, and from unsuspected
eye-corner, and it was true.
Sometimes when she was
alone, and knew she was
alone, she permitted her mind
to play in a garden, and she
smiled. And it was wonderful
to see how quickly she could
drive the smile to earth the
way the woodchucks holed
their children.
Adam
concealed
his
treasure deep in his tunnels,
but he was inclined to pay for
his pleasure with something.
Alice began to find gifts—in
her sewing basket, in her
worn-out purse, under her
pillow—two cinnamon pinks,
a bluebird's tailfeather, half a

stick of green sealing wax, a
stolen handkerchief. At first
Alice was startled, but then
that passed, and when she
found
some
unsuspected
present the garden smile
flashed and disappeared the
way a trout crosses a knife of
sunshine in a pool. She asked
no questions and made no
comment.
Her coughing was very
bad at night, so loud and
disturbing that Cyrus had at
last to put her in another
room or he would have got no
sleep. But he did visit her
very often—hopping on his
one bare foot, steadying
himself with hand on wall.

The boys could hear and feel the jar of his body through the house as he hopped to and from Alice's bed.

As Adam grew he feared one thing more than any other. He feared the day he would be taken and enlisted in the army. His father never let him forget that such a time would come. He spoke of it often. It was Adam who needed the army to make a man of him. Charles was pretty near a man already. And Charles was a man, and a dangerous man, even at fifteen, and when Adam was sixteen.

3

The affection between the two boys had grown with the

years. It may be that part of
Charles'
feeling
was
contempt, but it was a
protective
contempt.
It
happened that one evening
the
boys
were
playing
peewee, a new game to them,
in the dooryard. A small
pointed stick was laid on the
ground, then struck near one
end with a bat. The small
stick flew into the air and
then was batted as far as
possible.
Adam was not good at

games. But by some accident of eye and timing he beat his brother at peewee. Four times he drove the peewee farther than Charles did. It was a new experience to him, and a wild flush came over him, so that he did not watch and feel out his brother's mood as he usually did. The fifth time he drove the peewee it flew humming like a bee far out in the field. He turned happily to face Charles and suddenly he froze deep in his chest. The hatred in Charles' face frightened him. "I guess it was just an accident," he said lamely. "I bet I couldn't do it

again.”

Charles set his peewee,

struck it, and, as it rose into

the air, swung at it and

missed.

Charles

moved

slowly toward Adam, his eyes

cold

and

noncommittal.

Adam edged away in terror.

He did not dare to turn and

run for his brother could

outrun him. He backed slowly

away, his eyes frightened and

his throat dry. Charles moved

close and struck him in the

face with his bat. Adam

covered his bleeding nose

with his hands, and Charles

swung his bat and hit him in

the ribs, knocked the wind
out of him, swung at his head
and knocked him out. And as
Adam lay unconscious on the
ground Charles kicked him
heavily in the stomach and
walked away.
After a while Adam
became
conscious.
He
breathed shallowly because
his chest hurt. He tried to sit
up and fell back at the wrench
of the torn muscles over his
stomach.
He
saw
Alice
looking out, and there was
something in her face that he
had never seen before. He did

not know what it was, but it was not soft or weak, and it might be hatred. She saw that he was looking at her, dropped the curtains into place, and disappeared. When Adam finally got up from the ground and moved, bent over, into the kitchen, he found a basin of hot water standing ready for him and a clean towel beside it. He could hear his stepmother coughing in her room.

Charles had one great quality. He was never sorry—ever. He never mentioned the beating, apparently never thought of it again. But Adam made very sure that he didn't

win again—at anything. He had always felt the danger in his brother, but now he understood that he must never win unless he was prepared to kill Charles. Charles was not sorry. He had very simply fulfilled himself.

Charles did not tell his father about the beating, and Adam did not, and surely Alice did not, and yet he seemed to know. In the months that followed he turned a gentleness on Adam. His speech became softer toward him. He did not punish him any more. Almost nightly he lectured him, but not violently. And Adam was more afraid of the gentleness than he had been at the

violence, for it seemed to him
that he was being trained as a
sacrifice, almost as though he
was
being
subjected
to
kindness before death, the
way victims intended to the
gods
were
cuddled
and
flattered so that they might go
happily to the stone and not
outrage
the
gods
with
unhappiness.
Cyrus explained softly to
Adam the nature of a soldier.

And though his knowledge
came from research rather
than experience, he knew and
he was accurate. He told his
son of the sad dignity that can
belong to a soldier, how he is
necessary in the light of all
the failures of man—the
penalty
of
our
frailties.
Perhaps Cyrus discovered
these things in himself as he
told them. It was very
different
from
the
flag-waving, shouting bellicosity
of his younger days. The
humilities are piled on a
soldier, so Cyrus said, in

order that he may, when the time comes, be not too resentful of the final humility —a meaningless and dirty death. And Cyrus talked to Adam alone and did not permit Charles to listen. Cyrus took Adam to walk with him one late afternoon, and the black conclusions of all of his study and his thinking came out and flowed with a kind of thick terror over his son. He said, “I’ll have you know that a soldier is the most holy of all humans because he is the most tested—most tested of all. I’ll try to tell you. Look now—in all of history men have been taught that killing of men is an evil thing not to

be countenanced. Any man
who kills must be destroyed
because this is a great sin,
maybe the worst sin we
know. And then we take a
soldier and put murder in his
hands and we say to him,
‘Use it well, use it wisely.’
We put no checks on him. Go
out and kill as many of a
certain kind or classification
of your brothers as you can.
And we will reward you for it
because it is a violation of
your early training.”
Adam wet his dry lips
and tried to ask and failed and
tried again. “Why do they
have to do it?” he said. “Why
is it?”
Cyrus was deeply moved
and he spoke as he had never

spoken

before.

“I

don’t

know,” he said. “I’ve studied

and maybe learned how

things are, but I’m not even

close to why they are. And

you must not expect to find

that people understand what

they do. So many things are

done instinctively, the way a

bee makes honey or a fox

dips his paws in a stream to

fool dogs. A fox can’t say

why he does it, and what bee

remembers winter or expects

it to come again? When I

knew you had to go I thought

to leave the future open so

you could dig out your own

findings, and then it seemed

better if I could protect you
with the little I know. You'll
go in soon now—you've
come to the age."
"I don't want to," said
Adam quickly.
"You'll go in soon," his
father went on, not hearing.
"And I want to tell you so
you won't be surprised.
They'll first strip off your
clothes, but they'll go deeper
than that. They'll shuck off
any little dignity you have—
you'll lose what you think of
as your decent right to live
and to be let alone to live.
They'll make you live and eat
and sleep and shit close to
other men. And when they
dress you up again you'll not
be able to tell yourself from

the others. You can’t even
wear a scrap or pin a note on
your breast to say, ‘This is me
—separate from the rest.’ ”
“I don’t want to do it,”
said Adam.
“After a while,” said
Cyrus,
“you’ll
think
no
thought the others do not
think. You’ll know no word
the others can’t say. And
you’ll do things because the
others do them. You’ll feel
the danger in any difference
whatever—a danger to the
whole crowd of like-thinking,
like-acting men.”
“What if I don’t?” Adam
demanded.

“Yes,”

said

Cyrus,

“sometimes

that

happens.

Once in a while there is a

man who won’t do what is

demanded of him, and do you

know what happens? The

whole machine devotes itself

coldly to the destruction of

his difference. They’ll beat

your spirit and your nerves,

your body and your mind,

with iron rods until the

dangerous difference goes out

of you. And if you can’t

finally give in, they’ll vomit

you up and leave you stinking

outside—neither

part

of

themselves nor yet free. It’s

better to fall in with them.

They only do it to protect

themselves.

A

thing

so

triumphantly

illogical,

so

beautifully senseless as an

army can’t allow a question

to weaken it. Within itself, if

you do not hold it up to other

things for comparison and

derision, you’ll find slowly,

surely, a reason and a logic

and a kind of dreadful beauty.

A man who can accept it is

not a worse man always, and

sometimes is a much better

man. Pay good heed to me for
I have thought long about it.
Some men there are who go
down the dismal wrack of
soldiering,
surrender
themselves,
and
become
faceless. But these had not
much face to start with. And
maybe you're like that. But
there are others who go
down,
submerge
in
the
common slough, and then rise
more themselves than they
were, because—because they
have lost a littleness of vanity
and have gained all the gold

of the company and the regiment. If you can go down so low, you will be able to rise higher than you can conceive, and you will know a holy joy, a companionship almost like that of a heavenly company of angels. Then you will know the quality of men even if they are inarticulate. But until you have gone way down you can never know this."

As they walked back toward the house Cyrus turned left and entered the woodlot among the trees, and it was dusk. Suddenly Adam said, "You see that stump there, sir? I used to hide between the roots on the far side. After you punished me I

used to hide there, and
sometimes I went there just
because I felt bad."
"Let's go and see the
place," his father said. Adam
led him to it, and Cyrus
looked down at the nestlike
hole between the roots. "I
knew about it long ago," he
said. "Once when you were
gone a long time I thought
you must have such a place,
and I found it because I felt
the kind of place you would
need. See how the earth is
tamped and the little grass is
torn? And while you sat in
there you stripped little pieces
of bark to shreds. I knew it
was the place when I came
upon it."
Adam was staring at his

father in wonder. “You never
came here looking for me,”
he said.
“No,” Cyrus replied. “I
wouldn’t do that. You can
drive a human too far. I
wouldn’t do that. Always you
must leave a man one escape
before death. Remember that!
I knew, I guess, how hard I
was pressing you. I didn’t
want to push you over the
edge.”
They moved restlessly
off through the trees. Cyrus
said, “So many things I want
to tell you. I’ll forget most of
them. I want to tell you that a
soldier gives up so much to
get something back. From the
day of a child’s birth he is
taught by every circumstance,

by every law and rule and
right, to protect his own life.
He starts with that great
instinct,
and
everything
confirms it. And then he is a
soldier and he must learn to
violate all of this—he must
learn coldly to put himself in
the way of losing his own life
without going mad. And if
you can do that—and, mind
you, some can't—then you
will have the greatest gift of
all. Look, son," Cyrus said
earnestly, "nearly all men are
afraid, and they don't even
know what causes their fear
—shadows,
perplexities,
dangers without names or

numbers, fear of a faceless death. But if you can bring yourself to face not shadows but real death, described and recognizable, by bullet or saber, arrow or lance, then you need never be afraid again, at least not the same way you were before. Then you will be a man set apart from other men, safe where other men may cry in terror. This is the great reward. Maybe this is the only reward. Maybe this is the final purity all ringed with filth. It's nearly dark. I'll want to talk to you again tomorrow night when both of us have thought about what I've told you."

But Adam said, "Why

don’t you talk to my brother?
Charles will be going. He’ll
be good at it, much better
than I am.”
“Charles
won’t
be
going,” Cyrus said. “There’d
be no point in it.”
“But he would be a
better soldier.”
“Only outside on his
skin,”
said
Cyrus.
“Not
inside, Charles is not afraid
so he could never learn
anything about courage. He
does not know anything
outside himself so he could
never gain the things I’ve

tried to explain to you. To put him in an army would be to let loose things which in Charles must be chained down, not let loose. I would not dare to let him go."

Adam complained, "You never punished him, you let him live his life, you praised him, you did not haze him, and now you let him stay out of the army." He stopped, frightened at what he had said, afraid of the rage or the contempt or the violence his words might let loose.

His father did not reply.

He walked on out of the woodlot, and his head hung down so that his chin rested on his chest, and the rise and fall of his hip when his

wooden leg struck the ground
was
monotonous.
The
wooden leg made a side
semicircle to get ahead when
its turn came.
It was completely dark
by now, and the golden light
of the lamps shone out from
the open kitchen door. Alice
came to the doorway and
peered out, looking for them,
and then she heard the uneven
footsteps approaching and
went back to the kitchen.
Cyrus walked to the
kitchen stoop before he
stopped and raised his head.
“Where are you?” he asked.
“Here—right behind you
—right here.”

“You asked a question. I guess I’ll have to answer. Maybe it’s good and maybe it’s bad to answer it. You’re not clever. You don’t know what you want. You have no proper fierceness. You let other people walk over you. Sometimes I think you’re a weakling who will never amount to a dog turd. Does that answer your question? I love you better. I always have. This may be a bad thing to tell you, but it’s true. I love you better. Else why would I have given myself the trouble of hurting you? Now shut your mouth and go to your supper. I’ll talk to you tomorrow night. My leg aches.”

4

There was no talk at supper. The quiet was disturbed only by the slup of soup and gnash of chewing, and his father waved his hand to try to drive the moths away from the chimney of the kerosene lamp. Adam thought his brother watched him secretly. And he caught an eye flash from Alice when he looked up suddenly. After he had finished eating Adam pushed back his chair. “I think I’ll go for a walk,” he said.

Charles stood up. “I’ll go with you.”

Alice and Cyrus watched them go out the door, and then she asked one of her rare questions.

She
asked
nervously, “What did you
do?”
“Nothing,” he said.
“Will you make him
go?”
“Yes.”
“Does he know?”
Cyrus stared bleakly out
the open door into the
darkness. “Yes, he knows.”
“He won’t like it. It’s
not right for him.”
“It
doesn’t
matter,”
Cyrus said, and he repeated
loudly, “It doesn’t matter,”
and his tone said, “Shut your
mouth. This is not your
affair.” They were silent a

moment, and then he said
almost in a tone of apology,
“It isn’t as though he were
your child.”
Alice did not reply.
The boys walked down
the dark rutty road. Ahead
they could see a few pinched
lights where the village was.
“Want to go in and see if
anything’s stirring at the
inn?” Charles asked.
“I hadn’t thought of it,”
said Adam.
“Then what the hell are
you walking out at night for?”
“You didn’t have to
come,” said Adam.
Charles moved close to
him. “What did he say to you
this afternoon? I saw you
walking together. What did

he say?”

“He just talked about the

army—like always.”

“Didn’t look like that to

me,”

Charles

said

suspiciously. “I saw him

leaning close, talking the way

he talks to men—not telling,

talking.”

“He was telling,” Adam

said patiently, and he had to

control his breath, for a little

fear had begun to press up

against his stomach. He took

as deep a gulp of air as he

could and held it to push back

at the fear.

“What did he tell you?”

Charles demanded again.

“About the army and

how it is to be a soldier."

"I don't believe you,"

said Charles. "I think you're a

goddam mealy-mouthed liar.

What're you trying to get

away with?"

"Nothing," said Adam.

Charles said harshly,

"Your crazy mother drowned

herself. Maybe she took a

look at you. That'd do it."

Adam let out his breath

gently, pressing down the

dismal fear. He was silent.

Charles cried, "You're

trying to take him away! I

don't know how you're going

about it. What do you think

you're doing?"

"Nothing," said Adam.

Charles jumped in front

of him so that Adam had to

stop, his chest almost against
his brother's chest. Adam
backed away, but carefully,
as one backs away from a
snake.
"Look at his birthday!"
Charles shouted. "I took six
bits and I bought him a knife
made
in
Germany—three
blades and a corkscrew,
pearl-handled. Where's that
knife? Do you ever see him
use it? Did he give it to you?
I never even saw him hone it.
Have you got that knife in
your pocket? What did he do
with it? 'Thanks,' he said,
like that. And that's the last I
heard of a pearl-handled
German knife that cost six

bits.”

Rage was in his voice,

and Adam felt the creeping

fear; but he knew also that he

had a moment left. Too many

times he had seen the

destructive

machine

that

chopped

down

anything

standing in its way. Rage

came

first

and

then

a

coldness,

a

possession;

noncommittal eyes and a

pleased smile and no voice at all, only a whisper. When that happened murder was on the way, but cool, deft murder, and hands that worked precisely, delicately. Adam swallowed saliva to dampen his dry throat. He could think of nothing to say that would be heard, for once in rage his brother would not listen, would not even hear. He bulked darkly in front of Adam, shorter, wider, thicker, but still not crouched. In the starlight his lips shone with wetness, but there was no smile yet and his voice still raged.

“What did you do on his
birthday? You think I didn’t
see? Did you spend six bits or
even four bits? You brought
him a mongrel pup you
picked up in the woodlot.
You laughed like a fool and
said it would make a good
bird dog. That dog sleeps in
his room. He plays with it
while he’s reading. He’s got
it all trained. And where’s the
knife? ‘Thanks,’ he said, just
Thanks.’ ” Charles spoke in a
whisper, and his shoulders
dropped.
Adam
made
one
desperate jump backward and
raised his hands to guard his
face. His brother moved

precisely, each foot planted
firmly.
One
fist
lanced
delicately to get the range,
and then the bitter-frozen
work—a hard blow in the
stomach, and Adam's hands
dropped; then four punches to
the head. Adam felt the bone
and gristle of his nose crunch.
He raised his hands again and
Charles drove at his heart.
And all this time Adam
looked at his brother as the
condemned look hopelessly
and
puzzled
at
the
executioner.

Suddenly to his own
surprise Adam launched a
wild,
overhand,
harmless
swing which had neither
force nor direction. Charles
ducked in and under it and
the helpless arm went around
his neck. Adam wrapped his
arms around his brother and
hung close to him, sobbing.
He felt the square fists
whipping nausea into his
stomach and still he held on.
Time was slowed to him.
With his body he felt his
brother move sideways to
force his legs apart. And he
felt the knee come up, past
his knees, scraping his thighs,
until it crashed against his

testicles and flashing white

pain

ripped

and

echoed

through his body. His arms

let go. He bent over and

vomited, while the cold

killing went on.

Adam felt the punches

on temples, cheeks, eyes. He

felt his lip split and tatter over

his teeth, but his skin seemed

thickened and dull, as though

he were encased in heavy

rubber. Dully he wondered

why his legs did not buckle,

why he did not fall, why

unconsciousness

did

not

come to him. The punching

continued eternally. He could
hear his brother panting with
the quick explosive breath of
a sledgehammer man, and in
the sick starlit dark he could
see his brother through the
tear-watered
blood
that
flowed from his eyes. He saw
the innocent, noncommittal
eyes, the small smile on wet
lips. And as he saw these
things—a flash of light and
darkness.
Charles stood over him,
gulping air like a run-out dog.
And then he turned and
walked quickly back, toward
the house, kneading his
bruised knuckles as he went.
Consciousness

came
back quick and frightening to
Adam. His mind rolled in a
painful mist. His body was
heavy and thick with hurt.
But almost instantly he forgot
his hurts. He heard quick
footsteps on the road. The
instinctive fear and fierceness
of a rat came over him. He
pushed himself up on his
knees and dragged himself
off the road to the ditch that
kept it drained. There was a
foot of water in the ditch, and
the tall grass grew up from its
sides. Adam crawled quietly
into the water, being very
careful to make no splash.
The
footsteps
came

close, slowed, moved on a
little, came back. From his
hiding place Adam could see
only a darkness in the dark.
And then a sulphur match
was struck and burned a tiny
blue until the wood caught,
lighting his brother's face
grotesquely
from
below.
Charles raised the match and
peered around, and Adam
could see the hatchet in his
right hand.
When the match went
out the night was blacker than
before. Charles moved slowly
on and struck another match,
and on and struck another. He
searched the road for signs.
At last he gave it up. His right

hand rose and he threw the
hatchet far off into the field.
He walked rapidly away
toward the pinched lights of
the village.
For a long time Adam
lay in the cool water. He
wondered how his brother
felt, wondered whether now
that his passion was chilling
he would feel panic or sorrow
or sick conscience or nothing.
These things Adam felt for
him. His conscience bridged
him to his brother and did his
pain for him the way at other
times he had done his
homework.
Adam crept out of the
water and stood up. His hurts
were stiffening and the blood
was dried in a crust on his

face. He thought he would
stay outside in the darkness
until his father and Alice
went to bed. He felt that he
could
not
answer
any
questions, because he did not
know any answers, and trying
to find one was harsh to his
battered
mind.
Dizziness
edged with blue lights came
fringing his forehead, and he
knew that he would be
fainting soon.
He shuffled slowly up
the road with wide-spread
legs. At the stoop he paused,
looked in. The lamp hanging

by its chain from the ceiling
cast a yellow circle and
lighted
Alice
and
her
mending basket on the table
in front of her. On the other
side his father chewed a
wooden pen and dipped it in
an open ink bottle and made
entries in his black record
book.
Alice, glancing up, saw
Adam’s bloody face. Her
hand rose to her mouth and
her fingers hooked over her
lower teeth.
Adam dragfooted up one
step and then the other and
supported himself in the
doorway.

Then Cyrus raised his
head. He looked with a
distant curiosity. The identity
of the distortion came to him
slowly. He stood up, puzzled
and wondering. He stuck the
wooden pen in the ink bottle
and wiped his fingers on his
pants. “Why did he do it?”
Cyrus asked softly.
Adam tried to answer,
but his mouth was caked and
dry. He licked his lips and
started them bleeding again.
“I don’t know,” he said.
Cyrus stumped over to
him and grasped him by the
arm so fiercely that he winced
and tried to pull away. “Don’t
lie to me! Why did he do it?
Did you have an argument?”
“No.”

Cyrus wrenched at him.

“Tell me! I want to know.

Tell me! You’ll have to tell

me. I’ll make you tell me!

Goddam it, you’re always

protecting him! Don’t you

think I know that? Did you

think you were fooling me?

Now tell me, or by God I’ll

keep you standing there all

night!”

Adam cast about for an

answer. “He doesn’t think

you love him.”

Cyrus released the arm

and hobbled back to his chair

and sat down. He rattled the

pen in the ink bottle and

looked blindly at his record

book. “Alice,” he said, “help

Adam to bed. You’ll have to

cut his shirt off, I guess. Give

him a hand.” He got up again, went to the corner of the room where the coats hung on nails, and, reaching behind the garments, brought out his shotgun, broke it to verify its load, and clumped out of the door.

Alice raised her hand as though she would hold him back with a rope of air. And her rope broke and her face hid her thoughts. “Go in your room,” she said. “I’ll bring some water in a basin.”

Adam lay on the bed, a sheet pulled up to his waist, and Alice patted the cuts with a linen handkerchief dipped in warm water. She was silent for a long time and then she continued Adam’s sentence

as though there had never
been an interval, “He doesn’t
think his father loves him.
But you love him—you
always have.”
Adam did not answer
her.
She went on quietly,
“He’s a strange boy. You
have to know him—all rough
shell, all anger until you
know.” She paused to cough,
leaned down and coughed,
and when the spell was over
her cheeks were flushed and
she was exhausted. “You
have to know him,” she
repeated. “For a long time he
has given me little presents,
pretty things you wouldn’t
think he’d even notice. But he
doesn’t give them right out.

He hides them where he
knows I'll find them. And
you can look at him for hours
and he won't ever give the
slightest sign he did it. You
have to know him."
She smiled at Adam and
he closed his eyes.

Chapter 4

1

Charles stood at the bar in the
village inn and Charles was
laughing delightedly at the
funny
stories
the
night-stranded
drummers
were
telling. He got out his tobacco
sack with its meager jingle of
silver and bought the men a

drink to keep them talking.
He stood and grinned and
rubbed his split knuckles.
And when the drummers,
accepting his drink, raised
their glasses and said, “Here’s
to
you,”
Charles
was
delighted. He ordered another
drink for his new friends, and
then he joined them for some
kind of deviltry in another
place.
When Cyrus stumped
out into the night he was
filled
with
a
kind
of

despairing anger at Charles. He looked on the road for his son, and he went to the inn to look for him, but Charles was gone. It is probable that if he had found him that night he would have killed him, or tried to. The direction of a big act will warp history, but probably all acts do the same in their degree, down to a stone stepped over in the path or a breath caught at sight of a pretty girl or a fingernail nicked in the garden soil. Naturally it was not long before Charles was told that his father was looking for him with a shotgun. He hid out for two weeks, and when he finally did return, murder had sunk back to simple anger

and he paid his penalty in
overwork
and
a
false
theatrical humility.
Adam lay four days in
bed, so stiff and aching that
he could not move without a
groan. On the third day his
father gave evidence of his
power with the military. He
did it as a poultice to his own
pride and also as a kind of
prize for Adam. Into the
house, into Adam’s bedroom,
came a captain of cavalry and
two
sergeants
in
dress
uniform of blue. In the

dooryard their horses were held by two privates. Lying in his bed, Adam was enlisted in the army as a private in the cavalry.

He signed the Articles of War and took the oath while his father and Alice looked on. And his father's eyes glistened with tears.

After the soldiers had gone his father sat with him a long time. "I've put you in the cavalry for a reason," he said. "Barrack life is not a good life for long. But the cavalry has work to do. I made sure of that. You'll like going for the Indian country.

There’s action coming. I can’t tell you how I know. There’s fighting on the way.”

“Yes, sir,” Adam said.

2

It has always seemed strange to me that it is usually men like Adam who have to do the soldiering. He did not like fighting to start with, and far from learning to love it, as some men do, he felt an increasing revulsion for violence. Several times his officers looked closely at him for malingering, but no charge was brought. During

these five years of soldiering
Adam did more detail work
than any man in the squadron,
but if he killed any enemy it
was an accident of ricochet.
Being
a
marksman
and
sharpshooter,
he
was
peculiarly fitted to miss. By
this time the Indian fighting
had become like dangerous
cattle drives—the tribes were
forced into revolt, driven and
decimated, and the sad, sullen
remnants settled on starvation
lands. It was not nice work
but, given the pattern of the
country's development, it had

to be done.

To Adam who was an

instrument, who saw not the

future farms but only the torn

bellies of fine humans, it was

revolting and useless. When

he fired his carbine to miss he

was

committing

treason

against his unit, and he didn’t

care.

The

emotion

of

nonviolence was building in

him

until

it

became

a

prejudice like any other

thought-stultifying prejudice.
To inflict any hurt on
anything for any purpose
became inimical to him. He
became obsessed with this
emotion, for such it surely
was, until it blotted out any
possible thinking in its area.
But never was there any hint
of cowardice in Adam's army
record.
Indeed
he
was
commended three times and
then decorated for bravery.
As he revolted more and
more from violence, his
impulse took the opposite
direction. He ventured his life
a number of times to bring in
wounded

men.

He

volunteered for work in field

hospitals even when he was

exhausted from his regular

duties. He was regarded by

his

comrades

with

contemptuous affection and

the unspoken fear men have

of impulses they do not

understand.

Charles wrote to his

brother

regularly—of

the

farm and the village, of sick

cows and a foaling mare, of

the added pasture and the

lightning-struck

barn,

of
Alice’s choking death from
her consumption and his
father’s move to a permanent
paid position in the G.A.R. in
Washington. As with many
people, Charles, who could
not talk, wrote with fullness.
He set down his loneliness
and his perplexities, and he
put on paper many things he
did not know about himself.
During the time Adam
was away he knew his brother
better than ever before or
afterward. In the exchange of
letters there grew a closeness
neither of them could have
imagined.
Adam kept one letter
from his brother, not because
he understood it completely

but because it seemed to have

a covered meaning he could

not get at. “Dear Brother

Adam,” the letter said, “I take
my pen in hand to hope you
are in good health”—he
always started this way to
ease himself gently into the
task of writing. “I have not
had your answer to my last
letter but I presume you have
other things to do—ha! ha!
The rain came wrong and
damned the apple blossoms.
There won’t be many to eat
next winter but I will save
what I can. Tonight I cleaned
the house, and it is wet and
soapy and maybe not any
cleaner. How do you suppose
Mother kept it the way she
did? It does not look the
same.
Something

settles
down on it. I don’t know
what, but it will not scrub off.
But I have spread the dirt
around more evenly anyways.
Ha! ha!
“Did Father write you
anything about his trip? He’s
gone clean out to San
Francisco in California for an
encampment of the Grand
Army. The Secty. of War is
going to be there, and Father
is to introduce him. But this is
not any great shucks to
Father. He has met the
President three, four times
and even been to supper to
the White House. I would like
to see the White House.
Maybe you and me can go
together when you come

home. Father could put us up
for a few days and he would
be wanting to see you
anyways.
“I think I better look
around for a wife. This is a
good farm, and even if I’m no
bargain there’s girls could do
worse than this farm. What
do you think? You did not
say if you are going to come
live home when you get out
of the army. I hope so. I miss
you.”
The
writing
stopped
there. There was a scratch on
the page and a splash of ink,
and then it went on in pencil,
but the writing was different.
In pencil it said, “Later.

Well, right there the pen gave
out. One of the points broke
off. I'll have to buy another
penpoint in the village—
rusted right through."
The words began to flow
more smoothly. "I guess I
should wait for a new
penpoint and not write with a
pencil. Only I was sitting here
in the kitchen with the lamp
on and I guess I got to
thinking and it come on late
—after twelve, I guess, but I
never looked. Old Black Joe
started crowing out in the
henhouse.
Then
Mother's
rocking chair cricked for all
the world like she was sitting
in it. You know I don't take

truck with that, but it set me
minding backward, you know
how you do sometimes. I
guess I'll tear this letter up
maybe, because what's the
good of writing stuff like
this."
The words began to race
now as though they couldn't
get out fast enough. "If I'm to
throw it away I'd just as well
set it down," the letter said.
"It's like the whole house was
alive
and
had
eyes
everywhere, and like there
was people behind the door
just ready to come in if you
looked away. It kind of
makes my skin crawl. I want

to say—I want to say—I
mean, I never understood—
well, why our father did it. I
mean, why didn't he like that
knife I bought for him on his
birthday. Why didn't he? It
was a good knife and he
needed a good knife. If he
had used it or even honed it,
or took it out of his pocket
and looked at it—that's all he
had to do. If he'd liked it I
wouldn't have took out after
you. I had to take out after
you. Seems like to me my
mother's chair is rocking a
little. It's just the light. I
don't take any truck with that.
Seems like to me there's
something
not
finished.

Seems like when you half
finished a job and can't think
what it was. Something didn't
get done. I shouldn't be here.
I ought to be wandering
around the world instead of
sitting here on a good farm
looking for a wife. There is
something wrong, like it
didn't get finished, like it
happened too soon and left
something out. It's me should
be where you are and you
here. I never thought like this
before. Maybe because it's
late—it's later than that. I just
looked out and it's first dawn.
I don't think I fell off to
sleep. How could the night go
so fast? I can't go to bed now.
I couldn't sleep anyways."
The

letter
was
not
signed. Maybe Charles forgot
he had intended to destroy it
and sent it along. But Adam
saved it for a time, and
whenever he read it again it
gave him a chill and he didn’t
know why.

Chapter 5

On the ranch the little
Hamiltons began to grow up,
and every year there was a
new one. George was a tall
handsome boy, gentle and
sweet, who had from the first
a kind of courtliness. Even as
a little boy he was polite and
what they used to call “no
trouble.” From his father he
inherited the neatness of

clothing and body and hair,
and he never seemed ill
dressed even when he was.
George was a sinless boy and
grew to be a sinless man. No
crime of commission was
ever attributed to him, and his
crimes of omission were only
misdemeanors. In his middle
life, at about the time such
things were known about, it
was discovered that he had
pernicious
anemia.
It
is
possible that his virtue lived
on a lack of energy.
Behind George, Will
grew along, dumpy and
stolid.
Will

had
little
imagination but he had great
energy. From childhood on he
was a hard worker, if anyone
would tell him what to work
at, and once told he was
indefatigable. He was a
conservative, not only in
politics but in everything.
Ideas he found revolutionary,
and he avoided them with
suspicion and distaste. Will
liked to live so that no one
could find fault with him, and
to do that he had to live as
nearly like other people as
possible.
Maybe his father had
something to do with Will's
distaste for either change or
variation. When Will was a

growing boy, his father had
not been long enough in the
Salinas Valley to be thought
of as an “old-timer.” He was
in fact a foreigner and an
Irishman. At that time the
Irish were much disliked in
America. They were looked
upon
with
contempt,
particularly on the East Coast,
but a little of it must have
seeped out to the West. And
Samuel
had
not
only
variability but was a man of
ideas and innovations. In
small cut-off communities
such

a
man
is
always
regarded with suspicion until
he has proved he is no danger
to the others. A shining man
like Samuel could, and can,
cause a lot of trouble. He
might, for example, prove too
attractive to the wives of men
who knew they were dull.
Then there were his education
and his reading, the books he
bought and borrowed, his
knowledge of things that
could not be eaten or worn or
cohabited with, his interest in
poetry and his respect for
good writing. If Samuel had
been a rich man like the
Thornes or the Delmars, with

their big houses and wide flat lands, he would have had a great library.

The Delmars had a library—nothing but books in it and paneled in oak. Samuel, by borrowing, had read many more of the Delmars' books than the Delmars had. In that day an educated rich man was acceptable. He might send his sons to college without comment, might wear a vest and white shirt and tie in the daytime of a weekday, might wear gloves and keep his nails clean. And since the lives and practices of rich men were mysterious, who

knows what they could use or
not use? But a poor man—
what need had he for poetry
or for painting or for music
not fit for singing or dancing?
Such things did not help him
bring in a crop or keep a
scrap
of
cloth
on
his
children’s backs. And if in
spite of this he persisted,
maybe he had reasons which
would not stand the light of
scrutiny.
Take
Samuel,
for
instance. He made drawings
of work he intended to do

with iron or wood. That was
good
and
understandable,
even enviable. But on the
edges of the plans he made
other drawings, sometimes
trees, sometimes faces or
animals or bugs, sometimes
just figures that you couldn’t
make out at all. And these
caused men to laugh with
embarrassed
uneasiness.
Then, too, you never knew in
advance what Samuel would
think or say or do—it might
be anything.
The first few years after
Samuel came to Salinas
Valley there was a vague
distrust of him. And perhaps

Will as a little boy heard talk in the San Lucas store. Little boys don't want their fathers to be different from other men. Will might have picked up his conservatism right then. Later, as the other children came along and grew, Samuel belonged to the valley, and it was proud of him in the way a man who owns a peacock is proud. They weren't afraid of him any more, for he did not seduce their wives or lure them out of sweet mediocrity. The Salinas Valley grew fond of Samuel, but by that time Will was formed.

Certain individuals, not

by

any

means
always
deserving, are truly beloved
of the gods. Things come to
them without their effort or
planning. Will Hamilton was
one of these. And the gifts he
received were the ones he
could
appreciate.
As
a
growing boy Will was lucky.
Just as his father could not
make money, Will could not
help making it. When Will
Hamilton raised chickens and
his hens began to lay, the
price of eggs went up. As a
young man, when two of his
friends who ran a little store
came

to
the
point
of
despondent bankruptcy, Will
was asked to lend them a
little money to tide them over
the quarter’s bills, and they
gave him a one-third interest
for a pittance. He was not
niggardly. He gave them what
they asked for. The store was
on its feet within one year,
expanding in two, opening
branches in three, and its
descendants,
a
great
mercantile
system,
now
dominate a large part of the

area.
Will also took over a
bicycle-and-tool shop for a
bad debt. Then a few rich
people of the valley bought
automobiles,
and
his
mechanic worked on them.
Pressure was put on him by a
determined
poet
whose
dreams were brass, cast iron,
and rubber. This man’s name
was Henry Ford, and his
plans were ridiculous if not
illegal.
Will
grumblingly
accepted the southern half of
the valley as his exclusive

area, and within fifteen years
the valley was two-deep in
Fords and Will was a rich
man driving a Marmon.
Tom, the third son, was
most like his father. He was
born in fury and he lived in
lightning.
Tom
came
headlong into life. He was a
giant in joy and enthusiasms.
He didn't discover the world
and its people, he created
them. When he read his
father's books, he was the
first. He lived in a world
shining and fresh and as
uninspected as Eden on the
sixth day. His mind plunged
like a colt in a happy pasture,
and when later the world put

up fences he plunged against
the wire, and when the final
stockade surrounded him, he
plunged right through it and
out. And as he was capable of
giant joy, so did he harbor
huge sorrow, so that when his
dog died the world ended.
Tom was as inventive as
his father but he was bolder.
He would try things his father
would not dare. Also, he had
a large concupiscence to put
the spurs in his flanks, and
this Samuel did not have.
Perhaps it was his driving
sexual need that made him
remain a bachelor. It was a
very moral family he was
born into. It might be that his
dreams and his longing, and
his outlets for that matter,

made him feel unworthy,
drove
him
sometimes
whining into the hills. Tom
was a nice mixture of
savagery and gentleness. He
worked inhumanly, only to
lose in effort his crushing
impulses.
The Irish do have a
despairing quality of gaiety,
but they have also a dour and
brooding ghost that rides on
their shoulders and peers in
on their thoughts. Let them
laugh too loudly, it sticks a
long
finger
down
their
throats.

They
condemn
themselves before they are
charged, and this makes them
defensive always.
When Tom was nine
years old he worried because
his pretty little sister Mollie
had an impediment in her
speech. He asked her to open
her mouth wide and saw that
a membrane under her tongue
caused the trouble. “I can fix
that,” he said. He led her to a
secret place far from the
house,
whetted
his
pocketknife on a stone, and
cut the offending halter of
speech. And then he ran away
and was sick.

The
Hamilton
house
grew as the family grew. It
was
designed
to
be
unfinished, so that lean-tos
could jut out as they were
needed. The original room
and kitchen soon disappeared
in a welter of these lean-tos.
Meanwhile Samuel got
no richer. He developed a
very bad patent habit, a
disease many men suffer
from. He invented a part of a
threshing machine, better,
cheaper, and more efficient
than any in existence. The
patent attorney ate up his

little profit for the year. Samuel sent his models to a manufacturer, who promptly rejected the plans and used the method. The next few years were kept lean by the suing, and the drain stopped only when he lost the suit. It was his first sharp experience with the rule that without money you cannot fight money. But he had caught the patent fever, and year after year the money made by threshing and by smithing was drained off in patents. The Hamilton children went barefoot, and their overalls were patched and food was sometimes scarce, to pay for the crisp blueprints with cogs and planes and elevations.

Some men think big and
some think little. Samuel and
his sons Tom and Joe thought
big and George and Will
thought little. Joseph was the
fourth
son—a
kind
of
mooning boy, greatly beloved
and protected by the whole
family. He early discovered
that a smiling helplessness
was his best protection from
work. His brothers were
tough hard workers, all of
them. It was easier to do Joe's
work than to make him do it.
His mother and father thought
him a poet because he wasn't
any good at anything else.
And they so impressed him

with this that he wrote glib
verses to prove it. Joe was
physically lazy, and probably
mentally
lazy
too.
He
daydreamed out his life, and
his mother loved him more
than the others because she
thought he was helpless.
Actually he was the least
helpless, because he got
exactly what he wanted with
a minimum of effort. Joe was
the darling of the family.
In
feudal
times
an
ineptness with sword and
spear headed a young man for

the church: in the Hamilton
family
Joe’s
inability
properly to function at farm
and forge headed him for a
higher education. He was not
sickly or weak but he did not
lift very well; he rode horses
badly and detested them. The
whole family laughed with
affection when they thought
of Joe trying to learn to plow;
his tortuous first furrow
wound about like a flatland
stream, and his second furrow
touched his first only once
and then to cross it and
wander off.
Gradually he eliminated
himself from every farm duty.
His mother explained that his

mind was in the clouds, as
though
this
were
some
singular virtue.
When Joe had failed at
every job, his father in
despair put him to herding
sixty sheep. This was the
least difficult job of all and
the one classically requiring
no skill. All he had to do was
to stay with the sheep. And
Joe lost them—lost sixty
sheep and couldn’t find them
where they were huddled in
the shade in a dry gulch.
According to the family story,
Samuel called the family
together, girls and boys, and
made them promise to take

care of Joe after he was gone,
for if they did not Joe would
surely starve.
Interspersed with the
Hamilton boys were five
girls: Una the oldest, a
thoughtful, studious, dark
girl; Lizzie—I guess Lizzie
must have been the oldest
since she was named for her
mother—I don't know much
about
Lizzie.
She
early
seemed to find a shame for
her family. She married
young and went away and
thereafter was seen only at
funerals.
Lizzie
had

a

capacity

for

hatred

and

bitterness unique among the

Hamiltons. She had a son,

and when he grew up and

married a girl Lizzie didn’t

like she did not speak to him

for many years.

Then there was Dessie,

whose

laughter

was

so

constant that everyone near

her was glad to be there

because it was more fun to be

with Dessie than with anyone

else.

The next sister was

Olive, my mother. And last
was Mollie, who was a little
beauty with lovely blond hair
and violet eyes.
These
were
the
Hamiltons, and it was almost
a miracle how Liza, skinny
little biddy that she was,
produced them year after year
and fed them, baked bread,
made
their
clothes,
and
clothed them with good
manners and iron morals too.
It is amazing how Liza
stamped her children. She
was
completely

without
experience in the world, she
was unread and, except for
the one long trip from
Ireland, untraveled. She had
no experience with men save
only her husband, and that
she looked upon as a tiresome
and sometimes painful duty.
A good part of her life was
taken up with bearing and
raising. Her total intellectual
association was the Bible,
except the talk of Samuel and
her children, and to them she
did not listen. In that one
book she had her history and
her poetry, her knowledge of
peoples and things, her ethics,
her morals, and her salvation.
She never studied the Bible or
inspected it; she just read it.

The many places where it seems to refute itself did not confuse her in the least. And finally she came to a point where she knew it so well that she went right on reading it without listening.

Liza enjoyed universal respect because she was a good woman and raised good children. She could hold up her head anywhere. Her husband and her children and her grandchildren respected her. There was a nail-hard strength in her, a lack of any compromise, a Tightness in the face of all opposing wrongness, which made you hold her in a kind of awe but not in warmth.

Liza

hated
alcoholic
liquors with an iron zeal.
Drinking alcohol in any form
she regarded as a crime
against a properly outraged
deity. Not only would she not
touch it herself, but she
resisted its enjoyment by
anyone
else.
The
result
naturally
was
that
her
husband Samuel and all her
children had a good lusty love
for a drink.
Once when he was very
ill Samuel asked, “Liza,

couldn’t I have a glass of
whisky to ease me?”
She set her little hard
chin. “Would you go to the
throne of God with liquor on
your breath? You would not!”
she said.
Samuel rolled over on
his side and went about his
illness without ease.
When Liza was about
seventy
her
elimination
slowed up and her doctor told
her to take a tablespoon of
port wine for medicine. She
forced
down
the
first
spoonful, making a crooked

face, but it was not so bad.
And from that moment she
never drew a completely
sober breath. She always took
the wine in a tablespoon, it
was always medicine, but
after a time she was doing
over a quart a day and she
was a much more relaxed and
happy woman.
Samuel
and
Liza
Hamilton got all of their
children raised and well
toward adulthood before the
turn of the century. It was a
whole clot of Hamiltons
growing up on the ranch to
the east of King City. And
they were American children
and young men and women.

Samuel never went back to Ireland and gradually he forgot it entirely. He was a busy man. He had no time for nostalgia. The Salinas Valley was the world. A trip to Salinas sixty miles to the north at the head of the valley was event enough for a year, and the incessant work on the ranch, the care and feeding and clothing of his bountiful family, took most of his time —but not all. His energy was large.

His daughter Una had become a brooding student, tense and dark. He was proud of her wild, exploring mind. Olive was preparing to take county examinations after a stretch in the secondary

school in Salinas. Olive was
going to be a teacher, an
honor like having a priest in
the family in Ireland. Joe was
to be sent to college because
he was no damn good at
anything else. Will was well
along the way to accidental
fortune. Tom bruised himself
on the world and licked his
cuts. Dessie was studying
dressmaking,
and
Mollie,
pretty
Mollie,
would
obviously marry some well-to-do man.
There was no question
of inheritance. Although the
hill ranch was large it was
abysmally poor. Samuel sunk

well after well and could not find water on his own land. That would have made the difference. Water would have made them comparatively rich. The one poor pipe of water pumped up from deep near the house was the only source; sometimes it got dangerously low, and twice it went dry. The cattle had to come from the far fringe of the ranch to drink and then go out again to feed.

All in all it was a good firm-grounded family, permanent, and successfully planted in the Salinas Valley, not poorer than many and not richer than many either. It was a well-balanced family

with its conservatives and its radicals, its dreamers and its realists. Samuel was well pleased with the fruit of his loins.

Chapter 6

1

After Adam joined the army and Cyrus moved to Washington, Charles lived alone on the farm. He boasted about getting himself a wife, but he did not go about doing it by the usual process of meeting girls, taking them to dances, testing their virtues or otherwise, and finally

slipping feebly into marriage.

The truth of it was that Charles was abysmally timid of girls. And, like most shy men, he satisfied his normal needs in the anonymity of the prostitute. There is great safety for a shy man with a whore. Having been paid for, and in advance, she has become a commodity, and a shy man can be gay with her and even brutal to her. Also, there is none of the horror of the possible turndown which shrivels the guts of timid men.

The arrangement was simple and reasonably secret. The owner of the inn kept three rooms on his top floor for transients, which he

rented to girls for two-week periods. At the end of two weeks a new set of girls took their place. Mr. Hallam, the innkeeper, had no part in the arrangement. He could almost say with truth that he didn't know anything about it. He simply collected five times the normal rent for his three rooms.

The girls were assigned, procured, moved, disciplined, and robbed by a whoremaster named Edwards, who lived in Boston. His girls moved in a slow circuit among the small towns, never staying anywhere more than two

weeks.

It

was

an

extremely workable system.

A girl was not in town long

enough to cause remark either

by citizen or town marshal.

They stayed pretty much in

the rooms and avoided public

places. They were forbidden

on pain of beating to drink or

make noise or to fall in love

with anyone. Meals were

served in their rooms, and the

clients

were

carefully

screened. No drunken man

was permitted to go up to

them. Every six months each

girl was given one month of

vacation to get drunk and
raise hell. On the job, let a
girl be disobedient to the
rules, and Mr. Edwards
personally
stripped
her,
gagged
her,
and
horsewhipped her within an
inch of her life. If she did it
again she found herself in
jail, charged with vagrancy
and public prostitution.
The two-week stands
had another advantage. Many
of the girls were diseased,
and a girl had nearly always
gone away by the time her
gift had incubated in a client.
There was no one for a man

to get mad at. Mr. Hallam knew nothing about it, and Mr. Edwards never appeared publicly in his business capacity. He had a very good thing in his circuit.

The girls were all pretty much alike—big, healthy, lazy, and dull. A man could hardly tell there had been a change. Charles Trask made it a habit to go to the inn at least once every two weeks, to creep up to the top floor, do his quick business, and return to the bar to get mildly drunk.

The Trask house had never been gay, but lived in only by Charles it took on a gloomy, rustling decay. The lace curtains were gray, the

floors, although swept, grew
sticky and dank. The kitchen
was
lacquered—walls,
windows, and ceiling—with
grease from the frying pans.
The constant scrubbing
by the wives who had lived
there and the biannual deep-seated scourging had kept the
dirt down. Charles rarely did
more than sweep. He gave up
sheets on his bed and slept
between blankets. What good
to clean the house when there
was no one to see it? Only on
the nights he went to the inn
did he wash himself and put
on clean clothes.
Charles
developed
a
restlessness that got him out

at dawn. He worked the farm mightily because he was lonely. Coming in from his work, he gorged himself on fried food and went to bed and to sleep in the resulting torpor.

His dark face took on the serious expressionlessness of a man who is nearly always alone. He missed his brother more than he missed his mother and father. He remembered quite inaccurately the time before Adam went away as the happy time, and he wanted it to come again.

During the years he was never sick, except of course for the chronic indigestion which was universal, and still is, with men who live alone, cook for themselves, and eat in solitude. For this he took a powerful purge called Father George's Elixir of Life.

One accident he did have in the third year of his aloneness. He was digging out rocks and sledding them to the stone wall. One large boulder was difficult to move. Charles pried at it with a long iron bar, and the rock bucked and rolled back again and again. Suddenly he lost his temper. The little smile came on his face, and he fought the stone as though it were a

man, in silent fury. He drove
his bar deep behind it and
threw his whole weight back.
The bar slipped and its upper
end
crashed
against
his
forehead. For a few moments
he lay unconscious in the
field and then he rolled over
and staggered, half-blinded,
to the house. There was a
long torn welt on his forehead
from hairline to a point
between his eyebrows. For a
few weeks his head was
bandaged over a draining
infection, but that did not
worry him. In that day pus
was. thought to be benign, a
proof that a wound was

healing properly. When the wound did heal, it left a long and crinkled scar, and while most scar tissue is lighter than the surrounding skin, Charles' scar turned dark brown. Perhaps the bar had forced iron rust under the skin and made a kind of tattoo. The wound had not worried Charles, but the scar did. It looked like a long fingermark laid on his forehead. He inspected it often in the little mirror by the stove. He combed his hair down over his forehead to

conceal as much of it as he could. He conceived a shame for his scar; he hated his scar. He became restless when anyone looked at it, and fury rose in him if any question was asked about it. In a letter to his brother he put down his feeling about it.

“It looks,” he wrote, “like somebody marked me like a cow. The damn thing gets darker. By the time you get home it will maybe be black. All I need is one going the other way and I would look like a Papist on Ash Wednesday. I don’t know why it bothers me. I got plenty other scars. It just seems like I was marked. And when I go into town, like to

the inn, why, people are always looking at it. I can hear them talking about it when they don't know I can hear. I don't know why they're so damn curious about it. It gets so I don't feel like going in town at all."

2

Adam was discharged in 1885 and started to beat his way home. In appearance he had changed little. There was no military carriage about him. The cavalry didn't act that way. Indeed some units took pride in a sloppy posture.

Adam felt that he was sleepwalking. It is a hard thing to leave any deeply routined life, even if you hate

it.

In

the

morning

he

awakened on a split second

and lay waiting for reveille.

His calves missed the hug of

leggings and his throat felt

naked without its tight collar.

He arrived in Chicago, and

there, for no reason, rented a

furnished room for a week,

stayed in it for two days, went

to Buffalo," changed his

mind, and moved to Niagara

Falls. He didn't want to go

home and he put it off as long

as possible. Home was not a

pleasant place in his mind.

The kind of feelings he had

had there were dead in him,

and he had a reluctance to
bring them to life. He
watched the falls by the hour.
Their roar stupefied and
hypnotized him.
One evening he felt a
crippling loneliness for the
close men in barracks and
tent. His impulse was to rush
into a crowd for warmth, any
crowd. The first crowded
public place he could find
was a little bar, thronged and
smoky.
He
sighed
with
pleasure, almost nestled in the
human clot the way a cat
nestles into a woodpile. He
ordered whisky and drank it
and felt warm and good. He

did not see or hear. He simply
absorbed the contact.
As it grew late and the
men began to drift away, he
became fearful of the time
when he would have to go
home. Soon he was alone
with the bartender, who was
rubbing and rubbing the
mahogany of the bar and
trying with his eyes and his
manner to get Adam to go.
“I’ll have one more,”
Adam said.
The bartender set the
bottle out. Adam noticed him
for the first time. He had a
strawberry
mark
on
his
forehead.

“I’m a stranger in these
parts,” said Adam.
“That’s what we mostly
get at the falls,” the bartender
said.
“I’ve been in the army.
Cavalry.”
“Yeah!” the bartender
said.
Adam felt suddenly that
he had to impress this man,
had to get under his skin
some
way.
“Fighting
Indians,” he said. “Had some
great times.”
The man did not answer
him.
“My brother has a mark
on his head.”
The bartender touched

the strawberry mark with his
fingers. “Birthmark,” he said.
“Gets bigger every year. Your
brother got one?”
“His came from a cut.
He wrote me about it.”
“You notice this one of
mine looks like a cat?”
“Sure it does.”
“That’s my nickname,
Cat. Had it all my life. They
say my old lady must of been
scared by a cat when she was
having me.”
“I’m on my way home.
Been away a long time.
Won’t you have a drink?”
“Thanks. Where you
staying?”
“Mrs. May’s boarding
house.”
“I know her. What they

tell is she fills you up with
soup so you can’t eat much
meat.”
“I guess there are tricks
to every trade,” said Adam.
“I guess that’s right.
There’s sure plenty in mine.”
“I bet that’s true,” said
Adam.
“But the one trick I need
I haven’t got. I wisht I knew
that one.”
“What is it?”
“How the hell to get you
to go home and let me close
up.”
Adam stared at him,
stared at him and did not
speak.
“It’s
a
joke,”

the

bartender said uneasily.

“I guess I’ll go home in

the morning,” said Adam. “I

mean my real home.”

“Good

luck,”

the

bartender said.

Adam walked through

the dark town, increasing his

speed as though his loneliness

sniffed along behind him. The

sagging front steps of his

boarding house creaked a

warning as he climbed them.

The hall was gloomed with

the dot of yellow light from

an oil lamp turned down so

low that it jerked expiringly.

The landlady stood in

her open doorway and her

nose made a shadow to the
bottom of her chin. Her cold
eyes followed Adam as do the
eyes
of
a
front-painted
portrait, and she listened with
her nose for the whisky that
was in him.
“Good
night,”
said
Adam.
She did not answer him.
At the top of the first
flight he looked back. Her
head was raised, and now her
chin made a shadow on her
throat and her eyes had no
pupils.
His room smelled of

dust dampened and dried
many times. He picked a
match from his block and
scratched it on the side of the
block. He lighted the shank of
candle
in
the
japanned
candlestick and regarded the
bed—as
spineless
as
a
hammock and covered with a
dirty patchwork quilt, the
cotton batting spilling from
the edges.
The
porch
steps
complained again, and Adam

knew the woman would be
standing in her doorway
ready to spray inhospitality
on the new arrival.
Adam sat down in a
straight chair and put his
elbows on his knees and
supported his chin in his
hands. A roomer down the
hall
began
a
patient,
continuing cough against the
quiet night.
And Adam knew he
could not go home. He had
heard old soldiers tell of
doing what he was going to
do.
“I just couldn’t stand it.
Didn’t have no place to go.

Didn’t
know
nobody.
Wandered around and pretty
soon I got in a panic like a
kid, and first thing I knowed
I’m begging the sergeant to
let me back in—like he was
doing me a favor.”
Back in Chicago, Adam
re-enlisted and asked to be
assigned to his old regiment.
On the train going west the
men of his squadron seemed
very dear and desirable.
While he waited to
change trains in Kansas City,
he heard his name called and
a message was shoved into
his hand—orders to report to
Washington to the office of
the Secretary of War. Adam

in his five years had absorbed
rather than learned never to
wonder about an order. To an
enlisted man the high far gods
in Washington were crazy,
and if a soldier wanted to
keep his sanity he thought
about generals as little as
possible.

In due course Adam
gave his name to a clerk and
went to sit in an anteroom.
His father found him there. It
took Adam a moment to
recognize Cyrus, and much
longer to get used to him.
Cyrus had become a great
man. He dressed like a great
man—black broadcloth coat
and trousers, wide black hat,
overcoat with a velvet collar,
ebony cane which he made to

seem a sword. And Cyrus
conducted himself like a great
man. His speech was slow
and mellow, measured and
unexcited, his gestures were
wide, and new teeth gave him
a vulpine smile out of all
proportion to his emotion.
After Adam had realized
that this was his father he was
still puzzled. Suddenly he
looked down—no wooden
leg. The leg was straight, bent
at the knee, and the foot was
clad in a polished kid
congress gaiter. When he
moved there was a limp, but
not a clumping wooden-legged limp.
Cyrus saw the look.
“Mechanical,”
he
said,

“Works on a hinge. Got a spring. Don’t even limp when I set my mind to it. I’ll show it to you when I take it off. Come along with me.”

Adam said, “I’m under orders, sir. I’m to report to Colonel Wells.”

“I know you are. I told Wells to issue the orders. Come along.”

Adam said uneasily, “If you don’t mind, sir, I think I’d better report to Colonel Wells.”

His father reversed himself. “I was testing you,” he said grandly. “I wanted to see whether the army has any discipline these days. Good

boy. I knew it would be good
for you. You're a man and a
soldier, my boy."
"I'm under orders, sir,"
said Adam. This man was a
stranger to him. A faint
distaste
arose
in
Adam.
Something was not true. And
the speed with which doors
opened
straight
to
the
Colonel,
the
obsequious
respect of that officer, the
words, "The Secretary will
see you now, sir," did not

remove Adam's feeling.

"This is my son, a private soldier, Mr. Secretary —just as I was—a private soldier in the United States Army."

"I was discharged a corporal, sir," said Adam. He hardly heard the exchange of compliments.

He was thinking, This is the Secretary of War. Can't he see that this isn't the way my father is? He's play-acting. What's happened to him? It's funny the Secretary can't see it.

They walked to the small hotel where Cyrus

lived, and on the way Cyrus
pointed out the sights, the
buildings,
the
spots
of
history,
with
the
expansiveness of a lecturer. “I
live in a hotel,” he said. “I’ve
thought of getting a house,
but I’m on the move so much
it wouldn’t hardly pay. I’m
all over the country most of
the time.”
The hotel clerk couldn’t
see either. He bowed to
Cyrus, called him “Senator,”
and indicated that he would
give Adam a room if he had
to throw someone out.

“Send a bottle of whisky
to my room, please.”
“I
can
send
some
chipped ice if you like.”
“Ice!” said Cyrus. “My
son is a soldier.” He rapped
his leg with his stick and it
gave forth a hollow sound. “I
have
been
a
soldier—a
private soldier. What do we
want ice for?”
Adam was amazed at
Cyrus’s accommodations. He
had not only a bedroom but a
sitting room beside it, and the
toilet was in a closet right in

the bedroom.

Cyrus sat down in a deep chair and sighed. He pulled up his trouser leg, and Adam saw the contraption of iron and leather and hard wood. Cyrus unlaced the leather sheath that held it on his stump and stood the travesty-on-flesh beside his chair. “It gets to pinching pretty bad,” he said.

With the leg off, his father became himself again, the self Adam remembered. He had experienced the beginning of contempt, but now the childhood fear and respect and animosity came back to him, so that he seemed a little boy testing his father’s immediate mood to escape trouble.

Cyrus

made

his

preparations,

drank

his

whisky, and loosened his

collar.

He

faced

Adam.

“Well?”

“Sir?”

“Why did you re-enlist?”

“I—I don’t know, sir. I

just wanted to.”

“You don’t like the

army, Adam.”

“No, sir.”

“Why did you go back?”

“I didn’t want to go

home.”

Cyrus sighed and rubbed the tips of his fingers on the arms of his chair. “Are you going to stay in the army?” he asked.

“I don’t know, sir.”

“I can get you into West Point. I have influence. I can get you discharged so you can enter West Point.”

“I don’t want to go there.”

“Are you defying me?” Cyrus asked quietly.

Adam took a long time to answer, and his mind sought escape before he said, “Yes, sir.”

Cyrus said, “Pour me some whisky, son,” and when he had it he continued, “I wonder if you know how

much influence I really have.
I can throw the Grand Army
at any candidate like a sock.
Even the President likes to
know what I think about
public matters. I can get
senators defeated and I can
pick
appointments
like
apples. I can make men and I
can destroy men. Do you
know that?”
Adam knew more than
that. He knew that Cyrus was
defending
himself
with
threats. “Yes, sir. I’ve heard.”
“I
could
get

you

assigned to Washington—

assigned to me even—teach

you your way about.”

“I’d rather go back to

my regiment, sir.” He saw the

shadow of loss darken his

father’s face.

“Maybe

I

made

a

mistake. You’ve learned the

dumb resistance of a soldier.”

He sighed. “I’ll get you

ordered to your regiment.

You’ll rot in barracks.”

“Thank you, sir.” After a

pause Adam asked, “Why

don’t you bring Charles

here?”

“Because

I—No,
Charles is better where he is
—better where he is.”
Adam remembered his
father’s tone and how he
looked. And he had plenty of
time to remember, because he
did rot in barracks. He
remembered that Cyrus was
lonely and alone—and knew
it.

3

Charles had looked forward
to Adam’s return after five
years. He had painted the
house and the barn, and as the
time approached he had a
woman in to clean the house,
to clean it to the bone.
She was a clean, mean
old woman. She looked at the
dust-gray rotting curtains,

threw them out, and made
new ones. She dug grease out
of the stove that had been
there since Charles' mother
died. And she leached the
walls of a brown shiny
nastiness
deposited
by
cooking fat and kerosene
lamps. She pickled the floors
with lye, soaked the blankets
in sal soda, complaining the
whole time to herself, "Men
—dirty animals. Pigs is clean
compared. Rot in their own
juice. Don't see how no
woman ever marries them.
Stink like measles. Look at
oven—pie
juice
from

Methuselah.”

Charles had moved into
a shed where his nostrils
would not be assailed by the
immaculate but painful smells
of lye and soda and ammonia
and yellow soap. He did,
however, get the impression
that she didn’t approve of his
housekeeping. When finally
she grumbled away from the
shining
house
Charles
remained in the shed. He
wanted to keep the house
clean for Adam. In the shed
where he slept were the tools
of the farm and the tools for
their repair and maintenance.
Charles found that he could
cook his fried and boiled

meals more quickly and
efficiently on the forge than
he could on the kitchen stove.
The bellows forced quick
flaring heat from the coke. A
man didn't have to wait for a
stove
to
heat
up.
He
wondered why he had never
thought of it before.
Charles
waited
for
Adam, and Adam did not
come. Perhaps Adam was
ashamed to write. It was
Cyrus who told Charles in an
angry letter about Adam's
reenlistment

against
his
wishes. And Cyrus indicated
that, in some future, Charles
could
visit
him
in
Washington, but he never
asked him again.
Charles moved back to
the house and lived in a kind
of savage filth, taking a
satisfaction in overcoming the
work
of
the
grumbling
woman.
It was over a year before
Adam wrote to Charles—a
letter

of

embarrassed

newsiness

building

his

courage to say, “I don’t know

why I signed again. It was

like somebody else doing it.

Write soon and tell me how

you are.”

Charles did not reply

until he had received four

anxious letters, and then he

replied coolly, “I didn’t

hardly expect you anyway,”

and he went on with a

detailed account of farm and

animals.

Time had got in its

work. After that Charles

wrote right after New Year’s

and received a letter from

Adam written right after New Year's. They had grown so apart that there was little mutual reference and no questions.

Charles began to keep one slovenly woman after another. When they got on his nerves he threw them out the way he would sell a pig. He didn't like them and had no interest in whether or not they liked him. He grew away from the village. His contacts were only with the inn and the postmaster. The village people might denounce his manner of life, but one thing he had which balanced his ugly life even in their eyes. The farm had never been so well run. Charles cleared

land, built up his walls, improved his drainage, and added a hundred acres to the farm. More than that, he was planting tobacco, and a long new tobacco barn stood impressively behind the house. For these things he kept the respect of his neighbors. A farmer cannot think too much evil of a good farmer. Charles was spending most of his money and all of his energy on the farm.

Chapter 7

1

Adam spent his next five years doing the things an army uses to keep its men from going insane—endless

polishing
of
metal
and
leather, parade and drill and
escort, ceremony of bugle and
flag, a ballet of business for
men
who
aren’t
doing
anything. In 1886 the big
packinghouse strike broke out
in Chicago and Adam’s
regiment entrained, but the
strike was settled before they
were needed. In 1888 the
Seminóles, who had never
signed a peace treaty, stirred
restlessly, and the cavalry
entrained again; but the
Seminóles retired into their

swamps and were quiet, and
the dreamlike routine settled
on the troops again.
Time
interval
is
a
strange
and
contradictory
matter in the mind. It would
be reasonable to suppose that
a routine time or an eventless
time
would
seem
interminable. It should be so,
but it is not. It is the dull
eventless times that have no
duration whatever. A time
splashed
with

interest,
wounded
with
tragedy,
crevassed with joy—that's
the time that seems long in
the memory. And this is right
when you think about it.
Eventlessness has no posts to
drape duration on. From
nothing to nothing is no time
at all.
Adam's
second
five
years were up before he knew
it. It was late in 1890, and he
was
discharged
with
sergeant's stripes in the
Presidio in San Francisco.

Letters between Charles and
Adam had become great
rarities, but Adam wrote his
brother
just
before
his
discharge, “This time I’m
coming home,” and that was
the last Charles heard of him
for over three years.
Adam waited out the
winter, wandering up the
river to Sacramento, ranging
in the valley of the San
Joaquín, and when the spring
came Adam had no money.
He rolled a blanket and
started
slowly
eastward,
sometimes

walking
and
sometimes with groups of
men on the rods under slow-moving freight cars. At night
he jungled up with wandering
men in the camping places on
the fringes of towns. He
learned to beg, not for money
but for food. And before he
knew it he was a bindlestiff
himself.
Such men are rare now,
but in the nineties there were
many of them, wandering
men, lonely men, who wanted
it that way. Some of them ran
from
responsibilities
and
some felt driven out of
society by injustice. They
worked a little, but not for

long. They stole a little, but
only food and occasionally
needed garments from a wash
line. They were all kinds of
men—literate
men
and
ignorant men, clean men and
dirty men—but all of them
had restlessness in common.
They followed warmth and
avoided great heat and great
cold. As the spring advanced
they tracked it eastward, and
the first frost drove them west
and
south.
They
were
brothers to the coyote which,
being wild, lives close to man
and his chickenyards: they

were near towns but not in
them. Associations with other
men were for a week or for a
day and then they drifted
apart.
Around the little fires
where
communal
stew
bubbled there was all manner
of talk and only the personal
was unmentionable. Adam
heard of the development of
the I.W.W. with its angry
angels.
He
listened
to
philosophic discussions, to
metaphysics, to esthetics, to
impersonal experience. His
companions for the night

might be a murderer, an
unfrocked priest or one who
had unfrocked himself, a
professor forced from his
warm berth by a dull faculty,
a lone driven man running
from
memory,
a
fallen
archangel and a devil in
training, and each contributed
bits of thought to the fire as
each contributed carrots and
potatoes and onions and meat
to the stew. He learned the
technique of shaving with
broken glass, of judging a
house before knocking to ask
for a handout. He learned to
avoid or get along with
hostile police and to evaluate

a woman for her warmth of
heart.
Adam took pleasure in
the new life. When autumn
touched the trees he had got
as far as Omaha, and without
question or reason or thought
he hurried west and south,
fled through the mountains
and arrived with relief in
Southern
California.
He
wandered by the sea from the
border north as far as San
Luis Obispo, and he learned
to pilfer the tide pools for
abalones
and
eels
and
mussels and perch, to dig the

sandbars for clams, and to
trap a rabbit in the dunes with
a noose of fishline. And he
lay in the sun-warmed sand,
counting the waves.
Spring urged him east
again, but more slowly than
before. Summer was cool in
the
mountains,
and
the
mountain people were kind as
lonesome people are kind.
Adam took a job on a
widow’s outfit near Denver
and shared her table and her
bed humbly until the frost
drove him south again. He
followed the Rio Grande past
Albuquerque and El Paso
through

the
Big
Bend,
through
Laredo
to
Brownsville.
He
learned
Spanish words for food and
pleasure, and he learned that
when people are very poor
they still have something to
give and the impulse to give
it. He developed a love for
poor people he could not have
conceived if he had not been
poor himself. And by now he
was an expert tramp, using
humility
as
a

working
principle. He was lean and
sun-darkened, and he could
withdraw his own personality
until he made no Stir of anger
or jealousy. His voice had
grown soft, and he had
merged many accents and
dialects into his own speech,
so that his speech did not
seem foreign anywhere. This
was the great safety of the
tramp, a protective veil. He
rode
the
trains
very
infrequently, for there was a
growing
anger
against
tramps, based on the angry

violence of the I.W.W. and aggravated by the fierce reprisals against them. Adam was picked up for vagrancy. The quick brutality of police and prisoners frightened him and drove him away from the gatherings of tramps. He traveled alone after that and made sure that he was shaven and clean.

When spring came again he started north. He felt that his time of rest and peace was over. He aimed north toward Charles and the weakening memories of his childhood. Adam moved rapidly across interminable East Texas, through Louisiana and

the butt ends of Mississippi and Alabama, and into the flank of Florida. He felt that he had to move quickly. The Negroes were poor enough to be kind, but they could not trust any white man no matter how poor, and the poor white men had a fear of strangers. Near Tallahassee he was picked up by sheriff's men, judged vagrant, and put on a road gang. That's how the roads were built. His sentence was six months. He was released and instantly picked up again for a second six months. And now he learned how men can consider other men as beasts and that the easiest way to get along with such men was to be a beast. A

clean face, an open face, an
eye raised to meet an eye—
these drew attention and
attention
drawn
brought
punishment. Adam thought
how a man doing an ugly or a
brutal thing has hurt himself
and must punish someone for
the hurt. To be guarded at
work by men with shotguns,
to be shackled by the ankle at
night to a chain, were simple
matters of precaution, but the
savage whippings for the
least stir of will, for the
smallest shred of dignity or
resistance, these seemed to
indicate that guards were
afraid of prisoners, and Adam
knew from his years in the

army that a man afraid is a
dangerous
animal.
And
Adam, like anyone in the
world, feared what whipping
would do to his body and his
spirit. He drew a curtain
around himself. He removed
expression from his face,
light from his eyes, and
silenced his speech. Later he
was not so much astonished
that it had happened to him
but that he had been able to
take it and with a minimum
of pain. It was much more
horrible afterward than when
it was happening. It is a
triumph of self-control to see
a man whipped until the
muscles of his back show

white and glistening through
the cuts and to give no sign of
pity or anger or interest. And
Adam learned this.
People are felt rather
than seen after the first few
moments. During his second
sentence on the roads of
Florida, Adam reduced his
personality to a minus. He
caused no stir, put out no
vibration, became as nearly
invisible as it is possible to
be. And when the guards
could not feel him, they were
not afraid of him. They gave
him the jobs of cleaning the
camps, of handing out the
slops to the prisoners, of
filling the water buckets.
Adam waited until three
days

before
his
second
release. Right after noon that
day he filled the water
buckets and went back to the
little river for more. He filled
his buckets with stones and
sank them, and then he eased
himself into the water and
swam
a
long
way
downstream, rested and swam
farther down. He kept moving
in the water until at dusk he
found a place under a bank
with bushes for cover. He did
not get out of the water.
Late in the night he
heard the hounds go by,

covering both sides of the
river. He had rubbed his hair
hard with green leaves to
cover human odor. He sat in
the water with his nose and
eyes clear. In the morning the
hounds
came
back,
disinterested, and the men
were too tired to beat the
banks properly. When they
were gone Adam dug a piece
of
water-logged
fried
sowbelly out of his pocket
and ate it.
He had schooled himself
against hurry. Most men were
caught bolting. It took Adam
five days to cross the short

distance into Georgia. He took no chances, held back his impatience with an iron control. He was astonished at his ability.

On the edge of Valdosta, Georgia, he lay hidden until long after midnight, and he entered the town like a shadow, crept to the rear of a cheap store, forced a window slowly so that the screws of the lock were pulled from the sun-rotted wood. Then he replaced the lock but left the window open. He had to work by moonlight drifting through dirty windows. He stole a pair of cheap trousers, a white shirt, black shoes, black hat, and an oilskin raincoat, and he tried on each

article for fit. He forced himself to make sure nothing looked disturbed before he climbed out the window. He had taken nothing which was not heavily stocked. He had not even looked for the cash drawer. He lowered the window carefully and slipped from shadow to shadow in the moonlight.

He lay hidden during the day and went in search of food at night—turnips, a few ears of corn from a crib, a few windfall apples—nothing that would be missed. He broke the newness of the shoes with rubbed sand and kneaded the raincoat

to

destroy its newness. It was

three days before he got the

rain he needed, or in his

extreme

caution

felt

he

needed.

The rain started late in

the afternoon. Adam huddled

under his oilskin, waiting for

the dark to come, and when it

did he walked through the

dripping night into the town

of Valdosta. His black hat

was pulled down over his

eyes and his yellow oilskin

was strapped tight against his

throat. He made his way to

the

station

and
peered
through
a
rain-blurred
window. The station agent, in
green eyeshade and black
alpaca worksleeves, leaned
through the ticket window,
talking to a friend. It was
twenty minutes before the
friend went away. Adam
watched him off the platform.
He took a deep breath to calm
himself and went inside.

2

Charles received very few
letters. Sometimes he did not
inquire at the post office for
weeks. In February of 1894
when a thick letter came from
a

firm
of
attorneys
in
Washington the postmaster
thought it might be important.
He walked out to the Trask
farm, found Charles cutting
wood, and gave him the
letter. And since he had taken
so much trouble, he waited
around to hear what the letter
said.
Charles let him wait.
Very slowly he read all five
pages, went back and read
them again, moving his lips
over the words. Then he
folded it up and turned
toward the house.
The postmaster called
after him, “Anything wrong,

Mr. Trask?”

“My father is dead,”

Charles said, and he walked

into the house and closed the

door.

“Took it hard,” the

postmaster reported in town.

“Took it real hard. Quiet man.

Don’t talk much.”

In the house Charles

lighted the lamp although it

was not dark yet. He laid the

letter on the table, and he

washed his hands before he

sat down to read it again.

There

hadn’t

been

anyone to send him a

telegram. The attorneys had

found his address among his

father’s papers. They were

sorry—offered
their
condolences. And they were
pretty excited too. When they
had made Trask's will they
thought he might have a few
hundred dollars to leave his
sons. That is what he looked
to be worth. When they
inspected his bankbooks they
found that he had over ninety-three thousand dollars in the
bank and ten thousand dollars
in good securities. They felt
very different about Mr.
Trask then. People with that
much money were rich. They
would never have to worry. It
was enough to start a dynasty.
The lawyers congratulated
Charles
and
his

brother

Adam. Under the will, they

said, it was to be shared

equally. After the money they

listed the personal effects left

by

the

deceased:

five

ceremonial swords presented

to Cyrus at various G.A.R.

conventions, an olive wood

gavel with a gold plate on it,

a Masonic watch charm with

a diamond set in the dividers,

the gold caps from the teeth

he had out when he got his

plates, watch (silver), gold-headed stick, and so forth.

Charles read the letter

twice more and cupped his

forehead in his hands. He

wondered about Adam. He

wanted Adam home.

Charles felt puzzled and dull. He built up the fire and put the frying pan to heat and sliced thick pieces of salt pork into it. Then he went back to stare at the letter. Suddenly he picked it up and put it in the drawer of the kitchen table. He decided not to think of the matter at all for a while.

Of course he thought of little else, but it was a dull circular thinking that came back to the starting point again and again: Where had he gotten it?

When two events have something in common, in their natures or in time or place, we leap happily to the

conclusion that they are
similar
and
from
this
tendency we create magics
and store them for retelling.
Charles had never before had
a letter delivered at the farm
in his life. Some weeks later a
boy ran out to the farm with a
telegram.
Charles
always
connected the letter and the
telegram the way we group
two deaths and anticipate a
third. He hurried to the
village
railroad
station,
carrying the telegram in his

hand.

“Listen to this,” he said

to the operator.

“I already read it.”

“You did?”

“It comes over the wire,”

said the operator. “I wrote it

down.”

“Oh! Yes, sure. ‘Urgent

need you telegraph me one

hundred

dollars.

Coming

home. Adam.’ ”

“Came

collect,”

the

operator said. “You owe me

sixty cents.”

“Valdosta,

Georgia—I

never heard of it.”

“Neither’d I, but it’s
there.”
“Say, Carlton, how do
you go about telegraphing
money?”
“Well, you bring me a
hundred and two dollars and
sixty cents and I send a wire
telling the Valdosta operator
to pay Adam one hundred
dollars. You owe me sixty
cents too.”
“I’ll pay—say, how do I
know it’s Adam? What’s to
stop anybody from collecting
it?”
The operator permitted
himself
a
smile
of
worldliness. “Way we go

about it, you give me a question couldn't nobody else know the answer. So I send both the question and the answer. Operator asks this fella the question, and if he can't answer he don't get the money."

"Say, that's pretty cute. I better think up a good one."

"You better get the hundred dollars while Old Breen still got the window open."

Charles was delighted with the game. He came back with the money in his hand.

"I got the question," he said.

"I hope it ain't your mother's middle name. Lot of people don't remember."

"No, nothing like that.

It’s this. ‘What did you give
Father on his birthday just
before you went in the army?’
”

“It’s a good question but
it’s long as hell. Can’t you cut
it down to ten words?”
“Who’s paying for it?
Answer is, ‘A pup.’ ”
“Wouldn’t nobody guess
that,” said Carlton. “Well, it’s
you paying, not me.”
“Be funny if he forgot,”
said Charles. “He wouldn’t
ever get home.”

3

Adam came walking out from
the village. His shirt was dirty
and the stolen clothes were
wrinkled and soiled from
having been slept in for a
week. Between the house and

the barn he stopped and
listened for his brother, and in
a moment he heard him
hammering at something in
the big new tobacco barn.
“Oh, Charles!” Adam called.
The hammering stopped,
and there was silence. Adam
felt as though his brother
were inspecting him through
the cracks in the barn. Then
Charles came out quickly and
hurried to Adam and shook
hands.
“How are you?”
“Fine,” said Adam.
“Good
God,
you’re
thin!”
“I guess I am. And I’m
years older too.”

Charles inspected him
from head to foot. “You don’t
look prosperous.”
“I’m not.”
“Where’s your valise?”
“I haven’t got one.”
“Jesus Christ! Where’ve
you been?”
“Mostly
wandering
around all over.”
“Like a hobo?”
“Like a hobo.”
After all the years and
the life that had made creased
leather out of Charles’ skin
and redness in his dark eyes,
Adam
knew
from
remembering that Charles
was thinking of two things—

the questions and something
else.
“Why didn’t you come
home?”
“I just got to wandering.
Couldn’t stop. It gets into
you. That’s a real bad scar
you’ve got there.”
“That’s the one I wrote
you about. Gets worse all the
time. Why didn’t you write?
Are you hungry?” Charles’
hands itched into his pockets
and out and touched his chin
and scratched his head.
“It may go away. I saw a
man
once—bartender—he
had one that looked like a cat.
It was a birthmark. His
nickname was Cat.”
“Are you hungry?”

“Sure, I guess I am.”

“Plan to stay home

now?”

“I—I guess so. Do you

want to get to it now?”

“I—I guess so,” Charles

echoed him. “Our father is

dead.”

“I know.”

“How the hell do *you*

know?”

“Station agent told me.

How long ago did he die?”

“ ’Bout a month.”

“What of?”

“Pneumonia.”

“Buried here?”

“No. In Washington. I

got a letter and newspapers.

Carried him on a caisson with

a flag over it. The Vice-President was there and the

President sent a wreath. All in

the papers. Pictures too—I'll
show you. I've got it all."
Adam
studied
his
brother's face until Charles
looked away. "Are you mad
at something?" Adam asked.
"What should I be mad
at?"
"It just sounded—"
"I've got nothing to be
mad at. Come on, I'll get you
something to eat."
"All right. Did he linger
long?"
"No. It was galloping
pneumonia. Went right out."
Charles was covering up
something. He wanted to tell
it but he didn't know how to
go about it. He kept hiding in

words. Adam fell silent. It might be a good thing to be quiet and let Charles sniff and circle until he came out with it.

“I don’t take much stock in messages from the beyond,” said Charles. “Still, how can you know? Some people claim they’ve had messages—old Sarah Whitburn. She swore. You just don’t know what to think. You didn’t get a message, did you? Say, what the hell’s bit off your tongue?”

Adam said,

“Just
thinking.”
And
he
was
thinking with amazement,
Why, I’m not afraid of my
brother! I used to be scared to
death of him, and I’m not any
more. Wonder why not?
Could it be the army? Or the
chain gang? Could it be
Father’s death? Maybe—but I
don’t understand it. With the
lack of fear, he knew he could
say anything he wanted to,
whereas before he had picked
over his words to avoid
trouble. It was a good feeling
he had, almost as though he
himself had been dead and
resurrected.

They walked into the kitchen he remembered and didn't remember. It seemed smaller and dingier. Adam said almost gaily, "Charles, I been listening. You want to tell me something and you're walking around it like a terrier around a bush. You better tell before it bites you."

Charles' eyes sparked up with anger. He raised his head. His force was gone. He thought with desolation, I can't lick him any more. I can't.

Adam chuckled. "Maybe it's wrong to feel good when our father's just died, but you know, Charles, I never felt better in my whole life. I never felt as good. Spill it,

Charles. Don’t let it chew on
you.”
Charles asked, “Did you
love our father?”
“I won’t answer you
until I know what you’re
getting at.”
“Did you or didn’t you?”
“What’s that got to do
with you?”
“Tell me.”
The
creative
free
boldness was all through
Adam’s bones and brain. “All
right, I’ll tell you. No. I
didn’t. Sometimes he scared
me.
Sometimes—yes,
sometimes I admired him, but
most of the time I hated him.

Now tell me why you want to know.”

Charles was looking down at his hands. “I don’t understand,” he said. “I just can’t get it through my head. He loved you more than anything in the world.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“You don’t have to. He liked everything you brought him. He didn’t like me. He didn’t like anything I gave him. Remember the present I gave him, the pocketknife? I cut and sold a load of wood to get that knife. Well, he didn’t even take it to Washington with him. It’s right in his bureau right now. And you

gave him a pup. It didn't cost you a thing. Well, I'll show you a picture of that pup. It was at his funeral. A colonel was holding it—it was blind, couldn't walk. They shot it after the funeral."

Adam was puzzled at the fierceness of his brother's tone. "I don't see," he said. "I don't see what you're getting at."

"I loved him," said Charles. And for the first time that Adam could remember, Charles began to cry. He put his head down in his arms and cried.

Adam was about to go to him when a little of the old fear came back. No, he thought, if I touched him he

would try to kill me. He went
to the open doorway and
stood looking out, and he
could hear his brother's
sniffling behind him.
It was not a pretty farm
near the house—never had
been. There was litter about
it,
an
unkemptness,
a
rundownness, a lack of plan;
no flowers, and bits of paper
and scraps of wood scattered
about on the ground. The
house was not pretty either. It
was a well-built shanty for
shelter and cooking. It was a
grim farm and a grim house,
unloved and unloving. It was
no home, no place to long for

or to come back to. Suddenly
Adam
thought
of
his
stepmother—as unloved as
the farm, adequate, clean in
her way, but no more wife
than the farm was a home.
His brother's sobbing
had stopped. Adam turned.
Charles was looking blankly
straight ahead. Adam said,
"Tell me about Mother."
"She died. I wrote you."
"Tell me about her."
"I told you. She died.
It's so long ago. She wasn't
your mother."
The smile Adam had
once caught on her face
flashed up in his mind. Her

face was projected in front of
him.
Charles'
voice
came
through
the
image
and
exploded it. "Will you tell me
one thing—not quick—think
before you tell me, and
maybe don't answer unless
it's true, your answer."
Charles moved his lips
to form the question in
advance. "Do you think it
would be possible for our
father to be—dishonest?"
"What do you mean?"
"Isn't that plain enough?
I said it plain. There's only

one meaning to dishonest."

"I don't know," said Adam. "I don't know. No one ever said it. Look what he got to be. Stayed overnight in the White House. The Vice-President came to his funeral. Does that sound like a dishonest man? Come on, Charles," he begged, "tell me what you've been wanting to tell me from the minute I got here."

Charles wet his lips. The blood seemed to have gone out of him, and with it energy and all ferocity. His voice became a monotone. "Father made a will. Left everything equal to me and you."

Adam laughed. "Well, we can always live on the farm. I guess we won't

starve.”

“It’s over a hundred

thousand dollars,” the dull

voice went on.

“You’re crazy. More

like a hundred dollars. Where

would he get it?”

“It’s no mistake. His

salary with the G.A.R. was a

hundred

and

thirty-five

dollars a month. He paid his

own room and board. He got

five cents a mile and hotel

expenses when he traveled.”

“Maybe he had it all the

time and we never knew.”

“No, he didn’t have it all

the time.”

“Well, why don’t we

write to the G.A.R. and ask?

Someone there might know.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” said Charles.

“Now look! Don’t go off half-cocked. There’s such a thing as speculation. Lots of men struck it rich. He knew big men. Maybe he got in on a good thing. Think of the men who went to the gold rush in California and came back rich.”

Charles’ face was desolate. His voice dropped so that Adam had to lean close to hear. It was as toneless as a report. “Our father went into the Union Army in June 1862. He had three months’ training here in

this state. That makes it
September.
He
marched
south. October twelfth he was
hit in the leg and sent to the
hospital. He came home in
January.”
“I don’t see what you’re
getting at.”
Charles’ words were thin
and sallow. “He was not at
Chancellorsville. He was not
at
Gettysburg
or
the
Wilderness or Richmond or
Appomattox.”
“How do you know?”
“His discharge. It came
down with his other papers.”

Adam sighed deeply. In
his chest, like beating fists,
was a surge of joy. He shook
his head almost in disbelief.
Charles said, “How did
he get away with it? How in
hell did he get away with it?
Nobody ever questioned it.
Did you? Did I? Did my
mother? Nobody did. Not
even in Washington.”
Adam stood up. “What’s
in the house to eat? I’m going
to warm up something.”
“I killed a chicken last
night. I’ll fry it if you can
wait.”
“Anything quick?”
“Some salt pork and
plenty of eggs.”
“I’ll have that,” said
Adam.

They left the question
lying there, walked mentally
around it, stepped over it.
Their words ignored it but
their minds never left it. They
wanted to talk about it and
could not. Charles fried salt
pork, warmed up a skillet of
beans, fried eggs.
“I plowed the pasture,”
he said. “Put it in rye.”
“How did it do?”
“Just fine, once I got the
rocks out.” He touched his
forehead. “I got this damn
thing trying to pry out a
stone.”
“You wrote about that,”
Adam said. “Don’t know
whether I told you your
letters meant a lot to me.”
“You never wrote much

what you were doing," said
Charles.
"I guess I didn't want to
think about it. It was pretty
bad, most of it."
"I
read
about
the
campaigns in the papers. Did
you go on those?"
"Yes. I didn't want to
think about them. Still don't."
"Did you kill Injuns?"
"Yes, we killed Injuns."
"I guess they're real
ornery."
"I guess so."
"You don't have to talk
about it if you don't want to."
"I don't want to."
They ate their dinner

under the kerosene lamp.

“We’d get more light if I

would only get around to

washing that lampshade.”

“I’ll do it,” said Adam.

“It’s

hard

to

think

of

everything.”

“It’s going to be fine

having you back. How would

you like to go to the inn after

supper?”

“Well, we’ll see. Maybe

I’d like just to sit awhile.”

“I didn’t write about it in

a letter, but they’ve got girls

at the inn. I didn’t know but

you’d like to go in with me.

They change every two

weeks. I didn't know but
you'd like to look them
over."
"Girls?"
"Yes, they're upstairs.
Makes it pretty handy. And I
thought you just coming
home—"
"Not tonight. Maybe
later. How much do they
charge?"
"A dollar. Pretty nice
girls mostly."
"Maybe
later,"
said
Adam. "I'm surprised they let
them come in."
"I was too at first. But
they worked out a system."
"You go often?"
"Every two or three

weeks. It's pretty lonesome here, a man living alone."

"You wrote once you were thinking of getting married."

"Well, I was. Guess I didn't find the right girl."

All around the main subject the brothers beat. Now and then they would almost step into it, and quickly pull away, back into crops and local gossip and politics and health. They knew they would come back to it sooner or later. Charles was more anxious to strike in deep than Adam was, but then Charles had had the time to think of it, and to Adam it was a new field of thinking and feeling. He would have

preferred to put it over until
another day, and at the same
time he knew his brother
would not permit him to.
Once he said openly,
“Let’s sleep on that other
thing.”
“Sure, if you want to,”
said Charles.
Gradually they ran out
of
escape
talk.
Every
acquaintance was covered
and every local event. The
talk lagged and the time went
on.
“Feel like turning in?”
Adam asked.
“In a little while.”
They were silent, and the

night moved restlessly about
the house, nudging them and
urging them.
“I sure would like to’ve
seen
that
funeral,”
said
Charles.
“Must have been pretty
fancy.”
“Would you care to see
the
clippings
from
the
papers? I’ve got them all in
my room.”
“No. Not tonight.”
Charles squared his chair
around and put his elbows on
the table. “We’ll have to

figure it out," he said nervously. "We can put it off all we want, but we goddam well got to figure what we're going to do."

"I know that," said Adam. "I guess I just wanted some time to think about it."

"Would that do any good? I've had time, lots of time, and I just went in circles. I tried not to think about it, and I still went in circles. You think time is going to help?"

"I guess not. I guess not. What do you want to talk about first? I guess we might as well get into it. We're not thinking about anything else."

"There's the money," said Charles. "Over a hundred

thousand dollars—a fortune.”

“What

about

the

money?”

“Well, where did it come

from?”

“How do I know? I told

you

he

might

have

speculated. Somebody might

have put him onto a good

thing there in Washington.”

“Do you believe that?”

“I

don’t

believe

anything,” Adam said. “I

don’t know, so what can I

believe?”

“It’s a lot of money,”
said Charles. “It’s a fortune
left to us. We can live the rest
of our lives on it, or we can
buy a hell of a lot of land and
make it pay. Maybe you
didn’t think about it, but
we’re rich. We’re richer than
anybody hereabouts.”
Adam laughed. “You
say it like it was a jail
sentence.”
“Where did it come
from?”
“What do you care?”
Adam asked. “Maybe we
should just settle back and
enjoy it.”
“He
wasn’t
at
Gettysburg. He wasn’t at any

goddam battle in the whole
war. He was hit in a skirmish.
Everything he told was lies."
"What are you getting
at?" said Adam.
"I think he stole the
money,"
Charles
said
miserably. "You asked me
and that's what I think."
"Do you know where he
stole it?"
"No."
"Then why do you think
he stole it?"
"He told lies about the
war."
"What?"
"I mean, if he lied about
the war—why, he could
steal."

“How?”

“He held jobs in the G.A.R.—big jobs. He maybe could have got into the treasury, rigged the books.”

Adam sighed. “Well, if that’s what you think, why don’t you write to them and tell them? Have them go over the books. If it’s true we could give back the money.”

Charles’ face was twisted and the scar on his forehead showed dark. “The Vice-President came to his funeral. The President sent a wreath. There was a line of carriages half a mile long and hundreds of people on foot. And do you know who the

pall bearers were?”

“What are you digging

at?”

“ ’Spose we found out

he’s a thief. Then it would

come out how he never was

at Gettysburg or anyplace

else. Then everybody would

know he was a liar too, and

his whole life was a goddam

lie. Then even if sometimes

he did tell the truth, nobody

would believe it was the

truth.”

Adam sat very still. His

eyes were untroubled but he

was watchful. “I thought you

loved him,” he said calmly.

He felt released and free.

“I did. I do. That’s why I

hate this—his whole life gone

—all gone. And his grave—

they might even dig him up
and throw him out." His
words were ragged with
emotion. "Didn't you love
him at all?" he cried.
"I wasn't sure until
now," said Adam. "I was all
mixed up with how I was
supposed to feel. No. I did
not love him."
"Then you don't care if
his life is spoiled and his poor
body rooted up and—oh, my
God almighty!"
Adam's
brain
raced,
trying to find words for his
feeling. "I don't have to
care."
"No, you don't," Charles
said bitterly. "Not if you

didn’t love him, you don’t.
You can help kick him in the
face.”
Adam knew that his
brother
was
no
longer
dangerous. There was no
jealousy to drive him. The
whole weight of his father
was on him, but it was his
father and no one could take
his father away from him.
“How will you feel,
walking
in
town,
after
everyone knows?” Charles
demanded. “How will you
face anybody?”

“I told you I don’t care. I
don’t have to care because I
don’t believe it.”
“You
don’t
believe
what?”
“I don’t believe he stole
any money. I believe in the
war he did just what he said
he did and was just where he
said he was.”
“But the proof—how
about the discharge?”
“You haven’t any proof
that he stole. You just made
that up because you don’t
know where the money came
from.”
“His army papers—”
“They could be wrong,”
Adam said. “I believe they

are wrong. I believe in my
father.”
“I don’t see how you
can.”
Adam said, “Let me tell
you. The proofs that God
does not exist are very strong,
but in lots of people they are
not as strong as the feeling
that He does.”
“But you said you did
not love our father. How can
you have faith in him if you
didn’t love him?”
“Maybe
that’s
the
reason,” Adam said slowly,
feeling his way. “Maybe if I
had loved him I would have
been jealous of him. You
were. Maybe—maybe love

makes you suspicious and doubting. Is it true that when you love a woman you are never sure—never sure of her because you aren't sure of yourself? I can see it pretty clearly. I can see how you loved him and what it did to you. I did not love him. Maybe he loved me. He tested me and hurt me and punished me and finally he sent me out like a sacrifice, maybe to make up for something. But he did not love you, and so he had faith in you. Maybe—why, maybe it's a kind of reverse."

Charles stared at him. "I don't understand," he said.

"I'm trying to," said Adam. "It's a new thought to

me. I feel good. I feel better maybe than I have ever felt in my whole life. I've got rid of something. Maybe sometime I'll get what you have, but I haven't got it now."

"I don't understand," Charles said again.

"Can you see that I don't think our father was a thief? I don't believe he was a liar."

"But the papers—"

"I won't look at the papers. Papers are no match at all for my faith in my father."

Charles was breathing heavily. "Then you would take the money?"

"Of course."

"Even if he stole it?"

"He did not steal it. He

couldn’t have stolen it.”

“I don’t understand,”

said Charles.

“You don’t? Well, it

does seem that maybe this

might be the secret of the

whole thing. Look, I’ve never

mentioned

this—do

you

remember when you beat me

up just before I went away?”

“Yes.”

“Do

you

remember

later? You came back with a

hatchet to kill me.”

“I don’t remember very

well. I must have been

crazy.”

“I didn’t know then, but

I know now—you were

fighting for your love.”

“Love?”

“Yes,”

said

Adam.

“We’ll use the money well.

Maybe

we’ll

stay

here.

Maybe we’ll go away—

maybe to California. We’ll

have to see what we’ll do.

And of course we must set up

a monument to our father—a

big one.”

“I couldn’t ever go away

from here,” said Charles.

“Well, let’s see how it

goes, There’s no hurry. We’ll

feel it out.”

Chapter 8

1

I believe there are monsters
born in the world to human
parents. Some you can see,
misshapen and horrible, with
huge heads or tiny bodies;
some are born with no arms,
no legs, some with three
arms, some with tails or
mouths in odd places. They
are accidents and no one’s

fault, as used to be thought. Once they were considered the visible punishment for concealed sins.

And just as there are physical monsters, can there not be mental or psychic monsters born? The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce a malformed soul?

Monsters are variations from the accepted normal to a greater or a less degree. As a child may be born without an arm, so one may be born without kindness or the potential of conscience. A

man who loses his arms in an accident has a great struggle to adjust himself to the lack, but one born without arms suffers only from people who find him strange. Having never had arms, he cannot miss them. Sometimes when we are little we imagine how it would be to have wings, but there is no reason to suppose it is the same feeling birds have. No, to a monster the norm must seem monstrous, since everyone is normal to himself. To the inner monster it must be even more obscure, since he has no visible thing to compare with others. To a man born without conscience, a soul-stricken man must seem

ridiculous.

To

a

criminal, honesty is foolish.

You must not forget that a

monster is only a variation,

and that to a monster the

norm is monstrous.

It is my belief that Cathy

Ames was born with the

tendencies, or lack of them,

which drove and forced her

all of her life. Some balance

wheel

was

misweighted,

some gear out of ratio. She

was not like other people,

never was from birth. And

just as a cripple may learn to

utilize his lack so that he

becomes more effective in a

limited
field
than
the
uncrippled, so did Cathy,
using her difference, make a
painful and bewildering stir
in her world.
There was a time when a
girl like Cathy would have
been called possessed by the
devil. She would have been
exorcised to cast out the evil
spirit, and if after many trials
that did not work, she would
have been burned as a witch
for
the
good
of
the
community. The one thing

that may not be forgiven a
witch is her ability to distress
people, to make them restless
and uneasy and even envious.
As
though
nature
concealed a trap, Cathy had
from the first a face of
innocence. Her hair was gold
and lovely; wide-set hazel
eyes with upper lids that
drooped
made
her
look
mysteriously sleepy. Her nose
was delicate and thin, and her
cheekbones high and wide,
sweeping down to a small
chin so that her face was
heart-shaped. Her mouth was

well shaped and well lipped
but abnormally small—what
used to be called a rosebud.
Her ears were very little,
without
lobes,
and
they
pressed so close to her head
that even with her hair
combed up they made no
silhouette. They were thin
flaps sealed against her head.
Cathy always had a
child's figure even after she
was grown, slender, delicate
arms and hands—tiny hands.
Her breasts never developed
very
much.
Before
her

puberty the nipples turned

inward. Her mother had to

manipulate them out when

they

became

painful

in

Cathy’s tenth year. Her body

was a boy’s body, narrow-hipped, straight-legged, but

her ankles were thin and

straight

without

being

slender. Her feet were small

and round and stubby, with

fat insteps almost like little

hoofs. She was a pretty child

and she became a pretty

woman.

Her

voice

was

huskily soft, and it could be
so sweet as to be irresistible.
But there must have been
some steel cord in her throat,
for Cathy's voice could cut
like a file when she wished.
Even as a child she had
some
quality
that
made
people look at her, then look
away, then look back at her,
troubled
at
something
foreign. Something looked
out of her eyes, and was
never there when one looked
again. She moved quietly and
talked little, but she could
enter

no

room

without

causing everyone to turn

toward her.

She made people uneasy

but not so that they wanted to

go away from her. Men and

women wanted to inspect her,

to be close to her, to try to

find

what

caused

the

disturbance she distributed so

subtly. And since this had

always been so, Cathy did not

find it strange.

Cathy was different from

other children in many ways,

but one thing in particular set

her apart. Most children

abhor difference. They want
to look, talk, dress, and act
exactly like all of the others.
If the style of dress is an
absurdity, it is pain and
sorrow to a child not to wear
that absurdity. If necklaces of
pork chops were accepted, it
would be a sad child who
could not wear pork chops.
And this slavishness to the
group normally extends into
every game, every practice,
social or otherwise. It is a
protective coloration children
utilize for their safety.
Cathy had none of this.
She never conformed in dress
or
conduct.
She
“wore

whatever she wanted to. The result was that quite often other children imitated her. As she grew older the group, the herd, which is any collection of children, began to sense what adults felt, that there was something foreign about Cathy. After a while only one person at a time associated with her. Groups of boys and girls avoided her as though she carried a nameless danger.

Cathy was a liar, but she did not lie the way most children do. Hers was no daydream lying, when the thing imagined is told and, to make it seem more real, told as real. That is just ordinary deviation

from
external
reality. I think the difference
between a lie and a story is
that a story utilizes the
trappings and appearance of
truth for the interest of the
listener as well as of the
teller. A story has in it neither
gain nor loss. But a lie is a
device for profit or escape. I
suppose if that definition is
strictly held to, then a writer
of stories is a liar—if he is
financially fortunate.
Cathy's lies were never
innocent. Their purpose was
to escape punishment, or
work, or responsibility, and
they were used for profit.
Most liars are tripped up
either because they forget

what they have told or because the lie is suddenly faced with an incontrovertible truth. But Cathy did not forget her lies, and she developed the most effective method of lying. She stayed close enough to the truth so that one could never be sure. She knew two other methods also—either to interlard her lies with truth or to tell a truth as though it were a lie. If one is accused of a lie and it turns out to be the truth, there is a backlog that will last a long time and protect a number of untruths.

Since Cathy was an only child her mother had no close contrast in the family. She thought all children were like

her own. And since all
parents are worriers she was
convinced that all her friends
had the same problems.
Cathy's father was not
so sure. He operated a small
tannery
in
a
town
in
Massachusetts, which made a
comfortable, careful living if
he worked very hard. Mr.
Ames came in contact with
other children away from his
home and he felt that Cathy
was not like other children. It
was a matter more felt than
known. He was uneasy about
his daughter but he could not
have said why.

Nearly everyone in the world has appetites and impulses, trigger emotions, islands of selfishness, lusts just beneath the surface. And most people either hold such things in check or indulge them secretly. Cathy knew not only these impulses in others but how to use them for her own gain. It is quite possible that she did not believe in any other tendencies in humans, for while she was preternaturally alert in some directions she was completely blind in others.

Cathy learned when she

was very young that sexuality

with

all

its

attendant

yearnings

and

pains,

jealousies and taboos, is the

most

disturbing

impulse

humans have. And in that day

it was even more disturbing

than it is now, because the

subject was unmentionable

and unmentioned. Everyone

concealed that little hell in

himself,

while

publicly

pretending it did not exist—

and when he was caught up in
it he was completely helpless.
Cathy learned that by the
manipulation and use of this
one part of people she could
gain and keep power over
nearly everyone. It was at
once a weapon and a threat. It
was irresistible. And since the
blind
helplessness
seems
never to have fallen on Cathy,
it is probable that she had
very little of the impulse
herself and indeed felt a
contempt for those who did.
And when you think of it in
one way, she was right.
What freedom men and
women could have, were they
not constantly tricked and

trapped and enslaved and
tortured by their sexuality!
The only drawback in that
freedom is that without it one
would not be a human. One
would be a monster.
At ten Cathy knew
something of the power of the
sex impulse and began coldly
to experiment with it. She
planned everything coldly,
foreseeing difficulties and
preparing for them.
The sex play of children
has
always
gone
on.
Everyone, I guess, who is not
abnormal has foregathered
with little girls in some dim
leafy place, in the bottom of a

manger, under a willow, in a culvert under a road—or at least has dreamed of doing so. Nearly all parents are faced with the problem sooner or later, and then the child is lucky if the parent remembers his own childhood. In the time of Cathy's childhood, however, it was harder. The parents, denying it in themselves, were horrified to find it in their children.

2

On a spring morning when with late-surviving dew the

young grass bristled under the
sun, when the warmth crept
into the ground and pushed
the yellow dandelions up,
Cathy's
mother
finished
hanging the washed clothes
on the line. The Ameses lived
on the edge of town, and
behind their house were barn
and carriage house, vegetable
garden and fenced paddock
for two horses.
Mrs. Ames remembered
having seen Cathy stroll away
toward the barn. She called
for her, and when there was
no answer she thought she
might have been mistaken.
She was about to go into the
house when she heard a

giggle from the carriage
house. “Cathy!” she called.
There was no answer. An
uneasiness came over her.
She reached back in her mind
for the sound of the giggle. It
had not been Cathy’s voice.
Cathy was not a giggler.
There is no knowing
how or why dread comes on a
parent. Of course many times
apprehension arises when
there is no reason for it at all.
And it comes most often to
the parents of only children,
parents who have indulged in
black dreams of loss.
Mrs. Ames stood still,
listening. She heard soft
secret voices and moved
quietly toward the carriage
house. The double doors were

closed. The murmur of voices came from inside, but she could not make out Cathy's voice. She made a quick stride and pulled the doors open and the bright sun crashed inside. She froze, mouth open, at what she saw. Cathy lay on the floor, her skirts pulled up. She was naked to the waist, and beside her two boys about fourteen were kneeling. The shock of the sudden light froze them too. Cathy's eyes were blank with terror. Mrs. Ames knew the boys, knew their parents. Suddenly one of the boys leaped up, darted past Mrs. Ames, and ran around the corner of the house. The other boy helplessly edged

away from the woman and
with a cry rushed through the
doorway. Mrs. Ames clutched
at him, but her fingers slipped
from his jacket and he was
gone. She could hear his
running-footsteps outside.
Mrs. Ames tried to speak
and her voice was a croaking
whisper. “Get up!”
Cathy stared blankly up
at her and made no move.
Mrs. Ames saw that Cathy’s
wrists were tied with a heavy
rope. She screamed and flung
herself down and fumbled at
the knots. She carried Cathy
into the house and put her to
bed.
The family doctor, after
he had examined Cathy,
could find no evidence that

she had been mistreated.

“You can just thank God you got there in time,” he said over and over to Mrs. Ames.

Cathy did not speak for a long time. Shock, the doctor called it. And when she did come out of the shock Cathy refused to talk. When she was questioned her eyes widened until the whites showed all around the pupils and her breathing stopped and her body grew rigid and her cheeks reddened from holding her breath.

The conference with the parents of the boys was attended by Dr. Williams. Mr. Ames was silent most of the

time. He carried the rope
which
had
been
around
Cathy's wrists. His eyes were
puzzled. There were things he
did not understand, but he did
not bring them up.
Mrs. Ames settled down
to a steady hysteria. She had
been there. She had seen. She
was the final authority. And
out of her hysteria a sadistic
devil peered. She wanted
blood. There was a kind of
pleasure in her demands for
punishment. The town, the
country, must be protected.
She put it on that basis. She
had arrived in time, thank
God. But maybe the next time

she would not; and how
would other mothers feel?
And Cathy was only ten years
old.
Punishments were more
savage then than they are
now. A man truly believed
that
the
whip
was
an
instrument of virtue. First
singly and then together the
boys were whipped, whipped-to raw cuts.
Their crime was bad
enough, but the lies proved an
evil that not even the whip
could remove. And their
defense
was
from

the
beginning ridiculous. Cathy,
they said, had started the
whole thing, and they had
each given her five cents.
They had not tied her hands.
They said they remembered
that she was playing with a
rope.
Mrs. Ames said it first
and the whole town echoed it.
“Do they mean to say she tied
her own hands? A ten-year-old child?”
If the boys had owned
up to the crime they might
have escaped some of the
punishment. Their refusal
brought a torturing rage not
only to their fathers, who did
the whipping, but to the
whole community. Both boys
were sent to a house of

correction with the approval
of their parents.
“She’s haunted by it,”
Mrs.
Ames
told
the
neighbors. “If she could only
talk about it, maybe she
would get better. But when I
ask her about it—it’s like it
came right back to her and
she goes into shock again.”
The Ameses never spoke
of it to her again. The subject
was closed. Mr. Ames very
soon forgot his haunting
reservations. He would have
felt bad if two boys were in
the house of correction for
something they did not do.
After Cathy had fully

recovered from her shock,
boys and girls watched her
from a distance and then
moved closer, fascinated by
her. She had no girl crushes,
as is usual at twelve and
thirteen. Boys did not want to
take the chance of being
ragged by their friends for
walking home from school
with her. But she exercised a
powerful effect on both boys
and girls. And if any boy
could come on her alone, he
found himself drawn to her
by a force he could neither
understand nor overcome.
She was dainty and very
sweet and her voice was low.
She went for long walks by
herself, and it was a rare walk
when some boy did not

blunder out of a woodlot and
come on her by accident. And
while
whispers
went
scurrying about, there is no
knowing what Cathy did. If
anything
happened,
only
vague whispers followed, and
this in itself was unusual at an
age when there are many
secrets and none of them kept
long enough to raise a cream.
Cathy developed a little
smile, just a hint of a smile.
She had a way of looking
sideways and down that
hinted to a lone boy of secrets
he could share.
In her father’s mind

another question stirred, and
he shoved it down deep and
felt dishonest for thinking
about it at all. Cathy had
remarkable luck in finding
things—a
gold
charm,
money, a little silken purse, a
silver cross with red stones
said to be rubies. She found
many things, and when her
father
advertised
in
the
weekly *Courier* about the
cross no one ever claimed it.
Mr.
William
Ames,
Cathy's father, was a covered

man. He rarely told the
thoughts in his mind. He
wouldn't have dared so far to
expose himself to the gaze of
his neighbors. He kept the
little flame of suspicion to
himself. It was better if he
didn't know anything, safer,
wiser,
and
much
more
comfortable. As for Cathy's
mother, she was so bound and
twisted in a cocoon of gauzy
half-lies,
warped
truth,
suggestions, all planted by
Cathy, that she would not
have known a true thing if it
had come to her.

3

Cathy grew more lovely all
the
time.
The
delicate
blooming skin, the golden
hair, the wide-set, modest,
and yet promising eyes, the
little mouth full of sweetness,
caught attention and held it.
She finished the eight grades
of grammar school with such
a good record that her parents
entered her in the small high
school, although in that time
it was not usual for a girl to
go on with her studies. But
Cathy said she wanted to be a
teacher, which delighted her
mother and father, for this
was the one profession of

dignity open to a girl of a
good but not well-to-do
family. Parents took honor
from a daughter who was a
teacher.
Cathy
was
fourteen
when she entered high school.
She had always been precious
to her parents, but with her
entrance into the rarities of
algebra and Latin she climbed
into clouds where her parents
could not follow. They had
lost her. They felt that she
was translated to a higher
order.
The teacher of Latin was
a pale intense young man
who had failed in divinity
school and yet had enough

education
to
teach
the
inevitable grammar, Caesar,
Cicero. He was a quiet young
man who warmed his sense of
failure to his bosom. Deep in
himself he felt that he had
been rejected by God, and for
cause.
For a time it was noticed
that a flame leaped in James
Grew and some force glowed
in his eyes. He was never
seen with Cathy and no
relationship
was
even
suspected.
James Grew became a
man. He walked on his toes

and sang to himself. He wrote
letters so persuasive that the
directors of his divinity
school looked favorably on
readmitting him.
And then the flame went
out. His shoulders, held so
high and square, folded
dejectedly. His eyes grew
feverish
and
his
hands
twitched. He was seen in
church at night, on his knees,
moving his lips over prayers.
He missed school and sent
word that he was ill when it
was known that he was
walking all alone in the hills
beyond the town.
One night, late, he

tapped on the door of the Ames house. Mr. Ames complained his way out of bed, lighted a candle, flung an overcoat over his nightgown, and went to the door. It was a wild and crazy-looking James Grew who stood before him, his eyes shining and his body one big shudder.

“I’ve got to see you,” he said hoarsely to Mr. Ames.

“It’s after midnight,” Mr. Ames said sternly.

“I’ve got to see you alone. Put on some clothes and come outside. I’ve got to talk to you.”

‘‘Young man, I think you’re drunk or sick. Go home and get some sleep. It’s after midnight.”

“I can’t wait. I’ve got to
talk to you.”
“Come down to the
tannery in the morning,” said
Mr. Ames, and he closed the
door firmly on the reeling
caller
and
stood
inside,
listening.
He
heard
the
wailing voice, “I can’t wait. I
can’t wait,” and then the feet
dragged slowly down the
steps.
Mr. Ames shielded the
candlelight away from his
eyes with his cupped hand
and went back to bed. He

thought he saw Cathy's door
close
very
silently,
but
perhaps
the
leaping
candlelight had fooled his
eyes, for a portiere seemed to
move too.
"What in the world?" his
wife demanded when he
came back to the bedside.
Mr. Ames didn't know
why he answered as he did—
perhaps to save discussion.
"A drunken man," he said.
"Got the wrong house."
"I don't know what the
world is coming to," said
Mrs. Ames.

As he lay in the darkness
after the light was out he saw
the green circle left in his
eyes by the candle flame, and
in its whirling, pulsing frame
he saw the frantic, beseeching
eyes of James Grew. He
didn’t go back to sleep for a
long time.
In the morning a rumor
ran
through
the
town,
distorted here and there,
added to, but by afternoon the
story clarified. The sexton
had
found
James
Grew
stretched on the floor in front

of the altar. The whole top of his head was blown off. Beside him lay a shotgun, and beside it the piece of stick with which he had pushed the trigger. Near him on the floor was a candlestick from the altar. One of the three candles was still burning. The other two had not been lighted. And on the floor were two books, the hymnal and the Book of Common Prayer, one on top of the other. The way the sexton figured it, James Grew had propped the gun barrel on the books to bring it in line with his temple. The recoil of the discharge had thrown the shotgun off the books.

A number of people

remembered having heard an
explosion
early
in
the
morning,
before
daylight.
James Grew left no letter. No
one could figure why he had
done it.
Mr. Ames' first impulse
was to go to the coroner with
his story of the midnight call.
Then he thought, What good
would it do? If I knew
anything
it
would
be
different. But I don't know a
single thing. He had a sick

feeling in his stomach. He told himself over and over that it was not his fault. How could I have helped it? I don't even know what he wanted. He felt guilty and miserable. At dinner his wife talked about the suicide and he couldn't eat. Cathy sat silent, but no more silent than usual. She ate with little dainty nips and wiped her mouth often on her napkin.

Mrs. Ames went over the matter of the body and the gun in detail. "There's one thing I meant to speak of," she said. "That drunken man who came to the door last night—could that have been young Grew?"

"No," he said quickly.

“Are you sure? Could
you see him in the dark?”
“I had a candle,” he said
sharply.
“Didn’t
look
anything like, had a big
beard.”
“No need to snap at me,”
she said. “I just wondered.”
Cathy wiped her mouth,
and when she laid the napkin
on her lap she was smiling.
Mrs. Ames turned to her
daughter. “You saw him
every day in school, Cathy.
Has he seemed sad lately?
Did you notice anything that
might mean—”
Cathy looked down at
her plate and then up. “I
thought he was sick,” she

said. “Yes, he has looked bad. Everybody was talking in school today. And somebody —I don’t remember who— said that Mr. Grew was in some kind of trouble in Boston. I didn’t hear what kind of trouble. We all liked Mr. Grew.” She wiped her lips delicately.

That was Cathy’s method. Before the next day was out everybody in town knew that James Grew had been in trouble in Boston, and no one could possibly imagine

that

Cathy

had

planted the story. Even Mrs.

Ames had forgotten where

she heard it.

4

Soon after her sixteenth

birthday a change came over

Cathy. One morning she did

not get up for school. Her

mother went into her room

and found her in bed, staring

at the ceiling. “Hurry, you’ll

be late. It’s nearly nine.”

“I’m not going.” There

was no emphasis in her voice.

“Are you sick?”

“No.”

“Then hurry, get up.”

“I’m not going.”

“You must be sick.

You've never missed a day."

"I'm

not

going

to

school," Cathy said calmly.

"I'm never going to school

again."

Her mother's mouth fell

open. "What do you mean?"

"Not ever," said Cathy

and continued to stare at the

ceiling.

"Well, we'll just see

what your father has to say

about that! With all our work

and expense, and two years

before

you

get

your

certificate!" Then she came

close and said softly, “You
aren’t thinking of getting
married?”
“No.”
“What’s
that
book
you’re hiding?”
“Here, I’m not hiding
it.”
“Oh!
Alice
in
Wonderland. You’re too big
for that.”
Cathy said, “I can get to
be *so* little you can’t even see
me.”
“What in the world are
you talking about?”
“Nobody can find me.”
Her mother said angrily,

“Stop making jokes. I don’t know what you’re thinking of. What does Miss Fancy think she is going to do?”

“I don’t know yet,” said Cathy. “I think I’ll go away.”

“Well, you just lie there, Miss Fancy, and when your father comes home he’ll have a thing or two to say to you.”

Cathy turned her head very slowly and looked at her mother.

Her eyes were expressionless and cold. And suddenly Mrs. Ames was afraid of her daughter. She went out quietly and closed the door. In her kitchen she sat down and cupped her

hands in her lap and stared
out the window at the
weathering carriage house.
Her
daughter
had
become a stranger to her. She
felt, as most parents do at one
time or another, that she was
losing control, that the bridle
put in her hands for the
governing of Cathy was
slipping through her fingers.
She did not know that she had
never had any power over
Cathy. She had been used for
Cathy's
purposes
always.
After a while Mrs. Ames put
on a bonnet and went to the
tannery. She wanted to talk to

her husband away from the house.

In the afternoon Cathy rose listlessly from her bed and spent a long time in front of the mirror.

That evening Mr. Ames, hating what he had to do, delivered a lecture to his daughter. He spoke of her duty, her obligation, her natural love for her parents. Toward the end of his speech he was aware that she was not listening to him. This made him angry and he fell into threats. He spoke of the authority God had given him over his child and of how this natural authority had been armed by the state. He had her attention now. She looked

him right in the eyes. Her
mouth smiled a little, and her
eyes did not seem to blink.
Finally he had to look away,
and this enraged him further.
He ordered her to stop her
nonsense.
Vaguely
he
threatened her with whipping
if she did not obey him.
He ended on a note of
weakness. “I want you to
promise me that you will go
to school in the morning and
stop your foolishness.”
Her
face
was
expressionless.
The
little

mouth was straight. “All
right,” she said.
Later that night Mr.
Ames said to his wife with an
assurance he did not feel,
“You see, it just needs a little
authority. Maybe we’ve been
too lax. But she has been a
good child. I guess she just
forgot who’s boss. A little
sternness
never
hurt
anybody.” He wished he were
as confident as his words.
In the morning she was
gone. Her straw traveling
basket was gone and the best
of her clothing. Her bed was
neatly made. The room was
impersonal—nothing
to

indicate that a girl had grown
up in it. There were no
pictures, no mementos, none
of the normal clutter of
growing. Cathy had never
played with dolls. The room
had no Cathy imprint.
In his way Mr. Ames
was an intelligent man. He
clapped on his derby hat and
walked quickly to the railroad
station. The station agent was
certain. Cathy had taken the
early morning train. She had
bought a ticket for Boston.
He helped Mr. Ames write a
telegram to the Boston police.
Mr. Ames bought a round-trip
ticket and caught the nine-fifty train to Boston. He was a
very good man in a crisis.
That night Mrs. Ames
sat in the kitchen with the

door closed. She was white and she gripped the table with her hands to control her shaking. The sound, first of the blows and then of the screaming, came clearly to her through the closed doors. Mr. Ames was not good at whipping because he had never done it. He lashed at Cathy's legs with the buggy whip, and when she stood quietly staring at him with calm cold eyes he lost his temper. The first blows were tentative and timid, but when she did not cry he slashed at her sides and shoulders. The whip licked and cut. In his rage he missed her several times or got too close so that the whip wrapped around her

body.

Cathy learned quickly.

She found him out and knew

him, and once she had

learned she screamed, she

writhed,

she

cried,

she

begged, and she had the

satisfaction of feeling the

blows

instantly

become

lighter.

Mr.

Ames

was

frightened at the noise and

hurt he was creating. He

stopped. Cathy dropped back

on the bed, sobbing. And if

he had looked, her father
would have seen that there
were no tears in her eyes, but
rather the muscles of her neck
were tight and there were
lumps just under her temples
where
the
jaw
muscles
knotted.
He said, “Now, will you
ever do that again?”
“No, oh, no! Forgive
me,” Cathy said. She turned
over on the bed so that her
father could not see the
coldness in her face.
“See you remember who
you are. And don’t forget
what I am.”
Cathy’s voice caught.

She produced a dry sob. “I won’t forget,” she said.

In the kitchen Mrs. Ames wrestled her hands. Her husband put his fingers on her shoulder.

“I hated to do it,” he said. “I had to. And I think it did her good. She seems like a changed girl to me. Maybe we haven’t bent the twig enough. We’ve spared the rod. Maybe we were wrong.”

And he knew that although his wife had insisted on the whipping, although she had forced him to whip Cathy, she hated him for doing it.

Despair settled over him.

5

There seemed no doubt that it was what Cathy needed. As

Mr. Ames said, “It kind of opened her up.” She had always been tractable but now she became thoughtful too. In the weeks that followed she helped her mother in the kitchen and offered to help more than was needed. She started to knit an afghan for her mother, a large project that would take months. Mrs. Ames told the neighbors about it. “She has such a fine color sense—rust and yellow. She’s finished three squares already.”

For her father Cathy kept a ready smile. She hung up his hat when he came in

and turned his chair properly
under the light to make it
easy for him to read.
Even in school she was
changed. Always she had
been a good student, but now
she began to make plans for
the future. She talked to the
principal about examinations
for her teaching certificate,
perhaps a year early. And the
principal looked over her
record and thought she might
well try it with hope of
success. He called on Mr.
Ames at the tannery to
discuss it.
“She didn’t tell us any of
this,” Mr. Ames said proudly.
“Well,
maybe
I

shouldn’t have told you. I hope I haven’t ruined a surprise.”

Mr. and Mrs. Ames felt that they had blundered on some magic which solved all of their problems. They put it down to an unconscious wisdom which comes only to parents. “I never saw such a change in a person in my life,” Mr. Ames said.

“But she was always a good child,” said his wife.

“And have you noticed how pretty she’s getting? Why, she’s almost beautiful. Her cheeks have so much color.”

“I don’t think she’ll be teaching school long with her looks,” said Mr. Ames.

It was true that Cathy

glowed. The childlike smile
was constantly on her lips
while she went about her
preparations. She had all the
time in the world. She
cleaned the cellar and stuffed
papers all around the edges of
the foundation to block the
draft. When the kitchen door
squeaked she oiled the hinges
and then the lock that turned
too hard, and while she had
the oil can out she oiled the
front-door hinges too. She
made it her duty to keep the
lamps
filled
and
their
chimneys clean. She invented
a
way

of
dipping
the
chimneys in a big can of
kerosene she had in the
basement.
“You’d have to see it to
believe it,” her father said.
And it wasn’t only at home
either. She braved the smell
of the tannery to visit her
father. She was just past
sixteen and of course he
thought of her as a baby. He
was amazed at her questions
about business.
“She’s
smarter
than
some men I could name,” he
told his foreman. “She might
be running the business

someday.”

She was interested not

only in the tanning processes

but in the business end too.

Her father explained the

loans, the payments, the

billing, and the payroll. He

showed her how to open the

safe and was pleased that

after

the

first

try

she

remembered the combination.

“The way I look at it is

this,” he told his wife.

“We’ve all of us got a little of

the Old Nick in us. I wouldn’t

want a child that didn’t have

some gumption. The way I

see it, that’s just a kind of

energy. If you just check it and keep it in control, why, it will go in the right direction."

Cathy mended all of her clothes and put her things in order.

One day in May she came home from school and went directly to her knitting needles. Her mother was dressed to go out. "I have to go to the Altar Guild," she said. "It's about the cake sale next week. I'm chairman. Your father wondered if you would go by the bank and pick up the money for the payroll and take it to the tannery. I told him about the cake sale so I can't do it."

"I'd like to," said Cathy. "They'll have the money

ready for you in a bag," said Mrs. Ames, and she hurried out.

Cathy worked quickly but without hurry. She put on an old apron to cover her clothes. In the basement she found a jelly jar with a top and carried it out to the carriage house where the tools were kept. In the chickenyard she caught a little pullet, took it to the block and chopped its head off, and held the writhing neck over the jelly jar until it was full of blood. Then she carried the quivering pullet to the manure pile and buried it deep. Back in the kitchen she took off the apron and put it in the stove and poked the

coals until a flame sprang up
on the cloth. She washed her
hands and inspected her shoes
and stockings and wiped a
dark spot from the toe of her
right shoe. She looked at her
face in the mirror. Her cheeks
were bright with color and
her eyes shone and her mouth
turned
up
in
its
small
childlike smile. On her way
out she hid the jelly jar under
the lowest part of the kitchen
steps. Her mother had not
been gone even ten minutes.
Cathy walked lightly,
almost dancingly around the
house and into the street. The

trees were breaking into leaf
and a few early dandelions
were in yellow flower on the
lawns. Cathy walked gaily
toward the center of the town
where the bank was. And she
was so fresh and pretty that
people walking turned and
looked after her when she had
passed.

6

The fire broke out at about
three o’clock in the morning.
It
rose,
flared,
roared,
crashed, and crumbled in on
itself almost before anyone
noticed
it.
When

the
volunteers ran up, pulling
their hose cart, there was
nothing for them to do but
wet down the roofs of the
neighboring houses to keep
them from catching fire.
The Ames house had
gone up like a rocket. The
volunteers and the ordinary
audience fires attract looked
around at the lighted faces,
trying to see Mr. and Mrs.
Ames and their daughter. It
came to everyone at once that
they were not there. People
gazed at the broad ember-bed
and saw themselves and their
children in there, and hearts
rose up and pumped against
throats. The volunteers began
to dump water on the fire

almost as though they might
even so late save some
corporeal part of the family.
The
frightened
talk
ran
through the town that the
whole Ames family had
burned.
By sunrise everyone in
town was tight-packed about
the smoking black pile. Those
in front had to shield their
faces against the heat. The
volunteers continued to pump
water to cool off the charred
mess. By noon the coroner
was able to throw wet planks
down and probe with a
crowbar among the sodden
heaps of charcoal. Enough

remained of Mr. and Mrs.
Ames to make sure there
were
two
bodies.
Near
neighbors pointed out the
approximate
place
where
Cathy’s room had been, but
although the coroner and any
number of helpers worked
over the debris with a garden
rake they could find no tooth
or bone.
The
chief
of
the
volunteers meanwhile had
found the doorknobs and lock

of the kitchen door. He
looked at the blackened
metal, puzzled, but not quite
knowing what puzzled him.
He borrowed the coroner's
rake and worked furiously.
He went to the place where
the front door had been and
raked until he found that lock,
crooked and half melted. By
now he had his own small
crowd,
who
demanded,
"What are you looking for,
George?" And "What did you
find, George?"
Finally the coroner came
over to him. "What's on your
mind, George?"
"No keys in the locks,"
the chief said uneasily.

“Maybe they fell out.”

“How?”

“Maybe they melted.”

“The locks didn’t melt.”

“Maybe Bill Ames took

them out.”

“On the inside?” He held

up his trophies. Both bolts

stuck out.

Since the owner’s house

was burned and the owner

ostensibly burned with it, the

employees of the tannery, out

of respect, did not go to work.

They hung around the burned

house, offering to help in any

way they could, feeling

official and generally getting

in the way.

It wasn’t until afternoon

that

Joel

Robinson,
the
foreman, went down to the
tannery. He found the safe
open and papers scattered all
over the floor. A broken
window showed how the thief
had entered.
Now
the
whole
complexion changed. So, it
was not an accident. Fear
took the place of excitement
and
sorrow,
and
anger,
brother of fear, crept in. The
crowd began to spread.
They had not far to go.
In the carriage house there

was what is called “signs of a
struggle”—in this case a
broken
box,
a
shattered
carriage lamp, scraped marks
in the dust, and straw on the
floor. The onlookers might
not have known these as signs
of a struggle had there not
been a quantity of blood on
the floor.
The
constable
took
control.
This
was
his
province. He pushed and
herded everyone out of the

carriage house. “Want to gum
up all the clues?” he shouted
at them. “Now you all stay
clear outside the door.”
He searched the room,
picked up something, and in a
corner found something else.
He came to the door, holding
his discoveries in his hands—
a blood-splattered blue hair
ribbon and a cross with red
stones. “Anybody recognize
these here?” he demanded.
In a small town where
everyone knows everyone it
is
almost
impossible
to
believe that one of your
acquaintance could murder
anyone. For that reason, if the

signs are not pretty strong in
a particular direction, it must
be some dark stranger, some
wanderer from the outside
world where such things
happen. Then the hobo camps
are
raided
and
vagrants
brought in and hotel registers
scrutinized. Every man who
is not known is automatically
suspected.
It
was
May,
remember, and the wandering
men had only recently taken
to the roads, now that the
warming months let them
spread their blankets by any

water course. And the gypsies

were

out

too—a

whole

caravan less than five miles

away. And what a turning out

those poor gypsies got!

The ground for miles

around was searched for new-turned earth, and likely pools

were dragged for Cathy's

body. "She was so pretty,"

everyone said, and they

meant that in themselves they

could see a reason for

carrying Cathy off. At length

a bumbling hairy half-wit was

brought in for questioning.

He was a fine candidate for

hanging because not only did

he have no alibis, he could

not remember what he had

done at anytime in his life.
His feeble mind sensed that
these
questioners
wanted
something of him and, being
a friendly creature, he tried to
give it to them. When a baited
and set question was offered
to him, he walked happily
into the trap and was glad
when the constable looked
happy. He tried manfully to
please these superior beings.
There was something very
nice about him. The only
trouble with his confession
was that he confessed too
much in too many directions.
Also, he had constantly to be
reminded of what he was
supposed to have done. He

was really pleased when he
was indicted by a stern and
frightened jury. He felt that at
last
he
amounted
to
something.
There were, and are,
some men who become
judges whose love for the law
and for its intention of
promoting justice has the
quality of love for a woman.
Such a man presided at the
examination before plea—a
man so pure and good that he
canceled
out
a
lot
of

wickedness with his life. Without the prompting the culprit was used to, his confession was nonsense. The judge questioned him and found out that although the suspect was trying to follow instructions he simply could not remember what he had done, whom he had killed, how or why. The judge sighed wearily and motioned him out of the courtroom and crooked his fingers at the constable.

“Now look here, Mike,” he said, “you shouldn’t do a thing like that. If that poor fellow had been just a little smarter you might have got him hanged.”

“He said he did it.” The

constable’s feelings were hurt
because
he
was
a
conscientious man.
“He
would
have
admitted climbing the golden
stairs and cutting St. Peter’s
throat with a bowling ball,”
the judge said. “Be more
careful, Mike. The law was
designed to save, not to
destroy.”
In
all
such
local
tragedies time works like a
damp brush on water color.

The sharp edges blur, the
ache goes out of it, the colors
melt together, and from the
many separated lines a solid
gray
emerges.
Within
a
month it was not so necessary
to hang someone, and within
two months nearly everybody
discovered that there wasn’t
any real evidence against
anyone. If it had not been for
Cathy’s murder, fire and
robbery might have been a
coincidence. Then it occurred
to
people
that
without
Cathy’s body you couldn’t

prove anything even though you thought she was dead. Cathy left a scent of sweetness behind her.

Chapter 9

1

Mr. Edwards carried on his business of whoremaster in an orderly and unemotional way. He maintained his wife and his two well-mannered children in a good house in a good neighborhood in Boston. The children, two boys, were entered on the books at Groton when they were infants.

Mrs. Edwards kept a dustless house and controlled her servants. There were of

course many times when Mr. Edwards had to be away from home on business, but he managed to live an amazingly domestic life and to spend more evenings at home than you could imagine. He ran his business with a public accountant's neatness and accuracy. He was a large and powerful man, running a little to fat in his late forties, and yet in surprisingly good condition for a time when a man wanted to be fat if only to prove he was a success. He had invented his business—the circuit route through the small towns, the

short stay of each girl, the discipline, the percentages. He felt his way along and made few mistakes. He never sent his girls into the cities. He could handle the hungry constables of the villages, but he had respect for the experienced and voracious big city police. His ideal stand was a small town with a mortgaged hotel and no amusements, one where his only competition came from wives and an occasional wayward girl. At this time he had ten units. Before he died at sixty-seven of strangulation on a chicken bone, he had groups of four girls in each of thirty-three small towns in New England. He was better

than well fixed—he was rich;
and the manner of his death
was in itself symbolic of
success and well-being.
At the present time the
institution of the whorehouse
seems to a certain extent to be
dying out. Scholars have
various reasons to give. Some
say that the decay of morality
among girls has dealt the
whorehouse its deathblow.
Others,
perhaps
more
idealistic, maintain that police
supervision on an increased
scale is driving the houses out
of existence. In the late days
of the last century and the
early part of this one, the
whorehouse was an accepted

if

not

openly

discussed

institution. It was said that its

existence protected decent

women. An unmarried man

could go to one of these

houses and evacuate the

sexual energy which was

making him uneasy and at the

same

time

maintain

the

popular attitudes about the

purity and loveliness of

women. It was a mystery, but

then

there

are

many

mysterious things in our
social thinking.
These houses ranged
from palaces filled with gold
and velvet to the crummiest
cribs where the stench would
drive a pig away. Every once
in a while a story would start
about how young girls were
stolen and enslaved by the
controllers of the industry,
and perhaps many of the
stories were true. But the
great majority of whores
drifted into their profession
through
laziness
and
stupidity. In the houses they
had no responsibility. They
were fed and clothed and
taken care of until they were

too old, and then they were kicked out. This ending was no deterrent. No one who is young is ever going to be old. Now and then a smart girl came into the profession, but she usually moved up to better things. She got a house of her own or worked successfully at blackmail or married a rich man. There was even a special name for the smart ones. They were grandly called courtesans. Mr. Edwards had no trouble either in recruiting or in controlling his girls. If a girl was not properly stupid, he threw her out. He did not want very pretty girls either. Some local young man might fall in love with a pretty

whore and there would be
hell to pay. When any of his
girls became pregnant they
had the choice of leaving or
of being aborted so brutally
that a fair proportion died. In
spite of this the girls usually
chose abortion.
It
was
not
always
smooth
sailing
for
Mr.
Edwards. He did have his
problems. At the time of
which I am telling you he had
been subjected to a series of
misfortunes. A train wreck
had killed off two units of

four girls each. Another of his
units he lost to conversion
when a small-town preacher
suddenly caught fire and
began igniting the townsfolk
with
his
sermons.
The
swelling congregation had to
move out of the church and
into the fields. Then, as
happens
so
often,
the
preacher turned over his hole-card, the sure-fire card. He
predicted the date of the end
of the world, and the whole
county moved bleating in on
him. Mr. Edwards went to the
town, took the heavy quirt

from
his
suitcase,
and
whipped
the
girls
unmercifully;
instead
of
seeing the thing his way, the
girls
begged
for
more
whipping to wipe out their
fancied sins. He gave up in
disgust, took their clothes,
and went back to Boston. The
girls
achieved
a

certain
prominence when they went
naked to the camp meeting to
confess and testify. That is
how Mr. Edwards happened
to
be
interviewing
and
recruiting numbers of girls
instead of picking one up here
and there. He had three units
to rebuild from the ground.
I don’t know how Cathy
Ames
heard
about
Mr.
Edwards. Perhaps a hack
driver told her. The word got
around when a girl really
wanted

to

know.

Mr.

Edwards had not had a good

morning when she came into

his office. The pain in his

stomach he ascribed to a

halibut chowder his wife had

given him for supper the

night before. He had been up

all night. The chowder had

blown both ways and he still

felt weak and crampy.

For this reason he did

not take in all at once the girl

who called herself Catherine

Amesbury. She was far too

pretty for his business. Her

voice was low and throaty,

she

was

slight,

almost
delicate, and her skin was
lovely. In a word she was not
Mr. Edwards' kind of girl at
all. If he had not been weak
he would have rejected her
instantly. But while he did
not look at her very closely
during
the
routine
questioning, mostly about
relatives who might cause
trouble, something in Mr.
Edwards' body began to feel
her. Mr. Edwards was not a
concupiscent
man,
and
besides he never mixed his
professional life with his
private

pleasures.

His

reaction startled him. He

looked up, puzzled, at the

girl, and her eyelids dipped

sweetly and mysteriously,

and

there

was

just

a

suggestion of a sway on her

lightly padded hips. Her little

mouth wore a cat smile. Mr.

Edwards leaned forward at

his desk, breathing heavily.

He realized that he wanted

this one for his own.

“I can’t understand why

a girl like you—” he began,

and fell right into the oldest

conviction in the world—that

the girl you are in love with
can’t possibly be anything but
true and honest.
“My father is dead,”
Catherine
said
modestly.
“Before he died he had let
things go to pieces. We didn’t
know
he
had
borrowed
money on the farm. And I
can’t let the bank take it away
from my mother. The shock
would kill her.” Catherine’s
eyes dimmed with tears. “I
thought maybe I could make
enough to keep up the
interest.”
If ever Mr. Edwards had

a chance it was now. And
indeed a little warning buzz
did sound in his brain, but it
was not loud enough. About
eighty per cent of the girls
who came to him needed
money to pay off a mortgage.
And Mr. Edwards made it an
unvarying rule not to believe
anything his girls said at any
time, beyond what they had
for
breakfast,
and
they
sometimes lied about that.
And here he was, a big, fat,
grown-up
whoremaster,
leaning his stomach against
his desk while his cheeks
darkened with blood and

excited chills ran up his legs
and thighs.
Mr.
Edwards
heard
himself saying, “Well now,
my dear, let’s talk this over.
Maybe we can figure some
way for you to get the interest
money.” And this to a girl
who had simply asked for a
job as a whore—or had she?

2

Mrs.
Edwards
was
persistently if not profoundly
religious. She spent a great
part of her time with the
mechanics of her church,
which did not leave her time
for either its background or

its effects. To her, Mr. Edwards was in the importing business, and even if she had known—which she probably did—what business he was really in, she would not have believed it. And this is another mystery. Her husband had always been to her a coldly thoughtful man who made few and dutiful physical demands on her. If he had never been warm, he had never been cruel either. Her dramas and her emotions had to do with the boys, with the vestry, and with food. She was content with her life and thankful. When her husband's

disposition
began
to
disintegrate, causing him to
be restless and snappish, to sit
staring and then to rush out of
the house in a nervous rage,
she ascribed it first to his
stomach and then to business
reverses. When by accident
she came upon him in the
bathroom, sitting on the toilet
and crying softly to himself,
she knew he was a sick man.
He tried quickly to cover his
red, brimming eyes from her
scrutiny. When neither herb
teas nor physics cured him
she was helpless.
If in all the years Mr.
Edwards had heard about
anyone like himself he would

have

laughed.

For

Mr.

Edwards, as cold-blooded a

whoremaster as ever lived,

had

fallen

hopelessly,

miserably

in

love

with

Catherine

Amesbury.

He

rented a sweet little brick

house for her and then gave it

to her. He bought her every

imaginable

luxury,

overdecorated the house, kept

it overwarm. The carpeting
was too deep and the walls
were crowded with heavy
framed pictures.
Mr. Edwards had never
experienced such misery. As
a matter of business he had
learned
so
much
about
women that he did not trust
one for a second. And since
he deeply loved Catherine
and love requires trust, he
was
torn
to
quivering
fragments by his emotion. He
had to trust her and at the
same time he did not trust

her. He tried to buy her loyalty with presents and with money. When he was away from her, he tortured himself with the thought of other men slipping into her house. He hated to leave Boston to check up on his units because this would leave Catherine alone. To a certain extent he began to neglect his business. It was his first experience with this kind of love and it nearly killed him.

One thing Mr. Edwards did not know, and could not know because Catherine would not permit it, was that she was faithful to him in the sense that she did not receive

or visit other men. To Catherine, Mr. Edwards was as cold a business proposition as his units were to him. And as he had his techniques, so had she hers. Once she had him, which was very soon, she managed always to seem slightly dissatisfied. She gave him an impression of restlessness, as though she might take flight at any moment. When she knew he was going to visit her, she made it a point to be out and to come in glowing as from some incredible experience. She complained a good deal about the difficulties of

avoiding the lecherous looks
and touches of men in the
street who could not keep
away from her. Several times
she ran frightened into the
house, having barely escaped
a man who had followed her.
When she would return in the
late afternoon and find him
waiting for her she would
explain,
“Why,
I
was
shopping. I have to go
shopping, you know.” And
she made it sound like a lie.
In their sexual relations
she convinced him that the
result
was
not

quite
satisfactory to her, that if he
were a better man he could
release
a
flood
of
unbelievable reaction in her.
Her method was to keep him
continually off balance. She
saw with satisfaction his
nerves begin to go, his hands
take to quivering, his loss of
weight, and the wild glazed
look in his eyes. And when
she delicately sensed the near
approach of insane, punishing
rage, she sat in his lap and
soothed him and made him
believe for a moment in her
innocence.
She

could
convince him.
Catherine
wanted
money, and she set about
getting it as quickly and as
easily as she could. When she
had successfully reduced him
to a pulp, and Catherine knew
exactly when the time had
come, she began to steal from
him. She went through his
pockets and took any large
bills she found. He didn’t
dare accuse her for fear she
would go away. The presents
of jewelry he gave her
disappeared, and although she
said she had lost them he
knew they had been sold. She
padded the grocery bills,
added to the prices of clothes.

He could not bring himself to stop it. She did not sell the house but she mortgaged it for every penny she could get.

One evening his key did not fit the lock of the front door.

She answered his pounding after a long time. Yes, she had changed the locks because she had lost her key. She was afraid, living alone. Anyone could get in. She would get him another key—but she never did. He always had to ring the bell after that, and sometimes it took a long time for her to answer, and at other times his

ring was not answered at all. There was no way for him to know whether she was at home or not. Mr. Edwards had her followed—and she did not know how often.

Mr. Edwards was essentially a simple man, but even a simple man has complexities which are dark and twisted. Catherine was clever, but even a clever woman misses some of the strange corridors in a man. She made only one bad slip, and she had tried to avoid that one. As was proper, Mr. Edwards had stocked the pretty little nest with champagne. Catherine

had from the first refused to
touch it.
“It makes me sick,” she
explained. “I’ve tried it and I
can’t drink it.”
“Nonsense,” he said.
“Just have one glass. It can’t
hurt you.”
“No, thank you. No. I
can’t drink it.”
Mr. Edwards thought of
her reluctance as a delicate, a
ladylike quality. He had never
insisted until one evening
when it occurred to him that
he knew nothing about her.
Wine
might
loosen
her
tongue. The more he thought
of it, the better the idea

seemed to him.

“It’s not friendly of you

not to have a glass with me.”

“I tell you, it doesn’t

agree with me.”

“Nonsense.”

“I tell you I don’t want

it.”

“This is silly,” he said.

“Do you want me to be angry

with you?”

“No.”

“Then drink a glass.”

“I don’t want it.”

“Drink it.” He held a

glass for her, and she

retreated from it.

“You don’t know. It’s

not good for me.”

“Drink it.”

She took the glass and

poured it down and stood

still, quivering, seeming to
listen. The blood flowed to
her
cheeks.
She
poured
another glass for herself and
another. Her eyes became set
and cold. Mr. Edwards felt a
fear of her. Something was
happening to her which
neither she nor he could
control.
“I didn’t want to do it.
Remember that,” she said
calmly.
“Maybe you’d better not
have any more.”
She laughed and poured
herself another glass. “It
doesn’t matter now,” she
said. “More won’t make

much difference.”

“It’s nice to have a glass

or so,” he said uneasily.

She spoke to him softly.

“You fat slug,” she said.

“What do you know about

me? Do you think I can’t read

every rotten thought you ever

had? Want me to tell you?

You wonder where a nice girl

like me learned tricks. I’ll tell

you. I learned them in cribs—

you

hear?—cribs.

I’ve

worked in places you never

even heard of—four years.

Sailors brought me little

tricks from Port Said. I know

every nerve in your lousy

body and I can use them.”

“Catherine,”

he
protested, “you don’t know
what you’re saying.”
“I could see it. You
thought I would talk. Well,
I’m talking.”
She advanced slowly
toward him, and Mr. Edwards
overcame his impulse to edge
away. He was afraid of her
but he sat still. Directly in
front of him she drank the last
champagne in her glass,
delicately struck the rim on
the table, and jammed the
ragged edge against his
cheek.
And then he did run
from the house and he could
hear her laughing as he went.

3

Love to a man like Mr.

Edwards
is
a
crippling
emotion.
It
ruined
his
judgment,
canceled
his
knowledge, weakened him.
He told himself that she was
hysterical and tried to believe
it, and it was made easier for
him
by
Catherine.
Her
outbreak had terrified her,
and for a time she made every
effort to restore his sweet

picture of her.

A man so painfully in
love is capable of self-torture
beyond belief. Mr. Edwards
wanted with all his heart to
believe in her goodness, but
he was forced not to, as much
by his own particular devil as
by her outbreak. Almost
instinctively he went about
learning the truth and at the
same time disbelieved it. He
knew, for instance, that she
would not put her money in a
bank. One of his employees,
using a complicated set of
mirrors, found out the place
in the cellar of the little brick
house where she did keep it.
One day a clipping came
from
the

agency

he

employed. It was an old

newspaper account of a fire

from a small-town weekly.

Mr. Edwards studied it. His

chest and stomach turned to

molten metal and a redness

glowed in his head behind his

eyes. There was real fear

mixed up in his love, and the

precipitate from the mixing of

these two is cruelty. He

staggered dizzily to his office

couch and lay face down, his

forehead against the cool

black leather. For a time he

hung

suspended,

hardly

breathing. Gradually his brain

cleared. His mouth tasted

salty, and there was a great
ache
of
anger
in
his
shoulders. But he was calm
and his mind cut its intention
through time like the sharp
beam of a searchlight through
a dark room. He moved
slowly, checking his suitcase
just as he always did when he
started out to inspect his units
—clean shirts and underwear,
a nightgown and slippers, and
the heavy quirt with the lash
curving around the end of the
suitcase.
He moved heavily up the
little garden in front of the
brick house and rang the bell.

Catherine answered it immediately. She had on her coat and hat.

“Oh!” she said. “What a shame! I must go out for a while.”

Mr. Edwards put down his suitcase. “No,” he said.

She studied him.

Something was changed. He lumbered past her and went down into the cellar.

“Where are you going?”

Her voice was shrill.

He did not reply. In a moment he came up again, carrying a small oak box. He opened his suitcase and put the box inside.

“That’s mine,” she said

softly.

“I know.”

“What are you up to?”

“I thought we’d go for a

little trip.”

“Where? I can’t go.”

“Little

town

in

Connecticut. I have some

business there. You told me

once you wanted to work.

You’re going to work.”

“I don’t want to now.

You can’t make me. Why, I’ll

call the police!”

He smiled so horribly

that she stepped back from

him.

His

temples

were

thudding with blood. “Maybe you’d rather go to your home town,” he said. “They had a big fire there several years ago. Do you remember that fire?”

Her eyes probed and searched him, seeking a soft place, but his eyes were flat and hard. “What do you want me to do?” she asked quietly.

“Just come for a little trip with me. You said you wanted to work.”

She could think of only one plan. She must go along with him and wait for a chance. A man couldn’t always watch. It would be dangerous to thwart him now —best go along with it and wait. That always worked. It

always had. But his words had given Catherine real fear. In the small town they got off the train at dusk, walked down its one dark street, and on out into the country. Catherine was wary and watchful. She had no access to his plan. In her purse she had a thin-bladed knife.

Mr. Edwards thought he knew what he intended to do. He meant to whip her and put her in one of the rooms at the inn, whip her and move her to another town, and so on until she was of no use any more. Then he would throw her out. The local constable would see to it that she did not run away. The knife did not

bother him. He knew about
that.
The first thing he did
when they stopped in a
private place between a stone
wall and a fringe of cedars
was to jerk the purse from her
hand and throw it over the
wall. That took care of the
knife. But he didn't know
about himself, because in all
his life he had never been in
love with a woman. He
thought he only meant to
punish her. After two slashes
the quirt was not enough. He
dropped it on the ground and
used his fists. His breathing
came out in squealing whines.
Catherine did her best
not to fall into panic. She
tried to duck his threshing

fists or at least to make them
ineffective, but at last fear
overcame her and she tried to
run. He leaped at her and
brought her down, and by
then his fists were not
enough. His frantic hand
found a stone on the ground
and his cold control was burst
through with a red roaring
wave.
Later he looked down on
her beaten face. He listened
for her heartbeat and could
hear
nothing
over
the
thumping of his own. Two
complete
and
separate

thoughts ran in his mind. One said, “Have to bury her, have to dig a hole and put her in it.” And the other cried like a child, “I can’t stand it. I couldn’t bear to touch her.”

Then
the
sickness
that
follows rage overwhelmed him. He ran from the place, leaving his suitcase, leaving the quirt, leaving the oak box of money. He blundered away in the dusk, wondering only where he could hide his sickness for a while.

No question was ever asked of him. After a time of sickness to which his wife ministered tenderly, he went

back to his business and
never again let the insanity of
love come near him. A man
who
can’t
learn
from
experience is a fool, he said.
Always afterward he had a
kind of fearful respect for
himself. He had never known
that the impulse to kill was in
him.
That he had not killed
Catherine was an accident.
Every
blow
had
been
intended to crush her. She
was a long time unconscious
and

a

long

time

half-conscious. She realized her

arm was broken and that she

must find help if she wanted

to live. Wanting to live forced

her to drag herself along the

dark road, looking for help.

She turned in at a gate and

almost made the steps of the

house before she fainted. The

roosters were crowing in the

chickenhouse and a gray rim

of dawn lay on the east.

Chapter 10

1

When two men live together

they usually maintain a kind

of shabby neatness out of

incipient rage at each other.

Two men alone are constantly

on the verge of fighting, and they know it. Adam Trask had not been home long before the tensions began to build up. The brothers saw too much of each other and not enough of anyone else. For a few months they were busy getting Cyrus's money in order and out at interest.

They traveled together to Washington to look at the grave, good stone and on top an iron star with seal and a hole on the top in which to insert the stick for a little flag on Decoration Day. The brothers stood by the grave a long time, then they went away and they didn't

mention Cyrus.

If

Cyrus

had

been

dishonest he had done it well.

No one asked questions about

the money. But the subject

was on Charles' mind.

Back on the farm Adam

asked him, "Why don't you

buy

some

new

clothes?

You're a rich man. You act

like you're afraid to spend a

penny."

"I am," said Charles.

"Why?"

"I might have to give it

back."

“Still harping on that? If
there was anything wrong,
don’t you think we’d have
heard about it by now?”
“I don’t know,” said
Charles. “I’d rather not talk
about it.”
But that night he brought
up the subject again. “There’s
one thing bothers me,” he
began.
“About the money?”
“Yes, about the money.
If you make that much money
there’s bound to be a mess.”
“How do you mean?”
“Well,
papers
and
account books and bills of
sale, notes, figuring—well,
we went through Father’s

things and there wasn't none
of that."
"Maybe he burned it
up."
"Maybe he did," said
Charles.
The brothers lived by a
routine
established
by
Charles, and he never varied
it. Charles awakened on the
stroke of four-thirty as surely
as though the brass pendulum
of the clock had nudged him.
He was awake, in fact, a split
second before four-thirty. His
eyes were open and had
blinked once before the high
gong struck. For a moment he
lay still, looking up into the
darkness and scratching his

stomach. Then he reached to
the table beside his bed and
his hand fell exactly on the
block of sulphur matches
lying there. His fingers pulled
a match free and struck it on
the side of the block. The
sulphur burned its little blue
bead before the wood caught.
Charles lighted the candle
beside his bed. He threw back
his blanket and got up. He
wore long gray underwear
that bagged over his knees
and hung loose around his
ankles. Yawning, he went to
the door, opened it, and
called,
“Half-past
four,
Adam. Time to get up. Wake
up.”

Adam's
voice
was
muffled. "Don't you ever
forget?"
"It's time to get up."
Charles slipped his legs into
his pants and hunched them
up over his hips. "You don't
have to get up," he said.
"You're a rich man. You can
lay in bed all day."
"So are you. But we still
get up before daylight."
"You don't have to get
up," Charles repeated. "But if
you're going to farm, you'd
better farm."
Adam said ruefully, "So
we're going to buy more land
so we can do more work."
"Come off it," said

Charles. “Go back to bed if you want to.”

Adam said, “I bet you couldn’t sleep if you stayed in bed. You know what I bet? I bet you get up because you want to, and then you take credit for it—like taking credit for six fingers.”

Charles went into the kitchen and lighted the lamp. “You can’t lay in bed and run a farm,” he said, and he knocked the ashes through the grate of the stove and tore some paper over the exposed coals and blew until the flames started.

Adam was watching him through the door.

“You
wouldn’t use a match,” he
said.
Charles turned angrily.
“You mind your own goddam
business. Stop picking at
me.”
“All right,” said Adam.
“I will. And maybe my
business isn’t here.”
“That’s up to you. Any
time you want to get out, you
go right ahead.”
The quarrel was silly but
Adam couldn’t stop it. His
voice went on without his
willing it, making angry and
irritating
words.
“You’re
damn right I’ll go when I
want,” he said. “This is my

place as much as yours.”

“Then why don’t you do

some work on it?”

“Oh, Lord!” Adam said.

“What are we fussing about?

Let’s not fuss.”

“I don’t want trouble,”

said Charles. He scooped

lukewarm mush into two

bowls and spun them on the

table.

The brothers sat down.

Charles buttered a slice of

bread, gouged out a knifeful

of jam, and spread it over the

butter. He dug butter for his

second slice and left a slop of

jam on the butter roll.

“Goddam it, can’t you

wipe your knife? Look at that

butter!”

Charles laid his knife

and the bread on the table and
placed his hands palm down
on either side. “You better get
off the place,” he said.
Adam got up. “I’d rather
live in a pigsty,” he said, and
he walked out of the house.

2

It was eight months before
Charles
saw
him
again.
Charles came in from work
and found Adam sloshing
water on his hair and face
from the kitchen bucket.
“Hello,” said Charles.
“How are you?”
“Fine,” said Adam.
“Where’d you go?”
“Boston.”

“No place else?”

“No. Just looked at the

city.”

The brothers settled back

to their old life, but each took

precautions against anger. In

a way each protected the

other and so saved himself.

Charles, always the early

riser, got breakfast ready

before he awakened Adam.

And Adam kept the house

clean and started a set of

books on the farm. In this

guarded way they lived for

two

years

before

their

irritation grew beyond control

again.

On a winter evening

Adam looked up from his
account book. “It’s nice in
California,” he said. “It’s nice
in the winter. And you can
raise anything there.”
“Sure you can raise it.
But when you got it, what are
you going to do with it?”
“How
about
wheat?
They raise a lot of wheat in
California.”
“The rust will get to it,”
said Charles.
“What makes you so
sure? Look, Charles, things
grow so fast in California
they say you have to plant
and step back quick or you’ll
get knocked down.”
Charles said, “Why the

hell don’t you go there? I’ll buy you out any time you say.”

Adam was quiet then, but in the morning while he combed his hair and peered in the small mirror he began it again.

“They don’t have any winter in California,” he said. “It’s just like spring all the time.”

“I like the winter,” said Charles.

Adam came toward the stove. “Don’t be cross,” he said.

“Well, stop picking at me. How many eggs?”

“Four,” said Adam.

Charles placed seven eggs on top of the warming

oven and built his fire
carefully of small pieces of
kindling
until
it
burned
fiercely. He put the skillet
down next to the flame. His
sullenness left him as he fried
the bacon.
“Adam,” he said, “I
don’t know whether you
notice it, but it seems like
every other word you say is
California. Do you really
want to go?”
Adam chuckled. “That’s
what I’m trying to figure
out,” he said. “I don’t know.
It’s like getting up in the
morning. I don’t want to get
up but I don’t want to stay in

bed either.”

“You sure make a fuss

about it.” said Charles.

Adam went on, “Every

morning in the army that

damned bugle would sound.

And I swore to God if I ever

got out I would sleep till noon

every day. And here I get up

a half-hour before reveille.

Will you tell me, Charles,

what in hell we’re working

for?”

“You can’t lay in bed

and run a farm,” said Charles.

He stirred the hissing bacon

around with a fork.

“Take a look at it,”

Adam

said

earnestly.

“Neither one of us has got a

chick or a child, let alone a wife. And the way we're going it don't look like we ever will. We don't have time to look around for a wife. And here we're figuring to add the Clark place to ours if the price is right. What for?"

"It's a damn fine piece," said Charles. "The two of them together would make one of the best farms in this section. Say! You thinking of getting married?"

"No. And that's what I'm talking about. Come a few years and we'll have the finest farm in this section. Two lonely old farts working our tails off. Then one of us will die off and the fine farm will belong to one lonely old

fart, and then he'll die off—"

"What the hell are you

talking

about?"

Charles

demanded. "Fellow can't get

comfortable. You make me

itch. Get it out—what's on

your mind?"

"I'm not having any

fun," said Adam. "Or anyway

I'm not having enough. I'm

working too hard for what

I'm getting, and I don't have

to work at all."

"Well, why don't you

quit?" Charles shouted at

him. "Why don't you get the

hell out? I don't see any

guards holding you. Go down

to the South Seas and lay in a

hammock if that's what you

want.”

“Don’t be cross,” said

Adam quietly. “It’s like

getting up. I don’t want to get

up and I don’t want to stay

down. I don’t want to stay

here and I don’t want to go

away.”

“You make me itch,”

said Charles.

“Think about it, Charles.

You like it here?”

“Yes.”

“And you want to live

here all your life?”

“Yes.”

“Jesus, I wish I had it

that easy. What do you

suppose is the matter with

me?”

“I think you’ve got

knocker fever. Come in to the

inn tonight and get it cured
up.”
“Maybe that’s it,” said
Adam. “But I never took
much
satisfaction
in
a
whore.”
“It’s all the same,”
Charles said. “You shut your
eyes and you can’t tell the
difference.”
“Some of the boys in the
regiment used to keep a
squaw around. I had one for a
while.”
Charles turned to him
with interest. “Father would
turn in his grave if he knew
you was squawing around.
How was it?”

“Pretty nice. She’d wash
my clothes and mend and do
a little cooking.”
“I mean the other—how
was that?”
“Good. Yes, good. And
kind of sweet—kind of soft
and sweet. Kind of gentle and
soft.”
“You’re lucky she didn’t
put a knife in you while you
were asleep.”
“She wouldn’t. She was
sweet.”
“You’ve got a funny
look in your eye. I guess you
were kind of gone on that
squaw.”
“I guess I was,” said
Adam.
“What
happened

to

her?”

“Smallpox.”

“You didn’t get another

one?”

Adam’s

eyes

were

pained. “We piled them up

like they were logs, over two

hundred,

arms

and

legs

sticking out. And we piled

brush on top and poured coal

oil on.”

“I’ve heard they can’t

stand smallpox.”

“It kills them,” said

Adam. “You’re burning that

bacon.”

Charles turned quickly
back to the stove. “It’ll just be
crisp,” he said, “I like it
crisp.” He shoveled the bacon
out on a plate and broke the
eggs in the hot grease and
they jumped and fluttered
their edges to brown lace and
made clucking sounds.
“There
was
a
schoolteacher,” Charles said.
“Prettiest thing you ever saw.
Had little tiny feet. Bought all
her clothes in New York.
Yellow hair, and you never
saw such little feet. Sang too,
in the choir. Everybody took
to going to church. Damn
near stampeded getting into
church. That was quite a

while ago.”

“ ’Bout the time you

wrote about thinking of

getting married?”

Charles

grinned.

“I

guess so. I guess there wasn’t

a young buck in the county

didn’t

get

the

marrying

fever.”

“What

happened

to

her?”

“Well, you know how it

is. The women got kind of

restless with her here. They

got together. First thing you

knew they had her out. I
heard
she
wore
silk
underwear. Too hoity toity.
School board had her out
halfway through the term.
Feet no longer than that.
Showed her ankles too, like it
was an accident. Always
showing her ankles."
"Did you get to know
her?" Adam asked.
"No. I only went to
church. Couldn't hardly get
in. Girl that pretty's got no
right in a little town. Just
makes people uneasy. Causes
trouble."
Adam said, "Remember
that Samuels girl? She was

real pretty. What happened to her?”

“Same thing. Just caused trouble. She went away. I heard she’s living in Philadelphia. Does dressmaking. I heard she gets ten dollars just for making one dress.”

“Maybe we ought to go away from here,” Adam said.

Charles said, “Still thinking of California?”

“I guess so.”

Charles’ temper tore in two. “I want you out of here!”

he shouted. “I want you to get off the place. I’ll buy you or sell you or anything. Get out, you son of a bitch—” He stopped. “I guess I don’t mean that last. But goddam it, you make me nervous.”

“I’ll go,” said Adam.

3

In three months Charles got a colored picture postcard of the bay at Rio, and Adam had written on the back with a splottery pen, “It’s summer here when it’s winter there. Why don’t you come down?”

Six months later there was another card, from Buenos Aires. “Dear Charles

—my God this is a big city.

They

speak

French

and

Spanish both. I’m sending

you a book.”

But no book came.

Charles looked for it all the

following winter and well

into the spring. And instead

of the book Adam arrived. He

was brown and his clothes

had a foreign look.

“How are you?” Charles

asked.

“Fine. Did you get the

book?”

“No.”

“I

wonder

what

happened to it? It had
pictures.”
“Going to stay?”
“I guess so. I’ll tell you
about that country.”
“I don’t want to hear
about it,” said Charles.
“Christ, you’re mean,”
said Adam.
“I can just see it all over
again. You’ll stay around a
year or so and then you’ll get
restless and you’ll make me
restless. We’ll get mad at
each other and then we’ll get
polite to each other—and
that’s worse. Then we’ll blow
up and you’ll go away again,
and then you’ll come back
and we’ll do it all over
again.”
Adam asked, “Don’t you

want me to stay?”

“Hell,

yes,”

said

Charles. “I miss you when

you’re not here. But I can see

how it’s going to be just the

same.”

And it was just that way.

For a while they reviewed old

times, for a while they

recounted the times when

they were apart, and finally

they relapsed into the long

ugly silences, the hours of

speechless work, the guarded

courtesy, the flashes of anger.

There were no boundaries to

time so that it seemed endless passing.

On an evening Adam said, “You know, I’m going to be thirty-seven. That’s half a life.”

“Here it comes,” said Charles. “Wasting your life. Look, Adam, could we not have a fight this time?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, if we run true to form we’ll fight for three or four weeks, getting you ready to go away. If you’re getting restless, couldn’t you just go away and save all the trouble?”

Adam laughed and the tension went out of the room.

“I’ve got a pretty smart

brother.” he said. “Sure, when
I get the itch bad enough I’ll
go without fighting. Yes, I
like that. You’re getting rich,
aren’t you, Charles?”
“I’m doing all right. I
wouldn’t say rich.”
“You wouldn’t say you
bought four buildings and the
inn in the village?”
“No, I wouldn’t say it.”
“But you did. Charles,
you’ve made this about the
prettiest
farm
anywhere
about. Why don’t we build a
new
house—bathtub
and
running water and a water
closet? We’re not poor people

any more. Why, they say
you're nearly the richest man
in this section."
"We don't need a new
house," Charles said gruffly.
"You take your fancy ideas
away."
"It would be nice to go
to the toilet without going
outside."
"You take your fancy
ideas away."
Adam
was
amused.
"Maybe I'll build a pretty
little house right over by the
woodlot. Say, how would that
be? Then we wouldn't get on
each other's nerves."
"I don't want it on the
place."

“The place is half mine.”

“I’ll buy you out.”

“But I don’t have to

sell.”

Charles’ eyes blazed.

“I’ll burn your goddam house

down.”

“I believe you would,”

Adam said, suddenly sobered.

“I believe you really would.

What are you looking like

that for?”

Charles

said

slowly,

“I’ve thought about it a lot.

And I’ve wanted for you to

bring it up. I guess you aren’t

ever going to.”

“What do you mean?”

“You remember when

you sent me a telegram for a

hundred dollars?”

“You bet I do. Saved my

life, I guess. Why?”

“You never paid it

back.”

“I must have.”

“You didn’t.”

Adam looked down at

the old table where Cyrus had

sat, knocking on his wooden

leg with a stick. And the old

oil lamp was hanging over the

center of the table, shedding

its unstable yellow light from

the round Rochester wick.

Adam said slowly, “I’ll

pay you in the morning.”

“I gave you plenty of

time to offer.”

“Sure you did, Charles. I

should have remembered.”

He paused, considering, and

at last he said, “You don’t
know why I needed the
money.”
“I never asked.”
“And
I
never
told.
Maybe I was ashamed. I was
a prisoner, Charles. I broke
jail—I escaped.”
Charles’
mouth
was
open. “What are you talking
about?”
“I’m going to tell you. I
was a tramp and I got taken
up for vagrancy and put on a
road gang—leg irons at night.
Got out in six months and
picked right up again. That’s

how they get their roads built.
I served three days less than
the second six months and
then I escaped—got over the
Georgia line, robbed a store
for clothes, and sent you the
telegram."
"I don't believe you,"
Charles said. "Yes, I do. You
don't tell lies. Of course I
believe you. Why didn't you
tell me?"
"Maybe I was ashamed.
But I'm more ashamed that I
didn't pay you."
"Oh, forget it," said
Charles. "I don't know why I
mentioned it."
"Good God, no. I'll pay
you in the morning."
"I'll be damned," said
Charles.

“My
brother
a
jailbird!”
“You don’t have to look
so happy.”
“I don’t know why,”
said Charles, “but it makes
me kind of proud. My brother
a jailbird! Tell me this, Adam
—why did you wait till just
three days before they let you
go to make your break?”
Adam smiled. “Two or
three reasons,” he said. “I was
afraid if I served out my time,
why, they’d pick me up
again. And I figured if I
waited till the end they
wouldn’t expect me to run
away.”
“That makes sense,” said

Charles. “But you said there
was one more reason.”
“I guess the other was
the most important,” Adam
said, “and it’s the hardest to
explain. I figured I owed the
state six months. That was the
sentence. I didn’t feel right
about cheating. I only cheated
three days.”
Charles exploded with
laughter. “You’re a crazy son
of a bitch,” he said with
affection. “But you say you
robbed a store.”
“I sent the money back
with ten per cent interest,”
Adam said.
Charles leaned forward.
“Tell me about the road gang,
Adam.”
“Sure I will, Charles.

Sure I will.”

Chapter 11

1

Charles had more respect for Adam after he knew about the prison. He felt the warmth for his brother you can feel only for one who is not perfect and therefore no target for your hatred. Adam took some advantage of it too. He tempted Charles.

“Did you ever think, Charles, that we’ve got enough money to do anything we want to do?”

“All right, what do we want?”

“We could go to Europe,

we could walk around Paris.”

“What’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“I

thought

I

heard

someone on the stoop.”

“Probably a cat.”

“I guess so. Have to kill

off some of them pretty

soon.”

“Charles, we could go to

Egypt and walk around the

Sphinx.”

“We could stay right

here and make some good use

of our money. And we could

get the hell out to work and

make some use of the day.

Those goddam cats!” Charles

jumped to the door and

yanked it open and said, "Get!" Then he was silent, and Adam saw him staring at the steps. He moved beside him.

A dirty bundle of rags and mud was trying to worm its way up the steps. One skinny hand clawed slowly at the stairs. The other dragged helplessly. There was a caked face with cracked lips and eyes peering out of swollen, blackened lids. The forehead was laid open, oozing blood back into the matted hair.

Adam went down the stairs and kneeled beside the figure. "Give me a hand," he said. "Come on, let's get her in. Here—look out for that arm. It looks broken."

She fainted when they
carried her in.
“Put her in my bed,”
Adam said. “Now I think you
better go for the doctor.”
“Don’t you think we
better hitch up and take her
in?”
“Move her? No. Are you
crazy?”
“Maybe not as crazy as
you. Think about it a minute.”
“For God’s sake, think
about what?”
“Two men living alone
and they’ve got this in their
house.”
Adam
was
shocked.
“You don’t mean it.”
“I mean it all right. I

think we better take her in.
It'll be all over the county in
two hours. How do you know
what she is? How'd she get
here? What happened to her?
Adam, you're taking an awful
chance."
Adam said coldly, "If
you don't go now, I'll go and
leave you here."
"I think you're making a
mistake. I'll go, but I tell you
we'll suffer for it."
"I'll do the suffering,"
said Adam. "You go."
After Charles left, Adam
went to the kitchen and
poured hoi water from the
teakettle into a basin. In his
bedroom he dampened a
handkerchief in the water and
loosened the caked blood and

dirt on the girl's face. She reeled up to consciousness and her blue eyes glinted at him. His mind went back—it was this room, this bed. His stepmother was standing over him with a damp cloth in her hand, and he could feel the little running pains as the water cut through. And she had said something over and over. He heard it but he could not remember what it was.

"You'll be all right," he said to the girl. "We're getting a doctor. He'll be here right off."

Her lips moved a little.

"Don't try to talk," he said. "Don't try to say anything." As he worked gently with his cloth a huge

warmth crept over him. “You can stay here,” he said. “You can stay here as long as you want. I’ll take care of you.”

He squeezed out the cloth and sponged her matted hair and lifted it out of the gashes in her scalp.

He could hear himself talking as he worked, almost as though he were a stranger listening. “There, does that hurt? The poor eyes—I’ll put some brown paper over your eyes. You’ll be all right. That’s a bad one on your forehead. I’m afraid you’ll have a scar there. Could you tell me your name? No, don’t try. There’s lots of time. There’s lots of time. Do you hear that? That’s the doctor’s

rig. Wasn't that quick?" He moved to the kitchen door. "In here, Doc. She's in here," he called.

2

She was very badly hurt. If there had been X-rays in that time the doctor might have found more injuries than he did. As it was he found enough. Her left arm and three ribs were broken and her jaw was cracked. Her skull was cracked too, and the teeth on the left side were missing. Her scalp was ripped and torn and her forehead laid open to the skull. So much the doctor could see and identify. He set her arm, taped her ribs, and sewed up her scalp. With a pipette and

an alcohol flame he bent a
glass tube to go through the
aperture where a tooth was
missing so that she could
drink and take liquid food
without moving her cracked
jaw. He gave her a large shot
of morphine, left a bottle of
opium pills, washed his
hands, and put on his coat.
His patient was asleep before
he left the room.
In the kitchen he sat
down at the table and drank
the hot coffee Charles put in
front of him.
“All
right,
what
happened to her?” he asked.
“How do we know?”
Charles said truculently. “We

found her on our porch. If
you want to see, go look at
the marks on the road where
she dragged herself."
"Know who she is?"
"God, no."
"You go upstairs at the
inn—is she anybody from
there?"
"I haven't been there
lately. I couldn't recognize
her
in
that
condition
anyway."
The doctor turned his
head toward Adam. "You
ever see her before?"
Adam shook his head
slowly.
Charles said harshly,

“Say, what you mousing
around at?”
“I’ll tell you, since
you’re interested. That girl
didn’t fall under a harrow
even if she looks that way.
Somebody did that to her,
somebody who didn’t like her
at all. If you want the truth,
somebody tried to kill her.”
“Why don’t you ask
her?” Charles said.
“She won’t be talking
for quite a while. Besides, her
skull is cracked, and God
knows what that will do to
her. What I’m getting at is,
should I bring the sheriff into
it?”
“No!” Adam spoke so
explosively that the two
looked at him. “Let her alone.

Let her rest.”

“Who’s going to take

care of her?”

“I am,” said Adam.

“Now, you look here—”

Charles began.

“Keep out of it!”

“It’s my place as much

as yours.”

“Do you want me to

go?”

“I didn’t mean that.”

“Well, I’ll go if she has

to go.”

The doctor said, “Steady

down. What makes you so

interested?”

“I wouldn’t put a hurt

dog out.”

“You wouldn’t get mad

about it either. Are you

holding something back? Did

you go out last night? Did
you do it?”
“He was here all night,”
said Charles. “He snores like
a goddam train.”
Adam said, “Why can’t
you let her be? Let her get
well.”
The doctor stood up and
dusted his hands. “Adam,” he
said, “your father was one of
my oldest friends. I know you
and your family. You aren’t
stupid. I don’t know why you
don’t
recognize
ordinary
facts, but you don’t seem to.
Have to talk to you like a
baby. That girl was assaulted.
I believe whoever did it tried
to kill her. If I don’t tell the

sheriff about it, I'm breaking
the law. I admit I break a few,
but not that one."
"Well, tell him. But
don't let him bother her until
she's better."
"It's not my habit to let
my patients be bothered," the
doctor said. "You still want to
keep her here?"
"Yes."
"Your funeral. I'll look
in tomorrow. She'll sleep.
Give her water and warm
soup through the tube if she
wants it." He stalked out.
Charles turned on his
brother. "Adam, for God's
sake, what is this?"
"Let me alone."
"What's got into you?"
"Let

me
alone—you
hear? Just let me alone."
"Christ!" said Charles
and spat on the floor and
went restlessly and uneasily
to work.
Adam was glad he was
gone. He moved about the
kitchen, washed the breakfast
dishes, and swept the floor.
When he had put the kitchen
to rights he went in and drew
a chair up to the bed. The girl
snored thickly through the
morpnine. The swelling was
going down on her face, but
the eyes were blackened and
swollen. Adam sat very still,
looking at her. Her set and
splintered arm lay on her
stomach, but her right arm lay

on top of the coverlet, the fingers curled like a nest. It was a child's hand, almost ä baby's hand. Adam touched her wrist with his finger, and her fingers moved a little in reflex. Her wrist was warm. Secretly then, as though he were afraid he might be caught, he straightened her hand and touched the little cushion pads on the fingertips. Her fingers were pink and soft, but the skin on the back of her hand seemed to have an underbloom like a pearl. Adam chuckled with delight.

Her

breathing
stopped
and
he
became
electrically alert—then her
throat
clicked
and
the
rhythmed snoring continued.
Gently he worked her hand
and arm under the cover
before he tiptoed out of the
room.
For several days Cathy
lay in a cave of shock and
opium. Her skin felt like lead,
and she moved very little
because of the pain. She was
aware of movement around
her. Gradually her head and

her eyes cleared. Two young men were with her, one occasionally and the other a great deal. She knew that another man who came in was the doctor, and there was also a tall lean man, who interested her more than any of the others, and the interest grew out of fear. Perhaps in her drugged sleep she had picked something up and stored it.

Very slowly her mind assembled the last days and rearranged them. She saw the face of Mr. Edwards, saw it lose its placid self-sufficiency and dissolve into murder. She had never been so afraid before in her life, but she had learned fear now. And her

mind sniffed about like a rat
looking for an escape. Mr.
Edwards knew about the fire.
Did anyone else? And how
did he know? A blind
nauseating terror rose in her
when she thought of that.
From things she heard
she learned that the tall man
was the sheriff and wanted to
question her, and that the
young man named Adam was
protecting
her
from
the
questioning.
Maybe
the
sheriff knew about the fire.
Raised voices gave her
the cue to her method. The

sheriff said, “She must have a
name. Somebody must know
her.”
“How could she answer?
Her jaw is broken.” Adam’s
voice.
“If she’s right-handed
she could spell out answers.
Look
here,
Adam,
if
somebody tried to kill her I’d
better catch him while I can.
Just give me a pencil and let
me talk to her.”
Adam said, “You heard
the doctor say her skull was
cracked. How do you know
she can remember?”
“Well, you give me
paper and pencil and we’ll

see.”

“I don’t want you to

bother her.”

“Adam, goddam it, it

doesn’t matter what you

want. I’m telling you I want a

paper and pencil.”

Then the other young

man’s voice. “What’s the

matter with you? You make it

sound like it was you who did

it. Give him a pencil.”

She had her eyes closed

when the three men came

quietly into her room.

“She’s asleep,” Adam

whispered.

She opened her eyes and

looked at them.

The tall man came to the

side of the bed. “I don’t want

to bother you, Miss. I’m the

sheriff. I know you can’t talk,
but will you just write some
things on this?”
She tried to nod and
winced
with
pain.
She
blinked her eyes rapidly to
indicate assent.
“That’s the girl,” said
the sheriff. “You see? She
wants to.” He put the tablet
on the bed beside her and
molded her fingers around the
pencil. “There we are. Now.
What is your name?”
The three men watched
her face. Her mouth grew thin
and her eyes squinted. She
closed her eyes and the pencil
began to move. “I don’t

know," it scrawled in huge
letters.
"Here, now there's a
fresh sheet. What do you
remember?"
"All black. Can't think,"
the pencil wrote before it
went over the edge of the
tablet.
"Don't you remember
who you are, where you came
from? Think!"
She
seemed
to
go
through a great struggle and
then her face gave up and
became tragic. "No. Mixed
up. Help me."
"Poor child," the sheriff
said. "I thank you for trying

anyway. When you get better
we'll try again. No, you don't
have to write any more."
The
pencil
wrote,
"Thank you," and fell from
her fingers.
She had won the sheriff.
He ranged himself with
Adam. Only Charles was
against
her.
When
the
brothers were in her room,
and it took two of them to
help her on the bedpan
without hurting her, she
studied
Charles'
dark

sullenness. He had something
in
his
face
that
she
recognized, that made her
uneasy. She saw that he
touched the scar on his
forehead very often, rubbed
it, and drew its outline with
his fingers. Once he caught
her watching. He looked
guiltily at his fingers. Charles
said brutally, “Don’t you
worry. You’re going to have
one like it, maybe even a
better one.”
She smiled at him, and
he looked away. When Adam
came in with her warm soup
Charles said, “I’m going in

town and drink some beer.”

3

Adam couldn’t remember ever having been so happy. It didn’t bother him that he did not know her name. She had said to call her Cathy, and that was enough for him. He cooked for Cathy, going through recipes used by his mother and his stepmother. Cathy’s vitality was great. She began to recover very quickly. The swelling went out of her cheeks and the prettiness of convalescence came to her face. In a short time she could

be helped to a sitting position. She opened and closed her mouth very carefully, and she began to eat soft foods that required little chewing. The bandage was still on her forehead but the rest of her face was little marked except for the hollow cheek on the side where the teeth were missing.

Cathy was in trouble and her mind ranged for a way out of it. She spoke little even when it was not so difficult. One afternoon she heard someone moving around in the kitchen. She called,

“Adam, is it you?”

Charles' voice answered,

"No, it's me."

"Would you come in

here just a minute, please?"

He stood in the doorway.

His eyes were sullen.

"You don't come in

much," she said.

"That's right."

"You don't like me."

"I guess that's right too."

"Will you tell me why?"

He struggled to find an

answer. "I don't trust you."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. And I

don't believe you lost your

memory."

"But why should I lie?"

"I don't know. That's

why I don't trust you. There's

something—I

almost
recognize."
"You never saw me in
your life."
"Maybe not. But there's
something that bothers me—
that I ought to know. And
how do you know I never saw
you?"
She was silent, and he
moved to leave. "Don't go,"
she said. "What do you intend
to do?"
"About what?"
"About me."
He regarded her with a
new interest. "You want the
truth?"
"Why else would I ask?"
"I don't know, but I'll
tell you. I'm going to get you
out of here just as soon as I

can. My brother's turned fool,
but I'll bring him around if I
have to lick him."
"Could you do that?
He's a big man."
"I could do it."
She
regarded
him
levelly. "Where is Adam?"
"Gone in town to get
some more of your goddam
medicine."
"You're a mean man."
"You know what I
think? I don't think I'm half
as mean as you are under that
nice skin. I think you're a
devil."
She
laughed
softly.

“That makes two of us,” she said. “Charles, how long do I have?”

“For what?”

“How long before you put me out? Tell me truly.”

“All right, I will. About a week or ten days. Soon as you can get around.”

“Suppose I don’t go.”

He regarded her craftily, almost with pleasure at the thought of combat. “All right, I’ll tell you. When you had all that dope you talked a lot, like in your sleep.”

“I don’t believe that.”

He laughed, for he had seen the quick tightening of her mouth. “All right, don’t. And if you just go about your business as soon as you can, I

won’t tell. But if you don’t,
you’ll know all right, and so
will the sheriff.”
“I don’t believe I said
anything bad. What could I
say?”
“I won’t argue with you.
And I’ve got work to do. You
asked me and I told you.”
He went outside. Back
of the henhouse he leaned
over and laughed and slapped
his leg. “I thought she was
smarter,” he said to himself.
And he felt more easy than he
had for days.

4

Charles had frightened her
badly.
And
if
he

had
recognized her, so had she
recognized him. He was the
only person she had ever met
who played it her way. Cathy
followed his thinking, and it
did not reassure her. She
knew that her tricks would
not work with him, and she
needed protection and rest.
Her money was gone. She
had to be sheltered, and
would have to be for a long
time. She was tired and sick,
but her mind went skipping
among possibilities.
Adam came back from
town with a bottle of Pain
Killer.
He
poured
a

tablespoonful. “This will taste horrible,” he said. “It’s good stuff though.”

She took it without protest, did not even make much of a face about it.

“You’re good to me,” she said. “I wonder why? I’ve brought you trouble.”

“You have not. You’ve brightened up the whole house. Never complain or anything, hurt as bad as you are.”

“You’re so good, so kind.”

“I want to be.”

“Do you have to go out? Couldn’t you stay and talk to me?”

“Sure I could. There’s nothing so important to do.”

“Draw up a chair, Adam,
and sit down.”
When he was seated she
stretched her right hand
toward him, and he took it in
both of his. “So good and
kind,” she repeated. “Adam,
you keep promises, don’t
you?”
“I try to. What are you
thinking about?”
“I’m alone and I’m
afraid,”
she
cried.
“I’m
afraid.”
“Can’t I help you?”
“I don’t think anyone
can help me.”
“Tell me and let me try.”
“That’s the worst part. I

can’t even tell you.”

“Why not? If it’s a secret

I won’t tell it.”

“It’s not my secret, don’t

you see?”

“No, I don’t.”

Her fingers gripped his

hand tightly. “Adam, I didn’t

ever lose my memory.”

“Then why did you say

__”

“That’s what I’m trying

to tell you. Did you love your

father, Adam?”

“I guess I revered him

more than loved him.”

“Well, if someone you

revered were in trouble,

wouldn’t you do anything to

save him from destruction?”

“Well, sure. I guess I

would.”

“Well, that’s how it is

with me.”

“But how did you get

hurt?”

“That’s part of it. That’s

why I can’t tell.”

“Was it your father?”

“Oh, no. But it’s all tied

up together.”

“You mean, if you tell

me who hurt you, then your

father will be in trouble?”

She sighed. He would

make up the story himself.

“Adam, will you trust me?”

“Of course.”

“It’s an awful thing to

ask.”

“No, it isn’t, not if

you’re

protecting

your

father.”

“You understand, it’s

not my secret. If it were I’d

tell you in a minute.”

“Of course I understand.

I’d do the same thing

myself.”

“Oh, you understand so

much.” Tears welled up in

her eyes. He leaned down

toward her, and she kissed

him on the cheek.

“Don’t you worry,” he

said. “I’ll take care of you.”

She lay back against the

pillow. “I don’t think you

can.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well,

your

brother

doesn’t like me. He wants me

to get out of here.”

“Did he tell you that?”

“Oh, no. I can just feel

it.

He

hasn’t

your

understanding.”

“He has a good heart.”

“I know that, but he

doesn’t have your kindness.

And when I have to go—the

sheriff is going to begin

asking questions and I’ll be

all alone.”

He stared into space.

“My brother can’t make you

go. I own half of this farm. I

have my own money.”

“If he wanted me to go I

would have to. I can’t spoil

your life.”

Adam stood up and
strode out of the room. He
went to the back door and
looked out on the afternoon.
Far off in the field his brother
was lifting stones from a sled
and piling them on the stone
wall. Adam looked up at the
sky. A blanket of herring
clouds was rolling in from the
east. He sighed deeply and
his breath made a tickling,
exciting feeling in his chest.
His ears seemed suddenly
clear, so that he heard the
chickens cackling and the
east wind blowing over the
ground. He heard horses'
hoofs plodding on the road
and far-off pounding on wood
where
a

neighbor
was
shingling a barn. And all
these sounds related into a
kind of music. His eyes were
clear too. Fences and walls
and sheds stood staunchly out
in the yellow afternoon, and
they were related too. There
was change in everything. A
flight of sparrows dropped
into the dust and scrabbled
for bits of food and then flew
off like a gray scarf twisting
in the light. Adam looked
back at his brother. He had
lost track of time and he did
not know how long he had
been standing in the doorway.
No time had passed.
Charles was still struggling
with the same large stone.

And Adam had not released
the full, held breath he had
taken when time stopped.
Suddenly he knew joy
and sorrow felted into one
fabric. Courage and fear were
one thing too. He found that
he had started to hum a
droning little tune. He turned,
walked through the kitchen,
and stood in the doorway,
looking at Cathy. She smiled
weakly at him, and he
thought. What a child! What
a helpless child! and a surge
of love filled him.
“Will you marry me?”
he asked.
Her face tightened and
her hand closed convulsively.
“You don’t have to tell
me now,” he said. “I want

you to think about it. But if you would marry me I could protect you. No one could hurt you again."

Cathy recovered in an instant. "Come here, Adam. There, sit down. Here, give me your hand. That's good, that's right." She raised his hand and put the back of it against her cheek. "My dear," she said brokenly. "Oh, my dear. Look, Adam, you have trusted me. Now will you promise me something? Will you promise not to tell your brother you have asked me?"

"Asked you to marry me? Why shouldn't I?"

"It's not that. I want this night to think. I'll want maybe more than this night.

Could you let me do that?”

She raised her hand to her head. “You know I’m not sure I can think straight. And I want to.”

“Do you think you might marry me?”

“Please, Adam. Let me alone to think. Please, my dear.”

He smiled and said nervously, “Don’t make it long. I’m kind of like a cat up a tree so far he can’t come down.”

“Just let me think. And, Adam—you’re a kind man.”

He went outside and walked toward where his brother was loading stones.

When he was gone Cathy got up from her bed

and moved unsteadily to the bureau. She leaned forward and looked at her face. The bandage was still on her forehead. She raised the edge of it enough to see the angry red underneath. She had not only made up her mind to marry Adam but she had so decided before he had asked her. She was afraid. She needed protection and money. Adam could give her both. And she could control him—she knew that. She did not want to be married, but for the time being it was a refuge. Only one thing bothered her. Adam had a warmth toward her which she did not understand since she had none toward him, nor had

ever experienced it toward anyone. And Mr. Edwards had really frightened her. That had been the only time in her life she had lost control of a situation. She determined never to let it happen again. She smiled to herself when she thought what Charles would say. She felt a kinship to Charles. She didn't mind his suspicion of her.

5

Charles straightened up when Adam approached. He put his palms against the small of his back and massaged the tired muscles. "My God, there's lots of rocks," he said. "Fellow in the army told me there's

valleys
in
California—miles and miles
—and you can’t find a stone,
not even a little one.”
“There’ll be something
else,” said Charles. “I don’t
think
there’s
any
farm
without something wrong
with it. Out in the Middle
West it’s locusts, someplace
else it’s tornadoes. What’s a
few stones?”
“I guess you’re right. I
thought I would give you a
hand.”
“That’s nice of you. I
thought you’d spend the rest
of your life holding hands

with that in there. How long
is she going to stay?”
Adam was on the point
of telling him of his proposal
but the tone of Charles’ voice
made him change his mind.
“Say,”
Charles
said,
“Alex Platt came by a little
while ago. You’d never think
what happened to him. He’s
found a fortune.”
“How do you mean?”
“Well, you know the
place on his property where
that clump of cedars sticks
out—you know, right on the
county road?”
“I know. What about it?”
“Alex went in between
those trees and his stone wall.

He was hunting rabbits. He
found a suitcase and a man's
clothes, all packed nice.
Soaked up with rain though.
Looked like it had been there
some time. And there was a
wooden box with a lock, and
when he broke it open there
was
near
four
thousand
dollars in it. And he found a
purse too. There wasn't
anything in it."
"No name or. anything?"
"That's the strange part
—no name; no name on the
clothes, no labels on the suits.
It's just like the fellow didn't
want to be traced."
"Is Alex going to keep

it?”

“He took it in to the

sheriff, and the sheriff is

going to advertise it, and if

nobody answers Alex can

keep it.”

“Somebody’s sure to

claim it.”

“I guess so. I didn’t tell

Alex that. He’s feeling so

good about it. That’s funny

about no labels—not cut out,

just didn’t have any.”

“That’s a lot of money,”

Adam

said.

“Somebody’s

bound to claim it.”

“Alex hung around for a

while. You know, his wife

goes around a lot.” Charles

was silent. “Adam,” he said

finally, “we got to have a
talk. The whole county’s
doing plenty of talking.”
“What about? What do
you mean?”
“Goddam it, about that
—that girl. Two men can’t
have a girl living with them.
Alex says the women are
pretty riled up about it.
Adam, we can’t have it. We
live here. We’ve got a good
name.”
“You want me to throw
her out before she’s well?”
“I want you to get rid of
her—get her out. I don’t like
her.”
“You never have.”
“I know it. I don’t trust
her.
There’s

something—

something—I don’t know

what it is, but I don’t like it.

When you going to get her

out?”

“Tell you what,” Adam

said slowly. “Give her one

more week and then I’ll do

something about her.”

“You promise?”

“Sure I promise.”

“Well, that’s something.

I’ll get the word to Alex’s

wife. From there on she’ll

handle the news. Good Lord,

I’ll be glad to have the house

to ourselves again. I don’t

suppose her memory’s come

back?”

“No,” said Adam.

6

Five days later, when Charles

had gone to buy some calf feed, Adam drove the buggy to the kitchen steps. He helped Cathy in, tucked a blanket around her knees, and put another around her shoulders. He drove to the county seat and was married to her by a justice of the peace.

Charles was home when they returned. He looked sourly at them when they came into the kitchen. “I thought you’d took her in to put her on the train.”

“We got married,”

Adam said simply.

Cathy smiled at Charles.

“Why? Why did you do it?”

“Why not? Can’t a man get married?”

Cathy went quickly into the bedroom and closed the door.

Charles began to rave.

“She’s no damn good, I tell you. She’s a whore.”

“Charles!”

“I tell you, she’s just a two-bit whore. I wouldn’t trust her with a bit piece—why, that bitch, that slut!”

“Charles, stop it! Stop it, I tell you! You keep your filthy mouth shut about my wife!”

“She’s no more a wife

than an alley cat.”

Adam said slowly, “I

think you’re jealous, Charles.

I think you wanted to marry

her.”

“Why, you goddam fool!

Me jealous? I won’t live in

the same house with her!”

Adam said evenly, “You

won’t have to. I’m going

away. You can buy me out if

you want. You can have the

farm. You always wanted it.

You can stay here and rot.”

Charles’ voice lowered.

“Won’t you get rid of her?

Please, Adam. Throw her out.

She’ll tear you to pieces.

She’ll destroy you, Adam,

she’ll destroy you!”

“How do you know so

much about her?”

Charles’
eyes
were
bleak. “I don’t,” he said, and
his mouth snapped shut.
Adam did not even ask
Cathy whether she wanted to
come out for dinner. He
carried two plates into the
bedroom and sat beside her.
“We’re going to go
away,” he said. “Let me go
away. Please, let me. I don’t
want to make you hate your
brother. I wonder why he
hates me?”
“I think he’s jealous.”
Her
eyes
narrowed.
“Jealous?”
“That’s what it looks

like to me. You don’t have to
worry. We’re getting out.
We’re going to California.”
She said quietly, “I don’t
want to go to California.”
“Nonsense. Why, it’s
nice there, sun all the time
and beautiful.”
“I don’t want to go to
California.”
“You are my wife,” he
said softly. “I want you to go
with me.”
She was silent and did
not speak of it again.
They heard Charles slam
out the door, and Adam said,
“That will be good for him.
He’ll get a little drunk and
he’ll feel better.”
Cathy modestly looked
at her fingers. “Adam, I can’t

be a wife to you until I'm well."

"I know," he said. "I understand. I'll wait."

"But I want you to stay with me. I'm afraid of Charles. He hates me so."

"I'll bring my cot in here. Then you can call me if you're frightened. You can reach out and touch me."

"You're so good," she said. "Could we have some tea?"

"Why, sure, I'd like some myself." He brought the steaming cups in and went back for the sugar bowl. He settled himself in a chair near her bed. "It's pretty strong. Is it too strong for you?"

"I like it strong."

He finished his cup.

“Does it taste strange to you?

It’s got a funny taste.”.

Her hand flew to her

mouth. “Oh, let me taste it.”

She

sipped

the

dregs.

“Adam,” she cried, “you got

the wrong cup—that was

mine. It had my medicine in

it.”

He licked his lips. “I

guess it can’t hurt me.”

“No, it can’t.” She

laughed softly. “I hope I

don’t need to call you in the

night.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you drank my

sleeping medicine. Maybe

you
wouldn’t
wake
up
easily.”
Adam went down into a
heavy opium sleep though he
fought to stay awake. “Did
the doctor tell you to take this
much?” he asked thickly.
“You’re just not used to
it,” she said.
Charles came back at
eleven o’clock. Cathy heard
his tipsy footsteps. He went
into his room, flung off his
clothes, and got into bed. He
grunted and turned, trying to
get comfortable, and then he
opened his eyes. Cathy was
standing by his bed. “What
do you want?”

“What do you think?

Move over a little.”

“Where’s Adam?”

“He drank my sleeping

medicine by mistake. Move

over a little.”

He breathed harshly. “I

already been with a whore.”

“You’re a pretty strong

boy. Move over a little.”

“How about your broken

arm?”

“I’ll take care of that.

It’s not your worry.”

Suddenly

Charles

laughed. “The poor bastard,”

he said, and he threw back the

blanket to receive her.

PART TWO

Chapter 12

You can see how this book

has reached a great boundary
that was called 1900. Another
hundred years were ground
up and churned, and what had
happened was all muddied by
the way folks wanted it to be
—more rich and meaningful
the farther back it was. In the
books of some memories it
was the best time that ever
sloshed over the world—the
old time, the gay time, sweet
and simple, as though time
were young and fearless. Old
men
who
didn’t
know
whether they were going to
stagger over the boundary of
the century looked forward to
it with distaste. For the world

was changing, and sweetness
was gone, and virtue too.
Worry had crept on a
corroding world, and what
was
lost—good
manners,
ease and beauty? Ladies were
not ladies any more, and you
couldn’t trust a gentleman’s
word.
There was a time when
people kept their fly buttons
fastened. And man’s freedom
was boiling off. And even
childhood was no good any
more—not the way it was. No
worry then but how to find a
good stone, not round exactly
but flattened and water-shaped, to use in a sling
pouch cut from a discarded
shoe. Where did all the good

stones go, and all simplicity?
A man's mind vagued
up a little, for how can you
remember the feel of pleasure
or pain or choking emotion?
You can remember only that
you had them. An elder man
might truly recall through
water the delicate doctor-testing of little girls, but such
a man forgets, and wants to,
the acid emotion eating at the
spleen so that a boy had to
put his face flat down in the
young wild oats and drum his
fists against the ground and
sob "Christ! Christ!" Such a
man might say, and did,
"What's that damned kid
lying out there in the grass
for? He'll catch a cold."
Oh, strawberries don't
taste as they used to and the

thighs of women have lost
their clutch!
And some men eased
themselves like setting hens
into the nest of death.
History was secreted in
the glands of a million
historians. We must get out of
this banged-up century, some
said, out of this cheating,
murderous century of riot and
secret death, of scrabbling for
public lands and damn well
getting them by any means at
all.
Think back, recall our
little nation fringing the
oceans,
torn
with
complexities, too big for its
britches. Just got going when

the British took us on again.
We beat them, but it didn't do
us much good. What we had
was a burned White House
and ten thousand widows on
the public pension list.
Then the soldiers went
to Mexico and it was a kind
of painful picnic. Nobody
knows why you go to a picnic
to be uncomfortable when it
is so easy and pleasant to eat
at home. The Mexican War
did two good things though.
We got a lot of western land,
damn near doubled our size,
and besides that it was a
training ground for generals,
so that when the sad self-murder settled on us the
leaders knew the techniques
for
making

it

properly

horrible.

And then the arguments:

Can you keep a slave?

Well if you bought him

in good faith, why not?

Next they'll be saying a

man can't have a horse. Who

is it wants to take my

property?

And there we were, like

a man scratching at his own

face and bleeding into his

own beard.

Well, that was over and

we got slowly up off the

bloody ground and started

westward.

There came boom and

bust, bankruptcy, depression.

Great

public
thieves
came along and picked the
pockets of everyone who had
a pocket.
To hell with that rotten
century!
Let’s get it over and the
door closed shut on it! Let’s
close it like a book and go on
reading! New chapter, new
life. A man will have clean
hands once we get the lid
slammed shut on that stinking
century. It’s a fair thing
ahead. There’s no rot on this
clean new hundred years. It’s
not stacked, and any bastard
who deals seconds from this
new deck of years—why,
we’ll crucify him head down
over a privy.

Oh, but strawberries will never taste so good again and the thighs of women have lost their clutch!

Chapter 13

1

Sometimes a kind of glory lights up the mind of a man. It happens to nearly everyone. You can feel it growing or preparing like a fuse burning toward dynamite. It is a feeling in the stomach, a delight of the nerves, of the forearms. The skin tastes the air, and every deep-drawn breath is sweet. Its beginning has the pleasure of a great stretching yawn; it flashes in the brain and the whole world glows outside your eyes. A man may have lived all of his

life in the gray, and the land and trees of him dark and somber. The events, even the important ones, may have trooped by faceless and pale. And then—the glory—so that a cricket song sweetens his ears, the smell of the earth rises chanting to his nose, and dappling light under a tree blesses his eyes. Then a man pours outward, a torrent of him, and yet he is not diminished. And I guess a man's importance in the world can be measured by the quality and number of his glories. It is a lonely thing but it relates us to the world. It is the mother of all creativeness, and it sets each man separate from all other men.

I don’t know how it will
be in the years to come. There
are monstrous changes taking
place in the world, forces
shaping a future whose face
we do not know. Some of
these forces seem evil to us,
perhaps not in themselves but
because their tendency is to
eliminate other things we
hold good. It is true that two
men can lift a bigger stone
than one man. A group can
build automobiles quicker
and better than one man, and
bread from a huge factory is
cheaper and more uniform.
When our food and clothing
and housing all are born in
the complication of mass
production, mass method is
bound to get into our thinking

and to eliminate all other
thinking. In our time mass or
collective
production
has
entered our economics, our
politics,
and
even
our
religion, so that some nations
have substituted the idea
collective for the idea God.
This in my time is the danger.
There is great tension in the
world, tension toward a
breaking point, and men are
unhappy and confused.
At such a time it seems
natural and good to me to ask
myself these questions. What
do I believe in? What must I

fight for and what must I
fight against?
Our species is the only
creative species, and it has
only one creative instrument,
the individual mind and spirit
of a man. Nothing was ever
created by two men. There
are no good collaborations,
whether in music, in art, in
poetry, in mathematics, in
philosophy. Once the miracle
of creation has taken place,
the group can build and
extend it, but the group never
invents
anything.
The
preciousness lies in the lonely
mind of a man.
And now the forces
marshaled around the concept

of the group have declared a war of extermination on that preciousness, the mind of man. By disparagement, by starvation, by repressions, forced direction, and the stunning hammerblows of conditioning, the free, roving mind is being pursued, roped, blunted, drugged. It is a sad suicidal course our species seems to have taken.

And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion,

or

government

which limits or destroys the

individual. This is what I am

and what I am about. I can

understand why a system

built on a pattern must try to

destroy the free mind, for this

is one thing which can by

inspection destroy such a

system.

Surely

I

can

understand this, and I hate it

and I will fight against it to

preserve the one thing that

separates

us

from

the

uncreative beasts. If the glory

can be killed, we are lost.

2

Adam Trask grew up in
grayness, and the curtains of
his life were like dusty
cobwebs, and his days a slow
file of half-sorrows and sick
dissatisfactions, and then,
through Cathy, the glory
came to him.
It doesn't matter that
Cathy was what I have called
a monster. Perhaps we can't
understand Cathy, but on the
other hand we are capable of
many things in all directions,
of great virtues and great sins.
And who in his mind has not
probed the black water?
Maybe we all have in us
a secret pond where evil and
ugly things germinate and

grow strong. But this culture
is fenced, and the swimming
brood climbs up only to fall
back. Might it not be that in
the dark pools of some men
the evil grows strong enough
to wriggle over the fence and
swim free? Would not such a
man be our monster, and are
we not related to him in our
hidden water? It would be
absurd
if
we
did
not
understand both angels and
devils, since we invented
them.
Whatever Cathy may
have been, she set off the
glory in Adam. His spirit rose

flying and released him from fear and bitterness and rancid memories. The glory lights up the world and changes it the way a star shell changes a battleground. Perhaps Adam did not see Cathy at all, so lighted was she by his eyes. Burned in his mind was an image of beauty and tenderness, a sweet and holy girl, precious beyond thinking, clean and loving, and that image was Cathy to her husband, and nothing Cathy did or said could warp Adam's Cathy.

She said she did not
want to go to California and
he did not listen, because *his*
Cathy took his arm and
started first. So bright was his
glory that he did not notice
the sullen pain in his brother,
did not see the glinting in his
brother's eyes. He sold his
share of the farm to Charles,
for less than it was worth, and
with that and his half of his
father's money he was free
and rich.
The
brothers
were
strangers now. They shook
hands at the station, and
Charles watched the train pull
out and rubbed his scar. He
went to the inn, drank four

quick whiskies, and climbed the stairs to the top floor. He paid the girl and then could not perform. He cried in her arms until she put him out. He raged at his farm, forced it, added to it, drilled and trimmed, and his boundaries extended. He took no rest, no recreation, and he became rich without pleasure and respected without friends.

Adam stopped in New York long enough to buy clothes for himself and Cathy before they climbed on the train which bore them across the continent. How they happened to go to the Salinas Valley is very easy to understand.

In that day the railroads

—growing, fighting among
themselves,
striving
to
increase and to dominate—
used every means to increase
their traffic. The companies
not only advertised in the
newspapers,
they
issued
booklets
and
broadsides
describing and picturing the
beauty and richness of the
West. No claim was too
extravagant—wealth
was
unlimited.
The
Southern

Pacific Railroad, headed by
the wild energy of Leland
Stanford,
had
begun
to
dominate the Pacific Coast
not only in transportation but
in politics. Its rails extended
down the valleys. New towns
sprang up, new sections were
opened and populated, for the
company
had
to
create
customers to get custom.
The long Salinas Valley
was part of the exploitation.
Adam had seen and studied a
fine color broadside which set
forth the valley as that region

which heaven unsuccessfully imitated. After reading the literature, anyone who did not want to settle in the Salinas Valley was crazy.

Adam did not rush at his purchase. He bought a rig and drove around, meeting the earlier comers, talking of soil and water, climate and crops, prices and facilities. It was not speculation with Adam. He was here to settle, to found a home, a family, perhaps a dynasty.

Adam drove exuberantly from farm to farm, picked up dirt and crumbled it in his fingers, talked and planned and dreamed. The people of the valley liked him and were glad he had come to live

there, for they recognized a man of substance.

He had only one worry, and that was for Cathy. She was not well. She rode around the country with him, but she was listless. One morning she complained of feeling ill and stayed in her room in the King City hotel while Adam drove into the country. He returned at about five in the afternoon to find her nearly dead from loss of blood. Luckily Adam found Dr. Tilson at his supper and dragged him from his roast beef. The doctor made a quick examination, inserted a packing, and turned to Adam. “Why don’t you wait downstairs?” he suggested.

“Is she all right?”

“Yes. I’ll call you pretty

soon.”

Adam patted Cathy’s

shoulder, and she smiled up

at him.

Dr. Tilson closed the

door behind him and came

back to the bed. His face was

red with anger. “Why did you

do it?”

Cathy’s mouth was a

thin tight line.

“Does

your

husband

know you are pregnant?”

Her head moved slowly

from side to side.

“What did you do it

with?”

She stared up at him.

He looked around the
room. He stepped to the
bureau and picked up a
knitting needle. He shook it
in her face. “The old offender
—the old criminal,” he said.
“You’re a fool. You’ve nearly
killed
yourself
and
you
haven’t lost your baby. I
suppose you took things too,
poisoned yourself, inserted
camphor,
kerosene,
red
pepper. My God! Some of the
things you women do!”
Her eyes were as cold as
glass.
He pulled a chair up

beside her bed. “Why don’t
you want to have the baby?”
he asked softly. “You’ve got
a good husband. Don’t you
love him? Don’t you intend to
speak to me at all? Tell me,
damn it! Don’t turn mulish.”
Her lips did not move
and her eyes did not flicker.
“My dear,” he said,
“can’t you see? You must not
destroy life. That’s the one
thing gets me crazy. God
knows I lose patients because
I don’t know enough. But I
try—I always try. And then I
see a deliberate killing.” He
talked rapidly on. He dreaded
the sick silence between his
sentences.
This
woman

puzzled him. There was something inhuman about her. “Have you met Mrs. Laurel? She’s wasting and crying for a baby. Everything she has or can get she would give to have a baby, and you —you try to stab yours with a knitting needle. All right,” he cried, “you won’t speak—you don’t have to. But I’m going to tell you. The baby is safe. Your aim was bad. And I’m telling you this—you’re going to have that baby. Do you know what the law in this state has to say about abortion? You don’t have to answer, but you listen to me! If this happens again, if you

lose this baby and I have any reason to suspect monkey business, I will charge you, I will testify against you, and I will see you punished. Now I hope you have sense enough to believe me, because I mean it."

Cathy moistened her lips with a little pointed tongue. The cold went out of her eyes and a weak sadness took its place. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry. But you don't understand."

"Then why don't you tell me?"

His anger disappeared like mist. "Tell me, my dear."

“It’s hard to tell. Adam
is so good, so strong. I am—
well, I’m tainted. Epilepsy.”
“Not you!”
“No, but my grandfather
and my father—and my
brother.” She covered her
eyes with her hands. “I
couldn’t bring that to my
husband.”
“Poor child,” he said.
“My poor child. You can’t be
certain.
It’s
more
than
probable that your baby will
be fine and healthy. Will you
promise me not to try any
more tricks?”
“Yes.”
“All right then. I won’t

tell your husband what you
did. Now lie back and let me
see if the bleeding's stopped."
In a few minutes he
closed his satchel and put the
knitting needle in his pocket.
"I'll
look
in
tomorrow
morning," he said.
Adam swarmed on him
as he came down the narrow
stairs into the lobby. Dr.
Tilson warded off a flurry of
"How is she? Is she all right?
What caused it? Can I go
up?"
"Whoa, hold up—hold
up." And he used his trick,
his standard joke. "Your wife
is sick."

“Doctor—”

“She has the only good

sickness there is—”

“Doctor—”

“Your wife is going to

have a baby.” He brushed

past Adam and left him

staring. Three men sitting

around the stove grinned at

him. One of them observed

dryly, “If it was me now—

why, I’d invite a few, maybe

three, friends to have a

drink.” His hint was wasted.

Adam bolted clumsily up the

narrow stairs.

Adam’s

attention

narrowed to the Bordoni

ranch a few miles south of

King City, almost equidistant,

in fact, between San Lucas

and King City.

The Bordonis had nine hundred acres left of a grant of ten thousand acres which had come to Mrs. Bordoni's great-grandfather from the Spanish crown. The Bordonis were Swiss, but Mrs. Bordoni was the daughter and heiress of a Spanish family that had settled in the Salinas Valley in very early times. And as happened with most of the old families, the land slipped away. Some was lost in gambling, some chipped off for taxes, and some acres torn off like coupons to buy luxuries—a horse, a diamond, or a pretty woman. The nine hundred remaining acres were the core of the original

Sanchez grant, and the best of it too. They straddled the river and tucked into the foothills on both sides, for at this point the valley narrows and then opens out again. The original Sanchez house was still usable. Built of adobe, it stood in a tiny opening in the foothills, a miniature valley fed by a precious ever-running spring of sweet water. That of course was why the first Sanchez had built his seat there. Huge live oaks shaded the valley, and the earth had a richness and a greenness foreign to this part of the country. The walls of the low house were four feet thick, and the round pole rafters were tied on with rawhide ropes which had

been put on wet. The hide shrank and pulled joist and rafter tight together, and the leather ropes became hard as iron and nearly imperishable. There is only one drawback to this building method. Rats will gnaw at the hide if they are let.

The old house seemed to have grown out of the earth, and it was lovely. Bordoni used it for a cow barn. He was a Swiss, an immigrant, with his national passion for cleanliness. He distrusted the thick mud walls and built a frame house some distance away, and his cows put their heads out the deep recessed windows of the old Sanchez house.

The
Bordonis
were
childless, and when the wife
died in ripe years a lonely
longing for his Alpine past
fell on her husband. He
wanted to sell the ranch and
go
home.
Adam
Trask
refused to buy in a hurry, and
Bordoni was asking a big
price and using the selling
method of pretending not to
care whether he sold or not.
Bordoni knew Adam was
going to buy his land long
before Adam knew it.
Where Adam settled he
intended to stay and to have

his unborn children stay. He was afraid he might buy one place and then see another he liked better, and all the time the Sanchez place was drawing him. With the advent of Cathy, his life extended long and pleasantly ahead of him. But he went through all the motions of carefulness. He drove and rode and walked over every foot of the land. He put a post-hole auger down through the subsoil to test and feel and smell the under earth. He inquired about the small wild plants of field and riverside and hill. In damp places he knelt down

and examined the game
tracks in the mud, mountain
lion and deer, coyote and
wild cat, skunk and raccoon,
weasel and rabbit, all overlaid
with the pattern of quail
tracks. He threaded among
willows and sycamores and
wild blackberry vines in the
riverbed, patted the trunks of
live oak and scrub oak,
madrone, laurel, toyon.
Bordoni watched him
with squinting eyes and
poured tumblers of red wine
squeezed from the grapes of
his small hillside vineyard. It
was Bordoni's pleasure to get
a little drunk every afternoon.
And Adam, who had never
tasted wine, began to like it.
Over and over he asked

Cathy’s opinion of the place.
Did she like it? Would she be
happy there? And he didn’t
listen to her noncommittal
answers. He thought that she
linked
arms
with
his
enthusiasm. In the lobby of
the King City hotel he talked
to the men who gathered
around the stove and read the
papers sent down from San
Francisco.
“It’s
water
I
think
about,” he said one evening.
“I wonder how deep you’d
have to go to bring in a well.”

A rancher crossed his
denim knees. “You ought to
go see Sam Hamilton,” he
said. “He knows more about
water than anybody around
here. He’s a water witch and
a well-digger too. He’ll tell
you. He’s put down half the
wells in this part of the
valley.”
His
companion
chuckled. “Sam’s got a real
legitimate
reason
to
be
interested in water. Hasn’t got
a goddam drop of it on his
own place.”
“How do I find him?”
Adam asked.

“I’ll tell you what. I’m
going out to have him make
some angle irons. I’ll take
you with me if you want.
You’ll like Mr. Hamilton.
He’s a fine man.”
“Kind of a comical
genius,” his companion said.

3

They went to the Hamilton
ranch
in
Louis
Lippo’s
buckboard—Louis and Adam
Trask. The iron straps rattled
around in the box, and a leg
of venison, wrapped in wet
burlap to keep it cool, jumped
around on top of the iron. It
was customary in that day to
take some substantial lump of

food as a present when you
went calling on a man, for
you had to stay to dinner
unless you wished to insult
his house. But a few guests
could set back the feeding
plans for the week if you did
not build up what you
destroyed. A quarter of pork
or a rump of beef would do.
Louis had cut down the
venison and Adam provided a
bottle of whisky.
“Now I’ll have to tell
you,”
Louis
said.
“Mr.
Hamilton will like that, but
Mrs. Hamilton has got a
skunner on it. If I was you I’d
leave it under the seat, and

when we drive around to the shop, why, then you can get it out. That's what we always do."

"Doesn't she let her husband take a drink?"

"No bigger than a bird," said Louis. "But she's got brassbound opinions. Just you leave the bottle under the seat."

They left the valley road and drove into the worn and rutted hills over a set of wheel tracks gulleyed by the winter rains. The horses strained into their collars and the buckboard rocked and swayed. The year had not been kind to the hills, and already in June they were dry and

the
stones
showed
through the short, burned
feed. The wild oats had
headed out barely six inches
above the ground, as though
with knowledge that if they
didn’t make seed quickly they
wouldn’t get to seed at all.
“It’s not likely looking
country,” Adam said.
“Likely?
Why,
Mr.
Trask, it’s country that will
break a man’s heart and eat
him up. Likely! Mr. Hamilton
has a sizable piece and he’d
of starved to death on it with
all those children. The ranch
don’t feed them. He does all

kinds of jobs, and his boys
are starting to bring in
something now. It's a fine
family."
Adam stared at a line of
dark mesquite that peeked out
of a draw. "Why in the world
would he settle on a place
like this?"
Louis Lippo, as does
every man, loved to interpret,
to a stranger particularly, if
no native was present to put
up an argument. "I'll tell
you," he said. "Take me—my
father was Italian. Came here
after the trouble but he
brought a little money. My
place isn't very big but it's
nice. My father bought it. He
picked it out. And take you—
I don't know how you're

fixed and wouldn’t ask, but
they say you’re trying to buy
the old Sanchez place and
Bordoni never gave anything
away. You’re pretty well
fixed or you couldn’t even
ask about it.”
“I’m comfortably off,”
said Adam modestly.
“I’m talking the long
way around,” said Louis.
“When
Mr.
and
Mrs.
Hamilton came into the
valley they didn’t have a pot
to piss in. They had to take
what was left—government
land that nobody else wanted.
Twenty-five acres of it won’t
keep a cow alive even in

good years, and they say the
coyotes move away in bad
years. There's people say
they don't know how the
Hamiltons lived. But of
course Mr. Hamilton went
right to work—that's how
they lived. Worked as a hired
hand till he got his threshing
machine built."
"Must have made a go of
it. I hear of him all over."
"He made a go of it all
right. Raised nine children.
I'll bet he hasn't got four bits
laid away. How could he?"
One
side
of
the
buckboard leaped up, rolled
over a big round stone, and

dropped down again. The horses were dark with sweat and lathered under the collar and britching.

“I’ll be glad to talk to him,” said Adam.

“Well, sir, he raised one fine crop—he had good children and he raised them fine. All doing well—maybe except Joe. Joe—he’s the youngest—they’re talking about sending him to college, but all the rest are doing fine. Mr. Hamilton can be proud. The house is just on the other side of the next rise. Don’t forget and bring out that whisky—she’ll freeze you to the ground.”

The

dry
earth
was
ticking under the sun and the
crickets rasped. “It’s real
godforsaken country,” said
Louis.
“Makes me feel mean,”
said Adam.
“How’s that?”
“Well, I’m fixed so I
don’t have to live on a place
like this.”
“Me too, and I don’t feel
mean. I’m just goddam glad.”
When the buckboard
topped the rise Adam could
look down on the little cluster
of buildings which composed
the Hamilton seat—a house
with many lean-tos, a cow
shed, a shop, and a wagon

shed. It was a dry and sun-eaten sight—no big trees and a small hand-watered garden.

Louis turned to Adam, and there was just a hint of hostility in his tone. “I want to put you straight on one or two things, Mr. Trask.

There’s people that when they see Samuel Hamilton the first time might get the idea he’s full of bull. He don’t talk like other people. He’s an Irishman. And he’s all full of plans—a hundred plans a day. And he’s all full of hope. My Christ, he’d have to be to live on this land!

But
you
remember this—he's a fine
worker, a good blacksmith,
and some of his plans work
out. And I've heard him talk
about things that were going
to happen and they did."
Adam was alarmed at
the hint of threat. "I'm not a
man to run another man
down," he said, and he felt
that suddenly Louis thought
of him as a stranger and an
enemy.
"I just wanted you to get
it straight. There's some
people come in from the East
and they think if a man hasn't
got a lot of money he's no
good."
"I wouldn't think of—"

“Mr. Hamilton maybe
hasn’t got four bits put away,
but he’s our people and he’s
as good as we got. And he’s
raised
the
nicest
family
you’re likely to see. I just
want you to remember that.”
Adam was on the point
of defending himself and then
he said, “I’ll remember.
Thanks for telling me.”
Louis faced around front
again. “There he is—see, out
by the shop? He must of
heard us.”
“Has he got a beard?”
Adam asked, peering.
“Yes, got a nice beard.
It’s

turning
white
fast,
beginning to grizzle up.”
They drove past the
frame house and saw Mrs.
Hamilton looking out the
window at them, and they
drew up in front of the shop
where Samuel stood waiting
for them.
Adam saw a big man,
bearded like a patriarch, his
graying hair stirring in the air
like thistledown. His cheeks
above his beard were pink
where the sun had burned his
Irish skin. He wore a clean
blue shirt, overalls, and a
leather apron. His sleeves
were rolled up, and his
muscular arms were clean

too. Only his hands were blackened from the forge. After a quick glance Adam came back to the eyes, light blue and filled with a young delight. The wrinkles around them were drawn in radial lines inward by laughter.

“Louis,” he said, “I’m glad to see you. Even in the sweetness of our little heaven here, we like to see our friends.” He smiled at Adam, and Louis said, “I brought Mr. Adam Trask to see you. He’s a stranger from down east, come to settle.”

“I’m glad,” said Samuel. “We’ll shake another time. I wouldn’t soil your hand with these forge hooks.”

“I brought some strap

iron, Mr. Hamilton. Would
you make some angles for
me? The whole frame of my
header bed is fallen to hell."
"Sure I will, Louis. Get
down, get down. We'll put
the horses to the shade."
"There's a piece of
venison behind, and Mr.
Trask
brought
a
little
something."
Samuel glanced toward
the house. "Maybe we'll get
out the 'little something'
when we've got the rig
behind the shed."
Adam could hear the
singing lilt of his speech and
yet could detect no word

pronounced in a strange

manner except perhaps in

sharpened *i*'s and *l*'s held

high on the tongue.

"Louis, will you out-span your team? I'll take the

vension in. Liza will be glad.

She likes a venison stew."

"Any of the young ones

home?"

"Well, no, they aren't.

George and Will came home

for the week-end, and they all

went last night to a dance up

Wild Horse Canyon at the

Peach

Tree

school-house.

They'll come trooping back

by dusk. We lack a sofa

because of that. I'll tell you

later—Liza

will

have

a

vengeance on them—it was

Tom did it. I'll tell you later."

He

laughed

and

started

toward the house, carrying

the wrapped deer's haunch.

"If you want you can bring

the 'little something' into the

shop, so you don't let the sun

glint on it."

They heard him calling

as he came near the house.

"Liza, you'll never guess.

Louis Lippo has brought a

piece of venison bigger than

you."

Louis drove in back of

the shed, and Adam helped

him take the horses out, tie up
the tugs, and halter them in
the shade. “He meant that
about the sun shining on the
bottle,” said Louis.
“She must be a holy
terror.”
“No bigger than a bird
but she’s brassbound.”
“ ‘Out-span,’ ” Adam
said. “I think I’ve heard it
said that way, or read it.”
Samuel rejoined them in
the shop. “Liza will be happy
if you will stay to dinner,” he
said.
“She didn’t expect us,”
Adam protested.
“Hush, man. She’ll make
some extra dumplings for the
stew. It’s a pleasure to have
you here. Give me your

straps, Louis, and let's see
how you want them."
He built a chip fire in the
black square of the forge and
pulled a bellows breeze on it
and then fed wet coke over
with his fingers until it
glowed. "Here, Louis," he
said, "wave your wing on my
fire. Slow, man, slow and
even." He laid the strips of
iron on the glowing coke.
"No, sir, Mr. Trask, Liza's
used to cooking for nine
starving children. Nothing
can startle her." He tongued
the
iron
to
more
advantageous heat, and he
laughed. "I'll take that last

back as a holy lie," he said.
"My wife is rumbling like
round stones in the surf. And
I'll caution the both of you
not to mention the word
'sofa.' It's a word of anger
and sorrow to Liza."
"You said something
about it," Adam said.
"If you knew my boy
Tom, you'd understand it
better, Mr. Trask. Louis
knows him."
"Sure I know him,"
Louis said.
Samuel went on, "My
Tom is a hell-bent boy.
Always takes more on his
plate than he can eat. Always
plants more than he can
harvest. Pleasures too much,
sorrows too much. Some

people are like that. Liza thinks I'm like that. I don't know what will come to Tom. Maybe greatness, maybe the noose—well, Hamiltons have been hanged before. And I'll tell you about that sometime."

"The sofa," Adam suggested politely.

"You're right. I do, and Liza says I do, shepherd my words like rebellious sheep. Well, came the dance at the Peach Tree school and the boys, George, Tom, Will, and Joe, all decided to go. And of course the girls were asked. George and Will and Joe, poor simple boys, each asked one lady friend, but Tom—he

took too big a helping as
usual. He asked two Williams
sisters, Jennie and Belle. How
many screw holes do you
want, Louis?”
“Five,” said Louis.
“All right. Now I must
tell you, Mr. Trask, that my
Tom has all the egotism and
self-love of a boy who thinks
he’s ugly. Mostly lets himself
go fallow, but comes a
celebration and he garlands
himself like a maypole, and
he glories like spring flowers.
This takes him quite a piece
of time. You notice the
wagon house was empty?
George and Will and Joe
started early and not so
beautiful as Tom. George
took the rig, Will had the

buggy, and Joe got the little
two-wheeled cart." Samuel's
blue
eyes
shone
with
pleasure. "Well then, Tom
came out as shy and shining
as a Roman emperor and the
only thing left with wheels
was a hay rake, and you can't
take even one Williams sister
on that. For good or bad, Liza
was taking her nap. Tom sat
on the steps and thought it
out. Then I saw him go to the
shed and hitch up two horses
and take the doubletree off
the hay rake. He wrestled the
sofa out of the house and ran
a fifth-chain under the legs—
the fine goose-neck horsehair

sofa that Liza loves better
than anything. I gave it to her
to rest on before George was
born. The last I saw, Tom
went dragging up the hill,
reclining at his ease on the
sofa to get the Williams girls.
And, oh, Lord, it'll be worn
thin as a wafer from scraping
by the time he gets it back."
Samuel put down his tongs
and placed his hands on his
hips the better to laugh. "And
Liza has the smoke of
brimstone coming out her
nostrils. Poor Tom."
Adam
said,
smiling,
"Would you like to take a
little something?"
"That I would," said

Samuel. He accepted the
bottle and took a quick
swallow
of
whisky
and
passed it back.
"Uisquebaugh—it's an
Irish word—whisky, water of
life—and so it is."
He took the red straps to
his anvil and punched screw
holes in them and bent the
angles with his hammer and
the forked sparks leaped out.
Then he dipped the iron
hissing into his half-barrel of
black water. "There you are,"
he said and threw them on the
ground.
"I thank you," said
Louis. "How much will that

be?”

“The pleasure of your company.”

“It’s always like that,” Louis said helplessly.

“No, when I put your new well down you paid my price.”

“That reminds me—Mr. Trask here is thinking of buying the Bordoni place—the old Sanchez grant—you remember?”

“I know it well,” said Samuel. “It’s a fine piece.”

“He was asking about water, and I told him you knew more about that than anybody around here.”

Adam passed the bottle, and Samuel took a delicate sip and wiped his mouth on

his forearm above the soot.

“I haven’t made up my mind,” said Adam. “I’m just asking some questions.”

“Oh, Lord, man, now you’ve put your foot in it. They say it’s a dangerous thing to question an Irishman because he’ll tell you. I hope you know what you’re doing when you issue me a license to talk. I’ve heard two ways of looking at it. One says the silent man is the wise man and the other that a man without words is a man without thought. Naturally I favor the second—Liza says to a fault. What do you want to know?”

“Well, take the Bordoni place. How deep would you

have to go to get water?”

“I’d have to see the spot

—some places thirty feet,

some places a hundred and

fifty, and in some places clear

to the center of the world.”

“But you could develop

water?”

“Nearly

every

place

except my own.”

“I’ve heard you have a

lack here.”

“Heard? Why, God in

heaven must have heard! I’ve

screamed it loud enough.”

“There’s a four-hundred-acre piece beside the river.

Would there be water under

it?”

“I’d have to look. It

seems to me it’s an odd

valley. If you'll hold your
patience close, maybe I can
tell you a little bit about it, for
I've looked at it and poked
my stinger down into it. A
hungry man gorges with his
mind—he does indeed."
Louis Lippo said, "Mr.
Trask is from New England.
He plans to settle here. He's
been west before though—in
the army, fighting Indians."
"Were you now? Then
it's you should talk and let
me learn."
"I don't want to talk
about it."
"Why not? God help my
family and my neighbors if I
had fought the Indians!"
"I didn't want to fight
them, sir." The "sir" crept in

without his knowing it.

“Yes, I can understand

that. It must be a hard thing to

kill a man you don’t know

and don’t hate.”

“Maybe that makes it

easier,” said Louis.

“You have a point,

Louis. But some men are

friends with the whole world

in their hearts, and there are

others that hate themselves

and

spread

their

hatred

around like butter on hot

bread.”

“I’d rather you told me

about this land,” Adam said

uneasily, for a sick picture of

piled-up bodies came into his

mind.

“What time is it?”

Louis stepped out and

looked at the sun. “Not past

ten o’clock.”

“If I get started I have no

self-control. My son Will

says I talk to trees when I

can’t

find

a

human

vegetable.” He sighed and sat

down on a nail keg. “I said it

was a strange valley, but

maybe that’s because I was

born in a green place. Do you

find it strange, Louis?”

“No, I never been out of

it.”

“I’ve dug into it plenty,”

Samuel

said.

“Something

went on under it—maybe still

is going on. There’s an ocean

bed underneath, and below

that another world. But that

needn’t bother a farming

man. Now, on top is good

soil, particularly on the flats.

In the upper valley it is light

and sandy, but mixed in with

that, the top sweetness of the

hills that washed down on it

in the winters. As you go

north the valley widens out,

and the soil gets blacker and

heavier and perhaps richer.

It’s my belief that marshes

were there once, and the roots

of centuries rotted into the

soil and made it black and

fertilized it. And when you

turn it up, a little greasy clay
mixes and holds it together.
That's from about Gonzales
north to the river mouth. Off
to the sides, around Salinas
and Blanco and Castroville
and
Moss
Landing,
the
marshes are still there. And
when one day those marshes
are drained off, that will be
the richest of all land in this
red world."
"He always tells what it
will be like someday," Louis
threw in.
"Well, a man's mind
can't stay in time the way his
body does."
"If I'm going to settle

here I need to know about
how and what will be," said
Adam. "My children, when I
have them, will be on it."
Samuel's eyes looked
over the heads of his friends,
out of the dark forge to the
yellow sunlight. "You'll have
to know that under a good
part of the valley, some
places deep and others pretty
near the surface, there's a
layer called hard-pan. It's a
clay, hard-packed, and it feels
greasy too. Some places it is
only a foot thick, and more in
others. And this hard-pan
resists water. If it were not
there the winter rains would
go soaking down and dampen
the earth, and in the summer
it would rise up to the roots

again. But when the earth
above the hard-pan is soaked
full, the rest runs fresheting
off or stands rotting on top.
And that's one of the main
curses of our valley."
"Well, it's a pretty good
place to live, isn't it?"
"Yes, it is, but a man
can't entirely rest when he
knows it could be richer. I've
thought that if you could
drive thousands of holes
through it to let the water in,
it might solve it. And then I
tried something with a few
sticks of dynamite. I punched
a hole through the hard-pan
and blasted. That broke it up
and the water could get down.
But, God in heaven, think of
the amount of dynamite! I've

read that a Swede—the same
man who invented dynamite
—has got a new explosive
stronger and safer Maybe that
might be the answer."
Louis
said
half
derisively and half with
admiration,
"He's
always
thinking about how to change
things. He's never satisfied
with the way they are."
Samuel smiled at him.
"They say men lived in trees
one time. Somebody had to
get dissatisfied with a high
limb or your feet would not
be touching flat ground now."
And then he laughed again. "I

can see myself sitting on my
dust heap making a world in
my mind as surely as God
created this one. But God saw
this world. I'll never see mine
except—this way. This will
be a valley of great richness
one day. It could feed the
world, and maybe it will. And
happy people will live here,
thousands and thousands—"
A cloud seemed to come over
his eyes and his face set in
sadness and he was silent.
"You make it sound like
a good place to settle," Adam
said. "Where else could I
raise my children with that
coming?"
Samuel
went
on,

“There’s one thing I don’t
understand.
There’s
a
blackness on this valley. I
don’t know what it is, but I
can feel it. Sometimes on a
white blinding day I can feel
it cutting off the sun and
squeezing the light out of it
like a sponge.” His voice
rose.
“There’s
a
black
violence on this valley. I
don’t know—I don’t know.
It’s as though some old ghost
haunted it out of the dead
ocean below and troubled the
air with unhappiness. It’s as
secret as hidden sorrow. I

don’t know what it is, but I
see it and feel it in the people
here.”
Adam shivered. “I just
remembered I promised to get
back early. Cathy, my wife, is
going to have a baby.”
“But
Liza’s
getting
ready.”
“She’ll understand when
you tell her about the baby.
My wife is feeling poorly.
And I thank you for telling
me about the water.”
“Have I depressed you
with my rambling?”
“No, not at all—not at
all. It’s Cathy’s first baby and
she’s miserable.”
Adam struggled all night

with his thoughts and the next day he drove out and shook hands with Bordoni and the Sanchez place was his.

Chapter 14

1

There is so much to tell about the Western country in that day that it is hard to know where to start. One thing sets off a hundred others. The problem is to decide which one to tell first.

You remember that Samuel Hamilton said his children had gone to a dance at the Peach Tree School. The country schools were the centers of culture then. The Protestant churches in the

towns were fighting for their existence in a country where they were newcomers. The Catholic church, first on the scene and deeply dug in, sat in comfortable tradition while the missions were gradually abandoned and their roofs fell in and pigeons roosted on the stripped altars. The library (in Latin and Spanish) of the San Antonio Mission was thrown into a granary, where the rats ate off the sheepskin bindings. In the country the repository of art and science was the school, and the schoolteacher shielded and carried the torch of learning

and

of

beauty.

The

schoolhouse was the meeting

place for music, for debate.

The polls were set in the

schoolhouse for elections.

Social life, whether it was the

crowning of a May queen, the

eulogy to a dead president, or

an all-night dance, could be

held nowhere else. And the

teacher was not only an

intellectual paragon and a

social leader, but also the

matrimonial catch of the

countryside. A family could

indeed walk proudly if a son

married the schoolteacher.

Her children were presumed

to

have
intellectual
advantages both inherited and
conditioned.
The daughters of Samuel
Hamilton were not destined
to become work-destroyed
farm
wives.
They
were
handsome girls and they
carried with them the glow of
their descent from the kings
of Ireland. They had a pride
that
transcended
their
poverty. No one ever thought
of them as deserving pity.
Samuel raised a distinctly
superior breed. They were

better read and better bred
than
most
of
their
contemporaries. To all of
them Samuel communicated
his love of learning, and he
set them apart from the
prideful ignorance of their
time. Olive Hamilton became
a teacher. That meant that she
left home at fifteen and went
to live in Salinas, where she
could go to secondary school.
At seventeen she took county
board examinations, which
covered all the arts and
sciences, and at eighteen she
was teaching school at Peach
Tree.
In her school there were

pupils older and bigger than she was. It required great tact to be a schoolteacher. To keep order among the big undisciplined boys without pistol and bull whip was a difficult and dangerous business. In one school in the mountains a teacher was raped by her pupils.

Olive Hamilton had not only to teach everything, but to all ages. Very few youths went past the eighth grade in those days, and what with farm duties some of them took fourteen or fifteen years to do it. Olive also had to practice rudimentary

medicine, for there were constant accidents. She sewed up knife cuts after a fight in the schoolyard. When a small barefooted boy was bitten by a rattlesnake, it was her duty to suck his toe to draw the poison out.

She taught reading to the first grade and algebra to the eighth. She led the singing, acted as a critic of literature, wrote the social notes that went weekly to the *Salinas Journal.* In addition, the whole social life of the area was in her hands, not only graduation exercises, but dances, meetings, debates, chorals, Christmas and May

Day
festivals,
patriotic
exudations on Decoration
Day and the Fourth of July.
She was on the election board
and headed and held together
all charities. It was far from
an easy job, and it had duties
and
obligations
beyond
belief. The teacher had no
private life. She was watched
jealously for any weakness of
character. She could not
board with one family for
more than one term, for that
would
cause
jealousy—a
family

gained
social
ascendancy by boarding the
teacher. If a marriageable son
belonged to the family where
she boarded a proposal was
automatic; if there was more
than one claimant, vicious
fights occurred over her hand.
The Aguita boys, three of
them, nearly clawed each
other to death over Olive
Hamilton. Teachers rarely
lasted very long in the
country schools. The work
was so hard and the proposals
so constant that they married
within a very short time.
This was a course Olive
Hamilton
determined

she
would not take. She did not
share
the
intellectual
enthusiasms of her father, but
the time she had spent in
Salinas determined her not to
be a ranch wife. She wanted
to live in a town, perhaps not
so big as Salinas but at least
not a crossroads. In Salinas,
Olive
had
experienced
niceties of living, the choir
and vestments, Altar Guild,
and bean suppers of the
Episcopal church. She had
partaken of the arts—road
companies of plays and even

operas, with their magic and
promise of an aromatic world
outside. She had gone to
parties,
played
charades,
competed in poetry readings,
joined a chorus and orchestra.
Salinas had tempted her.
There she could go to a party
dressed for the party and
come home in the same dress,
instead of rolling her clothes
in a saddlebag and riding ten
miles, then unrolling and
pressing them.
Busy though she was
with her teaching, Olive
longed for the metropolitan
life, and when the young man
who had built the flour mill in
King City sued properly for

her hand, she accepted him
subject to a long and secret
engagement. The secrecy was
required because if it were
known there would be trouble
among the young men in the
neighborhood.
Olive
had
not
her
father’s brilliance, but she did
have a sense of fun, together
with her mother’s strong and
undeviating will. What light
and beauty could be forced
down the throats of her
reluctant pupils, she forced.
There was a wall against
learning. A man wanted his
children to read, to figure,
and that was enough. More

might make them dissatisfied
and flighty. And there were
plenty of examples to prove
that learning made a boy
leave the farm to live in the
city—to
consider
himself
better than his father. Enough
arithmetic to measure land
and lumber and to keep
accounts, enough writing to
order goods and write to
relatives, enough reading for
newspapers, almanacs, and
farm journals, enough music
for religious and patriotic
display—that was enough to
help a boy and not to lead
him astray. Learning was for
doctors,
lawyers,

and
teachers, a class set off and
not considered related to
other people. There were
some sports, of course, like
Samuel Hamilton, and he was
tolerated and liked, but if he
had not been able to dig a
well, shoe a horse, or run a
threshing
machine,
God
knows what would have been
thought of the family.
Olive did marry her
young man and did move,
first to Paso Robles, then to
King City, and finally to
Salinas. She was as intuitive
as a cat. Her acts were based
on
feelings

rather

than

thoughts.

She

had

her

mother’s firm chin and button

nose and her father’s fine

eyes. She was the most

definite

of

any

of

the

Hamiltons except her mother.

Her theology was a curious

mixture of Irish fairies and an

Old

Testament

Jehovah

whom in her later life she

confused with her father.

Heaven was to her a nice
home ranch inhabited by her
dead
relatives.
External
realities of a frustrating nature
she obliterated by refusing to-believe in them, and when
one resisted her disbelief she
raged at it. It was told of her
that she cried bitterly because
she could not go to two
dances on one Saturday night.
One was in Greenfield and
the other in San Lucas—
twenty miles apart. To have
gone to both and then home
would have entailed a sixty-mile horseback ride. This was
a fact she could not blast with
her disbelief, and so she cried
with vexation and went to
neither dance.
As she grew older she

developed
a
scattergun
method for dealing with
unpleasant facts. When I, her
only son, was sixteen I
contracted
pleural
pneumonia, in that day a
killing disease. I went down
and down, until the wing tips
of the angels brushed my
eyes.
Olive
used
her
scattergun method of treating
pleural pneumonia, and it
worked. The Episcopalian
minister prayed with and for
me, the Mother Superior and
nuns of the convent next to

our house held me up to
Heaven for relief twice a day,
a distant relative who was a
Christian Science reader held
the thought for me. Every
incantation, magic, and herbal
formula known was brought
out, and she got two good
nurses and the town's best
doctors. Her method was
practical. I got well. She was
loving and firm with her
family, three girls and me,
trained us in housework, dish
washing, clothes washing,
and manners. When angered
she had a terrible eye which
could blanch the skin off a
bad child as easily as if he
were a boiled almond.
When I recovered from
my pneumonia it came time

for me to learn to walk again.
I had been nine weeks in bed,
and the muscles had gone lax
and the laziness of recovery
had set in. When I was helped
up, every nerve cried, and the
wound in my side, which had
been opened to drain the pus
from the pleural cavity,
pained horribly. I fell back in
bed, crying, “I can’t do it! I
can’t get up!”
Olive fixed me with her
terrible eye. “Get up!” she
said. “Your father has worked
all day and sat up all night.
He has gone into debt for
you. Now get up!”
And I got up.
Debt was an ugly word
and an ugly concept to Olive.
A bill unpaid past the

fifteenth of the month was a

debt.

The

word

had

connotations of dirt and

slovenliness and dishonor.

Olive, who truly believed that

her family was the best in the

world,

quite

snobbishly

would not permit it to be

touched by debt. She planted

that terror of debt so deeply

in her children that even now,

in

a

changed

economic

pattern where indebtedness is

a part of living, I become

restless when a bill is two days overdue. Olive never accepted the time-payment plan when it became popular. A thing bought on time was a thing you did not own and for which you were in debt. She saved for things she wanted, and this meant that the neighbors had new gadgets as much as two years before we did.

2

Olive had great courage. Perhaps it takes courage to raise children. And I must tell you what she did about the First World War. Her thinking

was

not

international.

Her

first

boundary was the geography

of her family, second her

town, Salinas, and finally

there was a dotted line, not

clearly defined, which was

the county line. Thus she did

not quite believe in the war,

not even when Troop C, our

militia cavalry, was called

out, loaded its horses on a

train, and set out for the open

world.

Martin

Hopps

lived

around the corner from us. He

was wide, short, red-haired.

His mouth was wide, and he
had red eyes. He was almost
the shyest boy in Salinas. To
say good morning to him was
to make him itch with self-consciousness. He belonged
to Troop C because the
armory had a basketball
court.
If the Germans had
known Olive and had been
sensible they would have
gone out of their way not to
anger her. But they didn't
know or they were stupid.
When they killed Martin
Hopps they lost the war
because that made my mother
mad and she took out after
them. She had liked Martin
Hopps. He had never hurt
anyone. When they killed him
Olive declared war on the

German empire.

She cast about for a

weapon. Knitting helmets and

socks was not deadly enough

for her. For a time she put on

a Red Cross uniform and met

other ladies similarly dressed

in

the

armory,

where

bandages were rolled and

reputations unrolled. This

was all right, but it was not

driving at the heart of the

Kaiser. Olive wanted blood

for the life of Martin Hopps.

She found her weapon in

Liberty bonds. She had never

sold anything in her life

beyond an occasional angel

cake for the Altar Guild in the

basement of the Episcopal church, but she began to sell bonds by the bale. She brought ferocity to her work. I think she made people afraid not to buy them. And when they did buy from Olive she gave them a sense of actual combat, of putting a bayonet in the stomach of Germany.

As her sales skyrocketed and stayed up, the Treasury Department began to notice this new Amazon. First there came mimeographed letters of commendation, then real letters signed by the Secretary of the Treasury, and not with a rubber stamp either. We were proud but not so proud as when prizes began to

arrive, a German helmet (too
small for any of us to wear), a
bayonet, a jagged piece of
shrapnel set on an ebony
base. Since we were not
eligible for armed conflict
beyond
marching
with
wooden guns, our mother's
war seemed to justify us. And
then she outdid herself, and
outdid everyone in our part of
the country. She quadrupled
her already fabulous record
and she was awarded the
fairest prize of all—a ride in
an army airplane.
Oh, we were proud kids!
Even vicariously this was an
eminence we could hardly
stand. But my poor mother—I

must tell you that there are certain things in the existence of which my mother did not believe, against any possible evidence to the contrary. One was a bad Hamilton and another was the airplane. The fact that she had seen them didn't make her believe in them one bit more.

In the light of what she did I have tried to imagine how she felt. Her soul must have crawled with horror, for how can you fly in something that does not exist? As a punishment the ride would have been cruel and unusual, but it was a prize, a gift, an honor, and an eminence. She must have looked into our eyes and seen the shining

idolatry there and understood
that she was trapped. Not to
have gone would have let her
family
down.
She
was
surrounded, and there was no
honorable way out save
death. Once she had decided
to go up in the nonexistent
thing she seemed to have had
no idea whatever that she
would survive it.
Olive made her will—
took lots of time with it and
had it checked to be sure it
was legal. Then she opened
her rosewood box wherein
were the letters her husband
had written to her in courtship
and since. We had not known

he wrote poetry to her, but he had. She built a fire in the grate and burned every letter. They were hers, and she wanted no other human to see them. She bought all new underwear. She had a horror of being found dead with mended or, worse, unmended underclothes. I think perhaps she saw the wide twisted mouth and embarrassed eyes of Martin Hopps on her and felt that in some way she was reimbursing him for his stolen life. She was very gentle with us and did not notice a badly washed dinner plate that left a greasy stain on the dish towel.

This

glory

was
scheduled to take place at the
Salinas Race Track and
Rodeo Grounds. We were
driven to the track in an army
automobile,
feeling
more
solemn and golden than at a
good funeral. Our father was
working at the Spreckles
Sugar Factory, five miles
from town and could not get
off, or perhaps didn’t want to,
for fear he could not stand the
strain. But Olive had made
arrangements, on pain of not
going up, for the plane to try
to fly as far as the sugar
factory before it crashed.
I realize now that the
several hundred people who

had gathered simply came to see the airplane, but at that time we thought they were there to do my mother honor. Olive was not a tall woman and at that age she had begun to put on weight. We had to help her out of the car. She was probably stiff with fright but her little chin was set. The plane stood in the field around which the race track was laid out. It was appallingly little and flimsy—an open cockpit biplane with wooden struts, tied with piano wire. The wings were covered with canvas. Olive was stunned. She went to the side

as an ox to the knife. Over the
clothes she was convinced
were her burial clothes, two
sergeants slipped on a coat, a
padded coat, and a flight coat,
and she grew rounder and
rounder with each layer. Then
a leather helmet and goggles,
and with her little button of a
nose and her pink cheeks you
really had something. She
looked like a goggled ball.
The two sergeants hoisted her
bodily into the cockpit and
wedged her in. She filled the
opening completely. As they
strapped her in she suddenly
came to life and began
waving
frantically
for
attention. One of the soldiers

climbed up, listened to her,
came over to my sister Mary,
and led her to the side of the
plane. Olive was tugging at
the thick padded flight glove
on her left hand. She got her
hands free, took off her
engagement ring with its tiny
diamond, and handed it down
to Mary. She set her gold
wedding ring firmly, pulled
the gloves back on, and faced
the front. The pilot climbed
into the front cockpit, and one
of the sergeants threw his
weight
on
the
wooden
propeller. The little ship
taxied away and turned, and
down the field it roared and

staggered into the air, and
Olive was looking straight
ahead and probably her eyes
were closed.
We followed it with our
eyes as it swept up and away,
leaving a lonesome silence
behind
it.
The
bond
committee, the friends and
relatives,
the
simple
unhonored spectators didn’t
think of leaving the field. The
plane became a speck in the
sky toward Spreckles and
disappeared. It was fifteen
minutes before we saw it
again, flying serenely and

very high. Then to our horror
it seemed to stagger and fall.
It fell endlessly, caught itself,
climbed, and made a loop.
One of the sergeants laughed.
For a moment the plane
steadied and then it seemed to
go crazy. It barrel-rolled,
made
Immelmann
turns,
inside and outside loops, and
turned over and flew over the
field upside down. We could
see the black bullet which
was our mother's helmet. One
of the soldiers said quietly, "I
think he's gone nuts. She's
not a young woman."
The
airplane
landed

steadily enough and ran up to
the group. The motor died.
The
pilot
climbed
out,
shaking
his
head
in
perplexity.
“Goddamest
woman I ever saw,” he said.
He reached up and shook
Olive’s nerveless hand and
walked hurriedly away.
It took four men and
quite a long time to get Olive
out of the cockpit. She was so
rigid they could not bend her.
We took her home and put
her to bed, and she didn’t get

up for two days.

What

had

happened

came out slowly. The pilot talked some and Olive talked some, and both stories had to be put together before they made sense. They had flown out and circled the Spreckles Sugar Factory as ordered—circled it three times so that our father would be sure to see, and then the pilot thought of a joke. He meant no harm. He shouted something, and his face looked contorted. Olive could not hear over the noise of the engine. The pilot throttled down and shouted, "Stunt?" It was a kind of joke. Olive saw his goggled

face and the slip stream
caught his word and distorted
it. What Olive heard was the
word “stuck.”
Well, she thought, here
it is just as I knew it would
be. Here was her death. Her
mind flashed to see if she had
forgotten
anything—will
made, letters burned, new
underwear, plenty of food in
the house for dinner. She
wondered whether she had
turned out the light in the
back room. It was all in a
second. Then she thought
there might be an outside
chance of survival. The
young soldier was obviously
frightened and fear might be
the worst thing that could

happen to him in handling the
situation. If she gave way to
the panic that lay on her heart
it might frighten him more.
She decided to encourage
him. She smiled brightly and
nodded to give him courage,
and then the bottom fell out
of the world. When he
leveled out of his loop the
pilot looked back again and
shouted, “More?”
Olive was way beyond
hearing anything, but her chin
was
set
and
she
was
determined to help the pilot
so that he would not be too
afraid before they hit the

earth. She smiled and nodded again. At the end of each stunt he looked back, and each time she encouraged him. Afterward he said over and over, "She's the goddamest woman I ever saw. I tore up the rule book and she wanted more. Good Christ, what a pilot she would have made!"

Chapter 15

1

Adam sat like a contented cat on his land. From the entrance to the little draw under a giant oak, which dipped its

roots
into
underground water, he could
look out over the acres lying
away to the river and across
to an alluvial flat and then up
the rounded foothills on the
western side. It was a fair
place even in the summer
when the sun laced into it. A
line of river willows and
sycamores banded it in the
middle, and the western hills
were yellow-brown with feed.
For
some
reason
the
mountains to the west of the
Salinas Valley have a thicker
skin of earth on them than
have the eastern foothills, so

that the grass is richer there.
Perhaps the peaks store rain
and distribute it more evenly,
and perhaps, being more
wooded, they draw more
rainfall.
Very
little
of
the
Sanchez, now Trask, place
was under cultivation, but
Adam in his mind could see
the wheat growing tall and
squares of green alfalfa near
the river. Behind him he
could
hear
the
rackety
hammering of the carpenters
brought all the way from

Salinas to rebuild the old
Sanchez house. Adams had
decided to live in the old
house. Here was a place in
which to plant his dynasty.
The manure was scraped out,
the old floors torn up, neck-rubbed
window
casings
ripped away. New sweet
wood was going in, pine
sharp with resin and velvety
redwood and a new roof of
long split shakes. The old
thick walls sucked in coat
after coat of white-wash
made with lime and salt
water, which, as it dried,
seemed to have a luminosity
of its own.
He planned a permanent
seat. A gardener had trimmed

the ancient roses, planted
geraniums,
laid
out
the
vegetable flat, and brought
the living spring in little
channels to wander back and
forth through the garden.
Adam foretasted comfort for
himself and his descendants.
In a shed, covered with
tarpaulins, lay the crated
heavy furniture sent from San
Francisco and carted out from
King City.
He would have good
living too. Lee, his pigtailed
Chinese cook, had made a
special trip to Pajaro to buy
the pots and kettles and pans,
kegs, jars, copper, and glass

for his kitchen. A new pigsty
was building far from the
house and downwind, with
chicken and duck runs near
and a kennel for the dogs to
keep the coyotes away. It was
no
quick
thing
Adam
contemplated, to be finished
and ready in a hurry. His men
worked
deliberately
and
slowly. It was a long job.
Adam wanted it well done.
He inspected every wooden
joint, stood off to study paint
samples on a shingle. In the
corner of his room catalogues
piled

up—catalogues
for
machinery, furnishing, seeds,
fruit trees. He was glad now
that his father had left him a
rich man. In his mind a
darkness was settling over his
memory
of
Connecticut.
Perhaps the hard flat light of
the West was blotting out his
birthplace. When he thought
back to his father's house, to
the farm, the town, to his
brother's face, there was a
blackness over all of it. And
he shook off the memories.
Temporarily
he
had
moved Cathy into the white-painted, clean spare house of

Bordoni, there to await the
home and the child. There
was no doubt whatever that
the child would be finished
well before the house was
ready.
But
Adam
was
unhurried.
“I want it built strong,”
he directed over and over. “I
want it to last—copper nails
and hard wood—nothing to
rust and rot.”
He was not alone in his
preoccupation with the future.
The whole valley, the whole
West was that way. It was a
time when the past had lost
its sweetness and its sap.
You’d go a good long road

before you'd find a man, and
he very old, who wished to
bring back a golden past.
Men
were
notched
and
comfortable in the present,
hard and unfruitful as it was,
but only as a doorstep into a
fantastic future. Rarely did
two men meet, or three stand
in a bar, or a dozen gnaw
tough venison in camp, that
the valley's future, paralyzing
in its grandeur, did not come
up, not as conjecture but as a
certainty.
"It'll be—who knows?
maybe in our lifetime," they
said.
And

people
found
happiness
in
the
future
according to their present
lack. Thus a man might bring
his family down from a hill
ranch in a drag—a big box
nailed on oaken runners
which pulled bumping down
the broken hills. In the straw
of the box, his wife would
brace the children against the
tooth-shattering,
tongue-biting crash of the runners
against stone and ground.
And the father would set his
heels and think, When the
roads come in—then will be
the time. Why, we'll sit high

and happy in a surrey and get clear into King City in three hours—and what more in the world could you want than that?

Or let a man survey his grove of live-oak trees, hard as coal and hotter, the best firewood in the world. In his pocket might be a newspaper with a squib: “Oak cord wood is bringing ten dollars a cord in Los Angeles.” Why, hell, when the railroad puts a branch out here, I could lay it down neat, broke up and seasoned, right beside the track, for a dollar and a half a cord. Let’s go whole hog and say the Southern Pacific will charge three-fifty to carry it. There’s still five dollars a

cord,
and
there’s
three
thousand cords in that little
grove alone. That’s fifteen
thousand dollars right there.
There were others who
prophesied, with rays shining
on their foreheads, about the
sometime ditches that would
carry water all over the valley
—who knows? maybe in our
lifetime—or deep wells with
steam engines to pump the
water up out of the guts of the
world. Can you imagine? Just
think what this land would
raise with plenty of water!
Why, it will be a frigging
garden!
Another man, but he was

crazy, said that someday
there'd be a way, maybe ice,
maybe some other way, to get
a peach like this here I got in
my
hand
clear
to
Philadelphia.
In the towns they talked
of sewers and inside toilets,
and some already had them;
and arc lights on the street
corners—Salinas had those—
and telephones. There wasn't
any limit, no boundary at all,
to the future. And it would be
so a man wouldn't have room
to
store
his
happiness.

Contentment would flood
raging down the valley like
the Salinas River in March of
a thirty-inch year.
They looked over the
flat dry dusty valley and the
ugly mushroom towns and
they saw a loveliness—who
knows?
maybe
in
our
lifetime. That’s one reason
you couldn’t laugh too much
at Samuel Hamilton. He let
his
mind
range
more
deliciously than any other,
and it didn’t sound so silly
when you heard what they

were doing in San Jose.
Where Samuel went haywire
was
wondering
whether
people would be happy when
all that came.
Happy? He’s haywire
now. Just let us get it, and
we’ll show you happiness.
And
Samuel
could
remember hearing of a cousin
of his mother’s in Ireland, a
knight
and
rich
and
handsome, and anyway shot
himself on a silken couch,
sitting

beside
the
most
beautiful woman in the world
who loved him.
“There’s a capacity for
appetite,” Samuel said, “that
a whole heaven and earth of
cake can’t satisfy.”
Adam Trask nosed some
of his happiness into futures
but
there
was
present
contentment in him too. He
felt his heart smack up
against his throat when he
saw Cathy sitting in the sun,
quiet, her baby growing, and
a transparency to her skin that
made him think of the angels

on Sunday School cards.
Then a breeze would move
her bright hair, or she would
raise her eyes, and Adam
would swell out in his
stomach with a pressure of
ecstasy that was close kin to
grief.
If Adam rested like a
sleek fed cat on his land,
Cathy was catlike too. She
had the inhuman attribute of
abandoning what she could
not get and of waiting for
what she could get. These
two gifts gave her great
advantages. Her pregnancy
had been an accident. When
her attempt to abort herself
failed
and
the

doctor
threatened her, she gave up
that method. This does not
mean that she reconciled
herself to pregnancy. She sat
it out as she would have
weathered an illness. Her
marriage to Adam had been
the same. She was trapped
and she took the best possible
way out. She had not wanted
to go to California either, but
other plans were denied her
for the time being. As a very
young child she had learned
to
win
by
using
the
momentum of her opponent.
It was easy to guide a man’s

strength
where
it
was
impossible to resist him. Very
few people in the world could
have known that Cathy did
not want to be where she was
and in the condition she was.
She relaxed and waited for
the change she knew must
come some time. Cathy had
the one quality required of a
great and successful criminal:
she trusted no one, confided
in no one. Her self was an
island. It is probable that she
did not even look at Adam's
new land or building house,
or turn his towering plans to
reality in her mind, because
she did not intend to live here

after her sickness was over,
after her trap opened. But to
his questions she gave proper
answers; to do otherwise
would be waste motion, and
dissipated energy, and foreign
to a good cat.
“See, my darling, how
the
house
lies—windows
looking down the valley?”
“It’s beautiful.”
“You know, it may
sound foolish, but I find
myself trying to think the way
old Sanchez did a hundred
years ago. How was the
valley then? He must have
planned so carefully. You
know, he had pipes? He did
—made out of redwood with

a hole bored or burned
through to carry the water
down from the spring. We
dug up some pieces of it."
"That's remarkable," she
said. "He must have been
clever."
"I'd like to know more
about him. From the way the
house sets, the trees he left,
the shape and proportion of
the house, he must have been
a kind of an artist."
"He was a Spaniard,
wasn't he? They're artistic
people,
I've
heard.
I
remember in school about a
painter—no,
he

was

a

Greek.”

“I wonder where I could

find out about old Sanchez.”

“Well, somebody must

know.”

“All of his work and

planning, and Bordoni kept

cows in the house. You know

what I wonder about most?”

“What, Adam?”

“I wonder if he had a

Cathy and who she was.”

She smiled and looked

down and away from him.

“The things you say.”

“He must have had! He

must have had. I never had

energy or direction or—well,

even a very great desire to

live before I had you.”

“Adam, you embarrass
me. Adam, be careful. Don’t
joggle me, it hurts.”
“I’m
sorry.
I’m
so
clumsy.”
“No, you’re not. You
just don’t think. Should I be
knitting or sewing, do you
suppose? I’m so comfortable
just sitting.”
“We’ll buy everything
we need. You just sit and be
comfortable. I guess in a way
you’re working harder than
anyone here. But the pay—
the pay is wonderful.”
“Adam, the scar on my
forehead isn’t going to go
away, I’m afraid.”

“The doctor said it
would fade in time.”
“Well,
sometimes
it
seems to be getting fainter,
and then it comes back. Don’t
you think it’s darker today?”
“No, I don’t.”
But it was. It looked like
a huge thumbprint, even to
whorls of wrinkled skin. He
put his finger near, and she
drew her head away.
“Don’t,” she said. “It’s
tender to the touch. It turns
red if you touch it.”
“It will go away. Just
takes a little time, that’s all.”
She smiled as he turned,
but when he walked away her
eyes

were
flat
and
directionless. She shifted her
body restlessly. The baby was
kicking. She relaxed and all
her muscles loosened. She
waited.
Lee came near where her
chair was set under the
biggest oak tree. “Missy likee
tea?”
“No—yes, I would too.”
Her eyes inspected him
and her inspection could not
penetrate the dark brown of
his eyes. He made her uneasy.
Cathy had always been able
to shovel into the mind of any
man and dig up his impulses
and his desires. But Lee’s
brain gave and repelled like

rubber. His face was lean and pleasant, his forehead broad, firm, and sensitive, and his lips curled in a perpetual smile. His long black glossy braided queue, tied at the bottom with a narrow piece of black silk, hung over his shoulder and moved rhythmically against his chest. When he did violent work he curled his queue on top of his head. He wore narrow cotton trousers, black heelless slippers, and a

frogged
Chinese
smock.
Whenever he could he hid his
hands in his sleeves as though
he were afraid for them, as
most Chinese did in that day.
“I bling litta table,” he
said, bowed slightly, and
shuffled away.
Cathy looked after him,
and her eyebrows drew down
in a scowl. She was not afraid
of Lee, yet she was not
comfortable with him either.
But he was a good and
respectful servant—the best.
And what harm could he do
her?

2

The summer progressed and
the Salinas River retired

underground or stood in
green pools under high banks.
The cattle lay drowsing all
day long under the willows
and only moved out at night
to feed. An umber tone came
to
the
grass.
And
the
afternoon
winds
blowing
inevitably down the valley
started a dust that was like
fog and raised it into the sky
almost
as
high
as
the

mountaintops. The wild oat
roots stood up like nigger-heads where the winds blew
the earth away. Along a
polished earth, pieces of
straw and twigs scampered
until they were stopped by
some rooted thing; and little
stones
rolled
crookedly
before the wind.
It became more apparent
than ever why old Sanchez
had built his house in the
little draw, for the wind and
the dust did not penetrate, and
the
spring,
while
it
diminished, still gushed a
head of cold clear water. But

Adam, looking out over his
dry dust-obscured land, felt
the panic the Eastern man
always does at first in
California. In a Connecticut
summer two weeks without
rain is a dry spell and four a
drought. If the countryside is
not green it is dying. But in
California
it
does
not
ordinarily rain at all between
the end of May and the first
of November. The Eastern
man, though he has been told,
feels the earth is sick in the
rainless months.
Adam sent Lee with a
note to the Hamilton place to
ask Samuel to visit him and

discuss the boring of some
wells on his new place.
Samuel was sitting in the
shade, watching his son Tom
design
and
build
a
revolutionary coon trap, when
Lee drove up in the Trask
cart. Lee folded his hands in
his
sleeves
and
waited.
Samuel read the note. “Tom,”
he said, “do you think you
could keep the estate going
while I run down and talk
water with a dry man?”
“Why don’t I go with
you? You might need some

help.”

“At

talking?—that

I

don’t. It won’t come to

digging for some time if I’m

any judge. With wells there’s

got to be a great deal of talk

—five or six hundred words

for every shovel of dirt.”

“I’d like to go—it’s Mr.

Trask, isn’t it? I didn’t meet

him when he came here.”

“You’ll do that when the

digging starts. I’m older than

you. I’ve got first claim on

the talk. You know, Tom, a

coon is going to reach his

pretty little hand through here

and let himself out. You

know how clever they are.”

“See this piece here? It

screws on and turns down
here. You couldn't get out of
that yourself."
"I'm not so clever as a
coon. I think you've worked
it out, though. Tom, boy,
would you saddle Doxology
while I go tell your mother
where I'm going?"
"I bling lig," said Lee.
"Well, I have to come
home some time."
"I bling back."
"Nonsense,"
said
Samuel. "I'll lead my horse in
and ride back."
Samuel sat in the buggy
beside Lee, and his clobber-footed saddle horse shuffled
clumsily behind.
"What's your name?"
Samuel asked pleasantly.

“Lee. Got more name.
Lee papa family name. Call
Lee.”
“I’ve read quite a lot
about China. You born in
China?”
“No. Born here.”
Samuel was silent for
quite a long time while the
buggy lurched down the
wheel track toward the dusty
valley. “Lee,” he said at last,
“I mean no disrespect, but
I’ve never been able to figure
why you people still talk
pidgin when an illiterate
baboon from the black bogs
of Ireland, with a head full of
Gaelic and a tongue like a
potato, learns to talk a poor
grade of English in ten
years.”

Lee grinned. “Me talkee
Chinese talk,” he said.
“Well, I guess you have
your reasons. And it’s not my
affair. I hope you’ll forgive
me if I don’t believe it, Lee.”
Lee looked at him and
the brown eyes under their
rounded upper lids seemed to
open and deepen until they
weren’t foreign any more, but
man’s
eyes,
warm
with
understanding. Lee chuckled.
“It’s
more
than
a
convenience,” he said. “It’s
even

more

than

self-protection. Mostly we have to

use it to be understood at all.”

Samuel showed no sign

of having observed any

change. “I can understand the

first

two,”

he

said

thoughtfully, “but the third

escapes me.”

Lee said, “I know it’s

hard to believe, but it has

happened so often to me and

to my friends that we take if

for granted. If I should go up

to a lady or a gentleman, for

instance, and speak as I am

doing now, I wouldn’t be

understood.”

“Why not?”

“Pidgin they expect, and
pidgin they’ll listen to. But
English from me they don’t
listen to, and so they don’t
understand it.”

“Can that be possible?
How do I understand you?”

“That’s why I’m talking
to you. You are one of the
rare people who can separate
your observation from your
preconception. You see what
is, where most people see
what they expect.”

“I hadn’t thought of it.
And I’ve not been so tested as
you, but what you say has a
candle of truth. You know,
I’m very glad to talk to you.
I’ve wanted to ask so many
questions.”

“Happy to oblige.”

“So many questions. For

instance, you wear the queue.

I’ve read that it is a badge of

slavery imposed by conquest

by the Manchus on the

Southern Chinese.”

“That is true.”

“Then why in the name

of God do you wear it here,

where the Manchus can’t get

at you?”

“Talkee Chinese talk.

Queue Chinese fashion—you

savvy?”

Samuel laughed loudly.

“That does have the green

touch of convenience,” he

said. “I wish I had a hidey-hole like that.”

“I’m wondering whether

I can explain,” said Lee.

“Where there is no likeness of

experience it's very difficult.
I understand you were not
born in America."
"No, in Ireland."
"And in a few years you
can almost disappear; while I,
who was born in Grass
Valley, went to school and
several
years
to
the
University of California, have
no chance of mixing."
"If you cut your queue,
dressed and talked like other
people?"
"No. I tried it. To the so-called whites I was still a
Chinese, but an untrustworthy
one; and at the same time my
Chinese friends steered clear
of me. I had to give it up."

Lee pulled up under a
tree, got out and unfastened
the check rein. “Time for
lunch,” he said. “I made a
package. Would you like
some?”
“Sure I would. Let me
get down in the shade there. I
forget to eat sometimes, and
that’s strange because I’m
always hungry. I’m interested
in what you say. It has a
sweet sound of authority.
Now it peeks into my mind
that you should go back to
China.”
Lee smiled satirically at
him. “In a few minutes I
don’t think you’ll find a loose
bar I’ve missed in a lifetime
of search. I did go back to
China. My father was a fairly

successful man. It didn't
work. They said I looked like
a foreign devil; they said I
spoke like a foreign devil. I
made mistakes in manners,
and I didn't know delicacies
that had grown up since my
father left. They wouldn't
have me. You can believe it
or not—I'm less foreign here
than I was in China."
"I'll have to believe you
because
it's
reasonable.
You've given me things to
think about until at least
February twenty-seventh. Do
you mind my questions?"
"As a matter of fact, no.
The trouble with pidgin is
that you get to thinking in

pidgin. I write a great deal to
keep my English up. Hearing
and reading aren't the same
as speaking and writing."
"Don't you ever make a
mistake? I mean, break into
English?"
"No, I don't. I think it's
a matter of what is expected.
You look at a man's eyes,
you see that he expects pidgin
and a shuffle, so you speak
pidgin and shuffle."
"I guess that's right,"
said Samuel. "In my own way
I tell jokes because people
come all the way to my place
to laugh. I try to be funny for
them even when the sadness
is on me."
"But the Irish are said to
be a happy people, full of

jokes.”

“There’s your pidgin and your queue. They’re not. They’re a dark people with a gift for suffering way past their deserving. It’s said that without whisky to soak and soften the world, they’d kill themselves. But they tell jokes because it’s expected of them.”

Lee unwrapped a little bottle. “Would you like some of this? Chinese drink ng-ka-py.”

“What is it?”

“Chinee blandy. Stlong dlink—as a matter of fact it’s a brandy with a dosage of wormwood. Very powerful. It softens the world.”

Samuel sipped from the bottle. “Tastes a little like

rotten apples," he said.

"Yes, but nice rotten

apples. Taste it back along

your

tongue

toward

the

roots."

Samuel

took

a

big

swallow and tilted his head

back. "I see what you mean.

That *is* good."

"Here

are

some

sandwiches, pickles, cheese, a

can of buttermilk."

"You do well."

"Yes, I see to it."

Samuel
bit
into
a
sandwich. “I was shuffling
over half a hundred questions.
What you said brings the
brightest one up. You don’t
mind?”
“Not at all. The only
thing I do want to ask of you
is not to talk this way when
other people are listening. It
would only confuse them and
they wouldn’t believe it
anyway.”
“I’ll try,” said Samuel.
“If I slip, just remember that
I’m a comical genius. It’s
hard to split a man down the
middle and always to reach
for the same half.”

“I think I can guess what
your next question is.”
“What?”
“Why am I content to be
a servant?”
“How in the world did
you know?”
“It seemed to follow.”
“Do you resent the
question?”
“Not from you. There
are no ugly questions except
those
clothed
in
condescension. I don’t know
where being a servant came
into disrepute. It is the refuge
of a philosopher, the food of
the lazy, and, properly carried
out, it is a position of power,
even

of

love.

I

can’t

understand

why

more

intelligent people don’t take it

as a career—learn to do it

well and reap its benefits. A

good servant has absolute

security, not because of his

master’s

kindness,

but

because

of

habit

and

indolence. It’s a hard thing

for a man to change spices or

lay out his own socks. He’ll

keep a bad servant rather than
change. But a good servant,
and I am an excellent one,
can completely control his
master, tell him what to think,
how to act, whom to marry,
when to divorce, reduce him
to terror as a discipline, or
distribute happiness to him,
and finally be mentioned in
his will. If I had wished I
could have robbed, stripped,
and
beaten
anyone
I’ve
worked for and come away
with thanks. Finally, in my
circumstances
I
am
unprotected. My master will

defend me, protect me. You
have to work and worry. I
work less and worry less.
And I am a good servant. A
bad one does no work and
does no worrying, and he still
is fed, clothed, and protected.
I don’t know any profession
where the field is so cluttered
with incompetents and where
excellence is so rare.”
Samuel leaned toward
him, listening intently.
Lee went on, “It’s going
to be a relief after that to go
back to pidgin.”
“It’s
a
very
short
distance to the Sanchez place.
Why did we stop so near?”

Samuel asked.

“Allee time talkee. Me Chinee number one boy. You leddy go now?”

“What? Oh, sure. But it must be a lonely life.”

“That’s the only fault with it,” said Lee. “I’ve been thinking of going to San Francisco and starting a little business.”

“Like a laundry? Or a grocery store?”

“No. Too many Chinese laundries and restaurants. I thought perhaps a bookstore. I’d like that, and the competition wouldn’t be too

great. I probably won't do it
though. A servant loses his
initiative."

3

In the afternoon Samuel and
Adam rode over the land. The
wind came up as it did every
afternoon, and the yellow
dust ran into the sky.
"Oh, it's a good piece,"
Samuel cried. "It's a rare
piece of land."
"Seems
to
me
it's
blowing away bit by bit,"
Adam observed.
"No, it's just moving
over a little. You lose some to
the James ranch but you get
some from the Southeys."

“Well, I don’t like the
wind. Makes me nervous.”
“Nobody likes wind for
very long. It makes animals
nervous and restless too. I
don’t know whether you
noticed, but a little farther up
the valley they’re planting
windbreaks of gum trees.
Eucalyptus—comes
from
Australia. They say the gums
grow ten feet a year. Why
don’t you try a few rows and
see what happens? In time
they should back up the wind
a little, and they make grand
firewood.”
“Good idea,” Adam said.
“What I really want is water.
This wind would pump all the
water I could find. I thought

if I could bring in a few wells
and
irrigate,
the
topsoil
wouldn't blow away. I might
try some beans."
Samuel squinted into the
wind. "I'll try to get you
water if you want," he said.
"And I've got a little pump I
made that will bring it up fast.
It's my own invention. A
windmill is a pretty costly
thing. Maybe I could build
them for you and save you
some money."
"That's
good,"
said
Adam. "I wouldn't mind the
wind if it worked for me. And

if I could get water I might
plant alfalfa."
"It's never brought much
of a price."
"I wasn't thinking of
that. Few weeks ago I took a
drive up around Greenfield
and Gonzales. Some Swiss
have moved in there. They've
got nice little dairy herds, and
they get four crops of alfalfa
a year."
"I heard about them.
They brought in Swiss cows."
Adam's face was bright with
plans. "That's what I want to
do. Sell butter and cheese and
feed the milk to pigs."
"You're going to bring
credit to the valley," Samuels
said. "You're going to be a
real joy to the future."

“If I can get water.”

“I’ll get you water if

there’s any to be got. I’ll find

it. I brought my magic wand.”

He patted a forked stick tied

to his saddle.

Adam pointed to the left

where a wide flat place was

covered with a low growth of

sagebrush. “Now then,” he

said, “thirty-six acres and

almost level as a floor. I put

an auger down. Topsoil

averages three and a half feet,

sand on top and loam within

plow reach. Think you could

get water there?”

“I don’t know,” Samuel

said.

“I’ll

see.”

He

dismounted, handed his reins to Adam, and untied his forked wand. He took the forks in his two hands and walked slowly, his arms out and stretched before him and the wand tip up. His steps took a zigzag course. Once he frowned and backed up a few steps, then shook his head and went on. Adam rode slowly behind, leading the other horse.

Adam kept his eyes on the stick. He saw it quiver and then jerk a little, as though an invisible fish were tugging at a line. Samuel's face was taut with attention. He continued on until the point of the wand seemed to be pulled strongly downward

against his straining arms. He made a slow circle, broke off a piece of sagebrush, and dropped it on the ground. He moved well outside his circle, held up his stick again, and moved inward toward his marker. As he came near it, the point of the stick was drawn down again. Samuel sighed and relaxed and dropped his wand on the ground. “I can get water here,” he said. “And not very deep. The pull was strong, plenty of water.”

“Good,” said Adam. “I want to show you a couple more places.”

Samuel whittled out a
stout piece of sagewood and
drove it into the soil. He
made a split on the top and
fitted a crosspiece on for a
mark. Then he kicked the
brittle brush down in the area
so he could find his marker
again.
On a second try three
hundred yards away the wand
seemed nearly torn downward
out of his hands. “Now
there’s a whole world of
water here,” he said.
The third try was not so
productive. After half an hour
he had only the slightest sign.
The
two
men
rode

slowly back toward the Trask house. The afternoon was golden, for the yellow dust in the sky gilded the light. As always the wind began to drop as the day waned, but it sometimes took half the night for the dust to settle out of the air. “I knew it was a good place,” Samuel said. “Anyone can see that. But I didn’t know it was that good. You must have a great drain under your land from the mountains. You know how to pick land, Mr. Trask.”

Adam smiled. “We had a farm in Connecticut,” he said. “For six generations we dug

stones out. One of the first things I remember is sledding stones over to the walls. I thought that was the way all farms were. It's strange to me and almost sinful here. If you wanted a stone, you'd have to go a long way for it."

"The ways of sin are curious," Samuel observed. "I guess if a man had to shuck off everything he had, inside and out, he'd manage to hide a few little sins somewhere for his own discomfort. They're the last things we'll give up."

"Maybe that's a good thing to keep us humble. The fear of God in us."

"I guess

so,”

said

Samuel.

“And

I

guess

humility must be a good

thing, since it’s a rare man

who has not a piece of it, but

when you look at humbleness

it’s hard to see where its

value rests unless you grant

that it is a pleasurable pain

and very precious. Suffering

—I wonder has it been

properly looked at.”

“Tell me about your

stick,” Adam said. “How

does it work?”

Samuel stroked the fork

now tied to his saddle strings.

“I don’t really believe in it

save that it works.” He smiled
at Adam. “Maybe it’s this
way. Maybe I know where
the water is, feel it in my
skin. Some people have a gift
in this direction or that.
Suppose—well,
call
it
humility, or a deep disbelief
in myself, forced me to do a
magic to bring up to the
surface the thing I know
anyway. Does that make any
sense to you?”
“I’d have to think about
it,” said Adam.
The horses picked their
own way, heads hung low,
reins loosened against the
bits.
“Can

you
stay
the
night?” Adam asked.
“I can but better not. I
didn’t tell Liza I’d be away
the night. I’d not like to give
her a worry.”
“But she knows where
you are.”
“Sure she knows. But
I’ll ride home tonight. It
doesn’t matter the time. If
you’d like to ask me to
supper I’d be glad. And when
do you want me to start on
the wells?”
“Now—as soon as you
can.”
“You know it’s no cheap
thing, indulging yourself with
water. I’d have to charge you

fifty cents or more a foot,
depending on what we find
down there. It can run into
money."
"I have the money. I
want the wells. Look, Mr.
Hamilton—"
" 'Samuel' would be
easier."
"Look, Samuel, I mean
to make a garden of my land.
Remember
my
name
is
Adam. So far I've had no
Eden, let alone been driven
out."
"It's the best reason I
ever heard for making a
garden," Samuel exclaimed.
He chuckled. "Where will the

orchard be?”

Adam said, “I won’t plant apples. That would be looking for accidents.”

“What does Eve say to that? She has a say, you remember. And Eves delight in apples.”

“Not this one.” Adam’s eyes were shining. “You don’t know this Eve. She’ll celebrate my choice. I don’t think anyone can know her goodness.”

“You have a rarity. Right now I can’t recall any greater gift.”

They were coming near to the entrance to the little side valley in which was the Sanchez house. They could see the rounded green tops of

the great live oaks.

“Gift,” Adam said softly.

“You can’t know. No one can know. I had a gray life, Mr. Hamilton—Samuel. Not that it was bad compared to other lives, but it was nothing. I don’t know why I tell you this.”

“Maybe because I like to hear.”

“My mother—died—before my memory. My stepmother was a good woman but troubled and ill. My father was a stern, fine man—maybe a great man.”

“You

couldn’t
love
him?”
“I had the kind of feeling
you have in church, and not a
little fear in it.”
Samuel nodded. “I know
—and some men want that.”
He smiled ruefully. “I’ve
always wanted the other. Liza
says it’s the weak thing in
me.”
“My father put me in the
army, in the West, against the
Indians.”
“You told me. But you
don’t think like a military
man.”
“I wasn’t a good one. I
seem to be telling you
everything.”
“You must want to.

There's always a reason."

"A soldier must want to
do the things we had to do—
or at least be satisfied with
them. I couldn't find good
enough reasons for killing
men
and
women,
nor
understand the reasons when
they were explained."

They rode on in silence
for a time. Adam went on, "I
came out of the army like
dragging myself muddy out
of a swamp. I wandered for a
long time before going home
to a remembered place I did
not love."

"Your father?"

"He died, and home was

a place to sit around or work
around, waiting for death the
way you might wait for a
dreadful picnic.”
“Alone?”
“No, I have a brother.”
“Where is he—waiting
for the picnic?”
“Yes—yes,
that’s
exactly what. Then Cathy
came. Maybe I will tell you
some time when I can tell and
you want to hear.”
“I’ll want to hear,”
Samuel said. “I eat stories
like grapes.”
“A kind of light spread
out from her. And everything
changed color. And the world
opened out. And a day was
good to awaken to. And there

were no limits to anything.
And the people of the world
were good and handsome.
And I was not afraid any
more."
"I recognize it," Samuel
said. "That's an old friend of
mine. It never dies but
sometimes it moves away, or
you do. Yes, that's my
acquaintance—eyes,
nose,
mouth, and hair."
"All this coming out of a
little hurt girl."
"And not out of you?"
"Oh, no, or it would
have come before. No, Cathy
brought it, and it lives around
her. And now I've told you
why I want the wells. I have
to repay somehow for value

received. I’m going to make a
garden so good, so beautiful,
that it will be a proper place
for her to live and a fitting
place for her light to shine
on.”
Samuel
swallowed
several times, and he spoke
with a dry voice out of a
pinched-up throat. “I can see
my duty,” he said. “I can see
it plainly before me if I am
any kind of man, any kind of
friend to you.”
“What do you mean?”
Samuel said satirically,
“It’s my duty to take this
thing of yours and kick it in
the face, then raise it up and
spread slime on it thick
enough to blot out its

dangerous light.” His voice grew strong with vehemence. “I should hold it up to you muck-covered and show you its dirt and danger. I should warn you to look closer until you can see how ugly it really is. I should ask you to think of inconstancy and give you examples. I should give you Othello’s handkerchief. Oh, I know I should. And I should straighten out your tangled thoughts, show you that the impulse is gray as lead and rotten as a dead cow in wet weather. If I did my duty well, I could give you back your bad old life and feel good about it, and welcome you back to the musty membership in the lodge.”

“Are you joking? Maybe
I shouldn’t have told—”
“It is the duty of a
friend. I had a friend who did
the duty once for me. But I’m
a false friend. I’ll get no
credit for it among my peers.
It’s a lovely thing, preserve it,
and glory in it. And I’ll dig
your wells if I have to drive
my rig to the black center of
the earth. I’ll squeeze water
out like juice from an
orange.”
They rode under the
great oaks and toward the
house. Adam said, “There she
is,
sitting
outside.”
He
shouted, “Cathy, he says

there’s water—lots of it.”

Aside he said excitedly, “Did you know she’s going to have a baby?”

“Even at this distance she looks beautiful,” Samuel said.

4

Because the day had been hot, Lee set a table outside under an oak tree, and as the sun neared the western mountains he padded back and forth from the kitchen, carrying the cold meats, pickles, potato salad, coconut cake, and peach pie which were supper. In the center of the table he placed a gigantic

stoneware pitcher full of
milk.
Adam and Samuel came
from the wash house, their
hair and faces shining with
water, and Samuel's beard
was fluffy after its soaping.
They stood at the trestle table
and waited until Cathy came
out.
She
walked
slowly,
picking her way as though
she were afraid she would
fall. Her full skirt and apron
concealed to a certain extent
her swelling abdomen. Her
face was untroubled and
childlike, and she clasped her
hands in front of her. She had
reached the table before she

looked up and glanced from
Samuel to Adam.
Adam held her chair for
her. “You haven’t met Mr.
Hamilton, dear,” he said.
She held out her hand.
“How do you do,” she said.
Samuel
had
been
inspecting
her.
“It’s
a
beautiful face,” he said, “I’m
glad to meet you. You are
well, I hope?”
“Oh, yes. Yes, I’m
well.”
The men sat down. “She
makes it formal whether she
wants to or not. Every meal is

a kind of occasion," Adam
said.
"Don't talk like that,"
she said. "It isn't true."
"Doesn't it feel like a
party to you, Samuel?" he
asked.
"It does so, and I can tell
you there's never been such a
candidate for a party as I am.
And my children—they're
worse. My boy Tom wanted
to come today. He's spoiling
to get off the ranch."
Samuel
suddenly
realized that he was making
his speech last to prevent
silence from falling on the
table. He paused, and the
silence
dropped.

Cathy
looked down at her plate
while she ate a sliver of roast
lamb. She looked up as she
put it between her small sharp
teeth. Her wide-set eyes
communicated
nothing.
Samuel shivered.
“It isn’t cold, is it?”
Adam asked.
“Cold? No. A goose
walked over my grave, I
guess.”
“Oh, yes, I know that
feeling.”
The silence fell again.
Samuel waited for some
speech to start up, knowing in
advance that it would not.
“Do you like our valley,
Mrs. Trask?”

“What? Oh, yes.”

“If it isn’t impertinent to ask, when is your baby due?”

“In about six weeks,” Adam said. “My wife is one of those paragons—a woman who does not talk very much.”

“Sometimes a silence tells the most,” said Samuel, and he saw Cathy’s eyes leap up and down again, and it seemed to him that the scar on her forehead grew darker. Something had flicked her the way you’d flick a horse with the braided string popper on a buggy whip. Samuel couldn’t recall what he had said that had made her give a small inward start. He felt a tenseness coming over him

that was somewhat like the
feeling he had just before the
water wand pulled down, an
awareness
of
something
strange and strained. He
glanced at Adam and saw that
he was looking raptly at his
wife. Whatever was strange
was not strange to Adam. His
face had happiness on it.
Cathy was chewing a
piece of meat, chewing with
her front teeth. Samuel had
never seen anyone chew that
way before. And when she
had swallowed, her little
tongue flicked around her
lips. Samuel's mind repeated,
"Something—something—
can't

find
what
it
is.
Something wrong," and the
silence hung on the table.
There was a shuffle
behind him. He turned. Lee
set a teapot on the table and
shuffled away.
Samuel began to talk to
push the silence away. He
told how he had first come to
the valley fresh from Ireland,
but within a few words
neither Cathy nor Adam was
listening to him. To prove it,
he used a trick he had devised
to
discover
whether
his

children were listening when
they begged him to read to
them and would not let him
stop. He threw in two
sentences of nonsense. There
was no response from either
Adam or Cathy. He gave up.
He bolted his supper,
drank his tea scalding hot,
and
folded
his
napkin.
“Ma’am, if you’ll excuse me,
I’ll ride off home. And I
thank
you
for
your
hospitality.”
“Good night,” she said.
Adam jumped to his

feet, He seemed torn out of a reverie. “Don’t go now. I hoped to persuade you to stay the night.”

“No, thank you, but that I can’t. And it’s not a long ride. I think—of course, I know—there’ll be a moon.”

“When will you start the wells?”

“I’ll have to get my rig together, do a piece of sharpening, and put my house in order. In a few days I’ll send the equipment with Tom.”

The life was flowing back into Adam. “Make it soon,” he said. “I want it soon. Cathy, we’re going to make the most beautiful place in the world. There’ll be

nothing like it anywhere.”

Samuel

switched

his

gaze to Cathy’s face. It did

not change. The eyes were

flat and the mouth with its

small up-curve at the corners

was carven.

“That will be nice,” she

said.

For

just

a

moment

Samuel had an impulse to do

or say something to shock her

out of her distance. He

shivered again.

“Another goose?” Adam

asked.

“Another goose.” The

dusk was falling and already
the tree forms were dark
against the sky. “Good night,
then.”
“I’ll walk down with
you.”
“No, stay with your
wife. You haven’t finished
your supper.”
“But I—”
“Sit down, man. I can
find my own horse, and if I
can’t I’ll steal one of yours.”
Samuel pushed Adam gently
down in his chair. “Good
night. Good night. Good
night, ma’am.” He walked
quickly toward the shed.
Old
platter-foot
Doxology
was

daintily
nibbling hay from the manger
with lips like two flounders.
The halter chain clinked
against wood. Samuel lifted
down his saddle from the big
nail where it hung by one
wooden stirrup and swung it
over the broad back. He was
lacing the látigo through the
cinch rings when there was a
small stir behind him. He
turned and saw the silhouette
of Lee against the last light
from the open shadows.
“When you come back?”
the Chinese asked softly.
“I don’t know. In a few
days or a week. Lee, what is
it?”
“What is what?”
“By God, I got creepy!

Is there something wrong

here?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know damn well

what I mean.”

“Chinee boy jus’ workee

—not hear, not talkee.”

‘‘Yes. I guess you’re

right. Sure, you’re right.

Sorry I asked you. It wasn’t

very good manners.” He

turned back, slipped the bit in

Dox’s mouth, and laced the

big

flop

ears

into

the

headstall. He slipped the

halter and dropped it in the

manger. “Good night, Lee,”

he said.

“Mr. Hamilton—”

“Yes?”

“Do you need a cook?”

“On my place I can’t

afford a cook?”

“I’d work cheap.”

“Liza would kill you.

Why—you want to quit?”

“Just thought I’d ask,”

said Lee. “Good night.”

5

Adam and Cathy sat in the

gathering dark under the tree.

“He’s a good man,”

Adam said. “I like him. I

wish I could persuade him to

take over here and run this

place—kind

of

superintendent.”

Cathy said, “He’s got his

own place and his own

family.”

“Yes, I know. And it’s
the poorest land you ever
saw. He could make more at
wages from me. I’ll ask him.
It does take a time to get used
to a new country. It’s like
being born again and having
to learn all over. I used to
know from what quarter the
rains came. It’s different here.
And once I knew in my skin
whether wind would blow,
when it would be cold. But
I’ll learn. It just takes a little
time. Are you comfortable,
Cathy?”

“Yes.”

“One day, and not too
far away, you’ll see the whole
valley green with alfalfa—see
it from the fine big windows

of the finished house. I'll plant rows of gum trees, and I'm going to send away for seeds and plants—put in a kind of experimental farm. I might try lichee nuts from China. I wonder if they would grow here. Well, I can try. Maybe Lee could tell me. And once the baby's born you can ride over the whole place with me. You haven't really seen it. Did I tell you? Mr. Hamilton is going to put up windmills, and we'll be able to see them turning from here." He stretched his legs out comfortably under the table. "Lee should bring candles," he said. "I wonder what's keeping him."

Cathy

spoke

very

quietly. “Adam, I didn’t want

to come here. I am not going

to stay here. As soon as I can

I will go away.”

“Oh,

nonsense.”

He

laughed. “You’re like a child

away from home for the first

time. You’ll love it once *you*

get used to it and the baby is

born. You know, when I first

went away to the army I

thought I was going to die of

homesickness. But I got over

it. We all get over it. So don’t

say silly things like that.”

“It’s not a silly thing.”

“Don’t talk about it,

dear. Everything will change

after the baby is born. You'll
see. You'll see."
He clasped his hands
behind his head and looked
up at the faint stars through
the tree branches.

Chapter 16

1

Samuel Hamilton rode back
home in a night so flooded
with moonlight that the hills
took on the quality of the
white and dusty moon. The
trees and earth were moon-dry, silent and airless and
dead. The shadows were
black without shading and the
open places white without
color. Here and there Samuel
could see secret movement,
for the moon-feeders were at
work—the deer which browse
all night when the moon is

clear and sleep under thickets
in the day. Rabbits and field
mice and all other small
hunted that feel safer in the
concealing light crept and
hopped and crawled and froze
to resemble stones or small
bushes when ear or nose
suspected
danger.
The
predators were working too—
the long weasels like waves
of brown light; the cobby
wildcats crouching near to the
ground,
almost
invisible
except when their yellow
eyes caught light and flashed
for a second; the foxes,

sniffling with pointed up-raised noses for a warm-blooded supper; the raccoons

padding near still water,

talking frogs. The coyotes

nuzzled along the slopes and,

torn with sorrow-joy, raised

their heads and shouted their

feeling,

half

keen,

half

laughter, at their goddess

moon. And over all the

shadowy screech owls sailed,

drawing

a

smudge

of

shadowy fear below them on

the ground. The wind of the

afternoon was gone and only

a little breeze like a sigh was

stirred

by

the

restless

thermals of the warm, dry

hills.

Doxology's loud off-beat hoofsteps silenced the

night people until after he had

passed.

Samuel's

beard

glinted white, and his graying

hair stood up high on his

head. He had hung his black

hat on his saddle horn. An

ache was on the top of his

stomach, an apprehension

that was like a sick thought. It

was a *Weltschmerz*—which

we

used

to

call

“Welshrats”—the

world

sadness that rises into the soul

like a gas and spreads despair

so that you probe for the

offending event and can find

none.

Samuel went back in his

mind over the fine ranch and

the indications of water—no

Welshrats could come out of

that unless he sheltered a

submerged envy. He looked

in himself for envy and could

find none. He went on to

Adam’s dream of a garden

like Eden and to Adam’s

adoration of Cathy. Nothing

there

unless—unless

his

secret mind brooded over his
own healed loss. But that was
so long ago he had forgotten
the pain. The memory was
mellow
and
warm
and
comfortable, now that it was
all over. His loins and his
thighs had forgotten hunger.
As he rode through the
light and dark of tree-shade
and open his mind moved on.
When had the Welshrats
started crawling in his chest?
He found it then—and it was
Cathy, pretty, tiny, delicate
Cathy. But what about her?
She was silent, but many
women were silent. What was
it? Where had it come from?

He remembered that he had
felt an imminence akin to the
one that came to him when he
held the water wand. And he
remembered the shivers when
the goose walked over his
grave. Now he had pinned it
down in time and place and
person. It had come at dinner
and it had come from Cathy.
He built her face in front
of him and studied her wide-set eyes, delicate nostrils,
mouth smaller than he liked
but sweet, small firm chin,
and back to her eyes. Were
they cold? Was it her eyes?
He was circling to the point.
The eyes of Cathy had no
message, no communication
of any kind. There was
nothing recognizable behind
them. They were not human

eyes. They reminded him of
something—what was it?—
some memory, some picture.
He strove to find it and then it
came of itself.
It rose out of the years
complete with all its colors
and its cries, its crowded
feelings. He saw himself, a
very little boy, so small that
he had to reach high for his
father's hand. He felt the
cobbles
of
Londonderry
under his feet and the crush
and gaiety of the one big city
he had seen. A fair, it was,
with puppet shows and stalls
of produce and horses and
sheep penned right in the
street for sale or trade or

auction, and other stalls of
bright-colored
knickknackery, desirable, and
because his father was gay,
almost possessable.
And then the people
turned like a strong river, and
they were carried along a
narrow street as though they
were chips on a flood tide,
pressure at chest and back
and the feet keeping up. The
narrow street opened out to a
square, and against the gray
wall of a building there was a
high structure of timbers and
a noosed rope hanging down.
Samuel and his father
were pushed and bunted by
the water of people, pushed
closer and closer. He could
hear in his memory ear his

father saying, “It’s no thing
for a child. It’s no thing for
anybody, but less for a child.”
His father struggled to turn,
to force his way back against
the flood wave of people.
“Let us out. Please let us out.
I’ve a child here.”
The wave was faceless
and
it
pushed
without
passion. Samuel raised his
head to look at the structure.
A group of dark-clothed,
dark-hatted men had climbed
up on the high platform. And
in their midst was a man with
golden hair, dressed in dark
trousers and a light blue shirt
open at the throat. Samuel

and his father were so close
that the boy had to raise his
head high to see.
The golden man seemed
to have no arms. He looked
out over the crowd and then
looked down, looked right at
Samuel. The picture was
clear, lighted and perfect. The
man's eyes had no depth—
they were not like other eyes,
not like the eyes of a man.
Suddenly
there
was
quick movement on the
platform, and Samuel's father
put both his hands on the
boy's head so that his palms
cupped over the ears and his
fingers met behind. The
hands forced Samuel's head

down and forced his face
tight in against his father's
black best coat. Struggle as
he would, he could not move
his head. He could see only a
band of light around the
edges of his eyes and only a
muffled roar of sound came
to his ears through his
father's hands. He heard
heartbeats in his hears. Then
he felt his father's hands and
arms grow rigid with set
muscles, and against his face
he could feel his father's
deep-caught breathing and
then deep intake and held
breath, and his father's hands,
trembling.
A little more there was
to it, and he dug it up and set
it before his eyes in the air

ahead of the horse's head—a worn and battered table at a pub, loud talk and laughter. A pewter mug was in front of his father, and a cup of hot milk, sweet and aromatic with sugar and cinnamon, before himself. His father's lips were curiously blue and there were tears in his father's eyes.

"I'd never have brought you if I'd known. It's not fit for any man to see, and sure not for a small boy."

"I didn't see any,"

Samuel piped. "You held my head down."

"I'm glad of that."

"What was it?"

“I’ll have to tell you.
They were killing a bad
man.”
“Was it the golden
man?”
“Yes, it was. And you
must put no sorrow on him.
He had to be killed. Not once
but many times he did
dreadful things—things only
a fiend could think of. It’s not
his hanging sorrows me but
that they make a holiday of it
that should be done secretly,
in the dark.”
“I saw the golden man.
He looked right down at me.”
“For that even more I
thank God he’s gone.”
“What did he do?”
“I’ll never tell you
nightmare things.”

“He had the strangest
eyes, the golden man. They
put me in mind of a goat’s
eyes.”
“Drink your sweety-milk
and you shall have a stick
with ribbons and a long
whistle like silver.”
“And the shiny box with
a picture into it?”
“That also, so you drink
up your sweety-milk and beg
no more.”
There it was, mined out
of the dusty past.
Doxology was climbing
the last rise before the hollow
of the home ranch and the big
feet stumbled over stones in
the roadway.
It was the eyes, of
course, Samuel thought. Only

twice in my life have I seen

eyes

like

that—not

like

human eyes. And he thought,

It’s the night and the moon.

Now what connection under

heaven can there be between

the golden man hanged so

long ago and the sweet little

bearing mother? Liza’s right.

My imagination will get me a

passport to hell one day. Let

me dig this nonsense out, else

I’ll be searching that poor

child for evil. This is how we

can get trapped. Now think

hard and then lose it. Some

accident of eye shape and eye

color, it is. But no, that’s not

it. It’s a look and has no

reference to shape or color.

Well, why is a look evil then?

Maybe such a look may have

been sometime on a holy

face.

Now,

stop

this

romancing and never let it

trouble

again—ever.

He

shivered. I'll have to set up a

goose fence around my grave,

he thought.

And Samuel Hamilton

resolved to help greatly with

the Salinas Valley Eden, to

make a secret guilt-payment

for his ugly thoughts.

2

Liza Hamilton, her apple

cheeks flaming red, moved like a caged leopard in front of the stove when Samuel came into the kitchen in the morning. The oakwood fire roared up past an open damper to heat the oven for the bread, which lay white and rising in the pans. Liza had been up before dawn. She always was. It was just as sinful to her to lie abed after light as it was to be abroad after dark. There was no possible virtue in either. Only one person in the world could with impunity and without crime lie between her crisp ironed sheets after dawn, after sunup, even to the far reaches of midmorning, and that was her youngest and last born,

Joe. Only Tom and Joe lived
on the ranch now. And Tom,
big
and
red,
already
cultivating a fine flowing
mustache, sat at the kitchen
table with his sleeves rolled
down
as
he
had
been
mannered. Liza poured thick
batter from a pitcher onto a
soapstone griddle. The hot
cakes rose like little hassocks,
and small volcanos formed
and erupted on them until
they were ready to be turned.
A cheerful brown, they were,

with
tracings
of
darker
brown. And the kitchen was
full of the good sweet smell
of them.
Samuel came in from the
yard where he had been
washing himself. His face and
beard gleamed with water,
and he turned down the
sleeves of his blue shirt as he
entered the kitchen. Rolled-up sleeves at the table were
not
acceptable
to
Mrs.
Hamilton.
They
indicated
either an ignorance or a

flouting of the niceties.

“I’m

late,

Mother,”

Samuel said.

She did not look around

at him. Her spatula moved

like a striking snake and the

hot cakes settled their white

sides

hissing

on

the

soapstone. “What time was it

you came home?” she asked.

“Oh, it was late—late.

Must have been near eleven. I

didn’t look, fearing to waken

you.”

“I did not waken,” Liza

said grimly. “And maybe you

can find it healthy to rove all

night, but the Lord God will do what He sees fit about that." It was well known that Liza Hamilton and the Lord God held similar convictions on nearly every subject. She turned and reached and a plate of crisp hot cakes lay between Tom's hands. "How does the Sanchez place look?" she asked.

Samuel went to his wife, leaned down from his height, and kissed her round red cheek.

"Good morning, Mother.

Give

me
your
blessing.”
“Bless you,” said Liza
automatically.
Samuel sat down at the
table and said, “Bless you,
Tom. Well, Mr. Trask is
making great changes. He’s
fitting up the old house to live
in.”
Liza turned sharply from
the stove. “The one where the
cows and pigs have slept the
years?”
“Oh, he’s ripped out the
floors and window casings.
All new and new painted.”
“He’ll never get the
smell of pigs out,” Liza said
firmly. “There’s a pungency
left by a pig that nothing can

wash out or cover up.”

“Well, I went inside and looked around, Mother, and I could smell nothing except paint.”

“When the paint dries you’ll smell pig,” she said. “He’s got a garden laid out with spring water running through it, and he’s set a place apart for flowers, roses and the like, and some of the bushes are coming clear from Boston.”

“I don’t see how the Lord God puts up with such waste,” she said grimly. “Not that I don’t like a rose myself.”

“He said he’d try to root some cuttings

for

me,”

Samuel said.

Tom finished his hot

cakes and stirred his coffee.

“What kind of a man is he,

Father?”

“Well, I think he’s a fine

man—has a good tongue and

a fair mind. He’s given to

dreaming—”

“Hear now the pot

blackguarding the kettle,”

Liza interrupted.

“I know, Mother, I

know. But have you ever

thought that my dreaming

takes the place of something I

haven’t?

Mr.

Trask

has

practical dreams and the
sweet dollars to make them
solid. He wants to make a
garden of his land, and he
will do it too."
"What's his wife like?"
Liza asked.
"Well, she's very young
and very pretty. She's quiet,
hardly speaks, but then she's
having her first baby soon."
"I know that," Liza said.
"What was her name before?"
"I don't know."
"Well, where did she
come from?"
"I don't know."
She put his plate of hot
cakes in front of him and
poured coffee in his cup and
refilled Tom's cup. "What did
you learn then? How does she

dress?”

“Why, very nice, pretty

—a blue dress and a little

coat, pink but tight about the

waist.”

“You’ve an eye for that.

Would you say they were

made

clothes

or

store

bought?”

“Oh,

I

think

store

bought.”

“You would not know,”

Liza

said

firmly.

“You

thought the traveling suit
Dessie made to go to San
Jose was store bought.”
“Dessie’s
the
clever
love,” said Samuel. “A needle
sings in her hands.”
Tom
said,
“Dessie’s
thinking
of
opening
a
dressmaking shop in Salinas.”
“She told me,” Samuel
said. “She’d make a great
success of it.”
“Salinas?” Liza put her
hands on her hips. “Dessie
didn’t tell me.”

“I’m afraid we’ve done
bad service to our dearie,”
Samuel
said.
“Here
she
wanted to save it for a real
tin-plate
surprise
to
her
mother and we’ve leaked it
like wheat from a mouse-hole
sack.”
“She might have *told*
me,” said Liza. “I don’t like
surprises. Well, go on—what
was she doing?”
“Who?”
“Why, Mrs. Trask of
course.”
“Doing? Why, sitting,

sitting in a chair under an oak

tree. Her time's not far."

"Her hands, Samuel, her

hands—what was she doing

with her hands?"

Samuel

searched

his

memory. "Nothing I guess. I

remember—she

had

little

hands and she held them

clasped in her lap."

Liza

sniffed.

"Not

sewing, not mending, not

knitting?"

"No, Mother."

"I don't know that it's a

good idea for you to go over

there. Riches and idleness,
devil's tools, and you've not
a very sturdy resistance."
Samuel raised his head
and laughed with pleasure.
Sometimes his wife delighted
him but he could never tell
her how. "It's only the riches
I'll be going there for, Liza. I
meant to tell you after
breakfast so you could sit
down to hear. He wants me to
bore four or five wells for
him,
and
maybe
put
windmills and storage tanks."
"Is it all talk? Is it a
windmill turned by water?
Will he pay you or will you
come back excusing as usual?

‘He’ll pay when his crop
comes in,’ ” she mimicked, “
‘He’ll pay when his rich
uncle
dies.’
It’s
my
experience,
Samuel,
and
should be yours, that if they
don’t pay presently they
never pay at all. We could
buy a valley farm with your
promises.”
“Adam Trask will pay,”
said Samuel. “He’s well
fixed. His father left him a
fortune. It’s a whole winter of
work, Mother. We’ll lay
something by and we’ll have
a Christmas to scrape the

stars. He'll pay fifty cents a
foot, and the windmills,
Mother.
I
can
make
everything but the casings
right here. I'll need the boys
to help. I want to take Tom
and Joe."
"Joe can't go," she said.
"You know he's delicate."
"I thought I might scrape
off some of his delicacy. He
can starve on delicacy."
"Joe can't go," she said
finally. "And who is to run
the ranch while you and Tom
are gone?"
"I
thought
I'd

ask
George to come back. He
doesn't like a clerk's job even
if it is in King City."
"Like it he may not, but
he can take a measure of
discomfort for eight dollars a
week."
"Mother," Samuel cried,
"here's our chance to scratch
our name in the First National
Bank! Don't throw the weight
of your tongue in the path of
fortune. Please, Mother!"
She grumbled to herself
all morning over her work
while Tom and Samuel went
over the boring equipment,
sharpened bits, drew sketches
of windmills new in design,
and measured for timbers and
redwood water tanks. In the

midmorning Joe came out to
join them, and he became so
fascinated that he asked
Samuel to let him go.
Samuel said, “Offhand
I’d say I’m against it, Joe.
Your mother needs you here.”
“But I want to go,
Father. And don’t forget, next
year I’ll be going, to college
in Palo Alto. And that’s going
away, isn’t it? Please let me
go. I’ll work hard.”
“I’m sure you would if
you could come. But I’m
against it. And when you talk
to your mother about it, I’ll
thank you to let it slip that
I’m against it. You might
even throw in that I refused
you.”
Joe grinned, and Tom

laughed aloud.

“Will

you

let

her

persuade you?” Tom asked.

Samuel scowled at his

sons. “I’m a hard-opinioned

man,” he said. “Once I’ve set

my mind, oxen can’t stir me.

I’ve looked at it from all

angles and my word is—Joe

can’t go. You wouldn’t want

to make a liar of my word,

would you?”

“I’ll go in and talk to her

now,” said Joe.

“Now, son, take it easy,”

Samuel called after him. “Use

your head. Let her do most of

it. Meanwhile I’ll set my

stubborn up.”

Two days later the big wagon pulled away, loaded with timbers and tackle. Tom drove four hordes, and beside him Samuel and Joe sat swinging their feet.

Chapter 17

1

When I said Cathy was a monster it seemed to me that it was so. Now I have bent close with a glass over the small print of her and reread the footnotes, and I wonder if it was true. The trouble is that since we cannot know what

she wanted, we will never
know whether or not she got
it. If rather than running
toward something, she ran
away from something, we
can’t know whether she
escaped. Who knows but that
she tried to tell someone or
everyone what she was like
and could not, for lack of a
common language. Her life
may have been her language,
formal,
developed,
indecipherable. It is easy to
say she was bad, but there is
little meaning unless we
know why.
I’ve built the image in
my mind of Cathy, sitting
quietly

waiting

for

her

pregnancy to be over, living

on a farm she did not like,

with a man she did not love.

She sat in her chair

under the oak tree, her hands

clasped each to each in love

and shelter. She grew very

big—abnormally big, even at

a time when women gloried

in big babies and counted

extra pounds with pride. She

was misshapen; her belly,

tight

and

heavy

and

distended, made it impossible

for her to stand without

supporting herself with her

hands. But the great lump
was local. Shoulders, neck,
arms, hands, face, were
unaffected,
slender
and
girlish. Her breasts did not
grow and her nipples did not
darken.
There
was
no
quickening of milk glands, no
physical planning to feed the
newborn.
When
she
sat
behind a table you could not
see that she was pregnant at
all.
In that day there was no

measuring of pelvic arch, no testing of blood, no building with calcium. A woman gave a tooth for a child. It was the law. And a woman was likely to have strange tastes, some said for filth, and it was set down to the Eve nature still under sentence for original sin.

Cathy's odd appetite was simple compared to some. The carpenters, repairing the old house, complained that they could not keep the lumps of chalk with which they coated their chalk lines. Again and again the scored hunks disappeared. Cathy stole them and broke them in little pieces. She carried the chips in her apron pocket, and

when no one was about she crushed the soft lime between her teeth. She spoke very little. Her eyes were remote. It was as though she had gone away, leaving a breathing doll to conceal her absence.

Activity surged around her. Adam went happily about building and planning his Eden. Samuel and his boys brought in a well at forty feet and put down the newfangled expensive metal casing, for Adam wanted the best.

The Hamiltons moved their rig and started another hole. They slept in a tent beside the work and cooked over a campfire. But there was always one or another of

them riding home for a tool
or with a message.
Adam fluttered like a
bewildered bee confused by
too many flowers. He sat by
Cathy and chatted about the
pieplant roots just come in.
He sketched for her the new
fan
blade
Samuel
had
invented for the windmill. It
had a variable pitch and was
an unheard-of thing. He rode
out to the well rig and slowed
the work with his interest.
And
naturally,
as
he
discussed wells with Cathy,

his talk was all of birth and
child care at the well head. It
was a good time for Adam,
the best time. He was the king
of his wide and spacious life.
And summer passed into a
hot and fragrant autumn.

2

The Hamiltons at the well rig
had finished their lunch of
Liza's bread and rat cheese
and venomous coffee cooked
in a can over the fire. Joe's
eyes were heavy and he was
considering how he could get
away into the brush to sleep
for a while.

Samuel knelt in the
sandy soil, looking at the torn
and broken edges of his bit.
Just before they had stopped
for lunch the drill had found

something thirty feet down
that had mangled the steel as
though it were lead. Samuel
scraped the edge of the blade
with his pocketknife and
inspected the scrapings in the
palm of his hand His eyes
shone
with
a
childlike
excitement. He held out his
hand
and
poured
the
scrapings into Tom's hand.
"Take a look at it, son.
What do you think it is?"
Joe wandered over from
his place in front of the tent.
Tom studied the fragments in

his hand. “Whatever it is, it’s
hard,” he said. “Couldn’t be a
diamond that big. Looks like
metal. Do you think we’ve
bored
into
a
buried
locomotive?”
His
father
laughed.
“Thirty feet down,” he said
admiringly.
“It looks like tool steel,”
said Tom. “We haven’t got
anything that can touch it.”
Then he saw the faraway
joyous look on his father’s
face and a shiver of shared
delight came to him. The
Hamilton children loved it

when their father's mind went
free. Then the world was
peopled with wonders.
Samuel said, "Metal,
you say. You think, steel.
Tom, I'm going to make a
guess and then I'm going to
get an assay. Now hear my
guess—and remember it. I
think we'll find nickel in it,
and silver maybe, and carbon
and manganese. How I would
like to dig it up! It's in sea
sand. That's what we've been
getting."
Tom said, "Say, what do
you think it is with—nickel
and silver—"
"It must have been long
thousand
centuries
ago,"

Samuel said, and his sons knew he was seeing it.

“Maybe it was all water here—an inland sea with the seabirds circling and crying. And it would have been a pretty thing if it happened at night. There would come a line of light and then a pencil of white light and then a tree of blinding light drawn in a long arc from heaven. Then there’d be a great water spout and a big mushroom of steam. And your ears would be staggered by the sound because the soaring cry of its coming would be on you at the same time the water exploded. And then it would be black night again, because of the blinding light. And

gradually you'd see the killed
fish coming up, showing
silver in the starlight, and the
crying birds would come to
eat them. It's a lonely, lovely
thing to think about, isn't it?"
He made them see it as
he always did.
Tom said softly, "You
think it's a meteorite, don't
you?"
"That I do. and we can
prove it by assay."
Joe said eagerly, "Let's
dig it up."
"You dig it, Joe, while
we bore for water."
Tom said seriously, "If
the assay showed enough
nickel and silver, wouldn't it
pay to mine it?"
"You're my own son,"

said Samuel. “We don’t know
whether it’s big as a house or
little as a hat.”
“But we could probe
down and see.”
“That we could if we did
it secretly and hid our
thinking under a pot.”
“Why, what do you
mean?”
“Now, Tom, have you
no kindness toward your
mother? We give her enough
trouble, son. She’s told me
plain that if I spend any more
money
patenting
things,
she’ll give us trouble to
remember. Have pity on her!
Can’t you see her shame
when they ask her what we’re

doing?

She’s

a

truthful

woman, your mother. She’d

have to say, ‘They’re at

digging up a star.’ ” He

laughed

happily.

“She’d

never live it down. And she’d

make us smart. No pies for

three months.”

Tom said, “We can’t get

through it. We’ll have to

move to another place.”

“I’ll put some blasting

powder down,” said his

father, “and if that doesn’t

crack it aside we’ll start a

new hole.” He stood up. “I’ll

have to go home for powder

and to sharpen the drill. Why
don’t you boys ride along
with me and we’ll give
Mother a surprise so that
she’ll cook the whole night
and complain. That way
she’ll
dissemble
her
pleasure.”
Joe said, “Somebody’s
coming, coming fast.” And
indeed they could see a
horseman riding toward them
at full gallop, but a curious
horseman who flopped about
on his mount like a tied
chicken. When he came a
little closer they saw that it
was Lee, his elbows waving
like wings, his queue lashing
about like a snake. It was

surprising that he stayed on at
all and still drove the horse at
full tilt. He pulled up,
breathing heavily. “Missy
Adam say come! Missy
Cathy
bad—come
quick.
Missy yell, scream.”
Samuel said, “Hold on,
Lee. When did it start?”
“Mebbe bleakfus time.”
“All
right.
Calm
yourself. How is Adam?”
“Missy Adam clazy. Cly
—laugh—make vomit.”
“Sure,” said Samuel.
“These new fathers. I was one
once. Tom, throw a saddle on
for me, will you?”

Joe said, “What is it?”

“Why, Mrs. Trask is about to have her baby. I told Adam I’d stand by.”

“You?” Joe asked.

Samuel leveled his eyes on his youngest son. “I brought both of you into the world,” he said. “And you’ve given no evidence you think I did a bad service to the world. Tom, you get all the tools gathered up. And go back to the ranch and sharpen the metal. Bring back the box of powder that’s on the shelf in the tool shed, and go easy with it as you love your arms and legs. Joe, I want you to stay here and look after things.”

Joe

said

plaintively,

“But what will I do here

alone?”

Samuel was silent for a

moment. Then he said, “Joe,

do you love me?”

“Why, sure.”

“If

you

heard

I’d

committed some great crime

would you turn me over to

the police?”

“What are you talking

about?”

“Would you?”

“No.”

“All right then. In my

basket, under my clothes,

you’ll find two books—new,

so be gentle with them. It's two volumes by a man the world is going to hear from. You can start reading if you want and it will raise up your lid a little. It's called *The Principles of Psychology* and it's by an Eastern man named William James. No relative to the train robber. And, Joe, if you ever let on about the books I'll run you off the ranch. If your mother ever found out I spent the money on them she'd run me off the ranch."

Tom led a saddled horse to him. "Can I read it next?"

"Yes," said Samuel, and he slipped his leg lightly over the saddle. "Come on, Lee."

The Chinese wanted to

break into a gallop but
Samuel restrained him. “Take
it easy, Lee. Birthing takes
longer
than
you
think,
mostly.”
For a time they rode in
silence, and then Lee said,
“I’m sorry you bought those
books. I have the condensed
form, in one volume, the
textbook. You could have
borrowed it.”
“Have you now? Do you
have many books?”
“Not many here—thirty
or forty. But you’re welcome
to any of them you haven’t
read.”
“Thank you, Lee. And

you may be sure I'll look the first moment I can. You know, you could talk to my boys. Joe's a little flighty but Tom's all right and it would do him good."

"It's a hard bridge to cross, Mr. Hamilton. Makes me timid to talk to a new person, but I'll try if you say so."

They walked the horses rapidly toward the little draw of the Trask place. Samuel said, "Tell me, how is it with the mother?"

"I'd rather you saw for yourself and thought for yourself," Lee said. "You know when a man lives alone as much as I do, his mind can go off on an irrational tangent

just because his social world
is out of kilter."
"Yes, I know. But I'm
not lonely and I'm on a
tangent too. But maybe not
the same one."
"You don't think I
imagine it then?"
"I don't know what it is,
but I'll tell you for your
reassurance that I've a sense
of strangeness."
"I guess that's all it is
with me too," said Lee. He
smiled. "I'll tell you how far
it got with me though. Since
I've come here I find myself
thinking of Chinese fairy
tales my father told me. We
Chinese
have
a

well-developed demonology."

"You think she is a

demon?"

"Of course not," said

Lee. "I hope I'm a little

beyond such silliness. I don't

know what it is. You know,

Mr. Hamilton, a servant

develops an ability to taste

the wind and judge the

climate of the house he works

in. And there's a strangeness

here. Maybe that's what

makes me remember my

father's demons."

"Did your father believe

in them?"

"Oh, no. He thought I

should know the background.

You Occidentals perpetuate a

good many myths too."

Samuel said, "Tell me

what happened to set you off.
This morning, I mean."
"If you weren't coming I
would try," said Lee. "But I
would rather not. You can see
for yourself. I may be crazy.
Of course Mr. Adam is strung
so tight he may snap like a
banjo string."
"Give me a little hint. It
might save time. What did
she do?"
"Nothing. That's just it.
Mr. Hamilton, I've been at
births before, a good many of
them, but this is something
new to me."
"How?"
"It's—well—I'll tell you
the one thing I can think of.
This is much more like a
bitter, deadly combat than a

birth.”

As they rode into the

draw and under the oak trees

Samuel said, “I hope you

haven’t got me in a state, Lee.

It’s a strange day, and I don’t

know why.”

“No wind,” said Lee.

“It’s the first day in a month

when there hasn’t been wind

in the afternoon.”

“That’s so. You know

I’ve been so close to the

details I’ve paid no attention

to the clothing of the day.

First we find a buried star and

now we go to dig up a mint-new human.” He looked up

through the oak branches at

the yellow-lit hills. “What a

beautiful day to be born in!”

he said. “If signs have their

fingers on a life, it’s a sweet

life coming. And, Lee, if
Adam plays true, he'll be in
the way. Stay close, will you?
In case I need something.
Look,
the
men,
the
carpenters, are sitting under
that tree."
"Mr. Adam stopped the
work.
He
thought
the
hammering might disturb his
wife."
Samuel said, "You stay
close. That sounds like Adam
playing true. He doesn't
know his wife probably
couldn't hear God Himself

beating a tattoo on the sky.”

The workmen sitting

under the tree waved to him.

“How do, Mr. Hamilton.

How’s your family?”

“Fine, fine. Say, isn’t

that

Rabbit

Holman?

Where’ve you been, Rabbit?”

“Went prospecting, Mr.

Hamilton.”

“Find anything, Rabbit?”

“Hell, Mr. Hamilton, I

couldn’t even find the mule I

went out with.”

They rode on toward the

house. Lee said quickly, “If

you ever get a minute, I’d like

to show you something.”

“What is it, Lee?”

“Well, I’ve been trying

to translate some old Chinese
poetry into English. I'm not
sure it can be done. Will you
take a look?"
"I'd like to, Lee. Why,
that would be a treat for me."

3

Bordoni's white frame house
was
very
quiet,
almost
broodingly quiet, and the
shades were pulled down.
Samuel dismounted at the
stoop, untied his bulging
saddlebags, and gave his
horse to Lee. He knocked and
got no answer and went in. It
was dusky in the living room
after the outside light. He
looked

in
the
kitchen,
scrubbed to the wood grain
by Lee. A gray stoneware
pilon coffeepot grunted on
the back of the stove. Samuel
tapped lightly on the bedroom
door and went in.
It was almost pitch-black
inside, for not only were the
shades down but blankets
were
tacked
over
the
windows. Cathy was lying in
the big four-poster bed, and
Adam sat beside her, his face
buried in the coverlet. He
raised his head and looked
blindly out.

Samuel said pleasantly,
“Why are you sitting in the
dark?”
Adam’s
voice
was
hoarse. “She doesn’t want the
light. It hurts her eyes.”
Samuel walked into the
room and authority grew in
him with each step. “There
will have to be lieht,” he said.
“She can close her eyes. I’ll
tie a black cloth over them if
she wants.” He moved to the
window and grasped the
blanket to pull it down, but
Adam was upon him before
he could yank.
“Leave it. The light hurts
her,” he said fiercely.
Samuel turned on him.

“Now, Adam, I know what
you feel. I promised you I’d
take care of things, and I will.
I only hope one of those
things isn’t you.” He pulled
the blanket down and rolled
up the shade to let the golden
afternoon light in.
Cathy made a little
mewing sound from the bed,
and Adam went to her.
“Close your eyes, dear. I’ll
put a cloth over your eyes.”
Samuel
dropped
his
saddlebags in a chair and
stood
beside
the
bed.
“Adam,” he said firmly, “I’m

going to ask you to go out of
the room and to stay out."
"No, I can't. Why?"
"Because I don't want
you
in
the
way.
It's
considered a sweet practice
for you to get drunk."
"I couldn't."
Samuel said, "Anger's a
slow thing in me and disgust
is slower, but I can taste the
beginnings of both of them.
You'll get out of the room
and give me no trouble or I'll
go away and you'll have a
basket of trouble."
Adam went finally, and
from the doorway Samuel

called, “And I don’t want you
bursting in if you hear
anything. You wait for me to
come out.” He closed the
door, noticed there was a key
in the lock, and turned it.
“He’s an upset, vehement
man,” he said. “He loves
you.”
He had not looked at her
closely until now. And he
saw true hatred in her eyes,
unforgiving,
murderous
hatred.
“It’ll be over before
long, dearie. Now tell me, has
the water broke?”
Her hostile eyes glared
at him and her lips raised
snarling from her little teeth.
She did not answer him.

He stared at her. “I did
not come by choice except as
a friend,” he said. “It’s not a
pleasure
to
me,
young
woman. I don’t know your
trouble and minute by minute
I don’t care. Maybe I can
save you some pain—who
knows? I’m going to ask you
one more question. If you
don’t answer, if you put that
snarling look on me, I’m
going out and leave you to
welter.”
The words struck into
her understanding like lead
shot dropping in water. She
made a great effort. And it
gave him a shivering to see

her face change, the steel
leave her eyes, the lips
thicken from line to bow, and
the corners turn up. He
noticed a movement of her
hands, the fists unclench and
the
fingers
turn
pinkly
upward. Her face became
young and innocent and
bravely hurt. It was like one
magic-lantern slide taking the
place of another.
She said softly, “The
water broke at dawn.”
“That’s better. Have you
had hard labor?”
“Yes.”
“How far apart?”
“I don’t know.”

“Well, I’ve been in this
room fifteen minutes.”
“I’ve had two little ones
—no big ones since you
came.”
“Fine.
Now
where’s
your linen?”
“In that hamper over
there.”
“You’ll be all right,
dearie,” he said gently.
He
opened
his
saddlebags and took out a
thick rope covered with blue
velvet and looped at either
end. On the velvet hundreds
of little pink flowers were
embroidered. “Liza sent you

her pulling rope to use," he
said. "She made it when our
first-born
was
preparing.
What with our children and
friends', this rope has pulled
a great number of people into
the world." He slipped one of
the loops over each of the
footposts of the bed.
Suddenly
her
eyes
glazed and her back arched
like a spring and the blood
started to her cheeks. He
waited for her cry or scream
and looked apprehensively at
the closed door. But there
was no scream—only a series
of grunting squeals. After a

few seconds her body relaxed
and the hatefulness was back
in her face.
The labor struck again.
“There’s a dear,” he said
soothingly. “Was it one or
two? I don’t know. The more
you see, the more you learn
no two are alike. I’d better get
my hands washed.”
Her head threshed from
side to side. “Good, good, my
darling,” he said. “I think it
won’t be long till your baby’s
here.” He put his hand on her
forehead where her scar
showed dark and angry.
“How did you get the hurt on
your head?” he asked.
Her head jerked up and
her sharp teeth fastened on
his hand across the back and

up into the palm near the little finger. He cried out in pain and tried to pull his hand away, but her jaw was set and her head twisted and turned, mangling his hand the way a terrier worries a sack. A shrill snarling came from her set teeth. He slapped her on the cheek and it had no effect. Automatically he did what he would have done to stop a dog fight. His left hand went to her throat and he cut off her wind. She struggled and tore at his hand before her jaws unclenched and he pulled his hand free. The flesh was torn and bleeding. He stepped back from the bed and looked at the damage her teeth had done. He looked at

her with fear. And when he
looked, her face was calm
again
and
young
and
innocent.
“I’m sorry,” she said
quickly. “Oh, I’m sorry.”
Samuel shuddered.
“It was the pain,” she
said.
Samuel laughed shortly.
“I’ll have to muzzle you, I
guess,” he said. “A collie
bitch did the same to me
once.” He saw the hatred look
out of her eyes for a second
and then retreat.
Samuel said, “Have you
got anything to put on it?
Humans are more poisonous

than snakes.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, have you got any

whisky?

I’ll

pour

some

whisky on it.”

“In the second drawer.”

He splashed whisky on

his

bleeding

hand

and

kneaded the flesh against the

alcohol

sting.

A

strong

quaking was in his stomach

and a sickness rose up against

his eyes. He took a swallow

of whisky to steady himself.
He dreaded to look back at
the bed. “My hand won’t be
much good for a while,” he
said.
Samuel
told
Adam
afterward, “She must be made
of whalebone. The birth
happened before I was ready.
Popped like a seed. I’d not
the water ready to wash him.
Why, she didn’t even touch
the pulling rope to bear down.
Pure whalebone, she is.” He
tore at the door, called Lee
and demanded warm water.
Adam came charging into the
room. “A boy!” Samuel cried.
“You’ve got a boy! Easy,” he
said, for Adam had seen the

mess in the bed and a green
was rising in his face.
Samuel said, “Send Lee
in here. And you, Adam, if
you still have the authority to
tell your hands and feet what
to do, get to the kitchen and
make me some coffee. And
see the lamps are filled and
the chimneys clean.”
Adam turned like a
zombie and left the room. In a
moment
Lee
looked
in.
Samuel pointed to the bundle
in a laundry basket. “Sponge
him off in warm water, Lee.
Don’t let a draft get on him.
Lord! I wish Liza were here. I
can’t do everything at once.”

He turned back to the bed. “Now, dearie, I’ll get you cleaned up.”

Cathy was bowed again, snarling in her pain. “It’ll be over in a little,” he said. “Takes a little time for the residue. And you’re so quick. Why, you didn’t even have to pull on Liza’s rope.” He saw something, stared, and went quickly to work. “Lord God in Heaven, it’s another one!”

He worked fast, and as with the first the birth was incredibly quick. And again Samuel tied the cord. Lee took the second baby, washed it, wrapped it, and put it in the basket.

Samuel cleaned

the
mother and shifted her gently
while he changed the linen on
the bed. He found in himself
a reluctance to look in her
face. He worked as quickly as
he could, for his bitten hand
was stiffening. He drew a
clean white sheet up to her
chin and raised her to slip a
fresh pillow under her head.
At last he had to look at her.
Her golden hair was wet
with perspiration but her face
had changed. It was stony,
expressionless. At her throat
the pulse fluttered visibly.
“You have two sons,”
Samuel said. “Two fine sons.
They aren’t alike. Each one
born separate in his own
sack.”

She inspected him coldly
and without interest.
Samuel said, “I’ll show
your boys to you.”
“No,” she said without
emphasis.
“Now, dearie, don’t you
want to see your sons?”
“No. I don’t want them.”
“Oh,
you’ll
change.
You’re tired now, but you’ll
change. And I’ll tell you now
—this birth was quicker and
easier than I’ve seen ever in
my life.”
The eyes moved from
his face. “I don’t want them. I
want you to cover the
windows and take the light
away.”

“It’s weariness. In a few days you’ll feel so different you won’t remember.”

“I’ll remember. Go away. Take them out of the room. Send Adam in.”

Samuel was caught by her tone. There was no sickness, no weariness, no softness. His words came out without his will. “I don’t like you,” he said and wished he could gather the words back into his throat and into his mind. But his words had no effect on Cathy.

“Send Adam in,” she said.

In the little living room Adam looked vaguely at his

sons and went quickly into
the bedroom and shut the
door. In a moment came the
sound of tapping. Adam was
nailing the blankets over the
windows again.
Lee brought coffee to
Samuel.
“That’s
a
bad-looking hand you have there,”
he said.
“I know. I’m afraid it’s
going to give me trouble.”
“Why did she do it?”
“I don’t know. She’s a
strange thing.”
Lee said, “Mr. Hamilton,
let me take care of that. You
could lose an arm.”
The life went out of
Samuel. “Do what you want,

Lee. A frightened sorrow has
closed down over my heart. I
wish I were a child so I could
cry. I'm too old to be afraid
like this. And I've not felt
such despair since a bird died
in my hand by a flowing
water long ago."
Lee left the room and
shortly returned, carrying a
small ebony box carved with
twisting dragons. He sat by
Samuel and from his box took
a
wedge-shaped
Chinese
razor. "It will hurt," he said
softly.
"I'll try to bear it, Lee."
The Chinese bit his lips,
feeling the inflicted pain in
himself while he cut deeply

into the hand, opened the
flesh around the toothmarks
front and back, and trimmed
the ragged flesh away until
good red blood flowed from
every wound. He shook a
bottle of yellow emulsion
labeled Hall’s Cream Salve
and poured it into the deep
cuts.
He
saturated
a
handkerchief with the salve
and
wrapped
the
hand.
Samuel winced and gripped
the chair arm with his good
hand.
“It’s

mostly
carbolic
acid," Lee said. "You can
smell it."
"Thank you, Lee. I'm
being a baby to knot up like
this."
"I don't think I could
have been so quiet," said Lee.
"I'll get you another cup of
coffee."
He came back with two
cups and sat down by
Samuel. "I think I'll go
away," he said. "I never went
willingly
to
a
slaughter
house."
Samuel stiffened. "What
do you mean?"

“I don’t know. The
words came out.”
Samuel shivered. “Lee,
men are fools. I guess I
hadn’t thought about it, but
Chinese men are fools too.”
“What made you doubt
it?”
“Oh, maybe because we
think of strangers as stronger
and better than we are.”
“What do you want to
say?”
Samuel said, “Maybe the
foolishness is necessary, the
dragon fighting, the boasting,
the pitiful courage to be
constantly knocking a chip
off God’s shoulder, and the
childish cowardice that makes
a ghost of a dead tree beside a
darkening road. Maybe that’s

good and necessary, but—”

“What do you want to

say?” Lee repeated patiently.

“I thought some wind

had blown up the embers in

my foolish mind,” Samuel

said. “And now I hear in your

voice that you have it too. I

feel wings over this house. I

feel a dreadfulness coming.”

“I feel it too.”

“I know you do, and that

makes me take less than my

usual

comfort

in

my

foolishness. This birth was

too quick, too easy—like a

cat having kittens. And I fear

for these kittens. I have

dreadful thoughts gnawing to

get into my brain."

"What do you want to

say?" Lee asked a third time.

"I

want

my

wife,"

Samuel cried. "No dreams, no ghosts, no foolishness. I want her here. They say miners take canaries into the pits to test the air. Liza has no truck with foolishness. And, Lee, if Liza sees a ghost, it's a ghost and not a fragment of a dream. If Liza feels trouble we'll bar the doors."

Lee got up and went to the laundry basket and looked down at the babies. He had to peer close, for the light was going

fast.

“They’re

sleeping,” he said.

“They’ll be squalling

soon enough. Lee, will you

hitch up the rig and drive to

my place for Liza? Tell her I

need her here. If Tom’s still

there, tell him to mind the

place. If not, I’ll send him in

the morning. And if Liza

doesn’t want to come, tell her

we need a woman’s hand here

and a woman’s clear eyes.

She’ll know what you mean.”

“I’ll do it,” said Lee.

“Maybe we’re scaring each

other, like two children in the

dark.”

“I’ve thought of that,”

Samuel said. “And Lee, tell

her I hurt my hand at the well

head. Do not, for God's sake,
tell her how it happened."
"I'll get some lamps lit
and then I'll go," said Lee. "It
will be a great relief to have
her here."
"That it will, Lee. That it
will. She'll let some light into
this cellar hole."
After Lee drove away in
the dark Samuel picked up a
lamp in his left hand. He had
to set it on the floor to turn
the knob of the bedroom
door. The room was in pitch-blackness, and the yellow
lamplight streamed upward
and did not light the bed.
Cathy's
voice
came
strong and edged from the
bed. "Shut the door. I do not

want the light. Adam, go out!
I want to be in the dark—
alone."
Adam said hoarsely, "I
want to stay with you."
"I do not want you."
"I will stay."
"Then stay. But don't
talk any more. Please close
the door and take the lamp
away."
Samuel went back to the
living room. He put the lamp
on the table by the laundry
basket and looked in on the
small sleeping faces of the
babies. Their eyes were
pinched shut and they sniffled
a little in discomfort at the
light.
Samuel
put

his
forefinger down and stroked
the hot foreheads. One of the
twins opened his mouth and
yawned
prodigiously
and
settled back to sleep. Samuel
moved the lamp and then
went to the front door and
opened it and stepped outside.
The evening star was so
bright that it seemed to flare
and crumple as it sank toward
the western mountains. The
air was still, and Samuel
could smell the day-heated
sage. The night was very
dark. Samuel started when he
heard a voice speaking out of
the blackness.
“How is she?”

“Who is it?” Samuel
demanded.
“It’s me, Rabbit.” The
man emerged and took form
in the light from the doorway.
“The mother, Rabbit?
Oh, she’s fine.”
“Lee said twins.”
“That’s
right—twin
sons. You couldn’t want
better. I guess Mr. Trask will
tear the river up by the roots
now. He’ll bring in a crop of
candy canes.”
Samuel didn’t know why
he
changed
the
subject.
“Rabbit, do you know what
we bored into today? A

meteorite.”

“What’s

that,

Mr.

Hamilton?”

“A shooting star that fell

a million years ago.”

“You did? Well, think of

that! How did you hurt your

hand?”

“I almost said on a

shooting

star.”

Samuel

laughed. “But it wasn’t that

interesting. I pinched it in the

tackle.”

“Bad?”

“No, not bad.”

“Two

boys,”

said

Rabbit. “My old lady will be
jealous.”
“Will you come inside
and sit, Rabbit?”
“No, no, thank you. I’ll
get out to sleep. Morning
seems to come earlier every
year I live.”
“That it does, Rabbit.
Good night then.”
Liza Hamilton arrived
about four in the morning.
Samuel was asleep in his
chair, dreaming that he had
gripped a red-hot bar of iron
and could not let go. Liza
awakened him and looked at
his hand before she even
glanced at the babies. While
she did well the things he had
done
in

a
lumbering,
masculine way, she gave him
his orders and packed him
off. He was to get up this
instant, saddle Doxology, and
ride straight to King City. No
matter what time it was, he
must wake up that good-for-nothing doctor and get his
hand treated. If it seemed all
right he could go home and
wait. And it was a criminal
thing to leave your last-born,
and he little more than a baby
himself, sitting there by a
hole in the ground with no
one to care for him. It was a
matter which might even
engage the attention of the
Lord God himself.
If Samuel craved realism
and activity, he got it. She

had him off the place by
dawn.
His
hand
was
bandaged by eleven, and he
was in his own chair at his
own table by five in the
afternoon, sizzling with fever,
and Tom was boiling a hen to
make chicken soup for him.
For three days Samuel
lay in bed, fighting the fever
phantoms and putting names
to them too, before his great
strength broke down the
infection
and
drove
it
caterwauling away.”
Samuel looked up at

Tom with clear eyes and said,

“I’ll have to get up,” tried it

and

sat

weakly

back,

chuckling—the

sound

he

made when any force in the

world defeated him. He had

an idea that even when beaten

he could steal a little victory

by laughing at defeat. And

Tom brought him chicken

soup until he wanted to kill

him. The lore had not died

out of the world, and you will

still find people who believe

that soup will cure any hurt or

illness and is no bad thing to

have for the funeral either.

4

Liza stayed away a week. She cleaned the Trask house from the top clear down into the grain of the wooden floors. She washed everything she could bend enough to get into a tub and sponged the rest. She put the babies on a working basis and noted with satisfaction that they howled most of the time and began to gain weight. Lee she used like a slave since she didn't quite believe in him. Adam she ignored since she couldn't use him

for
anything. She did make him
wash the windows and then
did it again after he had
finished.
Liza sat with Cathy just
enough to come to the
conclusion that she was a
sensible girl who didn't talk
very much or try to teach her
grandmother to suck eggs.
She also checked her over
and found that she was
perfectly healthy, not injured
and not sick, and that she
would never nurse the twins.
"And just as well too," she
said. "Those great lummoxes
would chew a little thing like
you to the bone." She forgot
that she was smaller than
Cathy and had nursed every

one of her own children.
On Saturday afternoon
Liza checked her work, left a
list of instructions as long as
her arm to cover every
possibility from colic to an
inroad of grease ants, packed
her traveling basket, and had
Lee drive her home.
She found her house a
stable
of
filth
and
abomination and she set to
cleaning it with the violence
and disgust of a Hercules at
labor.
Samuel
asked
questions of her in flight.
How were the babies?

They
were
fine,
growing.
How was Adam?
Well, he moved around
as if he was alive but he left
no evidence. The Lord in his
wisdom gave money to very
curious
people,
perhaps
because
they'd
starve
without.
How was Mrs. Trask?
Quiet, lackadaisical, like
most rich Eastern women
(Liza had never known a rich
Eastern woman), but on the
other

hand

docile

and

respectful. “And it’s a strange

thing,” Liza said. “I can find

no real fault with her save

perhaps a touch of laziness,

and yet I don’t like her very

much. Maybe it’s that scar.

How did she get it?”

“I don’t know,” said

Samuel.

Liza

leveled

her

forefinger

like

a

pistol

between his eyes. “I’ll tell

you something. Unbeknownst

to herself, she’s put a spell on

her husband. He moons
around her like a sick duck. I
don’t think he’s given the
twins a thorough good look
yet.”
Samuel waited until she
went by again. He said,
“Well, if she’s lazy and he’s
moony, who’s going to take
care of the sweet babies?
Twin boys take a piece of
looking after.”
Liza stopped in mid-swoop, drew a chair close to
him, and sat, resting her
hands
on
her
knees.
“Remember I’ve never held
the truth lightly if you don’t
believe me,” she said.
“I don’t think you could

lie, dearie," he said, and she
smiled,
thinking
it
a
compliment.
"Well, what I'm to tell
you might weigh a little
heavy on your belief if you
did not know that."
"Tell me."
"Samuel, you know that
Chinese with his slanty eyes
and his outlandish talk and
that braid?"
"Lee? Sure I know him."
"Well, wouldn't you say
offhand he was a heathen?"
"I don't know."
"Come now, Samuel,
anybody would. But he's
not." She straightened up.

“What is he?”

She tapped his arm with

an

iron

finger.

“A

Presbyterian, and well up—

well up, I say, when you dig

it out of that crazy talk. Now

what do you think of that?”

Samuel’s

voice

was

unsteady with trying to clamp

his laughter in. “No!” he said.

“And I say yes. Well

now, who do you think is

looking after the twins? I

wouldn’t trust a heathen from

here

to

omega—but

a

Presbyterian—he

learned

everything I told him.”

“No

wonder

they’re

taking

on

weight,”

said

Samuel.

“It’s a matter for praise

and it’s a matter for prayer.”

“We’ll do it too,” said

Samuel. “Both.”

5

For a week Cathy rested and

gathered her strength. On

Saturday of the second week

of October she stayed in her

bedroom all morning. Adam

tried the door and found it
locked.
“I’m busy,” she called,
and he went away.
Putting her bureau in
order, he thought, for he
could
hear
her
opening
drawers and closing them.
In the late afternoon Lee
came to Adam where he sat
on the stoop. “Missy say I go
King City buy nursey bottle,”
he said uneasily.
“Well, do it then,” said
Adam. “She’s your mistress.”
“Missy say not come
back mebbe Monday. Take
__”
Cathy

spoke

calmly

from the doorway. “He hasn’t

had a day off for a long time.

A rest would do him good.”

“Of course,” said Adam.

“I just didn’t think of it. Have

a good time. If I need

anything I’ll get one of the

carpenters.”

“Men

go

home,

Sunday.”

“I’ll get the Indian.

Lopez will help.”

Lee felt Cathy’s eyes on

him. “Lopez dlunk. Find

bottle whisky.”

Adam said petulantly,

“I’m not helpless, Lee. Stop

arguing.”

Lee looked at Cathy
standing in the doorway. He
lowered his eyelids. “Mebbe I
come back late,” he said, and
he thought he saw two dark
lines appear between her eyes
and then disappear. He turned
away. “Goo-by,” he said.
Cathy went back to her
room as the evening came
down. At seven-thirty Adam
knocked. “I’ve got you some
supper, dear. It’s not much.”
The door opened as though
she
had
been
standing
waiting. She was dressed in
her neat traveling dress, the
jacket edged in black braid,
black velvet lapels, and large

jet buttons. On her head was a
wide straw hat with a tiny
crown;
long
jet-beaded
hatpins held it on. Adam's
mouth dropped open.
She gave him no chance
to speak. "I'm going away
now."
"Cathy, what do you
mean?"
"I told you before."
"You didn't."
"You didn't listen. It
doesn't matter."
"I don't believe you."
Her voice was dead and
metallic. "I don't give a damn
what you believe. I'm going."
"The babies—"
"Throw them in one of

your wells.”

He

cried

in

panic,

“Cathy, you’re sick. You

can’t go—not from me—not

from me.”

“I can do anything to

you. Any woman can do

anything to you. You’re a

fool.”

The word got through

his haze. Without warning,

his hands reached for her

shoulders and he thrust her

backward. As she staggered

he took the key from the

inside of the door, slammed

the door shut, and locked it.

He stood panting, his ear

close to the panel, and a

hysterical sickness poisoned him. He could hear her moving quietly about. A drawer was opened, and the thought leaped in him—she's going to stay. And then there was a little click he could not place. His ear was almost touching the door.

Her voice came from so near that he jerked his head back. He heard richness in her voice. "Dear," she said softly, "I didn't know you would take it so. I'm sorry, Adam."

His breath burst hoarsely out of his throat. His hand trembled, trying to turn the key, and it fell out on the floor after he had turned it.

He pushed the door open. She

stood three feet away. In her right hand she held his .44 Colt, and the black hole in the barrel pointed at him. He took a step toward her, saw that the hammer was back.

She shot him. The heavy slug struck him in the shoulder and flattened and tore out a piece of his shoulderblade. The flash and roar smothered him, and he staggered back and fell to the floor. She moved slowly toward him, cautiously, as she might toward a wounded animal. He stared up into her eyes, which inspected him impersonally. She tossed the pistol on the floor beside him and walked out of the house.

He heard her steps on

the porch, on the crisp dry oak leaves on the path, and then he could hear her no more. And the monotonous sound that had been there all along was the cry of the twins, wanting their dinner. He had forgotten to feed them.

Chapter 18

1

Horace Quinn was the new deputy sheriff appointed to look after things around the King City district. He complained that his new job took him away from his ranch too much.

His
wife
complained even more, but
the truth of the matter was
that
nothing
much
had
happened in a criminal way
since
Horace
had
been
deputy. He had seen himself
making a name for himself
and running for sheriff. The
sheriff was an important
officer. His job was less
flighty than that of district
attorney, almost as permanent
and dignified as superior
court judge. Horace didn’t

want to stay on the ranch all
his life, and his wife had an
urge to live in Salinas where
she had relatives.
When
the
rumors,
repeated by the Indian and the
carpenters, that Adam Trask
had
been
shot
reached
Horace, he saddled up right
away and left his wife to
finish butchering the pig he
had killed that morning.
Just north of the big
sycamore tree where the
Hester road turns off to the
left,
Horace

met
Julius
Euskadi. Julius was trying to
decide whether to go quail
hunting or to King City and
catch the train to Salinas to
shake some of the dust out of
his britches. The Euskadis
were well-to-do, handsome
people of Basque extraction.
Julius said, “If you’d
come along with me, I’d go
into Salinas. They tell me that
right next door to Jenny’s,
two doors from the Long
Green, there’s a new place
called Faye’s. I heard it was
pretty nice, run like San
Francisco. They’ve got a
piano player.”
Horace rested his elbow
on his saddle horn and stirred

a fly from his horse's
shoulder with his rawhide
quirt. "Some other time," he
said. "I've got to look into
something."
"You wouldn't be going
to Trask's, would you?"
"That's right. Did you
hear anything about it?"
"Not to make any sense.
I heard Mr. Trask shot
himself in the shoulder with a
forty-four and then fired
everybody on the ranch. How
do you go about shooting
yourself in the shoulder with
a forty-four, Horace?"
"I don't know. Them
Easterners are pretty clever. I
thought I'd go up and find
out. Didn't his wife just have
a baby?"

“Twins, I heard,” said
Julius. “Maybe they shot
him.”
“One hold the gun and
the other pull the trigger?
Hear anything else?”
“All mixed up, Horace.
Want some company?”
“I’m
not
going
to
deputize you, Julius. Sheriff
says the supervisors are
raising hell about the payroll.
Hornby out in the Alisal
deputized his great aunt and
kept her in posse three weeks
just before Easter.”
“You’re fooling!”
“No, I’m not. And you
get no star.”

“Hell, I don’t want to be
a deputy. Just thought I’d ride
along with you for company.
I’m curious.”
“Me too. Glad to have
you, Julius. I can always fling
the oath around your neck if
there’s any trouble. What do
you say the new place is
called?”
“Faye’s.
Sacramento
woman.”
“They do things pretty
nice in Sacramento,” and
Horace told how they did
things in Sacramento as they
rode along.
It was a nice day to be
riding. As they turned into the
Sanchez draw they were
cursing the bad hunting in

recent years. Three things are
never any good—farming,
fishing,
and
hunting—
compared to other years, that
is. Julius was saying, “Christ,
I wish they hadn’t killed off
all the grizzly bears. In
eighteen-eighty
my
grandfather killed one up by
Pleyto
weighed
eighteen
hundred pounds.”
A silence came on them
as they rode in under the
oaks, a silence they took from
the place itself. There was no
sound, no movement.
“I wonder if he finished

fixing up the old house,”

Horace said.

“Hell,

no.

Rabbit

Holman was working on it,

and he told me Trask called

them all in and fired them.

Told them not to come back.”

“They say Trask has got

a pot of money.”

“I guess he’s well fixed,

all right,” said Julius. “Sam

Hamilton is sinking four

wells—if he didn’t get fired

too.”

“How is Mr. Hamilton? I

ought to go up to see him.”

“He’s fine. Full of hell

as ever.”

“I’ll have to go up and

pay him a visit,” said Horace.

Lee came out on the

stoop to meet them.

Horace

said,

“Hello,

Ching Chong. Bossy man

here?”

“He sick,” said Lee.

“I’d like to see him.”

“No see. He sick.”

“That’s enough of that,”

said

Horace.

“Tell

him

Deputy Sheriff Quinn wants

to see him.”

Lee disappeared, and in

a moment he was back. “You

come,” he said, “I take

horsy.”

Adam lay in the four-poster bed where the twins

had been born. He was
propped high with pillows,
and a mound of home-devised bandages covered his
left breast and shoulder. The
room reeked of Hall's Cream
Salve.
Horace said later to his
wife, "And if you ever saw
death still breathing, there it
was."
Adam's cheeks hugged
the bone and pulled the skin
of his nose tight and slimy.
His eyes seemed to bulge out
of his head and to take up the
whole upper part of his face,
and they were shiny with
sickness, intense and myopic.
His bony right hand kneaded
a fistful of coverlet.
Horace said, "Howdy,
Mr. Trask. Heard you got

hurt.” He paused, waiting for an answer. He went on, “Just thought I’d drop around and see how you were doing. How’d it happen?”

A look of transparent eagerness came over Adam’s face. He shifted slightly in the bed.

“If it hurts to talk you can whisper,” Horace added helpfully.

“Only when I breathe deep,” Adam said softly. “I was cleaning my gun and it went off.”

Horace glanced at Julius and then back. Adam saw the look and a little color of embarrassment rose in his cheeks.

“Happens all the time,”

said Horace. “Got the gun
around?”
“I think Lee put it
away.”
Horace stepped to the
door. “Hey there, Ching
Chong, bring the pistol.”
In a moment Lee poked
the gun butt-first through the
door. Horace looked at it,
swung the cylinder out, poked
the
cartridges
out,
and
smelled the empty brass
cylinder of the one empty
shell.
“There’s
better
shooting cleaning the damn
things than pointing them. I’ll

have to make a report to the
county, Mr. Trask. I won't
take up much of your time.
You were cleaning the barrel,
maybe with a rod, and the
gun went off and hit you in
the shoulder?"
"That's right, sir," Adam
said quickly.
"And cleaning it, you
hadn't
swung
out
the
cylinder?"
"That's right."
"And you were poking
the rod in and out with the
barrel pointed toward you
with the hammer cocked?"
Adam's breath rasped in
a quick intake.

Horace went on, “And it
must have blowed the rod
right through you and took
off your left hand too.”
Horace’s pale sun-washed
eyes never left Adam’s face.
He
said
kindly,
“What
happened, Mr. Trask? Tell
me what happened.”
“I tell you truly it was an
accident, sir.”
“Now
you
wouldn’t
have me write a report like I
just said. The sheriff would
think I was crazy. What
happened?”
“Well, I’m not very used

to guns. Maybe it wasn't just like that, but I was cleaning it and it went off."

There was a whistle in Horace's nose. He had to breathe through his mouth to stop it. He moved slowly up from the foot of the bed, nearer to Adam's head and staring eyes. "You came from the East not very long ago, didn't you, Mr. Trask?"

"That's right. Connecticut."

"I guess people don't use guns very much there any more."

"Not much."

"Little hunting?"

"Some."

"So you'd be more used

to a shotgun?”

“That’s right. But I

never hunted much.”

“I guess you didn’t

hardly use a pistol at all, so

you didn’t know how to

handle it.”

“That’s right,” Adam

said

eagerly.

“Hardly

anybody there has a pistol.”

“So when you came here

you bought that forty-four

because everybody out here

has a pistol and you were

going to learn how to use it.”

“Well, I thought it might

be a good thing to learn.”

Julius

Euskadi

stood

tensely, his face and body
receptive,
listening
but
uncommunicative.
Horace
sighed
and
looked away from Adam. His
eyes brushed over and past
Julius and came back to his
hands. He laid the gun on the
bureau and carefully lined the
brass and lead cartridges
beside it. “You know,” he
said, “I’ve only been a deputy
a little while. I thought I was
going to have some fun with
it and maybe in a few years
run for sheriff. I haven’t got
the guts for it. It isn’t any fun
to me.”

Adam
watched
him
nervously.
“I don’t think anybody’s
ever been afraid of me before
—mad at me, yes—but not
afraid. It’s a mean thing,
makes me feel mean.”
Julius said irritably, “Get
to it. You can’t resign right
this minute.”
“The hell I can’t—if I
want to. All right! Mr. Trask,
you served in the United
States Cavalry. The weapons
of the cavalry are carbines
and pistols. You—” He
stopped
and
swallowed.
“What happened, Mr. Trask?”

Adam's eyes seemed to
grow larger, and they were
moist and edged with red. "It
was
an
accident,"
he
whispered.
"Anybody see it? Was
your wife with you when it
happened?"
Adam did not reply, and
Horace saw that his eyes were
closed. "Mr. Trask," he said,
"I know you're a sick man.
I'm trying to make it as easy
on you as I can. Why don't
you rest now while I have a
talk with your wife?" He
waited a moment and then
turned to the doorway, where
Lee

still
stood.
“Ching
Chong, tell Missy I would
admire to talk to her for a few
minutes.”
Lee did not reply.
Adam spoke without
opening his eyes. “My wife is
away on a visit.”
“She wasn’t here when it
happened?” Horace glanced
at Julius and saw a curious
expression on Julius’s lips.
The corners of his mouth
were turned slightly up in a
sardonic
smile.
Horace
thought quickly, He’s ahead
of me. He’d make a good
sheriff. “Say,” he said, “that’s

kind of interesting. Your wife had a baby—two babies—two weeks ago, and now she's gone on a visit. Did she take the babies with her? I thought I heard them a little while ago." Horace leaned over the bed and touched the back of Adam's clenched right hand. "I hate this, but I can't stop now. Trask!" he said loudly, "I want you to tell me what happened. This isn't nosiness. This is the law. Now, damn it, you open your eyes and tell me or, by Christ, I'll take you in to the sheriff even if you are hurt."

Adam opened his eyes, and they were blank like a sleepwalker's eyes. And his voice came out without rise

or fall, without emphasis, and
without any emotion. It was
as though he pronounced
perfectly words in a language
he did not understand.
“My wife went away,”
he said.
“Where did she go?”
“I don’t know.”
“What do you mean?”
“I don’t know where she
went.”
Julius broke in, speaking
for the first time. “Why did
she go?”
“I don’t know.”
Horace
said
angrily,
“You watch it, Trask. You’re
playing pretty close to the
edge and I don’t like what

I’m thinking. You must know

why she went away.”

“I don’t know why she

went.”

“Was she sick? Did she

act strange?”

“No.”

Horace turned. “Ching

Chong,

do

you

know

anything about this?”

“I go King City Satdy.

Come back mebbe twelve

night. Find Missy Tlask on

floor.”

“So you weren’t here

when it happened?”

“No, ma’am.”

“All right, Trask, I’ll

have to get back to you. Open

up that shade a little, Ching
Chong, so I can see. There,
that's better. Now I'm going
to do it your way first until I
can't any more. Your wife
went away. Did she shoot
you?"
"It was an accident."
"All right, an accident,
but was the gun in her hand?"
"It was an accident."
"You don't make it very
easy. But let's say she went
away and we have to find her
—see?—like a kid's game.
You're making it that way.
How long have you been
married?"
"Nearly a year."
"What was her name
before you married her?"
There was a long pause,

and then Adam said softly, “I
won’t tell. I promised.”
“Now you watch it.
Where did she come from?”
“I don’t know.”
“Mr.
Trask,
you’re
talking yourself right into the
county jail. Let’s have a
description. How tall was
she?”
Adam’s eyes gleamed.
“Not tall—little and delicate.”
“That’s just fine. What
color hair? Eyes?”
“She was beautiful.”
“Was?”
“Is.”
“Any scars?”
“Oh, God, no. Yes—a
scar on her forehead.”

“You don’t know her
name, where she came from,
where she went, and you
can’t describe her. And you
think I’m a fool.”
Adam said, “She had a
secret. I promised I wouldn’t
ask her. She was afraid for
someone.”
And
without
warning Adam began to cry.
His whole body shook, and
his breath made little high
sounds. It was hopeless
crying.
Horace felt misery rising
in him. “Come on in the other
room, Julius,” he said and led
the way into the living room.
“All right, Julius, tell me
what you think. Is he crazy?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did he kill her?”

“That’s what jumped

into my mind.”

“Mine too,” said Horace.

“My God!” He hurried into

the bedroom and came back

with the pistol and the shells.

“I

forgot

them,”

he

apologized. “I won’t last long

in this job.”

Julius asked, “What are

you going to do?”

“Well,

I

think

it’s

beyond me. I told you I

wouldn’t put you on the

payroll, but hold up your
right hand."
"I don't want to get
sworn in, Horace. I want to
go to Salinas."
"You don't have any
choice, Julius. I'll have to
arrest you if you don't get
your goddam hand up."
Julius reluctantly put up
his hand and disgustedly
repeated the oath. "And that's
what I get for keeping you
company," he said. "My
father will skin me alive. All
right, what do we do now?"
Horace said, "I'm going
to run to papa. I need the
sheriff. I'd take Trask in but I
don't want to move him.
You've got to stay, Julius.
I'm sorry. Have you got a

gun?”

“Hell, no.”

“Well, take this one, and

take my star.” He unpinned it

from his shirt and held it out.

“How long do you think

you’ll be gone?”

“Not any longer than I

can help. Did you ever see

Mrs. Trask, Julius?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Neither did I. And I’ve

got to tell the sheriff that

Trask doesn’t know her name

or anything. And she’s not

very big and she is beautiful.

That’s

one

hell

of

a

description! I think I’ll resign

before I tell the sheriff,

because he's sure as hell

going to fire me afterward.

Do you think he killed her?"

"How the hell do I

know?"

"Don't get mad."

Julius picked up the gun

and put the cartridges back in

the cylinder and balanced it in

his hand. "You want an idea,

Horace?"

"Don't it look like Ineed

one?"

"Well, Sam Hamilton

knew

her—he

took

the

babies, Rabbit says. And Mrs.

Hamilton took care of her.

Why don't you ride out there

on your way and find out
what she really looked like."
"I think maybe you
better keep that star," said
Horace. "That's good. I'll get
going."
"You want me to look
around?"
"I want you just to see
that he doesn't get away—or
hurt himself. Understand?
Take care of yourself."

2

About midnight Horace got
on a freight train in King
City. He sat up in the cab
with the engineer, and he was
in Salinas the first thing in the
morning. Salinas was the
county seat, and it was a fast-growing town. Its population
was due to cross the two
thousand mark any time. It

was the biggest town between
San Jose and San Luis
Obispo, and everyone felt that
a brilliant future was in store
for it.
Horace walked up from
the Southern Pacific Depot
and stopped in the Chop
House for breakfast. He
didn't want to get the sheriff
out so early and rouse ill will
when it wasn't necessary. In
the Chop House he ran into
young
Will
Hamilton,
looking pretty prosperous in a
salt-and-pepper business suit.
Horace sat down at the
table with him. "How are
you, Will?"
"Oh, pretty good."

“Up here on business?”

“Well, yes, I do have a

little deal on.”

“You might let me in on

something

sometime.”

Horace felt strange talking

like this to such a young man,

but Will Hamilton had an

aura of success about him.

Everybody knew he was

going to be a very influential

man in the county. Some

people exude their futures,

good or bad.

“I’ll do that, Horace. I

thought the ranch took all

your time.”

“I could be persuaded to

rent it if anything turned up.”

Will leaned over the

table. “You know, Horace,

our part of the county has
been pretty much left out. Did
you ever think of running for
office?"
"What do you mean?"
"Well, you're a deputy
—did you ever think of
running for sheriff?"
"Why, no, I didn't."
"Well, you think about
it. Just keep it under your hat.
I'll look you up in a couple of
weeks and we'll talk about it.
But keep it under your hat."
"I'll certainly do that,
Will. But we've got an awful
good sheriff."
"I know. That's got
nothing to do with it. King
City hasn't got a single
county officer—you see?"
"I see. I'll think about it.

Oh, by the way, I stopped by
and saw your father and
mother yesterday.”
Will’s face lighted up.
“You did? How were they?”
“Just fine. You know,
your father is a real comical
genius.”
Will
chuckled.
“He
made us laugh all the time we
were growing up.”
“But he’s a smart man
too, Will. He showed me a
new kind of windmill he’s
invented—goddamnedest
thing you ever saw.”
“Oh, Lord,” said Will,
“here
come
the

patent

attorneys again!”

“But this is good,” said

Horace.

“They’re all good. And

the only people who make

any money are the patent

lawyers. Drives my mother

crazy.”

“I guess you’ve got a

point there.”

Will said, “The only way

to make any money is to sell

something somebody else

makes.”

“You’ve got a point

there, Will, but this is the

goddamnedest windmill you

ever saw.”

“He took you in, did he,

Horace?”

“I guess he did. But you

wouldn’t want him to change,
would you?”
“Oh, Lord, no!” said
Will. “You think about what I
said.”
“All right.”
“And keep it under your
hat,” said Will.
The sheriff’s job was not
an easy one, and that county
which, out of the grab bag of
popular elections, pulled a
good sheriff was lucky. It was
a complicated position. The
obvious duties of the sheriff
—enforcing the law and
keeping the peace—were far
from the most important ones.
It was true that the sheriff
represented armed force in
the
county,

but
in
a
community
seething
with
individuals a harsh or stupid
sheriff did not last long.
There were water rights,
boundary
disputes,
astray
arguments,
domestic
relations, paternity matters—
all to be settled without force
of
arms.
Only
when
everything else failed did a
good sheriff make an arrest.

The best sheriff was not the best fighter but the best diplomat.

And Monterey County had a good one. He had a brilliant gift for minding his own business.

Horace went into the sheriff's office in the old county jail about ten minutes after nine. The sheriff shook hands and discussed the weather and the crops until Horace was ready to get down to business.

"Well, sir," Horace said finally, "I had to come up to get your advice." And he told his story in great detail—what everybody had said and how they looked and what

time it was—everything.

After a few moments the

sheriff closed his eyes and

laced his fingers together. He

punctuated

the

account

occasionally by opening his

eyes,

but

he

made

no

comment.

“Well, there I was on a

limb,”

Horace

said.

“I

couldn’t

find

out

what
happened. I couldn't even
find out what the woman
looked like. It was Julius
Euskadi got the idea I should
go to see Sam Hamilton."
The
sheriff
stirred,
crossed
his
legs,
and
inspected the job. "You think
he killed her."
"Well, I did. But Mr.
Hamilton kind of talked me
out of it. He says Trask hasn't
got it in him to kill anybody."
"Everybody's got it in
him," the sheriff said. "You
just find his trigger and

anybody will go off."

"Mr. Hamilton told me some funny things about her. You know, when he was taking her babies she bit him on the hand. You ought to see that hand, like a wolf got him."

"Did Sam give you a description?"

"He did, and his wife did." Horace took a piece of paper from his pocket and read a detailed description of Cathy. Between the two of them the Hamiltons knew

pretty

much

everything

physical there was to know about Cathy.

When Horace finished

the sheriff sighed. “They both
agreed about the scar?”
“Yes, they did. And both
of them remarked about how
sometimes it was darker than
other times.”
The sheriff closed his
eyes again and leaned back in
his
chair.
Suddenly
he
straightened up, opened a
drawer of his rolltop desk,
and took out a pint of whisky.
“Have a drink,” he said.
“Don’t mind if I do.
Here’s looking at you.”
Horace wiped his mouth and
handed back the pint. “Got
any ideas?” he asked.
The sheriff took three

big swallows of whisky,
corked the pint, and put it
back in the drawer before he
replied. “We’ve got a pretty
well-run county,” he said. “I
get along with the constables,
give them a hand when they
need it, and they help me out
when I need it. You take a
town growing like Salinas,
and strangers in and out all
the time—we could have
trouble if we didn’t watch it
pretty close. My office gets
along fine with the local
people.” He looked Horace in
the eye. “Don’t get restless.
I’m not making a speech. I
just want to tell you how it is.
We
don’t
drive

people.
We've got to live with them."
"Did I do something
wrong?"
"No, you didn't, Horace.
You did just right. If you
hadn't come to town or if you
had brought Mr. Trask in,
we'd of been in one hell of a
mess. Now hold on. I'm
going to tell you—"
"I'm
listening,"
said
Horace.
"Over across the tracks
down by Chinatown there's a
row of whorehouses."
"I know that."
"Everybody knows it. If
we closed them up they'd just
move. The people want those

houses. We keep an eye on them so not much bad happens. And the people that run those houses keep in touch with us. I've picked up some wanted men from tips I got down there."

Horace said, "Julius told me—"

"Now wait a minute. Let me get all this said so we won't have to go back over it. About three months ago a fine-looking woman came in to see me. She wanted to open a house here and wanted to do it right. Came from Sacramento. Ran a place there. She had letters from some pretty important people —straight record—never had any trouble. A pretty damn

good citizen.”

“Julius told me. Name of

Faye.”

“That’s right. Well, she

opened a nice place, quiet,

well run. It was about time

old Jenny and the Nigger had

some competition. They were

mad as hell about it, but I told

them just what I told you. It’s

about time they had some

competition.”

“There’s

a

piano

player.”

“Yes, there is. Good one

too—blind fella. Say, are you

going to let me tell this?”

“I’m

sorry,”

said

Horace.

“That’s all right. I know
I’m slow but I’m thorough.
Anyways, Faye turned out to
be just what she looks like, a
good solid citizen. Now
there’s one thing a good quiet
whorehouse is more scared of
than anything else. Take a
flighty randy girl runs off
from home and goes in a
house. Her old man finds her
and he begins to shovel up
hell. Then the churches get
into it, and the women, and
pretty soon that whorehouse
has got a bad name and we’ve
got to close it up. You
understand?”

“Yeah!” Horace said
softly.

“Now don’t get ahead of

me. I hate to tell something
you already thought out. Faye
sent me a note Sunday night.
She's got a girl and she can't
make much out of her. What
puzzles Faye is that this kid
looks like a runaway girl
except she's a goddam good
whore. She knows all the
answers and all the tricks. I
went down and looked her
over. She told me the usual
bull, but I can't find a thing
wrong with her. She's of age
and
nobody's
made
a
complaint." He spread his
hands. "Well, there it is.
What do we do about it?"
"You're pretty sure it's

Mrs. Trask?”

The sheriff said, “Wide-set eyes, yellow hair, and a scar on her forehead, and she came in Sunday afternoon.”

Adam’s weeping face was in Horace’s mind. “God all mighty! Sheriff, you got to get somebody else to tell him. I’ll quit before I do.”

The sheriff gazed into space. “You say he didn’t even know her name, where she came from. She really bullshitted him, didn’t she?”

“The poor bastard,” Horace said.

“The poor bastard is in love with her.

No, by God, somebody else
has got to tell him. I won't."
The sheriff stood up.
"Let's go down to the Chop
House and get a cup of
coffee."
They walked along the
street in silence for a while.
"Horace," the sheriff said, "if
I told some of the things I
know, this whole goddam
county would go up in
smoke."
"I guess that's right."
"You
said
she
had
twins?"
"Yeah, twin boys."
"You
listen

to

me,

Horace. There's only three

people in the world that

knows—her and you and me.

I'm going to warn her that if

she ever tells I'll brush her

ass out of this county so fast

it'll burn. And, Horace—if

you should ever get an itchy

tongue,

before

you

tell

anybody, even your wife,

why, you think about those

little boys finding out their

mother is a whore."

3

Adam sat in his chair under

the big oak tree. His left arm

was

expertly
bandaged
against his side so that he
could not move his shoulder.
Lee came out carrying the
laundry basket. He set it on
the ground beside Adam and
went back inside.
The twins were awake,
and they both looked blindly
and earnestly up at the wind-moved leaves of the oak tree.
A dry oak leaf came whirling
down and landed in the
basket. Adam leaned over and
picked it out.
He didn’t hear Samuel’s
horse until it was almost upon
him, but Lee had seen him
coming. He brought a chair
out and led Doxology away
toward the shed.
Samuel

sat
down
quietly, and he didn’t trouble
Adam by looking at him too
much, and he didn’t trouble
him by not looking at him.
The wind freshened in the
treetops and a fringe of it
ruffled Samuel’s hair. “I
thought I’d better get back to
the wells,” Samuel said
softly.
Adam’s voice had gone
rusty from lack of use. “No,”
he said, “I don’t want any
wells. I’ll pay for the work
you did.”
Samuel leaned over the
basket and put his finger
against the small palm of one
of the twins and the fingers
closed and held on. “I guess

the last bad habit a man will
give up is advising."
"I don't want advice."
"Nobody does. It's a
giver's present. Go through
the motions, Adam."
"What motions?"
"Act out being alive, like
a play. And after a while, a
long while, it will be true."
"Why should I?" Adam
asked.
Samuel was looking at
the twins. "You're going to
pass something down no
matter what you do or if you
do nothing. Even if you let
yourself go fallow, the weeds
will grow and the brambles.
Something will grow."
Adam did not answer,
and Samuel stood up. "I'll be

back," he said. "I'll be back again and again. Go through the motions, Adam."

In the back of the shed Lee held Doxology while Sam mounted. "There goes your bookstore, Lee," he said.

"Oh, well," said the Chinese, "maybe I didn't want it much anyway."

Chapter 19

1

A new country seems to follow a pattern. First come the openers, strong and brave and rather childlike. They can take care of themselves in a wilderness, but they are naïve and helpless against men, and perhaps that is why they went out in the first place. When the rough edges are worn off

the new land, businessmen
and lawyers come in to help
with the development—to
solve problems of ownership,
usually by removing the
temptations to themselves.
And finally comes culture,
which
is
entertainment,
relaxation, transport out of
the pain of living. And
culture can be on any level,
and is.
The church and the
whorehouse arrived in the Far
West simultaneously. And
each
would
have
been
horrified to think it was a

different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels. The sectarian churches came in swinging, cocky and loud and confident. Ignoring the laws of debt and repayment, they built churches which couldn't be paid for in a hundred years. The sects fought evil, true enough, but they also fought each other with a fine lustiness. They fought at the turn of a doctrine. Each happily believed all the others were bound for hell in a basket. And each for all its

bumptiousness brought with
it
the
same
thing:
the
Scripture on which our ethics,
our art and poetry, and our
relationships are built. It took
a smart man to know where
the difference lay between the
sects, but anyone could see
what they had in common.
And they brought music—
maybe not the best, but the
form and sense of it. And
they brought conscience, or,
rather, nudged the dozing
conscience. They were not
pure, but they had a potential
of purity, like a soiled white
shirt. And any man could

make something pretty fine of
it
within
himself.
True
enough, the Reverend Billing,
when they caught up with
him, turned out to be a thief,
an adulterer, a libertine, and a
zoophilist, but that didn’t
change the fact that he had
communicated some good
things to a great number of
receptive people. Billing went
to jail, but no one ever
arrested the good things he
had released. And it doesn’t
matter much that his motive
was impure. He used good
material and some of it stuck.
I use Billing only as an
outrageous

example.

The

honest preachers had energy

and go. They fought the devil,

no holds barred, boots and

eye-gouging permitted. You

might get the idea that they

howled truth and beauty the

way a seal bites out the

National Anthem on a row of

circus horns. But some of the

truth and beauty remained,

and

the

anthem

was

recognizable. The sects did

more than this, though. They

built the structure of social

life in the Salinas Valley. The

church

supper

is

the

grandfather of the country

club, just as the Thursday

poetry

reading

in

the

basement under the vestry

sired the little theater.

While

the

churches,

bringing the sweet smell of

piety for the soul, came in

prancing and farting like

brewery horses in bock-beer

time, the sister evangelism,

with release and joy for the

body, crept in silently and

gravely, with its head bowed

and its face covered.

You may have seen the
spangled palaces of sin and
fancy dancing in the false
West of the movies, and
maybe some of them existed
—but not in the Salinas
Valley. The brothels were
quiet,
orderly,
and
circumspect. Indeed, if after
hearing the ecstatic shrieks of
climactic conversion against
the thumping beat of the
melodeon you had stood
under the window of a
whorehouse and listened to
the low decorous voices, you
would have been likely to
confuse the identities of the
two ministries. The brothel
was accepted while it was not

admitted.

I will tell you about the
solemn courts of love in
Salinas. They were about the
same in other towns, but the
Salinas Row has a pertinence
to this telling.

You walked west on
Main Street until it bent.
That's
where
Castroville
Street
crossed
Main.

Castroville Street is now
called Market Street, God
knows why. Streets used to
be named for the place they
aimed at. Thus Castroville
Street, if you followed it nine
miles,

brought

you

to

Castroville, Alisal Street to

Alisal, and so forth.

Anyway,

when

you

came to Castroville Street

you turned right. Two blocks

down, the Southern Pacific

tracks cut diagonally across

the street on their way south,

and

a

street

crossed

Castroville Street from east to

west. And for the life of me I

cannot remember the name of

that street. If you turned left

on that street and crossed the

tracks
you
were
in
Chinatown. If you turned
right you were on the Row.
It was a black ’dobe
street, deep shining mud in
winter and hard as rutted iron
in summer. In the spring the
tall grass grew along its sides
—wild oats and mallow
weeds and yellow mustard
mixed in. In the early
morning
the
sparrows
shrieked
over
the
horse
manure in the street.

Do

you

remember

hearing that, old men? And

do you remember how an

easterly breeze brought odors

in from Chinatown, roasting

pork and punk and black

tobacco and yen shi? And do

you remember the deep

Waiting stroke of the great

gong in the Joss House, and

how its tone hung in the air so

long?

Remember, too, the little

houses,

unpainted,

unrepaired? They seemed

very small, and they tried to

efface themselves in outside

neglect,

and

the
wild
overgrown front yards tried to
hide them from the street.
Remember how the shades
were always drawn with little
lines of yellow light around
their edges? You could hear
only a murmur from within.
Then the front door would
open to admit a country boy,
and you'd hear laughter and
perhaps the soft sentimental
tone of an open-face piano
with a piece of toilet chain
across the strings, and then
the door would close it off
again.
Then you might hear
horses' hoofs on the dirt
street, and Pet Bulene would
drive his hack up in front, and

maybe four or five portly men
would get out—great men,
rich or official, bankers
maybe, or the courthouse
gang. And Pet would drive
around the corner and settle
down in his hack to wait for
them. Big cats would ripple
across the street to disappear
in the tall grass.
And then—remember?
—the train whistle and the
boring light and a freight
from King City would go
stomping across Castroville
Street and into Salinas and
you could hear it sighing at
the station. Remember?
Every town has its
celebrated madams, eternal
women to be sentimentalized
down the years. There is

something very attractive to
men about a madam. She
combines the brains of a
businessman, the toughness
of a prize fighter, the warmth
of a companion, the humor of
a tragedian. Myths collect
around
her,
and,
oddly
enough,
not
voluptuous
myths.
The
stories
remembered and repeated
about a madam cover every
field
but
the

bedroom.

Remembering,

her

old

customers picture her as a

philanthropist,

medical

authority,

bouncer,

and

poetess

of

the

bodily

emotions

without

being

involved with them.

For a number of years

Salinas had sheltered two of

these

treasures:

Jenny,

sometimes

called

Fartin’

Jenny, and the Nigger, who

owned and operated the Long

Green. Jenny was a good

companion, a keeper of

secrets, a giver of secret

loans. There is a whole

literature of stories about

Jenny in Salinas.

The

Nigger

was

a

handsome, austere woman

with snow-white hair and a

dark and awful dignity. Her

brown eyes, brooding deep in

her skull, looked out on an

ugly world with philosophic

sorrow. She conducted her
house
like
a
cathedral
dedicated to a sad but erect
Priapus. If you wanted a good
laugh and a poke in the ribs,
you went to Jenny's and got
your money's worth; but if
the sweet world-sadness close
to tears crept out of your
immutable
loneliness,
the
Long Green was your place.
When you came out of there
you felt that something pretty
stern and important had
happened. It was no jump in
the hay. The dark beautiful
eyes of the Nigger stayed

with you for days.
When Faye came down
from Sacramento and opened
her house there was a flurry
of animosity from the two
incumbents.
They
got
together to drive Faye out,
but they discovered she was
not in competition.
Faye was the motherly
type,
big-breasted,
big-hipped, and warm. She was a
bosom to cry on, a soother
and a stroker. The iron sex of
the Nigger and the tavern
bacchanalianism of Jenny had
their devotees, and they were
not lost to Faye. Her house
became the refuge of young

men
puling
in
puberty,
mourning over lost virtue,
and aching to lose some
more. Faye was the reassurer
of misbegotten husbands. Her
house took up the slack for
frigid wives. It was the
cinnamon-scented kitchen of
one’s grandmother. If any
sexual thing happened to you
at Faye’s you felt it was an
accident but forgivable. Her
house led the youths of
Salinas into the thorny path of
sex in the pinkest, smoothest
way. Faye was a nice woman,
not very bright, highly moral,
and easily shocked. People
trusted her and she trusted

everyone. No one could want
to hurt Faye once he knew
her. She was no competition
to the others. She was a third
phase.
Just as in a store or on a
ranch the employees are
images of the boss, so in a
whorehouse the girls are very
like
the
madam,
partly
because she hires that kind
and partly because a good
madam
imprints
her
personality on the business.
You could stay a very long
time at Faye's before you
would hear an ugly or

suggestive word spoken. The
wanderings to the bedrooms,
the payments, were so soft
and casual they seemed
incidental. All in all, she ran a
hell of a fine house, as the
constable and the sheriff
knew.
Faye
contributed
heavily to every charity.

Having a revulsion against
disease, she paid for regular
inspection of her girls. You
had less chance of contracting
a difficulty at Faye's than
with your Sunday School
teacher. Faye soon became a
solid and desirable citizen of
the growing town of Salinas.

2

The girl Kate puzzled Faye—
she was so young and pretty,
so
lady-like,
so
well
educated. Faye took her into
her own inviolate bedroom
and questioned her far more
than she would if Kate had
been another kind of girl.

There were always women
knocking on the door of a
whorehouse,
and
Faye
recognized most of them
instantly. She could tick them
off—lazy, vengeful, lustful,
unsatisfied,
greedy,
ambitious. Kate didn't fall
into any of these classes.
"I hope you don't mind
my asking you all these
questions," she said. "It just
seems so strange that you
should come here. Why, you
could get a husband and a
surrey and a corner house in
town with no trouble at all, no
trouble at all." And Faye
rolled her wedding band

around and around on her fat
little finger.
Kate smiled shyly. “It’s
so hard to explain. I hope you
won’t insist on knowing. The
happiness of someone very
near and dear to me is
involved. Please don’t ask
me.”
Faye nodded solemnly.
“I’ve known things like that. I
had one girl who was
supporting her baby, and no
one knew for a long, long
time. That girl has a fine
house and a husband in—
there, I nearly told you where.
I’d cut out my tongue before
I’d tell. Do you have a baby,
dear?”
Kate looked down to try
to conceal the shine of tears

in her eyes. When she could
control
her
throat
she
whispered, “I’m sorry, I can’t
talk about it.”
“That’s all right. That’s
all right. You just take your
time.”
Faye was not bright, but
she was far from stupid. She
went to the sheriff and got
herself cleared. There was no
sense in taking chances. She
knew something was wrong
about Kate, but if it didn’t
harm the house it really
wasn’t Faye’s business.
Kate might have been a
chiseler, but she wasn’t. She
went to work right away. And

when customers come back again and again and ask for a girl by name, you know you've got something. A pretty face won't do that. It was quite apparent to Faye that Kate was not learning a new trade.

There are two things it is good to know about a new girl: first, will she work? and second, will she get along with the other girls? There's nothing will upset a house like an ill-tempered girl.

Faye didn't have long to wonder about the second question. Kate put herself out to be pleasant. She helped the other girls keep their rooms clean. She served them when they were sick, listened to

their troubles, answered them
in matters of love, and as
soon as she had some, loaned
them money. You couldn't
want a better girl. She
became
best
friend
to
everyone in the house.
There was no trouble
Kate would not take, no
drudgery she was afraid of,
and, in addition, she brought
business. She soon had her
own
group
of
regular
customers.
Kate
was

thoughtful
too.
She
remembered birthdays and
always had a present and a
cake with candles. Faye
realized she had a treasure.
People who don't know
think it is easy to be a madam
—just sit in a big chair and
drink beer and take half the
money the girls make, they
think. But it's not like that at
all. You have to feed the girls
—that's groceries and a cook.
Your laundry problem is
quite a bit more complicated
than that of a hotel. You have
to keep the girls well and as
happy as possible, and some
of them can get pretty ornery.
You have to keep suicide at

an absolute minimum, and
whores, particularly the ones
getting along in years, are
flighty with a razor; and that
gets your house a bad name.
It isn't so easy, and if
you have waste too you can
lose money. When Kate
offered to help with the
marketing and planning of
meals Faye was pleased,
although she didn't know
when the girl found time.
Well, not only did the food
improve, but the grocery bills
came down one-third the first
month Kate took over. And
the
laundry—Faye
didn't
know what Kate said to the
man but that bill suddenly

dropped twenty-five per cent.
Faye didn't see how she ever
got along without Kate.
In the late afternoon
before business they sat
together in Faye's room and
drank tea. It was much nicer
since Kate had painted the
woodwork and put up lace
curtains. The girls began to
realize that there were two
bosses, not one, and they
were glad because Kate was
very easy to get along with.
She made them turn more
tricks but she wasn't mean
about it. They'd as likely as
not have a big laugh over it.
By the time a year had
passed Faye and Kate were
like mother and daughter.
And the girls said, "You

watch—she'll own this house

some day."

Kate's

hands

were

always busy, mostly at drawn

worn on the sheerest of lawn

handkerchiefs.

She

could

make

beautiful

initials.

Nearly all the girls carried

and

treasured

her

handkerchiefs.

Gradually a perfectly

natural thing happened. Faye,

the essence of motherness,

began to think of Kate as her

daughter. She felt this in her
breast and in her emotions,
and her natural morality took
hold. She did not want her
daughter to be a whore. It was
a
perfectly
reasonable
sequence.
Faye thought hard how
she was going to bring up the
subject. It was a problem. It
was
Faye’s
nature
to
approach
any
subject
sideways. She could not say,
“I want you to give up
whoring.”

She said, “If it is a
secret, don’t answer, but I’ve
always meant to ask you.
What did the sheriff say to
you—good Lord, is it a year
ago? How the time goes!
Quicker as you get older, I
think. He was nearly an hour
with you. He didn’t—but of
course not. He’s a family
man. He goes to Jenny’s. But
I don’t want to pry into your
affairs.”
“There’s no secret at all
about that,” said Kate. “I
would have told you. He told
me I should go home. He was
very nice about it. When I
explained that I couldn’t, he
was
very
nice

and

understanding.”

“Did you tell him why?”

Faye asked jealously.

“Of course not. Do you

think I would tell him when I

won’t tell you? Don’t be silly,

darling. You’re such a funny

little girl.”

Faye

smiled

and

snuggled contentedly down in

her chair.

Kate’s face was in

repose,

but

she

was

remembering every word of

that interview. As a matter of

fact, she rather liked the

sheriff. He was direct.

3

He had closed the door of her
room, glanced around with
the quick recording eye of a
good
policeman—no
photographs, none of the
personal
articles
which
identify, nothing but clothes
and shoes.
He sat down on her little
cane rocking chair and his
buttocks hung over on each
side. His fingers got together
in conference, talking to one
another like ants. He spoke in
an unemotional tone, almost
as though he weren't much
interested in what he was

saying. Maybe that was what impressed her.

At first she put on her slightly stupid demure look, but after a few of his words she gave that up and bored into him with her eyes, trying to read his thoughts. He neither looked in her eyes nor avoided them. But she was aware that he was inspecting her as she inspected him. She felt his glance go over the scar on her forehead almost as though he had touched it.

“I don’t want to make a record,” he said quietly. “I’ve held office a long time. About one more term will be enough. You know, young woman, if this were fifteen years back I’d do some

checking, and I guess I'd find something pretty nasty." He waited for some reaction from her but she did not protest. He nodded his head slowly. "I don't want to know," he said. "I want peace in this county, and I mean all kinds of peace, and that means people getting to sleep at night. Now I haven't met your husband," he said, and she knew he noticed the slight movement of her tightening muscles. "I hear he's a very nice man. I hear also that he's pretty hard hit." He looked into her eyes for a moment. "Don't you want to know how bad you shot him?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, he's going to get

well—smashed his shoulder,
but he's going to get well.
That Chink is taking pretty
good care of him. Course I
don't think he'll lift anything
with his left arm for quite a
spell. A forty-four tears hell
out of a man. If the Chink
hadn't come back he'd of
bled to death, and you'd be
staying with me in the jail."
Kate was holding her
breath, listening for any hint
of what was coming and not
hearing any hints.
"I'm sorry," she said
quietly.
The
sheriff's
eyes
became alert. "Now that's the
first time you've made a

mistake," he said. "You're
not sorry. I knew somebody
like you once—hung him
twelve years ago in front of
the county jail. We used to do
that here."
The little room with its
dark
mahogany
bed,
its
marble-top wash stand with
bowl and pitcher and a door
for the pot, its wallpaper
endlessly repeating little roses
—little roses—the little room
was silent, the sound sucked
out of it.
The sheriff was staring
at a picture of three cherubim
—just heads, curly-haired,
limpid-eyed,

with
wings
about the size of pigeons'
wings growing out of where
their necks would be. He
frowned. "That's a funny
picture for a whorehouse," he
said.
"It was here," said Kate.
Apparently the preliminaries
were over now.
The sheriff straightened
up, undid his fingers, and
held the arms of his chair.
Even his buttocks pulled in a
little. "You left a couple of
babies," he said. "Little boys.
Now you calm down. I'm not
going to try to get you to go
back. I guess I'd do quite a
bit to keep you from going
back. I think I know you. I

could just run you over the
county line and have the next
sheriff run you, and that
could keep up till you landed
splash in the Atlantic Ocean.
But I don't want to do that. I
don't care how you live as
long as you don't give me
any trouble. A whore is a
whore."
Kate
asked
evenly,
"What is it you do want?"
"That's more like it," the
sheriff said. "Here's what I
want. I notice you changed
your name. I want you to
keep your new name. I guess
you made up someplace you
came
from—well,

that’s
where you came from. And
your reason—that’s when
you’re maybe drunk—you
keep your reason about two
thousand miles away from
King City.”
She was smiling a little,
and not a forced smile. She
was beginning to trust this
man and to like him.
“One thing I thought of,”
he said. “Did you know many
people around King City?”
“No.”
“I
heard
about
the
knitting needle,” he said
casually. “Well, it could
happen that somebody you

knew might come in here.
That your real hair color?”
“Yes.”
“Dye it black for a
while. Lots of people look
like somebody else.”
“How about this?” She
touched her scar with a
slender finger.
“Well, that’s just a—
what is that word? What is
that goddam word? I had it
this morning.”
“Coincidence?”
“That’s
it—
coincidence.” He seemed to
be finished. He got out
tobacco and papers and rolled
a clumsy, lumpy cigarette. He
broke out a sulphur match
and struck it on the block and

held it away until its acrid blue flame turned yellow. His cigarette burned crookedly up the side.

Kate said, “Isn’t there a threat? I mean, what you’ll do if I—”

“No, there isn’t. I guess I could think up something pretty ornery, though, if it came to that. No, I don’t want you—what you are, what you do, or what you say—to hurt Mr. Trask or his boys. You figure you died and now you’re somebody else and we’ll get along fine.”

He stood up and went to the door, then turned. “I’ve got a boy—he’ll be twenty this year; big, nice-looking fellow with a broken nose.

Everybody likes him. I don't want him in here. I'll tell Faye too. Let him go to Jenny's. If he comes in, you tell him to go to Jenny's." He closed the door behind him. Kate smiled down at her fingers.

4

Faye twisted around in her chair to reach a piece of brown panocha studded with walnuts. When she spoke it was around a mouth full of candy.

Kate wondered uneasily whether she could read minds, for Faye said, "I still don't like it as well. I said it then and I say it again. I liked your hair blond better.

I don’t know what got into
you to change it. You’ve got
a fair complexion.”
Kate caught a single
thread of hair with fingernails
of thumb and forefinger and
gently drew it out. She was
very clever. She told the best
lie of all—the truth. “I didn’t
want to tell you,” she said. “I
was afraid I might be
recognized and that would
hurt someone.”
Faye got up out of her
chair and went to Kate and
kissed her. “What a good
child it is,” she said. “What a
thoughtful dear.”
Kate said, “Let’s have
some tea. I’ll bring it in.” She
went out of the room, and in
the hall on the way to the

kitchen she rubbed the kiss
from her cheek with her
fingertips.
Back in her chair, Faye
picked out a piece of panocha
with a whole walnut showing
through. She put it in her
mouth and bit into a piece of
walnut shell. The sharp,
pointed fragment hit a hollow
tooth and whanged into the
nerve. Blue lights of pain
flashed through her. Her
forehead became wet. When
Kate came back with teapot
and cups on a tray Faye was
clawing at her mouth with a
crooked
finger
and
whimpering in agony.
“What is it?” Kate cried.

“Tooth—nutshell.”

“Here, let me see. Open

and point.” Kate looked into

the open mouth, then went to

the nut bowl on the fringed

table for a nut pick. In a

fraction of a second she had

dug out the shell and held it

in the palm of her hand.

“There it is.”

The

nerve

stopped

shrieking

and

the

pain

dropped to an ache. “Only

that big? It felt like a house.

Look, dear,” said Faye, “open

that second drawer where my

medicine

is.

Bring

the

paregoric and a piece of

cotton. Will you help me

pack this tooth?”

Kate brought the bottle

and pushed a little ball of

saturated cotton into the tooth

with the point of the nut pick.

“You ought to have it out.”

“I know. I will.”

“I have three teeth

missing on this side.”

“Well,

you’d

never

know it. That made me feel

all shaky. Bring me the

Pinkham, will you?” She

poured herself a slug of the

vegetable

compound

and

sighed with relief. “That’s a

wonderful medicine,” she

said.

“The

woman

who

invented it was a saint.”

Chapter 20

1

It was a pleasant afternoon.

Frémont’s Peak was lighted

pinkly by the setting sun, and

Faye could see it from her

window.

From

over

on

Castroville Street came the

sweet sound of jingling horse

bells from an eight-horse

grain team down from the ridge. The cook was fighting pots in the kitchen. There was a rubbing sound on the wall and then a gentle tap on the door.

"Come in, Cotton Eye," Faye called.

The door opened and the crooked little cotton-eyed piano player stood in the entrance, waiting for a sound to tell him where she was.

"What is it you want?" Faye asked.

He turned to her. "I don't feel good, Miss Faye. I want to crawl into my bed and not do no playing tonight."

"You were sick two nights last week, Cotton Eye.

Don’t you like your job?”

“I don’t feel good.”

“Well, all right. But I

wish you’d take better care of

yourself.”

Kate said softly, “Let the

gong alone for a couple of

weeks, Cotton Eye.”

“Oh, Miss Kate. I didn’t

know you was here. I ain’t

been smoking.”

“You’ve been smoking,”

Kate said.

“Yes, Miss Kate, I sure

will let it alone. I don’t feel

good.” He closed the door,

and they could hear his hand

rubbing along the wall to

guide him.

Faye said, “He told me

he’d stopped.”

“He hasn’t stopped.”

“The poor thing,” said
Faye, “he doesn’t have much
to live for.”
Kate stood in front of
her. “You’re so sweet,” she
said.
“You
believe
in
everybody. Someday if you
don’t watch, or I don’t watch
for you, someone will steal
the roof.”
“Who’d want to steal
from me?” asked Faye.
Kate put her hand on
Faye’s plump shoulders. “Not
everyone is as nice as you
are.”
Faye’s eyes glistened
with tears. She picked up a
handkerchief from the chair

beside her and wiped her eyes
and patted delicately at her
nostrils. “You’re like my own
daughter, Kate,” she said.
“I’m
beginning
to
believe I am. I never knew
my mother. She died when I
was small.”
Faye drew a deep breath
and plunged into the subject.
“Kate, I don’t like you
working here.”
“Why not?”
Faye shook her head,
trying to find words. “I’m not
ashamed. I run a nice house.
If I didn’t somebody else
might run a bad house. I don’t
do anybody any harm. I’m
not ashamed.”

“Why should you be?”

asked Kate.

“But I don’t like you

working. I just don’t like it.

You’re sort of my daughter. I

don’t

like

my

daughter

working.”

“Don’t

be

a

silly,

darling,” said Kate. “I have to

—here or somewhere else. I

told you. I have to have the

money.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Of course I do. Where

else could I get it?”

“You could be my

daughter. You could manage
the house. You could take
care of things for me and not
go upstairs. I'm not always
well, you know."
"I know you're not, poor
darling. But I have to have
money."
"There's plenty for both
of us, Kate. I could give you
as much as you make and
more, and you'd be worth it."
Kate shook her head
sadly. "I do love you," she
said. "And I wish I could do
what you want. But you need
your little reserve, and I—
well,
suppose
something
should happen to you? No, I
must go on working. Do you

know, dear, I have five
regulars tonight?”
A jar of shock struck
Faye. “I don’t want you to
work.”
“I have to, Mother.”
The word did it. Faye
burst into tears, and Kate sat
on the arm of her chair and
stroked her cheek and wiped
her streaming eyes. The
outburst sniffled to a close.
The dusk was settling
deeply on the valley. Kate’s
face was a glow of lightness
under her dark hair. “Now
you’re all right. I’ll go and
look in on the kitchen and
then dress.”
“Kate, can’t you tell
your regulars you’re sick?”
“Of course not, Mother.”

“Kate, it’s Wednesday.
Probably won’t be anybody
in after one o’clock.”
“The Woodmen of the
World are having a do.”
“Oh,
yes.
But
on
Wednesday—the Woodmen
won’t be here after two.”
“What are you getting
at?”
“Kate, when you close,
you tap on my door. I’ll have
a little surprise for you.”
“What
kind
of
a
surprise?”
“Oh, a secret surprise!

Will you ask the cook to
come in as you go by the
kitchen?”
“Sounds like a cake
surprise.”
“Now
don’t
ask
questions, darling. It’s a
surprise.”
Kate kissed her. “What a
dear you are, Mother.”
When she had closed the
door behind her Kate stood
for a moment in the hall. Her
fingers caressed her little
pointed chin. Her eyes were
calm. Then she stretched her
arms over her head and
strained her body in a
luxurious yawn. She ran her
hands slowly down her sides

from right under her breasts
to her hips. Her mouth
corners turned up a little, and
she
moved
toward
the
kitchen.

2

The few regulars drifted in
and out and two drummers
walked down the Line to look
them over, but not a single
Woodman of the World
showed up. The girls sat
yawning in the parlor until
two o’clock, waiting.
What kept the Woodmen
away was a sad accident.
Clarence Monteith had a
heart attack right in the
middle of the closing ritual

and before supper. They laid
him out on the carpet and
dampened his forehead until
the doctor came. Nobody felt
like sitting down to the
doughnut supper. After Dr.
Wilde had arrived and looked
Clarence over, the Woodmen
made a stretcher by putting
flagpoles through the sleeves
of two overcoats. On the way
home Clarence died, and they
had to go for Dr. Wilde again.
And by the time they had
made plans for the funeral
and written the piece for the
Salinas Journal, nobody had
any heart for a whorehouse.
The next day, when they
found out what had happened,
the girls all remembered what
Ethel had said at ten minutes

to two.

“My God!” Ethel had

said. “I never heard it so

quiet. No music, cat’s got

Kate’s tongue. It’s like setting

up with a corpse.”

Later

Ethel

was

impressed with having said it

—almost as if she knew.

Grace

had

said,

“I

wonder what cat’s got Kate’s

tongue. Don’t you feel good?

Kate—I said, don’t you feel

good?”

Kate started. “Oh! I

guess I was thinking of

something.”

“Well, I’m not,” said
Grace. “I’m sleepy. Why
don’t we close up? Let’s ask
Faye if we can’t lock up.
There won’t even be a Chink
in tonight. I’m going to ask
Faye.”
Kate’s voice cut in on
her. “Let Faye alone. She’s
not well. We’ll close up at
two.”
“That
clock’s
way
wrong,” said Ethel. “What’s
the matter with Faye?”
Kate said, “Maybe that’s
what I was thinking about.
Faye’s not well. I’m worried
to death about her. She won’t
show it if she can help it.”
“I thought she was all

right," Grace said.

Ethel hit the jackpot

again. "Well, she don't look

good to me. She's got a kind

of flush. I noticed it."

Kate spoke very softly.

"Don't you girls ever let her

know

I

told

you.

She

wouldn't want you to worry.

What a dear she is!"

"Best goddam house I

ever hustled," said Grace.

Alice said, "You better

not let her hear you talk

words like that."

"Balls!"

said

Grace.

“She knows all the words.”

“She don’t like to hear

them—not from us.”

Kate said patiently, “I

want

to

tell

you

what

happened. I was having tea

with her late this afternoon

and she fainted dead away. I

do wish she’d see a doctor.”

“I noticed she had a kind

of

bright

flush,”

Ethel

repeated. “That clock’s way

wrong but I forget which

way.”

Kate said, “You girls go

on to bed. I'll lock up."

When they were gone

Kate went to her room and

put on her pretty new print

dress that made her look like

a little girl. She brushed and

braided her hair and let it

hang behind in one thick

pigtail tied with a little white

bow. She patted her cheeks

with Florida water. For a

moment she hesitated, and

then from the top bureau

drawer she took a little gold

watch that hung from a fleur-de-lis pin. She wrapped it in

one

of

her

fine

lawn

handkerchiefs and went out

of the room.

The hall was very dark,
but a rim of light showed
under Faye's door. Kate
tapped softly.
Faye called, "Who is it?"
"It's Kate."
"Don't you come in yet.
You wait outside. I'll tell you
when." Kate heard a rustling
and a scratching in the room.
Then Faye called, "All right.
Come in."
The
room
was
decorated. Japanese lanterns
with candles in them hung on
bamboo sticks at the corners,
and red crepe paper twisted in
scallops from the center to the
corners to give the effect of a
tent. On the table, with

candlesticks around it, was a big white cake and a box of chocolates, and beside these a basket with a magnum of champagne peeking out of crushed ice. Faye wore her best lace dress and her eyes were shiny with emotion.

“What in the world?” Kate cried. She closed the door. “Why, it looks like a party!”

“It is a party. It’s a party for my dear daughter.”

“It’s not my birthday.” Faye said, “In a way maybe it is.”

“I don’t know what you mean. But I brought you a present.” She laid the folded handkerchief in Faye’s lap.

“Open it carefully,” she said.

Faye held the watch up.

“Oh, my dear, my dear! You crazy child! No, I can’t take it.” She opened the face and then picked open the back with her fingernail. It was engraved.—”To C. with all my heart from A.”

“It was my mother’s watch,” Kate said softly. “I would like my new mother to have it.”

“My darling child! My darling child!”

“Mother would be glad.”

“But it’s my party. I have a present for my dear daughter—but I’ll have to do it in my own way. Now, Kate, you open the bottle of wine and pour two glasses while I cut the cake. I want it to be

fancy.”

When everything was

ready Faye took her seat

behind the table. She raised

her glass. “To my new

daughter—may

you

have

long life and happiness.” And

when they had drunk Kate

proposed, “To my mother.”

Faye said, “You’ll make me

cry—don’t make me cry.

Over on the bureau, dear.

Bring the little mahogany

box. There that’s the one.

Now put it on the table here

and open it.”

In the polished box lay a

rolled white paper tied with a

red ribbon. “What in the

world is it?” Kate asked. “It’s

my gift to you. Open it.”

Kate

very

carefully

untied the red ribbon and

unrolled the tube. It was

written elegantly with shaded

letters, and it was well and

carefully

drawn

and

witnessed by the cook.

“All my worldly goods

without exception to Kate

Albey because I regard her as

my daughter.”

It was simple, direct, and

legally irreproachable. Kate

read it three times, looked

back at the date, studied the

cook’s

signature.

Faye
watched her, and her lips
were parted in expectation.
When Kate's lips moved,
reading, Faye's lips moved.
Kate rolled the paper
and tied the ribbon around it
and put it in the box and
closed the lid. She sat in her
chair.
Faye said at last, "Are
you pleased?"
Kate's eyes seemed to
peer into and beyond Faye's
eyes—to penetrate the brain
behind the eyes. Kate said
quietly, "I'm trying to hold
on, Mother. I didn't know
anyone could be so good. I'm
afraid if I say anything too
quickly or come too close to
you, I'll break to pieces."

It was more dramatic
than Faye had anticipated,
quiet and electric. Faye said,
“It’s a funny present, isn’t
it?”
“Funny? No, it isn’t
funny.”
“I mean, a will is a
strange present. But it means
more than that. Now you are
my real daughter I can tell
you. I—no, *we*—have cash
and securities in excess of
sixty thousand dollars. In my
desk are notations of accounts
and safe-deposit boxes. I sold
the place in Sacramento for a
very good price. Why are you
so silent, child? Is something
bothering you?”
“A will sounds like
death. That’s thrown a pall.”

“But everyone should
make a will.”
“I know, Mother.” Kate
smiled ruefully. “A thought
crossed my mind. I thought of
all your kin coming in angrily
to break such a will as this.
You can’t do this.”
“My poor little girl, is
that what’s bothering you? I
have no folks. As far as I
know I have no kin. And if I
did have some—who would
know? Do you think you are
the only one with secrets? Do
you think I use the name I
was born with?”
Kate looked long and
levelly at Faye.
“Kate,” she cried, “Kate,
it’s a party. Don’t be sad!
Don’t be frozen!”

Kate got up, gently
pulled the table aside, and sat
down on the floor. She put
her cheek on Faye's knee.
Her slender fingers traced a
gold thread on the skirt
through its intricate leaf
pattern. And Faye stroked
Kate's cheek and hair and
touched her strange ears.
Shyly Faye's fingers explored
to the borders of the scar.
"I think I've never been
so happy before," said Kate.
"My darling. You make
me happy too. Happier than I
have ever been. Now I don't
feel alone. Now I feel safe."
Kate picked delicately at
the gold thread with her
fingernails.
They sat in the warmth

for a long time before Faye
stirred. “Kate,” she said,
“we’re forgetting. It’s a party.
We’ve forgotten the wine.
Pour it, child. We’ll have a
little celebration.”
Kate said uneasily, “Do
we need it, Mother?”
“It’s good. Why not? I
like to take on a little load. It
lets the poison out. Don’t you
like champagne, Kate?”
“Well, I never have
drunk much, it’s not good for
me.”
“Nonsense.
Pour
it,
darling.”
Kate got up from the
floor and filled the glasses.
Faye said, “Now drink it

down. I’m watching you.
You’re not going to let an old
woman get silly by herself.”
“You’re not an old
woman, Mother.”
“Don’t talk—drink it. I
won’t touch mine until yours
is empty.” She held her glass
until Kate had emptied hers,
then gulped it. “Good, that’s
good,” she said. “Fill them
up. Now, come on dear—
down the rat hole. After two
or three the bad things go
away.”
Kate’s
chemistry
screamed against the wine.
She remembered, and she was
afraid.
Faye said, “Now let me
see the bottom, child—there.

You see how good it is? Fill
up again.”
The transition came to
Kate
almost
immediately
after the second glass. Her
fear evaporated, her fear of
anything disappeared. This
was what she had been afraid
of, and now it was too late.
The wine had forced a
passage
through
all
the
carefully built barriers and
defenses and deceptions, and
she didn’t care. The thing she
had learned to cover and
control was lost. Her voice
became chill and her mouth

was thin. Her wide-set eyes
slitted and grew watchful and
sardonic.
“Now
you
drink—
Mother—while I watch,” she
said. “There’s a—dear. I’ll
bet you can’t drink two
without stopping.”
“Don’t bet me, Kate.
You’d lose. I can drink six
without stopping.”
“Let me see you.”
“If I do, will you?”
“Of course.”
The contest started, and
a puddle of wine spread out
over the tabletop and the wine
went down in the magnum.
Faye giggled. “When I
was a girl—I could tell you

stories maybe you wouldn't
believe."
Kate said, "I could tell
stories
nobody
would
believe."
"You? Don't be silly.
You're a child."
Kate
laughed.
"You
never saw such a child. This
is a child—yes—a child!"
She laughed with a thin
penetrating shriek.
The sound got through
the wine that was muffling
Faye. She centered her eyes
on Kate. "You look so
strange," she said. "I guess
it's the lamplight. You look

different.”

“I am different.”

“Call

me

‘Mother,’

dear.”

“Mother— dear.”

“Kate, we’re going to

have such a good life.”

“You bet we are. You

don’t even know. You don’t

know.”

“I’ve always wanted to

go to Europe. We could get

on a ship and have nice

clothes—dresses from Paris.”

“Maybe we’ll do that—

but not now.”

“Why not, Kate? I have

plenty of money.”

“We’ll

have

plenty

more.”

Faye spoke pleadingly,

“Why don’t we go now? We

could sell the house. With the

business we’ve got, we could

get maybe ten thousand

dollars for it.”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?

It’s my house. I can sell it.”

“Did you forget I’m

your daughter?”

“I don’t like your tone,

Kate. What’s the matter with

you? Is there any more

wine?”

“Sure, there’s a little.

Look at it through the bottle.

Here, drink it out of the

bottle. That’s right—Mother

—spill it down your neck.

Get it in under your corset,
Mother, against your fat
stomach."
Faye
wailed,
"Kate,
don't be mean! We were
feeling so nice. What do you
want to go and spoil it for?"
Kate wrenched the bottle
from her hand. "Here, give
me that." She tipped it up and
drained it and dropped it on
the floor. Her face was sharp
and her eyes glinted. The lips
of her little mouth were
parted to show her small
sharp teeth, and the canines
were longer and more pointed
than the others. She laughed
softly. "Mother—dear Mother
—I'm going to show you how

to run a whorehouse. We'll
fix the gray slugs that come
in here and dump their nasty
little loads—for a dollar.
We'll give them pleasure,
Mother dear."
Faye said sharply. "Kate,
you're drunk. I don't know
what you're talking about."
"You
don't,
Mother
dear? Do you want me to tell
you?"
"I want you to be sweet.
I want you to be like you
were."
"Well, it's too late. I
didn't want to drink the wine.
But you, you nasty fat worm,
you made me. I'm your dear,
sweet daughter—don't you

remember? Well, I remember how surprised you were that I had regulars. Do you think I'll give them up? Do you think they give me a mean little dollar in quarters? No, they give me ten dollars, and the price is going up all the time. They can't go to anybody else. Nobody else is any good for them."

Faye wept like a child.

"Kate," she said, "don't talk like that. You're not like that. You're not like that."

"Dear Mother, sweet fat Mother, take down the pants of one of my regulars. Look at the heelmarks on the groin —very pretty. And the little cuts that bleed for a long time. Oh, Mother dear, I've

got the sweetest set of razors
all in a case—and so sharp, so
sharp.”
Faye struggled to get out
of her chair. Kate pushed her
back. “And do you know,
Mother dear, that’s the way
this whole house is going to
be. The price will be twenty
dollars, and we’ll make the
bastards take a bath. We’ll
catch the blood on white silk
handkerchiefs—Mother dear
—blood
from
the
little
knotted whips.”
In her chair Faye began
to scream hoarsely. Kate was
on her instantly with a hard
hand cupped over her mouth.

“Don’t make a noise. There’s a good darling. Get snot all over your daughter’s hand—but no noise.” Tentatively she took her hand away and wiped it on Faye’s skirt.

Faye whispered, “I want you out of the house. I want you out. I run a good house without nastiness. I want you out.”

“I can’t go, Mother. I can’t leave you alone, poor dear.” Her voice chilled. “Now I’m sick of you. Sick of you.” She took a wineglass from the table, went to the bureau, and poured paregoric until the glass was half full.

“Here, Mother, drink it. It will be good for you.”

“I don’t want to.”

“There’s a good dear.
Drink it.” She coaxed the
fluid into Faye. “Now one
more
swallow—just
one
more.”
Faye mumbled thickly
for a while and then she
relaxed in her chair and slept,
snoring thickly.

3

Dread began to gather in the
corners of Kate’s mind, and
out of dread came panic. She
remembered the other time
and a nausea swept through
her. She gripped her hands
together, and the panic grew.
She lighted a candle from the
lamp and went unsteadily
down the dark hall to the

kitchen. She poured dry
mustard in a glass, stirred
water into it until it was
partly fluid, and drank it. She
held on to the edge of the sink
while the paste went burning
down.
She
retched
and
strained again and again. At
the end of it, her heart was
pounding and she was weak
—but the wine was overcome
and her mind was clear.
She
went
over
the
evening in her mind, moving
from scene to scene like a
sniffing animal. She bathed

her face and washed out the
sink and put the mustard back
on the shelf. Then she went
back to Faye's room.
The dawn was coming,
lighting up the back of
Frémont's Peak so that it
stood black against the sky.
Faye was still snoring in her
chair. Kate watched her for a
few moments and then she
fixed
Faye's
bed.
Kate
dragged and strained and
lifted the dead weight of the
sleeping woman. On the bed
Kate undressed Faye and
washed her face and put her
clothes away.
The day was coming

fast. Kate sat beside the bed
and watched the relaxed face,
the mouth open, lips blowing
in and out.
Faye made a restless
movement and her dry lips
slobbered a few thick words
and sighed off to a snore
again.
Kate's
eyes
become
alert. She opened the top
bureau drawer and examined
the bottles which constituted
the medicine chest of the
house—paregoric,
Pain
Killer, Lydia Pinkham, iron
wine tonic, Hall's Cream
Salve, Epsom salts, castor oil,
ammonia. She carried the

ammonia bottle to the bed, saturated a handkerchief, and, standing well away, held the cloth over Faye's nose and mouth.

The strangling, shocking fumes went in, and Faye came snorting and fighting out of her black web. Her eyes were wide and terrified. Kate said, "It's all right, Mother. It's all right. You had a nightmare. You had a bad dream."

"Yes, a dream," and then sleep overcame her again and she fell back and began to snore, but the shock of the ammonia had lifted her up nearer consciousness and she was more restless. Kate put the bottle back in its drawer.

She straightened the table,
mopped up the spilled wine,
and carried the glasses to the
kitchen.
The house was dusky
with dawnlight creeping in
around the edges of the
blinds. The cook stirred in his
lean-to behind the kitchen,
groping for his clothes and
putting on his clodhopper
shoes.
Kate moved quietly. She
drank two glasses of water
and filled the glass again and
carried it back to Faye's room
and closed the door. She
lifted Faye's right eyelid, and
the eye looked rakishly up at
her but it was not rolled back
in her head. Kate acted
slowly and precisely. She

picked up the handkerchief and smelled it. Some of the ammonia had evaporated but the smell was still sharp. She laid the cloth lightly over Faye's face, and when Faye twisted and turned and came near to waking, Kate took the handkerchief away and let Faye sink back. This she did three times. She put the handkerchief

away

and

picked up an ivory crochet hook from the marble top of the bureau. She turned down the cover and pressed the blunt end of the ivory against Faye's flabby breast with a steady, increasing pressure until the sleeping woman

whined and writhed. Then Kate explored the sensitive places of the body with the hook—under the arm, the groin, the ear, the clitoris, and always she removed the pressure just before Faye awakened fully.

Faye was very near the surface now. She whined and sniffled and tossed. Kate stroked her forehead and ran smooth fingers over her inner arm and spoke softly to her.

“Dear—dear.
You’re
having a bad dream. Come out of the bad dream,
Mother.”

Faye’s breathing grew more regular. She heaved a great sigh and turned on her

side and settled down with
little grunts of comfort.
Kate stood up from the
bed and a wave of dizziness
rose in her head. She steadied
herself, then went to the door
and listened, slipped out, and
moved cautiously to her own
room. She undressed quickly
and put on her nightgown and
a robe and slippers. She
brushed her hair and put it up
and covered it with a sleeping
cap, and she sponged her face
with Florida water. She went
quietly back to Faye's room.
Faye was still sleeping
peacefully on her side. Kate
opened the door to the hall.
She carried the glass of water
to the bed and poured cold
water in Faye's ear.

Faye
screamed,
and
screamed
again.
Ethel's
frightened face looked out of
her room in time to see Kate
in robe and slippers at Faye's
door. The cook was right
behind Kate, and he put out
his hand to stop her.
"Now don't go in there,
Miss Kate. You don't know
what's in there."
"Nonsense, Faye's in
trouble." Kate burst in and
ran to the bed.
Faye's eyes were wild
and she was crying and
moaning.
"What is it? What is it,

dear?”

The cook was in the

middle of the room, and three

sleep-haggard girls stood in

the doorway.

“Tell me, what is it?”

Kate cried.

“Oh,

darling—the

dreams, the dreams! I can’t

stand them!”

Kate turned to the door.

“She’s had a nightmare—

she’ll be all night. You go

back to bed. I’ll stay with her

a while. Alex, bring a pot of

tea.”

Kate was tireless. The

other girls remarked on it.

She put cold towels on Faye’s

aching head and held her

shoulders and the cup of tea

for her. She petted and babied her, but the look of horror would not go out of Faye's eyes. At ten o'clock Alex brought in a can of beer and without a word put it on the bureau top. Kate held a glass of it to Faye's lips.

"It will help, darling. Drink it down."

"I never want another drink."

"Nonsense! Drink it down like medicine. That's a good girl. Now just lie back and go to sleep."

"I'm afraid to sleep."

"Were the dreams so bad?"

"Horrible, horrible!"

“Tell me about them,
Mother. Maybe that will
help.”
Faye shrank back. “I
wouldn’t tell anyone. How I
could have dreamed them!
They
weren’t
like
my
dreams.”
“Poor
little
Mother!
Ilove you,” Kate said. “You
go to sleep. I’ll keep the
dreams away.”
Gradually Faye did slip
off to sleep. Kate sat beside
the bed, studying her.

Chapter 21

1

In human affairs of danger
and
delicacy
successful
conclusion is sharply limited
by hurry. So often men trip
by being in a rush. If one
were properly to perform a
difficult and subtle act, he
should first inspect the end to
be achieved and then, once he
had accepted the end as
desirable, he should forget it
completely and concentrate
solely on the means. By this
method he would not be
moved to false action by
anxiety or hurry or fear. Very
few people learn this.
What made Kate so
effective was the fact that she
had either learned it or had

been
born
with
the
knowledge.
Kate
never
hurried. If a barrier arose, she
waited
until
it
had
disappeared
before
continuing. She was capable
of
complete
relaxation
between the times for action.
Also, she was mistress of a
technique which is the basis
of good wrestling—that of

letting your opponent do the heavy work toward his own defeat, or of guiding his strength toward his weaknesses.

Kate was in no hurry. She thought to the end very quickly and then put it out of her mind. She set herself to work on method. She built a structure and attacked it, and if it showed the slightest shakiness she tore it down and started fresh. This she did only late at night or otherwise when she was completely alone, so that no change or preoccupation was noticeable in her manner. Her building was

constructed
of
personalities,
materials,
knowledge, and time. She had
access to the first and last,
and she set about getting
knowledge and materials, but
while she did that she set in
motion
a
series
of
imperceptible springs and
pendulums and left them to
pick up their own momenta.
First the cook told about
the will. It must have been the
cook. He thought he did
anyway. Kate heard about it
from
Ethel,

and

she

confronted him in the kitchen

where he was kneading bread,

his hairy big arms floured to

the elbows and his hands

yeast bleached.

“Do you think it was a

good thing to tell about being

a witness?” she said mildly.

“What do you think Miss

Faye is going to think?”

He

looked

confused.

“But I didn’t—”

“You didn’t what—tell

about it or think it would

hurt?”

“I don’t think I—”

“You don’t think you

told? Only three people knew.

Do you think I told? Or do
you think Miss Faye did?”
She saw the puzzled look
come into his eyes and knew
that by now he was far from
sure that he had not told. In a
moment he would be sure that
he had.
Three
of
the
girls
questioned Kate about the
will, coming to her together
for mutual strength.
Kate said, “I don’t think
Faye would like me to discuss
it. Alex should have kept his
mouth shut.” Their wills
wavered, and she said, “Why
don’t you ask Faye?”
“Oh, we wouldn’t do

that!”

“But you dare to talk

behind her back! Come on

now, let’s go in to her and

you

can

ask

her

the

questions.”

“No, Kate, no.”

“Well, I’ll have to tell

her you asked. Wouldn’t you

rather be there? Don’t you

think she would feel better if

she knew you weren’t talking

behind her back?”

“Well—”

“I know I would. I

always like a person who

comes right out.” Quietly she

surrounded and nudged and

pushed until they stood in

Faye's room.

Kate said, "They asked

me about a certain you-know-what. Alex admits he let it

out."

Faye

was

slightly

puzzled. "Well, dear, I can't

see that it's such a secret."

Kate said, "Oh, I'm glad

you feel that way. But you

can see that I couldn't

mention it until you did."

"You think it's bad to

tell, Kate?"

"Oh, not at all. I'm glad,

but it seemed to me that it

wouldn't be loyal of me to

mention it before you did."

"You're sweet, Kate. I

don't see any harm. You see,

girls, I’m alone in the world
and I have taken Kate as my
daughter. She takes such care
of me. Get the box, Kate.”
And each girl took the
will in her own hands and
inspected it. It was so simple
they could repeat it word for
word to the other girls.
They watched Kate to
see how she would change,
perhaps become a tyrant, but
if anything, she was nicer to
them.
A week later when Kate
became ill, she went right on
with her supervision of the
house, and no one would
have known if she hadn’t
been found standing rigid in
the hall with agony printed on
her face. She begged the girls

not to tell Faye, but they were
outraged, and it was Faye
who forced her to bed and
called Dr. Wilde.
He was a nice man and a
pretty good doctor. He looked
at her tongue, felt her pulse,
asked her a few intimate
questions, and then tapped his
lower lip.
“Right here?” he asked
and exerted a little pressure
on the small of her back.
“No? Here? Does this hurt?
So. Well, I think you just
need a kidney flushing.” He
left yellow, green, and red
pills to be taken in sequence.
The pills did good work.
She did have one little
flare up. She told Faye, “I’ll
go to the doctor’s office.”

“I’ll ask him to come
here.”
“To bring me some more
pills? Nonsense. I’ll go in the
morning.”

2

Dr. Wilde was a good man
and an honest man. He was
accustomed to say of his
profession that all he was sure
of was that sulphur would
cure the itch. He was not
casual about his practice.
Like
so
many
country
doctors,
he
was
a
combination doctor, priest,

psychiatrist to his town. He knew most of the secrets, weaknesses, and the braveries of Salinas. He never learned to take death easily. Indeed the death of a patient always gave him a sense of failure and hopeless ignorance. He was not a bold man, and he used surgery only as a last and fearful resort. The drugstore was coming in to help the doctors, but Dr. Wilde was one of the few to maintain his own dispensary and to compound his own prescriptions. Many years of overwork and

interrupted
sleep had made him a little
vague and preoccupied.
At eight-thirty on a
Wednesday morning Kate
walked
up
Main
Street,
climbed the stairs of the
Monterey
County
Bank
Building, and walked along
the corridor until she found
the door which said, “Dr.
Wilde—Office Hours 11-2.”
At nine-thirty Dr. Wilde
put his buggy in the livery
stable and wearily lifted out
his black bag. He had been
out in the Alisal presiding at

the disintegration of old, old
lady German. She had not
been able to terminate her life
neatly. There were codicils.
Even
now
Dr.
Wilde
wondered whether the tough,
dry,
stringy
life
was
completely gone out of her.
She was ninety-seven and a
death
certificate
meant
nothing to her. Why, she had
corrected the priest who
prepared her. The mystery of
death was on him. It often

was. Yesterday, Allen Day,
thirty-seven, six feet one
inch, strong as a bull and
valuable to four hundred
acres and a large family, had
meekly surrendered his life to
pneumonia
after
a
little
exposure and three days of
fever. Dr. Wilde knew it was
a mystery. His eyelids felt
grainy. He thought he would
take a sponge bath and have a
drink before his first office
patients arrived with their
stomach aches.
He climbed the stairs
and put his worn key in the
lock of his office door. The
key would not turn. He set his

bag on the floor and exerted pressure. The key refused to budge.

He grabbed the doorknob and pulled outward and rattled the key. The door was opened from within. Kate stood in front of him.

“Oh, good morning. Lock was stuck. How did you get in?”

“It wasn’t locked. I was early and came in to wait.”

“Wasn’t locked?” He turned the key the other way and saw that, sure enough, the little bar slipped out easily.

“I’m

getting

old,

I

guess,”

he

said.

“I’m

forgetful.” He sighed. “I

don’t know why I lock it

anyway. You could get in

with a piece of baling wire.

And who’d want to get in

anyway?” He seemed to see

her for the first time. “I don’t

have

office

hours

until

eleven.”

Kate said, “I needed

some more of those pills and

I couldn’t come later.”

“Pills? Oh, yes. You’re
the girl from down at
Faye’s.”
“That’s right.”
“Feeling better?”
“Yes, the pills help.”
“Well, they can’t hurt,”
he said. “Did I leave the door
to the dispensary open too?”
“What’s a dispensary?”
“Over there—that door.”
“I guess you must have.”
“Getting old. How is
Faye?”
“Well,
I’m
worried
about her. She was real sick a
while ago. Had cramps and
went a little out of her head.”
“She’s had a stomach
disorder before,” Dr. Wilde

said. “You can’t live like that
and eat at all hours and be
very well. I can’t anyway. We
just call it stomach trouble.
Comes from eating too much
and staying up all night. Now
—the pills. Do you remember
what color?”
“There were three kinds,
yellow, red, and green.”
“Oh,
yes.
Yes,
I
remember.”
While he poured pills
into a round cardboard box
she stood in the door.
“What
a
lot
of

medicines!”

Dr. Wilde said, “Yes—

and the older I get, the fewer

I use. I got some of those

when I started to practice.

Never used them. That’s a

beginner’s stock. I was going

to experiment—alchemy.”

“What?”

“Nothing. Here you are.

Tell Faye to get some sleep

and eat some vegetables. I’ve

been up all night. Let yourself

out, will you?” He went

wavering

back

into

the

surgery.

Kate glanced after him

and then her eyes flicked over

the lines of bottles and

containers. She closed the dispensary door and looked around the outer office. One book in the case was out of line. She pushed it back until it was shoulder to shoulder with its brothers.

She picked up her big handbag from the leather sofa and left.

In her own room Kate took five small bottles and a strip of scribbled paper from her handbag. She put the whole works in the toe of a stocking, pushed the wad into a rubber overshoe, and stood it with its fellow in the back of her closet.

3

During the following months a gradual change came over

Faye's house. The girls were sloppy and touchy. If they had been told to clean themselves and their rooms a deep resentment would have set in and the house would have reeked of ill temper. But it didn't work that way.

Kate said at table one evening that she had just happened to look in Ethel's room and it was so neat and pretty she couldn't help buying her a present. When Ethel unwrapped the package right at the table it was a big bottle of Hoyt's German, enough to keep her smelling sweet for a long time. Ethel was pleased, and she hoped Kate hadn't seen the dirty clothes under the bed. After

supper she not only got the
clothes out but brushed the
floors and swept the cobwebs
out of the corners.
Then Grace looked so
pretty one afternoon that Kate
couldn’t help giving her the
rhinestone butterfly pin she
was wearing. And Grace had
to rush up and put on a clean
shirtwaist to set it off.
Alex in the kitchen,
who, if he had believed what
was usually said of him
would
have
considered
himself a murderer, found
that he had a magic hand with
biscuits. He discovered that
cooking was something you
couldn’t learn. You had to

feel it.

Cotton Eye learned that

nobody hated him. His tub-thumping

piano

playing

changed imperceptibly.

He told Kate, “It’s funny

what you remember when

you think back.”

“Like what?” she asked.

“Well, like this,” and he

played for her.

“That’s

lovely,”

she

said. “What is it?”

“Well, I don’t know. I

think it’s Chopin. If I could

just see the music!”

He told her how he had

lost his sight, and he had

never told anyone else. It was

a bad story. That Saturday
night he took the chain off the
piano strings and played
something
he
had
been
remembering and practicing
in the morning, something
called “Moonlight,” a piece
by Beethoven, Cotton Eye
thought.
Ethel said it sounded
like moonlight and did he
know the words.
“It don’t have words,”
said Cotton Eye.
Oscar Trip, up from
Gonzales for Saturday night,
said, “Well, it ought to have.
It’s pretty.”
One night there were

presents for everyone because
Faye's was the best house,
the cleanest, and nicest in the
whole county—and who was
responsible for that? Why, the
girls—who else? And did
they ever taste seasoning like
in that stew?
Alex retired into the
kitchen and shyly wiped his
eyes with the back of his
wrist. He bet he could make a
plum pudding would knock
their eyes out.
Georgia was getting up
at ten every morning and
taking piano lessons from
Cotton Eye and her nails were
clean.
Coming
back
from

eleven o’clock mass on a
Sunday morning, Grace said
to Trixie, “And I was about
ready to get married and give
up
whoring.
Can
you
imagine?”
“It’s sure nice,” said
Trixie. “Jenny’s girls came
over for Faye’s birthday cake
and they couldn’t believe
their eyes. They don’t talk
about nothing else but how it
is at Faye’s. Jenny’s sore.”
“Did you see the score
on
the
blackboard
this
morning?”

“Sure
I
did—eighty-seven tricks in one week. Let
Jenny or the Nigger match
that when there ain’t no
holidays!”
“No holidays, hell. Have
you forgot it’s Lent? They
ain’t turning a trick at
Jenny’s.”
After her illness and her
evil dreams Faye was quiet
and depressed. Kate knew she
was being watched, but there
was no help for that. And she
had made sure the rolled
paper was still in the box and
all the girls had seen it or
heard about it.
One
afternoon
Faye

looked up from her solitaire
game as Kate knocked and
entered the room.
“How do you feel,
Mother?”
“Fine, just fine.” Her
eyes were secretive. Faye
wasn’t very clever. “You
know, Kate, I’d like to go to
Europe.”
“Well, how wonderful!
And you deserve it and you
can afford it.”
“I don’t want to go
alone. I want you to go with
me.”
Kate looked at her in
astonishment.
“Me?
You
want to take me?”
“Sure, why not?”

“Oh, you sweet dear!

When can we go?”

“You want to?”

“I’ve always dreamed of

it. When can we go? Let’s go

soon.”

Faye’s eyes lost their

suspicion

and

her

face

relaxed.

“Maybe

next

summer,” she said. “We can

plan it for next summer.

Kate!”

“Yes, Mother.”

“You—you don’t turn

any tricks any more, do you?”

“Why should I? You

take such good care of me.”

Faye slowly gathered up
the cards, and tapped them
square, and dropped them in
the table drawer.
Kate pulled up a chair.
“I want to ask your advice
about something.”
“What is it?”
“Well, you know I’m
trying to help you.”
“You’re
doing
everything, darling.”
“You know our biggest
expense is food, and it gets
bigger in the winter.”
“Yes.”
“Well, right now you
can buy fruit and all kinds of
vegetables for two bits a lug.
And in the winter you know
what we pay for canned

peaches and canned string

beans.”

“You aren’t planning to

start preserving?”

“Well, why shouldn’t

we?”

“What will Alex say to

that?”

“Mother,

you

can

believe it or not, or you can

ask him. Alex suggested it.”

“No!”

“Well, he did. Cross my

heart.”

“Well, I’ll be damned—

Oh, I’m sorry, sweet. It

slipped out.”

The kitchen turned into a

cannery and all the girls

helped. Alex truly believed it

was his idea. At the end of
the season he had a silver
watch
with
his
name
engraved on the back to prove
it.
Ordinarily both Faye and
Kate had their supper at the
long table in the dining room,
but on Sunday nights when
Alex was off and the girls
dined on thick sandwiches,
Kate served supper for two in
Faye's room. It was pleasant
and a ladylike time. There
was
always
some
little
delicacy, very special and

good—foie gras or a tossed salad, pastry bought at Lang's Bakery just across Main Street. And instead of the white oilcloth and paper napkins of the dining room, Faye's table was covered with a white damask cloth and the napkins were linen. It had a party feeling too, candles and—something rare in Salinas—a bowl of flowers. Kate could make pretty floral arrangements using only the blossoms from weeds she picked in the fields.

"What a clever girl she is," Faye would say. "She can

do anything and she can make do with anything. We're going to Europe. And did you know Kate speaks French? Well, she can. When you get her alone ask her to say something in French. She's teaching me. Know how you say bread in French?" Faye was having a wonderful time. Kate gave her excitement and perpetual planning.

4

On Saturday the fourteenth of October the first wild ducks went over Salinas. Faye saw them from her window, a great wedge flying south. When Kate came in before supper, as she always did, Faye told her about it. "I guess the winter's nearly

here," she said. "We'll have to get Alex to set up the stoves."

"Ready for your tonic, Mother dear?"

"Yes, I am. You're making me lazy, waiting on me."

"I like to wait on you," said Kate. She took the bottle of Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound from the drawer and held it up to the light. "Not much left," she said. "We'll have to get some more."

"Oh, I think I have three bottles left of the dozen in my closet."

Kate picked up the glass.

“There’s a fly in the glass,”
she said. “I’ll just go and
wash it out.”
In the kitchen she rinsed
the glass. From her pocket
she took the eye-dropper. The
end was closed with a little
piece of potato, the way you
plug the spout of a kerosene
can. She carefully squeezed a
few drops of clear liquid into
the glass, a tincture of nux
vomica.
Back in Faye’s room she
poured the three tablespoons
of vegetable compound in the
glass and stirred it.
Faye drank her tonic and
licked her lips. “It tastes
bitter,” she said.
“Does it, dear? Let nie
taste.” Kate took a spoonful

from the bottle and made a face. “So it does,” she said. “I guess it’s been standing around too long. I’m going to throw it out. Say, that *is* bitter. Let me get you a glass of water.”

At supper Faye’s face was flushed. She stopped eating and seemed to be listening.

“What’s the matter?” Kate asked. “Mother, what’s the matter?”

Faye seemed to tear her attention away. “Why, I don’t know. I guess a little heart flutter. Just all of a sudden I felt afraid and my heart got to pounding.”

“Don’t you want me to help you to your room?”

“No, dear, I feel all right
now.”
Grace put down her fork.
“Well, you got a real high
flush, Faye.”
Kate said, “I don’t like
it. I wish you’d see Dr.
Wilde.”
“No, it’s all right now.”
“You frightened me,”
said Kate. “Have you ever
had it before?”
“Well, I’m a little short
of breath sometimes. I guess
I’m getting too stout.”
Faye didn’t feel very
good that Saturday night and
about
ten
o’clock
Kate
persuaded her to go to bed.

Kate looked in several times
until she was sure Faye was
asleep.
The next day Faye felt
all right. “I guess I’m just
short-winded,” she said.
“Well, we’re going to
have invalid food for my
darling,” said Kate. “I’ve
made some chicken soup for
you, and we’ll have a string-bean salad—the way you like
it, just oil and vinegar, and a
cup of tea.”
“Honest to God, Kate. I
feel pretty good.”
“It wouldn’t hurt either
of us to eat a little light. You
frightened me last night. I had
an aunt who died of heart
trouble. And that leaves a
memory, you know.”
“I never had any trouble

with my heart. Just a little
short-winded when I climb
the stairs."
In the kitchen Kate set
the supper on two trays. She
measured out the French
dressing in a cup and poured
it on the string-bean salad. On
Faye's tray she put her
favorite cup and set the soup
forward on the stove to heat.
Finally she took the eye-dropper from her pocket and
squeezed two drops of crotón
oil on the string beans and
stirred it in. She went to her
room and swallowed the
contents of a small bottle of
Cascara Sagrada and hurried
back to the kitchen. She
poured the hot soup in the
cups, filled the teapot with
boiling water, and carried the

trays to Faye's room.

"I didn't think I was hungry," Faye said. "But that soup smells good."

"I made a special salad dressing for you," said Kate. "It's an old recipe, rosemary and thyme. See if you like it."

"Why, it's delicious," said Faye. "Is there anything you can't do darling?"

Kate was stricken first. Her forehead beaded with perspiration and she doubled over, crying with pain. Her eyes were staring and the saliva ran from her mouth. Faye ran to the hallway, screaming for help. The girls and a few Sunday customers crowded into the room. Kate was writhing on the floor.

Two of the regulars lifted her onto Faye's bed and tried to straighten her out, but she screamed and doubled up again. The sweat poured from her body and wet her clothes. Faye was wiping Kate's forehead with a towel when the pain struck her.

It was an hour before Dr. Wilde could be found playing euchre with a friend. He was dragged down to the Line by two hysterical whores. Faye and Kate were weak from vomiting and diarrhea and the spasms continued at intervals. Dr. Wilde said, "What did you eat?" And then he noticed the trays. "Are these string beans home canned?" he demanded.

“Sure,” said Grace. “We
did them right here.”
“Did any of you have
them?”
“Well, no. You see—”
“Go out and break every
jar,”
Dr.
Wilde
said.
“Goddam the string beans!”
And he unpacked his stomach
pump.
On Tuesday he sat with
the two pale weak women.
Kate’s bed had been moved
into Faye’s room. “I can tell
you now,” he said. “I didn’t
think you had a chance.
You’re pretty lucky. And let
home-made
string

beans
alone. Buy canned ones."
"What is it?" Kate
asked.
"Botulism. We don't
know much about it, but
damn few ever get over it. I
guess it's because you're
young and she's tough." He
asked Faye, "Are you still
bleeding from the bowels?"
"Yes, a little."
"Well, here are some
morphine pills. They'll bind
you up. You've probably
ruptured something. But they
say you can't kill a whore.
Now take it easy, both of
you."
That was October 17.
Faye was never really
well again. She would make a

little gain and then go to pieces. She had a bad time on December 3, and it took even longer for her to gain her strength. February 12 the bleeding became violent and the strain seemed to have weakened Faye's heart. Dr. Wilde listened a long time through his stethoscope.

Kate was haggard and her slender body had shrunk to bones. The girls tried to spell her with Faye, but Kate would not leave.

Grace said, "God knows when's the last sleep she had. If Faye was to die I think it would kill that girl."

"She's just as like to blow her brains out," said Ethel.

Dr. Wilde took Kate into the day-darkened parlor and put his black bag on the chair. “I might as well tell you,” he said. “Her heart just can’t take the strain, I’m afraid. She’s all torn up inside. That goddam botulism. Worse than a rattlesnake.” He looked away from Kate’s haggard face. “I thought it would be better to tell you so you can prepare yourself,” he said lamely and put his hand on her bony shoulder. “Not many people have such loyalty. Give her a little warm milk if she can take it.”

Kate carried a basin of warm water to the table beside the bed. When Trixie looked in, Kate was bathing

Faye and using the fine linen
napkins to do it. Then she
brushed the lank blond hair
and braided it.
Faye's skin had shrunk,
clinging to jaw and skull, and
her eyes were huge and
vacant.
She tried to speak, and
Kate said, "Shush! Save your
strength. Save your strength."
She went to the kitchen
for a glass of warm milk and
put it on the bedside table.
She took two little bottles
from her pocket and sucked a
little from each one into the
eye-dropper.
"Open
up,
Mother. This is a new kind of
medicine. Now be brave,

dear. This will taste bad." She squeezed the fluid far back on Faye's tongue and held up her head so she could drink a little milk to take away the taste. "Now you rest and I'll be back in a little while."

Kate slipped quietly out of the room. The kitchen was dark. She opened the outer door and crept out and moved back among the weeds. The ground was damp from the spring rains. At the back of the lot she dug a small hole with a pointed stick. She dropped in a number of small thin bottles and an eye-dropper. With the stick she crushed the glass to bits and scraped dirt over them. Rain was beginning to fall as Kate went back to the house.

At first they had to tie
Kate down to keep her from
hurting
herself.
From
violence she went into a
gloomy stupor. It was a long
time before she regained her
health.
And
she
forgot
completely about the will. It
was
Trixie
who
finally
remembered.

Chapter 22

1

On the Trask place Adam
drew

into
himself.
The
unfinished Sanchez house lay
open to wind and rain, and
the new floorboards buckled
and warped with moisture.
The
laid-out
vegetable
gardens rioted with weeds.
Adam seemed clothed in
a viscosity that slowed his
movements and held his
thoughts down. He saw the
world through gray water.
Now and then his mind
fought its way upward, and
when the light broke in it
brought him only a sickness
of the mind, and he retired
into the grayness again. He

was aware of the twins
because he heard them cry
and laugh, but he felt only a
thin distaste for them. To
Adam they were symbols of
his loss. His neighbors drove
up into his little valley, and
every one of them would
have understood anger or
sorrow—and so helped him.
But they could do nothing
with the cloud that hung over
him. Adam did not resist
them. He simply did not see
them, and before long the
neighbors stopped driving up
the road under the oaks.
For a time Lee tried to
stimulate Adam to awareness,
but Lee was a busy man. He
cooked
and

washed,
he
bathed the twins and fed
them. Through his hard and
constant work he grew fond
of the two little boys. He
talked to them in Cantonese,
and Chinese words were the
first they recognized and tried
to repeat.
Samuel Hamilton went
back twice to try to wedge
Adam up and out of his
shock. Then Liza stepped in.
“I want you to stay away
from there,” she said. “You
come back a changed man.
Samuel, you don’t change
him. He changes you. I can
see the look of him in your
face.”
“Have you thought of

the two little boys, Liza?" he
asked.
"I've thought of your
own
family,"
she
said
snappishly. "You lay a crepe
on us for days after."
"All right, Mother," he
said, but it saddened him
because Samuel could not
mind his own business when
there was pain in any man. It
was no easy thing for him to
abandon
Adam
to
his
desolation.
Adam had paid him for
his work, had even paid him

for the windmill parts and did
not want the windmills.
Samuel sold the equipment
and sent Adam the money.
He had no answer.
He became aware of an
anger at Adam Trask. It
seemed to Samuel that Adam
might be pleasuring himself
with sadness. But there was
little leisure to brood. Joe was
off to college—to that school
Leland Stanford had built on
his farm near Palo Alto. Tom
worried his father, for Tom
grew deeper and deeper into
books. He did his work well
enough, but Samuel felt that
Tom had not joy enough.
Will and George were
doing well in business, and
Joe was writing letters home

in rhymed verse and making
as smart an attack on all the
accepted verities as was
healthful.
Samuel wrote to Joe,
saying,
“I
would
be
disappointed if you had not
become an atheist, and I read
pleasantly that you have, in
your
age
and
wisdom,
accepted agnosticism the way
you’d take a cookie on a full
stomach. But I would ask you
with all my understanding
heart not to try to convert
your mother. Your last letter

only made her think you are
not well. Your mother does
not believe there are many ills
uncurable by good strong
soup. She puts your brave
attack on the structure of our
civilization
down
to
a
stomach ache. It worries her.
Her faith is a mountain, and
you, my son, haven't even got
a shovel yet."
Liza was getting old.
Samuel saw it in her face, and
he could not feel old himself,
white beard or no. But Liza
was living backwards, and
that's the proof.
There was a time when
she looked on his plans and

prophecies
as
the
crazy
shoutings of a child. Now she
felt that they were unseemly
in a grown man. They three,
Liza and Tom and Samuel,
were alone on the ranch. Una
was married to a stranger and
gone away. Dessie had her
dressmaking
business
in
Salinas. Olive had married
her young man, and Mollie
was married and living,
believe it or not, in an
apartment in San Francisco.
There was perfume, and a
white bearskin rug in the
bedroom in front of the

fireplace, and Mollie smoked

a

gold-tipped

cigarette—

Violet Milo—with her coffee

after dinner.

One day Samuel strained

his back lifting a bale of hay,

and it hurt his feelings more

than his back, for he could

not imagine a life in which

Sam

Hamilton

was

not

privileged to lift a bale of

hay. He felt insulted by his

back, almost as he would

have been if one of his

children had been dishonest.

In King City, Dr. Tilson

felt him over. The doctor

grew more testy with his

overworked years.

“You

sprained

your

back.”

“That

I

did,”

said

Samuel.

“And you drove all the

way in to have me tell you

that you sprained your back

and charge you two dollars?”

“Here’s

your

two

dollars.”

“And you want to know

what to do about it?”

“Sure I do.”

“Don’t sprain it any
more. Now take your money
back. You’re not a fool,
Samuel, unless you’re getting
childish.”
“But it hurts.”
“Of course it hurts. How
would you know it was
strained if it didn’t?”
Samuel
laughed.
“You’re good for me,” he
said. “You’re more than two
dollars good for me. Keep the
money.”
The
doctor
looked
closely at him. “I think you’re
telling the truth, Samuel. I’ll
keep the money.”
Samuel went in to see

Will in his fine new store. He
hardly knew his son, for Will
was
getting
fat
and
prosperous and he wore a
coat and vest and a gold ring
on his little finger.
“I’ve got a package
made up for Mother,” Will
said. “Some little cans of
things
from
France.
Mushrooms and liver paste
and sardines so little you can
hardly see them.”
“She’ll just send them to
Joe,” said Samuel.
“Can’t you make her eat
them?”

“No,” said his father.

“But she’ll enjoy sending

them to Joe.”

Lee came into the store

and his eyes lighted up. “How

do, Missy,” he said.

“Hello, Lee. How are the

boys?”

“Boys fine.”

Samuel said, “I’m going

to have a glass of beer next

door, Lee. Be glad to have

you join me.”

Lee and Samuel sat at

the little round table in the

barroom and Samuel drew

figures on the scrubbed wood

with the moisture of his beer

glass. “I’ve wanted to go to

see you and Adam but I

didn’t think I could do any

good.”

“Well, you can’t do any harm. I thought he’d get over it. But he still walks around like a ghost.”

“It’s over a year, isn’t it?” Samuel asked.

“Three months over.”

“Well, what do you think I can do?”

“I don’t know,” said Lee. “Maybe you could shock him out of it. Nothing else has worked.”

“I’m not good at shocking. I’d probably end up by shocking myself. By the way, what did he name the twins?”

“They don’t have any

names.”

“You’re making a joke,

Lee.”

“I am not making jokes.”

“What does he call

them?”

“He calls them ‘they.’ ”

“I mean when he speaks

to them.”

“When he speaks to

them he calls them ‘you,’ one

or both.”

“This

is

nonsense,”

Samuel said angrily. “What

kind of fool is the man?”

“I’ve meant to come and

tell you. He’s a dead man

unless you can wake him up.”

Samuel said, “I’ll come.

I’ll bring a horse whip. No

names! You're damn right I'll
come Lee."
"When?"
"Tomorrow."
"I'll kill a chicken," said
Lee. "You'll like the twins,
Mr. Hamilton. They're fine-looking boys. I won't tell Mr.
Trask you're coming."

2

Shyly Samuel told his wife he
wanted to visit the Trask
place. He thought she would
pile up strong walls of
objection, and for one of the
few times in his life he would
disobey her wish no matter
how strong her objection. It
gave him a sad feeling in the
stomach
to
think
of

disobeying his wife. He explained his purpose almost as though he were confessing. Liza put her hands on her hips during the telling and his heart sank. When he was finished she continued to look at him, he thought, coldly. Finally she said,

“Samuel, do you think you can move this rock of a man?”

“Why, I don’t know, Mother.” He had not expected this. “I don’t know.”

“Do you think it is such an important matter that those babies have names right now?”

“Well, it seemed so to

me," he said lamely.

"Samuel, do you think

why you want to go? Is it

your

natural

incurable

nosiness? Is it your black

inability to mind your own

business?"

"Now, Liza, I know my

failings pretty well. I thought

it might be more than that."

"It had better be more

than that," she said. "This

man has not admitted that his

sons live. He has cut them off

mid-air."

"That's the way it seems

to me, Liza."

"If he tells you to mind

your own business—what

then?"

“Well, I don’t know.”
Her jaw snapped shut
and her teeth clicked. “If you
do not get those boys named,
there’ll be no warm place in
this house for you. Don’t you
dare come whining back,
saying he wouldn’t do it or he
wouldn’t listen. If you do I’ll
have to go myself.”
“I’ll give him the back
of my hand,” Samuel said.
“No, that you won’t do.
You fall short in savagery,
Samuel. I know you. You’ll
give
him
sweet-sounding
words
and
you’ll
come

dragging back and try to
make me forget you ever
went.”
“I’ll beat his brains out,”
Samuel shouted.
He slammed into the
bedroom, and Liza smiled at
the panels.
He came out soon in his
black suit and his hard shiny
shirt and collar. He stooped
down to her while she tied his
black string tie. His white
beard was brushed to shining.
“You’d best take a swab
at your shoes with a blacking
brush,” she said.
In the midst of painting
the blacking on his worn
shoes he looked sideways up
at her. “Could I take the Bible
along?” he asked. “There’s no

place for getting a good name
like the Bible."
"I don't much like it out
of the house," she said
uneasily. "And if you're late
coming home, what'll I have
for my reading? And the
children's names are in it."
She saw his face fall. She
went into the bedroom and
came back with a small Bible,
worn and scuffed, its cover
held on by brown paper and
glue. "Take this one," she
said.
"But
that's
your
mother's."
"She wouldn't mind.
And all the names but one in
here have two dates."

“I’ll wrap it so it won’t
get hurt,” said Samuel.
Liza
spoke
sharply.
“What my mother would
mind is what I mind, and I’ll
tell you what I mind. You’re
never satisfied to let the
Testament
alone.
You’re
forever picking at it and
questioning it. You turn it
over the way a ’coon turns
over a wet rock, and it angers
me.”
“I’m
just
trying
to
understand it, Mother.”

“What
is
there
to
understand? Just read it.
There it is in black and white.
Who wants you to understand
it? If the Lord God wanted
you to understand it He’d
have given you to understand
or He’d have set it down
different.”
“But, Mother—”
“Samuel,”
she
said,
“you’re the most contentious
man this world has ever
seen.”
“Yes, Mother.”
“Don’t agree with me all
the

time.

It

hints

of

insincerity. Speak up for

yourself.”

She looked after his dark

figure in the buggy as he

drove away. “He’s a sweet

husband,” she said aloud,

“but contentious.”

And

Samuel

was

thinking with wonder, Just

when I think I know her she

does a thing like that.

3

On the last half-mile, turning

out of the Salinas Valley and

driving up the unscraped road

under the great oak trees,

Samuel tried to plait a rage to
take
care
of
his
embarrassment.
He
said
heroic words to himself.
Adam was more gaunt
than Samuel remembered.
His eyes were dull, as though
he did not use them much for
seeing. It took a little time for
Adam to become aware that
Samuel was standing before
him. A grimace of displeasure
drew down his mouth.
Samuel said, “I feel
small
now—coming
uninvited as I have.”

Adam said, “What do
you want? Didn’t I pay you?”
“Pay?” Samuel asked.
“Yes, you did. Yes, by God,
you did. And I’ll tell you that
pay has been more than I’ve
merited by the nature of it.”
“What? What are you
trying to say?”
Samuel’s anger grew
and put out leaves. “A man,
his
whole
life,
matches
himself against pay. And
how, if it’s my whole life’s
work to find my worth, can
you, sad man, write me down
instant in a ledger?”
Adam exclaimed, “I’ll
pay. I tell you I’ll pay. How

much? I'll pay."

"You have, but not to

me."

"Why did you come

then? Go away!"

"You once invited me."

"I don't invite you now."

Samuel put his hands on

his hips and leaned forward.

"I'll tell you now, quiet. In a

bitter night, a mustard night

that was last night, a good

thought came and the dark

was sweetened when the day

sat down. And this thought

went from evening star to the

late dipper on the edge of the

first light—that our betters

spoke of. So I invite myself."

"You are not welcome."

Samuel said, "I'm told

that out of some singular

glory your loins got twins.”

“What business is that of

yours?”

A kind of joy lighted

Samuel’s

eyes

at

the

rudeness. He saw Lee lurking

inside the house and peeking

out at him. “Don’t, for the

love of God, put violence on

me. I’m a man hopes there’ll

be a picture of peace on my

hatchments.”

“I

don’t

understand

you.”

“How could you? Adam

Trask, a dog wolf with a pair

of cubs, a scrubby rooster

with sweet paternity for a

fertilized egg! A dirty clod!”

A

darkness

covered
Adam’s cheeks and for the
first time his eyes seemed to
see. Samuel joyously felt hot
rage in his stomach. He cried,
“Oh, my friend, retreat from
me! Please, I beg of you!”
The saliva dampened the
corners
of
his
mouth.
“Please!” he cried. “For the
love of any holy thing you
can remember, step back
from me. I feel murder
nudging my gizzard.”
Adam said, “Get off my
place. Go on—get off. You’re
acting crazy. Get off. This is
my place. I bought it.”

“You bought your eyes
and nose,” Samuel jeered.
“You
bought
your
uprightness. You bought your
thumb on sideways. Listen to
me, because I’m like to kill
you after. You bought! You
bought out of some sweet
inheritance. Think now—do
you deserve your children,
man?”
“Deserve them? They’re
here—I
guess.
I
don’t
understand you.”
Samuel wailed, “God
save me, Liza! It’s not the
way you think, Adam! Listen

to me before my thumb finds
the bad place at your throat.
The precious twins—untried,
unnoticed, undirected—and I
say it quiet with my hands
down—undiscovered."
"Get off," said Adam
hoarsely. "Lee, bring a gun!
This man is crazy. Lee!"
Then Samuel's hands
were on Adam's throat,
pressing the throbbing up to
his temples, swelling his eyes
with blood. And Samuel was
snarling at him. "Tear away
with your jelly fingers. You
have not bought these boys,
nor stolen them, nor passed
any bit for them. You have
them by some strange and
lovely
dispensation."

Suddenly he plucked his hard
thumbs out of his neighbor's
throat.
Adam stood panting. He
felt his throat where the
blacksmith hands had been.
"What is it you want of me?"
"You have no love."
"I had—enough to kill
me."
"No
one
ever
had
enough. The stone orchard
celebrates too little, not too
much."
"Stay away from me. I
can fight back. Don't think I
can't defend myself."
"You have two weapons,
and they not named."

“I’ll fight you, old man.
You are an old man.”
Samuel said, “I can’t
think in my mind of a dull
man picking up a rock, who
before evening would not put
a name to it—like Peter. And
you—for a year you’ve lived
with your heart’s draining
and you’ve not even laid a
number to the boys.”
Adam said, “What I do
is my own business.”
Samuel struck him with
a work-heavy fist, and Adam
sprawled out in the dust.
Samuel asked him to rise, and
when Adam accepted struck
him again, and this time
Adam did not get up. He
looked
stonily

at

the

menacing old man.

The fire went out of

Samuel's eyes and he said

quietly, "Your sons have no

names."

Adam replied, "Their

mother left them motherless."

"And you have left them

fatherless. Can't you feel the

cold at night of a lone child?

What warm is there, what

bird song, what possible

morning can be good? Don't

you remember, Adam, how it

was, even a little?"

"I didn't do it," Adam

said.

"Have you undone it?

Your boys have no names."

He stooped down and put his

arms
around
Adam's
shoulders and helped him to
his feet. "We'll give them
names," he said. "We'll think
long and find good names to
clothe them." He whipped the
dust from Adam's shirt with
his hands.
Adam wore a faraway
yet intent look, as though he
were listening to some wind-carried music, but his eyes
were not dead as they had
been. He said, "It's hard to
imagine I'd thank a man for
insults and for shaking me out
like a rug. But I'm grateful.
It's a hurty thanks, but it's
thanks."
Samuel smiled, crinkle-eyed. "Did it seem natural?
Did I do it right?" he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in a way I

promised my wife I’d do it.

She didn’t believe I would.

I’m not a fighting man, you

see. The last time I clobbered

a human soul it was over a

red-nosed

girl

and

a

Schoolbook

in

County

Derry.”

Adam stared at Samuel,

but in his mind he saw and

felt his brother Charles, black

and murderous, and that sight

switched to Cathy and the

quality of her eyes over the

gun barrel. “There wasn’t any

fear in it," Adam said. "It was more like a weariness."

"I guess I was not angry enough."

"Samuel, I'll ask just once and then no more. Have you heard anything? Has there been any news of her—any news at all?"

"I've heard nothing."

"It's almost a relief," said Adam.

"Do you have hatred?"

"No. No—only a kind of sinking in the heart. Maybe later I'll sort it out to hatred. There was no interval from loveliness to horror, you see. I'm confused, confused."

Samuel said, "One day we'll sit and you'll lay it out on the table, neat like a

solitaire deck, but now—why,
you can’t find all the cards.”
From behind the shed
there came the indignant
shrieking of an outraged
chicken and then a dull
thump.
“There’s something at
the hens,” said Adam.
A
second
shrieking
started. “It’s Lee at the hens,”
said Samuel. “You know, if
chickens had government and
church and history, they
would take a distant and
distasteful view of human
joy. Let any gay and hopeful
thing happen to a man, and
some chicken goes howling
to the block.”

Now the two men were
silent, breaking it only with
small
false
courtesies—
meaningless inquiries about
health and weather, with
answers unlistened to. And
this might have continued
until they were angry at each
other again if Lee had not
interfered.
Lee brought out a table
and two chairs and set the
chairs facing each other. He
made another trip for a pint of
whisky and two glasses and
set a glass on the table in
front of each chair. Then he
carried out the twins, one
under each arm, and put them
on the ground beside the table

and gave each boy a stick for
his hand to shake and make
shadows with.
The boys sat solemnly
and looked about, stared at
Samuel's beard and searched
for Lee. The strange thing
about
them
was
their
clothing, for the boys were
dressed
in
the
straight
trousers and the frogged and
braided
jackets
of
the
Chinese.

One
was
in
turquoise blue and the other
in a faded rose pink, and the
frogs and braid were black.
On their heads sat round
black silken hats, each with a
bright red button on its flat
top.
Samuel asked, “Where
in the world did you get those
clothes, Lee?”
“I didn’t get them,” Lee
said testily. “I had them. The
only other clothes they have I
made myself, out of sail
cloth. A boy should be well
dressed on his naming day.”
“You’ve dropped the
pidgin, Lee.”
“I hope for good. Of

course I use it in King City."
He addressed a few short
sung syllables to the boys on
the ground, and they both
smiled up at him and waved
their sticks in the air. Lee
said, "I'll pour you a drink.
It's some that was here."
"It's some you bought
yesterday in King City," said
Samuel.
Now that Samuel and
Adam were seated together
and the barriers were down, a
curtain of shyness fell on
Samuel. What he had beaten
in with his fists he could not
supplement
easily.
He
thought of the virtues of
courage

and
forbearance,
which become flabby when
there is nothing to use them
on. His mind grinned inward
at itself.
The two sat looking at
the twin boys in their strange
bright-colored
clothes.
Samuel thought, Sometimes
your opponent can help you
more than your friend. He
lifted his eyes to Adam.
“It’s hard to start,” he
said. “And it’s like a put-off
letter that gathers difficulties
to itself out of the minutes.
Could you give me a hand?”
Adam looked up for a
moment and then back at the
boys on the ground. “There’s

a crashing in my head," he said. "Like sounds you hear under water. I'm having to dig myself out of a year."

"Maybe you'll tell me how it was and that will get us started."

Adam tossed down his drink and poured another and rolled the glass at an angle in his hand. The amber whisky moved high on the side and the pungent fruit odor of its warming filled the air. "It's hard to remember," he said. "It was not agony but a dullness. But no—there were needles in it. You said I had not all the cards in the deck—and I was thinking of that. Maybe I'll never have all the cards."

“Is it herself trying to
come out? When a man says
he does not want to speak of
something he usually means
he can think of nothing else.”
“Maybe it’s that. She’s
all mixed up with the
dullness,
and
I
can’t
remember much except the
last picture drawn in fire.”
“She did shoot you,
didn’t she, Adam?”
His lips grew thin and
his eyes black.
Samuel said, “There’s
no need to answer.”
“There’s no reason not
to,” Adam replied. “Yes, she
did.”

“Did she mean to kill
you?”
“I’ve thought of that
more than anything else. No,
I don’t think she meant to kill
me. She didn’t allow me that
dignity. There was no hatred
in her, no passion at all. I
learned about that in the
army. If you want to kill a
man, you shoot at head or
heart or stomach. No, she hit
me where she intended. I can
see the gun barrel moving
over. I guess I wouldn’t have
minded so much if she had
wanted my death. That would
have been a kind of love. But
I was an annoyance, not an
enemy.”
“You’ve given it a lot of
thought,” said Samuel.

“I’ve had lots of time for
it. I want to ask you
something. I can’t remember
behind the last ugly thing.
Was she very beautiful,
Samuel?”
“To
you
she
was
because you built her. I don’t
think you ever saw her—only
your own creation.”
Adam mused aloud, “I
wonder who she was—what
she was. I was content not to
know.”
“And now you want to?”
Adam dropped his eyes.
“It’s not curiosity. But I
would like to know what kind
of blood is in my boys. When

they grow up—won't I be
looking for something in
them?"
"Yes, you will. And I
will warn you now that not
their blood but your suspicion
might build evil in them.
They will be what you expect
of them."
"But their blood—"
"I don't very much
believe
in
blood,"
said
Samuel. "I think when a man
finds good or bad in his
children he is seeing only
what he planted in them after
they cleared the womb."
"You can't make a race
horse of a pig."

“No,” said Samuel, “but
you can make a very fast
pig.”
“No
one
hereabouts
would agree with you. I think
even Mrs. Hamilton would
not.”
“That’s exactly right.
She most of all would
disagree, and so I would not
say it to her and let loose the
thunder of her disagreement.
She wins all arguments by the
use of vehemence and the
conviction that a difference of
opinion is a personal affront.
She’s a fine woman, but you
have to learn to feel your way
with her. Let’s speak of the
boys.”

“Will you have another
drink?”
“That I will, thank you.
Names are a great mystery.
I’ve never known whether the
name is molded by the child
or the child changed to fit the
name. But you can be sure of
this—whenever a human has
a nickname it is a proof that
the name given him was
wrong. How do you favor the
standard
names—John
or
James or Charles?”
Adam was looking at the
twins and suddenly with the
mention of the name he saw
his brother peering out of the
eyes of one of the boys. He
leaned forward.

“What is it?” Samuel

asked.

“Why,” Adam cried,

“these boys are not alike!

They don’t look alike.”

“Of course they don’t.

They’re not identical twins.”

“That

one—that

one

looks like my brother. I just

saw it. I wonder if the other

looks like me.”

“Both of them do. A

face has everything in it right

back to the beginning.”

“It’s not so much now,”

said Adam. “But for a

moment I thought I was

seeing a ghost.”

“Maybe

that’s

what

ghosts are," Samuel observed.

Lee brought dishes out

and put them on the table.

"Do you have Chinese

ghosts?" Samuel asked.

"Millions," said Lee.

"We have more ghosts than

anything else. I guess nothing

in China ever dies. It's very

crowded. Anyway, that's the

feeling I got when I was

there."

Samuel said, "Sit down,

Lee. We're trying to think of

names."

"I've got chicken frying.

It will be ready pretty soon."

Adam looked up from

the twins and his eyes were

warmed and softened. "Will

you have a drink, Lee?"

“I’m nipping at the og-ka-py in the kitchen,” said
Lee and went back to the
house.
Samuel leaned down and
gathered up one of the boys
and held him on his lap.
“Take that one up,” he said to
Adam. “We ought to see
whether there’s something
that draws names to them.”
Adam held the other
child awkwardly on his knee.
“They look some alike,” he
said, “but not when you look
close. This one has rounder
eyes than that one.”
“Yes, and a rounder
head
and
bigger
ears,”
Samuel added. “But this one

is more like—like a bullet.
This one might go farther but
not so high. And this one is
going to be darker in the hair
and skin. This one will be
shrewd,
I
think,
and
shrewdness is a limitation on
the mind. Shrewdness tells
you what you must not do
because it would not be
shrewd. See how this one
supports himself! He's farther
along than that one—better
developed. Isn't it strange
how different they are when
you look close?"
Adam's
face
was

changing as though he had opened and come out on his surface. He held up his finger, and the child made a lunge for it and missed and nearly fell off his lap. “Whoa!” said Adam. “Take it easy. Do you want to fall?”

“It would be a mistake to name them for qualities we think they have,” Samuel said. “We might be wrong—so wrong. Maybe it would be good to give them a high mark to shoot at—a name to live up to. The man I’m named for had his name called clear by the Lord God, and I’ve been listening all my life. And once or twice I’ve thought I heard my name called—but not clear, not

clear.”

Adam, holding the child
by his upper arm, leaned over
and poured whisky in both
glasses. “I thank you for
coming, Samuel,” he said. “I
even thank you for hitting
me. That’s a strange thing to
say.”

“It was a strange thing
for me to do. Liza will never
believe it, and so I’ll never
tell her. An unbelieved truth
can hurt a man much more
than a lie. It takes great
courage
to
back
truth
unacceptable to our times.
There’s a punishment for it,
and it’s usually crucifixion. I

haven’t the courage for that.”

Adam

said,

“I’ve

wondered why a man of your

knowledge would work a

desert hill place.”

“It’s because I haven’t

courage,” said Samuel. “I

could never quite take the

responsibility. When the Lord

God did not call my name, I

might have called His name

—but I did not. There you

have the difference between

greatness and mediocrity. It’s

not an uncommon disease.

But it’s nice for a mediocre

man to know that greatness

must be the loneliest state in

the world.”

“I’d think there are

degrees of greatness," Adam said.

"I don't think so," said Samuel. "That would be like saying there is a little bigness. No. I believe when you come to that responsibility the hugeness and you are alone to make your choice. On one side you have warmth and companionship and sweet understanding, and on the other—cold, lonely greatness. There you make your choice. I'm glad I chose mediocrity, but how am I to say what reward might have come with the other? None of my children will be great either, except perhaps Tom. He's suffering over the choosing right now. It's a painful thing

to watch. And somewhere in me I want him to say yes. Isn't that strange? A father to want his son condemned to greatness! What selfishness that must be."

Adam chuckled. "This naming is no simple business, I see."

"Did you think it would be?"

"I didn't know it could be so pleasant," said Adam.

Lee came out with a platter of fried chicken, a bowl of smoking boiled potatoes, and a deep dish of pickled beets, all carried on a pastry board. "I don't know how good it will be," he said. "The hens are a little old. We don't have any pullets. The

weasels got the baby chicks

this year.”

“Pull up,” said Samuel.

“Wait until I get my ng-ka-py,” said Lee.

While he was gone

Adam said, “It’s strange to

me—he

used

to

speak

differently.”

“He trusts you now,”

Samuel said. “He has a gift of

resigned loyalty without -

hope of reward. He’s maybe a

much better man than either

of us could dream of being.”

Lee came back and took

his seat at the end of the

table. “Just put the boys on

the ground,” he said.

The

twins
protested
when they were set down.
Lee spoke to them sharply in
Cantonese and they were
silent.
The men ate quietly as
nearly all country people do.
Suddenly Lee got up and
hurried into the house. He
came back with a jug of red
wine. “I forgot it,” he said. “I
found it in the house.”
Adam
laughed.
“I
remember drinking wine here
before I bought the place.
Maybe I bought the place
because of the wine. The
chicken’s good, Lee. I don’t
think I’ve been aware of the

taste of food for a long time.”

“You’re getting well,”

Samuel said. “Some people

think it’s an insult to the

glory of their sickness to get

well. But the time poultice is

no

respecter

of

glories.

Everyone gets well if he waits

around.”

4

Lee cleared the table and

gave each of the boys a clean

drumstick. They sat solemnly

holding their greasy batons

and alternately inspecting and

sucking them. The wine and

the glasses stayed on the

table.

“We’d best get on with

the naming," Samuel said. "I
can feel a little tightening on
my halter from Liza."
"I can't think what to
name them," Adam said.
"You have no family
name you want—no inviting
trap for a rich relative, no
proud name to re-create?"
"No, I'd like them to
start fresh, insofar as that is
possible."
Samuel
knocked
his
forehead with his knuckles.
"What a shame," he said.
"What a shame it is that the
proper names for them they
cannot have."
"What do you mean?"
Adam asked.

“Freshness, you said. I
thought last night—” He
paused. “Have you thought of
your own name?”
“Mine?”
“Of course. Your first-born—Cain and Abel.”
Adam said, “Oh, no. No,
we can’t do that.”
“I know we can’t. That
would be tempting whatever
fate there is. But isn’t it odd
that Cain is maybe the best-known name in the whole
world and as far as I know
only one man has ever borne
it?”
Lee said, “Maybe that’s
why the name has never
changed its emphasis.”
Adam looked into the
ink-red wine in his glass. “I
got a shiver when you
mentioned it,” he said.

“Two
stories
have
haunted us and followed us
from our beginning,” Samuel
said. “We carry them along
with us like invisible tails—
the story of original sin and
the story of Cain and Abel.
And I don’t understand either
of them. I don’t understand
them at all but I feel them.
Liza gets angry with me. She
says I should not try to
understand them. She says
why should we try to explain
a verity. Maybe she’s right—
maybe she’s right. Lee, Liza
says you’re a Presbyterian—
do you understand the Garden
of Eden and Cain and Abel?”
“She thought I should be

something, and I went to
Sunday School long ago in
San Francisco. People like
you
to
be
something,
preferably what they are."
Adam said, "He asked
you if you understood."
"I think I understand the
Fall. I could perhaps feel that
in myself. But the brother
murder—no. Well, maybe I
don't remember the details
very well."
Samuel
said,
"Most
people don't read the details.
It's the details that astonish
me. And Abel had no

children.” He looked up at the sky. “Lord, how the day passes! It’s like a life—so quickly when we don’t watch it and so slowly when we do. No,” he said, “I’m having enjoyment. And I made a promise to myself that I would not consider enjoyment a sin. I take a pleasure in inquiring into things. I’ve never been content to pass a stone without looking under it. And it is a black disappointment to me that I can never see the far side of the moon.”

“I don’t have a Bible,”
Adam said. “I left the family
one in Connecticut.”
“I have,” said Lee. “I’ll
get it.”
“No need,” said Samuel.
“Liza
let
me
take
her
mother’s. It’s here in my
pocket.” He took out the
package and unwrapped the
battered book. “This one has
been scraped and gnawed at,”
he said. “I wonder what
agonies have settled here.
Give me a used Bible and I
will, I think, be able to tell
you about a man by the
places that are edged with the

dirt of seeking fingers. Liza
wears a Bible down evenly.
Here we are—this oldest
story. If it troubles us it must
be that we find the trouble in
ourselves."
"I haven't heard it since
I was a child," said Adam.
"You think it's long
then, and it's very short," said
Samuel. "I'll read it through
and then we'll go back. Give
me a little wine, my throat's
dried out with wine. Here it is
—such a little story to have
made so deep a wound." He
looked down at the ground.
"See!" he said. "The boys
have gone to their sleep, there
in the dust."
Lee got up. "I'll cover
them," he said.

“The dust is warm,” said Samuel. “Now it goes this way. ‘And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” ’ ”

Adam started to speak and Samuel looked up at him and he was silent and covered his eyes with his hand.

Samuel read, “ ‘And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat

thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.' "

Lee said, "Now there—no, go on, go on. We'll come back."

Samuel read, " 'And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, "Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

" 'And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came

to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?” And he said, “I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?” And he said, “What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” And Cain said unto the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I

can bear. Behold, thou hast
driven me out this day from
the face of the earth, and from
thy face shall I be hid. And I
shall be a fugitive and a
vagabond in the earth; and it
shall come to pass that
everyone that findeth me
shall slay me." And the Lord
said unto him, "Therefore
whosoever
slayeth
Cain,
vengeance shall be taken on
him sevenfold." And the Lord
set a mark upon Cain, lest any
finding him should kill him.
And Cain went out from the
presence of the Lord and
dwelt in the land of Nod on
the east of Eden.' "
Samuel closed the loose

cover of the book almost with
weariness. “There it is,” he
said. “Sixteen verses, no
more. And oh, Lord! I had
forgotten how dreadful it is—
no
single
tone
of
encouragement.
Maybe
Liza’s right. There’s nothing
to understand.”
Adam sighed deeply.
“It’s not a comforting story,
is it?”
Lee poured a tumbler
full of dark liquor from his
round stone bottle and sipped
it and opened his mouth to
get the double taste on the
back of his tongue. “No story

has power, nor will it last,
unless we feel in ourselves
that it is true and true of us.
What a great burden of guilt
men have!”
Samuel said to Adam,
“And you have tried to take it
all.”
Lee said, “So do I, so
does everyone. We gather our
arms full of guilt as though it
were precious stuff. It must
be that we want it that way.”
Aron broke in, “It makes
me feel better, not worse.”
“How do you mean?”
Samuel asked.
“Well, every little boy
thinks he invented sin. Virtue
we think we learn, because
we are told about it. But sin is
our own designing.”

“Yes, I see. But how
does this story make it
better?”
“Because,” Adam said
excitedly, “we are descended
from this. This is our father.
Some of our guilt is absorbed
in our ancestry. What chance
did we have? We are the
children of our father. It
means we aren’t the first. It’s
an excuse, and there aren’t
enough excuses in the world.”
“Not convincing ones
anyway,” said Lee. “Else we
would long ago have wiped
out guilt, and the world
would not be filled with sad,
punished people.”
Samuel said, “But do
you think of another frame to
this picture? Excuse or not,

we are snapped back to our
ancestry. We have guilt."
Adam said, "I remember
being a little outraged at God.
Both Cain and Abel gave
what they had, and God
accepted Abel and rejected
Cain. I never thought that was
a
just
thing.
I
never
understood it. Do you?"
"Maybe we think out of
a different background," said
Lee. "I remember that this
story was written by and for a
shepherd people. They were
not farmers. Wouldn't the
god of shepherds find a fat
lamb more valuable than a

sheaf of barley? A sacrifice
must be the best and most
valuable."
"Yes, I can see that,"
said Samuel. "And Lee, let
me
caution
you
about
bringing
your
Oriental
reasoning
to
Liza's
attention."
Adam
was
excited.
"Yes, but why did God
condemn Cain? That's an
injustice."

Samuel said, “There’s an advantage to listening to the words. God did not condemn Cain at all. Even God can have a preference, can’t he? Let’s suppose God liked lamb better than vegetables. I think I do myself. Cain brought him a bunch of carrots maybe. And God said, ‘I don’t like this. Try again. Bring me something I like and I’ll set you up alongside your brother.’ But Cain got mad. His feelings were hurt. And when a man’s feelings are hurt he wants to strike at something, and Abel was in the way of his anger.”

Lee said, “St. Paul says to the Hebrews that Abel had faith.”

“There’s no reference to
it in Genesis,” Samuel said.
“No faith or lack of faith.
Only
a
hint
of
Cain’s
temper.”
Lee asked, “How does
Mrs. Hamilton feel about the
paradoxes of the Bible?”
“Why, she does not feel
anything because she does
not admit they are there.”
“But—”
“Hush, man. Ask her.
And you’ll come out of it
older but not less confused.”
Adam said, “You two
have studied this. I only got it
through my skin and not

much of it stuck. Then Cain
was driven out for murder?"
"That's
right—for
murder."
"And
God
branded
him?"
"Did you listen? Cain
bore the mark not to destroy
him but to save him. And
there's a curse called down
on any man who shall kill
him. It was a preserving
mark."
Adam said, "I can't get
over a feeling that Cain got
the dirty end of the stick."
"Maybe he did," said
Samuel. "But Cain lived and
had children, and Abel lives

only in the story. We are
Cain’s children. And isn’t it
strange that three grown men,
here in a century so many
thousands of years away,
discuss this crime as though it
happened
in
King
City
yesterday and hadn’t come up
for trial?”
One
of
the
twins
awakened and yawned and
looked at Lee and went to
sleep again.
Lee said, “Remember,
Mr. Hamilton, I told you I
was trying to translate some

old Chinese poetry into
English? No, don’t worry. I
won’t read it. Doing it, I
found some of the old things
as fresh and clear as this
morning. And I wondered
why. And, of course, people
are
interested
only
in
themselves. If a story is not
about the hearer he will not
listen. And I here make a rule
—a great and lasting story is
about everyone or it will not
last. The strange and foreign
is not interesting—only the
deeply
personal
and
familiar.”

Samuel said, “Apply that
to the Cain-Abel story.”
And Adam said, “I
didn’t kill my brother—”
Suddenly he stopped and his
mind went reeling back in
time.
“I think I can,” Lee
answered Samuel. “I think
this is the best-known story in
the world because it is
everybody’s story. I think it is
the symbol story of the
human soul. I’m feeling my
way now—don’t jump on me
if I’m not clear. The greatest
terror a child can have is that
he is not loved, and rejection
is the hell he fears. I think
everyone in the world to a
large or small extent has felt
rejection. And with rejection

comes anger, and with anger
some kind of crime in
revenge for the rejection, and
with the crime guilt—and
there is the story of mankind.
I think that if rejection could
be amputated, the human
would not be what he is.
Maybe there would be fewer
crazy people. I am sure in
myself there would not be
many jails. It is all there—the
start, the beginning. One
child, refused the love he
craves, kicks the cat and
hides his secret guilt; and
another steals so that money
will make him loved; and a
third conquers the world—
and always the guilt and
revenge and more guilt. The
human is the only guilty

animal. Now wait! Therefore I think this old and terrible story is important because it is a chart of the soul—the secret, rejected, guilty soul. Mr. Trask, you said you did not kill your brother and then you remembered something. I don't want to know what it was, but was it very far apart from Cain and Abel? And what do you think of my Oriental patter, Mr. Hamilton? You know I am no more Oriental than you are." Samuel had leaned his elbows on the table and his hands covered his eyes and his forehead. "I want to think," he said. "Damn you, I

want to think. I'll want to
take this off alone where I
can pick it apart and see.
Maybe you've tumbled a
world for me. And I don't
know what I can build in my
world's place."
Lee
said
softly,
"Couldn't a world be built
around
accepted
truth?
Couldn't some pains and
insanities be rooted out if the
causes were known?"
"I don't know, damn
you. You've disturbed my
pretty universe. You've taken
a contentious game and made
an answer of it. Let me alone

—let me think! Your damned bitch is having pups in my brain already. Oh, I wonder what my Tom will think of this! He'll cradle it in the palm of his mind. He'll turn it slow in his brain like a roast of pork before the fire. Adam, come out now. You've been long enough in whatever memory it was."

Adam started. He sighed deeply. "Isn't it too simple?" he asked. "I'm always afraid of simple things."

"It isn't simple at all," said Lee. "It's desperately complicated. But at the end there's light."

"There's not going to be light long," Samuel said. "We've sat and let the

evening come. I drove over to help name the twins and they're not named. We've swung ourselves on a pole. Lee, you better keep your complications out of the machinery of the set-up churches or there might be a Chinese with nails in his hands and feet. They like complications but they like their own. I'll have to be driving home."

Adam said desperately,

"Name me some names."

"From the Bible?"

"From anyplace."

"Well, let's see. Of all the people who started out of Egypt only two came to the Promised Land. Would you like them for a symbol?"

“Who?”

“Caleb and Joshua.”

“Joshua was a soldier—a

general.

I

don’t

like

soldiering.”

“Well, Caleb was a

captain.”

“But not a general. I

kind of like Caleb—Caleb

Trask.”

One of the twins woke

up and without interval began

to wail.

“You called his name,”

said Samuel. “You don’t like

Joshua, and Caleb’s named.

He’s the smart one—the dark

one. See, the other one is

awake too. Well, Aaron I’ve

always liked, but he didn't
make it to the Promised
Land."
The second boy almost
joyfully began to cry.
"That's good enough,"
said Adam.
Suddenly
Samuel
laughed. "In two minutes," he
said, "and after a waterfall of
words. Caleb and Aaron—
now you are people and you
have joined the fraternity and
you have the right to be
damned."
Lee took the boys up
under his arms. "Have you
got them straight?" he asked.
"Of course," said Adam.
"That one is Caleb and you
are Aaron."

Lee lugged the yelling
twins toward the house in the
dusk.
“Yesterday I couldn’t
tell them apart,” said Adam.
“Aaron and Caleb.”
“Thank the good Lord
we had produce from our
patient thought,” Samuel said.
“Liza would have preferred
Joshua.
She
loves
the
crashing walls of Jericho. But
she likes Aaron too, so I
guess it’s all right. I’ll go and
hitch up my rig.”
Adam walked to the
shed with him. “I’m glad you
came,” he said. “There’s a
weight off me.”

Samuel slipped the bit in
Doxology's reluctant mouth,
set the brow band, and
buckled
the
throatlatch.
"Maybe
you'll
now
be
thinking of the garden in the
flat land," he said. "I can see
it there the way you planned
it."
Adam
was
long
in
answering. At last he said, "I
think that kind of energy is
gone out of me. I can't feel
the pull of it. I have money

enough to live. I never
wanted it for myself. I have
no one to show a garden to."
Samuel wheeled on him
and his eyes were filled with
tears. "Don't think it will ever
die," he cried. "Don't expect
it. Are you better than other
men? I tell you it won't ever
die until you do." He stood
panting for a moment and
then he climbed into the rig
and whipped Doxology and
he drove away, his shoulders
hunched,
without
saying
good-by.

PART THREE

Chapter 23

1

The Hamiltons were strange,

high-strung people, and some
of them were tuned too high
and
they
snapped.
This
happens often in the world.
Of all his daughters Una
was Samuel's greatest joy.
Even as a little girl she
hungered for learning as a
child does for cookies in the
late afternoon. Una and her
father had a conspiracy about
learning—secret books were
borrowed and read and their
secrets
communicated
privately.
Of all the children Una
had the least humor. She met
and married an intense dark

man—a man whose fingers
were stained with chemicals,
mostly silver nitrate. He was
one of those men who live in
poverty so that their lines of
questioning may continue.
His
question
was
about
photography. He believed
that the exterior world could
be transferred to paper—not
in the ghost shadings of black
and white but in the colors
the human eye perceives.
His name was Anderson
and he had little gift for
communication. Like most
technicians, he had a terror
and
a

contempt
for
speculation. The inductive
leap was not for him. He dug
a step and pulled himself up
one single step, the way a
man climbs the last shoulder
of a mountain. He had great
contempt, born of fear, for the
Hamiltons, for they all half
believed they had wings—
and they got some bad falls
that way.
Anderson
never
fell,
never slipped back, never
flew. His steps moved slowly,
slowly upward, and in the
end, it is said, he found what
he wanted—color film. He
married

Una,

perhaps,

because she had little humor,

and this reassured him. And

because her family frightened

and embarrassed him, he took

her away to the north, and it

was black and lost where he

went—somewhere

on

the

borders of Oregon. He must

have lived a very primitive

life with his bottles and

papers.

Una wrote bleak letters

without joy but also without

self-pity. She was well and

she hoped her family was

well. Her husband was near

to his discovery.

And then she died and

her body was shipped home.
I never knew Una. She
was dead before I remember,
but George Hamilton told me
about it many years later and
his eyes filled with tears and
his voice croaked in the
telling.
“Una was not a beautiful
girl like Mollie,” he said.
“But she had the loveliest
hands and feet. Her ankles
were as slender as grass and
she moved like grass. Her
fingers were long and the
nails narrow and shaped like
almonds. And Una had lovely
skin too, translucent, even
glowing.
“She didn’t laugh and
play like the rest of us. There
was something set apart about

her. She seemed always to be
listening. When she was
reading, her face would be
like the face of one listening
to music. And when we asked
her any question, why, she
gave the answer, if she knew
it—not pointed up and full of
color and ‘maybes’ and ‘it-might-bes’ the way the rest of
us would. We were always
full of bull. There was some
pure simple thing in Una,”
George said.
“And then they brought
her home. Her nails were
broken to the quick and her
fingers cracked and all worn
out. And her poor, dear feet
—” George could not go on
for a while, and then he said
with the fierceness of a man
trying to control himself,

“Her feet were broken and gravel-cut and briar-cut. Her dear feet had not worn shoes for a long time. And her skin was rough as rawhide.

“We think it was an accident,” he said. “So many chemicals around. We think it was.”

But Samuel thought and mourned in the thought that the accident was pain and despair.

Una’s death struck Samuel like a silent earthquake. He said no brave and reassuring words, he

simply sat alone and rocked himself. He felt that it was his neglect had done it.

And now his tissue, which had fought joyously against time, gave up a little. His young skin turned old, his clear eyes dulled, and a little stoop came to his great shoulders. Liza with her acceptance could take care of tragedy; she had no real hope this side of Heaven. But Samuel had put up a laughing wall against natural laws, and Una's death breached his battlements. He became an old man.

His other children were doing well. George was in the insurance business. Will was getting rich. Joe had gone

east and was helping to invent
a new profession called
advertising. Joe's very faults
were virtues in this field. He
found
that
he
could
communicate his material
daydreaming—and, properly
applied, that is all advertising
is. Joe was a big man in a
new field.
The girls were married,
all except Dessie, and she had
a
successful
dressmaking
business in Salinas. Only
Tom had never got started.
Samuel told Adam Trask
that Tom was arguing with

greatness. And the father watched his son and could feel the drive and the fear, the advance and the retreat, because he could feel it in himself.

Tom did not have his father's lyric softness or his gay good looks. But you could feel Tom when you came near to him—you could feel strength and warmth and an iron integrity. And under all of this was a shrinking—a shy shrinking. He could be as gay as his father, and suddenly in the middle it would be cut the way you would cut a violin string, and you could watch Tom go whirling into darkness.

He was a dark-faced

man; his skin, perhaps from
sun, was a black red, as
though
some
Norse
or
perhaps Vandal blood was
perpetuated in him. His hair
and beard and mustache were
dark red too, and his eyes
gleamed
startlingly
blue
against his coloring. He was
powerful, heavy of shoulders
and arm, but his hips were
slim. He could lift and run
and hike and ride with
anyone, but he had no sense
of competition whatever. Will
and George were gamblers
and often tried to entice their

brother into the joys and
sorrows of venture.
Tom said, “I’ve tried and
it just seems tiresome. I’ve
thought why this must be. I
get no great triumph when I
win and no tragedy when I
lose. Without these it is
meaningless. It is not a way
to make money, that we
know, and unless it can
simulate birth and death, joy
and sorrow, it seems, at least
to me—it feels—it doesn’t
feel at all. I would do it if I
felt anything—good or bad.”
Will did not understand
this. His whole life was
competitive and he lived by
one kind of gambling or
another. He loved Tom and
he tried to give him the things

he himself found pleasant. He
took him into business and
tried to inoculate him with the
joys of buying and selling, of
outwitting other men, of
judging them for a bluff, of
living by maneuver.
Always Tom came back
to the ranch, puzzled, not
critical,
but
feeling
that
somewhere he had lost track.
He felt that he should take joy
in the man-pleasures of
contest, but he could not
pretend to himself that he did.
Samuel had said that
Tom always took too much
on his plate, whether it was
beans or women. And Samuel

was wise, but I think he knew only one side of Tom. Maybe Tom opened up a little more for children. What I set down about him will be the result of memory plus what I know to be true plus conjecture built on the combination. Who knows whether it will be correct?

We lived in Salinas and we knew when Tom had arrived—I think he always arrived at night—because under our pillows, Mary's and mine, there would be packages of gum. And gum was valuable in those days just as a nickel was valuable. There were months when he did not come, but every morning as soon as we

awakened we put our hands
under our pillows to see. And
I still do it, and it has been
many years since there has
been gum there.
My sister Mary did not
want to be a girl. It was a
misfortune she could not get
used to. She was an athlete, a
marble player, a pitcher of
one-o'-cat, and the trappings
of a girl inhibited her. Of
course this was long before
the compensations for being a
girl were apparent to her.
Just as we knew that
somewhere on our bodies,
probably under the arm, there
was a button which if pressed
just right would permit us to
fly, so Mary had worked out a
magic for herself to change

her over into the tough little boy she wanted to be. If she went to sleep in a magical position, knees crooked just right, head at a magical angle, fingers all crossed one over the other, in the morning she would be a boy. Every night she tried to find exactly the right combination, but she never could. I used to help her cross her fingers like shiplap.

She was despairing of ever getting it right when one morning there was gum under the pillow. We each peeled a stick and solemnly chewed it; it was Beeman's peppermint, and nothing so delicious has been made since.

Mary was pulling on her

long black ribbed stockings
when she said with great
relief, “Of course.”
“Of course what?” I
asked.
“Uncle Tom,” she said
and chewed her gum with
great snapping sounds.
“Uncle Tom what?” I
demanded.
“He’ll know how to get
to be a boy.”
There it was—just as
simple as that. I wondered
why I hadn’t thought of it
myself.
Mother
was
in
the
kitchen overseeing a new
little Danish girl who worked

for us. We had a series of girls. New-come Danish farm families put their daughters out to service with American families, and they learned not only English but American cooking and table setting and manners and all the little niceties of high life in Salinas. At the end of a couple of years of this, at twelve dollars a month, the girls were highly desirable wives for American boys. Not only did they have American manners but they could still work like horses in the fields. Some of the most elegant families in Salinas today are descended from these girls. It would be flaxen-haired Mathilde

in

the

kitchen,

with

Mother

clucking over her like a hen.

We charged in. “Is he

up?”

“Sh!” said Mother. “He

got in late. You let him

sleep.”

But

the

water

was

running in the basin of the

back bedroom so we knew he

was up. We crouched like

cats at his door, waiting for

him to emerge.

There was always a little

diffidence between us at first.

I think Uncle Tom was as shy
as we were. I think he wanted
to come running out and toss
us in the air, but instead we
were all formal.
“Thank you for the gum,
Uncle Tom.”
“I’m glad you liked it.”
“Do you think we’ll
have an oyster loaf late at
night while you’re here?”
“We’ll certainly try, if
your mother will let you.”
We drifted into the
sitting room and sat down.
Mother’s voice called from
the kitchen, “Children, you
let him alone.”
“They’re
all
right,
Ollie,” he called back.

We sat in a triangle in
the living room. Tom's face
was so dark and his eyes so
blue. He wore good clothes
but he never seemed well
dressed. In this he was very
different from his father. His
red mustache was never neat
and his hair would not lie
down and his hands were
hard from work.
Mary said, "Uncle Tom,
how do you get to be a boy?"
"How?
Why,
Mary,
you're just born a boy."
"No, that's not what I
mean. How do *I* get to be a
boy?"
Tom studied her gravely.
"You?" he asked.

Her words poured out. “I don’t want to be a girl, Uncle Tom. I want to be a boy. A girl’s all kissing and dolls. I don’t want to be a girl. I don’t want to.” Tears of anger welled up in Mary’s eyes. Tom looked down at his hands and picked at a loose piece of callus with a broken nail. He wanted to say something beautiful, I think. He wished for words like his father’s words, sweet winged words, cooing and lovely. “I wouldn’t like you to be a boy,” he said.

“Why not?”

“I like you as a girl.”

An idol was crashing in Mary’s temple. “You mean you like girls?”

“Yes, Mary, I like girls
very much.”
A
look
of
distaste
crossed Mary’s face. If it
were true, Tom was a fool.
She put on her don’t-give-me-any-of-that-crap
tone.
“All right,” she said, “but
how do *I* go about being a
boy?”
Tom had a good ear. He
knew he was reeling down in
Mary’s estimation and he
wanted her to love him and to
admire him. At the same time
there was a fine steel wire of
truthfulness in him that cut
off the heads of fast-traveling
lies. He looked at Mary’s

hair, so light that it was
almost white, and braided
tight to be out of the way, and
dirty at the end of the braid,
for Mary wiped her hands on
her braid before she made a
difficult marble shot. Tom
studied her cold and hostile
eyes.
“I don’t think you really
want to change.”
“I do.”
Tom was wrong—she
really did.
“Well,” he said, “you
can’t. And someday you’ll be
glad.”
“I won’t be glad,” said
Mary, and she turned to me
and said with frigid contempt,
“He doesn’t know!”
Tom

winced

and

I

shivered at the immensity of

her criminal charge. Mary

was braver and more ruthless

than most. That's why she

won every marble in Salinas.

Tom said uneasily, "If

your mother says it's all right,

I'll order the oyster loaf this

morning and pick it up

tonight."

"I don't like oyster

loaves,"

said

Mary

and

stalked to our bedroom and

slammed the door.

Tom looked ruefully

after her. "She's a girl all

right," he said.

Now we were alone

together and I felt that I had

to heal the wound Mary had

made. "I love oyster loaves,"

I said.

"Sure you do. So does

Mary."

"Uncle Tom, don't you

think there's some way for

her to be a boy?"

"No, I don't," he said

sadly. "I would have told her

if I had known."

"She's the best pitcher in

the West End."

Tom sighed and looked

down at his hands again, and

I could see his failure on him

and I was sorry for him,

aching sorry. I brought out

my hollowed cork with pins

stuck down to make bars.

“Would you like to have my fly cage, Uncle Tom?”

Oh, he was a great gentleman. “Do you want me to have it?”

“Yes. You see, you pull up a pin to get the fly in and then he sits in there and buzzes.”

“I’d like to have it very much. Thank you, John.”

He worked all day with a sharp tiny pocketknife on a small block of wood, and when we came home from school he had carved a little face. The eyes and ears and lips were movable, and little perches connected them with the inside of the hollow head. At the bottom of the neck

there was a hole closed by a
cork. And this was very
wonderful. You caught a fly
and eased him through the
hole and set the cork. And
suddenly the head became
alive. The eyes moved and
the lips talked and the ears
wiggled as the frantic fly
crawled
over
the
little
perches. Even Mary forgave
him a little, but she never
really trusted him until after
she was glad she was a girl,
and then it was too late. He
gave the head not to me but to
us. We still have it put away
somewhere, and it still works.
Sometimes Tom took me

fishing. We started before the sun came up and drove in the rig straight toward Frémont's Peak, and as we neared the mountains the stars would pale out and the light would rise to blacken the mountains. I can remember riding and pressing my ear and cheek against Tom's coat. And I can remember that his arm would rest lightly over my shoulders and his hand pat my arm occasionally.

Finally

we

would pull up under an oak tree and take the horse out of the shafts, water him at the stream side, and halter him to the back of the rig.

I don't remember that

Tom talked. Now that I think
of it, I can't remember the
sound of his voice or the kind
of words he used. I can
remember both about my
grandfather, but when I think
of Tom it is a memory of a
kind of warm silence. Maybe
he didn't talk at all. Tom had
beautiful tackle and made his
own flies. But he didn't seem
to care whether we caught
trout or not. He needed not to
triumph over animals.
I remember the five-fingered ferns growing under
the little waterfalls, bobbing
their green fingers as the
droplets struck them. And I
remember the smells of the
hills, wild azalea and a very
distant skunk and the sweet
cloy of lupin and horse sweat

on harness. I remember the
sweeping lovely dance of
high buzzards against the sky
and Tom looking long up at
them, but I can't remember
that he ever said anything
about them. I remember
holding the bight of a line
while Tom drove pegs and
braided a splice. I remember
the smell of crushed ferns in
the creel and the delicate
sweet odor of fresh damp
rainbow trout lying so prettily
on the green bed. And finally
I can remember coming back
to the rig and pouring rolled
barley into the leather feed-bag and buckling it over the
horse's head behind the ears.
And I have no sound of his
voice or words in my ear; he
is dark and silent and hugely

warm in my memory.
Tom felt his darkness.
His father was beautiful and
clever, his mother was short
and
mathematically
sure.
Each of his brothers and
sisters had looks or gifts or
fortune. Tom loved all of
them passionately, but he felt
heavy and earth-bound. He
climbed ecstatic mountains
and floundered in the rocky
darkness between the peaks.
He had spurts of bravery but
they
were
bracketed
in
battens of cowardice.
Samuel said that Tom

was quavering over greatness,
trying to decide whether he
could
take
the
cold
responsibility. Samuel knew
his son's quality and felt the
potential of violence, and it
frightened him, for Samuel
had no violence—even when
he hit Adam Trask with his
fist he had no violence. And
the books that came into the
house, some of them secretly
—well, Samuel rode lightly
on top of a book and he
balanced happily among ideas
the way a man rides white
rapids in a canoe. But Tom
got into a book, crawled and
groveled between the covers,

tunneled like a mole among
the thoughts, and came up
with the book all over his
face and hands.
Violence and shyness—
Tom's loins needed women
and at the same time he did
not think himself worthy of a
woman. For long periods he
would welter in a howling
celibacy, and then he would
take a train to San Francisco
and roll and wallow in
women, and then he would
come silently back to the
ranch, feeling weak and
unfulfilled and unworthy, and
he would punish himself with
work, would plow and plant
unprofitable land, would cut
tough oakwood until his back
was breaking and his arms

were weary rags.
It is probable that his
father stood between Tom
and the sun, and Samuel's
shadow fell on him. Tom
wrote secret poetry, and in
those days it was only
sensible to keep it secret. The
poets were pale emasculates,
and Western men held them
in contempt. Poetry was a
symptom of weakness, of
degeneracy and decay. To
read it was to court catcalls.
To write it was to be
suspected
and
ostracized.
Poetry was a secret vice, and
properly so. No one knows
whether Tom's poetry was
any good or not, for he

showed it to only one person,
and before he died he burned
every word. From the ashes
in the stove there must have
been a great deal of it.
Of all his family Tom
loved Dessie best. She was
gay. Laughter lived on her
doorstep.
Her shop was a unique
institution in Salinas. It was a
woman's world. Here all the
rules, and the fears that
created the iron rules, went
down. The door was closed to
men. It was a sanctuary
where
women
could
be
themselves—smelly, wanton,
mystic, conceited, truthful,

and

interested.

The

whalebone corsets came off

at Dessie's, the sacred corsets

that molded and warped

woman-flesh into goddess-flesh. At Dessie's they were

women who went to the toilet

and overate and scratched and

farted. And from this freedom

came

laughter,

roars

of

laughter.

Men could hear the

laughter through the closed

door and were properly

frightened at what was going

on, feeling, perhaps, that they

were the butt of the laughter

which to a large extent was

true.

I can see Dessie now,

her gold pince-nez wobbling

on a nose not properly

bridged for pince-nez, her

eyes streaming with hilarious

tears, and her whole front

constricted with muscular

spasms of laughter. Her hair

would come down and drift

between her glasses and her

eyes, and the glasses would

fall off her wet nose and spin

and swing at the end of their

black ribbon.

You had to order a dress

from

Dessie

months

in

advance, and you made

twenty visits to her shop

before you chose material and
pattern. Nothing so healthy as
Dessie had ever happened to
Salinas. The men had their
lodges, their clubs, their
whorehouses;
the
women
nothing but the Altar Guild
and the mincing coquetry of
the minister until Dessie
came along.
And then Dessie fell in
love. I do not know any
details of her love affair—
who the man was or what the
circumstances, whether it was
religion or a living wife, a
disease or a selfishness. I
guess my mother knew, but it
was one of those things put
away in the family closet and

never brought out. And if
other people in Salinas knew,
they must have kept it a loyal
town secret. All I do know is
that it was a hopeless thing,
gray and terrible. After a year
of it the joy was all drained
out of Dessie and the laughter
had ceased.
Tom
raged
crazily
through the hills like a lion in
horrible pain. In the middle of
a night he saddled and rode
away, not waiting for the
morning train, to Salinas.
Samuel followed him and
sent a telegram from King
City to Salinas.
And
when

in

the

morning Tom, his face black,

spurred his spent horse up

John Street in Salinas, the

sheriff was waiting for him.

He disarmed Tom and put

him in a cell and fed him

black coffee and brandy until

Samuel came for him.

Samuel did not lecture

Tom. He took him home and

never mentioned the incident.

And a stillness fell on the

Hamilton place.

2

On Thanksgiving of 1911 the

family gathered at the ranch

—all the children except Joe,

who was in New York, and

Lizzie, who had left the

family and joined another,

and Una, who was dead. They
arrived with presents and
more food than even this clan
could eat. They were all
married save Dessie and
Tom. Their children filled the
Hamilton place with riot. The
home place flared up—
noisier than it had ever been.
The
children
cried
and
screamed and fought. The
men made many trips to the
forge and came back self-consciously
wiping
their
mustaches.
Liza’s little round face
grew redder and redder. She
organized and ordered. The

kitchen stove never went out.
The beds were full, and
comforters laid on pillows on
the floor were for children.
Samuel dug up his old
gaiety. His sardonic mind
glowed and his speech took
on its old singing rhythm. He
hung on with the talk and the
singing and the memories,
and then suddenly, and it not
midnight, he tired. Weariness
came down on him, and he
went to his bed where Liza
had been for two hours. He
was puzzled at himself, not
that he had to go to bed but
that he wanted to.
When the mother and
father
were
gone,

Will
brought the whisky in from
the forge and the clan had a
meeting in the kitchen with
whisky passed around in
round-bottomed jelly glasses.
The mothers crept to the
bedrooms to see that the
children were covered and
then came back. They all
spoke softly, not to disturb
the children and the old
people. There were Tom and
Dessie, George and his pretty
Mamie, who had been a
Dempsey,
Mollie
and
William J. Martin, Olive and
Ernest Steinbeck, Will and
his Deila.
They all wanted to say

the same thing—all ten of
them. Samuel was ah old
man. It was as startling a
discovery as the sudden
seeing of a ghost. Somehow
they had not believed it could
happen. They drank their
whisky and talked softly of
the new thought.
His shoulders—did you
see how they slump? And
there's no spring in his step.
His toes drag a little, but
it's not that—it's in his eyes.
His eyes are old.
He never would go to
bed until last.
Did you notice he forgot
what he was saying right in
the middle of a story?
It's his skin told me. It's
gone wrinkled, and the backs

of his hands have turned
transparent.
He favors his right leg.
Yes, but that's the one
the horse broke.
I know, but he never
favored it before.
They said these things in
outrage. This can't happen,
they were saying. Father can't
be an old man. Samuel is
young as the dawn—the
perpetual dawn.
He might get old as
midday maybe, but sweet
God! the evening cannot
come, and the night—? Sweet
God, no!
It was natural that their
minds leaped on and recoiled,
and they would not speak of
that, but their minds said,

There can’t be any world

without Samuel.

How could we think

about

anything

without

knowing what he thought

about it?

What would the spring

be like, or Christmas, or rain?

There

couldn’t

be

a

Christmas.

Their

minds

shrank

away from such thinking and

they looked for a victim—

someone to hurt because they

were hurt. They turned on

Tom.

You were here. You've

been here all along!

How did this happen?

When did it happen?

Who did this to him?

Have you by any chance

done

this

with

your

craziness?

And Tom could stand it

because he had been with it.

"It was Una," he said

hoarsely. "He couldn't get

over Una. He told me how a

man, a real man, had no right

to let sorrow destroy him. He

told me again and again how

I must believe that time

would take care of it. He said

it so often that I knew he was losing."

"Why didn't you tell us? Maybe we could have done something."

Tom leaped up, violent and cringing. "Goddam it! What was there to tell? That he was dying of sorrow? That the marrow had melted out of his bones? What was there to tell? You weren't here. I had to look at it and see his eyes die down—goddam it." Tom went out of the room and they heard his clodhopper feet knocking on the flinty ground outside.

They were ashamed.

Will Martin said, "I'll go out

and bring him back."

"Don't do it," George

said quickly, and the blood

kin nodded. "Don't do it. Let

him alone. We know him

from

the

insides

of

ourselves."

In a little while Tom

came back. "I want to

apologize," he said. "I'm very

sorry. Maybe I'm a little

drunk. Father calls it 'jolly'

when I do it. One night I rode

home"—it was a confession

—"and I came staggering

across the yard and I fell into

the rosebush and crawled up

the stairs on my hands and

knees and I was sick on the

floor beside my bed. In the
morning I tried to tell him I
was sorry, and do you know
what he said? ‘Why, Tom,
you were just jolly.’ ‘Jolly,’ if
I did it. A drunken man didn’t
crawl home. Just jolly.”
George
stopped
the
crazy flow of talk. “We want
to apologize to you, Tom,” he
said. “Why, we sounded as
though we were blaming you
and we didn’t mean to. Or
maybe we did mean to. And
we’re sorry.”
Will
Martin
said
realistically, “It’s too hard a
life here. Why don’t we get

him to sell out and move to town? He could have a long and happy life. Mollie and I would like them to come and live with us."

"I don't think he'd do it," said Will. "He's stubborn as a mule and proud as a horse. He's got a pride like brass."

Olive's husband, Ernest, said, "Well, there'd be no harm in asking him. We would like to have him—or both of them—with us."

Then they were silent again, for the idea of not having the ranch, the dry, stony desert of heartbreaking hillside and unprofitable

hollow, was shocking to
them.
Will
Hamilton
from
instinct
and
training
in
business had become a fine
reader of the less profound
impulses of men and women.
He said, “If we ask him to
close up shop it will be like
asking him to close his life,
and he won’t do it.”
“You’re right, Will,”
George agreed. “He would
think it was like quitting.
He’d feel it was a cowardice.
No, he will never sell out, and
if he did I don’t think he

would live a week.”

Will

said,

“There’s

another way. Maybe he could

come for a visit. Tom can run

the ranch. It’s time Father and

Mother saw something of the

world. All kinds of things are

happening. It would freshen

him, and then he could come

back and go to work again.

And after a while maybe he

wouldn’t have to. He says

himself that thing about time

doing the job dynamite can’t

touch.”

Dessie brushed the hair

out of her eyes. “I wonder if

you really think he’s that

stupid,” she said.

And Will said out of his

experience, “Sometimes a
man wants to be stupid if it
lets him do a thing his
cleverness forbids. We can
try it anyway. What do you
all think?”
There was a nodding of
heads in the kitchen, and only
Tom
sat
rocklike
and
brooding.
“Tom, wouldn’t you be
willing to take over the
ranch?” George asked.
“Oh, that’s nothing,”
said Tom. “It’s no trouble to
run the ranch because the
ranch
doesn’t
run—never

has.”

“Then why don’t you

agree?”

“I’d find a reluctance to

insult my father,” Tom said.

“He’d know.”

“But where’s the harm

in suggesting it?”

Tom rubbed his ears

until he forced the blood out

of them and for a moment

they were white. “I don’t

forbid you,” he said. “But I

can’t do it.”

George said, “We could

write it in a letter—a kind of

invitation, full of jokes. And

when he got tired of one of

us, why, he could go to

another. There’s years of

visiting among the lot of us.”

And that was how they left it.

3

Tom brought Olive's letter
from King City, and because
he knew what it contained he
waited
until
he
caught
Samuel alone before he gave
it to him. Samuel was
working in the forge and his
hands were black. He took
the envelope by a tiny corner
and put it on the anvil, and
then he scrubbed his hands in
the half-barrel of black water
into which he plunged hot
iron. He slit the letter open
with the point of a horseshoe
nail and went into the
sunlight to read it. Tom had
the wheels off the buckboard

and was buttering the axles
with yellow axle grease. He
watched his father from the
corners of his eyes.
Samuel
finished
the
letter and folded it and put it
back in its envelope. He sat
down on the bench in front of
the shop and stared into
space. Then he opened the
letter and read it again and
folded it again and put it in
his blue shirt pocket. Then
Tom saw him stand up and
walk slowly up the eastern
hill, kicking at the flints on
the ground.
There had been a little
rain and a fuzz of miserly
grass had started up. Halfway

up the hill Samuel squatted
down and took up a handful
of the harsh gravelly earth in
his palm and spread it with
his
forefinger,
flint
and
sandstone and bits of shining
mica and a frail rootlet and a
veined stone. He let it slip
from his hand and brushed his
palms. He picked a spear of
grass and set it between his
teeth and stared up the hill to
the sky. A gray nervous cloud
was
scurrying
eastward,
searching for trees on which
to rain.
Samuel stood up and

sauntered down the hill. He looked into the tool shed and patted the four-by-four supports. He paused near Tom and spun one of the free-running wheels of the buckboard, and he inspected Tom as though he saw him for the first time. “Why, you’re a grown-up man,” he said.

“Didn’t you know?”

“I guess I did—I guess I did,” said Samuel and sauntered on. There was the sardonic look on his face his family knew so well—the

joke on himself that made him laugh inwardly. He walked by the sad little garden and all around the house—not a new house any more. Even the last added lean-to bedrooms were old and weathered and the putty around the windowpanes had shrunk away from the glass. At the porch he turned and surveyed the whole home cup of the ranch before he went inside.

Liza was rolling out pie crust on the floury board. She was so expert with the rolling pin that the dough seemed alive. It flattened out and then pulled back a little from tension in itself. Liza lifted the pale sheet of it and laid it

over one of the pie tins and
trimmed the edges with a
knife. The prepared berries
lay deep in red juice in a
bowl.
Samuel sat down in a
kitchen chair and crossed his
legs and looked at her. His
eyes were smiling.
“Can’t
you
find
something to do this time of
day?” she asked.
“Oh, I guess I could,
Mother, if I wanted to.”
“Well, don’t sit there
and make me nervous. The
paper’s in the other room if
you’re feeling day-lazy.”
“I’ve read it,” said
Samuel.

“All of it?”

“All I want to.”

“Samuel,

what’s

the

matter with you? You’re up

to something. I can see it in

your face. Now tell it, and let

me get on with my pies.”

He swung his leg and

smiled at her. “Such a little

bit of a wife,” he said. “Three

of her is hardly a bite.”

“Samuel, now you stop

this. I don’t mind a joke in

the evening sometimes, but

it’s not eleven o’clock. Now

you go along.”

Samuel said, “Liza, do

you know the meaning of the

English word ‘vacation’?”

“Now don’t you make

jokes in the morning.”

“Do you, Liza?”

“Of course I do. Don’t

play me for a fool.”

“What does it mean?”

“Going away for a rest

to the sea and the beach.

Now, Samuel, get out with

your fooling.”

“I wonder how you

know the word.”

“Will you tell me what

you’re after? Why shouldn’t I

know?”

“Did you ever have one,

Liza?”

“Why, I—” She stopped.

“In fifty years, did you

ever have a vacation, you

little, silly, half-pint, smidgin

of a wife?”

“Samuel, please go out

of my kitchen," she said
apprehensively.
He took the letter from
his pocket and unfolded it.
"It's from Ollie," he said.
"She wants us to come and
visit in Salinas. They've fixed
over the upstairs rooms. She
wants us to get to know the
children. She's got us tickets
for the Chautauqua season.
Billy Sunday's going to
wrestle with the Devil and
Bryan is going to make his
Cross of Gold speech. I'd like
to hear that. It's an old fool of
a speech but they say he gives
it in a way to break your
heart."
Liza rubbed her nose
and floured it with her finger.
"Is it very costly?" she asked

anxiously.

“Costly?

Ollie

has

bought the tickets. They’re a

present.”

“We can’t go,” said

Liza. “Who’d run the ranch?”

“Tom

would—what

running there is to do in the

winter.”

“He’d be lonely.”

“George would maybe

come out and stay a while to

go quail hunting. See what’s

in the letter, Liza.”

“What are those?”

“Two tickets to Salinas

on the train. Ollie says she

doesn’t want to give us a

single escape.”

“You can just turn them
in and send her back the
money.”
“No, I can’t. Why, Liza
—Mother—now don’t. Here
—here’s a handkerchief.”
“That’s a dish towel,”
said Liza.
“Sit
here,
Mother.
There! I guess the shock of
taking a rest kind of threw
you. Here! I know it’s a dish
towel. They say that Billy
Sunday drives the Devil all
over the stage.”
“That’s a blasphemy,”
said Liza.
“But I’d like to see it,
wouldn’t you? What did you
say? Hold up your head. I

didn’t hear you. What did you say?”

“I said yes,” said Liza.

Tom was making a drawing when Samuel came in to him. Tom looked at his father with veiled eyes, trying to read the effect of Olive’s letter.

Samuel looked at the drawing. “What is it?”

“I’m trying to work out a gate-opener so a man won’t have to get out of his rig. Here’s the pull-rod to open the latch.”

“What’s going to open it?”

“I figured a strong spring.”

Samuel studied

the
drawing. “Then what’s going
to close it?”
“This bar here. It would
slip to this spring with the
tension the other way.”
“I see,” said Samuel. “It
might work too, if the gate
was truly hung. And it would
only take twice as much time
to make and keep up as
twenty years of getting out of
the rig and opening the gate.”
Tom
protested,
“Sometimes with a skittish
horse—”
“I know,” said his father.
“But the main reason is that
it’s fun.”
Tom grinned. “Caught
me,” he said.

“Tom, do you think you
could look after the ranch if
your mother and I took a little
trip?”
“Why, sure,” said Tom.
“Where do you plan to go?”
“Ollie wants us to stay
with her for a while in
Salinas.”
“Why, that would be
fine,” said Tom. “Is Mother
agreeable?”
“She
is,
always
forgetting the expense.”
“That’s fine,” said Tom.
“How long do you plan to be
gone?”
Samuel’s
jeweled,
sardonic eyes dwelt on Tom’s

face until Tom said, “What’s
the matter, Father?”
“It’s the little tone, son
—so little that I could barely
hear it. But it was there. Tom,
my son, if you have a secret
with your brothers and sisters,
I don’t mind. I think that’s
good.”
“I don’t know what you
mean,” said Tom.
“You may thank God
you didn’t want to be an
actor, Tom, because you
would have been a very bad
one. You worked it out at
Thanksgiving, I guess, when
you were all together. And
it’s working smooth as butter.
I see Will’s hand in this.
Don’t tell me if you don’t
want to.”

“I wasn’t in favor of it,”
said Tom.
“It doesn’t sound like
you,” his father said. “You’d
be for scattering the truth out
in the sun for me to see.
Don’t tell the others I know.”
He turned away and then
came back and put his hand
on Tom’s shoulder. “Thank
you for wanting to honor me
with the truth, my son. It’s
not clever but it’s more
permanent.”
“I’m glad you’re going.”
Samuel stood in the
doorway of the forge and
looked at the land. “They say
a mother loves best an ugly
child,” he said, and he shook
his head sharply. “Tom, I’ll
trade you honor for honor.

You will please hold this in your dark secret place, nor tell any of your brothers and sisters—I know why I'm going—and, Tom, I know where I'm going, and I am content."

Chapter 24

1

I have wondered why it is that some people are less affected and torn by the verities of life and death than others. Una's death cut the earth from under Samuel's feet and opened his defended keep and let in old age. On the other hand Liza, who surely loved her family as deeply as did her husband, was not destroyed or warped. Her life continued evenly.

She felt sorrow but she
survived it.
I think perhaps Liza
accepted the world as she
accepted the Bible, with all of
its paradoxes and its reverses.
She did not like death but she
knew it existed, and when it
came it did not surprise her.
Samuel
may
have
thought and played and
philosophized about death,
hut he did not really believe
in it. His world did not have
death as a member. He, and
all around him, was immortal.
When real death came it was
an outrage, a denial of the
immortality he deeply felt,
and the one crack in his wall

caused the whole structure to
crash. I think he had always
thought
he
could
argue
himself out of death. It was a
personal opponent and one he
could lick.
To Liza it was simply
death—the thing promised
and expected. She could go
on and in her sorrow put a pot
of beans in the oven, bake six
pies, and plan to exactness
how much food would be
necessary properly to feed the
funeral guests. And she could
in her sorrow see that Samuel
had a clean white shirt and
that his black broadcloth was
brushed and free of spots and

his shoes blacked. Perhaps it takes these two kinds to make a good marriage, riveted with several kinds of strengths. Once Samuel accepted, he could probably go farther than Liza, but the process of accepting tore him to pieces. Liza watched him closely after the decision to go to Salinas. She didn't quite know what he was up to but, like a good and cautious mother, she knew he was up to something. She was a complete realist. Everything else being equal, she was glad to be going to visit her children. She was curious about them and their children. She had no love of places. A place was only a resting stage

on the way to Heaven. She
did not like work for itself,
but she did it because it was
there to be done. And she was
tired. Increasingly it was
more difficult to fight the
aches and stiffnesses which
tried to keep her in bed in the
morning—not that they ever
succeeded.
And she looked forward
to Heaven as a place where
clothes did not get dirty and
where food did not have to be
cooked and dishes washed.
Privately there were some
things in Heaven of which
she did not quite approve.
There was too much singing,
and she didn't see how even
the Elect could survive for
very

long
the
celestial
laziness which was promised.
She would find something to
do in Heaven. There must be
something to take up one's
time—some clouds to darn,
some weary wings to rub with
liniment. Maybe the collars of
the robes needed turning now
and then, and when you come
right down to it, she couldn't
believe that even in Heaven
there would not be cobwebs
in some corner to be knocked
down with a cloth-covered
broom.
She
was
gay
and

frightened about the visit to Salinas. She liked the idea so well that she felt there must be something bordering on sin involved in it. And the Chautauqua? Well, she didn't have to go and probably wouldn't. Samuel would run wild—she would have to watch him. She never lost her feeling that he was young and helpless. It was a good thing that she did not know what went on in his mind, and, through his mind, what happened to his body. Places were very

important to Samuel. The
ranch was a relative, and
when he left it he plunged a
knife into a darling. But
having made up his mind,
Samuel set about doing it
well. He made formal calls on
all of his neighbors, the old-timers who remembered how
it used to be and how it was.
And when he drove away
from his old friends they
knew they would not see him
again, although he did not say
it. He took to gazing at the
mountains and the trees, even
at
faces,
as
though
to
memorize them for eternity.
He saved his visit to the

Trask place for last. He had not been there for months. Adam was not a young man any more. The boys were eleven years old, and Lee—well, Lee did not change much. Lee walked to the shed with Samuel.

"I've wanted to talk to you for a long time," said Lee. "But there's so much to do. And I try to get to San Francisco at least once a month."

"You know how it is," Samuel said. "When you know a friend is there you do not go to see him. Then he's gone and you blast your conscience to shreds that you did not see him."

"I heard about your

daughter. I'm sorry."

"I got your letter, Lee. I have it. You said good things."

"Chinese things," said Lee. "I seem to get more Chinese as I get older."

"There's something changed about you, Lee. What is it?"

"It's my queue, Mr. Hamilton. I've cut off my queue."

"That's it."

"We all did. Haven't you heard? The Dowager Empress is gone. China is free. The Manchus are not overlords and we do not wear queues. It was a proclamation of the new government. There's not

a queue left anywhere.”

“Does

it

make

adifference, Lee?”

“Not much. It’s easier.

But

there’s

a

kind

of

looseness on the scalp that

makes me uneasy. It’s hard to

get used to the convenience

of it.”

“How is Adam?”

“He’s all right. But he

hasn’t

changed

much.

I

wonder what he was like

before.”

“Yes, I’ve wondered about that. It was a short flowering. The boys must be big.”

“They are big. I’m glad I stayed here. I learned a great deal from seeing the boys grow and helping a little.”

“Did you teach them Chinese?”

“No. Mr. Trask didn’t want me to. And I guess he was right. It would have been a needless complication. But I’m their friend—yes, I’m their friend. They admire their father, but I think they love me. And they’re very different. You can’t imagine how different.”

“In what way, Lee?”

“You’ll see when they
come home from school.
They’re like two sides of a
medal. Cal is sharp and dark
and watchful, and his brother
—well, he’s a boy you like
before he speaks and like
more afterwards.”
“And you don’t like
Cal?”
“I find myself defending
him—to
myself.
He’s
fighting for his life and his
brother doesn’t have to fight.”
“I have the same thing in
my brood,” said Samuel. “I
don’t understand it. You’d
think with the same training
and the same blood they’d be
alike, but they’re not—not at

all.”

Later Samuel and Adam

walked

down

the

oak-shadowed

road

to

the

entrance to the draw where

they could look out at the

Salinas Valley.

“Will

you

stay

to

dinner?” Adam asked.

“I

will

not

be

responsible for the murder of

more chickens," said Samuel.

"Lee's got a pot roast."

"Well, in that case—"

Adam still carried one shoulder lower than the other from the old hurt. His face was hard and curtained, and his eyes looked at generalities and did not inspect details. The two men stopped in the road and looked out at the valley, green tinged from the early rains.

Samuel said softly, "I wonder you do not feel a shame at leaving that land fallow."

"I had no reason to plant it," Adam said. "We had that out before. You thought I would change. I have not changed."

“Do you take pride in
your hurt?” Samuel asked.
“Does it make you seem large
and tragic?”
“I don’t know.”
“Well, think about it.
Maybe you’re playing a part
on a great stage with only
yourself as audience.”
A slight anger came into
Adam’s voice. “Why do you
come to lecture me? I’m glad
you’ve come, but why do you
dig into me?”
“To see whether I can
raise a little anger in you. I’m
a nosy man. But there’s all
that fallow land, and here
beside me is all that fallow
man. It seems a waste. And I
have a bad feeling about
waste because I could never

afford it. Is it a good feeling
to let life lie fallow?”
“What else could I do?”
“You could try again.”
Adam faced him. “I’m
afraid to, Samuel,” he said.
“I’d rather just go about it
this way. Maybe I haven’t the
energy or the courage.”
“How about your boys—
do you love them?”
“Yes—yes.”
“Do you love one more
than the other?”
“Why do you say that?”
“I
don’t
know.
Something about your tone.”
“Let’s go back to the
house,” said Adam. They
strolled back under the trees.

Suddenly Adam said, “Did
you ever hear that Cathy was
in Salinas? Did you ever hear
such a rumor?”
“Did you?”
“Yes—but
I
don’t
believe it. I can’t believe it.”
Samuel walked silently
in the sandy wheel rut of the
road.
His
mind
turned
sluggishly in the pattern of
Adam and almost wearily
took up a thought he had
hoped was finished. He said
at last, “You have never let
her go.”
“I guess not. But I’ve let

the shooting go. I don't think about it any more."

"I can't tell you how to live your life," Samuel said, "although I do be telling you how to live it. I know that it might be better for you to come out from under your might-have-beens, into the winds of the world. And while I tell you, I am myself sifting my memories, the way men pan the dirt under a barroom floor for the bits of gold dust that fall between the cracks. It's small mining—small mining. You're too young a man to be panning memories, Adam. You should be getting yourself some new ones, so that the mining will be richer when you come to

age.”

Adam’s face was bent
down, and his jawbone jutted
below his temples from
clenching.
Samuel glanced at him.
“That’s right,” he said. “Set
your teeth in it. How we do
defend a wrongness! Shall I
tell you what you do, so you
will not think you invented it?
When you go to bed and blow
out the lamp—then she stands
in the doorway with a little
light behind her, and you can
see her nightgown stir. And
she comes sweetly to your
bed,
and
you,
hardly
breathing, turn back the

covers to receive her and
move your head over on the
pillow to make room for her
head beside yours. You can
smell the sweetness of her
skin, and it smells like no
other skin in the world—”
“Stop it,” Adam shouted
at him. “Goddam you, stop it!
Stop nosing over my life!
You’re like a coyote sniffing
around a dead cow.”
“The way I know,”
Samuel said softly, “is that
one came to me that selfsame
way—night after month after
year, right to the very now.
And I think I should have
double-bolted my mind and
sealed off my heart against
her, but I did not. All of these
years I’ve cheated Liza. I’ve

given her an untruth, a
counterfeit, and I've saved
the best for those dark sweet
hours. And now I could wish
that she may have had some
secret caller too. But I'll
never know that. I think she
would maybe have bolted her
heart shut and thrown the key
to hell."
Adam's
hands
were
clenched and the blood was
driven out of his white
knuckles. "You make me
doubt
myself,"
he
said
fiercely. "You always have.
I'm afraid of you. What

should I do, Samuel? Tell me! I don't know how you saw the thing so clear. What should I do?"

"I know the 'shoulds,' although I never do them, Adam. I always know the 'shoulds.' You should try to find a new Cathy. You should let the new Cathy kill the dream Cathy—let the two of them fight it out. And you, sitting by, should marry your mind to the winner. That's the second-best should. The best would be to search out and find some fresh new loveliness to cancel out the old."

"I'm afraid to try," said Adam.

"That's

what
you've
said. And now I'm going to
put a selfishness on you. I'm
going away, Adam. I came to
say good-by."
"What do you mean?"
"My daughter Olive has
asked Liza and me to visit
with her in Salinas, and we're
going—day after tomorrow."
"Well, you'll be back."
Samuel went on, "After
we've visited with Olive for
maybe a month or two, there
will come a letter from
George. And his feelings will
be hurt if we don't visit him
in Paso Robles. And after that
Mollie will want us in San
Francisco, and then Will, and
maybe even Joe in the East, if

we should live so long.”

“Well, won’t you like

that?

You’ve

earned

it.

You’ve worked hard enough

on that dust heap of yours.”

“I love that dust heap,”

Samuel said. “I love it the

way a bitch loves her runty

pup. I love every flint, the

plow-breaking outcroppings,

the thin and barren top-soil,

the waterless heart of her.

Somewhere in my dust heap

there’s a richness.”

“You deserve a rest.”

“There, you’ve said it

again,” said Samuel. “That’s

what Ihad to accept,” and I

have accepted. When you say

I deserve a rest, you are
saying that my life is over."
"Do you believe that?"
"That's what I have
accepted."
Adam said excitedly,
"You can't do that. Why, if
you accept that you won't
live!"
"I know," said Samuel.
"But you can't do that."
"Why not?"
"I don't want you to."
"I'm a nosy old man,
Adam. And the sad thing to
me is that I'm losing my
nosiness. That's maybe how I
know it's time to visit my
children.
I'm
having
to

pretend to be nosy a good
deal of the time."
"I'd rather you worked
your guts out on your dust
heap."
Samuel smiled at him.
"What a nice thing to hear!
And I thank you. It's a good
thing to be loved, even late."
Suddenly Adam turned
in front of him so that Samuel
had to stop. "I know what
you've done for me," Adam
said. "I can't return anything.
But I can ask you for one
more thing. If I asked you,
would you do me one more
kindness, and maybe save my
life?"
"I would if I could."
Adam swung out his
hand and made an arc over

the west. “That land out there
—would you help me to
make the garden we talked of,
the windmills and the wells
and the flats of alfalfa? We
could
raise
flower-seeds.
There’s money in that. Think
what it would be like, acres of
sweet peas and gold squares
of calendulas. Maybe ten
acres of roses for the gardens
of the West. Think how they
would smell on the west
wind!”
“You’re going to make
me cry,” Samuel said, “and
that would be an unseemly
thing in an old man.” And
indeed his eyes were wet. “I
thank you, Adam,” he said.

“The sweetness of your offer is a good smell on the west wind.”

“Then you’ll do it?”

“No, I will not do it. But I’ll see it in my mind when I’m in Salinas, listening to William Jennings Bryan. And maybe I’ll get to believe it happened.”

“But I want to do it.”

“Go and see my Tom. He’ll help you. He’d plant the world with roses, poor man, if he could.”

“You know what you’re doing, Samuel?”

“Yes, I know what I’m doing, know so well that it’s half done.”

“What a stubborn man you are!”

“Contentious,”
said
Samuel. “Liza says I am
contentious, but now I’m
caught in a web of my
children—and I think I like
it.”

2

The dinner table was set in
the house. Lee said, “I’d have
liked to serve it under the tree
like the other times, but the
air is chilly.”
“So it is, Lee,” said
Samuel.
The twins came in
silently and stood shyly
staring at their guest.
“It’s a long time since
I’ve seen you, boys. But we
named you well. You’re
Caleb, aren’t you?”

“I’m Cal.”

“Well, Cal then.” And

he turned to the other. “Have

you found a way to rip the

backbone out of your name?”

“Sir?”

“Are you called Aaron?”

“Yes, sir.”

Lee chuckled. “He spells

it with one *a.* The two a’s

seem a little fancy to his

friends.”

“I’ve

got

thirty-five

Belgian hares, sir,” Aron said.

“Would you like to see them,

sir? The hutch is up by the

spring.

I’ve

got

eight

newborns—just

born

yesterday.”

“I’d like to see them,

Aron.” His mouth twitched.

“Cal, don’t tell me you’re a

gardener?”

Lee’s

head

snapped

around and he inspected

Samuel. “Don’t do that,” Lee

said nervously.

Cal said, “Next year my

father is going to let me have

an acre in the flat.”

Aron said, “I’ve got a

buck rabbit weighs fifteen

pounds. I’m going to give it

to my father for his birthday.”

They

heard

Adam's
bedroom
door
opening.
"Don't tell him," Aron said
quickly. "It's a secret."
Lee sawed at the pot
roast. "Always you bring
trouble for my mind, Mr.
Hamilton," he said. "Sit
down, boys."
Adam came in, turning
down his sleeves, and took
his seat at the head of the
table. "Good evening, boys,"
he said, and they replied in
unison,
"Good
evening,
Father."
And, "Don't you tell,"
said Aron.

“I
won’t,”
Samuel
assured him. “Don’t tell
what?” Adam asked. Samuel
said, “Can’t there be a
privacy? I have a secret with
your son.”
Cal broke in, “I’ll tell
you a secret too, right after
dinner.”
“I’ll like to hear it,” said
Samuel. “And I do hope I
don’t know already what it
is.”
Lee looked up from his
carving and glared at Samuel.
He began piling meat on the
plates.
The boys ate quickly and
quietly, wolfed their food.
Aron said, “Will you excuse

us, Father?”

Adam nodded, and the

two boys went quickly out.

Samuel looked after them.

“They

seem

older

than

eleven,” he said. “I seem to

remember that at eleven my

brood were howlers and

screamers and runners in

circles. These seem like

grown men.”

“Do they?” Adam asked.

Lee said, “I think I see

why that is. There is no

woman in the house to put a

value on babies. I don’t think

men care much for babies,

and so it was never an

advantage to these boys to be

babies. There was nothing to
gain by it. I don’t know
whether that is good or bad.”
Samuel wiped up the
remains of gravy in his plate
with a slice of bread. “Adam,
I wonder whether you know
what you have in Lee. A
philosopher who can cook, or
a cook who can think? He has
taught me a great deal. You
must have learned from him,
Adam.”
Adam said, “I’m afraid I
didn’t
listen
enough—or
maybe he didn’t talk.”
“Why didn’t you want
the boys to learn Chinese,
Adam?”
Adam thought for a

moment. “It seems a time for honesty,” he said at last. “I guess it was plain jealousy. I gave it another name, but maybe I didn’t want them to be able so easily to go away from me in a direction I couldn’t follow.”

“That’s reasonable, enough and almost too human,” said Samuel. “But knowing it—that’s a great jump. I wonder whether I have ever gone so far.”

Lee brought the gray enameled coffeepot to the table and filled the cups and sat down. He warmed the

palm of his hand against the
rounded side of his cup. And
then Lee laughed. “You’ve
given me great trouble, Mr.
Hamilton,
and
you’ve
disturbed the tranquillity of
China.”
“How do you mean,
Lee?”
“It almost seems that I
have told you this,” said Lee.
“Maybe I only composed it in
my mind, meaning to tell you.
It’s
an
amusing
story
anyway.”
“I want to hear,” said
Samuel, and he looked at

Adam. “Don’t you want to
hear, Adam? Or are you
slipping into your cloud
bath?”
“I was thinking of that,”
said Adam. “It’s funny—a
kind of excitement is coming
over me.”
“That’s
good,”
said
Samuel. “Maybe that’s the
best of all good things that
can happen to a human. Let’s
hear your story, Lee.”
The Chinese reached to
the side of his neck and he
smiled. “I wonder whether
I’ll ever get used to the lack
of a queue,” he said. “I guess
I used it more than I knew.
Yes, the story. I told you, Mr.

Hamilton, that I was growing
more Chinese. Do you ever
grow more Irish?"
"It comes and goes,"
said Samuel.
"Do
you
remember
when you read us the sixteen
verses of the fourth chapter of
Genesis and we argued about
them?"
"I do indeed. And that's
a long time ago."
"Ten years nearly," said
Lee. "Well, the story bit
deeply into me and I went
into it word for word. The
more I thought about the
story, the more profound it
became to me. Then I
compared the translations we

have—and they were fairly close. There was only one place that bothered me. The King James version says this—it is when Jehovah has asked Cain why he is angry. Jehovah says, ‘If thou doest well, shall thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and *thou shalt* rule over him.’ It was the ‘thou shalt’ that struck me, because it was a promise that Cain would conquer sin.”

Samuel nodded. “And his children didn’t do it entirely,” he said.

Lee sipped his coffee.

“Then I got a copy of the American Standard Bible. It

was very new then. And it was different in this passage. It says, *'Do thou* rule over him.' Now this is very different. This is not a promise, it is an order. And I began to stew about it. I wondered what the original word of the original writer had been that these very different translations could be made."

Samuel put his palms down on the table and leaned forward and the old young light came into his eyes.

"Lee," he said, "don't tell me you studied Hebrew!"

Lee said, "I'm going to tell you. And it's a fairly long story. Will you have a touch of ng-ka-py?"

“You mean the drink
that tastes of good rotten
apples?”
“Yes. I can talk better
with it.”
“Maybe I can listen
better,” said Samuel.
While Lee went to the
kitchen
Samuel
asked,
“Adam, did you know about
this?”
“No,” said Adam. “He
didn’t tell me. Maybe I
wasn’t listening.”
Lee came back with his
stone bottle and three little
porcelain cups so thin and
delicate that the light shone
through
them.

“Dlinkee
Chinee, fashion,” he said and poured the almost black liquor. “There’s a lot of wormwood in this. It’s quite a drink,” he said. “Has about the same effect as absinthe if you drink enough of it.”
Samuel sipped the drink.
“I want to know why you were so interested,” he said.
“Well, it seemed to me that the man who could conceive this great story would know exactly what he wanted to say and there would be no confusion in his statement.”
“You say ‘the man.’ Do you then not think this is a divine book written by the inky finger of God?”

“I think the mind that
could think this story was a
curiously divine mind. We
have had a few such minds in
China too.”
“I just wanted to know,”
said Samuel. “You’re not a
Presbyterian after all.”
“I told you I was getting
more Chinese. Well, to go on,
I went to San Francisco to the
headquarters of our family
association. Do you know
about
them?
Our
great
families have centers where
any member can get help or
give it. The Lee family is
very large. It takes care of its
own.”

“I have heard of them,”

said Samuel.

“You

mean

Chinee

hatchet man fightee Tong war

over slave girl?”

“I guess so.”

“It’s a little different

from that, really,” said Lee. “I

went there because in our

family there are a number of

ancient reverend gentlemen

who are great scholars. They

are thinkers in exactness. A

man may spend many years

pondering a sentence of the

scholar you call Confucius. I

thought

there

might

be

experts in meaning who could
advise me.
“They are fine old men.
They smoke their two pipes
of opium in the afternoon and
it rests and sharpens them,
and they sit through the night
and
their
minds
are
wonderful. I guess no other
people have been able to use
opium well.”
Lee
dampened
his
tongue in the black brew. “I
respectfully submitted my
problem to one of these
sages, read him the story, and
told him what I understood

from it. The next night four of them met and called me in. We discussed the story all night long."

Lee laughed. "I guess it's funny," he said. "I know I wouldn't dare tell it to many people. Can you imagine four old gentlemen, the youngest is over ninety now, taking on the study of Hebrew? They engaged a learned rabbi. They took to the study as though they were children. Exercise books, grammar, vocabulary, simple sentences. You should see Hebrew written in Chinese ink with a brush! The right to left didn't bother

them as much as it would
you, since we write up to
down.
Oh,
they
were
perfectionists! They went to
the root of the matter."
"And
you?"
said
Samuel.
"I went along with them,
marveling at the beauty of
their proud clean brains. I
began to love my race, and
for the first time I wanted to
be Chinese. Every two weeks
I went to a meeting with
them, and in my room here I
covered pages with writing. I
bought every known Hebrew

dictionary.

But

the

old

gentlemen were always ahead

of me. It wasn't long before

they were ahead of our rabbi;

he brought a colleague in. Mr.

Hamilton, you should have

sat through some of those

nights

of

argument

and

discussion. The questions, the

inspection, oh, the lovely

thinking—the

beautiful

thinking.

"After two years we felt

that we could approach your

sixteen verses of the fourth

chapter of Genesis. My old gentlemen felt that these words were very important too—'Thou shalt' and 'Do thou.' And this was the gold from our mining: ' *Thou mayest*.' 'Thou mayest rule over sin.' The old gentlemen smiled and nodded and felt the years were well spent. It brought them out of their Chinese shells too, and right now they are studying Greek."

Samuel said, "It's a fantastic story. And I've tried to follow and maybe I've missed somewhere. Why is this word so important?"

Lee's hand shook as he
filled the delicate cups. He
drank his down in one gulp.
"Don't you see?" he cried.
"The
American
Standard
translation *orders* men to
triumph over sin, and you can
call sin ignorance. The King
James translation makes a
promise in 'Thou shalt,'
meaning that men will surely
triumph over sin. But the
Hebrew word, the word
timshel—'Thou
mayest'—
that gives a choice. It might
be the most important word in
the world. That says the way
is open. That throws it right
back on a man. For if 'Thou

mayest'—it is also true that
'Thou mayest not.' Don't you
see?"
"Yes, I see. I do see. But
you do not believe this is
divine law. Why do you feel
its importance?"
"Ah!" said Lee. "I've
wanted to tell you this for a
long time. I even anticipated
your questions and I am well
prepared. Any writing which
has influenced the thinking
and the lives of innumerable
people is important. Now,
there are many millions in
their sects and churches who
feel the order, 'Do thou,' and
throw
their
weight
into

obedience. And there are
millions
more
who
feel
predestination
in
‘Thou
shalt.’ Nothing they may do
can interfere with what will
be. But “Thou mayest’! Why,
that makes a man great, that
gives him stature with the
gods, for in his weakness and
his filth and his murder of his
brother he has still the great
choice. He can choose his
course and fight it through
and win.” Lee’s voice was a
chant of triumph.
Adam said, “Do you
believe that, Lee?”

“Yes, I do. Yes, I do. It
is easy out of laziness, out of
weakness, to throw oneself
into the lap of deity, saying,
‘I couldn’t help it; the way
was set.’ But think of the
glory of the choice! That
makes a man a man. A cat
has no choice, a bee must
make honey. There’s no
godliness there. And do you
know, those old gentlemen
who were sliding gently
down to death are too
interested to die now?”
Adam said, “Do you
mean these Chinese men
believe the Old Testament?”
Lee said, “These old
men believe a true story, and
they know a true story when
they hear it. They are critics

of truth. They know that these sixteen verses are a history of humankind in any age or culture or race. They do not believe a man writes fifteen and three-quarter verses of truth and tells a lie with one verb. Confucius tells men how they should live to have good and successful lives. But this—this is a ladder to climb to the stars." Lee's eyes shone. "You can never lose that. It cuts the feet from under
weakness
and
cowardliness and laziness." Adam said, "I don't see how you could cook and raise the boys and take care of me and still do all this."

“Neither do I,” said Lee.
“But I take my two pipes in
the afternoon, no more and no
less, like the elders. And I
feel that I am a man. And I
feel that a man is a very
important
thing—maybe
more important than a star.
This is not theology. I have
no bent toward gods. But I
have a new love for that
glittering
instrument,
the
human soul. It is a lovely and
unique thing in the universe.
It is always attacked and
never
destroyed—because
‘Thou mayest.’ ”

3

Lee and Adam walked out to the shed with Samuel to see him off. Lee carried a tin lantern to light the way, for it was one of those clear early winter nights when the sky riots with stars and the earth seems doubly dark because of them. A silence lay on the hills. No animal moved about, neither grass-eater nor predator, and the air was so still that the dark limbs and leaves of the live oaks stood unmoving against the Milky Way. The three men were silent. The bail of the tin lantern squeaked a little as the light swung in Lee's hand. Adam asked, "When do you think you'll be back from your trip?"

Samuel did not answer.

Doxology

stood

patiently in the stall, head

down, his milky eyes staring

at the straw under his feet.

“You’ve had that horse

forever,” Adam said.

“He’s thirty-three,” said

Samuel. “His teeth are worn

off. I have to feed him warm

mash with my fingers. And

he has bad dreams. He

shivers and cries sometimes

in his sleep.”

“He’s about as ugly a

crow bait as I ever saw,”

Adam said.

“I know it. I think that’s

why I picked him when he

was a colt. Do you know I

paid two dollars for him

thirty-three

years

ago?

Everything was wrong with

him, hoofs like flapjacks, a

hock so thick and short and

straight there seems no joint

at all. He's hammerheaded

and swaybacked. He has a

pinched chest and a big

behind. He has an iron mouth

and he still fights the crupper.

With a saddle he feels as

though you were riding a sled

over a gravel pit. He can't trot

and he stumbles over his feet

when he walks. I have never

in thirty-three years found

one good thing about him. He

even has an ugly disposition.

He is selfish and quarrelsome

and mean and disobedient. To

this day I don’t dare walk
behind him because he will
surely take a kick at me.
When I feed him mash he
tries to bite my hand. And I
love him.”
Lee said, “And you
named him ‘Doxology.’ ”
“Surely,” said Samuel,
“so ill endowed a creature
deserved, I thought, one
grand possession. He hasn’t
very long now.”
Adam said, “Maybe you
should put him out of his
misery.”
“What misery?” Samuel
demanded. “He’s one of the
few happy and consistent
beings I’ve ever met.”
“He must have aches
and pains.”

“Well, he doesn’t think
so. Doxology still thinks he’s
one hell of a horse. Would
you shoot him, Adam?”
“Yes, I think I would.
Yes, I would.”
“You’d
take
the
responsibility?”
“Yes, I think I would.
He’s thirty-three. His lifespan
is long over.”
Lee had set his lantern
on
the
ground.
Samuel
squatted
beside
it
and

instinctively

stretched

his

hands for warmth to the

butterfly of yellow light.

“I’ve been bothered by

something, Adam,” he said.

“What is that?”

“You would really shoot

my horse because death

might be more comfortable?”

“Well, I meant—”

Samuel said quickly,

“Do you like your life,

Adam?”

“Of course not.”

“If I had a medicine that

might cure you and also

might kill you, should I give

it to you? Inspect yourself,

man.”

“What medicine?”

“No,” said Samuel. “If I
tell you, believe me when I
say it may kill you.”
Lee said, “Be careful,
Mr. Hamilton. Be careful.”
“What is this?” Adam
demanded. “Tell me what
you’re thinking of.”
Samuel said softly, “I
think for once I will not be
careful. Lee, if I am wrong—
listen—if I am mistaken, I
accept the responsibility and I
will take what blame there is
to take.”
“Are you sure you’re
right?” Lee asked anxiously.
“Of course I’m not sure.
Adam, do you want the
medicine?”
“Yes. I don’t know what
it is but give it to me.”

“Adam, Cathy is in

Salinas.

She

owns

a

whorehouse, the most vicious

and depraved in this whole

end of the country. The evil

and ugly, the distorted and

slimy,

the

worst

things

humans can think up are for

sale there. The crippled and

crooked

come

there

for

satisfaction. But it is worse

than that. Cathy, and she is

now called Kate, takes the

fresh and young and beautiful
and so maims them that they
can never be whole again.
Now, there's your medicine.
Let's see what it does to
you."
"You're a liar!" Adam
said.
"No,
Adam.
Many
things I am, but a liar I am
not."
Adam whirled on Lee.
"Is this true?"
"I'm no antidote," said
Lee. "Yes. It's true."
Adam stood swaying in
the lantern light and then he
turned and ran. They could
hear his heavy steps running
and tripping. They heard him

falling over the brush and
scrambling and clawing his
way upward on the slope. The
sound of him stopped only
when he had gone over the
brow of the hill.
Lee
said,
“Your
medicine acts like poison.”
“I take responsibility,”
said Samuel. “Long ago I
learned this: When a dog has
eaten strychnine and is going
to die, you must get an ax and
carry him to a chopping
block. Then you must wait
for his next convulsion, and
in that moment—chop off his
tail. Then, if the poison has
not gone too far, your dog
may recover. The shock of

pain
can
counteract
the
poison. Without the shock he
will surely die.”
“But how do you know
this is the same?” Lee asked.
“I don’t. But without it
he would surely die.”
“You’re a brave man,”
Lee said.
“No, I’m an old man.
And if I should have anything
on my conscience it won’t be
for long.”
Lee asked, “What do
you suppose he’ll do?”
“I don’t know,” said
Samuel, “but at least he won’t
sit around and mope. Here,
hold the lantern for me, will

you?”

In the yellow light
Samuel slipped the bit in
Doxology’s mouth, a bit worn
so thin that it was a flake of
steel. The check rein had
been abandoned long ago.
The old hammerhead was
free to drag his nose if he
wished, or to pause and crop
grass beside the road. Samuel
didn’t care. Tenderly he
buckled the crupper, and the
horse edged around to try to
kick him.
When Dox was between
the shafts of the cart Lee
asked, “Would you mind if I
rode along with you a little?
I’ll walk back.”
“Come
along,”

said
Samuel, and he tried not to
notice that Lee helped him up
into the cart.
The night was very dark,
and Dox showed his disgust
for
night-traveling
by
stumbling every few steps.
Samuel said, “Get on
with it, Lee. What is it you
want to say?”
Lee did not appear
surprised. “Maybe I’m nosy
the way you say you are. I get
to
thinking.
I
know
probabilities, but tonight you
fooled me completely. I

would have taken any bet that
you of all men would not
have told Adam.”
“Did you know about
her?”
“Of course,” said Lee,
“Do the boys know?”
“I don’t think so, but
that’s only a matter of time.
You know how cruel children
are.
Someday
in
the
schoolyard it will be shouted
at them.”
“Maybe he ought to take
them away from here,” said
Samuel. “Think about that,
Lee.”
“My
question

isn’t

answered,

Mr.

Hamilton.

How were you able to do

what you did?”

“Do you think I was that

wrong?”

“No, I don’t mean that at

all. But I’ve never thought of

you as taking any strong

unchanging

stand

on

anything. This has been my

judgment.

Are

you

interested?”

“Show me the man who

isn’t interested in discussing

himself,” said Samuel. “Go

on.”

“You’re a kind man, Mr. Hamilton. And I’ve always thought it was the kindness that comes from not wanting any trouble. And your mind is as facile as a young lamb leaping in a daisy field. You have never to my knowledge taken a bulldog grip on anything. And then tonight you did a thing that tears down my whole picture of you.”

Samuel

wrapped

the

lines around a stick stuck in

the

whip

socket,

and

Doxology stumbled on down
the rutty road. The old man
stroked his beard, and it
shone very white in the
starlight. He took off his
black hat and laid it in his lap.
“I guess it surprised me as
much as it did you,” he said.
“But if you want to know
why—look into yourself.”
“I
don’t
understand
you.”
“If you had only told me
about your studies earlier it
might have made a great
difference, Lee.”
“I still don’t understand
you.”
“Careful, Lee, you’ll get
me talking. I told you my

Irish came and went. It's
coming now."
Lee said, "Mr. Hamilton,
you're going away and you're
not coming back. You do not
intend to live very much
longer."
"That's true, Lee. How
did you know?"
"There's
death
all
around you. It shines from
you."
"I didn't know anyone
could see it," Samuel said.
"You know, Lee, I think of
my life as a kind of music,
not always good music but
still having form and melody.
And my life has not been a
full orchestra for a long time

now. A single note only—and
that note unchanging sorrow.
I'm not alone in my attitude,
Lee. It seems to me that too
many of us conceive of a life
as ending in defeat."
Lee
said,
"Maybe
everyone is too rich. I have
noticed that there is no
dissatisfaction like that of the
rich. Feed a man, clothe him,
put him in a good house, and
he will die of despair."
"It was your two-word
retranslation,
Lee—"Thou
mayest.' It took me by the
throat and shook me. And
when the dizziness was over,
a path was open, new and

bright. And my life which is ending seems to be going on to an ending wonderful. And my music has a new last melody like a bird song in the night."

Lee was peering at him' through the darkness. "That's what it did to those old men of my family."

" 'Thou mayest rule over sin,' Lee. That's it. I do not believe all men are destroyed. I can name you a dozen who were not, and they are the ones the world lives by. It is true of the spirit as it is true of battles—only the winners are remembered. Surely most men are destroyed, but there are others who like pillars of fire guide frightened men

through the darkness. *'Thou mayest, Thou mayest!'* What glory! It is true that we are weak and sick and quarrelsome, but if that is all we ever were, we would, millenniums ago, have disappeared from the face of the earth. A few remnants of fossilized jawbone, some broken teeth in strata of limestone, would be the only mark man would have left of his existence in the world. But the choice, Lee, the

choice of winning! I had
never
understood
it
or
accepted it before. Do you
see now why I told Adam
tonight? I exercised the
choice. Maybe I was wrong,
but by telling him I also
forced him to live or get off
the pot. What is that word,
Lee?"
"Timshel," said Lee.
"Will you stop the cart?"
"You'll have a long
walk back."
Lee
climbed
down.
"Samuel!" he said.
"Here am I." The old

man chuckled. “Liza hates for me to say that.”

“Samuel, you’ve gone beyond me.”

“It’s time, Lee.”

“Good-by, Samuel,” Lee said, and he walked hurriedly back along the road. He heard the iron tires of the cart grinding on the road. He turned and looked after it, and on the slope he saw old Samuel against the sky, his white hair shining with starlight.

Chapter 25

1

It was a deluge of a winter in the Salinas Valley, wet and

wonderful. The rains fell gently and soaked in and did not freshet. The feed was deep in January, and in February the hills were fat with grass and the coats of the cattle looked tight and sleek. In March the soft rains continued, and each storm waited courteously until its predecessor sank beneath the ground. Then warmth flooded the valley and the earth burst into bloom—yellow and blue and gold.

Tom was alone on the ranch, and even that dust heap was rich and lovely and the flints were hidden in grass and the Hamilton cows were fat and the Hamilton sheep sprouted grass from their

damp backs.

At noon on March 15

Tom sat on the bench outside

the forge. The sunny morning

was over, and gray water-bearing clouds sailed in over

the

mountains

from

the

ocean, and their shadows slid

under them on the bright

earth.

Tom heard a horse’s

clattering hoofs and he saw a

small boy, elbows flapping,

urging a tired horse toward

the house. He stood up and

walked toward the road. The

boy galloped up to the house,

yanked off his hat, flung a

yellow

envelope

on
the
ground,
spun
his
horse
around, and kicked up a
gallop again.
Tom started to call after
him, and then he leaned
wearily down and picked up
the telegram. He sat in the
sun on the bench outside the
forge, holding the telegram in
his hand. And he looked at
the hills and at the old house,
as though to save something,
before he tore open the
envelope
and
read
the

inevitable four words, the person, the event, and the time.

Tom slowly folded the telegram and folded it again and again until it was a square no larger than his thumb. He walked to the house, through the kitchen, through the little living room, and into his bedroom. He took his dark suit out of the clothespress and laid it over the back of a chair, and he put a white shirt and a black tie on the seat of the chair. And then he lay down on the bed and turned his face to the wall.

2

The surreys and the buggies had driven out of the Salinas

cemetery. The family and friends went back to Olive's house on Central Avenue to eat and to drink coffee, to see how each one was taking it, and to do and say the decent things.

George offered Adam Trask a lift in his rented surrey, but Adam refused. He wandered around the cemetery and sat down on the cement curb of the Williams family plot. The traditional dark cypresses wept around the edge of the cemetery, and white violets ran wild in the pathways.

Someone had

brought them in and they had become weeds.

The cold wind blew over the tombstones and cried in the cypresses. There were many cast-iron stars, marking the graves of Grand Army men, and on each star a small wind-bitten flag from a year ago Decoration Day.

Adam sat looking at the mountains to the east of Salinas, with the noble point of Frémont's Peak dominating. The air was crystalline as it sometimes is when rain is coming. And then the light rain began to blow on the wind although the sky was not properly

covered with cloud.

Adam had come up on the morning train. He had not intended to come at all, but something drew him beyond his power to resist. For one thing, he could not believe that Samuel was dead. He could hear the rich, lyric voice in his ears, the tones rising and falling in their foreignness, and the curious music of oddly chosen words tripping out so that you were never sure what the next word would be. In the speech of most men you are absolutely sure what the next word will be.

Adam had looked at Samuel in his casket and knew that he didn't want him

to be dead. And since the face
in the casket did not look like
Samuel's face, Adam walked
away to be by himself and to
preserve the man alive.
He had to go to the
cemetery.
Custom
would
have been outraged else. But
he stood well back where he
could not hear the words, and
when the sons filled in the
grave he had walked away
and strolled in the paths
where the white violets grew.
The
cemetery
was
deserted
and
the

dark

crooning of the wind bowed

the heavy cypress trees. The

rain droplets grew larger and

drove stinging along.

Adam

stood

up,

shivered, and walked slowly

over the white violets and

past the new grave. The

flowers had been laid evenly

to cover the mound of new-turned

damp

earth,

and

already the wind had frayed

the blossoms and flung the

smaller bouquets out into the

path. Adam picked them up

and laid them back on the

mound.

He walked out of the
cemetery. The wind and the
rain were at his back, and he
ignored the wetness that
soaked through his black
coat. Romie Lane was muddy
with pools of water standing
in the new wheel ruts, and the
tall wild oats and mustard
grew beside the road, with
wild
turnip
forcing
its
boisterous
way
up
and
stickery beads of purple
thistles rising above the green
riot of the wet spring.
The black ’dobe mud

covered Adam's shoes and splashed the bottoms of his dark trousers. It was nearly a mile to the Monterey road. Adam was dirty and soaking when he reached it and turned east into the town of Salinas. The water was standing in the curved brim of his derby hat and his collar was wet and sagging.

At John Street the road angled and became Main Street. Adam stamped the mud off his shoes when he reached the pavement. The buildings cut the wind from him and almost instantly he began to shake with a chill. He increased his speed. Near the other end of Main Street he turned into the Abbot

House bar. He ordered brandy and drank it quickly and his shivering increased.

Mr. Lapierre behind the bar saw the chill. “You’d better have another one,” he said. “You’ll get a bad cold. Would you like a hot rum? That will knock it out of you.”

“Yes, I would,” said Adam.

“Well, here. You sip another cognac while I get some hot water.”

Adam took his glass to a table and sat uncomfortably in his wet clothes. Mr. Lapierre brought a steaming kettle from the kitchen. He put the squat glass on a tray and brought it to the table.

“Drink it as hot as you can stand it,” he said. “That will shake the chill out of an aspen.” He drew a chair up, sat down, then stood up. “You’ve made me cold,” he said. “I’m going to have one myself.” He brought his glass back to the table and sat across from Adam. “It’s working,” he said. “You were so pale you scared me when you came in. You’re a stranger?”

“I’m from near King City,” Adam said. “Come up for the funeral?”

“Yes—he was an old

friend.”

“Big funeral?”

“Oh, yes.”

“I’m not surprised. He had lots of friends. Too bad it couldn’t have been a nice day. You ought to have one more and then go to bed.”

“I will,” said Adam. “It makes me comfortable and peaceful.”

“That’s worth something. Might have saved you from pneumonia too.”

After he had served another toddy he brought a damp cloth from behind the bar. “You can wipe off some of that mud,” he said. “A funeral isn’t very gay, but when it gets rained on—that’s

really mournful.”

“It didn’t rain till after,”

said Adam. “It was walking

back I got wet.”

“Why don’t you get a

nice room right here? You get

into bed and I’ll send a toddy

up to you, and in the morning

you’ll be fine.”

“I think I’ll do that,”

said Adam. He could feel the

blood stinging his cheeks and

running hotly in his arms, as

though it were some foreign

warm fluid taking over his

body.

Then

the

warmth

melted through into the cold

concealed box where he

stored forbidden thoughts,

and
the
thoughts
came
timidly up to the surface like
children who do not know
whether they will be received.
Adam picked up the damp
cloth and leaned down to
sponge off the bottoms of his
trousers. The blood pounded
behind his eyes. “I might
have one more toddy,” he
said.
Mr. Lapierre said, “If
it’s for cold, you’ve had
enough. But if you just want a
drink I’ve got some old
Jamaica rum. I’d rather you’d
have that straight. It’s fifty
years old. The water would
kill the flavor.”

“I just want a drink,”
said Adam.
“I’ll have one with you.
I haven’t opened that jug in
months. Not much call for it.
This is a whisky-drinking
town.”
Adam wiped off his
shoes and dropped the cloth
on the floor. He took a drink
of the dark rum and coughed.
The
heavy-muscled
drink
wrapped its sweet aroma
around his head and struck at
the base of his nose like a
blow. The room seemed to tip
sideways and then right itself.
“Good, isn’t it?” Mr.
Lapierre asked. “But it can
knock you over. I wouldn’t

have more than one—unless
of course you want to get
knocked over. Some do."
Adam leaned his elbows
on the table. He felt a
garrulousness coming on him
and he was frightened at the
impulse. His voice did not
sound like his voice, and his
words amazed him.
"I don't get up here
much," he said. "Do you
know a place called Kate's?"
"Jesus! That rum is
better than I thought," Mr.
Lapierre said, and he went on
sternly, "You live on a
ranch?"
"Yes. Got a place near
King
City.
My

name’s

Trask.”

“Glad to meet you.

Married?”

“No. Not now.”

“Widower?”

“Yes.”

“You go to Jenny’s. Let

Kate alone. That’s not good

for you. Jenny’s is right next

door. You go there and you’ll

get everything you need.”

“Right next door?”

“Sure, you go east a

block and a half and turn

right. Anybody’ll tell you

where the Line is.”

Adam’s

tongue

was

getting thick. “What’s the

matter with Kate’s?”

“You go to Jenny’s,”

said Mr. Lapierre.

3

It was a dirty gusty evening. Castroville Street was deep in sticky mud, and Chinatown was so flooded that its inhabitants had laid planks across the narrow street that separated their hutches. The clouds against the evening sky were the gray of rats, and the air was not damp but dank. I guess the difference is that dampness comes down but dankness rises up out of rot and fermentation. The afternoon wind had dropped away and left the air raw and wounded. It was cold enough to shake out the curtains of rum in Adam’s head without

restoring his timidity. He walked quickly down the unpaved sidewalks, his eyes on the ground to avoid stepping in puddles. The row was dimly lit by the warning lantern where the railroad crossed the street and by one small carbon-filamented globe that burned on the porch of Jenny's. Adam had his instructions. He counted two houses and nearly missed the third, so high and unbridled were the dark bushes in front of it. He looked in through the gateway at the dark porch, slowly opened the gate, and

went up the overgrown path.
In the half-darkness he could
see the sagging dilapidated
porch and the shaky steps.
The paint had long
disappeared
from
the
clapboard walls and no work
had ever been done on the
garden. If it had not been for
the vein of light around the
edges of the drawn shades he
would
have
passed
on,
thinking the house deserted.
The stair treads seemed to
crumple under his weight and
the porch planks squealed as
he crossed them.

The front door opened,
and he could see a dim figure
holding the knob.
A
soft
voice
said,
“Won’t you come in?”
The reception room was
dimly lighted by small globes
set under rose-colored shades.
Adam could feel a thick
carpet under his feet. He
could see the shine of
polished furniture and the
gleam of gold picture frames.
He got a quick impression of
richness and order.
The soft voice said,
“You should have worn a
raincoat. Do we know you?”
“No, you don’t,” said

Adam.

“Who sent you?”

“A man at the hotel.”

Adam peered at the girl

before him. She was dressed

in

black

and

wore

no

ornaments. Her face was

sharp—pretty and sharp. He

tried to think of what animal,

what night prowler, she

reminded him. It was some

secret and predatory animal.

The girl said, “I’ll move

nearer to a lamp if you like.”

“No.”

She laughed. “Sit down

—over here. You did come

here for something, didn’t

you? If you'll tell me what
you want I'll call the proper
girl." The low voice had a
precise and husky power.
And she picked her words as
one picks flowers in a mixed
garden and took her time
choosing.
She made Adam seem
clumsy to himself. He blurted
out, "I want to see Kate."
"Miss Kate is busy now.
Does she expect you?"
"No."
"I can take care of you,
you know."
"I want to see Kate."
"Can you tell me what
you want to see her about?"
"No."
The girl's voice took on
the edge of a blade sharpened

on a stone. “You can’t see
her. She’s busy. If you don’t
want a girl or something else,
you’d better go away.”
“Well, will you tell her
I’m here?”
“Does she know you?”
“I don’t know.” He felt
his courage going. This was a
remembered cold. “I don’t
know. But will you tell her
that Adam Trask would like
to see her? She’ll know then
whether I know her or not.”
“I see. Well, I’ll tell
her.” She moved silently to a
door on the right and opened
it. Adam heard a few muffled
words and a man looked
through the door. The girl left
the door open so that Adam
would know he was not

alone. On one side of the
room heavy dark portieres
hung over a doorway. The
girl parted the deep folds and
disappeared. Adam sat back
in his chair. Out of the side of
his eyes he saw the man's
head thrust in and then
withdrawn.
Kate's private room was
comfort and efficiency. It did
not look at all like the room
where Faye had lived. The
walls were clad in saffron silk
and the drapes were apple
green. It was a silken room—
deep
chairs
with
silk-upholstered cushions, lamps
with silken shades, a broad
bed at the far end of the room

with a gleaming white satin
cover on which were piled
gigantic pillows. There was
no picture on the wall, no
photograph or personal thing
of any kind. A dressing table
near the bed had no bottle or
vial on its ebony top, and its
sheen was reflected in triple
mirrors. The rug was old and
deep and Chinese, an apple-green dragon on saffron. One
end
of
the
room
was
bedroom, the center was
social, and the other end was
office—filing
cabinets
of
golden oak, a large safe,

black with gold lettering, and
a rolltop desk with a green-hooded double lamp over it, a
swivel chair behind it and a
straight chair beside it.
Kate sat in the swivel
chair behind the desk. She
was still pretty. Her hair was
blond again. Her mouth was
little and firm and turned up
at the corners as always. But
her outlines were not sharp
anywhere. Her shoulders had
become plump while her
hands
grew
lean
and
wrinkled. Her cheeks were
chubby and the skin under her
chin was crepe. Her breasts
were still tiny, but a padding
of fat protruded her stomach a

little. Her hips were slender,
but her legs and feet had
thickened so that a bulge
hung over her low shoes. And
through her stockings, faintly,
could be seen the wrappings
of elastic bandage to support
the veins.
Still, she was pretty and
neat. Only her hands had
really aged, the palms and
fingerpads shining and tight,
the
backs
wrinkled
and
splotched with brown. She
was dressed severely in a
dark dress with long sleeves,
and the only contrast was
billowing white lace at her
wrists and throat.

The work of the years had been subtle. If one had been near by it is probable that no change at all would have been noticed. Kate's cheeks were unlined, her eyes sharp and shallow, her nose delicate, and her lips thin and firm.

The scar on her forehead was barely visible. It was covered with a powder tinted to match Kate's skin. Kate inspected a sheaf of photographs on her rolltop desk, all the same size, all taken by the same camera and bright with flash powder. And although the characters were

different in each picture, there
was a dreary similarity about
their postures. The faces of
the
women
were
never
toward the camera.
Kate
arranged
the
pictures in four piles and
slipped each pile into a heavy
manila envelope. When the
knock came on her door she
put the envelopes in a
pigeonhole of her desk.
“Come in. Oh, come in, Eva.
Is he here?”
The girl came to the
desk before she replied. In the
increased

light

her

face

showed tight and her eyes

were shiny. “It’s a new one, a

stranger. He says he wants to

see you.”

“Well, he can’t, Eva.

You know who’s coming.”

“I told him you couldn’t

see him. He said he thought

he knew you.”

“Well, who is he, Eva?”

“He’s a big gangly man,

a little bit drunk. He says his

name is Adam Trask.”

Although Kate made no

movement or sound Eva

knew something had struck

home. The fingers of Kate’s

right hand slowly curled

around the palm while the left

hand crept like a lean cat
toward the edge of the desk.
Kate sat still as though she
held her breath. Eva was
jittery. Her mind went to the
box in her dresser drawer
where her hypodermic needle
lay.
Kate said at last, “Sit
over there in that big chair,
Eva. Just sit still a minute.”
When the girl did not move
Kate whipped one word at
her. “Sit!” Eva cringed and
went to the big chair.
“Don’t pick your nails,”
said Kate.
Eva’s hands separated,
and each one clung to an arm
of the chair.
Kate
stared

straight
ahead at the green glass
shades of her desk lamp.
Then she moved so suddenly
that Eva jumped and her lips
quivered. Kate opened the
desk drawer and took out a
folded paper. “Here! Go to
your room and fix yourself
up. Don’t take it all—no, I
won’t trust you.” Kate tapped
the paper and tore it in two; a
little white powder spilled
before she folded the ends
and passed one to Eva. “Now
hurry up! When you come
downstairs, tell Ralph I want
him in the hall close enough
to hear the bell but not the
voices. Watch him to see he
doesn’t creep up. If he hears
the bell—no, tell him—no, let

him do it his own way. After
that bring Mr. Adam Trask to
me."
"Will you be all right,
Miss Kate?"
Kate looked at her until
she turned away. Kate called
after her, "You can have the
other half as soon as he goes.
Now hurry up."
After the door had
closed Kate opened the right-hand drawer of her desk and
took out a revolver with a
short barrel. She swung the
cylinder sideways and looked
at the cartridges, snapped it
shut and put it on her desk,
and laid a sheet of paper over
it. She turned off one of the
lights and settled back in her
chair. She clasped her hands
on the desk in front of her.

When the knock came
on the door she called,
“Come in,” hardly moving
her lips.
Eva’s eyes were wet,
and she was relaxed. “Here
he is,” she said and closed the
door behind Adam.
He
glanced
quickly
about before he saw Kate
sitting so quietly behind the
desk. He stared at her, and
then he moved slowly toward
her.
Her hands unclasped and
her right hand moved toward
the paper. Her eyes, cold and
expressionless, remained on
his eyes.
Adam saw her hair, her

scar, her lips, her creping throat, her arms and shoulders and flat breasts. He sighed deeply.

Kate's hand shook a little. She said, "What do you want?"

Adam sat down in the straight chair beside the desk. He wanted to shout with relief, but he said, "Nothing now. I just wanted to see you. Sam Hamilton told me you were here."

The moment he sat down the shake went out of her hand. "Hadn't you heard before?"

"No," he said. "I hadn't heard. It made me a little crazy at first, but now I'm all right."

Kate relaxed and her
mouth smiled and her little
teeth
showed,
the
long
canines sharp and white. She
said, “You frightened me.”
“Why?”
“Well, I didn’t know
what you’d do.”
“Neither did I,” said
Adam, and he continued to
stare at her as though she
were not alive.
“I expected you for a
long time, and when you
didn’t come I guess I forgot
you.”
“I didn’t forget you,” he
said. “But now I can.”
“What do you mean?”

He laughed pleasantly.

“Now I see you, I mean. You know, I guess it was Samuel said I’d never seen you, and it’s true. I remember your face but I had never seen it. Now I can forget it.”

Her lips closed and straightened and her wide-set eyes narrowed with cruelty.

“You think you can?”

“I know I can.”

She changed her manner. “Maybe you won’t have to,” she said. “If you feel all right about everything, maybe we could

get together.”

“I don’t think so,” said

Adam.

“You were such a fool,”

she said. “Like a child. You

didn’t know what things to do

with yourself. I can teach you

now. You seem to be a man.”

“You have taught me,”

he said. “It was a pretty sharp

lesson.”

“Would you like a

drink?”

“Yes,” he said.

“I can smell your breath

—you’ve

been

drinking

rum.” She got up and went to

a cabinet for a bottle and two

glasses, and when she turned

back she noticed that he was

looking at her fattened ankles.
Her quick rage did not change
the little smile on her lips.
She carried the bottle to
the round table in the middle
of the room and filled the two
small glasses with rum.
“Come, sit over here,” she
said. “It’s more comfortable.”
As he moved to a big chair
she saw that his eyes were on
her protruding stomach. She
handed him a glass, sat down,
and folded her hands across
her middle.
He sat holding his glass,
and she said, “Drink it. It’s
very good rum.” He smiled at
her, a smile she had never
seen. She said, “When Eva
told me you were here I
thought at first I would have

you thrown out.”

“I would have come back,” he said. “I had to see you—not that I mistrusted Samuel, but just to prove it to myself.”

“Drink your rum,” she said.

He glanced at her glass.

“You don’t think I’d poison you—” She stopped and was angry that she had said it.

Smiling, he still gazed at her glass. Her anger came through to her face. She picked up her glass and touched her lips to it. “Liquor makes me sick,” she said. “I never drink it. It poisons me.”

She shut her mouth tight and her sharp teeth bit down on

her lower lip.

Adam continued to smile

at her.

Her rage was rising

beyond her control. She

tossed the rum down her

throat and coughed, and her

eyes watered and she wiped

her tears away with the back

of her hand. “You don’t trust

me very much,” she said.

“No, I don’t.” He raised

his glass and drank his rum,

then got up and filled both

glasses.

“I will not drink any

more,” she said in panic.

“You don’t have to,”

Adam said. “I’ll just finish

this and go along.”

The

biting

alcohol
burned in her throat and she
felt the stirring in her that
frightened her. “I’m not
afraid of you or anyone else,”
she said, and she drank off
her second glass.
“You haven’t any reason
to be afraid of me,” said
Adam. “You can forget me
now. But you said you had
already.” He felt gloriously
warm and safe, better than he
had for many years. “I came
up
to
Sam
Hamilton’s
funeral,” he said. “That was a
fine man. I’ll miss him. Do
you remember, Cathy, he
helped you with the twins?”

In Kate the liquor raged.

She fought and the strain of

the fight showed on her face.

“What’s the matter?”

Adam asked.

“I told you it poisoned

me. I told you it made me

sick.”

“I couldn’t take the

chance,” he calmly said.

“You shot me once. I don’t

know

what

else

you’ve

done.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve

heard

some

scandal,” he said. “Just dirty

scandal.”

For the moment she had
forgotten
her
will-fight
against the cruising alcohol,
and now she had lost the
battle. The redness was up in
her brain and her fear was
gone and in its place was
cruelty without caution. She
snatched the bottle and filled
her glass.
Adam had to get up to
pour his own. A feeling
completely foreign to him
had arisen. He was enjoying
what he saw in her. He liked
to see her struggling. He felt
good about punishing her, but
he was also watchful. “Now I
must be careful,” he told
himself. “Don’t talk, don’t

talk.”

He said aloud, “Sam Hamilton has been a good friend to me all the years. I’ll miss him.”

She had spilled some rum, and it moistened the corners of her mouth. “I hated him,” she said. “I would have killed him if I could.”

“Why? He was kind to us.”

“He looked—he looked into me.”

“Why not? He looked into me too, and he helped me.”

“I hate him,” she said. “I’m glad he’s dead.”

“Might have been good if I had looked into you,” Adam said.

Her lip curled. “You are
a fool,” she said. “I don’t hate
you. You’re just a weak
fool.”
As her tension built up, a
warm calm settled on Adam.
“Sit there and grin,” she
cried. “You think you’re free,
don’t you? A few drinks and
you think you’re a man! I
could crook my little finger
and
you’d
come
back
slobbering, crawling on your
knees.” Her sense of power
was loose and her vixen
carefulness abandoned. “I
know you,” she said. “I know
your cowardly heart.”
Adam went on smiling.

He tasted his drink, and that
reminded her to pour another
for herself. The bottle neck
chattered against her glass.
“When I was hurt I
needed you,” she said. “But
you were slop. And when I
didn’t need you any more you
tried to stop me. Take that
ugly smirk off your face.”
“I wonder what it is you
hate so much.”
“You wonder, do you?”
Her caution was almost
entirely gone. “It isn’t hatred,
it’s contempt. When I was a
little girl I knew what stupid
lying fools they were—my
own
mother
and
father

pretending goodness. And
they weren't good. I knew
them. I could make them do
whatever I wanted. I could
always make people do what
I wanted. When I was half-grown I made a man kill
himself. He pretended to be
good too, and all he wanted
was to go to bed with me—a
little girl."
"But you say he killed
himself. He must have been
very sorry about something."
"He was a fool," said
Kate. "I heard him come to
the door and beg. I laughed
all night."
Adam said, "I wouldn't
like to think I'd driven
anybody out of the world."
"You're a fool too. I
remember how they talked.

‘Isn’t she a pretty little thing, so sweet, so dainty?’ And no one knew me. I made them jump through hoops, and they never knew it.”

Adam drained his glass.

He felt remote and inspective. He thought he could see her impulses crawling like ants and could read them. The sense of deep understanding that alcohol sometimes gives was on him. He said, “It doesn’t matter whether you liked Sam Hamilton. I found him wise. I remember he said one time that a woman who knows all about men usually knows one part very well and can’t conceive the other parts, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t there.”

“He was a liar and a hypocrite too.” Kate spat out her words. “That’s what I hate, the liars, and they’re all liars. That’s what it is. I love to show them up. I love to rub their noses in their own nastiness.”

Adam’s brows went up.

“Do you mean that in the whole world there’s only evil and folly?”

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

“I don’t believe it,” Adam said quietly.

“You don’t believe it! You don’t believe it!” She mimicked him. “Would you like me to prove it?”

“You can’t,” he said.

She jumped up, ran to

her desk, and brought the
brown envelopes to the table.
“Take a look at those,” she
said.
“I don’t want to.”
“I’ll show you anyway.”
She took out a photograph.
“Look there. That’s a state
senator. He thinks he’s going
to run for Congress. Look at
his fat stomach. He’s got
bubs like a woman. He likes
whips. That streak there—
that’s a whip mark. Look at
the expression on his face!
He’s got a wife and four kids
and he’s going to run for
Congress. You don’t believe!
Look at this! This piece of
white
blubber
is

a

councilman; this big red

Swede has a ranch out near

Blanco. Look here! This is a

professor at Berkeley. Comes

all the way down here to have

the toilet splashed in his face

—professor of philosophy.

And look at this! This is a

minister of the Gospel, a little

brother of Jesus. He used to

burn a house down to get

what he wanted. We give it to

him now another way. See

that lighted match under his

skinny flank?"

"I don't want to see

these," said Adam.

"Well, you have seen

them. And you don't believe

it! I'll have you begging to

get in here. I'll have you

screaming at the moon." She tried to force her will on him, and she saw that he was detached and free. Her rage congealed to poison. "No one has ever escaped," she said softly. Her eyes were flat and cold but her fingernails were tearing at the upholstery of the chair, ripping and fraying the silk.

Adam sighed. "If I had those pictures and those men knew it, I wouldn't think my life was very safe," he said. "I guess one of those pictures could destroy a man's whole life. Aren't you in danger?"

"Do you think I'm a child?" she asked.

"Not any more," said Adam. "I'm beginning to

think you’re a twisted human

—or no human at all.”

She

smiled.

“Maybe

you’ve struck it,” she said.

“Do you think I want to be

human?

Look

at

those

pictures! I’d rather be a dog

than a human. But I’m not a

dog.

I’m

smarter

than

humans. Nobody can hurt me.

Don’t worry about danger.”

She waved at the filing

cabinets. “I have a hundred

beautiful pictures in there,

and those men know that if
anything should happen to me
—anything—one
hundred
letters, each one with a
picture, would be dropped in
the mail, and each letter will
go where it will do the most
harm. No, they won't hurt
me."
Adam
asked,
"But
suppose you had an accident,
or maybe a disease?"
"That wouldn't make
any difference," she said. She
leaned closer to him. "I'm
going to tell you a secret none
of those men knows. In a few
years I'll be going away. And
when I do—those envelopes

will be dropped in the mail
anyway.” She leaned back in
her chair, laughing.
Adam
shivered.
He
looked closely at her. Her
face and her laughter were
childlike and innocent. He got
up
and
poured
himself
another drink, a short drink.
The bottle was nearly empty.
“I know what you hate. You
hate something in them you
can’t understand. You don’t
hate their evil. You hate the
good in them you can’t get at.
I wonder what you want,
what final thing.”

“I’ll have all the money I need,” she said. “I’ll go to New York and I won’t be old. I’m not old. I’ll buy a house, a nice house in a nice neighborhood, and I’ll have nice servants. And first I will find a man, if he’s still alive, and very slowly and with the greatest attention to pain I will take his life away. If I do it well and carefully, he will go crazy before he dies.”

Adam stamped on the floor impatiently.

“Nonsense,” he said. “This isn’t true. This is crazy. None of this is true. I don’t believe any of it.”

She said,

“Do

you

remember when you first saw

me?”

His face darkened. “Oh,

Lord, yes!”

“You

remember

my

broken jaw and my split lips

and my missing teeth?”

“I remember. I don’t

want to remember.”

“My pleasure will be to

find the man who did that,”

she said. “And after that—

there will be other pleasures.”

“I have to go,” Adam

said.

She said, “Don’t go,

dear. Don’t go now, my love.

My sheets are silk. I want you

to feel those sheets against
your skin.”
“You don’t mean that?”
“Oh, I do, my love. I do.
You aren’t clever at love, but
I can teach you. I will teach
you.” She stood up unsteadily
and laid her hand on his arm.
Her face seemed fresh and
young. Adam looked down at
her hand and saw it wrinkled
as a pale monkey’s paw. He
moved away in revulsion.
She saw his gesture and
understood it and her mouth
hardened.
“I don’t understand,” he
said. “I know, but I can’t
believe. I know I won’t
believe it in the morning. It
will be a nightmare dream.
But no, it—it can’t be a

dream—no.

Because

I

remember you are the mother

of my boys. You haven't

asked about them. You are

the mother of my sons."

Kate put her elbows on

her knees and cupped her

hands under her chin so that

her

fingers

covered

her

pointed ears. Her eyes were

bright with triumph. Her

voice was mockingly soft. "A

fool

always

leaves

an

opening,"

she

said.

“I

discovered that when I was a

child. I am the mother of your

sons. Your sons? I am the

mother, yes—but how do you

know you are the father?”

Adam’s mouth dropped

open. “Cathy, what do you

mean?”

“My name is Kate,” she

said. “Listen, my darling, and

remember. How many times

did I let you come near

enough to me to have

children?”

“You were hurt,” he

said. “You were terribly

hurt.”

“Once,” said Kate, “just

once.”

“The pregnancy made
you ill,” he protested. “It was
hard on you.”
She
smiled
at
him
sweetly. “I wasn’t too hurt for
your brother.”
“My brother?”
“Have
you
forgotten
Charles?”
Adam laughed. “You are
a devil,” he said. “But do you
think I could believe that of
my brother?”
“I don’t care what you
believe,” she said.
Adam said, “I don’t
believe it.”

“You will. At first you
will wonder, and then you’ll
be unsure. You’ll think back
about Charles—all about him.
I could have loved Charles.
He was like me in a way.”
“He was not.”
“You’ll remember,” she
said. “Maybe one day you
will remember some tea that
tasted bitter. You took my
medicine
by
mistake—
remember? Slept as you had
never
slept
before
and
awakened
late—thick-headed?”
“You were too hurt to

plan a thing like that.”

“I can do anything,” she said. “And now, my love, take off your clothes. And I will show you what else I can do.”

Adam closed his eyes and his head reeled with the rum. He opened his eyes and shook his head violently. “It wouldn’t matter—even if it were true,” he said. “It wouldn’t matter at all.” And suddenly he laughed because he knew that this was so. He stood too quickly and had to grab the back of his chair to steady himself against dizziness.

Kate leaped up and put

both of her hands on his
elbow. “Let me help you take
off your coat.”
Adam twisted her hands
from his arm as though they
were
wire.
He
moved
unsteadily toward the door.
Uncontrolled
hatred
shone in Kate’s eyes. She
screamed, a long and shrill
animal
screech.
Adam
stopped and turned toward
her. The door banged open.
The house pimp took three
steps, poised, pivoted with his
whole weight, and his fist

struck Adam under the ear.
Adam crashed to the floor.
Kate screamed, “The
boots! Give him the boots!”
Ralph moved closer to the
fallen man and measured the
distance. He noticed Adam’s
open eyes staring up at him.
He turned nervously to Kate.
Her voice was cold. “I
said give him the boots.
Break his face!”
Ralph said, “He ain’t
fighting back. The fight’s all
out of him.”
Kate sat down. She
breathed through her mouth.
Her hands writhed in her lap.
“Adam,” she said, “I hate
you. I hate you now for the
first time. I hate you! Adam,
are you listening? I hate

you!”

Adam tried to sit up, fell back, and tried again. Sitting on the floor, he looked up at Kate. “It doesn’t matter,” he said. “It doesn’t matter at all.”

He got to his knees and rested with his knuckles against the floor. He said, “Do you know, I loved you better than anything in the world? I did. It was so strong that it took quite a killing.”

“You’ll come crawling back,” she said. “You’ll drag your belly on the floor—begging, begging!”

“You want the boots now, Miss Kate?” Ralph asked.

She did not answer.

Adam

moved
very
slowly toward the door,
balancing his steps carefully.
His hand fumbled at the
doorjamb.
Kate called, “Adam!”
He turned slowly. He
smiled at her as a man might
smile at a memory. Then he
went out and closed the door
gently behind him.
Kate sat staring at the
door. Her eyes were desolate.

Chapter 26

1

On the train back to King
City from his trip to Salinas,
Adam Trask was in a cloud of
vague forms and sounds and
colors. He was not conscious
of any thought at all.

I

believe

there

are

techniques of the human

mind whereby, in its dark

deep, problems are examined,

rejected or accepted. Such

activities sometimes concern

facets a man does not know

he has. How often one goes to

sleep troubled and full of

pain, not knowing what

causes the travail, and in the

morning

a

whole

new

direction and a clearness is

there, maybe the result of the

black reasoning. And again

there are mornings when

ecstasy bubbles in the blood,
and the stomach and chest are
tight and electric with joy,
and nothing in the thoughts to
justify it or cause it.
Samuel's funeral and the
talk with Kate should have
made Adam sad and bitter,
but they did not. Out of the
gray throbbing an ecstasy
arose. He felt young and free
and filled with a hungry
gaiety. He got off the train in
King City, and, instead of
going directly to the livery
stable to claim his horse and
buggy, he walked to Will
Hamilton's new garage.
Will was sitting in his
glass-walled
office
from

which he could watch the
activity of his mechanics
without hearing the clamor of
their work. Will's stomach
was beginning to fill out
richly.
He was studying an
advertisement
for
cigars
shipped direct and often from
Cuba. He thought he was
mourning for his dead father,
but he was not. He did have
some little worry about Tom,
who had gone directly from
the funeral to San Francisco.
He felt that it was more
dignified to lose oneself in
business, as he intended to
do, than in alcohol, as Tom
was probably doing.

He looked up when
Adam came into the office
and waved his hand to one of
the big leather chairs he had
installed to lull his customers
past the size of the bills they
were going to have to pay.
Adam sat down. “I don’t
know whether I offered my
condolences,” he said.
“It’s a sad time,” said
Will. “You were at the
funeral?”
“Yes,” said Adam. “I
don’t know whether you
know how I felt about your
father. He gave me things I
will never forget.”
“He was respected,” said
Will. “There were over two
hundred
people

at
the
cemetery—over
two
hundred.”
“Such a man doesn’t
really die,” Adam said, and
he was discovering it himself.
“I can’t think of him dead. He
seems maybe more alive to
me than before.”
“That’s true,” said Will,
and it was not true to him. To
Will, Samuel was dead.
“I think of things he
said,” Adam went on. “When
he said them I didn’t listen
very closely, but now they
come back, and I can see his
face when he said them.”
“That’s true,” said Will.
“I was just thinking the same

thing. Are you going back to
your place?”
“Yes, I am. But I
thought I would come in and
talk to you about buying an
automobile.”
A subtle change came
over Will, a kind of silent
alertness. “I would have said
you’d be the last man in the
valley to get a car,” he
observed
and
watched
through half-closed eyes for
Adam’s reaction.
Adam laughed. “I guess
I deserved that,” he said.
“Maybe
your
father
is

responsible for a change in
me.”
“How do you mean?”
“I don’t know as I could
explain it. Anyway, let’s talk
about a car.”
“I’ll
give
you
the
straight dope on it,” said Will.
“The truth of the matter is
I’m having one hell of a time
getting enough cars to fill my
orders. Why, I’ve got a list of
people who want them.”
“Is that so? Well, maybe
I’ll just have to put my name
on the list.”
“I’d be glad to do that,
Mr. Trask, and—” He paused.
“You’ve been so close to the

family that—well, if there
should be a cancellation I'd
be glad to move you up on
the list."
"That's kind of you,"
said Adam.
"How would you like to
arrange it?"
"How do you mean?"
"Well, I can arrange it so
you pay only so much a
month."
"Isn't it more expensive
that way?"
"Well, there's interest
and carrying charge. Some
people find it convenient."
"I think I'll pay cash,"
said Adam. "There'd be no
point in putting it off."
Will
chuckled.

“Not
very many people feel that
way,” he said. “And there’s
going to come a time when I
won’t be able to sell for cash
without losing money.”
“I’d never thought of
that,” said Adam. “You will
put me on the list though?”
Will leaned toward him.
“Mr. Trask, I’m going to put
you on the top of the list. The
first car that comes in, you’re
going to have.”
“Thank you.”
“I’ll be glad to do it for
you,” said Will.
Adam asked, “How is
your mother holding up?”
Will leaned back in his
chair and an affectionate
smile came on his face.

“She’s a remarkable woman,” he said. “She’s like a rock. I think back on all the hard times we had, and we had plenty of them. My father wasn’t very practical. He was always off in the clouds or buried in a book. I think my mother held us together and kept the Hamiltons out of the poorhouse.”

“She’s a fine woman,” Adam said.

“Not only fine. She’s strong. She stands on her two feet. She’s a tower of strength. Did you come back to Olive’s house after the funeral?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Well over a hundred people did. And my mother

fried all that chicken and saw
that everybody had enough."
"She didn't!"
"Yes, she did. And when
you think—it was her own
husband."
"A remarkable woman,"
Adam repeated Will's phrase.
"She's practical. She
knew they had to be fed and
she fed them."
"I guess she'll be all
right, but it must be a great
loss to her."
"She'll be all right,"
Will said. "And she'll outlive
us all, little tiny thing that she
is."
On his drive back to the
ranch Adam found that he
was noticing things he had
not seen for years. He saw the

wildflowers in the heavy grass, and he saw the red cows against the hillsides, moving up the easy ascending paths and eating as they went. When he came to his own land Adam felt a quick pleasure so sharp that he began to examine it. And suddenly he found himself saying aloud in rhythm with his horse's trotting feet, "I'm free, I'm free. I don't have to worry any more. I'm free. She's gone. She's out of me. Oh, Christ Almighty, I'm free!"

He reached out and stripped the fur from the silver-gray sage beside the road, and when his fingers were sticky with the sap he

smelled the sharp penetrating odor on his fingers, breathed it deep into his lungs. He was glad to be going home. He wanted to see how the twins had grown in the two days he had been gone—he wanted to see the twins.

“I’m free, she’s gone,” he chanted aloud.

2

Lee came out of the house to meet Adam, and he stood at the horse’s head while Adam climbed down from the buggy.

“How are the boys?” Adam asked.

“They’re fine. I made them some bows and arrows and they went hunting rabbits in the river bottom. I’m not

keeping the pan hot though.”

“Everything all right

here?”

Lee

looked

at

him

sharply,

was

about

to

exclaim, changed his mind.

“How was the funeral?”

“Lots of people,” Adam

said. “He had lots of friends. I

can’t get it through my head

that he’s gone.”

“My people bury them

with drums and scatter papers

to confuse the devils and put

roast pigs instead of flowers

on the grave. We’re a

practical people and always a little hungry. But our devils aren't very bright. We can outthink them. That's some progress."

"I think Samuel would have liked that kind of funeral," said Adam. "It would have interested him."

He noticed that Lee was staring at him. "Put the horse away, Lee, and then come in and make some tea. I want to talk to you."

Adam went into the house and took off his black clothes. He could smell the sweet and now sickish odor of rum about himself. He removed all of his clothes and sponged his skin with yellow soap until the odor was gone

from his pores. He put on a clean blue shirt and overalls washed until they were soft and pale blue and lighter blue at the knees where the wear came. He shaved slowly and combed his hair while the rattle of Lee at the stove sounded from the kitchen. Then he went to the living room. Lee had set out one cup and a bowl of sugar on the table beside his big chair. Adam looked around at the flowered curtains washed so long that the blossoms were pale. He saw the worn rugs on the floor and the brown path on the linoleum in the hall. And it was all new to him.

When Lee came in with

the teapot Adam said, “Bring
yourself a cup, Lee. And if
you’ve got any of that drink
of yours, I could use a little. I
got drunk last night.”
Lee said, “You drunk? I
can hardly believe it.”
“Well, I was. And I want
to talk about it. I saw you
looking at me.”
“Did you?” asked Lee,
and he went to the kitchen to
bring his cup and glasses and
his stone bottle of ng-ka-py.
He said when he came
back, “The only times I’ve
tasted it for years have been
with you and Mr. Hamilton.”
“Is that the same one we
named the twins with?”
“Yes, it is.” Lee poured
the scalding green tea. He

grimaced when Adam put
two spoonfuls of sugar in his
cup.
Adam stirred his tea and
watched the sugar crystals
whirl and disappear into
liquid. He said, “I went down
to see her.”
“I thought you might,”
said Lee. “As a matter of fact
I don’t see how a human man
could have waited so long.”
“Maybe I wasn’t a
human man.”
“I thought of that too.
How was she?”
Adam said slowly, “I
can’t understand it. I can’t
believe there is such a
creature in the world.”
“The trouble with you
Occidentals is that you don’t

have devils to explain things with. Did you get drunk afterward?"

"No, before and during. I needed it for courage, I guess."

"You look all right now."

"I am all right," said Adam. "That's what I want to talk to you about." He paused and said ruefully, "This time last year I would have run to Sam Hamilton to talk."

"Maybe both of us have got a piece of him," said Lee. "Maybe that's what immortality is."

"I seemed to come out of a sleep," said Adam. "In

some strange way my eyes
have cleared. A weight is off
me.”
“You even use words
that
sound
like
Mr.
Hamilton,” said Lee. “I’ll
build a theory for my
immortal relatives.”
Adam drank his cup of
black liquor and licked his
lips. “I’m free,” he said. “I
have to tell it to someone. I
can live with my boys. I
might even see a woman. Do
you know what I’m saying?”
“Yes, I know. And I can
see it in your eyes and in the
way your body stands. A man
can’t lie about a thing like

that. You'll like the boys, I
think."
"Well, at least I'm going
to give myself a chance. Will
you give me another drink
and some more tea?"
Lee poured the tea and
picked up his cup.
"I don't know why you
don't scald your mouth,
drinking it that hot."
Lee
was
smiling
inwardly. Adam, looking at
him, realized that Lee was not
a young man any more. The
skin on his cheeks was
stretched tight, and its surface
shone as though it were
glazed. And there was a red
irritated rim around his eyes.

Lee studied the shell-thin cup in his hand and his
was a memory smile. “Maybe
if you’re free, you can free
me.”
“What do you mean,
Lee?”
“Could you let me go?”
“Why, of course you can
go. Aren’t you happy here?”
“I don’t think I’ve ever
known what you people call
happiness.
We
think
of
contentment as the desirable
thing, and maybe that’s
negative.”
Adam said, “Call it that
then. Aren’t you contented
here?”
Lee said, “I don’t think

any man is contented when
there are things undone he
wishes to do."
"What do you want to
do?"
"Well, one thing it's too
late for. I wanted to have a
wife and sons of my own.
Maybe I wanted to hand
down the nonsense that
passes for wisdom in a
parent, to force it on my own
helpless children."
"You're not too old."
"Oh,
I
guess
I'm
physically able to father a
child. That's not what I'm
thinking. I'm too closely
married to a quiet reading

lamp. You know, Mr. Trask,
once I had a wife. I made her
up just as you did, only mine
had no life outside my mind.
She was good company in my
little room. I would talk and
she would listen, and then she
would talk, would tell me all
the happenings of a woman's
afternoon. She was very
pretty
and
she
made
coquettish little jokes. But
now I don't know whether I
would listen to her. And I
wouldn't want to make her
sad or lonely. So there's my
first plan gone."
"What was the other?"
"I

talked
to
Mr.
Hamilton about that. I want to
open
a
bookstore
in
Chinatown in San Francisco.
I would live in the back, and
my days would be full of
discussions and arguments. I
would like to have in stock
some of those dragon-carved
blocks of ink from the
dynasty of Sung. The boxes
are worm-bored, and that ink
is made from fir smoke and a
glue that comes only from
wild asses' skin. When you
paint with that ink it may
physically be black but it

suggests to your eye and
persuades your seeing that it
is all the colors in the world.
Maybe a painter would come
by and we could argue about
method and haggle about
price.”

Adam said, “Are you making this up?”

“No. If you are well and if you are free, I would like to have my little bookshop at last. I would like to die there.”

Adam sat silently for a while, stirring sugar into his lukewarm tea. Then he said, “Funny. I found myself wishing you were a slave so I could refuse you. Of course you can go if you want to. I’ll even lend you money for your bookstore.”

“Oh, I have the money. I’ve had it a long time.”

“I never thought of your going,” Adam said. “I took you

for

granted.”

He

straightened his shoulders.

“Could you wait a little

while?”

“What for?”

“I want you to help me

get acquainted with my boys.

I want to put this place in

shape, or maybe sell it or rent

it. I’ll want to know how

much money I have left and

what I can do with it.”

“You wouldn’t lay a trap

for me?” Lee asked. “My

wish isn’t as strong as it once

was. I’m afraid I could be

talked out of it or, what

would be worse, I could be

held back just by being

needed. Please try not to need

me. That's the worst bait of all to a lonely man."

Adam said, "A lonely man. I must have been far down in myself not to have thought of that."

"Mr. Hamilton knew," said Lee. He raised his head and his fat lids let only two sparks from his eyes show through. "We're controlled, we Chinese," he said. "We show no emotion. I loved Mr. Hamilton. I would like to go to Salinas tomorrow if you will permit it."

"Do anything you want," said Adam. "God knows you've done enough for me."

"I want to scatter devil papers," Lee said. "I want to put a little roast pig on the

grave of my father.”

Adam got up quickly

and knocked over his cup and

went outside and left Lee

sitting there.

Chapter 27

1

That year the rains had come

so gently that the Salinas

River did not overflow. A

slender stream twisted back

and forth in its broad bed of

gray sand, and the water was

not milky with silt but clear

and pleasant. The willows

that grow in the river bed

were well leafed, and the wild

blackberry

vines

were

thrusting their spiky new

shoots along the ground.

It was very warm for
March, and the kite wind
blew steadily from the south
and turned up the silver
undersides of the leaves.
Against the perfect cover
of vine and bramble and
tangled drift sticks, a little
gray brush rabbit sat quietly
in the sun, drying his breast
fur, wet by the grass dew of
his early feeding. The rabbit's
nose crinkled, and his ears
slewed around now and then,
investigating small sounds
that
might
possibly
be
charged with danger to a
brush rabbit. There had been
a rhythmic vibration in the

ground audible through the
paws, so that ears swung and
nose wrinkled, but that had
stopped. Then there had been
a
movement
of
willow
branches twenty-five years
away and downwind, so that
no odor of fear came to the
rabbit.
For the last two minutes
there had been sounds of
interest but not of danger—a
snap and then a whistle like
that of the wings of a wild
dove. The rabbit stretched out
one hind leg lazily in the
warm sun. There was a snap
and a whistle and a grunting
thud on fur. The rabbit sat

perfectly still and his eyes
grew large. A bamboo arrow
was through his chest, and its
iron tip deep in the ground on
the other side. The rabbit
slumped over on his side and
his feet ran and scampered in
the air for a moment before
he was still.
From the willow two
crouching boys crept. They
carried four-foot bows, and
tufts of arrows stuck their
feathers up from the quivers
behind their left shoulders.
They were dressed in overalls
and faded blue shirts, but
each boy wore one perfect
turkey tailfeather tied with
tape against his temple.
The
boys

moved
cautiously, bending low, self-consciously toeing-in like
Indians. The rabbit's flutter of
death was finished when they
bent over to examine their
victim.
"Right
through
the
heart," said Cal as though it
could not be any other way.
Aron looked down and said
nothing. "I'm going to say
you did it," Cal went on. "I
won't take credit. And I'll say
it was a hard shot."
"Well, it was," said
Aron.
"Well, I'm telling you.
I'll give you credit to Lee and
to Father."
"I don't know as I want

credit—not all of it," said
Aron. "Tell you what. If we
get another one we'll say we
each hit one, and if we don't
get any more, why don't we
say we both shot together and
we don't know who hit?"
"Don't
you
want
credit?" Cal asked subtly.
"Well, not full credit.
We could divide it up."
"After all, it was my
arrow," said Cal.
"No, it wasn't."
"You
look
at
the
feathers. See that nick? That's
mine."

“How did it get in my
quiver? I don’t remember any
nick.”
“Maybe
you
don’t
remember. But I’m going to
give you credit anyway.”
Aron said gratefully,
“No, Cal. I don’t want that.
We’ll say we both shot at
once.”
“Well, if that’s what you
want. But suppose Lee sees it
was my arrow?”
“We’ll just say it was in
my quiver.”
“You think he’ll believe
that? He’ll think you’re
lying.”
Aron said helplessly, “If
he thinks you shot it, why,

we'll just let him think that."
"I just wanted you to
know," said Cal. "Just in case
he'd think that." He drew the
arrow through the rabbit so
that the white feathers were
dark red with heart blood. He
put the arrow in his quiver.
"You can carry him," he said
magnanimously.
"We ought to start
back," said Aron. "Maybe
Father is back by now."
Cal said, "We could
cook that old rabbit and have
him for our supper and stay
out all night."
"It's too cold at night,
Cal. Don't you remember
how
you
shivered

this

morning?”

“It’s not too cold for

me,” said Cal. “I never feel

cold.”

“You did this morning.”

“No, I didn’t. I was just

making fun of you, shivering

and chattering like a milk

baby. Do you want to call me

a liar?”

“No,” said Aron. “I

don’t want to fight.”

“Afraid to fight?”

“No. I just don’t want

to.”

“If I was to say you was

scared, would you want to

call me a liar?”

“No.”

“Then you’re scared,

aren’t you?”

“I guess so.”

Aron wandered slowly away, leaving the rabbit on the ground. His eyes were very wide and he had a beautiful soft mouth. The width between his blue eyes gave him an expression of angelic innocence. His hair was fine and golden. The sun seemed to light up the top of his head.

He was puzzled—but he was often puzzled. He knew his brother was getting at something, but he didn’t know what. Cal was an enigma to him. He could not follow the reasoning of his brother, and he was always surprised at the tangents it took.

Cal looked more like Adam. His hair was dark brown. He was bigger than his brother, bigger of bone, heavier in the shoulder, and his jaw had the square sternness of Adam's jaw. Cal's eyes were brown and watchful, and sometimes they sparkled as though they were black. But Cal's hands were very small for the size of the rest of him. The fingers were short and slender, the nails delicate. Cal protected his hands. There were few things that could make him cry, but a cut finger was one of them. He never ventured with his hands, never touched an insect or carried a snake about. And in a fight he

picked up a rock or a stick to
fight with.
As Cal watched his
brother walking away from
him there was a small sure
smile on his lips. He called,
“Aron, wait for me!”
When he caught up with
his brother he held out the
rabbit. “You can carry it,” he
said kindly, putting his arm
around
his
brother’s
shoulders. “Don’t be mad
with me.”
“You always want to
fight,” said Aron.
“No, I don’t. I was only
making a joke.”
“Were you?”
“Sure. Look—you can

carry the rabbit. And we'll start back now if you want."

Aron smiled at last. He was always relieved when his brother let the tension go. The two boys trudged up out of the river bottom and up the crumbling cliff to the level land. Aron's right trouser leg was well bloodied from the rabbit.

Cal said, "They'll be surprised we got a rabbit. If Father's home, let's give it to him. He likes a rabbit for his supper."

"All right," Aron said happily. "Tell you what. We'll both give it to him and we won't say which one hit it."

"All right, if you want

to," said Cal.

They walked along in

silence for a time and then

Cal said, "All this is our land

—way to hell over the river."

"It's Father's."

"Yes, but when he dies

it's going to be ours."

This was a new thought

to Aron. "What do you mean,

when he dies?"

"Everybody dies," said

Cal. "Like Mr. Hamilton. He

died."

"Oh, yes," Aron said.

"Yes, he died." He couldn't

connect the two—the dead

Mr. Hamilton and the live

father.

"They put him in a box

and then they dig a hole and

put the box in," said Cal.

“I know that.” Aron
wanted to change the subject,
to think of something else.
Cal said, “I know a
secret.”
“What is it?”
“You’d tell.”
“No, I wouldn’t, if you
said not.”
“I don’t know if I
ought.”
“Tell me,” Aron begged.
“You won’t tell?”
“No, I won’t.”
Cal said, “Where do you
think our mother is?”
“She’s dead.”
“No, she isn’t.”
“She is too.”
“She ran away,” said
Cal. “I heard some men
talking.”

“They were liars.”

“She ran away,” said Cal. “You won’t tell I told you?”

“I don’t believe it,” said Aron. “Father said she was in Heaven.”

Cal said quietly, “Pretty soon I’m going to run away and find her. I’ll bring her back.”

“Where did the men. say she is?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll find her.”

“She’s in Heaven,” said Aron. “Why would Father tell a lie?” He looked at his brother, begging him silently to agree. Cal didn’t answer him. “Don’t you think she’s in Heaven with the angels?”

Aron insisted. And when Cal still did not answer, “Who were the men who said it?”

“Just some men. In the post office at King City. They didn’t think I could hear. But I got good ears. Lee says I can hear the grass grow.”

Aron said, “What would she want to run away for?”

“How do I know? Maybe she didn’t like us.”

Aron inspected this heresy. “No,” he said. “The men were liars. Father said she’s in Heaven. And you know how he don’t like to

talk about her.”

“Maybe that’s because

she ran away.”

“No. I asked Lee. Know

what Lee said? Lee said,

‘Your mother loved you and

she still does.’ And Lee gave

me a star to look at. He said

maybe that was our mother

and she would love us as long

as that light was there. Do

you think Lee is a liar?”

Through his gathering tears

Aron could see his brother’s

eyes, hard and reasonable.

There were no tears in Cal’s

eyes.

Cal

felt

pleasantly

excited. He found another

implement, another secret

tool, to use for any purpose he needed. He studied Aron, saw his quivering lips, but he noticed in time the flaring nostrils. Aron would cry, but sometimes, pushed to tears, Aron would fight too. And when Aron cried and fought at the same time he was dangerous. Nothing could hurt him and nothing could stop him. Once Lee had held him in his lap, clasping his still flailing fists to his sides, until after a long time he relaxed. And his nostrils had flared then.

Cal put his new tool away. He could bring it out anytime, and he knew it was the sharpest weapon he had found. He would inspect it at

his ease and judge just when
and how much to use it.
He made his decision
almost too late. Aron leaped
at him and the limp body of
the rabbit slashed against his
face. Cal jumped back and
cried, “I was just joking.
Honest, Aron, it was only a
joke.”
Aron stopped. Pain and
puzzlement were on his face.
“I don’t like that joke,” he
said, and he sniffled and
wiped his nose on his sleeve.
Cal came close to him
and hugged him and kissed
him on the cheek. “I won’t do
it any more,” he said.
The boys trudged along
silently for a while. The light
of day began to withdraw.

Cal looked over his shoulder
at a thunderhead sailing
blackly over the mountains
on the nervous March wind.
“Going to storm,” he said.
“Going to be a bastard.” Aron
said, “Did you really hear
those men?”
“Maybe I only thought I
did,” Cal said quickly. “Jesus,
look at that cloud!”
Aron turned around to
look at the black monster. It
ballooned in great dark rolls
above, and beneath it drew a
long trailing skirt of rain, and
as they looked the cloud
rumbled and flashed fire.
Borne on the wind, the
cloudburst
drummed
hollowly on the fat wet hills

across the valley and moved
out over the flat lands. The
boys turned and ran for home,
and the cloud boomed at their
backs
and
the
lightning
shattered the air into quaking
pieces. The cloud caught up
with them, and the first stout
drops plopped on the ground
out of the riven sky. They
could smell the sweet odor of
ozone. Running, they sniffed
the thunder smell.
As they raced across the
country road and onto the
wheel tracks that led to their
own home draw the water
struck them. The rain fell in
sheets

and

in

columns.

Instantly they were soaked

through,

and

their

hair

plastered down on their

foreheads and streamed into

their eyes, and the turkey

feathers at their temples bent

over with the weight of water.

Now that they were as

wet as they could get the boys

stopped running. There was

no reason to run for cover.

They looked at each other and

laughed for joy. Aron wrung

out the rabbit and tossed it in

the air and caught it and

threw it to Cal. And Cal,

feeling silly, put it around his neck with the head and hind feet under his chin. Both boys leaned over and laughed hysterically. The rain roared on the oak trees in the home draw and the wind disturbed their high dignity.

2

The twins came in sight of the ranch buildings in time to see Lee, his head through the center hole of a yellow oilskin poncho, leading a strange horse and a flimsy rubber-tired buggy toward the shed. “Somebody’s here,” said Cal. “Will you look at that rig?”

They began to run again, for there was a certain deliciousness about visitors.

Near the steps they slowed
down,
moved
cautiously
around the house, for there
was a certain fearsomeness
about visitors too. They went
in the back way and stood
dripping in the kitchen. They
heard voices in the living
room—their father's voice
and another, a man's voice.
And then a third voice
stiffened their stomachs and
rippled a little chill up their
spines. It was a woman's
voice. These boys had had
very little experience with
women. They tiptoed into
their own room and stood
looking at each other.
"Who do you 'spose it

is?” Cal asked.

An emotion like a light
had burst in Aron. He wanted
to shout, “Maybe it’s our
mother. Maybe she’s come
back.”

And
then
he
remembered that she was in
Heaven and people do not
come back from there. He
said, “I don’t know. I’m
going to put on dry clothes.”

The boys put on dry
clean clothes, which were
exact replicas of the sopping
clothes they were taking off.
They took off the wet turkey
feathers and combed their
hair back with their fingers.
And all the while they could

hear the voices, mostly low pitched, and then the high woman's voice, and once they froze, listening, for they heard a child's voice—a girl's voice—and this was such an excitement that they did not even speak of hearing it.

Silently they edged into the hall and crept toward the door to the living room. Cal turned the doorknob very, very slowly and lifted it up so that no creak would betray them.

Only the smallest crack was open when Lee came in the back door, shuffled along the hall, getting out of his poncho, and caught them there. "Lilly boy peek?" he

said in pidgin, and when Cal
closed the door and the latch
clicked Lee said quickly,
“Your father’s home. You’d
better go in.”
Aron
whispered
hoarsely,
“Who
else
is
there?”
“Just some people going
by. The rain drove them in.”
Lee put his hand over Cal’s
on the doorknob and turned it
and opened the door.
“Boys
come
long
home,” he said and left them
there, exposed in the opening.

Adam cried, “Come in,
boys! Come on in!”
The two carried their
heads low and darted glances
at the strangers and shuffled
their feet. There was a man in
city clothes and a woman in
the fanciest clothes ever. Her
duster and hat and veil lay on
a chair beside her, and she
seemed to the boys to be clad
entirely in black silk and lace.
Black lace even climbed up
little sticks and hugged her
throat. That was enough for
one day, but it wasn’t all.
Beside the woman sat a girl, a
little younger maybe than the
twins, but not much. She
wore
a
blue-checked

sunbonnet with lace around
the front. Her dress was
flowery, and a little apron
with pockets was tied around
her middle. Her skirt was
turned
back,
showing
a
petticoat of red knitted yarn
with tatting around the edge.
The boys could not see her
face
because
of
the
sunbonnet, but her hands
were folded in her lap, and it
was easy to see the little gold
seal ring she wore on her
third finger.
Neither boy had drawn a

breath and the red rings were beginning to flare in back of their eyes from holding their breath.

“These are my boys,” their father said. “They’re twins. That’s Aron and this is Caleb. Boys, shake hands with our guests.”

The boys moved forward, heads down, hands up, in a gesture very like surrender and despair. Their limp fins were pumped by the gentleman and then by the lacy lady. Aron was first, and he turned away from the little girl, but the lady said, “Aren’t you going to say how do to my daughter?”

Aron
shuddered
and
surrendered his hand in the
direction of the girl with the
hidden
face.
Nothing
happened.
His
lifeless
sausages were not gripped, or
wrung,
or
squeezed,
or
racheted. His hand simply
hung in the air in front of her.
Aron peeked up through his
eyelashes to see what was
going on.
Her head was down too,

and she had the advantage of
the sunbonnet. Her small
right hand with the signet ring
on the middle finger was
stuck out too, but it made no
move toward Aron's hand.
He stole a glance at the
lady. She was smiling, her
lips parted. The room seemed
crushed with silence. And
then Aron heard a ripping
snicker from Cal.
Aron reached out and
grabbed
her
hand
and
pumped it up and down three
times. It was as soft as a
handful of petals. He felt a
pleasure that burned him. He
dropped

her
hand
and
concealed his in his overall
pocket. As he backed hastily
away he saw Cal step up and
shake hands formally and say,
“How
do.”
Aron
had
forgotten to say it, so he said
it now, after his brother, and
it sounded strange. Adam and
his guests laughed.
Adam said, “Mr. and
Mrs. Bacon nearly got caught
in the rain.”
“We were lucky to be
lost here,” Mr. Bacon said. “I
was looking for the Long
ranch.”

“That’s
farther.
You
should have taken the next
left turn off the county road
to
the
south.”
Adam
continued to the boys, “Mr.
Bacojti
is
a
county
supervisor.”
“I don’t know why, but I
take the job very seriously,”
said Mr. Bacon, and he too
addressed the boys. “My
daughter’s name is Abra,
boys. Isn’t that a funny
name?” He used the tone

adults employ with children.
He turned to Adam and said
in poetic singsong, “ ‘Abra
was ready ere I called her
name; And though I called
another,
Abra
came.’
Matthew Prior. I won’t say I
hadn’t wanted a son—but
Abra’s such a comfort. Look
up, dear.”
Abra did not move. Her
hands were again clasped in
her lap. Her father repeated
with relish, “ ‘And though I
called another, Abra came.’ ”
Aron saw his brother
looking at the little sunbonnet
without an ounce of fear. And
Aron said hoarsely, “I don’t
think Abra’s a funny name.”

“He didn’t mean funny
that
way,”
Mrs.
Bacon
explained. “He only meant
curious.” And she explained
to Adam, “My husband gets
the strangest things out of
books. Dear, shouldn’t we be
going?”
Adam said eagerly, “Oh,
don’t go yet, ma’am. Lee is
making some tea. It will
warm you up.”
“Well, how pleasant!”
Mrs. Bacon said, and she
continued, “Children, it isn’t
raining any more. Go outside
and play.” Her voice had such
authority that they filed out—
Aron first and Cal second and

Abra following.

3

In the living room Mr. Bacon crossed his legs. “You have a fine prospect here,” he said. “Is it a sizable piece?”

Adam said, “I have a good strip. I cross the river to the other side. It’s a good piece.”

“That’s all yours across the county road then?”

“Yes, it is. I’m kind of ashamed to admit it. I’ve let it go badly. I haven’t farmed it at all. Maybe I got too much farming as a child.”

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bacon were looking at Adam now, and he knew he had to make some explanation for letting his good land run free.

He said, “I guess I’m a lazy man. And my father didn’t help me when he left me enough to get along on without working.”

He dropped his eyes but he could feel the relief on the part of the Bacons. It was not laziness if he was a rich man. Only the poor were lazy. Just as only the poor were ignorant. A rich man who didn’t know anything was spoiled or independent.

“Who takes care of the boys?” Mrs. Bacon asked.

Adam laughed. “What taking care of they get, and it isn’t much, is Lee’s work.”

“Lee?”

Adam became a little
irritated with the questioning.
“I only have one man,” he
said shortly.
“You mean the Chinese
we saw?” Mrs. Bacon was
shocked.
Adam smiled at her. She
had frightened him at first,
but now he was moje
comfortable. “Lee raised the
boys, and he has taken care of
me,” he said.
“But didn’t they ever
have a woman’s care?”
“No, they didn’t.”
“The poor lambs,” she
said.
“They’re wild but I
guess they’re healthy,” Adam
said. “I guess we’ve all gone
wild like the land. But now

Lee is going away. I don’t
know what we’ll do.”
Mr.
Bacon
carefully
cleared the phlegm from his
throat so it wouldn’t be run
over by his pronouncement.
“Have you thought about the
education of your sons?”
“No—I guess I haven’t
thought about it much.”
Mrs. Bacon said, “My
husband is a believer in
education.”
“Education is the key to
the future,” Mr. Bacon said.
“What
kind
of
education?” asked Adam.
Mr. Bacon went on, “All

things come to men who
know. Yes, I'm a believer in
the torch of learning." He
leaned close and his voice
became
confidential.
"So
long as you aren't going to
farm your land, why don't
you rent it and move to the
county seat—near our good
public schools?"
For just a second Adam
thought of saying, "Why
don't you mind your own
goddam
business?"
but
instead he asked, "You think
that would be a good idea?"
"I think I could get you a
good reliable tenant," Mr.

Bacon said. “No reason why you shouldn’t have something coming in from your land if you don’t live on it.”

Lee made a great stir coming in with the tea. He had heard enough of the tones through the door to be sure Adam was finding them tiresome. Lee was pretty certain they didn’t like tea, and if they did, they weren’t likely to favor the kind he had brewed. And when they drank it with compliments he knew the Bacons had their teeth in something. Lee tried to catch Adam’s eye but could not. Adam was studying the rug between his feet.

Mrs. Bacon was saying, “My husband has served on

his school board for many years—” but Adam didn’t hear the discussion that followed.

He was thinking of a big globe of the world, suspended and swaying from a limb of one of his oak trees. And for no reason at all that he could make out, his mind leaped to his father, stumping about on his wooden leg, rapping on his leg for attention with a walking stick. Adam could see the stern and military face of his father as he forced his sons through drill and made them carry heavy packs to develop their shoulders.

Through his memory Mrs.

Bacon’s voice droned on.

Adam felt the pack loaded

with rocks. He saw Charles’

face grinning sardonically—

Charles—the mean, fierce

eyes,

the

hot

temper.

Suddenly Adam wanted to

see Charles. He would take a

trip—take

the

boys.

He

slapped

his

leg

with

excitement.

Mr. Bacon paused in his

talk. “I beg your pardon?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Adam
said. “I just remembered
something I’ve neglected to
do.”
Both
Bacons
were
patiently, politely waiting for
his
explanation.
Adam
thought, Why not? I’m not
running for supervisor. I’m
not on the school board. Why
not? He said to his guests, “I
just remembered that I have
forgotten to write to my
brother for over ten years.”
They shuddered under his
statement
and
exchanged

glances.

Lee had been refilling

the teacups. Adam saw his

cheeks puff out and heard his

happy snort as he passed to

the safety of the hallway. The

Bacons

didn’t

want

to

comment on the incident.

They wanted to be alone to

discuss it.

Lee anticipated that it

would be this way. He

hurried out to harness up and

bring the rubber-tired buggy

to the front door.

4

When Abra and Cal and Aron

went out, they stood side by

side on the small covered

porch, looking at the rain
splashing and dripping down
from the wide-spreading oak
trees. The cloudburst had
passed into a distant echoing
thunder roll, but it had left a
rain determined to go on for a
long time.
Aron said, “That lady
told us the rain was stopped.”
Abra
answered
him
wisely. “She didn’t look.
When she’s talking she never
looks.”
Cal demanded, “How
old are you?”
“Ten, going on eleven,”
said Abra.
“Ho!” said Cal. “We’re
eleven, going on twelve.”

Abra
pushed
her
sunbonnet back. It framed her
head like a halo. She was
pretty, with dark hair in two
braids. Her little forehead was
round and domed, and her
brows were level. One day
her nose would be sweet and
turned up where now it still
was button-form. But two
features would be with her
always. Her chin was firm
and her mouth was as sweet
as a flower and very wide and
pink. Her hazel eyes were
sharp and intelligent and
completely
fearless.
She
looked straight into the faces

of the boys, straight into their eyes, one after the other, and there was no hint of the shyness she had pretended inside the house.

"I don't believe you're twins," she said. "You don't look alike."

"We are too," said Cal.

"We are too," said Aron.

"Some twins don't look alike," Cal insisted.

"Lots of them don't," Aron said. "Lee told us how it is. If the lady has one egg, the twins look alike. If she has two eggs, they don't."

"We're two eggs," said Cal.

Abra smiled with

amusement at the myths of
these country boys. “Eggs,”
she said. “Ho! Eggs.” She
didn’t say it loudly or
harshly, but Lee’s theory
tottered and swayed and then
she brought it crashing down.
“Which one of you is fried?”
she asked. “And which one is
poached?”
The
boys
exchanged
uneasy glances. It was their
first experience with the
inexorable logic of women,
which is overwhelming even,
or perhaps especially, when it
is wrong. This was new to
them,
exciting
and

frightening.

Cal said, “Lee is a Chinaman.”

“Oh, well,” said Abra kindly, “why don’t you say so? Maybe you’re china eggs then, like they put in a nest.”

She paused to let her shaft sink in. She saw opposition, struggle, disappear. Abra had taken control. She was the boss.

Aron suggested, “Let’s go to the old house and play there. It leaks a little but it’s nice.”

They ran under the dripping oaks to the old Sanchez house and plunged in through its open door, which squeaked restlessly on rusty hinges.

The ’dobe house had
entered its second decay. The
great sala all along the front
was half plastered, the line of
white halfway around and
then stopping, just as the
workmen had left it over ten
years before. And the deep
windows with their rebuilt
sashes remained glassless.
The new floor was streaked
with water stain, and a clutter
of old papers and darkened
nail bags with their nails
rusted to prickly balls filled
the corner of the room.
As the children stood in
the entrance a bat flew from
the rear of the house. The
gray shape swooped from
side to side and disappeared
through the doorway.

The
boys
conducted
Abra through the house—
opened closets to show wash
basins
and
toilets
and
chandeliers, still crated and
waiting to be installed. A
smell of mildew and of wet
paper was in the air. The
three children walked on
tiptoe, and they did not speak
for fear of the echoes from
the walls of the empty house.
Back in the big sala the
twins faced their guest. “Do
you like it?” Aron asked
softly because of the echo.
“Yee-es,” she admitted

hesitantly.

“Sometimes we play here,” Cal said boldly. “You can come here and play with us if you like.”

“I live in Salinas,” Abra said in such a tone that they knew they were dealing with a superior being who hadn’t time for bumpkin pleasures. Abra saw that she had crushed their highest treasure, and while she knew the weaknesses of men she still liked them, and, besides, she was a lady. “Sometimes, when we are driving by, I’ll come and play with you—a little,” she said kindly, and both boys felt grateful to her.

“I’ll give

you

my

rabbit," said Cal suddenly. "I

was going to give it to my

father, but you can have it."

"What rabbit?"

"The one we shot today

—right through the heart with

an arrow. He hardly even

kicked."

Aron looked at him in

outrage. "It was my—"

Cal interrupted, "We

will let you have it to take

home. It's a pretty big one."

Abra said, "What would

I want with a dirty old rabbit

all covered with blood?"

Aron said, "I'll wash

him off and put him in a box

and tie him with string, and if

you don't want to eat him,

you can have a funeral when
you get time—in Salinas."
"I go to real funerals,"
said Abra. "Went to one
yesterday. There was flowers
high as this roof."
"Don't you want our
rabbit?" Aron asked.
Abra looked at his sunny
hair, tight-curled now, and at
his eyes that seemed near to
tears, and she felt the longing
and the itching burn in her
chest that is the beginning of
love. Also, she wanted to
touch Aron, and she did. She
put her hand on his arm and
felt him shiver under her
fingers. "If you put it in a
box," she said.
Now that she had got
herself

in

charge,

Abra

looked around and inspected

her conquests. She was well

above vanity now that no

male principle threatened her.

She felt kindly toward these

boys. She noticed their thin

washed-out clothes patched

here and there by Lee. She

drew on her fairy tales. “You

poor children,” she said,

“does your father beat you?”

They shook their heads.

They were interested but

bewildered.

“Are you very poor?”

“How do you mean?”

Cal asked. “Do you sit in the

ashes and have to fetch water

and faggots?”

“What’s faggots?” Aron asked. She avoided that by continuing. “Poor darlings,” she began, and she seemed to herself to have a little wand in her hand tipped by a twinkling star. “Does your wicked stepmother hate you and want to kill you?”

“We don’t have a stepmother,” said Cal. “We don’t have any kind,” said Aron. “Our mother’s dead.” His words destroyed the story she was writing but almost immediately supplied her with another. The wand was gone but she wore a big hat with an ostrich plume and

she carried an enormous
basket from which a turkey's
feet protruded.
"Little
motherless
orphans," she said sweetly.
"I'll be your mother. I'll hold
you and rock you and tell you
stories."
"We're too big," said
Cal. "We'd overset you."
Abra looked away from
his brutality. Aron, she saw,
was caught up in her story.
His eyes were smiling and he
seemed almost to be rocking
in her arms, and she felt again
the tug of love for him. She
said pleasantly, "Tell me, did
your mother have a nice
funeral?"
"We don't remember,"

said Aron. “We were too
little.”
“Well, where is she
buried?
You
could
put
flowers on her grave. We
always do that for Grandma
and Uncle Albert.”
“We don’t know,” said
Aron.
Cal’s eyes had a new
interest, a gleaming interest
that was close to triumph. He
said naively, “I’ll ask our
father where it is so we can
take flowers.”
“I’ll go with you,” said
Abra. “I can make a wreath.
I’ll show you how.” She
noticed that Aron had not

spoken. “Don’t you want to
make a wreath?”
“Yes,” he said.
She had to touch him
again. She patted his shoulder
and then touched his cheek.
“Your mama will like that,”
she said. “Even in Heaven
they look down and notice.
My father says they do. He
knows a poem about it.”
Aron said, “I’ll go wrap
up the rabbit. I’ve got the box
my pants came in.” He ran
out of the old house. Cal
watched him go. He was
smiling.
“What are you laughing
at?” Abra asked.
“Oh, nothing,” he said.
Cal’s eyes stayed on her.
She tried to stare him

down. She was an expert at staring down, but Cal did not look away. At the very first he had felt a shyness, but that was gone now, and the sense of triumph at destroying Abra's control made him laugh. He knew she preferred his brother, but that was nothing new to him. Nearly everyone preferred Aron with his golden hair and the openness that allowed his affection to plunge like a puppy. Cal's emotions hid deep in him and peered out, ready to retreat or attack. He was starting to punish Abra for liking his brother, and this was nothing new either. He had done it since he first discovered he could. And

secret punishment had grown
to be almost a creative thing
with him.
Maybe the difference
between the two boys can
best be described in this way.
If Aron should come upon an
anthill in a little clearing in
the brush, he would lie on his
stomach
and
watch
the
complications of ant life—he
would see some of them
bringing food in the ant roads
and others carrying the white
eggs. He would see how two
members of the hill on
meeting put their antennas
together and talked. For hours
he would lie absorbed in the

economy of the ground.
If, on the other hand, Cal
came upon the same anthill,
he would kick it to pieces and
watch while the frantic ants
took care of their disaster.
Aron was content to be a part
of his world, but Cal must
change it.
Cal did not question the
fact that people liked his
brother better, but he had
developed
a
means
for
making it all right with
himself. He planned and
waited until one time that
admiring
person
exposed

himself, and then something happened and the victim never knew how or why. Out of revenge Cal extracted a fluid of power, and out of power, joy. It was the strongest, purest emotion he knew. Far from disliking Aron, he loved him because he was usually the cause for Cal's feelings of triumph. He had forgotten—if he had ever known—that he punished because he wished he could be loved as Aron was loved. It had gone so far that he preferred what he had to what Aron had.

Abra had started a

process in Cal by touching Aron and by the softness of her voice toward him. Cal's reaction was automatic. His brain probed for a weakness in Abra, and so clever was he that he found one almost at once in her words. Some children want to be babies and some want to be adults. Few are content with their age. Abra wanted to be an adult. She used adult words and simulated, insofar as she was able, adult attitudes and emotions.

She had left babyhood far behind, and she was not capable yet of being one of the grownups she

admired. Cal sensed this, and
it gave him the instrument to
knock down her anthill.
He knew about how long
it would take his brother to
find the box. He could see in
his mind what would happen.
Aron would try to wash the
blood off the rabbit, and this
would take time. Finding
string would take more time,
and the careful tying of the
bow knots still more time.
And meanwhile Cal knew he
was beginning to win. He felt
Abra's certainty wavering
and he knew that he could
prod it further.
Abra looked away from
him at last and said, "What do
you stare at a person for?"
Cal looked at her feet

and slowly raised his eyes,
going over her as coldly as if
she were a chair. This, he
knew, could make even an
adult nervous.
Abra couldn't stand it.
She said, "See anything
green?"
Cal asked, "Do you go
to school?"
"Of course I do."
"What grade?"
"High fifth."
"How old are you?"
"Going on eleven."
Cal laughed.
"What's
wrong
with
that?" she demanded. He
didn't answer her. "Come on,
tell me! What's wrong with

that?” Still no answer. “You think you’re mighty smart,” she said, and when he continued to laugh at her she said uneasily, “I wonder what’s taking your brother so long.

Look,

the

rain’s

stopped.”

Cal said, “I guess he’s looking around for it.”

“You mean, for the rabbit?”

“Oh, no. He’s got that all right—it’s dead. But maybe he can’t catch the other. It gets away.”

“Catch what? What gets away?”

“He wouldn’t want me

to tell," said Cal. "He wants it
to be a surprise. He caught it
last Friday. It bit him too."
"Whatever
are
you
talking about?"
"You'll see," said Cal,
"when you open the box. I bet
he tells you not to open it
right off." This was not a
guess. Cal knew his brother.
Abra knew she was
losing not only the battle but
the whole war. She began to
hate this boy. In her mind she
went over the deadly retorts
she knew and gave them all
up in helplessness, feeling
they would have no effect.
She retired into silence. She
walked out of the door and

looked toward the house
where her parents were.
“I think I’ll go back,”
she said.
“Wait,” said Cal.
She turned as he came
up with her. “What do you
want?” she asked coldly.
“Don’t be mad with
me,” he said. “You don’t
know what goes on here. You
should see my brother’s
back.”
His change of pace
bewildered her. He never let
her get set in an attitude, and
he had properly read her
interest
in
romantic
situations. His voice was low
and secret. She lowered her

voice to match his.

“What do you mean?

What’s

wrong

with

his

back?”

“All scars,” said Cal.

“It’s the Chinaman.”

She shivered and tensed

with interest. “What does he

do? Does he beat him?”

“Worse than that,” said

Cal.

“Why don’t you tell

your father?”

“We don’t dare. Do you

know what would happen if

we told?”

“No. What?”

He shook his head.

“No”—he seemed to think

carefully—“I don’t even dare
tell you.”
At that moment Lee
came from the shed leading
the Bacons’ horse hitched to
the high spindly rig with
rubber tires. Mr. and Mrs.
Bacon came out of the house
and automatically they all
looked up at the sky. Cal said,
“I can’t tell you now. The
Chinaman would know if I
told.”
Mrs.
Bacon
called,
“Abra! Hurry! We’re going.”
Lee held the restive horse
while Mrs. Bacon was helped
up into the rig.
Aron
came

dashing
around the house, carrying a
cardboard box intricately tied
with string in fancy bow
knots. He thrust it at Abra.
“Here,” he said. “Don’t untie
it until you get home.”
Cal saw revulsion on
Abra’s
face.
Her
hands
shrank away from the box.
“Take it, dear,” her
father said. “Hurry, we’re
very late.” He thrust the box
into her hands.
Cal stepped close to her.
“I want to whisper,” he said.
He put his mouth to her ear.
“You’ve wet your pants,” he
said. She blushed and pulled

the sunbonnet up over her
head. Mrs. Bacon picked her
up under the arms and passed
her into the buggy.
Lee and Adam and the
twins watched the horse pick
up a fine trot.
Before the first turn
Abra's hand came up and the
box went sailing backward
into the road. Cal watched his
brother's face and saw misery
come into Aron's eyes. When
Adam had gone back into the
house and Lee was moving
out with a pan of grain to feed
the chickens, Cal put his arm
around
his
brother's
shoulders and hugged him
reassuringly.

“I wanted to marry her,”
Aron said. “I put a letter in
the box, asking her.”
“Don’t be sad,” said Cal.
“I’m going to let you use my
rifle.”
Aron’s
head
jerked
around. “You haven’t got a
rifle.”
“Haven’t I?” Cal said.
“Haven’t I though?”

Chapter 28

1

It was at the supper table that
the boys discovered the
change in their father. They
knew him as a presence—as
ears that heard but did not
listen, eyes that looked and
did not notice. He was a

cloud of a father. The boys
had never learned to tell him
of
their
interests
and
discoveries, or of their needs.
Lee had been their contact
with the adult world, and Lee
had managed not only to
raise,
feed,
clothe,
and
discipline the boys, but he
had also given them a respect
for their father. He was a
mystery to the boys, and his
word, his law, was carried
down by Lee, who naturally
made it up himself and
ascribed it to Adam.

This night, the first after
Adam's return from Salinas,
Cal and Aron were first
astonished and then a little
embarrassed to find that
Adam listened to them and
asked questions, looked at
them and saw them. The
change made them timid.
Adam said, "I hear you
were hunting today."
The
boys
became
cautious as humans always
are, faced with a new
situation. After a pause Aron
admitted, "Yes, sir."
"Did you get anything?"
This time a longer pause,
and then, "Yes, sir."
"What did you get?"

“A rabbit.”

“With bows and arrows?

Who got him?”

Aron said, “We both

shot. We don’t know which

one hit.”

Adam said, “Don’t you

know your own arrows? We

used to mark our arrows

when I was a boy.”

This time Aron refused

to answer and get into

trouble.

And

Cal,

after

waiting, said, “Well, it was

my arrow, all right, but we

think it might have got in

Aron’s quiver.”

“What makes you think

that?”

“I don’t know,” Cal said.

“But I think it was Aron hit

the rabbit.”

Adam swung his eyes.

“And what do you think?”

“I think maybe I hit it—

but I’m not sure.”

“Well, you both seem to

handle the situation very

well.”

The alarm went out of

the faces of the boys. It did

not seem to be a trap.

“Where is the rabbit?”

Adam asked.

Cal said, “Aron gave it

to Abra as a present.”

“She threw it out,” said

Aron.

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I wanted

to marry her too.”

“You did?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How about you, Cal?”

“I guess I’ll let Aron

have her,” said Cal.

Adam laughed, and the

boys could not recall ever

having heard him laugh. “Is

she a nice little girl?” he

asked.

“Oh, yes,” said Aron.

“She’s nice, all right. She’s

good and nice.”

“Well, I’m glad of that if

she’s

going

to

be

my

daughter-in-law.”

Lee cleared the table and

after a quick rattling in the

kitchen

he

came

back.

“Ready to go to bed?” he

asked the boys.

They glared in protest.

Adam said, “Sit down and let

them stay a while.”

“I’ve got the accounts

together. We can go over

them later,” said Lee.

“What accounts, Lee?”

“The house and ranch

accounts.

You

said

you

wanted to know where you

stood.”

“Not the accounts for

over ten years, Lee!”

“You never wanted to be
bothered before.”
“I guess that’s right. But
sit a while. Aron wants to
marry the little girl who was
here today.”
“Are they engaged?”
Lee asked.
“I don’t think she’s
accepted
him
yet,”
said
Adam. “That may give us
some time.”
Cal had quickly lost his
awe of the changed feeling in
the house and had been
examining this anthill with
calculating eyes, trying to
determine just how to kick it
over. He made his decision.

“She’s a real nice girl,”
he said. “I like her. Know
why? Well, she said to ask
you where our mother’s grave
is, so we can take some
flowers.”
“Could
we,
Father?”
Aron asked. “She said she
would teach us how to make
wreaths.”
Adam’s mind raced. He
was not good at lying to
begin with, and he hadn’t
practiced.
The
solution
frightened him, it came so
quickly to his mind and so
glibly to his tongue. Adam
said, “I wish we could do

that, boys. But I'll have to tell
you. Your mother's grave is
clear across the country
where she came from."
"Why?" Aron asked.
"Well,
some
people
want to be buried in the place
they came from."
"How
did
she
get
there?" Cal asked. "We put
her on a train and sent her
home—didn't we, Lee?"
Lee nodded. "It's the
same with us," he said.
"Nearly all Chinese get sent
home to China after they
die."

“I know that,” said
Aron. “You told us that
before.”
“Did I?” Lee asked.
“Sure you did,” said Cal.
He was vaguely disappointed.
Adam quickly changed
the subject. “Mr. Bacon made
a suggestion this afternoon,”
he began. “I’d like you boys
to think about it. He said it
might be better for you if we
moved
to
Salinas—better
schools and lots of other
children to play with.”
The thought stunned the
twins. Cal asked, “How about
here?”
“Well, we’d keep the
ranch in case we want to

come back.”

Aron said, “Abra lives in

Salinas.”

And

that

was

enough for Aron. Already he

had forgotten the sailing box.

All he could think of was a

small apron and a sunbonnet

and soft little fingers.

Adam said, “Well, you

think about it. Maybe you

should go to bed now. Why

didn’t you go to school

today?”

“The teacher’s sick,”

said Aron.

Lee verified it. “Miss

Gulp has been sick for three

days,” he said. “They don’t

have

to

go

back

until

Monday. Come on, boys.”

They

followed

him

obediently from the room.

2

Adam sat smiling vaguely at

the lamp and tapping his knee

with a forefinger until Lee

came back. Adam said, “Do

they know anything?”

“I don’t know,” said

Lee.

“Well, maybe it was just

the little girl.”

Lee went to the kitchen

and brought back a big

cardboard box. “Here are the

accounts. Every year has a
rubber band around it. I've
been over it. It's complete."
"You
mean
all
accounts?"
Lee said, "You'll find a
book for each year and
receipted bills for everything.
You wanted to know how you
stood. Here it is—all of it. Do
you
really
think
you'll
move?"
"Well, I'm thinking of
it."
"I wish there were some
way you could tell the boys
the truth."

“That would rob them of
the good thoughts about their
mother, Lee.”
“Have you thought of
the other danger?”
“What do you mean?”
“Well, suppose they find
out the truth. Plenty of people
know.”
“Well,
maybe
when
they’re older it will be easier
for them.”
“I don’t believe that,”
said Lee. “But that’s not the
worst danger.”
“I guess I don’t follow
you, Lee.”
“It’s the lie I’m thinking
of. It might infect everything.
If they ever found out you’d

lied to them about this, the
true things would suffer.
They
wouldn't
believe
anything then."
"Yes, I see. But what
can I tell them? I couldn't tell
them the whole truth."
"Maybe you can tell
then a part truth, enough so
that you won't suffer if they
find out."
"I'll have to think about
that, Lee."
"If you go to live in
Salinas it will be more
dangerous."
"I'll have to think about
it."
Lee went on insistently,
"My father told me about my

mother when I was very little, and he didn't spare me. He told me a number of times as I was growing. Of course it wasn't the same, but it was pretty dreadful. I'm glad he told me though. I wouldn't like not to know."

"Do you want to tell me?"

"No, I don't want to. But it might persuade you to make some change for your own boys. Maybe if you just said she went away and you don't know where."

"But I do know."

"Yes, there's the trouble. It's bound to be all truth or part lie. Well, I can't force you."

"I'll think about it," said

Adam. “What’s the story
about your mother?”
“You really want to
hear?”
“Only if you want to tell
me.”
“I’ll make it very short,”
said Lee. “My first memory is
of living in a little dark shack
alone with my father in the
middle of a potato field, and
with it the memory of my
father telling me the story of
my mother. His language was
Cantonese, but whenever he
told the story he spoke in
high and beautiful Mandarin.
All right then. I’ll tell you—”
And Lee looked back in time.
“I’ll have to tell you first
that when you built the
railroads in the West the

terrible work of grading and
laying ties and spiking the
rails was done by many
thousands of Chinese. They
were cheap, they worked
hard, and if they died no one
had to worry. They were
recruited
largely
from
Canton, for the Cantonese are
short and strong and durable,
and
also
they
are
not
quarrelsome.
They
were
brought in by contract, and
perhaps the history of my

father was a fairly typical
one.
“You must know that a
Chinese must pay all of his
debts on or before our New
Year’s day. He starts every
year clean. If he does not, he
loses face; but not only that—
his family loses face. There
are no excuses.”
“That’s not a bad idea,”
said Adam.
“Well, good or bad,
that’s the way it was. My
father had some bad luck. He
could not pay a debt. The
family met and discussed the
situation.
Ours
is
an
honorable family. The bad

luck was nobody's fault, but the unpaid debt belonged to the whole family. They paid my father's debt and then he had to repay them, and that was almost impossible.

"One thing the recruiting agents for the railroad companies did—they paid down a lump of money on the signing of the contract. In this way they caught a great many men who had fallen into debt. All of this was reasonable and honorable. There was only one black sorrow.

"My father was a young man recently married, and his tie to his wife was very strong

and deep and warm, and hers
to him must have been—
overwhelming. Nevertheless,
with good manners they said
good-by in the presence of
the heads of the family. I
have
often
thought
that
perhaps formal good manners
may be a cushion against
heartbreak.
“The herds of men went
like animals into the black
hold of a ship, there to stay
until
they
reached
San
Francisco six weeks later.
And you can imagine what

those holes were like. The
merchandise
had
to
be
delivered in some kind of
working condition so it was
not mistreated. And my
people have learned through
the
ages
to
live
close
together, to keep clean and
fed
under
intolerable
conditions.
“They were a week at
sea
before

my
father
discovered my mother. She
was dressed like a man and
she had braided her hair in a
man’s queue. By sitting very
still and not talking, she had
not been discovered, and of
course
there
were
no
examinations or vaccinations
then. She moved her mat
close to my father. They
could not talk except mouth
to ear in the dark. My father
was
angry
at
her
disobedience, but he was glad

too.

“Well, there it was. They were condemned to hard labor for five years. It did not occur to them to run away once they were in America, for they were honorable people and they had signed the contract.”

Lee paused. “I thought I could tell it in a few sentences,” he said. “But you don’t know the background. I’m going to get a cup of water—do you want some?”

“Yes,” said Adam. “But there’s one thing I don’t understand. How could a woman do that kind of work?”

“I’ll be back in a moment,” said Lee, and he

went to the kitchen. He
brought back tin cups of
water and put them on the
table. He. asked, “Now what
did you want to know?”
“How could your mother
do a man’s work?”
Lee smiled. “My father
said she was a strong woman,
and I believe a strong woman
may be stronger than a man,
particularly if she happens to
have love in her heart. I guess
a loving woman is almost
indestructible.”
Adam made a wry
grimace.
Lee said, “You’ll see
one day, you’ll see.”
“I didn’t mean to think
badly,” said Adam. “How
could I know out of one

experience? Go on."

"One thing my mother did not whisper in my father's ear during that long miserable crossing. And because a great many were deadly seasick, no remark was made of her illness."

Adam cried, "She wasn't pregnant!"

"She was pregnant," said Lee. "And she didn't want to burden my father with more worries."

"Did she know about it when she started?"

"No, she did not. I set my presence in the world at the most inconvenient time. It's a longer story than I thought."

"Well, you can't stop

now," said Adam.

"No, I suppose not. In San Francisco the flood of muscle and bone flowed into cattle cars and the engines puffed up the mountains. They were going to dig hills aside in the Sierras and burrow tunnels under the peaks. My mother got herded into another car, and my father didn't see her until they got to their camp on a high mountain meadow. It was very beautiful, with green grass and flowers and the snow mountains all around. And only then did she tell my father about me.

"They went to work. A woman's muscles harden just as a man's do, and my mother

had a muscular spirit too. She did the pick and shovel work expected of her, and it must have been dreadful. But a panic worry settled on them about how she was going to have the baby."

Adam said, "Were they ignorant? Why couldn't she have gone to the boss and told him she was a woman and pregnant? Surely they would have taken care of her."

"You see?" said Lee. "I haven't told you enough. And that's why this is so long. They were not ignorant. These human cattle were imported for one thing only—to work. When the work was done, those who were not

dead were to be shipped back.
Only males were brought—
no females. The country did
not want them breeding. A
man and a woman and a baby
have a way of digging in, of
pulling the earth where they
are about them and scratching
out a home. And then it takes
all hell to root them out. But a
crowd of men, nervous,
lusting, restless, half sick
with loneliness for women—
why, they'll go anywhere,
and particularly will they go
home. And my mother was
the only woman in this pack
of
half-crazy,
half-savage
men. The longer the men
worked and ate, the more

restless they became. To the
bosses they were not people
but animals which could be
dangerous if not controlled.
You can see why my mother
did not ask for help. Why,
they'd have rushed her out of
the camp and—who knows?
—perhaps shot and buried her
like a diseased cow. Fifteen
men were shot for being a
little mutinous.
"No—they kept order
the way our poor species has
ever learned to keep order.
We think there must be better
ways but we never learn them
—always the whip, the rope,
and the rifle. I wish I hadn't
started to tell you this—"
"Why should you not
tell me?" Adam asked.

“I can see my father’s
face when he told me. An old
misery comes back, raw and
full of pain. Telling it, my
father had to stop and gain
possession of himself, and
when he continued he spoke
sternly and he used hard
sharp words almost as though
he wanted to cut himself with
them.
“These two managed to
stay
close
together
by
claiming she was my father’s
nephew. The months went by
and fortunately for them there
was very little abdominal
swelling, and she worked in
pain and out of it. My father

could only help her a little,
apologizing, ‘My nephew is
young and his bones are
brittle.’ They had no plan.
They did not know what to
do.
“And then my father
figured out a plan. They
would run into the high
mountains to one of the
higher meadows, and there
beside a lake they would
make a burrow for the
birthing,
and
when
my
mother was safe and the baby
born, my father would come
back and take his punishment.
And he would sign for an
extra five years to pay for his

delinquent nephew. Pitiful as their escape was, it was all they had, and it seemed a brightness. The plan had two requirements—the timing had to be right and a supply of food was necessary."

Lee said, "My parents"—and he stopped, smiling over his use of the word, and it felt so good that he warmed it up—"my dear parents began to make their preparations. They saved a part of their daily rice and hid it under their sleeping mats. My father found a length of string and filed out a hook from a piece of wire, for there were trout to be caught in the

mountain lakes. He stopped
smoking to save the matches
issued.
And
my
mother
collected every tattered scrap
of cloth she could find and
unraveled edges to make
thread and sewed this ragbag
together with a splinter to
make swaddling clothes for
me. I wish I had known her."
"So do I," said Adam.
"Did you ever tell this to Sam
Hamilton?"
"No Ididn't. I wish I
had. He loved a celebration of
the human soul. Such things
were like a personal triumph
to him."
"I hope they got there,"

said Adam.

“I know. And when my
father would tell me I would
say to him, ‘Get to that lake
—get my mother there—
don’t let it happen again, not
this time. Just once let’s tell
it: how you got to the lake
and built a house of fir
boughs.’ And my father
became very Chinese then.
He said, There’s more beauty
in the truth even if it is
dreadful
beauty.
The
storytellers at the city gate
twist life so that it looks
sweet to the lazy and the
stupid and the weak, and this
only
strengthens

their
infirmities
and
teaches
nothing, cures nothing, nor
does it let the heart soar.' "
"Get on with it," Adam
said irritably.
Lee got up and went to
the window, and he finished
the story, looking out at the
stars that winked and blew in
the March wind.
"A little boulder jumped
down a hill and broke my
father's leg. They set the leg
and gave him cripples' work,
straightening used nails with
a hammer on a rock. And
whether with worry or work
—it
doesn't

matter—my

mother went into early labor.

And then the half-mad men

knew and they went all mad.

One

hunger

sharpened

another hunger, and one

crime blotted out the one

before it, and the little crimes

committed

against

those

starving men flared into one

gigantic maniac crime.

“My father heard the

shout ‘Woman’ and he knew.

He tried to run and his leg

rebroke under him and he

crawled up the ragged slope

to the roadbed where it was

happening.

“When he got there a
kind of sorrow had come over
the sky, and the Canton men
were creeping away to hide
and to forget that men can be
like this. My father came to
her on the pile of shale. She
had not even eyes to see out
of, but her mouth still moved
and
she
gave
him
his
instructions.
My
father
clawed me out of the tattered
meat of my mother with his
fingernails. She died on the
shale in the afternoon.”
Adam was breathing

hard. Lee continued in a singsong cadence, “Before you hate those men you must know this. My father always told it at the last: No child ever had such care as I. The whole camp became my mother. It is a beauty—a dreadful kind of beauty. And now good night. I can’t talk any more.”

3

Adam restlessly opened drawers and looked up at the shelves and raised the lids of boxes in his house and at last he was forced to call Lee back and ask, “Where’s the ink and the pen?”

“You don’t have any,”

said
Lee.
“You
haven’t
written a word in years. I’ll
lend you mine if you want.”
He went to his room and
brought back a squat bottle of
ink and a stub pen and a pad
of paper and an envelope and
laid them on the table.
Adam asked, “How do
you know I want to write a
letter?”
“You’re going to try to
write to your brother, aren’t
you?”
“That’s right.”
“It will be a hard thing
to do after so long,” said Lee.
And it was hard. Adam
nibbled and munched on the

pen and his mouth made
strained grimaces. Sentences
were written and the page
thrown away and another
started. Adam scratched his
head with the penholder.
“Lee, if I wanted to take a trip
east, would you stay with the
twins until I get back?”
“It’s easier to go than to
write,” said Lee. “Sure I’ll
stay.”
“No.
I’m
going
to
write.”
“Why don’t you ask
your brother to come out
here?”
“Say, that’s a good idea,
Lee. I didn’t think of it.”

“It also gives you a
reason for writing, and that’s
a good thing.”
The letter came fairly
easily then, was corrected and
copied fair. Adam read it
slowly to himself before he
put it in the envelope.
“Dear brother Charles,”
it said. “You will be surprised
to hear from me after so long.
I have thought of writing
many times, but you know
how a man puts it off.
“I wonder how this letter
finds you. I trust in good
health. For all I know you
may have five or even ten
children by now. Ha! Ha! I
have two sons and they are
twins. Their mother is not
here. Country life did not

agree with her. She lives in a town nearby and I see her now and then.

“I have got a fine ranch, but I am ashamed to say I do not keep it up very well. Maybe I will do better from now on. I always did make good resolutions. But for a number of years I felt poorly. I am well now.

“How are you and how do you prosper? I would like to see you. Why don’t you come to visit here? It is a great country and you might even find a place where you would like to settle. No cold winters here. That makes a difference to ‘old men’ like us. Ha! Ha!

“Well, Charles, I hope

you will think about it and let
me know. The trip would do
you good. I want to see you. I
have much to tell you that I
can't write down.
"Well, Charles, write me
a letter and tell me all the
news of the old home. I
suppose many things have
happened. As you get older
you hear mostly about people
you knew that died. I guess
that is the way of the world.
Write quick and tell me if you
will come to visit. Your
brother Adam."
He sat holding the letter
in his hand and looking over
it at his brother's dark face
and its scarred forehead.
Adam could see the glinting
heat in the brown eyes, and as

he looked he saw the lips
writhe back from the teeth
and the blind destructive
animal take charge. He shook
his head to rid his memory of
the vision, and he tried to
rebuild the face smiling. He
tried
to
remember
the
forehead before the scar, but
he could not bring either into
focus. He seized the pen and
wrote below his signature,
“P.S. Charles, I never hated
you no matter what. I always
loved you because you were
my brother.”
Adam folded the letter
and forced the creases sharp
with his fingernails. He

sealed the envelope flap with his fist. “Lee!” he called, “Oh, Lee!”

The Chinese looked in through the door.

“Lee, how long does it take a letter to go east—clear east?”

“I don’t know,” said Lee. “Two weeks maybe.”

Chapter 29

1

After his first letter to his brother in over ten years was mailed Adam became impatient for an answer. He forgot how much time had elapsed. Before the letter got as far as San Francisco he was asking aloud in Lee’s

hearing, “I wonder why he doesn’t answer. Maybe he’s mad at me for not writing. But he didn’t write either. No —he didn’t know where to write. Maybe he’s moved away.”

Lee answered, “It’s only been gone a few days. Give it time.”

“I wonder whether he would really come out here?” Adam asked himself, and he wondered whether he wanted Charles. Now that the letter was gone, Adam was afraid Charles might accept. He was like a restless child whose fingers stray to every loose article. He interfered with the twins,

asked

them

innumerable questions about

school.

“Well, what did you

learn today?”

“Nothing!”

“Oh, come! You must

have learned something. Did

you read?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What did you read?”

“That old one about the

grasshopper and the ant.”

“Well,

that’s

interesting.”

“There’s one about an

eagle carries a baby away.”

“Yes, I remember that

one. I forget what happens.”

“We aren’t to it yet. We

saw the pictures.”

The
boys
were
disgusted. During one of
Adam's moments of fatherly
bungling Cal borrowed his
pocketknife, hoping he would
forget to ask for it back. But
the sap was beginning to run
freely in the willows. The
bark would slip easily from a
twig. Adam got his knife
back to teach the boys to
make willow whistles, a thing
Lee had taught them three
years before. To make it
worse, Adam had forgotten
how to make the cut. He
couldn't get a peep out of his
whistles.
At noon one day Will
Hamilton came roaring and

bumping up the road in a new
Ford. The engine raced in its
low gear, and the high top
swayed like a storm-driven
ship. The brass radiator and
the Prestolite tank on the
running board were blinding
with brass polish.
Will pulled up the brake
lever, turned the switch
straight down, and sat back in
the leather seat. The car
backfired
several
times
without ignition because it
was overheated.
“Here she is!” Will
called
with
a
false

enthusiasm. He hated Fords
with a deadly hatred, but they
were
daily
building
his
fortune.
Adam and Lee hung
over the exposed insides of
the car while Will Hamilton,
puffing under the burden of
his new fat, explained the
workings of a mechanism he
did not understand himself.
It is hard now to imagine
the difficulty of learning to
start, drive, and maintain an
automobile. Not only was the
whole process complicated,
but one had to start from
scratch.
Today’s

children
breathe in the theory, habits,
and idiosyncrasies of the
internal combustion engine in
their cradles, but then you
started with the blank belief
that it would not run at all,
and sometimes you were
right. Also, to start the engine
of a modern car you do just
two things, turn a key and
touch the starter. Everything
else is automatic. The process
used to be more complicated.
It required not only a good
memory, a strong arm, an
angelic temper, and a blind
hope, but also a certain
amount of practice of magic,
so that a man about to turn
the crank of a Model T might
be seen to spit on the ground

and whisper a spell.
Will Hamilton explained
the car and went back and
explained
it
again.
His
customers were wide-eyed,
interested
as
terriers,
cooperative, and did not
interrupt, but as he began for
the third time Will saw that
he was getting no place.
“Tell you what!” he said
brightly. “You see, this isn’t
my line. I wanted you to see
her. and listen to her before I
made delivery. Now, I’ll go
back to town and tomorrow
I’ll send out this car with an

expert, and he'll tell you more in a few minutes than I could in a week. But I just wanted you to see her."

Will had forgotten some of his own instructions. He cranked for a while and then borrowed a buggy and a horse from Adam and drove to town, but he promised to have a mechanic out the next day.

2

There was no question of sending the twins to school the next day. They wouldn't have gone. The Ford stood tall and aloof and dour under the oak tree where Will had stopped it. Its new owners circled it and touched it now and then, the way you touch a

dangerous horse to soothe
him.
Lee said, “I wonder
whether I’ll ever get used to
it.”
“Of course you will,”
Adam
said
without
conviction. “Why, you’ll be
driving all over the county
first thing you know.”
“I will try to understand
it,” Lee said. “But drive it I
will not.”
The boys made little
dives in and out, to touch
something and leap away.
“What’s
this
do-hickey,
Father?”

“Get your hands off
that.”
“But what’s it for?”
“I don’t know, but don’t
touch it. You don’t know
what might happen.”
“Didn’t the man tell
you?”
“I don’t remember what
he said. Now you boys get
away from it or I’ll have to
send you to school. Do you
hear me, Cal? Don’t open
that.”
They had got up and
were ready very early in the
morning. By eleven o’clock
hysterical nervousness had set
in. The mechanic drove up in
the buggy in time for the
midday meal. He wore box-toed shoes and Duchess
trousers and his wide square

coat came almost to his knees. Beside him in the buggy was a satchel in which were his working clothes and tools. He was nineteen and chewed tobacco, and from his three months in automobile school he had gained a great though weary contempt for human beings. He spat and threw the lines at Lee.

“Put this hayburner away,” he said, “How do you tell which end is the front?” And he climbed down from the rig as an ambassador comes out of a state train. He sneered at the twins and turned coldly to Adam, “I hope I’m in time for dinner,”

he said.

Lee and Adam stared at

each

other.

They

had

forgotten about the noonday

meal.

In the house the godling

grudgingly accepted cheese

and bread and cold meat and

pie and coffee and a piece of

chocolate cake.

“I’m used to a hot

dinner,” he said. “You better

keep those kids away if you

want any car left.” After a

leisurely meal and a short rest

on the porch the mechanic

took his satchel into Adam’s

bedroom. In a few minutes he

emerged, dressed in striped

overalls and a white cap
which had “Ford” printed on
the front of its crown.
“Well,” he said. “Done
any studying?”
“Studying?” Adam said.
“Ain’t you even read the
litature in the book under the
seat?”
“I didn’t know it was
there,” said Adam.
“Oh, Lord,” said the
young man disgustedly. With
a courageous gathering of his
moral forces he moved with
decision toward the car.
“Might as well get started,”
he said. “God knows how
long it’s going to take if you
ain’t studied.”
Adam
said,

“Mr.
Hamilton couldn’t start it last
night.”
“He always tries to start
it on the magneto,” said the
sage. “All right! All right,
come
along.
Know
the
principles
of
a
internal
combustion engine?”
“No,” said Adam.
“Oh, Jesus Christ!” He
lifted the tin flaps. “This-here
is a internal combustion
engine,” he said.
Lee said quietly, “So
young to be so erudite.”

The boy swung around
toward him, scowling. “What
did you say?” he demanded,
and he asked Adam, “What
did the Chink say?”
Lee spread his hands and
smiled blandly. “Say velly
smaht fella,” he observed
quietly. “Mebbe go college.
Velly wise.”
“Just call me Joe!” the
boy said for no reason at all,
and he added, “College! What
do them fellas know? Can
they set a timer, huh? Can
they file a point? College!”
And
he
spat
a
brown
disparaging comment on the

ground. The twins regarded
him with admiration, and Cal
collected spit on the back of
his tongue to practice.
Adam said, “Lee was
admiring your grasp of the
subject.”
The truculence went out
of the boy and a magnanimity
took its place. “Just call me
Joe,” he said. “I *ought* to
know it. Went to automobile
school in Chicago. That’s a
real school—not like no
college.” And he said, “My
old man says you take a good
Chink, I mean a good one—
why, he’s about as good as
anybody. They’re honest.”
“But not the bad ones,”
said Lee.
“Hell

no!

Not

no

highbinders nor nothing like

that. But good Chinks."

"I hope I may be

included in that group?"

"You look like a good

Chink to me. Just call me

Joe."

Adam was puzzled at the

conversation, but the twins

weren't.

Cal

said

experimentally to Aron, "Jus'

call me Joe," and Aron

moved his lips, trying out,

"Jus' call me Joe."

The mechanic became

professional again but his

tone was kinder. An amused

friendliness took the place of
his former contempt. “This-here,” he said, “is a internal
combustion engine.” They
looked down at the ugly lump
of iron with a certain awe.
Now the boy went on so
rapidly that the words ran
together into a great song of
the
new
era.
“Operates
through the explosion of
gases in a enclosed space.
Power of explosion is exerted
on
piston
and
through
connecting rod and crankshaft
through transmission thence
to rear wheels. Got that?”

They nodded blankly, afraid
to stop the flow. “They’s two
kinds, two cycle and four
cycle. This-here is four cycle.
Got that?”
Again they nodded. The
twins, looking up into his
face with adoration, nodded.
“That’s interesting,” said
Adam.
Joe went on hurriedly,
“Main difference of a Ford
automobile from other kinds
is its planetary transmission
which operates on a rev-reva-lu-shun-ary principle.” He
pulled up for a moment, his
face showing strain. And
when
his
four
listeners
nodded again he cautioned

them, “Don’t get the idea you
know it all. The planetary
system is, don’t forget, rev-a-lu-shun-ary. You better study
up on it in the book. Now, if
you got all that we’ll go on to
Operation
of
the
Automobile.” He said this in
boldface type, capital letters.
He was obviously glad to be
done with the first part of his
lecture, but he was no gladder
than his listeners. The strain
of
concentration
was
beginning to tell on them, and
it was not made any better by
the fact that they had not
understood one single word.
“Come around here,”

said the boy. “Now you see that-there? That’s the ignition key. When you turn that-there you’re ready to go ahead. Now, you push this do-hickey to the left. That puts her on battery—see, where it says Bat. That means battery.”

They craned their necks into the car. The twins were standing on the running board.

“No—wait. I got ahead of myself. First you got to retard the spark and advance the gas, else she’ll kick your goddam arm off. This-here—see it?—this-here’s the spark. You push it up—get it?— *up*. Clear up. And this-here’s the gas—you push her down. Now I’m going to explain it

and then I’m going to do it. I
want you to pay attention.
You kids get off the car.
You’re in my light. Get
down, goddam it.” The boys
reluctantly
climbed
down
from the running board; only
their eyes looked over the
door.
He took a deep breath.
“Now you ready? Spark
retarded, gas advanced. Spark
up, gas down. Now switch to
battery—left,
remember—
left.” A buzzing like that of a
gigantic bee sounded. “Hear
that? That’s the contact in one
of the coil boxes. If you don’t
get that, you got to adjust the

points or maybe file them.”

He

noticed

a

look

of

consternation

on

Adam’s

face. “You can study up on

that in the book,” he said

kindly.

He moved to the front of

the car. “Now this-here is the

crank and—see this little wire

sticking out of the radiator?—

that’s the choke. Now watch

careful while I show you.

You grab the crank like this

and push till she catches. See

how my thumb is turned

down? If I grabbed her the

other way with my thumb
around her, and she was to
kick, why, she'd knock my
thumb off. Got it?"
He didn't look up but he
knew they were nodding.
"Now," he said, "look
careful. I push in and bring
her
up
until
I
got
compression, and then, why, I
pull out this wire and I bring
her around careful to suck gas
in. Hear that sucking sound?
That's choke. But don't pull
her too much or you'll flood
her. Now, I let go the wire
and I give her a hell of spin,
and as soon as she catches I

run around and advance the
spark and retard the gas and I
reach over and throw the
switch quick over to magneto
—see where it says Mag?—
and there you are.”
His listeners were limp.
After all this they had just got
the engine started.
The boy kept at them. “I
want you to say after me now
so you learn it. Spark up—
gas down.”
They repeated in chorus,
“Spark up—gas down.”
“Switch to Bat.”
“Switch to Bat.”
“Crank to compression,
thumb down.”
“Crank to compression,
thumb down.”
“Easy over—choke out.”

“Easy over—choke out.”

“Spin her.”

“Spin her.”

“Spark down—gas up.”

“Spark down—gas up.”

“Switch to Mag.”

“Switch to Mag.”

“Now, we’ll go over her

again. Just call me Joe.”

“Just call you Joe.”

“Not that. Spark up—

gas down.”

A kind of weariness

settled on Adam as they went

over the litany for the fourth

time. The process seemed

silly to him. He was relieved

when a short time later Will

Hamilton drove up in his low

sporty red car. The boy

looked at the approaching

vehicle.

“That-there’s
got
sixteen valves,” he said in a
reverent tone. “Special job.”
Will leaned out of his
car. “How’s it going?” he
asked.
“Just fine,” said the
mechanic. “They catch on
quick.”
“Look, Roy, I’ve got to
take you in. The new hearse
knocked out a bearing. You’ll
have to work late to get it
ready for Mrs. Hawks at
eleven tomorrow.”
Roy snapped to efficient
attention. “I’ll get my clos’,”
he said and ran for the house.
As he tore back with his
satchel Cal stood in his way.
“Hey,” Cal said, “I

thought your name was Joe.”

“How do you mean,

Joe?”

“You told us to call you

Joe.

Mr.

Hamilton

says

you’re Roy.”

Roy laughed and jumped

into the roadster. “Know why

I say call me Joe?”

“No. Why?”

“Because my name is

Roy.” In the midst of his

laughter he stopped and said

sternly to Adam, “You get

that book under the seat and

you study up. Hear me?”

“I will,” said Adam.

Chapter 30

1

Even as in Biblical times,
there were miracles on the
earth in those days. One week
after the lesson a Ford
bumped up the main street of
King City and pulled to a
shuddering stop in front of
the post office. Adam sat at
the wheel with Lee beside
him and the two boys straight
and grand in the back seat.
Adam looked down at
the floorboards, and all four
chanted in unison, “Brake on
—advance gas—switch off.”
The little engine roared and
then stopped. Adam sat back
for a moment, limp but proud,
before he got out.
The postmaster looked
out between the bars of his
golden grill. “I see you’ve got

one of the damn things," he
said.
"Have to keep up with
the times," said Adam.
"I predict there'll come a
time when you can't find a
horse, Mr. Trask."
"Maybe so."
"They'll change the face
of the countryside. They get
their clatter into everything,"
the postmaster went on. "We
even feel it here. Man used to
come for his mail once a
week. Now he comes every
day, sometimes twice a day.
He just can't wait for his
damn
catalogue.
Running
around.
Always

running
around.” He was so violent in
his dislike that Adam knew
he hadn’t bought a Ford yet.
It was a kind of jealousy
coming out. “I wouldn’t have
one around,” the postmaster
said, and this meant that his
wife was at him to buy one. It
was the women who put the
pressure on. Social status was
involved.
The postmaster angrily
shuffled through the letters
from the T box and tossed out
a long envelope. “Well, I’ll
see you in the hospital,” he
said viciously.
Adam smiled at him and
took his letter and walked
out.
A man who gets few

letters does not open one

lightly. He hefts it for weight,

reads the name of the sender

on the envelope and the
address,
looks
at
the
handwriting, and studies the
postmark and the date. Adam
was out of the post office and
across the sidewalk to his
Ford before he had done all
of these things. The left-hand
corner of the envelope had
printed on it, Bellows and
Harvey, Attorneys at Law,
and their address was the
town in Connecticut from
which Adam had come.
He said in a pleasant
tone, “Why, I know Bellows
and Harvey, know them well.
I wonder what they want?”

He looked closely at the envelope. “I wonder how they got my address?” He turned the envelope over and looked at the back. Lee watched him, smiling.

“Maybe the questions are answered in the letter.”

“I guess so,” Adam said.

Once having decided to open the letter, he took out his pocketknife, opened the big blade, and inspected the envelope for a point of ingress, found none, held the letter up to the sun to make sure not to cut the message, tapped the letter to one end of the envelope, and cut off the other end. He blew in the end

and extracted the letter with two fingers. He read the letter very slowly.

“Mr. Adam Trask, King City, California, Dear Sir,” it began testily, “For the last six months we have exhausted every means of locating you. We have advertised in newspapers all over the country without success. It was only when your letter to your brother was turned over to us by the local postmaster that we were able to ascertain your whereabouts.” Adam could feel their impatience with him. The next paragraph began a complete change of

mood. “It is our sad duty to inform you that your brother Charles Trask is deceased. He died of a lung ailment October 12 after an illness of two weeks, and his body rests in the Odd Fellows cemetery. No stone marks his grave. We presume you will want to undertake this sorrowful duty yourself.”

Adam drew a deep full breath and held it while he read the paragraph again. He breathed out slowly to keep the release from being a sigh.

“My brother Charles is dead,” he said.

“I’m sorry,” said Lee.

Cal said, “Is he our uncle?”

“He was your Uncle

Charles," said Adam.

"Mine too?" Aron asked.

"Yours too."

"I didn't know we had him," Aron said. "Maybe we can put some flowers on his grave. Abra would help us. She likes to."

"It's a long way off—clear across the country."

Aron said excitedly, "I know! When we take flowers to our mother we'll take some to our Uncle Charles." And he said a little sadly, "I wish't I knew I had him before he was dead." He felt that he was growing rich in dead relatives. "Was he nice?" Aron asked.

"Very nice," said Adam.

"He was my only brother, just

like Cal is your only brother."

"Were you twins too?"

"No—not twins."

Cal asked, "Was he

rich?"

"Of course not," said

Adam. "Where'd you get that

idea?"

"Well, if he was rich

we'd get it, wouldn't we?"

Adam said sternly, "At a

time of death it isn't a nice

thing to talk about money.

We're sad because he died."

"How can I be sad?"

said Cal. "I never even saw

him."

Lee covered his mouth

with his hand to conceal his

smile. Adam looked back at

the letter, and again it

changed

mood
with
its
paragraph.
“As attorneys for the
deceased it is our pleasant
duty to inform you that your
brother through industry and
judgment
amassed
a
considerable fortune, which
in land, securities, and cash is
well in excess of one hundred
thousand dollars. His will,
which was drawn and signed
in this office, is in our hands
and will be sent to you on
your request. By its terms it
leaves all money, property,
and securities to be divided
equally between you and your

wife. In the event that your wife is deceased, the total goes to you. The will also stipulates that if you are deceased, all property goes to your wife. We judge from your letter that you are still in the land of the living and we wish to offer our congratulations.

Your obedient servants, Bellows and Harvey, by George B. Harvey." And at the bottom of the page was scrawled, "Dear Adam: Forget not thy servants in the days of thy prosperity.

Charles

never
spent a dime. He pinched a
dollar
until
the
eagle
screamed. I hope you and
your wife will get some
pleasure from the money. Is
there an opening out there for
a good lawyer? I mean
myself. Your old friend, Geo.
Harvey.”
Adam looked over the
edge of the letter at the boys
and at Lee. All three were
waiting for him to continue.
Adam’s mouth shut to a line.
He folded the letter, put it in
its envelope, and placed the
envelope carefully in his
inside pocket.

“Any
complications?”
Lee asked.
“No.”
“I just thought you
looked concerned.”
“I’m not. I’m sad about
my brother.” Adam was
trying to arrange the letter’s
information in his mind, and
it was as restless as a setting
hen scrounging into the nest.
He felt that he would have to
be alone to absorb it. He
climbed into the car and
looked
blankly
at
the
mechanism.
He
couldn’t

remember a single procedure.
Lee asked, “Want some
help?”
“Funny!” said Adam. “I
can’t remember where to
start.”
Lee and the boys began
softly, “Spark up—gas down,
switch over to Bat.”
“Oh, yes. Of course, of
course.” And while the loud
bee hummed in the coil box
Adam cranked the Ford and
ran to advance the spark and
throw the switch to Mag.
They
were
driving
slowly up the lumpy road of
the home draw under the oak
trees when Lee said, “We
forgot to get meat.”

“Did we? I guess we did.

Well,

can’t

we

have

something else?”

“How about bacon and

eggs?”

“That’s

fine.

That’s

good.”

“You’ll want to mail

your answer tomorrow,” said

Lee. “You can buy meat

then.”

“I guess so,” said Adam.

While

dinner

was

preparing Adam sat staring

into space. He knew he would

have to have help from Lee, if only the help of a listener to clear his own thinking.

Cal had led his brother outside and conducted him to the wagon shed where the tall Ford rested. Cal opened the door and sat behind the wheel. “Come on, get in!” he said.

Aron protested, “Father told us to stay out of it.”

“He won’t ever know. Get in!”

Aron climbed in timidly and eased back in the seat. Cal turned the wheel from side to side. “Honk, honk,” he said, and then, “Know what I think? I think Uncle Charles was rich.”

“He was not.”

“I bet you anything he

was.”

“You think our father’d

tell a lie.”

“I won’t say that. I just

bet he was rich.” They were

silent for a while. Cal steered

wildly

around

imaginary

curves. He said, “I bet you I

can find out.”

“How do you mean?”

“What you got to bet?”

“Nothing,” said Aron.

“How about your deer’s-leg whistle? I bet you this-here taw against that deer’s-leg whistle that we get sent to

bed right after supper. Is it a

bet?”

“I guess so,” Aron said

vaguely. “I don’t see why.”

Cal said, “Father will

want to talk to Lee. And I'm
going to listen."
"You won't dare."
"You think I won't."
" 'Spose I was to tell."
Cal's eyes turned cold
and his face darkened. He
leaned so close that his voice
dropped to a whisper. "You
won't tell. Because if you do
—I'll tell who stole his
knife."
"Nobody stole his knife.
He's got his knife. He opened
the letter with it."
Cal smiled bleakly. "I
mean tomorrow," he said.
And Aron saw what he meant
and he knew he couldn't tell.
He couldn't do anything
about it. Cal was perfectly
safe.

Cal saw the confusion and helplessness on Aron's face and felt his power, and it made him glad. He could outthink and outplan his brother. He was beginning to think he could do the same thing to his father. With Lee, Cal's tricks did not work, for Lee's bland mind moved effortlessly ahead of him and was always there waiting, understanding, and at the last moment cautioning quietly, "Don't do it." Cal had respect for Lee and a little fear of him. But Aron here, looking helplessly at him, was a lump of soft mud in his hands. Cal suddenly felt a deep love for his brother and an impulse to protect him in his weakness.

He put his arm around Aron.
Aron did not flinch or
respond. He drew back a little
to see Cal's face.
Cal said, "See any green
grass growing out of my
head?"
Aron said, "I don't know
why you go for to do it."
"How do you mean? Do
what?"
"All the tricky, sneaky
things," said Aron.
"What do you mean,
sneaky?"
"Well, about the rabbit,
and sneaking here in the car.
And you did something to
Abra. I don't know what, but
it was you made her throw
the box away."
"Ho,"

said

Cal.

“Wouldn’t you like to know!”

But he was uneasy.

Aron said slowly. “I

wouldn’t want to know that.

I’d like to know *why* you do

it.

You’re

always

at

something. I just wonder why

you do it. I wonder what’s it

good for.”

A pain pierced Cal’s

heart. His planning suddenly

seemed mean and dirty to

him. He knew that his brother

had found him out. And he

felt a longing for Aron to love

him. He felt lost and hungry

and he didn’t know what to

do.

Aron opened the door of the Ford and climbed down and walked out of the wagon shed. For a few moments Cal twisted the steering wheel and tried to imagine he was racing down the road. But it wasn't any good, and soon he followed Aron back toward the house.

2

When supper was finished and Lee had washed the dishes Adam said, "I think you boys had better go to bed. It's been a big day."

Aron looked quickly at Cal and slowly took his deer's-leg whistle out of his pocket.

Cal said, "I don't want

it.”

Aron said, “It’s yours

now.”

“Well, I don’t want it. I

won’t have it.”

Aron laid the bone

whistle on the table. “It’ll be

here for you,” he said.

Adam broke in, “Say,

what is this argument? I said

you boys should go to bed.”

Cal put on his “little

boy” face. “Why?” he asked.

“It’s too early to go to bed.”

Adam said, “That wasn’t

quite the truth I told you. I

want to talk privately to Lee.

And it’s getting dark so you

can’t go outside, so I want

you boys to go to bed—at

least to your room. Do you

understand?”

Both boys said, “Yes,
sir,” and they followed Lee
down the hall to their
bedroom at the back of the
house. In their nightgowns
they returned to say good
night to their father.
Lee came back to the
living room and closed the
door to the hall. He picked up
the deer’s-leg whistle and
inspected it and laid it down.
“I wonder what went on
there,” he said.
“How do you mean,
Lee?”
“Well, some bet was
made before supper, and just
after supper Aron lost the bet
and paid off. What were we
talking about?”
“All I can remember is

telling them to go to bed."

"Well, maybe it will

come out later," said Lee.

"Seems to me you put

too much stock in the affairs

of children. It probably didn't

mean anything."

"Yes,

it

meant

something." Then he said,

"Mr. Trask, do you think the

thoughts of people suddenly

become important at a given

age? Do you have sharper

feelings or clearer thoughts

now than when you were ten?

Do you see as well, hear as

well, taste as vitally?"

"Maybe you're right,"

said Adam.

"It's one of the great

fallacies, it seems to me,”
said Lee, “that time gives
much of anything but years
and sadness to a man.”
“And memory.”
“Yes, memory. Without
that, time would be unarmed
against us. What did you
want to talk to me about?”
Adam took the letter
from his pocket and put it on
the table. “I want you to read
this, to read it carefully, and
then—I want to talk about it.”
Lee took out his half-glasses
and put them on. He opened
the letter under the lamp and
read it.
Adam asked, “Well?”
“Is there an opening
here for a lawyer?”
“How do you mean? Oh,

I see. Are you making a

joke?”

“No, said Lee, “I was

not making a joke. In my

obscure

but

courteous

Oriental

manner

I

was

indicating to you that I would

prefer to know your opinion

before I offered mine.”

“Are

you

speaking

sharply to me?”

“Yes, I am,” said Lee.

“I’ll lay aside my Oriental

manner. I’m getting old and

cantankerous. I am growing

impatient. Haven’t you heard
of all Chinese servants that
when they get old they
remain loyal but they turn
mean?”
“I don’t want to hurt
your feelings.”
“They aren’t hurt. You
want to talk about this letter.
Then talk, and I will know
from your talk whether I can
offer an honest opinion or
whether it is better to reassure
you in your own.”
“I don’t understand it,”
said Adam helplessly.
“Well, you knew your
brother.
If
you
don’t
understand it, how can I, who

never saw him?”

Adam got up and opened the hall door and did not see the shadow that slipped behind it. He went to his room and returned and put a faded brown daguerreotype on the table in front of Lee.

“That is my brother Charles,” he said, and he went back to the hall door and closed it.

Lee studied the shiny metal under the lamp, shifting the picture this way and that to overcome the highlights.

“It’s a long time ago,” Adam said. “Before I went into the army.”

Lee leaned close to the picture. “It’s hard to make out. But from his expression I wouldn’t say your brother

had much humor.”

“He hadn’t any,” said

Adam. “He never laughed.”

“Well,

that

wasn’t

exactly what I meant. When I

read the terms of your

brother’s will it struck me

that he might have been a

man with a particularly brutal

sense of play. Did he like

you?”

“I don’t know,” said

Adam. “Sometimes I thought

he loved me. He tried to kill

me once.”

Lee said, “Yes, that’s in

his face—both the love and

the murder. And the two

made a miser of him, and a

miser is a frightened man

hiding in a fortress of money.

Did he know your wife?”

“Yes.”

“Did he love her?”

“He hated her.”

Lee sighed. “It doesn’t

really matter. That’s not your

problem, is it?”

“No. It isn’t.”

“Would you like to bring

the problem out and look at

it?”

“That’s what I want.”

“Go ahead then.”

“I can’t seem to get my

mind to work clearly.”

“Would you like me to

lay out the cards for you? The

uninvolved can sometimes do

that.”

“That’s what I want.”

“Very

well
then.”
Suddenly Lee grunted and a look of astonishment came over his face. He held his round chin in his thin small hand. “Holy horns!” he said. “I didn’t think of that.”
Adam stirred uneasily.
“I wish you’d get off the tack you’re sitting on,” he said irritably. “You make me feel like a column of figures on a blackboard.”
Lee took a pipe from his pocket, a long slender ebony stem with a little cuplike brass bowl. He filled the thimble bowl with tobacco so fine-cut it looked like hair, then lighted the pipe, took four long puffs, and let the

pipe go out.

“Is that opium?” Adam

demanded.

“No,” said Lee. “It’s a

cheap brand of Chinese

tobacco, and it has an

unpleasant taste.”

“Why do you smoke it

then?”

“I don’t know,” said

Lee. “I guess it reminds me of

something—something

I

associate with clarity. Not

very

complicated.”

Lee’s

eyelids half closed. “All right

then—I’m going to try to pull

out your thoughts like egg

noodles and let them dry in

the sun. The woman is still

your wife and she is still alive. Under the letter of the will she inherits something over fifty thousand dollars. That is a great deal of money. A sizable chunk of good or of evil could be done with it. Would your brother, if he knew where she is and what she is doing, want her to have the money? Courts always try to follow the wishes of the testator."

"My brother would not want that," said Adam. And then he remembered the girls upstairs in the tavern and Charles' periodic visits.

"Maybe you'll have to think for your brother," said Lee. "What your wife is doing is neither good nor bad.

Saints can spring from any
soil. Maybe with this money
she would do some “fine
thing. There’s no springboard
to philanthropy like a bad
conscience.”
Adam shivered. “She
told me what she would do if
she had money. It was closer
to murder than to charity.”
“You don’t think she
should
have
the
money
then?”
“She said she would
destroy many reputable men
in Salinas. She can do it too.”
“I see,” said Lee. “I’m
glad I can take a detached
view of this. The pants of

their reputations must have some thin places. Morally, then, you would be against giving her the money?"

"Yes."

"Well, consider this. She has no name, no background. A whore springs full blown from the earth. She couldn't very well claim the money, if she knew about it, without your help."

"I guess that's so. Yes, I can see that she might not be able to claim it without my help."

Lee took up the pipe and picked out the ash with a little brass pin and filled the bowl again. While he drew in the four slow puffs his heavy lids raised and he watched Adam.

“It’s a very delicate
moral problem,” he said.
“With your permission I shall
offer it for the consideration
of my honorable relatives—
using no names of course.
They will go over it as a boy
goes over a dog for ticks. I’m
sure they will get some
interesting results.” He laid
his pipe on the table. “But
you don’t have any choice, do
you?”
“What do you mean by
that?”
Adam
demanded.
“Well, do you? Do you know
yourself so much less than I
do?”
“I don’t know what to
do,” said Adam. “I’ll have to

give it a lot of thought.”

Lee said angrily, “I

guess I’ve been wasting my

time. Are you lying to

yourself or only to me?”

“Don’t speak to me like

that!” Adam said.

“Why

not?

I

have

always disliked deception.

Your course is drawn. What

you will do is written—

written

in

every

breath

you’ve ever taken. I’ll speak

any way I want to. I’m

crotchety. I feel sand under

my

skin.

I’m.

looking

forward to the ugly smell of

old books and the sweet smell

of good thinking. Faced with

two sets of morals, you’ll

follow your training. What

you call thinking won’t

change it. The fact that your

wife is a whore in Salinas

won’t change a thing.”

Adam got to his feet. His

face was angry. “You are

insolent now that you’ve

decided to go away,” he

cried. “I tell you I haven’t

made up my mind what to do

about the money.”

Lee sighed deeply. He

pushed his small body erect

with his hands against his

knees. He walked wearily to the front door and opened it. He turned back and smiled at Adam. “Bull shit!” he said amiably, and he went out and closed the door behind him.

3

Cal crept quietly down the dark hall and edged into the room where he and his brother slept. He saw the outline of his brother’s head against the pillow in the double bed, but he could not see whether Aron slept. Very gently he eased himself in on his side and turned slowly and laced his fingers behind his head and stared at the myriads of tiny colored dots that make up darkness. The window shade bellied slowly

in and then the night wind fell
and the worn shade flapped
quietly against the window.
A
gray,
quilted
melancholy descended on
him. He wished with all his
heart that Aron had not
walked away from him out of
the wagon shed. He wished
with all his heart that he had
not crouched listening at the
hall door. He moved his lips
in the darkness and made the
words silently in his head and
yet he could hear them.
“Dear Lord,” he said,
“let me be like Aron. Don’t
make me mean. I don’t want
to be. If you will let
everybody like me, why, I’ll

give you anything in the world, and if I haven't got it, why, I'll go for to get it. I don't want to be mean. I don't want to be lonely. For Jesus' sake, Amen." Slow warm tears were running down his cheeks. His muscles were tight and he fought against making any crying sound or sniffle.

Aron whispered from his pillow in the dark, "You're cold. You've got a chill." He stretched out his hand to Cal's arm and felt the goose bumps there. He asked softly, "Did Uncle Charles have any money?"

"No," said Cal.

"Well, you were out there long enough. What did

Father want to talk about?”

Cal lay still, trying to

control his breathing.

“Don’t you want to tell

me?” Aron asked. “I don’t

care if you don’t tell me.”

“I’ll

tell,”

Cal

whispered. He turned on his

side so that his back was

toward his brother. “Father is

going to send a wreath to our

mother. A great big goddam

wreath of carnations.”

Aron half sat up in bed

and asked excitedly, “He is?

How’s he going to get it clear

there?”

“On the train. Don’t talk

so loud.”

Aron dropped back to a

whisper. “But how’s it going to keep fresh?”

“With ice,” said Cal.

“They’re going to pack ice all around it.”

Aron asked, “Won’t it take a lot of ice?”

“A whole hell of a lot of ice,” said Cal. “Go to sleep now.”

Aron was silent, and then he said, “I hope it gets there fresh and nice.”

“It will,” said Cal. And in his mind he cried, “Don’t let me be mean.”

Chapter 31

1

Adam brooded around the house all morning, and at noon he went to find Lee, who was spading the dark

composted
earth
of
his
vegetable garden and planting
his spring vegetables, carrots
and beets, turnips, peas, and
string beans, rutabaga and
kale. The rows were straight
planted
under
a
tight-stretched string, and the pegs
at the row ends carried the
seed package to identify the
row. On the edge of the
garden in a cold frame the
tomato and bell pepper and
cabbage sets were nearly
ready
for
transplanting,

waiting only for the passing
of the frost danger.
Adam said, “I guess I
was stupid.”
Lee
leaned
on
his
spading fork and regarded
him quietly.
“When are you going?”
he asked.
“I thought I would catch
the two-forty. Then I can get
the eight o’clock back.”
“You could put it in a
letter, you know,” said Lee.
“I’ve thought of that.
Would you write a letter?”
“No. You’re right. I’m
the stupid one there. No
letters.”

“I have to go,” said
Adam. “I thought in all
directions and always a leash
snapped me back.”
Lee said, “You can be
unhonest in many ways, but
not in that way. Well, good
luck. I’ll be interested to hear
what she says and does.”
“I’ll take the rig,” said
Adam. “I’ll leave it at the
stable in King City. I’m
nervous about driving the
Ford alone.”
It was four-fifteen when
Adam climbed the rickety
steps and knocked on the
weather-beaten
door
of
Kate’s place. A new man
opened the door, a square-faced Finn, dressed in shirt

and

trousers;

red

silk

armbands held up his full

sleeves.

He

left

Adam

standing on the porch and in a

moment came back and led

him to the dining room.

It

was

a

large

undecorated room, the walls

and woodwork painted white.

A long square table filled the

center of the room, and on the

white oilcloth cover the

places were set—plates, cups

and saucers, and the cups
upside down in the saucers.
Kate sat at the head of
the table with an account
book open before her. Her
dress was severe. She wore a
green eyeshade, and she
rolled
a
yellow
pencil
restlessly in her fingers. She
looked coldly at Adam as he
stood in the doorway.
“What do you want
now?” she asked.
The Finn stood behind
Adam.
Adam did not reply. He
walked to the table and laid
the letter in front of her on
top of the account book.

“What’s
this?”
she
asked, and without waiting
for a reply she read the letter
quickly. “Go out and close
the door,” she told the Finn.
Adam sat at the table
beside her. He pushed the
dishes aside to make a place
for his hat.
When the door was
closed Kate said, “Is this a
joke? No, you haven’t got a
joke in you.” She considered.
“Your brother might be
joking. You sure he’s dead?”
“All I have is the letter,”
said Adam.
“What do you want me
to do about it?”
Adam

shrugged
his
shoulders.
Kate said, “If you want
me to sign anything, you’re
wasting your time. What do
you want?”
Adam drew his finger
slowly around his black
ribbon hatband. “Why don’t
you write down the name of
the firm and get in touch with
them yourself?”
“What have you told
them about me?”
“Nothing,” said Adam.
“I wrote to Charles and said
you were living in another
town, nothing more. He was
dead when the letter got
there. The letter went to the
lawyers. It tells about it.”

“The one who wrote the
postscript seems to be a
friend of yours. What have
you written him?”
“I haven’t answered the
letter yet.”
“What do you intend to
say when you answer it?”
“The same thing—that
you live in another town.”
“You can’t say we’ve
been divorced. We haven’t
been.”
“I don’t intend to.”
“Do you want to know
how much it will take to buy
me off? I’ll take forty-five
thousand in cash.”
“No.”
“What do you mean—
no? You can’t bargain.”
“I’m

not

bargaining.

You have the letter, you

know as much as I do. Do

what you want."

"What makes you so

cocky?"

"I feel safe."

She peered at him from

under the green transparent

eyeshade. Little curls of her

hair lay on the bill like vines

on a green roof. "Adam,

you're a fool. If you had kept

your mouth shut nobody

would ever have known I was

alive."

"I know that."

"You know it? Did you

think I might be afraid to

claim the money? You're a

damn fool if you thought

that.”

Adam said patiently, “I

don’t care what you do.”

She smiled cynically at

him.

“You

don’t,

huh?

Suppose I should tell you that

there’s a permanent order in

the sheriffs office, left there

by the old sheriff, that if I

ever use your name or admit

I’m your wife I’ll get a floater

out of the county and out of

the state. Does that tempt

you?”

“Tempt me to do what?”

“To get me floated and

take all the money.”

“I brought you the

letter,” Adam said patiently.

“I want to know why.”
Adam said, “I’m not
interested in what you think
or in what you think of me.
Charles left you the money in
his will. He didn’t put any
strings on it. I haven’t seen
the will, but he wanted you to
have the money.”
“You’re playing a close
game with fifty thousand
dollars,”
she
said,
“and
you’re not going to get away
with it. I don’t know what the
trick is, but I’m going to find
out.” And then she said,
“What am I thinking about?
You’re not smart. Who’s
advising you?”

“No one.”

“How

about

that

Chinaman? He’s smart.”

“He gave me no advice.”

Adam was interested in his

own

complete

lack

of

emotion. He didn’t really feel

that he was here at all. When

he glanced at her he surprised

an emotion on her face he had

never seen before. Kate was

afraid—she was afraid of

him. But why?

She controlled her face

and whipped the fear from it.

“You’re just doing it because

you’re honest, is that it?

You’re just too sugar sweet to live.”

“I hadn’t thought of it,” Adam said. “It’s your money and I’m not a thief. It doesn’t matter to me what you think about it.”

Kate pushed the eyeshade back on her head. “You want me to think you’re just dropping this money in my lap. Well, I’ll find out what you’re up to. Don’t think I won’t take care of myself. Did you think I’d take such a stupid bait?”

“Where do you get your mail?” he asked patiently.

“What’s that to you?”

“I’ll write the lawyers

where to get in touch with you."

"Don't you do it!" she said. She put the letter in the account book and closed the cover. "I'll keep this. I'll get legal advice. Don't think I won't. You can drop the innocence now."

"You do that," Adam said. "I want you to have what is yours. Charles willed you the money. It isn't mine."

"I'll find the trick. I'll find it."

Adam said, "I guess you can't understand it. I don't much care. There are so many things I don't understand. I don't understand how you could shoot me and desert your sons. I don't understand

how you or anyone could live
like this.” He waved his hand
to indicate the house.
“Who asked you to
understand?”
Adam stood up and took
his hat from the table. “I
guess that’s all,” he said.
“Good-by.”
He
walked
toward the door.
She called after him,
“You’re changed, Mr. Mouse.
Have you got a woman at
last?” Adam stopped and
slowly turned and his eyes
were thoughtful. “I hadn’t
considered before,” he said,
and he moved toward her
until he towered over her and
she had to tilt back her head

to look into his face. “I said I
didn’t understand about you,”
he said slowly. “Just now it
came to me what you don’t
understand.”
“What
don’t
I
understand, Mr. Mouse?”
“You know about the
ugliness in people. You
showed me the pictures. You
use all the sad, weak parts of
a man, and God knows he has
them.”
“Everybody—”
Adam
went
on,
astonished
at
his

own
thoughts,
“But
you—yes,
that’s right—you don’t know
about the rest. You don’t
believe I brought you the
letter because I don’t want
your money. You don’t
believe I loved you. And the
men who come to you here
with their ugliness, the men
in the pictures—you don’t
believe those men could have
goodness and beauty in them.
You see only one side, and
you think—more than that,
you’re sure—that’s all there
is.”
She cackled at him
derisively. “In sticks and
stones. What a sweet dreamer

is Mr. Mouse! Give me a sermon, Mr. Mouse."

"No. I won't because I seem to know that there's a part of you missing. Some men can't see the color green, but they may never know they can't. I think you are only a part of a human. I can't do anything about that. But I wonder whether you ever feel that something invisible is all around you. It would be horrible if you knew it was there and couldn't see it or feel it. That would be horrible."

Kate pushed back her chair and stood up. Her fists were clenched at her sides and hiding in the folds of her skirt. She tried to prevent the

shrillness that crept into her voice.

"Our Mouse is a philosopher," she said. "But our Mouse is no better at that than he is at other things. Did you ever hear of hallucinations? If there are things I can't see, don't you think it's possible that they are dreams manufactured in your own sick mind?"

"No, I don't," said Adam. "No, I don't. And I don't think you do either." He turned and went out and

closed the door behind him.

Kate sat down and stared

at the closed door. She was

not aware that her fists beat

softly on the White oilcloth.

But she did know that the

square

white

door

was

distorted by tears and that her

body shook with something

that felt like rage and also felt

like sorrow.

2

When Adam left Kate’s place

he had over two hours to wait

for the train back to King

City. On an impulse he turned

off Main Street and walked

up Central Avenue to number

130, the high white house of

Ernest Steinbeck. It was an
immaculate
and
friendly
house, grand enough but not
pretentious, and it sat inside
its white fence, surrounded by
its clipped lawn, and roses
and
catoneasters
lapped
against its white walls.
Adam walked up the
wide veranda steps and rang
the bell. Olive came to the
door and opened it a little,
while Mary and John peeked
around the edges of her.
Adam took off his hat.
“You don’t know me. I’m
Adam Trask. Your father was
a friend of mine. I thought I’d

like to pay my respects to
Mrs. Hamilton. She helped
me with the twins."
"Why, of course," Olive
said and swung the wide
doors open. "We've heard
about you. Just a moment.
You see, we've made a kind
of retreat for Mother."
She knocked on a door
off the wide front hall and
called, "Mother! There's a
friend to see you."
She opened the door and
showed
Adam
into
the
pleasant room where Liza
lived. "You'll have to excuse
me," she said to Adam.
"Catrina's frying chicken and

I have to watch her. John!

Mary! Come along. Come

along.”

Liza

seemed

smaller

than ever. She sat in a wicker

rocking chair and she was old

and old. Her dress was a full

wide-skirted black alpaca,

and at her throat she wore a

pin which spelled “Mother”

in golden script.

The pleasant little bed-sitting room was crowded

with photographs, bottles of

toilet water, lace pincushions,

brushes and combs, and the

china and silver bureau-knacks of many birthdays and

Christmases.

On the wall hung a huge

tinted photograph of Samuel,

which had captured a cold

and aloof dignity, a scrubbed
and
dressed
remoteness,
which did not belong to him
living. There was no twinkle
in the picture of him, nor any
of his inspective joyousness.
The picture hung in a heavy
gold frame, and to the
consternation of all children
its eyes followed a child
about the room.
On a wicker table beside
Liza was the cage of Polly
parrot. Tom had bought the
parrot from a sailor. He was
an old bird, reputed to be fifty
years old, and he had lived a
ribald life and acquired the
vigorous speech of a ship's
fo'c'sle. Try as she would,

Liza could not make him substitute psalms for the picturesque vocabulary of his youth.

Polly cocked his head sideways, inspecting Adam, and scratched the feathers at the base of his beak with a careful foreclaw. “Come off it, you bastard,” said Polly unemotionally.

Liza frowned at him.

“Polly,” she said sternly, “that’s not polite.”

“Bloody bastard!” Polly observed.

Liza ignored the vulgarity. She held out her tiny hand. “Mr. Trask,” she said, “I’m glad to see you. Sit

down, won't you?"

"I was passing by, and I

wanted

to

offer

my

condolences."

"We got your flowers."

And she remembered, too,

every bouquet after all this

time. Adam had sent a fine

pillow of everlastings.

"It must be hard to

rearrange your life."

Liza's eyes brimmed

over and she snapped her

little mouth shut on her

weakness.

Adam said, "Maybe I

shouldn't bring up your hurt,

but I miss him."

Liza turned her head

away. “How is everything down your way?” she asked.

“Good this year. Lots of rainfall. The feed’s deep already.”

“Tom wrote me,” she said.

“Button up,” said the parrot, and Liza scowled at him as she had at her growing children when they were mutinous.

“What brings you up to Salinas, Mr. Trask?” she asked.

“Why, some business.” He sat down in a wicker chair and it cricked under his weight. “I’m thinking of moving up here. Thought it might be better for my boys. They get lonely on the

ranch.”

“We never got lonely on

the ranch,” she said harshly.

“I thought maybe the

schools would be better here.

My twins could have the

advantages.”

“My

daughter

Olive

taught

at

Peachtree

and

Pleyto and the Big Sur.” Her

tone made it clear that there

were no better schools than

those. Adam began to feel a

warm admiration for her iron

gallantry.

“Well,

I

was
just
thinking about it," he said.
"Children raised in the
country do better." It was the
law, and she could prove it by
her own boys. Then she
centered closely on him. "Are
you looking for a house in
Salinas?"
"Well, yes, I guess I
am."
"Go see my daughter
Dessie," she said. "Dessie
wants to move back to the
ranch with Tom. She's got a
nice little house up the street
next to Reynaud's Bakery."
"I'll certainly do that,"
said Adam. "I'll go now. I'm
glad to see you doing so
well."

“Thank you,” she said.

“I’m comfortable.” Adam was moving toward the door when she said, “Mr. Trask, do you ever see my son Tom?”

“Well, no, I don’t. You see, I haven’t been off the ranch.”

“I wish you would go and see him,” she said quickly. “I think he’s lonely.” She stopped as though horrified at this breaking over.

“I will. I surely will. Good-by, ma’am.”

As he closed the door he heard the parrot say, “Button up, you bloody bastard!” And

Liza, “Polly, if you don’t watch your language, I’ll thrash you.”

Adam let himself out of the house and walked up the evening street toward Main. Next to Reynaud’s French Bakery he saw Dessie’s house set back in its little garden. The yard was so massed with tall privets that he couldn’t see much of the house. A neatly painted sign was screwed to the front gate. It read: Dessie Hamilton, Dressmaker.

The San Francisco Chop House was on the corner of Main and Central and its windows were on

both
streets. Adam went in to get
some dinner. Will Hamilton
sat at the corner table,
devouring a rib steak. “Come
and sit with me,” he called to
Adam. “Up on business?”
“Yes,” said Adam. “I
went to pay a call on your
mother.”
Will laid down his fork.
“I’m just up here for an hour.
I didn’t go to see her because
it gets her excited. And my
sister Olive would tear the
house down getting a special
dinner for me. I just didn’t
want
to
disturb
them.
Besides, I have to go right

back. Order a rib steak.

They've got good ones. How

is Mother?"

"She's

got

great

courage," said Adam. "I find

I admire her more all the

time."

"That she has. How she

kept her good sense with all

of us and with my father, I

don't know."

"Rib steak, medium,"

said Adam to the waiter.

"Potatoes?"

"No—yes, french fried.

Your mother is worried about

Tom. Is he all right?"

Will cut off the edging

of fat from his steak and

pushed it to the side of his

plate. “She’s got reason to
worry,”
he
said.
“Something’s the matter with
Tom. He’s moping around
like a monument.”
“I guess he depended on
Samuel.”
“Too much,” said Will.
“Far too much. He can’t seem
to come out of it. In some
ways Tom is a great big
baby.”
“I’ll go and see him.
Your mother says Dessie is
going to move back to the
ranch.”
Will laid his knife and
fork down on the tablecloth
and stared at Adam. “She
can’t do it,” he said. “I won’t

let her do it."

"Why not?"

Will covered up. "Well,"

he said, "she's got a nice

business here. Makes a good

living. It would be a shame to

throw it away." He picked up

his knife and fork, cut off a

piece of the fat, and put it in

his mouth.

"I'm catching the eight

o'clock home," Adam said.

"So am I," said Will. He

didn't want to talk any more.

Chapter 32

1

Dessie was the beloved of the

family. Mollie the pretty

kitten, Olive the strong-headed, Una with clouds on

her head, all were loved, but

Dessie

was

the
warm-beloved. Hers was the twinkle
and the laughter infectious as
chickenpox, and hers the
gaiety that colored a day and
spread to people so that they
carried it away with them.
I can put it this way.
Mrs. Clarence Morrison of
122 Church Street, Salinas,
had three children and a
husband who ran a dry goods
store. On certain mornings, at
breakfast, Agnes Morrison
would say, “I’m going to
Dessie Hamilton’s for a
fitting after dinner.”
The children would be
glad and would kick their
copper toes against the table
legs until cautioned. And Mr.
Morrison would rub his

palms together and go to his
store, hoping some drummer
would come by that day. And
any drummer who did come
by was likely to get a good
order. Maybe the children and
Mr. Morrison would forget
why it was a good day with a
promise on its tail.
Mrs. Morrison would go
to
the
house
next
to
Reynaud’s Bakery at two
o’clock and she would stay
until four. When she came
out her eyes would be wet
with tears and her nose red
and
streaming.

Walking
home, she would dab her
nose and wipe her eyes and
laugh all over again. Maybe
all Dessie had done was to
put several black pins in a
cushion to make it look like
the Baptist minister, and then
had the pincushion deliver a
short dry sermon. Maybe she
had recounted a meeting with
Old Man Taylor, who bought
old houses and moved them
to a big vacant lot he owned
until he had so many it
looked
like
a
dry-land
Sargasso Sea. Maybe she had
read a poem from *Chatterbox*
with

gestures.

It

didn’t

matter. It was warm-funny, it

was catching funny.

The Morrison children,

coming home from school,

would find no aches, no

carping, no headache. Their

noise was not a scandal nor

their dirty faces a care. And

when the giggles overcame

them, why, their mother was

giggling too.

Mr. Morrison, coming

home, would tell of the day

and get listened to, and he

would try to retell the

drummer’s stories—some of

them at least. The supper

would be delicious—omelets

never fell and cakes rose to

balloons of lightness, biscuits fluffed up, and no one could season a stew like Agnes Morrison. After supper, when the children had laughed themselves to sleep, like as not Mr. Morrison would touch Agnes on the shoulder in their old, old signal and they would go to bed and make love and be very happy. The visit to Dessie might carry its charge into two days more before it petered out and the little headaches came back and business was not so good as last year. That's how Dessie was and that's what she could do. She carried excitement in her arms just as Samuel had. She was the darling, she was the beloved

of the family.

Dessie was not beautiful. Perhaps she wasn't even pretty, but she had the glow that makes men follow a woman in the hope of reflecting a little of it. You would have thought that in time she would have got over her first love affair and found another love, but she did not. Come to think of it, none of the Hamiltons, with all their versatility, had any versatility in love. None of them seemed capable of light or changeable love.

Dessie did not simply throw up her hands and give up. It was much worse than that. She went right on doing and being what she was—

without the glow. The people who loved her ached for her, seeing her try, and they got to trying for her.

Dessie's friends were good and loyal but they were human, and humans love to feel good and they hate to feel bad. In time the Mrs. Morrisons found unassailable reasons for not going to the little house by the bakery. They weren't disloyal. They didn't want to be sad as much as they wanted to be happy. It is easy to find a logical and virtuous reason for not doing what you don't want to do.

Dessie's business began to fall off. And the women who had thought they wanted dresses never realized that

what they had wanted was
happiness.
Times
were
changing and the ready-made
dress was becoming popular.
It was no longer a disgrace to
wear one. If Mr. Morrison
was stocking ready-mades, it
was only reasonable that
Agnes Morrison should be
seen in them.
The family was worried
about Dessie, but what could
you do when she would not
admit there was anything
wrong with her? She did
admit to pains in her side,
quite fierce, but they lasted
only a little while and came
only at intervals.
Then Samuel died and

the world shattered like a
dish. His sons and daughters
and friends groped about
among the pieces, trying to
put some kind of world
together again.
Dessie decided to sell
her business and go back to
the ranch to live with Tom.
She hadn't much of any
business to sell out. Liza
knew about it, and Olive, and
Dessie had written to Tom.
But Will, sitting scowling at
the table in the San Francisco
Chop House, had not been
told. Will frothed inwardly
and finally he balled up his
napkin and got up. "I forgot
something," he said to Adam.
"I'll see you on the train."
He walked the half-block to Dessie's house and

went through the high grown
garden and rang Dessie's bell.
She was having her
dinner alone, and she came to
the door with her napkin in
her hand. "Why, hello, Will,"
she said and put up her pink
cheek for him to kiss. "When
did you get in town?"
"Business,"
he
said.
"Just here between trains. I
want to talk to you."
She led him back to her
kitchen
and
dining-room
combined, a warm little room
papered
with
flowers.

Automatically she poured a
cup of coffee and placed it for
him and put the sugar bowl
and the cream pitcher in front
of it.
“Have
you
seen
Mother?” she asked.
“I’m just here over
trains,”
he
said
gruffly.
“Dessie, is it true you want to
go back to the ranch?”
“I was thinking of it.”
“I don’t want you to go.”
She smiled uncertainly.
“Why not? What’s wrong
with that? Tom’s lonely down
there.”

“You’ve got a nice
business here,” he said.
“I haven’t any business
here,” she replied. “I thought
you knew that.”
“I don’t want you to go,”
he repeated sullenly.
Her smile was wistful
and she tried her best to put a
little mockery in her manner.
“My big brother is masterful.
Tell Dessie why not.”
“It’s too lonely down
there.”
“It won’t be as lonely
with the two of us.”
Will pulled at his lips
angrily. He blurted, “Tom’s
not himself. You shouldn’t be
alone with him.”
“Isn’t he well? Does he
need help?”

Will said, “I didn’t want
to tell you—I don’t think
Tom’s ever got over—the
death. He’s strange.”
She
smiled
affectionately. “Will, you’ve
always
thought
he
was
strange. You thought he was
strange when he didn’t like
business.”
“That was different. But
now he’s broody. He doesn’t
talk. He goes walking alone
in the hills at night. I went out
to see him and—he’s been
writing poetry—pages of it
all over the table.”
“Didn’t you ever write

poetry, Will?”

“I did not.”

“I have,” said Dessie.

“Pages and pages of it all

over the table.”

“I don’t want you to go.”

“Let me decide,” she

said

softly.

“I’ve

lost

something. I want to try to

find it again.”

“You’re talking foolish.”

She came around the

table and put her arms around

his neck. “Dear brother,” she

said, “please let me decide.”

He went angrily out of

the house and barely caught

his train.

Tom met Dessie at the King City station. She saw him out of the train window, scanning every coach for her. He was burnished, his face shaved so close that its darkness had a shine like polished wood. His red mustache was clipped. He wore a new Stetson hat with a flat crown, a tan Norfolk jacket with a belt buckle of mother-of-pearl. His shoes glinted in the noonday light so that it was sure he had gone over them with his handkerchief just before the train arrived. His hard collar stood up against his strong red neck, and he wore a pale blue knitted tie with a horseshoe tie pin. He tried to conceal his excitement by

clasping his rough brown hands in front of him.

Dessie waved wildly out the window, crying, “Here I am, Tom, here I am!” though she knew he couldn’t hear her over the grinding wheels of the train as the coach slid past him. She climbed down the steps and saw him looking frantically about in the wrong direction. She smiled and walked up behind him.

“I beg your pardon, stranger,” she said quietly. “Is there a Mister Tom Hamilton here?”

He spun around and he squealed with pleasure and picked her up in a bear hug and danced around her. He held her off the ground with

one arm and spanked her
bottom with his free hand. He
nuzzled her cheek with his
harsh mustache. Then he held
her back by the shoulders and
looked at her. Both of them
threw back their heads and
howled with laughter.
The station agent leaned
out his window and rested his
elbows, protected with black
false sleeves, on the sill. He
said over his shoulder to the
telegrapher,
“Those
Hamiltons!
Just
look
at
them!”
Tom
and

Dessie,

fingertips

touching,

were

doing a courtly heel-and-toe

while he sang Doodle-doodle-doo and Dessie sang Deedle-deedle-dee, and then they

embraced again.

Tom looked down at her.

“Aren’t

you

Dessie

Hamilton?

I

seem

to

remember you. But you’ve

changed. Where are your

pigtails?”

It took him quite a

fumbling time to get her

luggage checks, to lose them

in his pockets, to find them
and pick up the wrong pieces.
At last he had her baskets
piled in the back of the
buckboard. The two bay
horses pawed the hard ground
and threw up their heads so
that the shined pole jumped
and the doubletrees squeaked.
The harness was polished and
the horse brasses glittered
like gold. There was a red
bow tied halfway up the
buggy whip and red ribbons
were braided into the horses'
manes and tails.
Tom helped Dessie into
the seat and pretended to peek
coyly at her ankle. Then he
snapped up the check reins
and unfastened the leather tie
reins from the bits. He

unwrapped the lines from the whip stock, and the horses turned so sharply that the wheel screamed against the guard.

Tom said, “Would you care to make a tour of King City? It’s a lovely town.”

“No,” she said. “I think I remember it.” He turned left and headed south and lifted the horses to a fine swinging trot.

Dessie said, “Where’s Will?”

“I don’t know,” he answered gruffly. “Did he talk to you?”

“Yes.

He

said

you

shouldn’t come.”

“He told me the same

thing,” said Dessie. “He got

George to write to me too.”

“Why

shouldn’t

you

come if you want to?” Tom

raged. “What’s Will got to do

with it?”

She touched his arm.

“He thinks you’re crazy. Says

you’re writing poetry.”

Tom’s face darkened.

“He must have gone in the

house when I wasn’t there.

What’s he want anyway? He

had no right to look at my

papers.”

“Gently, gently,” said

Dessie. “Will’s your brother.

Don’t forget that.”

“How would he like me
to go through his papers?”
Tom demanded.
“He wouldn’t let you,”
Dessie said dryly. “They’d be
locked in the safe. Now let’s
not spoil the day with anger.”
“All right,” he said.
“God knows all right! But he
makes me mad. If I don’t
want to live his kind of life
I’m crazy—just crazy.”
Dessie
changed
the
subject, forced the change.
“You know, I had quite a
time at the last,” she said.
“Mother wanted to come.
Have you ever seen Mother
cry, Tom?”
“No, not that I can

remember. No, she's not a
crier."
"Well, she cried. Not
much, but a lot for her—a
choke and two sniffles and a
wiped nose and polished her
glasses and snapped shut like
a watch."
Tom said, "Oh, Lord,
Dessie, it's good to have you
back! It's good. Makes me
feel
I'm
well
from
a
sickness."
The
horses
spanked
along the county road. Tom
said,

“Adam
Trask
has
bought a Ford. Or maybe I
should say Will sold him a
Ford.”
“I didn’t know about the
Ford,” said Dessie. “He’s
buying my house. Giving me
a very good price for it.” She
laughed. “I put a very high
price on the house. I was
going to come down during
negotiations.
Mr.
Trask
accepted the first price. It put
me in a fix.”
“What did you do,
Dessie?”
“Well, I had to tell him
about the high price and that I

had planned to be argued
down. He didn't seem to care
either way."
Tom said, "Let me beg
you never to tell that story to
Will. He'd have you locked
up."
"But the house wasn't
worth what I asked!"
"I repeat what I said
about Will. What's Adam
want with your house?"
"He's going to move
there. Wants the twins to go
to school in Salinas."
"What'll he do with his
ranch?"
"I don't know. He didn't
say."
Tom said, "I wonder
what would have happened if
Father'd got hold of a ranch

like that instead of Old Dry
and Dusty."
"It isn't such a bad
place."
"Fine
for
everything
except making a living."
Dessie said earnestly,
"Have you ever known any
family that had more fun?"
"No, I don't. But that
was the family, not the land."
"Tom, remember when
you took Jenny and Belle
Williams to the Peachtree
dance on the sofa?"
"Mother never let me
forget it. Say, wouldn't it be
good to ask Jenny and Belle
down for a visit?"
"They'd

come

too,”

Dessie said. “Let’s do it.”

When they turned off the

county

road

she

said,

“Somehow I remember it

differently.”

“Drier?”

“I guess that’s it. Tom,

there’s so much grass.”

“I’m getting twenty head

of stock to eat it.”

“You must be rich.”

“No, and the good year

will break the price of beef. I

wonder what Will would do.

He’s a scarcity man. He told

me. He said, ‘Always deal in

scarcities.’ Will’s smart.”

The rutty road had not
changed except that the ruts
were deeper and the round
stones stuck up higher.
Dessie said, “What’s the
card on that mesquite bush?”
She picked it off as they
drove
by,
and
it
said,
“Welcome Home.”
“Tom, you did it!”
“I did not. Someone’s
been here.”
Every fifty yards there
was another card sticking on
a bush, or hanging from the
branches of a madrone, or
tacked to the trunk of a
buckeye, and all of them said,

“Welcome Home.” Dessie
squealed with delight over
each one.
They topped the rise
above the little valley of the
old Hamilton place and Tom
pulled up to let her enjoy the
view. On the hill across the
valley,
spelled
out
in
whitewashed stones, were the
huge
words,
“Welcome
Home, Dessie.” She put her
head against his lapel and
laughed and cried at the same
time.
Tom
looked

sternly
ahead of him. “Now who
could have done that?” he
said. “A man can’t leave the
place any more.”
In the dawn Dessie was
awakened by the chill of pain
that came to her at intervals.
It was a rustle and a threat of
pain; it scampered up from
her side and across her
abdomen, a nibbling pinch
and then a little grab and then
a hard catch and finally a
fierce grip as though a huge
hand had wrenched her.
When that relaxed she felt a
soreness like a bruise. It
didn’t last very long, but
while it went on the outside
world was blotted out, and
she seemed to be listening to

the struggle in her body.
When only the soreness
remained she saw how the
dawn had come silver to the
windows. She smelled the
good morning wind rippling
the curtains, bringing in the
odor of grass and roots and
damp earth. After that sounds
joined
the
parade
of
perception—sparrows
haggling among themselves,
a bawling cow monotonously
beratine a punching hungry
calf, a blue jay's squawk of
false excitement, the sharp
warning of a cock quail on
guard and the answering
whisper of the hen quail

somewhere near in the tall
grass. The chickenyard boiled
with excitement over an egg,
and a big lady Rhode Island
Red, who weighed four
pounds,
hypocritically
protested the horror of being
lustfully pinned to the ground
by a scrawny wreck of a
rooster she could have blasted
with one blow of her wing.
The cooing of pigeons
brought memory into the
procession.
Dessie
remembered how her father
had said, sitting at the head of
the table, “I told Rabbit I was
going to raise some pigeons
and—do
you

know?—he
said, ‘No white pigeons.’
‘Why not white?’ I asked
him, and he said, ‘They’re the
rare worst of bad luck. You
take a flight of white pigeons
and they’ll bring sadness and
death. Get gray ones.’ ‘Ilike
white ones.’ ‘Get gray ones,’
he told me. And as the sky
covers me, I’ll get white
ones.”
And Liza said patiently,
“Why do you be forever
testing, Samuel? Gray ones
taste just as good and they’re
bigger.”
“I’ll let no flimsy fairy
tale push me,” Samuel said.
And Liza said with her
dreadful simplicity, “You’re
already pushed by your own

contentiousness. You're a
mule of contention, a very
mule!"
"Someone's got to do
these
things,"
he
said
sullenly. "Else Fate would not
ever get nose-thumbed and
mankind
would
still
be
clinging to the top branches
of a tree."
And of course he got
white pigeons and waited
truculently for sadness and
death until he'd proved his
point. And here were the
great-great-grand

squabs
cooing in the morning and
rising to fly like a whirling
white scarf around the wagon
shed.
As Dessie remembered,
she heard the words and the
house
around
her
grew
peopled. Sadness and death,
she thought, and death and
sadness, and it wrenched in
her stomach against the
soreness. You just have to
wait around long enough and
it will come.
She
heard
the
air

whooshing
into
the
big
bellows in the forge and the
practice tap for range of
hammer on anvil. She heard
Liza open the oven door and
the thump of a kneaded loaf
on the floury board. Then Joe
wandered about, looking in
unlikely places for his shoes,
and at last found them where
he had left them under the
bed.
She
heard
Mollie’s
sweet high voice in the
kitchen, reading a morning
text from the Bible, and
Una’s

full

cold

throaty

correction.

And

Tom

had

cut

Mollie’s tongue with his

pocketknife and died in his

heart when he realized his

courage.

“Oh, dear Tom,” she

said, and her lips moved.

Tom’s cowardice was as

huge as his courage, as it

must be in great men. His

violence

balanced

his

tenderness, and himself was a

pitted battlefield of his own

forces. He was confused now,
but Dessie could hold his bit
and point him, the way a
handler points a thoroughbred
at the barrier to show his
breeding and his form.
Dessie lay part in pain
and a part of her dangled still
in sleep while the morning
brightened
against
the
window. She remembered
that Mollie was going to lead
the Grand March at the
Fourth of July picnic with no
less than Harry Forbes, State
Senator. And Dessie had not
finished putting the braid on
Mollie's dress. She struggled
to get up. There was so much
braid, and here she lay

drowsing.
She cried, “I’ll get it
done, Mollie. It will be
ready.”
She got up from her bed
and threw her robe around her
and
walked
barefooted
through the house crowded
with Hamiltons. In the hall
they were gone to the
bedrooms. In the bedrooms,
with the beds neat-made, they
were all in the kitchen, and in
the kitchen—they dispersed
and were gone. Sadness and
death. The wave receded and
left her in dry awakeness.
The house was clean,
scrubbed and immaculate,
curtains washed, windows

polished, but all as a man
does it—the ironed curtains
did not hang quite straight
and there were streaks on the
windows
and
a
square
showed on the table when a
book was moved.
The stove was warming,
with orange light showing
around the lids and the soft
thunder
of
drafty
flame
leaping past the open damper.
The kitchen clock flashed its
pendulum behind its glass
skirt, and it ticked like a little
wooden hammer striking on

an empty wooden box.
From outside came a
whistle as wild and raucous
as a reed and pitched high
and strange. The whistling
scattered a savage melody.
Then Tom's steps sounded on
the porch, and he came in
with an armload of oakwood
so high he could not see over
it. He cascaded the wood into
the woodbox.
"You're up," he said.
"That was to wake you if you
were still sleeping." His face
was lighted with joy. "This is
a morning light as down and
no time to be slugging."
"You sound like your
father," Dessie said, and she
laughed with him.
His joy hardened to

fierceness. “Yes,” he said
loudly. “And we’ll have that
time again, right here. I’ve
been dragging myself in
misery like a spine-broken
snake.
No
wonder
Will
thought I was cracked. But
now you’re back, and I’ll
show you. I’ll breathe life
into life again. Do you hear?
This house is going to be
alive.”
“I’m glad I came,” she
said, and she thought in
desolation how brittle he was
now and how easy to shatter,
and how she would have to
protect him.
“You must have worked

day and night to get the house
so clean," she said.
"Nothing," said Tom. "A
little twist with the fingers."
"I know that twist, but it
was with bucket and mop and
on
your
knees—unless
you've invented some way to
do it by chicken power or the
harnessed wind."
"Invented—now
that's
why I have no time. I've
invented a little slot that lets a
necktie slip around freely in a
stiff collar."
"You don't wear stiff
collars."
"I did yesterday. That's
when I invented it. And

chickens—I'm going to raise
millions
of
them—little
houses all over the ranch and
a ring on the roof to dip them
in a whitewash tank. And
eggs will come through on a
little conveyor belt—here! I'll
draw it."
"I want to draw some
breakfast,"
Dessie
said.
"What's the shape of a fried
egg? How would you color
the fat and lean of a strip of
bacon?"
"You'll have it," he
cried, and he opened the
stove lid and assaulted the
fire with the stove lifter until

the hairs on his hand curled and charred. He pitched wood in and started his high whistling.

Dessie said, “You sound like some goat-foot with a wheat flute on a hill in Greece.”

“What do you think I am?” he shouted.

Dessie thought miserably, If his is real, why can’t my heart be light? Why can’t I climb out of my gray ragbag? I will, she screeched inside herself. If he can—I will.

She said, “Tom!”

“Yes.”

“I want a purple egg.”

Chapter 33

1

The green lasted on the hills far into June before the grass turned yellow. The heads of the wild oats were so heavy with seed that they hung over on their stalks. The little springs trickled on late in the summer. The range cattle staggered under their fat and their hides shone with health. It was a year when the people of the Salinas Valley forgot the dry years. Farmers bought more land than they could afford and figured their profits on the covers of their checkbooks.

Tom Hamilton labored like a giant, not only with his strong arms and rough hands but also with his heart and

spirit. The anvil rang in the
forge again. He painted the
old
house
white
and
whitewashed the sheds. He
went to King City and studied
a flush toilet and then built
one of craftily bent tin and
carved wood. Because the
water came so slowly from
the spring, he put a redwood
tank beside the house and
pumped the water up to it
with a handmade windmill so
cleverly made that it turned in
the slightest wind. And he
made metal and wood models
of two ideas to be sent to the
patent office in the fall.
That was not all—he

labored with humor and good spirits. Dessie had to rise very early to get in her hand at the housework before Tom had it all done. She watched his great red happiness, and it was not light as Samuel's happiness was light. It did not rise out of his roots and come floating up. He was manufacturing happiness as cleverly as he knew how, molding it and shaping it. Dessie, who had more friends than anyone in the whole valley, had no

confidants. When her trouble had come upon her she had not talked about it. And the pains were a secret in herself. When Tom found her rigid and tight from the grabbing pain and cried in alarm, “Dessie, what’s the matter?” she controlled her face and said, “A little crick, that’s all. Just a little crick. I’m all right now.” And in a moment they were laughing. They laughed a great deal, as though to reassure themselves.

Only when Dessie went to her bed did her loss fall on her, bleak and unendurable. And Tom lay in the dark of his room, puzzled

as a child. He could hear his
heart beating and rasping a
little in its beat. His mind fell
away from thought and clung
for safety to little plans,
designs, machines.
Sometimes
in
the
summer
evenings
they
walked up the hill to watch
the afterglow clinging to the
tops of the western mountains
and to feel the breeze drawn
into the valley by the rising
day-heated air. Usually they
stood silently for a while and
breathed
in
peacefulness.

Since both were shy they
never
talked
about
themselves. Neither knew
about the other at all.
It was startling to both of
them when Dessie said one
evening on the hill, “Tom,
why don’t you get married?”
He looked quickly at her
and away. He said, “Who’d
have me?”
“Is that a joke or do you
really mean it?”
“Who’d have me?” he
said again. “Who’d want a
thing like me?”
“It sounds to me as
though you really mean it.”
Then
she

violated

their

unstated code. “Have you

been in love with someone?”

“No,” he said shortly.

“I wish I knew,” she said

as

though

he

had

not

answered.

Tom did not speak again

as they walked down the hill.

But on the porch he said

suddenly,

“You’re

lonely

here. You don’t want to stay.”

He waited for a moment.

“Answer me. Isn’t that true?”

“I want to stay here

more than I want to stay
anyplace else.” She asked,
“Do you ever go to women?”
“Yes,” he said.
“Is it any good to you?”
“Not much.”
“What are you going to
do?”
“I don’t know.”
In silence they went
back to the house. Tom
lighted the lamp in the old
living room. The horsehair
sofa he had rebuilt raised its
gooseneck against the wall,
and the green carpet had
tracks worn light between the
doors.
Tom sat down by the
round center table. Dessie sat
on the sofa, and she could see
that he was still embarrassed

from his last admission. She thought, How pure he is, how unfit for a world that even she knew more about than he did. A dragon killer, he was, a rescuer of damsels, and his small sins seemed so great to him that he felt unfit and unseemly. She wished her father were here. Her father had felt greatness in Tom. Perhaps he would know now how to release it out of its darkness and let it fly free. She took another tack to see whether she could raise some spark in him. “As long as we’re talking about ourselves, have you ever

thought that our whole world
is the valley and a few trips to
San Francisco, and have you
ever been farther south than
San Luis Obispo? I never
have.”
“Neither have I,” said
Tom.
“Well, isn’t that silly?”
“Lots
of
people
haven’t,” he said.
“But it’s not a law. We
could go to Paris and to
Rome or to Jerusalem. I
would dearly love to see the
Colosseum.”
He
watched
her
suspiciously, expecting some

kind of joke. “How could we?” he asked. “That takes a lot of money.”

“I don’t think it does,” she said. “We wouldn’t have to stay in fancy places. We could take the cheapest boats and the lowest class. That’s how our father came here from Ireland. And we could go to Ireland.”

Still he watched her, but a burning was beginning in his eyes.

Dessie went on, “We could take a year for work, save every penny. I can get some sewing to do in King City. Will would help us. And next summer you could sell all the stock and we could go. There’s no law forbids it.”

Tom got up and went outside. He looked up at the summer stars, at blue Venus and red Mars. His hands flexed at his sides, closed to fists and opened. Then he turned and went back into the house. Dessie had not moved.

“Do you want to go, Dessie?”

“More than anything in the world.”

“Then we will go!”

“Do you want to go?”

“More than anything in the world,” he said, and then, “Egypt—have you given a thought to Egypt?”

“Athens,” she said.

“Constantinople!”

“Bethlehem!”

“Yes, Bethlehem,” said

he suddenly, “Go to bed.
We’ve got a year of work—a
year. Get some rest. I’m
going to borrow money from
Will to buy a hundred
shoats.”
“What will you feed
them?”
“Acorns,” said Tom.
“I’ll make a machine to
gather acorns.”
After he had gone to his
room she could hear him
knocking around and talking
softly to himself. Dessie
looked out her window at the
starlit night and she was glad.
But she wondered whether
she really wanted to go, or
whether Tom did. And as she
wondered the whisper of pain
grew up from her side.

When Dessie got up in
the morning Tom was already
at his drawing board, beating
his forehead with his fist and
growling to himself. Dessie
looked over his shoulder. “Is
it the acorn machine?”
“It should be easy,” he
said. “But how to get out the
sticks and rocks?”
“I know you’re the
inventor, but I invented the
greatest acorn picker in the
world and it’s ready to go.”
“What do you mean?”
“Children,” she said.
“Those restless little hands.”
“They wouldn’t do it,
not even for pay.”
“They would for prizes.
A prize for everyone and a
big prize for the winner—

maybe a hundred-dollar prize.
They'd sweep the valley
clean. Will you let me try?"
He scratched his head.
"Why not?" he said. "But
how would you collect the
acorns?"
"The children will bring
them in," said Dessie. "Just
let me take care of it. I hope
you have plenty of storage
space."
"It would be exploiting
the young, wouldn't it?"
"Certainly it would,"
Dessie agreed. "When I had
my shop I exploited the girls
who wanted to learn to sew—
and they exploited me. I think
I will call this The Great
Monterey
County

Acorn
Contest. And I won’t let
everyone in. Maybe bicycles
for
prizes—wouldn’t
you
pick up acorns in hope of a
bicycle, Tom?”
“Sure I would,” he said.
“But couldn’t we pay them
too?”
“Not
with
money,”
Dessie said. “That would
reduce it to labor, and they
will not labor if they can help
it, Nor will I.”
Tom leaned back from
his board and laughed. “Nor
will I,” he said. “All right,
you are in charge of acorns

and I am in charge of pigs.”

Dessie

said,

“Tom,

wouldn’t it be ridiculous if

we made money, we of all

people?”

“But you made money in

Salinas,” he said.

“Some—not much. But

oh, I was rich in promises. If

the bills had ever been paid

we wouldn’t need pigs. We

could go to Paris tomorrow.”

“I’m going to drive in

and talk to Will,” said Tom.

He pushed his chair back

from the drawing board.

“Want to come with me?”

“No, I’ll stay and make

my plans. Tomorrow I start

The Great Acorn Contest.”

2

On the ride back to the ranch
in the late afternoon Tom was
depressed
and
sad.
As
always, Will had managed to
chew up and spit out his
enthusiasm. Will had pulled
his lip, rubbed his eyebrows,
scratched his nose, cleaned
his glasses, and made a major
operation of cutting and
lighting a cigar. The pig
proposition was full of holes,
and Will was able to put his
fingers in the holes.
The
Acorn
Contest
wouldn’t work although he

was not explicit about why it
wouldn't. The whole thing
was shaky, particularly in
these times. The very best
Will was able to do was to
agree to think about it.
At one time during the
talk Tom had thought to tell
Will about Europe, but a
quick instinct stopped him.
The idea of traipsing around
Europe, unless, of course, you
were retired and had your
capital out in good securities,
would be to Will a craziness
that would make the pig plan
a marvel of business acumen.
Tom did not tell him, and he
left Will to "think it over,"
knowing that the verdict
would be against the pigs and
the acorns.

Poor Tom did not know
and could not learn that
dissembling successfully is
one of the creative joys of a
businessman.
To
indicate
enthusiasm was to be idiotic.
And Will really did mean to
think it over. Parts of the plan
fascinated him. Tom had
stumbled
on
a
very
interesting thing. If you could
buy shoats on credit, fatten
them on food that cost next to
nothing, sell them, pay off
your loan, and take your
profit, you would really have
done something. Will would

not rob his brother. He would
cut him in on the profits, but
Tom was a dreamer and could
not be trusted with a good
sound
plan.
Tom,
for
instance, didn't even know
the price of pork and its
probable trend. If it worked
out, Will could be depended
on to give Tom a very
substantial
present—maybe
even a Ford. And how about a
Ford as first and only prize
for acorns? Everybody in the
whole valley would pick
acorns.
Driving up the Hamilton
road, Tom wondered how to

break it to Dessie that their plan was no good. The best way would be to have another plan to substitute for it. How could they make enough money in one year to go to Europe? And suddenly he realized that he didn't know how much they'd need. He didn't know the price of a steamship ticket. They might spend the evening figuring. He half expected Dessie to run out of the house when he drove up. He would put on his best face and tell a joke. But Dessie didn't run out. Maybe taking a nap, he thought. He watered the horses and stabled them and pitched hay into the manger. Dessie was lying on the

gooseneck sofa when Tom
came in. “Taking a nap?” he
asked, and then he saw the
color of her face. “Dessie,” he
cried, “what’s the matter?”
She
rallied
herself
against pain. “Just a stomach
ache,” she said. “A pretty
severe one.”
“Oh,” said Tom. “You
scared me. I can fix up a
stomach ache.” He went to
the kitchen and brought back
a glass of pearly liquid. He
handed it to her.
“What is it, Tom?”
“Good
old-fashioned
salts. It may gripe you a little
but it’ll do the job.”

She drank it obediently
and made a face. “I remember
that
taste,”
she
said.
“Mother’s remedy in green
apple season.”
“Now you lie still,” Tom
said. “I’ll rustle up some
dinner.”
She could hear him
knocking
about
in
the
kitchen. The pain roared
through her body. And on top
of the pain there was fear.
She could feel the medicine
burn down to her stomach.
After a while she dragged

herself to the new homemade
flush toilet and tried to vomit
the salts. The perspiration ran
from
her
forehead
and
blinded her. When she tried
to straighten up the muscles
over her stomach were set,
and she could not break free.
Later Tom brought her
some scrambled eggs. She
shook her head slowly. “I
can’t,” she said, smiling. “I
think I’ll just go to bed.”
“The salts should work
pretty soon,” Tom assured
her. “Then you’ll be all
right.” He helped her to bed.
“What do you suppose you
ate to cause it?”

Dessie
lay
in
her
bedroom and her will battled
the pain. About ten o'clock in
the evening her will began to
lose its fight. She called,
"Tom! Tom!" He opened the
door. He had the *World*
Almanac in his hand. "Tom,"
she said, "I'm sorry. But I'm
awfully
sick,
Tom.
I'm
terribly sick."
He sat on the edge of her
bed in the half-darkness. "Are
the gripes bad?"
"Yes, awful."
"Can you go to the toilet

now?”

“No, not now.”

“I’ll bring a lamp and sit

with you,” he said. “Maybe

you can get some sleep. It’ll

be gone in the morning. The

salts will do the job.”

Her will took hold again

and she lay still while Tom

read bits out of the *Almanac*

to soothe her. He stopped

reading when he thought she

was sleeping, and he dozed in

his chair beside the lamp.

A thin scream awakened

him. He stepped beside the

struggling

bedclothes.

Dessie’s eyes were milky and

crazy,

like

those

of

a

maddened horse. Her mouth

corners erupted thick bubbles

and her face was on fire. Tom

put his hand under the cover

and felt muscles knotted like

iron. And then her struggle

stopped and her head fell

back and the light glinted on

her half-closed eyes.

Tom put only a bridle on

the horse and flung himself

on bareback. He groped and

ripped out his belt to beat the

frightened

horse

to

an

awkward run over the stony,

rutted wheel track.

The Duncans, asleep

upstairs in their two-story house on the county road, didn't hear the banging on their door, but they heard the bang and ripping sound as their front door came off, carrying lock and hinges with it. By the time Red Duncan got downstairs with a shotgun Tom was screaming into the wall telephone at the King City central. "Dr. Tusón! Get him! I don't care. Get him! Get him, goddam it." Red Duncan sleepily had the gun on him.

Dr. Tilson said, "Yes! Yes—yes, I hear. You're Tom Hamilton. What's the matter with her? Is her stomach hard? What did you do? Salts! You goddam fool!"

Then
the
doctor
controlled his anger. “Tom,”
he said, “Tom, boy. Pull
yourself together. Go back
and lay cold cloths—cold as
you can get them. I don’t
suppose you have any ice.
Well, keep changing the
cloths. I’ll be out as fast as I
can. Do you hear me? Tom,
do you hear me?”
He hung the receiver up
and
dressed.
In
angry
weariness he opened the wall
cabinet and collected scalpels
and clamps, sponges and
tubes and sutures, to put in

his bag. He shook his gasoline pressure lantern to make sure it was full and arranged ether can and mask beside it on his bureau. His wife in boudoir cap and nightgown looked in. Dr. Tilson said, “I’m walking over to the garage. Call Will Hamilton. Tell him I want him to drive me to his father’s place. If he argues tell him his sister is—dying.”

3

Tom came riding back to the ranch a week after Dessie’s funeral, riding high and prim, his shoulders straight and chin in, like a guardsman on parade.

Tom had

done
everything slowly, perfectly.
His horse was curried and
brushed, and his Stetson hat
was square on his head. Not
even Samuel could have held
himself in more dignity than
Tom as he rode back to the
old house. A hawk driving
down on a chicken with
doubled fists did not make
him turn his head.
At
the
barn
he
dismounted,
watered
his
horse, held him a moment at
the door, haltered him, and
put rolled barley in the box

beside the manger. He took
off the saddle and turned the
blanket inside out to dry.
Then the barley was finished
and he led the bay horse out
and turned him free to graze
on every unfenced inch of the
world.
In
the
house
the
furniture, chairs, and stove
seemed to shrink back and
away from him in distaste. A
stool avoided him as he went
to the living room. His
matches were soft and damp,
and with a feeling of apology
he went to the kitchen for
more. The lamp in the living
room was fair and lonely.

Tom’s first match flame ran
quickly around the Rochester
wick and then stood up a full
inch of yellow flame.
Tom sat down in the
evening and looked around.
His
eyes
avoided
the
horsehair sofa. A slight noise
of mice in the kitchen made
him turn, and he saw his
shadow on the wall and his
hat was on. He removed it
and laid it on the table beside
him.
He thought dawdling,
protective thoughts, sitting
under the lamp, but he knew
that pretty soon his name
would be called and he would

have to go up before the
bench with himself as judge
and his own crimes as jurors.
And his name *was*
called, shrilly in his ears. His
mind walked in to face the
accusers:
Vanity,
which
charged him with being ill
dressed and dirty and vulgar;
and Lust, slipping him the
money for his whoring;
Dishonesty, to make him
pretend to talent and thought
he did not have; Laziness and
Gluttony arm in arm. Tom
felt
comforted
by
these
because they screened the

great Gray One in the back
seat, waiting—the gray and
dreadful crime. He dredged
up lesser things, used small
sins almost like virtues to
save himself. There were
Covetousness
of
Will's
money, Treason toward his
mother's God, Theft of time
and hope, sick Rejection of
love.
Samuel spoke softly but
his voice filled the room. "Be
good, be pure, be great, be
Tom Hamilton."
Tom ignored his father.
He said, "I'm busy greeting
my friends," and he nodded
to Discourtesy and Ugliness
and Unfilial Conduct and

Unkempt Fingernails. Then
he started with Vanity again.
The Gray One shouldered up
in front. It was too late to stall
with baby sins. This Gray
One was Murder.

Tom’s hand felt the chill

of the glass and saw the

pearly

liquid

with

the

dissolving

crystals

still

turning

over

and

lucent

bubbles

rising,

and

he

repeated aloud in the empty,

empty room, “This will do

the job. Just wait till morning.

You’ll feel fine then.” That’s

how it had sounded, exactly
how, and the walls and chairs
and the lamp had all heard it
and they could prove it. There
was no place in the whole
world for Tom Hamilton to
live. But it wasn't for lack of
trying.
He
shuffled
possibilities
like
cards.
London?
No!
Egypt—
pyramids in Egypt and the
Sphinx. No! Paris? No! Now
wait—they do all your sins
lots better there. No! Well,
stand aside and maybe we'll
come

back

to

you.

Bethlehem? Dear God, no! It

would be lonely there for a

stranger.

And here interpolated—

it’s so hard to remember how

you die or when. An eyebrow

raised or a whisper—they

may be it; or a night mottled

with splashed light until

powder-driven

lead

finds

your secret and lets out the

fluid in you.

Now this is true, Tom

Hamilton was dead and he

had only to do a few decent

things to make it final.

The sofa cricked in

criticism, and Tom looked at
it and at the smoking lamp to
which the sofa referred.
“Thank you,” Tom said to the
sofa. “I hadn’t noticed it,”
and he turned down the wick
until the smoking stopped.
His mind dozed. Murder
slapped him aware again.
Now Red Tom, Gum Tom,
was too tired to kill himself.
That takes some doing, with
maybe pain and maybe hell.
He remembered that his
mother had a strong distaste
for suicide, feeling that it
combined three things of
which
she
strongly
disapproved—bad manners,
cowardice, and sin. It was

almost as bad as adultery or stealing—maybe just as bad. There must be a way to avoid Liza's disapproval. She could make one suffer if she disapproved.

Samuel wouldn't make it hard, but on the other hand you couldn't avoid Samuel because he was in the air every place. Tom had to tell Samuel. He said, "My father, I'm sorry. I can't help it. You overestimated me. You were wrong. I wish I could justify the love and the pride you squandered on me. Maybe you could figure a way out, but I can't. I cannot live. I've killed Dessie and I want to sleep."

And his mind spoke for

his father absent, saying,
“Why, I can understand how
that would be. There are so
many patterns to choose from
in the arc from birth back to
birth again. But let’s think
how we can make it all right
with Mother. Why are you so
impatient, dear?”
“I can’t wait, that’s
why,” Tom said. “I can’t wait
any more.”
“Why, sure you can, my
son, my darling. You’re
grown great as I knew you
would. Open the table drawer
and then make use of that
turnip you call your head.”
Tom opened the drawer
and saw a tablet of Crane’s
Linen Lawn and a package of
envelopes to match and two

gnawed and crippled pencils
and in the dust corner at the
back a few stamps. He laid
out the tablet and sharpened
the
pencils
with
his
pocketknife.
He wrote, “Dear Mother,
I hope you keep yourself
well. I am going to plan to
spend more time with you.
Olive
asked
me
for
Thanksgiving and you know
I’ll be there. Our little Olive
can cook a turkey nearly to
match yours, but I know you
will never believe that. I’ve

had a stroke of good luck. Bought a horse for fifteen dollars—a gelding, and he looks like a blood-horse to me. I got him cheap because he has taken a dislike to mankind. His former owner spent more time on his own back than on the gelding's. I must say he's a pretty cute article. He's thrown me twice but I'll get him yet, and if I break him I'll have one of the best horses in the whole county. And you can be sure I'll break him if it takes all winter. I don't know why I go on about him, only the man I bought him from said a funny thing. He said, 'That horse is so mean he'd eat a man right off his back.' Well, remember

what Father used to say when
we went rabbit hunting?
‘Come back with your shield
or on it.’ I’ll see you
Thanksgiving.
Your
son
Tom.”
He wondered whether it
was good enough, but he was
too tired to do it again. He
added, “P.S. I notice that
Polly has not reformed one
bit. That parrot makes me
blush.”
On another sheet he
wrote, “Dear Will, No matter
what you yourself may think
—please help me now. For
Mother’s sake—please. I was
killed by a horse—thrown
and kicked in the head—

please! Your brother Tom.”

He stamped the letters

and put them in his pocket

and he asked Samuel, “Is that

all right?”

In his bedroom he broke

open a new box of shells and

put one of them in the

cylinder of his well-oiled

Smith and Wesson .38 and he

set the loaded chamber one

space to the left of the firing

pin.

His

horse

standing

sleepily near the fence came

to his whistle and stood

drowsing while he saddled

up.

It was three o’clock in

the morning when he dropped

the letters in the post office at
King City and mounted and
turned his horse south toward
the unproductive hills of the
old Hamilton place.
He
was
a
gallant
gentlemen.

PART FOUR

Chapter 34

A child may ask, “What is the
world’s story about?” And a
grown man or woman may
wonder, “What way will the
world go? How does it end
and, while we’re at it, what’s
the story about?”
I believe that there is one
story in the world, and only
one, that has frightened and

inspired us, so that we live in
a Pearl White serial of
continuing
thought
and
wonder. Humans are caught
—in their lives, in their
thoughts, in their hungers and
ambitions, in their avarice
and cruelty, and in their
kindness and generosity too
—in a net of good and evil. I
think this is the only story we
have and that it occurs on all
levels
of
feeling
and
intelligence. Virtue and vice
were warp and woof of our
first consciousness, and they
will be the fabric of our last,

and this despite any changes
we may impose on field and
river
and
mountain,
on
economy and manners. There
is no other story. A man, after
he has brushed off the dust
and chips of his life, will have
left only the hard, clean
questions: Was it good or was
it evil? Have I done well—or
ill?
Herodotus,
in
the
Persian War, tells a story of
how Croesus, the richest and
most-favored king of his
time,
asked

Solon
the
Athenian a leading question.
He would not have asked it if
he had not been worried
about the answer. “Who,” he
asked, “is the luckiest person
in the world?” He must have
been eaten with doubt and
hungry for reassurance. Solon
told him of three lucky people
in old times. And Croesus
more than likely did not
listen, so anxious was he
about himself. And when
Solon did not mention him,
Croesus was forced to say,
“Do you not consider me
lucky?”
Solon did not hesitate in
his answer. “How can I tell?”
he said. “You aren’t dead

yet.”

And this answer must

have

haunted

Croesus

dismally

as

his

luck

disappeared, and his wealth

and his kingdom. And as he

was being burned on a tall

fire, he may have thought of

it and perhaps wished he had

not asked or not been

answered.

And in our time, when a

man dies—if he has had

wealth and influence and

power and all the vestments

that arouse envy, and after the

living take stock of the dead

man’s
property
and
his
eminence and works and
monuments—the question is
still there: Was his life good
or was it evil?—which is
another
way
of
putting
Croesus’s question. Envies
are gone, and the measuring
stick is: “Was he loved or
was he hated? Is his death felt
as a loss or does a kind of joy
come of it?”
I remember clearly the
deaths of three men. One was
the richest man of the
century, who, having clawed

his way to wealth through the
souls and bodies of men,
spent many years trying to
buy back the love he had
forfeited and by that process
performed great service to the
world and, perhaps, had much
more than balanced the evils
of his rise. I was on a ship
when he died. The news was
posted on the bulletin board,
and nearly everyone received
the news with pleasure.
Several said, “Thank God that
son of a bitch is dead.”
Then there was a man,
smart as Satan, who, lacking
some perception of human
dignity and knowing all too
well every aspect of human
weakness and wickedness,
used his special knowledge to

warp men, to buy men, to
bribe and threaten and seduce
until he found himself in a
position of great power. He
clothed his motives in the
names of virtue, and I have
wondered whether he ever
knew that no gift will ever
buy back a man's love when
you have removed his self-love. A bribed man can only
hate his briber. When this
man died the nation rang with
praise and, just beneath, with
gladness that he was dead.
There was a third man,
who perhaps made many
errors in performance but
whose effective life was
devoted to making men brave
and dignified and good in a
time when they were poor
and frightened and when ugly

forces were loose in the world to utilize their fears. This man was hated by the few. When he died the people burst into tears in the streets and their minds wailed, “What can we do now? How can we go on without him?”

In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their topmost layers of frailty men want to be good and want to be loved. Indeed, most of their vices are attempted short cuts to love. When a man comes to die, no matter what his talents and influence and genius, if he dies unloved his life must be a failure to him and his dying a cold horror. It seems to me that if you or I must choose between two

courses of thought or action, we should remember our dying and try so to live that our death brings no pleasure to the world.

We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly respawn, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is venerable as nothing else in the world is.

Chapter 35

1

Lee helped Adam and the two boys move to Salinas, which is to say he did it all, packed

the things to be taken, saw them on the train, loaded the back seat of the Ford, and, arriving in Salinas, unpacked and saw the family settled in Dessie's little house. When he had done everything he could think of to make them comfortable, and a number of things unnecessary, and more things for the sake of delay, he waited on Adam formally one evening after the twins had gone to bed. Perhaps Adam caught his intention from Lee's coldness and formality.

Adam said, "All right. I've been expecting it. Tell me."

That broke up Lee's memorized speech, which he

had intended to begin, “For a
number of years I have served
you to the best of my ability
and now I feel—”
“I’ve put it off as long as
I could,” said Lee. “I have a
speech all ready. Do you
want to hear it?”
“Do you want to say it?”
“No,” said Lee. “I don’t.
And it’s a pretty good speech
too.”
“When do you want to
go?” Adam asked.
“As soon as possible.
I’m afraid I might lose my
intention if I don’t go soon.
Do you want me to wait until
you get someone else?”
“Better not,” said Adam.
“You know how slow I am. It
might be some time. I might

never get around to it.”

“I’ll go tomorrow then.”

“It will tear the boys to pieces,” Adam said. “I don’t know what they’ll do. Maybe you’d better sneak off and let me tell them afterward.”

“It’s my observation that children always surprise us,” said Lee.

And so it was. At breakfast the next morning Adam said, “Boys, Lee is going away.”

“Is he?” said Cal.

“There’s a basketball game tonight, costs ten cents. Can we go?”

“Yes. But did you hear

what I said?”

“Sure,” Aron said. “You said Lee’s going away.”

“But he’s not coming back.”

Cal asked, “Where’s he going?”

“To San Francisco to live.”

“Oh!” said Aron.

“There’s a man on Main Street, right on the street, and he’s got a little stove and he cooks sausages and puts them in buns. They cost a nickel. And you can take all the mustard you want.”

Lee stood in the kitchen door, smiling at Adam.

When the twins got their

books together Lee said,

“Good-by, boys.”

They shouted, “Good-by!” and tumbled out of the house.

Adam stared into his coffee cup and said in apology, “What little brutes! I guess that’s your reward for over ten years of service.”

“I like it better that way,” Lee said. “If they pretended sorrow they’d be liars. It doesn’t mean anything to them. Maybe they’ll think of me sometimes —privately. I don’t want them to be sad. I hope I’m not so small-souled as to take satisfaction in being missed.”

He laid fifty cents on the
table in front of Adam.
“When they start for the
basketball game tonight, give
them this from me and tell
them to buy the sausage buns.
My farewell gift may be
ptomaine, for all I know.”
Adam looked at the
telescope basket Lee brought
into the dining room. “Is that
all your stuff, Lee?”
“Everything
but
my
books. They’re in boxes in
the cellar. If you don’t mind
I’ll send for them or come for
them after I get settled.”
“Why, sure. I’m going to
miss you, Lee, whether you
want me to or not. Are you

really going to get your
bookstore?”
“That is my intention.”
“You’ll let us hear from
you?”
“I don’t know. I’ll have
to think about it. They say a
clean cut heals soonest.
There’s nothing sadder to me
than
associations
held
together by nothing but the
glue of postage stamps. If you
can’t see or hear or touch a
man, it’s best to let him go.”
Adam stood up from the
table. “I’ll walk to the depot
with you.”
“No!” Lee said sharply.
“No. I don’t want that. Good-by, Mr. Trask. Good-by,
Adam.” He went out of the

house so fast that Adam's "Good-by" reached him at the bottom of the front steps and Adam's "Don't forget to write" sounded over the click of the front gate.

2

That night after the basketball game Cal and Aron each had five sausages on buns, and it was just as well, for Adam had forgotten to provide any supper. Walking home, the twins discussed Lee for the first time.

"I wonder why he went away?" Cal asked.

"He's talked about going before."

"What do you suppose he'll do without us?"

"I don't know. I bet he

comes back," Aron said.

"How do you mean?

Father said he was going to

start a bookstore. That's

funny. A Chinese bookstore."

"He'll come back," said

Aron. "He'll get lonesome for

us. You'll see."

"Bet you ten cents he

don't."

"Before when?"

"Before forever."

"That's a bet," said

Aron.

Aron was not able to

collect his winnings for

nearly a month, but he won

six days later.

Lee came in on the ten-forty and let himself in with

his own key. There was a

light in the dining room but

Lee found Adam in the

kitchen, scraping at a thick
black crust in the frying pan
with the point of a can
opener.
Lee put down his basket.
“If you soak it overnight it
will come right out.”
“Will it? I’ve burned
everything
I’ve
cooked.
There’s a saucepan of beets
out in the yard. Smelled so
bad I couldn’t have them in
the house. Burned beets are
awful—“Lee!” he cried, and
then.
“Is
anything
the
matter?”
Lee took the black iron

pan from him and put it in the sink and ran water in it. “If we had a new gas stove we could make a cup of coffee in a few minutes,” he said. “I might as well build up the fire.”

“Stove won’t burn,” said Adam.

Lee lifted a lid. “Have you ever taken the ashes out?”

“Ashes?”

“Oh, go in the other room,” said Lee. “I’ll make some coffee.”

Adam waited impatiently in the dining room but he obeyed his orders. At last Lee brought in two cups of coffee and set

them on the table. “Made it in a skillet,” he said. “Much faster.” He leaned over his telescope basket and untied the rope that held it shut. He brought out the stone bottle. “Chinese absinthe,” he said. “Ng-ka-py maybe last ten more years. I forgot to ask whether you had replaced me.”

“You’re beating around the bush,” said Adam.

“I know it. And I also know the best way would be just to tell it and get it over with.”

“You lost your money in a fan-tan game.”

“No. I wish that was it. No, I have my money. This damn

cork’s

broken—I’ll

have to shove it in the bottle.”

He poured the black liquor

into his coffee. “I never drank

it this way,” he said. “Say,

it’s good.”

“Tastes

like

rotten

apples,” said Adam.

“Yes,

but

remember

Sam Hamilton said like good

rotten apples.”

Adam said, “When do

you think you’ll get around to

telling me what happened to

you?”

“Nothing happened to

me,”

said

Lee.

“I

got

lonesome. That’s all. Isn’t

that enough?”

“How

about

your

bookstore?”

“I

don’t

want

a

bookstore. I think I knew it

before I got on the train, but I

took all this time to make

sure.”

“Then there’s your last

dream gone.”

“Good riddance.” Lee

seemed on the verge of

hysteria.

“Missy

Tlask,

Chinee boy sink gung get

dlunk.”

Adam

was

alarmed.

“What’s the matter with you

anyway?”

Lee lifted the bottle to

his lips and took a deep hot

drink and panted the fumes

out of his burning throat.

“Adam,” he said, “I am

incomparably,

incredibly,

overwhelmingly glad to be

home. I’ve never been so

goddam lonesome in my

life.”

Chapter 36

1

Salinas had two grammar
schools, big yellow structures
with tall windows, and the
windows were baleful and the
doors did not smile. These
schools were called the East
End and the West End. Since
the East End School was way
to hell and gone across town
and the children who lived
east of Main Street attended
there, I will not bother with it.
The West End, a huge
building
of
two
stories,
fronted with gnarled poplars,
divided the play yards called
girlside and boyside. Behind
the school a high board fence

separated
girlside
from
boyside, and the back of the
play yard was bounded by a
slough of standing water in
which tall tules and even
cattails grew. The West End
had grades from third to
eighth. The first- and second-graders went to Baby School
some distance away.
In the West End there
was a room for each grade—
third, four, and fifth on the
ground floor, six, seventh,
and eighth on the second
floor. Each room had the
usual desks of battered oak, a
platform and square teacher’s
desk, one Seth Thomas clock
and one picture. The pictures
identified the rooms, and the

pre-Raphaelite influence was
overwhelming.
Galahad
standing in full armor pointed
the way for third-graders;
Atalanta's race urged on the
fourth, the Pot of Basil
confused the fifth grade, and
so on until the denunciation
of Cataline sent the eighth-graders on to high school
with a sense of high civic
virtue.
Cal and Aron were
assigned to the seventh grade
because of their age, and they
learned every shadow of its
picture—Laocoon completely
wrapped in snakes.
The boys were stunned
by the size and grandeur of
the West End after their
background in a one-room

country school. The opulence
of having a teacher for each
grade
made
a
deep
impression
on
them.
It
seemed wasteful. But as is
true of all humans, they were
stunned for one day, admiring
on the second, and on the
third day could not remember
very clearly ever having gone
to any other school.
The teacher was dark
and pretty, and by a judicious
raising or withholding of
hands the twins had no
worries. Cal worked it out

quickly and explained it to
Aron. “You take most kids,”
he said, “if they know the
answer, why, they hold up
their hands, and if they don’t
know they just crawl under
the desk. Know what we’re
going to do?”
“No. What?”
“Well, you notice the
teacher don’t always call on
somebody with his hand up.
She lets drive at the others
and, sure enough, they don’t
know.”
“That’s
right,”
said
Aron.
“Now, first week we’re
going to work like bedamned
but we won’t stick up our

hands. So she'll call on us and we'll know. That'll throw her. So the second week we won't work and we'll stick up our hands and she won't call on us. Third week we'll just sit quiet, and she won't ever know whether we got the answer or not. Pretty soon she'll let us alone. She isn't going to waste her time calling on somebody that knows."

Cal's method worked. In a short time the twins were not only let alone but got themselves a certain reputation for smartness. As a matter of fact, Cal's method was a waste of time. Both

boys learned easily enough.
Cal was able to develop
his marble game and set
about gathering in all the
chalkies and immies, glassies
and agates, in the schoolyard.
He traded them for tops just
as marble season ended. At
one time he had and used as
legal tender at least forty-five
tops of various sizes and
colors, from the thick clumsy
baby tops to the lean and
dangerous splitters with their
needle points.
Everyone who saw the
twins remarked on their
difference one from the other
and seemed puzzled that this
should be so. Cal was
growing up dark-skinned,
dark-haired. He was quick

and sure and secret. Even
though he may have tried, he
could
not
conceal
his
cleverness.
Adults
were
impressed with what seemed
to
them
a
precocious
maturity, and they were a
little frightened at it too. No
one liked Cal very much and
yet everyone was touched
with fear of him and through
fear with respect. Although
he had no friends he was
welcomed by his obsequious

classmates and took up a
natural and cold position of
leadership in the schoolyard.
If he concealed his
ingenuity, he concealed his
hurts too. He was regarded as
thick-skinned and insensitive
—even cruel.
Aron drew love from
every side. He seemed shy
and delicate. His pink-and-white skin, golden hair, and
wide-set blue eyes caught
attention. In the schoolyard
his very prettiness caused
some difficulty until it was
discovered by his testers that
Aron was a dogged, steady,
and
completely
fearless
fighter, particularly when he
was crying. Word got around,

and the natural punishers of
new boys learned to let him
alone. Aron did not attempt to
hide his disposition. It was
concealed
by
being
the
opposite of his appearance.
He was unchanging once a
course was set. He had few
facets
and
very
little
versatility. His body was as
insensitive to pain as was his
mind to subtleties.
Cal knew his brother and
could handle him by keeping
him off balance, but this only
worked up to a certain point.

Cal had learned when to sidestep, when to run away. Change of direction confused Aron, but that was the only thing that confused him. He set his path and followed it and he did not see nor was he interested in anything beside his path. His emotions were few and heavy. All of him was hidden by his angelic face, and for this he had no more concern or responsibility than has a fawn for the dappling spots on its young hide.

2

On Aron's first day in school he waited eagerly for the recess. He went over to the

girlside to talk to Abra. A
mob of squealing girls could
not drive him out. It took a
full-grown teacher to force
him back to the boyside.
At noon he missed her,
for her father came by in his
high-wheeled
buggy
and
drove her home for her lunch.
He
waited
outside
the
schoolyard gate for her after
school.
She
came
out
surrounded by girls. Her face
was composed and gave no

sign that she expected him.
She was far the prettiest girl
in the school, but it is
doubtful whether Aron had
noticed that.
The cloud of girls hung
on and hung on. Aron
marched along three paces
behind them, patient and
unembarrassed even when the
girls tossed their squealing
barbs of insult over their
shoulders at him. Gradually
some drifted away to their
own homes, and only three
girls were with Abra when
she came to the white gate of
her yard and turned in. Her
friends stared at him a
moment, giggled, and went
on their way.
Aron sat down on the

edge of the sidewalk. After a moment the latch lifted, the white gate opened, and Abra emerged. She walked across the walk and stood over him.

“What do you want?”

Aron’s wide eyes looked up at her. “You aren’t engaged to anybody?”

“Silly,” she said.

He struggled up to his feet. “I guess it will be a long time before we can get married,” he said.

“Who wants to get married?”

Aron didn’t answer.

Perhaps he didn’t hear. He walked along beside her.

Abra moved with firm

and deliberate steps and she
faced straight ahead. There
was wisdom and sweetness in
her expression. She seemed
deep in thought. And Aron,
walking beside her, never
took his eyes from her face.
His attention seemed tied to
her face by a taut string.
They walked silently
past the Baby School, and
there the pavement ended.
Abra turned right and led the
way through the stubble of
the summer's hayfield. The
black 'dobe clods crushed
under their feet.
On the edge of the field
stood a little pump house, and
a willow tree flourished
beside it, fed by the overspill
of water. The long skirts of

the willow hung down nearly
to the ground.
Abra parted the switches
like a curtain and went into
the house of leaves made
against the willow trunk by
the sweeping branches. You
could see out through the
leaves, but inside it was
sweetly protected and warm
and safe. The afternoon
sunlight came yellow through
the aging leaves.
Abra sat down on the
ground, or rather she seemed
to drift down, and her full
skirts settled in a billow
around her. She folded her
hands in her lap almost as
though she were praying.
Aron sat down beside
her. “I guess it will be a long

time before we can get
married," he said again. "Not
so long," Abra said. "I wish it
was now."
"It won't be so long,"
said Abra. Aron asked, "Do
you think your father will let
you?"
It was a new thought to
her, and she turned and
looked at him. "Maybe I
won't ask him."
"But your mother?"
"Let's not disturb them,"
she said. "They'd think it was
funny or bad. Can't you keep
a secret?"
"Oh, yes. I can keep
secrets better than anybody.
And I've got some too."
Abra said, "Well, you
just put this one with the

others.”

Aron picked up a twig

and drew a line on the dark

earth. “Abra, do you know

how you get babies?”

“Yes,” she said. “Who

told you?”

“Lee

told

me.

He

explained the whole thing. I

guess we can’t have any

babies for a long time.”

Abra’s mouth turned up

at

the

corners

with

a

condescending wisdom. “Not

so long,” she said.

“We’ll have a house
together some time,” Aron
said, bemused. “We’ll go in
and close the door and it will
be nice. But that will be a
long time.”
Abra put out her hand
and touched him on the arm.
“Don’t you worry about long
times,” she said. “This is a
kind of a house. We can play
like we live here while we’re
waiting. And you will be my
husband and you can call me
wife.”
He tried it over under his
breath
and
then
aloud.
“Wife,” he said. “It’ll be like
practicing,” said Abra.

Aron’s arm shook under

her hand, and she put it, palm

up, in her lap.

Aron

said

suddenly,

“While

we’re

practicing,

maybe

we

could

do

something else.”

“What?”

“Maybe you wouldn’t

like it.”

“What is it?”

“Maybe

we

could

pretend

like

you’re

my

mother.”

“That’s easy,” she said.

“Would you mind?”

“No, I’d like it. Do you

want to start now?”

“Sure,” Aron said. “How

do you want to go about it?”

“Oh, I can tell you that,”

said Abra. She put a cooing

tone in her voice and said,

“Come, my baby, put your

head in Mother’s lap. Come,

my little son. Mother will

hold you.” She drew his head

down, and without warning

Aron began to cry and could

not stop. He wept quietly, and

Abra stroked his cheek and

wiped the flowing tears away

with the edge of her skirt.

The sun crept down

toward

its

setting

place

behind the Salinas River, and

a

bird

began

to

sing

wonderfully from the golden

stubble of the field. It was as

beautiful under the branches

of the willow tree as anything

in the world can be.

Very

slowly

Aron’s

weeping stopped, and he felt

good and he felt warm.

“My good little baby,”
Abra said. “Here, let Mother
brush your hair back.”
Aron sat up and said
almost angrily, “I don’t
hardly ever cry unless I’m
mad. I don’t know why I
cried.”
Abra asked, “Do you
remember your mother?”
“No. She died when I
was a little bit of a baby.”
“Don’t you know what
she looked like?”
“No.”
“Maybe you saw a
picture.”
“No, I tell you. We don’t
have any pictures. I asked
Lee and he said no pictures—
no, I guess it was Cal asked
Lee.”

“When did she die?”

“Right after Cal and I

were born.”

“What was her name?”

“Lee says it was Cathy.

Say, what you asking so

much for?”

Abra went on calmly,

“How was she complected?”

“What?”

“Light or dark hair?”

“I don’t know.”

“Didn’t your father tell

you?”

“We never asked him.”

Abra was silent, and

after a while Aron asked,

“What’s the matter—cat got

your tongue?”

Abra

inspected

the

setting sun.

Aron asked uneasily,

“You mad with me”—and he

added tentatively—“wife?”

“No, I’m not mad. I’m

just wondering.”

“What about?”

“About

something.”

Abra’s firm face was tight

against a seething inner

argument.

She

asked,

“What’s it like not to have

any mother?”

“I don’t know. It’s like

anything else.”

“I guess you wouldn’t

even know the difference.”

“I would too. I wish you

would talk out. You’re like

riddles in the *Bulletin*."

Abra continued in her concentrated imperturbability, "Do you want to have a mother?"

"That's crazy," said Aron. " 'Course I do. Everybody does. You aren't trying to hurt my feelings, are you? Cal tries that sometimes and then he laughs."

Abra looked away from the setting sun. She had difficulty seeing past the purple spots the light had left on her eyes. "You said a little while ago you could keep secrets."

"I can."

"Well, do you have a

double-poison-and-cut-my-throat secret?”

“Sure I have.”

Abra said softly, “Tell

me what it is, Aron.” She put

a caress in his name.

“Tell you what?”

“Tell me the deepest

down hell-and-goddam secret

you know.”

Aron reared back from

her in alarm. “Why, I will

not,” he said. “What right you

got to ask me? I wouldn’t tell

anybody.”

“Come on, my baby—

tell Mother,” she crooned.

There

were

tears

crowding up in his eyes

again, but this time they were

tears of anger. “I don’t know

as I want to marry you," he said. "I think I'm going home now."

Abra put her hand on his wrist and hung on. Her voice lost its coquetry. "I wanted to see. I guess you can keep secrets all right."

"Why did you go for to do it? I'm mad now. I feel sick."

"I think I'm going to tell you a secret," she said.

"Ho!" he jeered at her.

"Who can't keep a secret now?"

"I was trying to decide," she said. "I think I'm going to tell you this secret because it might be good for you. It might make you glad."

"Who told you not to

tell?”

“Nobody,” she said. “I

only told myself.”

“Well, I guess that’s a

little different. What’s your

old secret?”

The red sun leaned its

rim on the rooftree of Tollot’s

house on the Blanco Road,

and Tollot’s chimney stuck

up like a black thumb against

it.

Abra said softly, “Listen,

you remember when we came

to your place that time?”

“Sure!”

“Well, in the buggy I

went to sleep, and when I

woke up my father and

mother didn’t know I was

awake.

They

said

your

mother wasn’t dead. They

said she went away. They

said something bad must have

happened to her, and she

went away.”

Aron

said

hoarsely,

“She’s dead.”

“Wouldn’t it be nice if

she wasn’t?”

“My father says she’s

dead. He’s not a liar.”

“Maybe *he* thinks she’s

dead.

He said, “I think he’d

know.”

But

there

was

uncertainty in his tone.
Abra said, “Wouldn’t it
be nice if we could find her?
’Spose she lost her memory
or something. I’ve read about
that. And we could find her
and that would make her
remember.” The glory of the
romance caught her like a rip
tide and carried her away.
Aron said, “I’ll ask my
father.”
“Aron,” she said sternly,
“what I told you is a secret.”
“Who says?”
“I say. Now you just say
after me—‘I’ll take double
poison and cut my throat if I
tell.’ ”
For
a
moment

he

hesitated

and

then

he

repeated, “I’ll take double

poison and cut my throat if I

tell.”

She said, “Now spit in

your palm—like this—that’s

right. Now you give me your

hand—see?—squidge the spit

all together. Now rub it dry

on your hair.” The two

followed the formula, and

then Abra said solemnly,

“Now, I’d just like to see you

tell that one. I knew one girl

that told a secret after that

oath and she burned up in a

barn fire.”

The

sun
was
gone
behind Toiler's house and the
gold light with it. The
evening star shimmered over
Mount Toro.
Abra said, "They'll skin
me alive. Come on. Hurry! I
bet my father's got the dog
whistle out for me. I'll get
whipped."
Aron looked at her in
disbelief. "Whipped! They
don't whip you?"
"That's what you think!"
Aron said passionately,
"You just let them try. If they
go for to whip you, you tell
them I'll kill them." His
wide-set blue eyes were
slitted

and

glinting.

“Nobody’s going to whip my

wife,” he said.

Abra

put

her

arms

around his neck in the dusk

under the willow tree. She

kissed him on his open

mouth. “I love you, husband,”

she said, and then she turned

and bolted, holding up her

skirts above her knees, her

lace-edged

white

drawers

flashing as she ran toward

home.

3

Aron went back to the trunk

of the willow tree and sat on the ground and leaned back against the bark. His mind was a grayness and there were churnings of pain in his stomach. He tried to sort out the feeling into thoughts and pictures so the pain would go away. It was hard. His slow deliberate mind could not accept so many thoughts and emotions at once. The door was shut against everything except physical pain. After a while the door opened a little and let in one thing to be scrutinized and then another and another, until all had been absorbed, one at a time. Outside his closed mind a huge thing was clamoring to get in. Aron held it back until

last.
First he let Abra in and
went over her dress, her face,
the feel of her hand on his
cheek, the odor that came
from her, like milk a little and
like cut grass a little. He saw
and felt and heard and
smelled her all over again. He
thought how clean she was,
her hands and fingernails, and
how
straightforward
and
unlike the gigglers in the
schoolyard.
Then,
in
order,
he
thought of her holding his
head and his baby crying,

crying with longing, wanting
something and in a way
feeling that he was getting it.
Perhaps the getting it was
what had made him cry.
Next he thought of her
trick—her testing of him. He
wondered what she would
have done if he had told her a
secret. What secret could he
have told her if he had
wished? Right now- he didn't
recall any secret except the
one that was beating on the
door to get into his mind.
The sharpest question
she had asked, "How does it
feel not to have a mother?"
slipped into his mind. And
how did it feel? It didn't feel
like anything. Ah, but in the
schoolroom, at Christmas and

graduation, when the mothers
of other children came to the
parties—then was the silent
cry and the wordless longing.
That's what it was like.
Salinas was surrounded
and penetrated with swamps,
with tule-filled ponds, and
every
pond
spawned
thousands of frogs. With the
evening the air was so full of
their song that it was a kind
of roaring silence. It was a
veil, a background, and its
sudden
disappearance,
as
after a clap of thunder, was a
shocking thing. It is possible
that if in the night the frog

sound should have stopped, everyone in Salinas would have awakened, feeling that there was a great noise. In their millions the frog songs seemed to have a beat and a cadence, and perhaps it is the ears' function to do this just as it is the eyes' business to make stars twinkle.

It was quite dark under the willow tree now. Aron wondered whether he was ready for the big thing, and while he wondered it slipped through and was in.

His mother was alive.

Often he had pictured her lying underground, still and cool and unrotted. But this was not so. Somewhere she moved about and spoke, and

her hands moved and her eyes were open. And in the midst of his flood of pleasure a sorrow came down on him and a sense of loss, of dreadful loss. Aron was puzzled. He inspected the cloud of sadness. If his mother was alive, his father was a liar. If one was alive, the other was dead. Aron said aloud under the tree, “My mother is dead. She’s buried some place in the East.”

In the darkness he saw Lee’s face and heard Lee’s soft speech. Lee had built very well. Having a respect that amounted to reverence for the truth, he had also its natural opposite, a loathing of a lie. He had made it very

clear to the boys exactly what
he meant. If something was
untrue and you didn't know
it, that was error. But if you
knew a true thing and
changed it to a false thing,
both
you
and
it
were
loathsome.
Lee's voice said, "I
know that sometimes a lie is
used in kindness. I don't
believe it ever works kindly.
The quick pain of truth can
pass away, but the slow,
eating agony of a lie is never
lost. That's a running sore."
And
Lee

had
worked
patiently and slowly and he
had succeeded in building
Adam as the center, the
foundation, the essence of
truth.
Aron shook his head in
the dark, shook it hard in
disbelief. “If my father is a
liar, Lee is a liar too.” He was
lost. He had no one to ask.
Cal was a liar, but Lee’s
conviction had made Cal a
clever liar. Aron felt that
something had to die—his
mother or his world.
His
solution
lay
suddenly before him. Abra
had not lied. She had told him

only what she had heard, and
her parents had only heard it
too. He got to his feet and
pushed his mother back into
death and closed his mind
against her.
He was late for supper.
“I was with Abra,” he
explained. After supper, when
Adam
sat
in
his
new
comfortable chair, reading the
Salinas Index, he felt a
stroking
touch
on
his
shoulder and looked up.
“What is it, Aron?” he asked.

“Good night, Father,”

Aron said.

Chapter 37

1

February in Salinas is likely
to be damp and cold and full
of miseries. The heaviest
rains fall then, and if the river
is going to rise, it rises then.
February of 1915 was a year
heavy with water.
The Trasks were well
established in Salinas. Lee,
once he had given up his
brackish
bookish
dream,
made a new kind of place for
himself in the house beside
Reynaud’s Bakery. On the
ranch his possessions had
never really been unpacked,

for Lee had lived poised to go
someplace else. Here, for the
first time in his life, he built a
home for himself, feathered
with
comfort
and
permanence.
The
large
bedroom
nearest the street door fell to
him. Lee dipped into his
savings. He had never before
spent a needless penny, since
all
money
had
been
earmarked for his bookstore.
But now he bought a little
hard bed and a desk. He built

bookshelves and unpacked
his books, invested in a soft
rug and tacked prints on the
walls. He placed a deep and
comfortable “Morris chair
under the best reading lamp
he could find. And last he
bought a typewriter and set
about learning to use it.
Having broken out of his
own Spartanism, he remade
the Trask household, and
Adam
gave
him
no
opposition. A gas stove came
into the house and electric
wires and a telephone. He
spent
Adam’s
money

remorselessly—new
furniture, new carpets, a gas
water-heater, and a large
icebox. In a short time there
was hardly a house in Salinas
so
well
equipped.
Lee
defended himself to Adam,
saying, “You have plenty of
money. It would be a shame
not to enjoy it.”
“I’m not complaining,”
Adam protested. “Only I’d
like to buy something too.
What shall I buy?”
“Why don’t you go to
Logan’s music store and
listen to one of the new
phonographs?”
“I think I’ll do that,”

said Adam. And he bought a Victor victrola, a tall Gothic instrument, and he went regularly to see what new records had come in.

The growing century was shucking Adam out of his shell. He subscribed to the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *National Geographic.* He joined the Masons and seriously considered the Elks.

The new icebox fascinated him. He bought a textbook on refrigeration and began to study it.

The truth was that Adam

needed work. He came out of his long sleep needing to do something.

"I think I'll go into business," he said to Lee.

"You don't need to. You have enough to live on."

"But I'd like to be doing something."

"That's different," said Lee. "Know what you want to do? I don't think you'd be very good at business."

"Why not?"

"Just a thought," said Lee.

"Say, Lee, I want you to read an article. It says they've dug up a mastodon in Siberia. Been in the ice thousands of years. And the meat's still good."

Lee smiled at him.

“You’ve got a bug in your

bonnet somewhere,” he said.

“What have you got in all of

those little cups in the

icebox?”

“Different things.”

“Is that the business?

Some of the cups smell bad.”

“It’s an idea,” Adam

said. “I can’t seem to stay

away from it. I just can’t

seem to get over the idea that

you can keep things if you get

them cold enough.”

“Let’s not have any

mastodon

meat

in

our

icebox,” said Lee.

If Adam had conceived

thousands of ideas, the way
Sam Hamilton had, they
might all have drifted away,
but he had only the one. The
frozen mastodon stayed in his
mind. His little cups of fruit,
of pudding, of bits of meat,
both
cooked
and
raw,
continued in the icebox. He
bought every available book
on
bacteria
and
began
sending for magazines that
printed articles of a mildly
scientific nature. And as is
usually true of a man of one
idea, he became obsessed.

Salinas had a small ice
company,
not
large
but
enough to supply the few
houses with iceboxes and to
service the ice-cream parlors.
The horse-drawn ice wagon
went its route every day.
Adam began to visit the
ice plant, and pretty soon he
was taking his little cups to
the freezing chambers. He
wished with all his heart that
Sam Hamilton were alive to
discuss cold with him. Sam
would have covered the field
very quickly, he thought.
Adam was walking back
from the ice plant one rainy
afternoon,

thinking

about

Sam Hamilton, when he saw

Will Hamilton go into the

Abbot

House

Bar.

He

followed him and leaned

against the bar beside him.

“Why don’t you come up and

have some supper with us?”

“I’d like to,” Will said.

“I’ll tell you what—I’ve got a

deal I’m trying to put

through. If I get finished in

time I’ll walk by. Is there

something important?”

“Well, I don’t know.

I’ve

been

doing

some
thinking and I'd like to ask
your advice."
Nearly every business
proposition in the county
came sooner or later to Will
Hamilton's
attention.
He
might have excused himself if
he had not remembered that
Adam was a rich man. An
idea was one thing, but
backed up with cash it was
quite another. "You wouldn't
entertain a reasonable offer
for your ranch, would you?"
he asked.
"Well,
the
boys,
particularly Cal, they like the

place. I think I'll hang on to
it."
"I think I can turn it over
for you."
"No, it's rented, paying
its own taxes. I'll hold on to
it."
"If I can't get in for
supper I might be able to
come in afterward," said
Will.
Will Hamilton was a
very substantial businessman.
No one knew exactly how
many pies his thumb had
explored, but it was known
that he was a clever and
comparatively rich man. His
business deal had been nonexistent. It was a part of his
policy always to be busy and
occupied.
He had supper alone in

the Abbot House. After a considered time he walked around the corner on Central Avenue and rang the bell of Adam Trask's house.

The boys had gone to bed. Lee sat with a darning basket, mending the long black stockings the twins wore to school. Adam had been reading the *Scientific American.* He let Will in and placed a chair for him. Lee brought a pot of coffee and went back to his mending. Will settled himself into a chair, took out a fat black cigar, and lighted up. He waited for Adam to open the game.

"Nice weather for a change. And how's your

mother?” Adam said.

“Just

fine.

Seems

younger every day. The boys

must be growing up.”

“Oh, they are. Cal’s

going to be in his school play.

He’s quite an actor. Aron’s a

real good student. Cal wants

to go to farming.”

“Nothing wrong with

that if you go about it right.

Country could use some

forward-looking

farmers.”

Will waited uneasily. He

wondered if it could be that

Adam’s

money

was

exaggerated. Could Adam be

getting ready to borrow
money? Will quickly worked
out how much he would lend
on the Trask ranch and how
much he could borrow on it.
The figures were not the
same, nor was the interest
rate. And still Adam did not
come up with his proposition.
Will grew restless. “I can’t
stay very long,” he said.
“Told a fellow I’d meet him
later tonight.”
“Have another cup of
coffee,” Adam suggested.
“No, thanks. Keeps me
awake.
Did
you
have
something you wanted to see
me about?”

Adam said, “I was thinking about your father and I thought I’d like to talk to a Hamilton.”

Will relaxed a little in his chair. “He was a great old talker.”

“Somehow he made a man better than he was,” said Adam.

Lee looked up from his darning egg. “Perhaps the best conversationalist in the world is the man who helps others to talk.”

Will said, “You know, it sounds funny to hear you use all those two-bit words. I’d swear to God you used to talk pidgin.”

“I used to,” said Lee. “It was vanity, I guess.” He

smiled at Adam and said to
Will, “Did you hear that
somewhere up in Siberia they
dug a mastodon out of the
ice? It had been there a
hundred thousand years and
the meat was still fresh.”
“Mastodon?”
“Yes, a kind of elephant
that hasn’t lived on the earth
for a long time.”
“Meat was still fresh?”
“Sweet as a pork chop,”
said Lee. He shoved the
wooden
egg
into
the
shattered-knee of a black
stocking.
“That’s
very

interesting," said Will.

Adam laughed. "Lee hasn't wiped my nose yet, but that will come," he said. "I guess I'm pretty roundabout. The whole thing comes up because I'm tired of just sitting around. I want to get something to take up my time."

"Why don't you farm your place?"

"No. That doesn't interest me. You see, Will, I'm not like a man looking for a job. I'm looking for work. I don't need a job."

Will came out of his cautiousness. "Well, what can I do for you?"

“I thought I’d tell you an idea I had, and you might give me an opinion. You’re a businessman.”

“Of course,” said Will.

“Anything I can do.”

“I’ve been looking into refrigeration,” said Adam. “I got an idea and I can’t get rid of it. I go to sleep and it comes right back at me. Never had anything give me so much trouble. It’s a kind of a big idea. Maybe it’s full of holes.”

Will uncrossed his legs and pulled at his pants where they were binding him. “Go ahead—shoot,” he said. “Like a cigar?”

Adam didn’t hear the offer, nor did he know the

implication.

“The

whole

country’s changing,” Adam

said. “People aren’t going to

live the way they used to. Do

you know where the biggest

market for oranges in the

winter is?”

“No. Where?”

“New York City. I read

that. Now in the cold parts of

the country, don’t you think

people

get

to

wanting

perishable

things

in

the

winter—like peas and lettuce

and cauliflower? In a big part of the country they don't have those things for months and months. And right here in the Salinas Valley we can raise them all the year around."

"Right here isn't right there," said Will. "What's your idea?"

"Well, Lee made me get a big icebox, and I got kind of interested. I put different kinds of vegetables in there. And I got to arranging them different ways. You know, Will, if you chop ice fine and lay a head of lettuce in it and wrap it in waxed paper, it will keep three weeks and come out fresh and good."

"Go on," said Will cautiously.

“Well, you know the
railroads built those fruit cars.
I went down and had a look at
them. They’re pretty good.
Do you know we could ship
lettuce right to the east coast
in the middle of winter?”
Will asked, “Where do
you come in?”
“I
was
thinking
of
buying the ice plant here in
Salinas and trying to ship
some things.”
“That would cost a lot of
money.”
“I have quite a lot of
money,” said Adam.
Will Hamilton putted his
lip angrily. “I don’t know

why I got into this," he said.

"I know better."

"How do you mean?"

"Look here," said Will.

"When a man comes to me

for advice about an idea, I

know he doesn't want advice.

He wants me to agree with

him. And if I want to keep his

friendship I tell him his idea

is fine and go ahead. But I

like you and you're a friend

of my family, so I'm going to

stick my neck out."

Lee

put

down

his

darning, moved his sewing

basket to the floor, and

changed his glasses.

Adam

remonstrated,
“What are you getting upset
about?”
“I come from a whole
goddam family of inventors,”
said Will. “We had ideas for
breakfast. We had ideas
instead of breakfast. We had
so many ideas we forgot to
make
the
money
for
groceries. When we got a
little ahead my father, or
Tom, patented something.
I’m the only one in the
family, except my mother,
who didn’t have ideas, and
I’m the only one who ever
made a dime. Tom had ideas
about helping people, and

some of it was pretty darn
near socialism. And if you
tell me you don't care about
making a profit, I'm going to
throw that coffee pot right at
your head."
"Well, I don't care
much."
"You stop right there,
Adam. I've got my neck out.
If you want to drop forty or
fifty thousand dollars quick,
you just go on with your idea.
But I'm telling you—let your
damned idea die. Kick dust
over it."
"What's wrong with it?"
"Everything's
wrong
with it. People in the East
aren't used to vegetables in
the winter. They wouldn't

buy them. You get your cars
stuck on a siding and you'll
lose the shipment. The market
is
controlled.
Oh,
Jesus
Christ! It makes me mad
when babies try to ride into
business on an idea."
Adam
sighed.
"You
make Sam Hamilton sound
like a criminal," he said.
"Well, he was my father
and I loved him, but I wish to
God he had let ideas alone."
Will looked at Adam and saw
amazement in his eyes, and
suddenly Will was ashamed.
He shook his head slowly

from side to side. “I didn’t mean to run down my people,” he said. “I think they were good people. But my advice to you stands. Let refrigeration alone.”

Adam turned slowly to Lee. “Have we got any more of that lemon pie we had for supper?” he asked.

“I don’t think so,” said Lee. “I thought I heard mice in the kitchen. I’m afraid there will be white of egg on the boys’ pillows. You’ve got half a quart of whisky.”

“Have I? Why don’t we have that?”

“I got excited,” said Will, and he tried to laugh at himself. “A drink would do me good.” His face was fiery

red and his voice was strained
in his throat. “I’m getting too
fat,” he said.
But he had two drinks
and
relaxed.
Sitting
comfortably, he instructed
Adam. “Some things don’t
ever change their value,” he
said. “If you want to put
money into something, you
look around at the world.
This war in Europe is going
to go on a long time. And
when there’s war there’s
going to be hungry people. I
won’t say it is so, but it
wouldn’t surprise me if we
got into it. I don’t trust this
Wilson—he’s all theory and
big words. And if we do get

into it, there's going to be
fortunes
made
in
imperishable foods. You take
rice and corn and wheat and
beans, they don't need ice.
They keep, and people can
stay alive on them. I'd say if
you were to plant your whole
damned bottom land to beans
and just put them away, why,
your boys wouldn't have to
worry about the future. Beans
are up to three cents now. If
we get into the war I
wouldn't be surprised if they
went to ten cents. And you
keep beans dry and they'll be
right there, waiting for a
market. If you want to turn a
profit, you plant beans."

He went away feeling good. The shame that had come over him was gone and he knew he had given sound advice.

After Will had gone Lee brought out one-third of a lemon pie and cut it in two.

‘“He’s getting too fat,” Lee said.

Adam was thinking. “I only said I wanted something to do,” he observed.

“How about the ice-plant?”

“I think I’ll buy it.”

“You might plant some beans too,” said Lee.

2

Late in the year Adam made his great try, and it was a sensation in a year of sensations, both local and

international. As he got
ready, businessmen spoke of
him as farseeing, forward-looking,
progress-minded.
The departure of six carloads
of lettuce packed in ice was
given a civic overtone. The
Chamber
of
Commerce
attended the departure. The
cars were decorated with big
posters which said, “Salinas
Valley Lettuce.” But no one
wanted to invest in the
project.
Adam untapped energy
he did not suspect he had. It
was a big job to gather, trim,
box, ice, and load the lettuce.
There was no equipment for
such work. Everything had to

be improvised, a great many
hands hired and taught to do
the work. Everyone gave
advice but no one helped. It
was estimated that Adam had
spent a fortune on his idea,
but how big a fortune no one
knew. Adam did not know.
Only Lee knew.
The idea looked good.
The lettuce was consigned to
commission
merchants
in
New York at a fine price.
Then the train was gone and
everyone went home to wait.
If it was a success any
number of men were willing
to dig down to put money in.
Even
Will

Hamilton
wondered whether he had not
been wrong with his advice.
If the series of events
had been planned by an
omnipotent and unforgiving
enemy it could not have been
more effective. As the train
came to Sacramento a snow
slide closed the Sierras for
two days and the six cars
stood on a siding, dripping
their ice away. On the third
day the freight crossed the
mountains, and that was the
time for unseasonable warm
weather
throughout
the
Middle West. In Chicago
there developed a confusion
of orders—no one's fault—

just one of those things that
happen, and Adam's six cars
of lettuce stood in the yard
for five more days. That was
enough, and there is no
reason to go into it in detail.
What arrived in New York
was six carloads of horrible
slop with a sizable charge just
to get rid of it.
Adam read the telegram
from the commission house
and he settled back in his
chair and a strange enduring
smile came on his face and
did not go away.
Lee kept away from him
to let him get a grip on
himself. The boys heard the
reaction in Salinas. Adam
was a fool. These know-it-all
dreamers always got into

trouble.

Businessmen congratulated themselves on their foresight in keeping out of it. It took experience to be a businessman. People who inherited their money always got into trouble. And if you wanted any proof—just look at how Adam had run his ranch. A fool and his money were soon parted. Maybe that would teach him a lesson. And he had doubled the output of the ice company.

Will Hamilton recalled that he had not only argued against it but had foretold in detail what would happen. He did not feel pleasure, but what could you do when a man wouldn't take advice

from a sound businessman?
And, God knows, Will had
plenty of experience with fly-by-night
ideas.
In
a
roundabout
way
it
was
recalled that Sam Hamilton
had been a fool too. And as
for Tom Hamilton—he had
been just crazy.
When Lee felt that
enough time had passed he
did not beat around the bush.
He sat directly in front of
Adam to get and to keep his
attention.
“How do you feel?” he
asked.

“All right.”

“You aren’t going to crawl back in your hole, are you?”

“What makes you think that?” Adam asked.

“Well, you have the look on your face you used to wear. And you’ve got that sleepwalker light in your eyes. Does this hurt your feelings?”

“No,” said Adam. “The only thing I was wondering about was whether I’m wiped out.”

“Not quite,” said Lee. “You have about nine thousand dollars left and the

ranch.”

“There’s

a

two-thousand-dollar

bill

for

garbage

disposal,”

said

Adam.

“That’s before the nine

thousand.”

“I owe quite a bit for the

new ice machinery.”

“That’s paid.”

“I have nine thousand?”

“And the ranch,” said

Lee. “Maybe you can sell the

ice plant.”

Adam’s face tightened

up and lost the dazed smile.

“I still believe it will work,”

he said. “It was a whole lot of accidents. I’m going to keep the ice plant. Cold does preserve things. Besides, the plant makes some money. Maybe I can figure something out.”

“Try not to figure something that costs money,” said Lee. “I would hate to leave my gas stove.”

3

The twins felt Adam’s failure very deeply. They were fifteen years old and they had known so long that they were sons of a wealthy man that the feeling was hard to lose. If only the affair had not been

a kind of carnival it would
not have been so bad. They
remembered the big placards
on the freight cars with
horror. If the businessmen
made fun of Adam, the high-school group was much more
cruel. Overnight it became
the thing to refer to the boys
as “Aron and Cal Lettuce,” or
simply as “Lettuce-head.”
Aron
discussed
his
problem with Abra. “It’s
going
to
make
a
big
difference,” he told her.
Abra had grown to be a
beautiful girl. Her breasts

were rising with the leaven of
her years, and her face had
the calm and warmth of
beauty. She had gone beyond
prettiness. She was strong and
sure and feminine.
She
looked
at
his
worried face and asked,
“Why is it going to make a
difference?”
“Well, one thing, I think
we’re poor.”
“You
would
have
worked anyway.”
“You know I want to go
to college.”
“You still can. I’ll help

you. Did your father lose all
his money?”
“I don’t know. That’s
what they say.”
“Who is ‘they’?” Abra
asked.
“Why, everybody. And
maybe
your
father
and
mother won’t want you to
marry me.”
“Then I won’t tell them
about it,” said Abra,
“You’re pretty sure of
yourself.”
“Yes,” she said, “I’m
pretty sure of myself. Will
you kiss me?”
“Right here? Right in the
street?”

“Why not?”

“Everybody’d see.”

“I want them to,” said

Abra.

Aron said, “No. I don’t

like to make things public

like that.”

She stepped around in

front of him and stopped him.

“You look here, mister. You

kiss me now.”

“Why?”

She said slowly, “So

everybody will know that I’m

Mrs. Lettuce-head.”

He gave her a quick

embarrassed peck and then

forced her beside him again.

“Maybe I ought to call it off

myself,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’m not good

enough for you now. I'm just
another poor kid. You think I
haven't seen the difference in
your father?"
"You're
just
crazy,"
Abra said. And she frowned a
little because she had seen the
difference in her father too.
They went into Bell's
candy store and sat at a table.
The rage was celery tonic that
year. The year before it had
been
root-beer
ice-cream
sodas.
Abra
stirred
bubbles
delicately with her straw and

thought how her father had changed since the lettuce failure. He had said to her, “Don’t you think it would be wise to see someone else for a change?”

“But I’m engaged to Aron.”

“Engaged!” he snorted at her. “Since when do children get engaged? You’d better look around a little. There are other fish in the sea.”

And she remembered that recently there had been references to suitability of families and once a hint that some people couldn’t keep a scandal hidden forever. This had happened only when Adam was reputed to have lost all of his money.”

She leaned across the
table. “You know what we
could really do is so simple it
will make you laugh.”
“What?”
“We could run your
father’s ranch. My father says
it’s beautiful land.”
“No,” Aron said quickly.
“Why not?”
“I’m not going to be a
farmer and you’re not going
to b? a farmer’s wife.”
“I’m going to be Aron’s
wife, no matter what he is.”
“I’m not going to give
up college,” he said.
“I’ll help you,” Abra
said again.
“Where would you get
the money?”
“Steal it,” she said.

“I want to get out of this
town,” he said. “Everybody’s
sneering at me. I can’t stand it
here.”
“They’ll forget it pretty
soon.”
“No, they won’t either. I
don’t want to stay two years
more to finish high school.”
“Do you want to go
away from me, Aron?”
“No. Oh, damn it, why
did he have to mess with
things
he
doesn’t
know
about?”
Abra
reproved
him.
“Don’t

you
blame
your
father. If it had worked
everybody'd been bowing to
him."
"Well, it didn't work. He
sure fixed me. I can't hold up
my head. By God! I hate
him."
Abra
said
sternly,
"Aron! You stop talking like
that!"
"How do I know he
didn't lie about my mother?"
Abra's face reddened
with anger. "You ought to be
spanked," she said. "If it
wasn't in front of everybody
I'd spank you myself." She

looked at his beautiful face, twisted now with rage and frustration, and suddenly she changed her tactics. “Why don’t you ask about your mother? Just come right out and ask him.”

“I can’t, I promised you.”

“You only promised not to say what I told you.”

“Well, if I asked him he’d want to know where I heard.”

“All right,” she cried, “you’re a spoiled baby! I let you out of your promise. Go ahead and ask him.”

“I don’t know if I will or not.”

“Sometimes I want to kill you,” she said. “But Aron

—I do love you so. I do love you so.” There was giggling from the stools in front of the soda fountain. Their voices had risen and they were overheard by their peers. Aron blushed and tears of anger started in his eyes. He ran out of the store and plunged away up the street. Abra calmly picked up her purse and straightened her skirt and brushed it with her hand. She walked calmly over to Mr. Bell and paid for the celery tonics. On her way to the door she stopped by the giggling group. “You let him alone,” she said coldly. She walked on, and a falsetto followed her—”Oh, Aron, I do love you so.”

In the street she broke
into a run to try to catch up
with Aron, but she couldn’t
find him. She called on the
telephone. Lee said that Aron
had not come home. But
Aron was in his bedroom,
lapped in resentments—Lee
had seen him creep in and
close his door behind him.
Abra walked up and
down the streets of Salinas,
hoping to catch sight of him.
She was angry at him, but she
was
also
bewilderingly
lonely, Aron hadn’t ever run
away from her before. Abra
had lost her gift for being
alone.
Cal

had
to
learn
loneliness. For a very short
time he tried to join Abra and
Aron, but they didn't want
him. He was jealous and tried
to attract the girl to himself
and failed.
His studies he found
easy
and
not
greatly
interesting. Aron had to work
harder to learn, wherefore
Aron had a greater sense of
accomplishment when he did
learn, and he developed a
respect for learning out of all
proportion to the quality of
the learning. Cal drifted

through. He didn’t care much for the sports at school or for the activities. His growing restlessness drove him out at night. He grew tall and rangy, and always there was the darkness about him.

Chapter 38

1

From his first memory Cal had craved warmth and affection, just as everyone does. If he had been an only child or if Aron had been a different kind of boy, Cal might have achieved his relationship normally and easily. But from the very first people were won instantly to Aron by his beauty and his simplicity. Cal very naturally competed for attention and

affection in the only way he
knew—by trying to imitate
Aron.
And
what
was
charming
in
the
blond
ingenuousness
of
Aron
became
suspicious
and
unpleasant in the dark-faced,
slit-eyed Cal. And since he
was
pretending,
his
performance

was

not

convincing. Where Aron was

received, Cal was rebuffed

for doing or saying exactly

the same thing.

And as a few strokes on

the nose will make a puppy

head shy, so a few rebuffs

will make a boy shy all over.

But whereas a puppy will

cringe away or roll on its

back, groveling, a little boy

may cover his shyness with

nonchalance, with bravado, or

with secrecy. And once a boy

has suffered rejection, he will

find rejection even where it

does not exist—or, worse,

will draw it forth from people

simply by expecting it.

In Cal the process had

been so long and so slow that
he felt no strangeness. He had
built a wall of self-sufficiency
around
himself,
strong
enough to defend him against
the world. If his wall had any
weak places they may have
been on the sides nearest
Aron
and
Lee,
and
particularly nearest Adam.
Perhaps in his father's very
unawareness Cal had felt
safety. Not being noticed at
all was better than being
noticed adversely.
When he was quite small
Cal had discovered a secret.

If he moved very quietly to
where his father was sitting
and if he leaned very lightly
against his father's knee,
Adam's hand would rise
automatically and his fingers
would caress Cal's shoulder.
It is probable that Adam did
not even know he did it, but
the caress brought such a
raging flood of emotion to the
boy that he saved this special
joy and used it only when he
needed it. It was a magic to
be depended upon. It was the
ceremonial symbol of a
dogged adoration.
Things do not change
with a change of scene. In
Salinas, Cal had no more
friends than he had had in
King City. Associates he had,

and authority and some admiration, but friends he did not have. He lived alone and walked alone.

2

If Lee knew that Cal left the house at night and returned very late, he gave no sign, since he couldn't do anything about it. The night constables sometimes saw him walking alone. Chief Heiserman made it a point to speak to the truant officer, who assured him that Cal not only had no record for playing hooky but actually was a very good student. The chief knew Adam of course, and since Cal broke no windows and caused no disturbance he told the constables to keep their

eyes open but to let the boy
alone unless he got into
trouble.
Old Tom Watson caught
up with Cal one night and
asked, “Why do you walk
around so much at night?”
“I’m
not
bothering
anybody,”
said
Cal
defensively.
“I know you’re not. But
you ought to be home in
bed.”
“I’m not sleepy,” said
Cal, and this didn’t make any
sense at all to Old Tom, who
couldn’t remember any time
in his whole life when he

wasn’t
sleepy.
The
boy
looked in on the fan-tan
games in Chinatown, but he
didn’t play. It was a mystery,
but then fairly simple things
were
mysteries
to
Tom
Watson and he preferred to
leave them that way.
On his walks Cal often
recalled
the
conversation
between Lee and Adam he
had heard on the ranch. He
wanted to dig out the truth.
And

his
knowledge
accumulated
slowly,
a
reference heard in the street,
the gibing talk in the pool
hall. If Aron had heard the
fragments he would not have
noticed, but Cal collected
them. He knew that his
mother was not dead. He
knew also, both from the first
conversation and from the
talk he heard, that Aron was
not likely to be pleased at
discovering her.
One night Cal ran into
Rabbit Holman, who was up
from San Ardo on his semi-annual drunk. Rabbit greeted
Cal effusively, as a country
man

always
greets
an
acquaintance in a strange
place. Rabbit, drinking from a
pint flask in the alley behind
the Abbot House, told Cal all
the news he could think of.
He had sold a piece of his
land at a fine price and he
was in Salinas to celebrate,
and celebration meant the
whole shebang. He was going
down the Line and show the
whores what a real man could
do.
Cal sat quietly beside
him, listening. When the
whisky got low in Rabbit's
pint Cal slipped away and got
Louis Schneider to buy him
another one. And Rabbit put

down his empty pint and
reached for it again and came
up with a full pint.
“Funny,”
he
said,
“thought I only had one.
Well, it’s a good mistake.”
Halfway
down
the
second pint Rabbit had not
only forgotten who Cal was
but how old he was. He
remembered, however, that
his companion was his very
dear old friend.
“Tell
you
what,
George,” he said. “You let me
get a little more of this here

lead in my pencil and you and
me will go down the Line.
Now don't say you can't
afford
it.
The
whole
shebang's on me. Did I tell
you I sold forty acres? Wasn't
no good neither."
And he said, "Harry, tell
you what let's do. Let's keep
away from them two-bit
whores. We'll go to Kate's
place. Costs high, ten bucks,
but what the hell! They got a
circus down there. Ever seen
a circus, Harry? Well, it's a
lulu. Kate sure knows her
stuff. You remember who
Kate is, don't you, George?
She's Adam Trask's wife,

mother of them damn twins.
Jesus! I never forget the time
she shot him and ran away.
Plugged him in the shoulder
and just runoff. Well, she
wasn't no good as a wife but
she's sure as hell a good
whore. Funny too—you know
how they say a whore makes
a good wife? Ain't nothing
new for them to experiment
with. Help me up a little, will
you, Harry? What was I
saying?"
"Circus," said Cal softly.
"Oh, yeah. Well, this
circus of Kate's will pop your
eyes out. Know what they
do?"
Cal
walked
a

little
behind so that Rabbit would
not notice him. Rabbit told
what they did. And what they
did wasn’t what made Cal
sick. That just seemed to him
silly. It was the men who
watched.
Seeing
Rabbit’s
face under the streetlights,
Cal knew what the watchers
at the circus would be like.
They went through the
overgrown yard and up on the
unpainted porch. Although
Cal was tall for his age he
walked high on his toes. The
guardian of the door didn’t
look at him very closely. The
dim room with its low secret
lamps

and
the
nervous
waiting men concealed his
presence.

3

Always before, Cal wanted to
build a dark accumulation of
things seen and things heard
—a kind of a warehouse of
materials that, like obscure
tools, might come in handy,
but after the visit to Kate's he
felt a desperate need for help.
One night Lee, tapping
away at his typewriter, heard
a quiet knock on his door and
let Cal in. The boy sat down
on the edge of the bed, and
Lee let his thin body down in
the Morris chair. He was
amused that a chair could

give him so much pleasure.
Lee folded his hands over his
stomach as though he wore
Chinese sleeves and waited
patiently. Cal was looking at
a spot in the air right over
Lee's head.
Cal spoke softly and
rapidly. "I know where my
mother is and what she's
doing. I saw her."
Lee's
mind
said
a
convulsive
prayer
for
guidance. "What do you want
to know?" he asked softly.
"I haven't thought yet.
I'm trying to think. Would

you tell me the truth?”

“Of course.”

The questions whirling in Cal’s head were so bewildering he had trouble picking one out. “Does my father know?”

“Yes.”

“Why did he say she was dead?”

“To save you from pain.”

Cal considered. “What did my father do to make her leave?”

“He loved her with his whole mind and body. He gave her everything he could imagine.”

“Did she shoot him?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because he didn’t want her to go away.”

“Did he ever hurt her?”

“Not that I know of. It wasn’t in him to hurt her.”

“Lee, why did she do it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t know or won’t say?”

“Don’t know.”

Cal was silent for so long that Lee’s fingers began to creep a little, holding to his wrists. He was relieved when Cal spoke again. The boy’s tone was different. There was a pleading in it.

“Lee, you knew her. What was she like?”

Lee sighed and his hands relaxed. “I can only say what

I think. I may be wrong."

"Well, what did you

think?"

"Cal," he said, "I've

thought about it for a great

many hours and I still don't

know. She is a mystery. It

seems to me that she is not

like other people. There is

something

she

lacks.

Kindness

maybe,

or

conscience. You can only

understand people if you feel

them in yourself. And I can't

feel her. The moment I think

about her my feeling goes

into darkness. I don't know

what she wanted or what she

was after. She was full of hatred, but why or toward what I don't know. It's a mystery. And her hatred wasn't healthy. It wasn't angry. It was heartless. I don't know that it is good to talk to you like this."

"I need to know."

"Why? Didn't you feel better before you knew?"

"Yes. But I can't stop now."

"You're right," said Lee. "When the first innocence goes, you can't stop—unless you're a hypocrite or a fool. But I can't tell you any more because I don't know any more.

Cal said, "Tell me about my father then."

“That I can do,” said
Lee. He paused. “I wonder if
anyone can hear us talking?
Speak softly.”
“Tell me about him,”
said Cal.
“I think your father has
in him, magnified, the things
his wife lacks. I think in him
kindness and conscience are
so large that they are almost
faults. They trip him up and
hinder him.”
“What did he do when
she left?”
“He died,” said Lee. “He
walked around but he was
dead. And only recently has
he come half to life again.”
Lee saw a strange new
expression on Cal’s face. The
eyes were open wider, and

the mouth, ordinarily tight and muscular, was relaxed. In his face, now for the first time, Lee could see Aron's face in spite of the different coloring.

Cal's shoulders were shaking a little, like a muscle too long held under a strain.

"What is it, Cal?" Lee asked.

"I love him," Cal said.

"I love him too," said Lee. "I guess I couldn't have stayed around so long if I hadn't. He is not smart in a worldly sense but he's a good man. Maybe the best man I have ever known."

Cal stood up suddenly.

“Good night, Lee,” he said.

“Now you wait just a

moment. Have you told

anyone?”

“No.”

“Not

Aron—no,

of

course you wouldn’t.”

“Suppose he finds out?”

“Then you’d have to

stand by to help him. Don’t

go yet. When you leave this

room we may not be able to

talk again. You may dislike

me for knowing you know the

truth. Tell me this—do you

hate your mother?”

“Yes,” said Cal.

“I wondered,” said Lee.

“I don’t think your father ever

hated her. He had only

sorrow.”

Cal drifted toward the door, slowly, softly. He shoved his fists deep in his pockets. “It’s like you said about knowing people. I hate her because I know why she went away. I know—because I’ve got her in me.” His head was down and his voice was heartbroken.

Lee jumped up. “You stop that!” he said sharply. “You hear me? Don’t let me catch you doing that. Of course you may have that in you. Everybody has. But you’ve got the other too. Here —look up! Look at me!”

Cal raised his head and said wearily, “What do you want?”

“You’ve got the other
too. Listen to me! You
wouldn’t even be wondering
if you didn’t have it. Don’t
you dare take the lazy way.
It’s too easy to excuse
yourself because of your
ancestry. Don’t let me catch
you doing it! Now—look
close at me so you will
remember. Whatever you do,
it will be you who do it—not
your mother.”
“Do you believe that,
Lee?”
“Yes, I believe it, and
you’d better believe it or I’ll
break every bone in your
body.”
After Cal had gone Lee
went back to his chair. He
thought ruefully, I wonder

what

happened

to

my

Oriental repose?

4

Cal’s discovery of his mother

was more a verification than a

new thing to him. For a long

time he had known without

details that the cloud was

there. And his reaction was

twofold. He had an almost

pleasant sense of power in

knowing,

and

he

could

evaluate

actions

and

expressions, could interpret

vague references, could even
dip up and reorganize the
past. But these did not
compensate for the pain in his
knowledge.
His
body
was
rearranging
itself
toward
manhood, and he was shaken
by the veering winds of
adolescence. One moment he
was dedicated and pure and
devoted;
the
next
he
wallowed in filth; and the
next he groveled in shame
and emerged rededicated.

His discovery sharpened all of his emotions. It seemed to him that he was unique, having such a heritage. He could not quite believe Lee's words or conceive that other boys were going through the

same thing.

The circus at Kate's

remained with him. At one

moment

the

memory

inflamed his mind and body

with pubescent fire, and the

next moment nauseated him

with revulsion and loathing.

He looked at his father

more closely and saw perhaps

more sadness and frustration

in Adam than may have been

there. And in Cal there grew

up a passionate love for his

father and a wish to protect

him and to make it up to him

for the things he had suffered.

In Cal's own sensitized mind

that suffering was unbearable.

He
blundered
into
the
bathroom while Adam was
bathing and saw the ugly
bullet scar and heard himself
ask against his will, “Father,
what’s that scar?”
Adam’s fingers went up
as though to conceal the scar.
He said, “It’s an old wound,
Cal. I was in the Indian
campaigns. I’ll tell you about
it some time.”
Cal, watching Adam’s
face, had seen his mind leap
into the past for a lie. Cal
didn’t hate the lie but the
necessity for telling it. Cal
lied for reasons of profit of
one kind or another. To be

driven to a lie seemed
shameful to him. He wanted
to shout, “I know how you
got it and it’s all right.” But,
of course, he did not. “I’d like
to hear about it,” he said.
Aron was caught in the
roil of change too, but his
impulses were more sluggish
than Cal’s. His body did not
scream at him so shrilly. His
passions took a religious
direction. He decided on the
ministry for his future. He
attended all services in the
Episcopal
church,
helped
with the flowers and leaves at
feast times, and spent many
hours with the young and
curly-haired clergyman, Mr.

Rolf. Aron's training in
worldliness was gained from
a
young
man
of
no
experience, which gave him
the agility for generalization
only the inexperienced can
have.
Aron was confirmed in
the Episcopal church and
took his place in the choir on
Sundays. Abra followed him.
Her feminine mind knew that
such things were necessary
but unimportant.
It was natural that the
convert Aron should work on
Cal.
First

Aron
prayed
silently for Cal, but finally he
approached
him.
He
denounced Cal's godlessness,
demanded his reformation.
Cal might have tried to
go along if his brother had
been more clever. But Aron
had reached a point of
passionate purity that made
everyone else foul. After a
few lectures Cal found him
unbearably smug and told
him so. It was a relief to both
of
them
when
Aron
abandoned his brother to

eternal damnation.

Aron's

religion

inevitably took a sexual turn. He spoke to Abra of the necessity for abstinence and decided that he would live a life of celibacy. Abra in her wisdom agreed with him, feeling and hoping that this phase would pass. Celibacy was the only state she had known. She wanted to marry Aron and bear any number of his children, but for the time being she did not speak of it. She had never been jealous before, but now she began to find in herself an instinctive and perhaps justified hatred of the Reverend Mr. Rolf.

Cal watched his brother

triumph over sins he had never committed. He thought sardonically of telling him about his mother, to see how he would handle it, but he withdrew the thought quickly. He didn't think Aron could handle it at all.

Chapter 39

1

At intervals Salinas suffered from a mild eructation of morality. The process never varied much. One burst was like another. Sometimes it started in the pulpit and sometimes with a new ambitious president of the Women's

Civic
Club.
Gambling was invariably the
sin to be eradicated. There
were certain advantages in
attacking
gambling.
One
could discuss it, which was
not true of prostitution. It was
an obvious evil and most of
the games were operated by
Chinese. There was little
chance of treading on the toes
of a relative.
From church and club
the town's two newspapers
caught
fire.
Editorials
demanded a clean-up. The
police agreed but pleaded

short-handedness and tried
for increased budget and
sometimes succeeded.
When it got to the
editorial stage everyone knew
the cards were down. What
followed was as carefully
produced as a ballet. The
police
got
ready,
the
gambling houses got ready,
and
the
papers
set
up
congratulatory editorials in
advance. Then came the raid,
deliberate and sure. Twenty
or more Chinese, imported

from Pajaro, a few bums, six or eight drummers, who, being strangers, were not warned, fell into the police net, were booked, jailed, and in the morning fined and released. The town relaxed in its new spotlessness and the houses lost only one night of business plus the fines. It is one of the triumphs of the human that he can know a thing and still not believe it. In the fall of 1916 Cal was watching the fan-tan game at Shorty Lim's one night when the raid scooped him up. In the dark no one noticed him, and the chief was embarrassed to find him in the tank in the morning. The chief telephoned Adam,

got
him
up
from
his
breakfast. Adam walked the
two blocks to the City Hall,
picked up Cal, crossed the
street to the post office for his
mail, and then the two walked
home.
Lee had kept Adam's
eggs warm and had fried two
for Cal.
Aron walked through the
dining room on his way to
school. "Want me to wait for
you?" he asked Cal.
"No," said Cal. He kept
his eyes down and ate his
eggs.
Adam had not spoken

except to say, “Come along!”
at the City Hall after he had
thanked the Chief.
Cal gulped down a
breakfast he did not want,
darting glances up through
his eyelashes at his father’s
face. He could make nothing
of Adam’s expression. It
seemed at once puzzled and
angry and thoughtful and sad.
Adam stared down into
his coffee cup. The silence
grew until it had the weight
of age so hard to lift aside.
Lee looked in. “Coffee?”
he asked.
Adam shook his head
slowly. Lee withdrew and this
time closed the kitchen door.
In
the

clock-ticking
silence Cal began to be
afraid. He felt a strength
flowing out of his father he
had never known was there.
Itching prickles of agony ran
up his legs, and he was afraid
to move to restore the
circulation. He knocked his
fork against his plate to make
a noise and the clatter was
swallowed up. The clock
struck nine deliberate strokes
and they were swallowed up.
As the fear began to
chill, resentment took its
place. So might a trapped fox
feel anger at the paw which
held him to the trap.
Suddenly Cal jumped
up. He hadn’t known he was
going to move. He shouted

and he hadn't known he was going to speak. He cried, "Do what you're going to do to me! Go ahead! Get it over!"

And his shout was sucked into the silence.

Adam slowly raised his head. It is true that Cal had never looked into his father's eyes before, and it is true that many people never look into their father's eyes. Adam's irises were light blue with dark radial lines leading into the vortices of his pupils. And deep down in each pupil Cal saw his own face reflected, as though two Cals looked out at him.

Adam said slowly, "I've failed you, haven't I?"

It was worse than an

attack. Cal faltered, “What do you mean?”

“You were picked up in a gambling house. I don’t know how you got there, what you were doing there, why you went there.”

Cal sat limply down and looked at his plate.

“Do you gamble, son?”

“No, sir. I was just watching.”

“Had you been there before?”

“Yes, sir. Many times.”

“Why do you go?”

“I don’t know. I get restless at night—like an alley cat, I guess.” The thought of Kate and his weak joke seemed horrible to him.

“When I can’t sleep I walk

around," he said, "to try to
blot it out."
Adam considered his
words, inspected each one.
"Does your brother walk
around too?"
"Oh,
no,
sir.
He
wouldn't think of it. He's—
he's not restless."
"You see, I don't know,"
said Adam. "I don't know
anything about you."
Cal wanted to throw his
arms about his father, to hug
him and to be hugged by him.
He
wanted
some
wild

demonstration of sympathy
and love. He picked up his
wooden napkin ring and
thrust his forefinger through
it. “I’d tell you if you asked,”
he said softly.
“I didn’t ask. I didn’t
ask! I’m as bad a father as my
father was.”
Cal had never heard this
tone in Adam’s voice. It was
hoarse and breaking with
warmth and he fumbled
among his words, feeling for
them in the dark.
“My father made a mold
and forced me into it,” Adam
said. “I was a bad casting but
I
couldn’t
be
remelted.

Nobody can be remelted. And so I remained a bad casting."

Cal said, "Sir, don't be sorry. You've had too much of that."

"Have I? Maybe—but maybe the wrong kind. I don't know my sons. I wonder whether I could learn."

"I'll tell you anything you want to know. Just ask me."

"Where would I start? Right at the beginning?"

"Are you sad or mad because I was in jail?"

To Cal's surprise Adam laughed. "You were just there, weren't you? You didn't do anything wrong."

"Maybe being there was

wrong.” Cal wanted a blame
for himself.
“One time I was just
there,” said Adam. “I was a
prisoner for nearly a year for
just being there.”
Cal tried to absorb this
heresy. “I don’t believe it,” he
said.
“Sometimes
I
don’t
either, but I know that when I
escaped I robbed a store and
stole some clothes.”
“I don’t believe it,” Cal
said weakly, but the warmth,
the
closeness,
was
so
delicious that he clung to it.

He breathed shallowly so that the warmth might not be disturbed.

Adam said, “Do you remember Samuel Hamilton? —sure you do. When you were a baby he told me I was a bad father. He hit me, knocked me down, to impress it on me.”

“That old man?”

“He was a tough old man. And now I know what he meant. I’m the same as my father was. He didn’t allow me to be a person, and I haven’t seen my sons as people. That’s what Samuel meant.” He looked right into Cal’s eyes and smiled, and Cal ached with affection for him.

Cal said, “We don’t
think you’re a bad father.”
“Poor
things,”
said
Adam. “How would you
know? You’ve never had any
other kind.”
“I’m glad I was in jail,”
said Cal.
“So am I. So am I.” He
laughed. “We’ve both been in
jail—we can talk together.” A
gaiety grew in him. “Maybe
you can tell me what kind of
a boy you are—can you?”
“Yes sir.”
“Will you?”
“Yes, sir.”
“Well, tell me. You see,
there’s a responsibility in
being a person. It’s more than

just taking up space where air would be. What are you like?"

"No joke?" Cal asked shyly.

"No joke—oh, surely, no joke. Tell me about yourself—that is, if you want to."

Cal began, "Well—I'm—" He stopped. "It's not so easy when you try," he said.

"I guess it would be—maybe impossible. Tell me about your brother."

"What do you want to know about him?"

"What you think of him, I guess. That's all you could tell me."

Cal said, "He's good. He doesn't do bad things. He doesn't think bad things."

“Now
you’re
telling
about yourself.”
“Sir?”
“You’re saying you do
and think bad things.”
Cal’s cheeks reddened.
“Well, I do.”
“Very bad things?”
“Yes, sir. Do you want
me to tell?”
“No, Cal. You’ve told.
Your voice tells and your
eyes tell you’re at war with
yourself. But you shouldn’t
be ashamed. It’s awful to be
ashamed.
Is
Aron
ever
ashamed?”

“He doesn’t do anything
to be ashamed of.”
Adam leaned forward.
“Are you sure?”
“Pretty sure.”
“Tell me, Cal—do you
protect him?”
“How do you mean,
sir?”
“I mean like this—if you
heard something bad or cruel
or ugly, would you keep it
from him?”
“I—I think so.”
“You think he’s too
weak to bear things you can
bear?”
“It’s not that, sir. He’s
good. He’s really good. He
never does anyone harm. He
never says bad things about
anyone. He’s not mean and

he never complains and he's
brave. He doesn't like to fight
but he will."
"You love your brother,
don't you?"
"Yes, sir. And I do bad
things to him. I cheat him and
I fool him. Sometimes I hurt
him for no reason at all."
"And
then
you're
miserable?"
"Yes, sir."
"Is
Aron
ever
miserable?"
"I don't know. When I
didn't want to join the Church
he felt bad. And once when
Abra got angry and said she

hated him he felt awful bad.
He was sick. He had a fever.
Don’t you remember? Lee
sent for the doctor.”
Adam said with wonder,
“I could live with you and not
know any of these things!
Why was Abra mad?”
Cal said, “I don’t know
if I ought to tell.”
“I don’t want you to
then.”
“It’s nothing bad. I guess
it’s all right. You see, sir,
Aron wants to be a minister.
Mr. Rolf—well, he likes high
church, and Aron liked that,
and he thought maybe he
would never get married and
maybe go to a retreat.”
“Like a monk, you
mean?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Abra didn’t like

that?”

“Like it? She got spitting

mad. She can get mad

sometimes. She took Aron’s

fountain pen and threw it on

the sidewalk and tramped on

it. She said she’d wasted half

her life on Aron.”

Adam laughed. “How

old is Abra?”

“Nearly

fifteen.

But

she’s—well, more than that

some ways.”

“I should say she is.

What did Aron do?”

“He just got quiet but he

felt awful bad.”

Adam said, “I guess you

could have taken her away
from him then.”
“Abra is Aron’s girl,”
said Cal.
Adam looked deeply
into Cal’s eyes. Then he
called, “Lee!” There was no
answer. “Lee!” he called
again. He said, ‘“I didn’t hear
him go out. I want some fresh
coffee.”
Cal jumped up. “I’ll
make it.”
“Say,” said Adam, “you
should be in school.”
“I don’t want to go.”
“You ought to go. Aron
went.”
“I’m happy,” Cal said. “I
want to be with you.”
Adam looked down at
his hands. “Make the coffee,”

he said softly and his voice was shy.

When Cal was in the kitchen Adam looked inward at himself with wonder. His nerves and muscles throbbed with an excited hunger. His fingers yearned to grasp, his legs to run. His eyes avidly brought the room into focus. He saw the chairs, the pictures, the red roses on the carpet, and new sharp things —almost people things but friendly things. And in his brain was born sharp appetite for the future—a pleased warm anticipation, as though the coming minutes and weeks must bring delight. He felt a dawn emotion, with a lovely day to slip golden and

quiet over him. He laced his fingers behind his head and stretched his legs out stiff. In the kitchen Cal urged on the water heating in the coffeepot, and yet he was pleased to be waiting. A miracle once it is familiar is no longer a miracle; Cal had lost his wonder at the golden relationship with his father but the pleasure remained. The poison of loneliness and the gnawing envy of the unlonely had gone out of him, and his person was clean and sweet, and he knew it was. He dredged up an old hatred to test himself, and he found the hatred gone. He wanted to serve his father, to give him some great gift, to perform

some huge good task in honor
of his father.
The coffee boiled over
and
Cal
spent
minutes
cleaning up the stove. He said
to himself, “I wouldn’t have
done this yesterday.”
Adam smiled at him
when he carried in the
steaming pot. Adam sniffed
and said, “That’s a smell
could raise me out of a
concrete grave.”
“It boiled over,” said
Cal.
“It has to boil over to
taste good,” Adam said. “I
wonder where Lee went.”
“Maybe in his room.

Shall I look?”

“No.

He’d

have

answered.”

“Sir, when I finish

school, will you let me run

the ranch?”

“You’re planning early.

How about Aron?”

“He wants to go to

college. Don’t tell him I told

you. Let him tell you, and

you be surprised.”

“Why, that’s fine,” said

Adam. “But don’t you want

to go to college too?”

“I bet I could make

money on the ranch—enough

to pay Aron’s way through

college.”

Adam sipped his coffee.

“That’s a generous thing,” he said. “I don’t know whether I ought to tell you this but—well, when I asked you earlier what kind of boy Aron was, you defended him so badly I thought you might dislike him or even hate him.”

“I have hated him,” Cal said vehemently. “And I’ve hurt him too. But, sir, can I tell you something? I don’t hate him now. I won’t ever hate him again. I don’t think I will hate anyone, not even my mother—”

He stopped, astonished at his slip, and his mind froze up tight and helpless.

Adam looked straight

ahead.

He

rubbed

his

forehead with the palm of his

hand. Finally he said quietly,

“You

know

about

your

mother.”

It

was

not

a

question.

“Yes—yes, sir.”

“All about her?”

“Yes, sir.”

Adam leaned back in his

chair. “Does Aron know?”

“Oh, no! No—no, sir.

He doesn’t know.”

“Why do you say it that

way?”

“I wouldn’t dare to tell

him.”

“Why not?”

Cal said brokenly, “I

don’t think he could stand it.

He hasn’t enough badness in

him to stand it.” He wanted to

continue, “—any more than

you could, sir,” but he left the

last unsaid.

Adam’s

face

looked

weary. He moved his head

from side to side. “Cal, listen

to me. Do you think there’s

any chance of keeping Aron

from

knowing?

Think
carefully.”
Cal said, “He doesn’t go
near places like that. He’s not
like me.”
“Suppose someone told
him?”
“I don’t think he would
believe it, sir. I think he
would lick whoever told him
and think it was a lie.”
“You’ve been there?”
“Yes, sir. I had to
know.” And Cal went on
excitedly, “If he went away to
college and never lived in this
town again—”
Adam nodded. “Yes.
That might be. But he has two
more years here.”
“Maybe I could make
him hurry it up and finish in

one year. He's smart."

"But you're smarter?"

"A different kind of

smart," said Cal.

Adam seemed to grow

until he filled one side of the

room. His face was stern and

his blue eyes sharp and

penetrating. "Cal!" he said

harshly.

"Sir?"

"I trust you, son," said

Adam.

2

Adam's recognition brought a

ferment of happiness to Cal.

He walked on the balls of his

feet. He smiled more often

than he frowned, and the

secret darkness was seldom

on him.

Lee, noticing the change

in him, asked quietly, “You haven’t found a girl, have you?”

“Girl? No. Who wants a girl?”

“Everybody,” said Lee.

And Lee asked Adam, “Do you know what’s got into Cal?”

Adam said, “He knows about her.”

“Does he?” Lee stayed out of trouble. “Well, you remember I thought you should have told them.”

“I didn’t tell him. He knew.”

“What do you think of that!” said Lee. “But that’s not information to make a boy hum when he studies and play catch with his cap when

he walks. How about Aron?”

“I’m afraid of that,” said

Adam. “I don’t think I want

him to know.”

“It might be too late.”

“I might have a talk with

Aron. Kind of feel around.”

Lee

considered.

“Something’s happened to

you too.”

“Has it? I guess it has,”

said Adam.

But

humming

and

sailing

his

cap,

driving

quickly

through

his
schoolwork, were only the
smallest of Cal's activities. In
his new joy he appointed
himself
guardian
of
his
father's content. It was true
what he had said about not
feeling hatred for his mother.
But that did not change the
fact that she had been the
instrument of Adam's hurt
and shame. Cal reasoned that
what she could do before, she
could do again. He set
himself to learn all he could
about her. A known enemy is
less dangerous, less able to
surprise.
At night he was drawn to

the house across the tracks.
Sometimes in the afternoon
he lay hidden in the tall
weeds across the street,
watching the place. He saw
the girls come out, dressed
somberly,
even
severely.
They left the house always in
pairs, and Cal followed them
with his eyes to the corner of
Castroville Street, where they
turned left toward Main
Street. He discovered that if
you didn’t know where they
had come from you couldn’t
tell what they were. But he
was not waiting for the girls
to come out. He wanted to see
his mother in the light of day.
He found that Kate emerged

every Monday at one-thirty.
Cal made arrangements
in school, by doing extra and
excellent work, to make up
for his absences on Monday
afternoons.
To
Aron's
questions he replied that he
was working on a surprise
and was duty bound to tell no
one. Aron was not much
interested anyway. In his self-immersion Aron soon forgot
the whole thing.
Cal,
after
he
had
followed Kate several times,
knew her route. She always
went to the same places—
first to the Monterey County

Bank where she was admitted
behind the shining bars that
defended
the
safe-deposit
vault. She spent fifteen or
twenty minutes there. Then
she moved slowly along Main
Street, looking in the store
windows. She stepped into
Porter
and
Irvine’s
and
looked
at
dresses
and
sometimes made a purchase
—elastic, safety pins, a veil, a
pair of gloves. About two-fifteen she entered Minnie
Franken’s

beauty
parlor,
stayed an hour, and came out
with her hair pinned up in
tight curls and a silk scarf
around her head and tied
under her chin.
At
three-thirty
she
climbed the stairs to the
offices over the Farmers'
Mercantile and went into the
consulting
room
of
Dr.
Rosen. When she came down
from the doctor's office she
stopped for a moment at
Bell's candy store and bought
a two-pound box of mixed

chocolates. She never varied
the route. From Bell's she
went
directly
back
to
Castroville Street and thence
to her house.
There
was
nothing
strange about her clothing.
She dressed exactly like any
well-to-do Salinas woman out
shopping
on
a
Monday
afternoon—except that she
always wore gloves, which
was unusual for Salinas.
The gloves made her

hands
seem
puffed
and
pudgy. She moved as though
she were surrounded by a
glass shell. She spoke to no
one and seemed to see no
one. Occasionally a man
turned and looked after her
and then nervously went
about his business. But for
the most part she slipped past
like an invisible woman.
For a number of weeks
Cal followed Kate. He tried
not to attract her attention.
And
since
Kate
walked
always

looking
straight
ahead, he was convinced that
she did not notice him.
When Kate entered her
own
yard
Cal
strolled
casually by and went home
by another route. He could
not have said exactly why he
followed her, except that he
wanted to know all about her.
The eighth week he took
the route she completed her
journey and went into her
overgrown yard as usual.
Cal waited a moment,
then strolled past the rickety
gate.
Kate

was

standing

behind a tall ragged privet.

She said to him coldly, “What

do you want?”

Cal froze in his steps. He

was suspended in time, barely

breathing. Then he began a

practice he had learned when

he was very young. He

observed

and

catalogued

details outside his main

object. He noticed how the

wind from the south bent over

the new little leaves of the tall

privet bush. He saw the

muddy path beaten to black

mush by many feet, and

Kate’s feet standing far to the

side out of the mud. He heard

a switch engine in the
Southern
Pacific
yards
discharging steam in shrill
dry spurts. He felt the chill air
on the growing fuzz on his
cheeks. And all the time he
was staring at Kate and she
was staring back at him. And
he saw in the set and color of
her eyes and hair, even in the
way she held her shoulders—
high in a kind of semi-shrug
—that Aron looked very like
her. He did not know his own
face well enough to recognize
her mouth and little teeth and
wide cheekbones as his own.
They stood thus for the
moment, between two gusts
of the southern wind.

Kate said, “This isn’t the
first time you’ve followed
me. What do you want?”
He dipped his head.
“Nothing,” he said.
“Who told you to do it?”
she demanded.
“Nobody—ma’am.”
“You won’t tell me, will
you?”
Cal heard his own next
speech with amazement. It
was out before he could stop
it. “You’re my mother and I
wanted to see what you’re
like.” It was the exact truth
and it had leaped out like the
stroke of a snake.
“What? What is this?
Who are you?”
“I’m Cal Trask,” he said.
He felt the delicate change of

balance as when a seesaw
moves. His was the upper
seat
now.
Although
her
expression had not changed
Cal knew she was on the
defensive.
She
looked
at
him
closely,
observed
every
feature. A dim remembered
picture of Charles leaped into
her mind. Suddenly she said,
“Come with me!” She turned
and walked up the path,
keeping well to the side, out

of the mud.

Cal hesitated only for a moment before following her up the steps. He remembered the big dim room, but the rest was strange to him. Kate preceded him down a hall and into her room. As she went past the kitchen entrance she called, “Tea. Two cups!”

In her room she seemed to have forgotten him!. She removed her coat, tugging at the sleeves with reluctant fat gloved fingers. Then she went to a new door cut in the wall in the end of the room where her bed stood. She opened the door and went into a new little lean-to. “Come in here!” she said. “Bring that chair with you.”

He followed her into a
box of a room. It had no
windows, no decorations of
any kind. Its walls were
painted a dark gray. A solid
gray carpet covered the floor.
The only furniture in the
room was a huge chair puffed
with gray silk cushions, a
tilted reading table, and a
floor lamp deeply hooded.
Kate pulled the light chain
with her gloved hand, holding
it deep in the crotch between
her thumb and forefinger as
though
her
hand
were
artificial.
“Close the door!” Kate
said.

The light threw a circle
on the reading table and only
diffused dimly through the
gray room. Indeed the gray
walls seemed to suck up the
light and destroy it.
Kate
settled
herself
gingerly among the thick
down cushions and slowly
removed her gloves. The
fingers of both hands were
bandaged.
Kate
said
angrily,
“Don’t stare. It’s arthritis. Oh
—so you want to see, do
you?” She unwrapped the
oily-looking bandage from
her right forefinger and stuck

the crooked finger under the light. “There—look at it,” she said. “It’s arthritis.” She whined in pain as she tenderly wrapped the bandage loosely. “God, those gloves hurt!” she said. “Sit down.”

Cal crouched on the edge of his chair.

“You’ll probably get it,” Kate said. “My great-aunt had it and my mother was just beginning to get it—” She stopped. The room was very silent.

There was a soft knock on the door. Kate called, “Is that you, Joe? Set the tray down out there. Joe, are you there?”

A mutter came through the door.

Kate

said

tonelessly,

“There’s a litter in the parlor.

Clean it up. Anne hasn’t

cleaned her room. Give her

one more warning. Tell her

it’s the last. Eva got smart last

night. I’ll take care of her.

And, Joe, tell the cook if he

serves carrots again this week

he can pack up. Hear me?”

The

mutter

came

through the door.

“That’s all,” said Kate.

“The

dirty

pigs!”

she

muttered. “They’d rot if I

didn’t watch them. Go out
and bring in the tea tray.”
The bedroom was empty
when Cal opened the door.
He carried the tray into the
lean-to and set it gingerly on
the tilted reading table. It was
a large silver tray, and on it
were a pewter teapot, two
paper-thin
white
teacups,
sugar, cream, and an open
box of chocolates.
“Pour the tea,” said
Kate. “It hurts my hands.”
She put a chocolate in her
mouth. “I saw you looking at
this room,” she went on when
she had swallowed her candy.
“The light hurts my eyes. I
come in here to rest.” She

saw Cal's quick glance at her
eyes and said with finality,
"The light hurts my eyes."
She said harshly, "What's the
matter? Don't you want tea?"
"No, ma'am," said Cal,
"I don't like tea."
She held the thin cup
with her bandaged fingers.
"All right. What *do* you
want?"
"Nothing, ma'am."
"Just wanted to look at
me?"
"Yes, ma'am."
"Are you satisfied?"
"Yes, ma'am."
"How do I look?" She
smiled crookedly at him and
showed her sharp white little
teeth.
"All right."

“I might have known
you’d cover up. Where’s your
brother?”
“In school, I guess, or
home.”
“What’s he like?”
“He looks more like
you.”
“Oh, he does? Well, *is*
he like me ?”
“He wants to be a
minister,” said Cal.
“I guess that’s the way it
should be—looks like me and
wants to go into the church. A
man can do a lot of damage in
the church. When someone
comes here, he’s got his
guard up. But in church a
man’s wide open.”
“He means it,” said Cal.
She leaned toward him,

and her face was alive with
interest. “Fill my cup. Is your
brother dull?”
“He’s nice,” said Cal.
“I asked you if he’s
dull.”
“No, ma’am,” said Cal.
She settled back and
lifted her cup. “How’s your
father?”
“I don’t want to talk
about him,” Cal said.
“Oh, no! You like him
then?”
“I love him,” said Cal.
Kate peered closely at
him, and a curious spasm
shook her—an aching twist
rose in her chest. And then
she closed up and her control
came back.
“Don’t you want some

candy?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am. Why did

you do it?”

“Why did I do what?”

“Why did you shoot my

father and run away from us.”

“Did he tell you that?”

“No. He didn’t tell us.”

She touched one hand

with the other and her hands

leaped apart as though the

contact burned them. She

asked, “Does your father ever

have any—girls or young

women come to your house?”

“No,” said Cal. “Why

did you shoot him and go

away?”

Her cheeks tightened

and her mouth straightened,

as though a net of muscles

took control. She raised her

head, and her eyes were cold and shallow.

"You talk older than your age," she said. "But you don't talk old enough. Maybe you'd better run along and play—and wipe your nose."

"Sometimes I work my brother over," he said. "I make him squirm, I've made him cry. He doesn't know how I do it. I'm smarter than he is. I don't want to do it. It makes me sick."

Kate picked it up as though it were her own conversation. "They thought they were so smart," she said. "They looked at me and thought they knew about me. And I fooled them. I fooled every one of them. And when

they thought they could tell me what to do—oh! that's when I fooled them best. Charles, I really fooled them then."

"My name is Caleb," Cal said. "Caleb got to the Promised Land. That's what Lee says, and it's in the Bible."

"That's the Chinaman," Kate said, and she went on eagerly, "Adam thought he had me. When I was hurt, all broken up, he took me in and he waited on me, cooked for me. He tried to tie me down that way. Most people get tied down that way. They're grateful, they're in debt, and that's the worst kind of handcuffs. But nobody can

hold me. I waited and waited
until I was strong, and then I
broke out. Nobody can trap
me," she said. "I knew what
he was doing. I waited."
The gray room was
silent except for her excited
wheezing breath.
Cal said, "Why did you
shoot him?"
"Because he tried to stop
me. I could have killed him
but I didn't. I just wanted him
to let me go."
"Did you ever wish
you'd stayed?"
"Christ, no! Even when I
was a little girl I could do
anything I wanted. They
never knew how I did it.
Never. They were always so
sure they were right. And

they never knew—no one
ever knew.” A kind of
realization came to her.
“Sure,
you’re
my
kind.
Maybe you’re the same. Why
wouldn’t you be?”
Cal stood up and clasped
his hands behind his back. He
said, “When you were little,
did you”—he paused to get
the thought straight—”did
you ever have the feeling like
you were missing something?
Like as if the others knew
something you didn’t—like a
secret they wouldn’t tell you?
Did you ever feel that way?”
While he spoke her face
began to close against him,

and by the time he paused she
was cut off and the open way
between them was blocked.
She said, “What am I
doing, talking to kids!”
Cal unclasped his hands
from behind him and shoved
them in his pockets.
“Talking to snot-nosed
kids,” she said. “I must be
crazy.”
Cal’s face was alight
with excitement, and his eyes
were wide with vision.
Kate said, “What’s the
matter with you?”
He
stood
still,
his
forehead
glistening

with
sweat, his hands clenched
into fists.
Kate, as she had always,
drove in the smart but
senseless knife of her cruelty.
She laughed softly. “I may
have
given
you
some
interesting things, like this—”
She held up her crooked
hands. “But if it’s epilepsy—
fits—you didn’t get it from
me.” She glanced brightly up
at him, anticipating the shock
and beginning worry in him.
Cal spoke happily. “I’m
going,” he said. “I’m going
now. It’s all right. What Lee
said was true.”

“What did Lee say?”

Cal said, “I was afraid I

had you in me.”

“You have,” said Kate.

“No, I haven’t. I’m my

own. I don’t have to be you.”

“How do you know

that?” she demanded.

“I just know. It just

came to me whole. If I’m

mean, it’s my own mean.”

“This

Chinaman

has

really fed you some pap.

What are you looking at me

like that for?”

Cal said, “I don’t think

the light hurts your eyes. I

think you’re afraid.”

“Get out!” she cried.

“Go on, get out!”

“I’m going.” He had his
hand on the doorknob. “I
don’t hate you,” he said. “But
I’m glad you’re afraid.”
She tried to shout “Joe!”
but her voice thickened to a
croak.
Cal wrenched open the
door and slammed it behind
him.
Joe was talking to one of
the girls in the parlor. They
heard the stutter of light quick
footsteps. But by the time
they looked up a streaking
figure had reached the door,
opened it, slipped through,
and the heavy front door
banged. There was only one
step on the porch and then a
crunch as jumping feet struck
earth.

“What in hell was that?”

the girl asked.

“God knows,” said Joe.

“Sometimes I think I’m

seeing things.”

“Me too,” said the girl.

“Did I tell you Clara’s got

bugs under her skin?”

“I guess she seen-the

shadow of the needle,” said

Joe. “Well, the way I figure,

the less you know, the better

off you are.”

“That’s the truth you

said there,” the girl agreed.

Chapter 40

1

Kate sat back in her chair

against

the

deep

down

cushions. Waves of nerves
cruised over her body, raising
the little hairs and making
ridges of icy burn as they
went.
She spoke softly to
herself. “Steady now,” she
said. “Quiet down. Don’t let
it hit you. Don’t think for a
while. The goddam snot-nose!”
She thought suddenly of
the only person who had ever
made her feel this panic
hatred.
It
was
Samuel
Hamilton, with his white
beard and his pink cheeks and
the laughing eyes that lifted
her
skin

and

looked

underneath.

With

her

bandaged

forefinger she dug out a

slender chain which hung

around her neck and pulled

the chain’s burden up from

her bodice. On the chain were

strung two safe-deposit keys,

a gold watch with a fleur-delis pin, and a little steel tube

with a ring on its top. Very

carefully she unscrewed the

top from the tube and,

spreading her knees, shook

out a gelatine capsule. She

held the capsule under the

light and saw the white

crystals inside—six grains of

morphine,

a

good,

sure

margin. Very gently she

eased the capsule into its

tube, screwed on the cap, and

dropped the chain inside her

dress.

Cal’s last words had

been repeating themselves

over and over in her head.

“I’m glad you’re afraid.” She

said the words aloud to

herself to kill the sound. The

rhythm stopped, but a strong

picture formed in her mind

and she let it form so that she

could inspect it again.

2

It was before the lean-to was

built. Kate had collected the

money Charles had left. The

check was converted to large bills, and the bills in their bales were in the safe-deposit box at the Monterey County Bank.

It was about the time the first pains began to twist her hands. There was enough money now to go away. It was just a matter of getting the most she could out of the house. But also it was better to wait until she felt quite well again.

She never felt quite well again. New York seemed cold and very far away.

A letter came to her signed “Ethel.” Who in hell was Ethel? Whoever she was, she must be crazy to ask for money. Ethel—there were

hundreds of Ethels. Ethels
grew on every bush. And this
one scrawled illegibly on a
lined pad.
Not very long afterward
Ethel came to see Kate, and
Kate hardly recognized her.
Kate sat at her desk,
watchful,
suspicious,
and
confident. “It’s been a long
time,” she said.
Ethel responded like a
soldier who comes in his
cushion age upon the sergeant
who trained him. “I’ve been
poorly,” she said. Her flesh
had thickened and grown
heavy all over her. Her
clothes had the strained
cleanliness

that

means

poverty.

“Where

are

you—

staying now?” Kate asked,

and she wondered how soon

the old bag would be able to

come to the point.

“Southern Pacific Hotel.

I got a room.”

“Oh, then you don’t

work in a house now?”

“I couldn’t never get

started again,” said Ethel.

“You shouldn’t of run me

off.” She wiped big tears

from the corners of her eyes

with the tip of a cotton glove.

“Things are bad,” she said.

“First I had trouble when we

got that new judge. Ninety days, and I didn't have no record—not here anyways. I come out of that and I got the old Joe. I didn't know I had it. Give it to a regular—nice fella, worked on the section gang. He got sore an' busted me up, hurt my nose, lost four teeth, an' that new judge he give me a hundred and eighty. Hell, Kate, you lose all your contacts in a hundred and eighty days. They forget you're alive. I just never could get started."

Kate nodded her head in cold and shallow sympathy. She knew that Ethel was working up to the bite. Just before it came Kate made a move. She opened her desk

drawer and took out some money and held it out to Ethel. “I never let a friend down,” she said. “Why don’t you go to a new town, start fresh? It might change your luck.”

Ethel tried to keep her fingers from grabbing at the money. She fanned the bills like a poker hand—four tens. Her mouth began to work with emotion.

Ethel said, “I kind of hoped you’d see your way to let me take more than forty bucks.”

“What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you get my letter?”

“What letter?”

“Oh’“ said Ethel. “Well,

maybe it got lost in the mail.
They don’t take no care of
things. Anyways, I thought
you might look after me. I
don’t feel good hardly ever.
Got a kind of weight dragging
my guts down.” She sighed
and then she spoke so rapidly
that Kate knew it had been
rehearsed.
“Well,
maybe
you
remember how I’ve got like
second sight,” Ethel began.
“Always predicting things
that
come
true.
Always
dreaming stuff and it come
out. Fella says I should go in

the business. Says I’m a
natural
medium.
You
remember that?”
“No,” said Kate, “I
don’t.”
“Don’t? Well, maybe
you never noticed. All the
others did. I told ’em lots of
things and they come true.”
“What are you trying to
say?”
“I had this-here dream. I
remember
when
it
was
because it was the same night
Faye died.” Her eves flicked
up at Kate’s cold face. She
continued

doggedly,

“It

rained that night, and it was

raining

in

my

dream—

anyways, it was wet. Well, in

my dream I seen you come

out the kitchen door. It wasn’t

pitch-dark—moon

was

coming through a little. And

the dream thing was you. You

went out to the back of the lot

and stooped over. I couldn’t

see what you done. Then you

come creeping back.

“Next thing I knew—

why, Faye was dead.” She

paused and waited for some

comment from Kate, but

Kate’s
face
was
expressionless.
Ethel waited until she
was sure Kate would not
speak. “Well, like I said, I
always
believed
in
my
dreams. It’s funny, there
wasn’t nothing out there
except
some
smashed
medicine bottles and a little
rubber tit from an eye-dropper.”
Kate said lazily, “So you
took them to a doctor. What
did he say had been in the
bottles?”

“Oh, I didn’t do nothing
like that.”
“You should have,” said
Kate.
“I don’t want to see
nobody get in trouble. I’ve
had enough trouble myself. I
put that broke glass in an
envelope and stuck it away.”
Kate said softly, “And so
you are coming to me for
advice?”
“Yes, ma’am.”
“I’ll tell you what I
think,” said Kate. “I think
you’re a worn-out old whore
and you’ve been beaten over
the head too many times.”
“Don’t you start saying
I’m nuts—” Ethel began.
“No, maybe you’re not,
but you’re tired and you’re

sick. I told you I never let a friend down. You can come back here. You can't work but you can help around, clean and give the cook a hand. You'll have a bed and you'll get your meals. How would that be? And a little spending money."

Ethel stirred uneasily.

"No, ma'am," she said. "I don't think I want to—sleep here. I don't carry that envelope around. I left it with a friend."

"What *did* you have in mind?" Kate asked.

"Well, I thought if you could see your way to let me have a hundred dollars a month, why, I could make out and maybe get my health

back.”

“You said you lived at

the Southern Pacific Hotel?”

“Yes, ma’am—and my

room is right up the hall from

the desk. The night clerk’s a

friend of mine. He don’t

never sleep when he’s on

duty. Nice fella.”

Kate said, “Don’t wet

your pants, Ethel. All you’ve

got to worry about is how

much does the ‘nice fella’

want. Now wait a minute.”

She counted six more ten-dollar bills from the drawer in

front of her and held them

out.

“Will it come the first of

the month or do I have to

come here for it?”

“I’ll send it to you,” said

Kate. “And, Ethel,” she

continued quietly, “I still think you ought to have those bottles analyzed.”

Ethel clutched the money tightly in her hand. She was bubbling over with triumph and good feeling. It was one of the few things that had ever worked out for her.

“I wouldn’t think of doing that,” she said. “Not unless I had to.”

After she had gone Kate strolled out to the back of the lot behind the house. And even after years she could see from the unevenness of the earth that it must have been pretty thoroughly dug over.

The next morning the

judge
heard
the
usual
chronicle of small violence
and nocturnal greed. He only
half listened to the fourth case
and at the end of the terse
testimony of the complaining
witness he asked, “How much
did you lose?”
The dark-haired man
said, “Pretty close to a
hundred dollars.”
The judge turned to the
arresting officer. “How much
did she have?”
“Ninety-six dollars. She
got whisky and cigarettes and
some magazines from the
night clerk at six o’clock this
morning.”

Ethel cried, “I never
seen this guy in my life.”
The judge looked up
from his papers. “Twice for
prostitution and now robbery.
You’re costing too much. I
want you out of town by
noon.” He turned to the
officer. “Tell the sheriff to
run her over the county line.”
And he said to Ethel, “If you
come back, I’ll give you to
the county for the limit, and
that’s San Quentin. Do you
understand?”
Ethel said, “Judge, I
want to see you alone.”
“Why?”
“I got to see you,” said
Ethel. “This is a frame.”
“Everything’s a frame,”
said the judge. “Next.”

While a deputy sheriff
drove Ethel to the county line
on the bridge over the Pajaro
River,
the
complaining
witness
strolled
down
Castroville
Street
toward
Kate’s, changed his mind and
went
back
to
Kenoe’s
barbershop to get a hair cut.

3

Ethel’s visit did not disturb
Kate very much when it
happened. She knew about

what attention would be paid to a whore with a grievance, and that an analysis of the broken bottles would not show anything recognizable as poison. She had nearly forgotten Faye. The forcible recalling was simply an unpleasant memory. Gradually, however, she found herself thinking about it. One night when she was checking the items on a grocery bill a thought shot into her mind, shining and winking like a meteor. The thought flashed and went out so quickly that she had to stop what she was doing to try to find it. How was the dark face of Charles involved in the thought? And Sam

Hamilton's
puzzled
and
merry eyes? And why did she
get a shiver of fear from the
flashing thought?
She gave it up and went
back to her work, but the face
of Charles was behind her,
looking over her shoulder.
Her fingers began to hurt her.
She put the accounts away
and made a tour through the
house. It was a slow, listless
night—a
Tuesday
night.
There weren't even enough
customers to put on the
circus.
Kate knew how the girls
felt about her. They were

desperately afraid of her. She kept them that way. It was probable that they hated her, and that didn't matter either. But they trusted her, and that did matter. If they followed the rules she laid down, followed them exactly, Kate would take care of them and protect them. There was no love involved and no respect. She never rewarded them and she punished an offender only twice before she removed her. The girls did have the security of knowing that they would not be punished without cause. As Kate walked about,

the girls became elaborately casual. Kate knew about that too and expected it. But on this night she felt that she was not alone. Charles seemed to walk to the side and behind her.

She went through the dining room and into the kitchen, opened the icebox and looked in. She lifted the cover of the garbage can and inspected it for waste. She did this every night, but this night she carried some extra charge.

When she had left the parlor the girls looked at each other

and

raised

their

shoulders in bewilderment.

Eloise, who was talking to the

dark-haired

Joe,

said,

“Anything the matter?”

“Not that I know of.

Why?”

“I don’t know. She

seems nervous.”

“Well, there was some

kind of rat race.”

“What was it?”

“Wait a minute!” said

Joe. “I don’t know and you

don’t know.”

“I get it. Mind my own

business.”

“You’re goddam right,”

said Joe. “Let’s keep it that
way, shall we?”
“I don’t want to know,”
said Eloise.
“Now you’re talking,”
Joe said.
Kate ranged back from
her tour. “I’m going to bed,”
she said to Joe. “Don’t call
me unless you have to.”
“Anything I can do?”
“Yes, make me a pot of
tea. Did you press that dress,
Eloise?”
“Yes, ma’am.”
“You didn’t do it very
well.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
Kate was restless. She
put all of her papers neatly in
the pigeonholes of her desk,
and when Joe brought the tea

tray she had him put it beside

her bed.

Lying back among her

pillows and sipping the tea,

she probed for her thought.

What about Charles? And

then it came to her.

Charles was clever. In

his crazy way Sam Hamilton

was clever. That was the fear-driven thought—there were

clever people. Both Sam and

Charles were dead, but maybe

there

were

others.

She

worked it out very slowly.

Suppose I had been the

one to dig up the bottles?

What would I think and what

would I do? A rim of panic

rose in her breast. Why were

the
bottles
broken
and
buried? So it wasn't a poison!
Then why bury them? What
had made her do that? She
should have dropped them in
the gutter on Main Street or
tossed them in the garbage
can. Dr. Wilde was dead. But
what kind of records did he
keep? She didn't know.
Suppose she had found the
glass and learned what had
been in them. Wouldn't she
have asked someone who
knew—"Suppose you gave
croton oil to a person. What
would happen?"
"Well, suppose you gave
little doses and kept it up a

long time?” She would know.
Maybe somebody else would
know.
“Suppose
you
heard
about a rich madam who
willed everything to a new
girl and then died.” Kate
knew perfectly well what her
first thought would be. What
insanity had made her get
Ethel floated? Now she
couldn’t be found. Ethel
should have been paid and
tricked into turning over the
glass. Where was the glass
now? In an envelope—but
where? How could Ethel be
found?
Ethel would know why
and how she had been

floated. Ethel wasn't bright,
but she might tell somebody
who
was
bright.
That
chattering voice might tell the
story, how Faye was sick, and
what she looked like, and
about the will.
Kate
was
breathing
quickly and little prickles of
fear were beginning to course
over her body. She should go
to New York or someplace—
not bother to sell the house.
She didn't need the money.
She had plenty. Nobody
could find her. Yes, but if she
ran out and the clever person

heard Ethel tell the story,
wouldn't that cinch it?
Kate got up from her bed
and took a heavy dose of
bromide.
From that time on the
crouching fear had always
been at her side. She was
almost glad when she learned
that the pain in her hands was
developing arthritis. An evil
voice had whispered that it
might be a punishment.
She had never gone out
in the town very much, but
now
she
developed
a
reluctance to go out at all.
She knew that men stared
secretly after her, knowing

who she was. Suppose one of

those

men

should

have

Charles' face or Samuel's

eyes. She had to drive herself

to go out once a week.

Then she built the lean-to and had it painted gray.

She said it was because the

light troubled her eyes, and

gradually

she

began

to

believe the light did trouble

her eyes. Her eyes burned

after a trip to the town. She

spent more and more time in

her little room.

It is possible to some

people, and it was possible

for

Kate,

to

hold

two

opposing thoughts at the

same time. She believed that

the light pained her eyes, and

also that the gray room was a

cave to hide in, a dark burrow

in the earth, a place where no

eyes could stare at her. Once,

sitting in her pillowed chair,

she considered having a

secret door built so that she

would have an avenue of

escape. And then a feeling

rather than a thought threw

out the plan. She would not

be protected then. If she

could get out, something

could get in—that something

which had begun to crouch
outside the house, to crawl
close to the walls at night,
and to rise silently, trying to
look through the windows. It
required more and more will
power for Kate to leave the
house on Monday afternoons.
When Cal began to
follow her she had a terrible
leap of fear. And when she
waited for him behind the
privet she was very near to
panic.
But now her head dug
deep in her soft pillows and
her eyes felt the gentle weight
of the bromide.

Chapter 41

1

The nation slid imperceptibly
toward war, frightened and at

the same time attracted.
People had not felt the
shaking emotion of war in
nearly
sixty
years.
The
Spanish affair was more
nearly an expedition than a
war. Mr. Wilson was reelected
President
in
November on his platform
promise to keep us out of
war, and at the same time he
was instructed to take a firm
hand, which inevitably meant
war. Business picked up and
prices began to rise. British
purchasing
agents
roved

about the country, buying
food and cloth and metals and
chemicals.
A
charge
of
excitement ran through the
country. People didn't really
believe in war even while
they planned it. The Salinas
Valley lived about as it
always had.

2

Cal walked to school with
Aron.
"You look tired," Aron
said.
"Do I?"
"I heard you come in last
night. Four o'clock. What do
you do so late?"
"I was walking around—

thinking. How would you like
to quit school and go back to
the ranch?”
“What for?”
“We could make some
money for Father.”
“I’m going to college. I
wish
I
could
go
now.
Everybody is laughing at us. I
want to get out of town.”
“You act mad.”
“I’m not mad. But I
didn’t lose the money. I
didn’t have a crazy lettuce
idea. But people laugh at me
just the same. And I don’t
know
if

there’s

enough

money for college.”

“He didn’t mean to lose

the money.”

“But he lost it.”

Cal said, “You’ve got

this year to finish and next

before you can go to college.”

“Do you think I don’t

know it?”

“If you worked hard,

maybe

you

could

take

entrance examinations next

summer and go in the fall.”

Aron swung around. “I

couldn’t do it.”

“I think you could. Why

don’t

you
talk
to
the
principal? And I bet the
Reverend Rolf would help
you.”
Aron said, “I want to get
out of this town. I don’t ever
want to come back. They still
call us Lettuce-heads. They
laugh at us.”
“How about Abra?”
“Abra will do what’s
best.”
Cal asked, “Would she
want you to go away?”
“Abra’s going to do
what I want her to do.”
Cal
thought
for

a

moment. “I’ll tell you what.

I’m going to try to make

some money. If you knuckle

down and pass examinations

a year early, why, I’ll help

you through college.”

“You will?”

“Sure I will.”

“Why, I’ll go and see the

principal right away.” He

quickened his steps.

Cal called, “Aron, wait!

Listen! If he says he thinks

you can do it, don’t tell

Father.”

“Why not?”

“I was just thinking how

nice it would be if you went

to him and told him you’d

done it.”

“I

don’t
see
what
difference it makes.”
“You don’t?”
“No, I don’t,” said Aron.
“It sounds silly to me.”
Cal had a violent urge to
shout, “I know who our
mother is! I can show her to
you.” That would cut through
and get inside of Aron.
Cal met Abra in the hall
before the schoolbell rang.
“What’s the matter with
Aron?” he demanded.
“I don’t know.”
“Yes, you do,” he said.
“He’s just in a cloud. I
think it’s that minister.”
“Does he walk home
with you?”

“Sure he does. But I can
see right through him. He’s
wearing wings.”
“He’s
still
ashamed
about the lettuce.”
“I know he is,” said
Abra. “I try to talk him out of
it. Maybe he’s enjoying it.”
“What do you mean?”
“Nothing,” said Abra.
After supper that night
Cal said, “Father, would you
mind if I went down to the
ranch Friday afternoon?”
Adam turned in his
chair. “What for?”
“Just want to see. Just
want to look around.”
“Does Aron want to
go?”

“No. I want to go alone.”

“I don’t see why you

shouldn’t. Lee, do you see

any reason why he shouldn’t

go?”

“No,” said Lee. He

studied

Cal.

“Thinking

seriously

of

going

to

farming?”

“I might. If you’d let me

take it over, I’d farm it,

Father.”

“The lease has more

than a year to run,” Adam

said.

“After that can I farm

it?”

“How about school?”

“I’ll be through school.”

“Well, we’ll see,” said

Adam. “You might want to

go to college.”

When Cal started for the

front door Lee followed and

walked out with him.

“Can you tell me what

it’s about?” Lee asked.

“I just want to look

around.”

“All right, I guess I’m

left out.” Lee turned to go

back into the house. Then he

called,

“Cal!”

The

boy

stopped. “You worried, Cal?”

“No.”

“I’ve got five thousand

dollars if you ever need it."

"Why would I need it?"

"I don't know," said

Lee.

3

Will Hamilton liked his glass cage of an office in the garage. His business interests were much wider than the automobile agency, but he did not get another office. He loved the movement that went on outside his square glass cage. And he had put in double glass to kill the noise of the garage.

He sat in his big red leather swivel chair, and most of the time he enjoyed his life. When people spoke of his brother Joe making so much money in advertising in

the East, Will always said he himself was a big frog in a little puddle.

"I'd be afraid to go to a big city," he said. "I'm just a country boy." And he liked the laugh that always followed. It proved to him that his friends knew he was well off.

Cal came in to see him one Saturday morning.

Seeing Will's puzzled look, he said, "I'm Cal Trask."

"Oh, sure. Lord, you're getting to be a big boy. Is your father down?"

“No. I came alone.”

“Well, sit down. I don’t

suppose you smoke.”

“Sometimes.

Cigarettes.”

Will slid a package of

Murads across the desk. Cal

opened the box and then

closed it. “I don’t think I will

right now.”

Will looked at the dark-faced boy and he liked him.

He thought, This boy is sharp.

He’s nobody’s fool. “I guess

you’ll be going into business

pretty soon,” he said.

“Yes, sir. I thought I

might run the ranch when I

get out of high school.”

“There’s no money in

that,” said Will. “Farmers

don’t make any money. It’s

the man who buys from him

and sells. You'll never make
any money farming." Will
knew that Cal was feeling
him, testing him, observing
him, and he approved of that.
And Cal had made up
his mind, but first he asked,
"Mr. Hamilton, you haven't
any children, have you?"
"Well, no. And I'm
sorry about that. I guess I'm
sorriest about that." And then,
"What makes you ask?"
Cal ignored the question.
"Would you give me some
advice?"
Will felt a glow of
pleasure. "If I can, I'll be glad
to. What is it you want to
know?"
And
then

Cal
did
something
Will
Hamilton
approved even more. He used
candor as a weapon. He said,
“I want to make a lot of
money. I want you to tell me
how.”
Will
overcame
his
impulse to laugh. Naïve as
the statement was, he didn’t
think
Cal
was
naïve.
“Everybody wants that,” he
said. “What do you mean by a
lot of money?”

“Twenty

or

thirty

thousand dollars.”

“Good God!” said Will,

and he screeched his chair

forward. And now he did

laugh, but not in derision. Cal

smiled along with Will’s

laughter.

Will said, “Can you tell

me why you want to make so

much?”

“Yes, sir,” said Cal, “I

can.” And Cal opened the box

of Murads and took out one

of

the

oval

cork-tipped

cigarettes and lighted it. “I’ll

tell you why,” he said.

Will leaned his chair
back in enjoyment.
“My father lost a lot of
money.”
“I know,” said Will. “I
warned him not to try to ship
lettuce across the country.”
“You did? Why did
you?”
“There
were
no
guarantees,” said Will. “A
businessman has to protect
himself.
If
anything
happened, he was finished.
And it happened. Go on.”
“I want to make enough
money to give him back what
he lost.”

Will gaped at him.

“Why?” he asked.

“I want to.”

Will said, “Are you fond

of him?”

“Yes.”

Will’s

fleshy

face

contorted and a memory

swept over him like a chilling

wind. He did not move

slowly over the past, it was

all there in one flash, all of

the years, a picture, a feeling

and a despair, all stopped the

way a fast camera stops the

world. There was the flashing

Samuel, beautiful as dawn

with a fancy like a swallow’s

flight,

and

the

brilliant,

brooding Tom who was dark

fire, Una who rode the

storms, and the lovely Mollie,

Dessie of laughter, George

handsome

and

with

a

sweetness that filled a room

like the perfume of flowers,

and there was Joe, the

youngest, the beloved. Each

one without effort brought

some gift into the family.

Nearly everyone has his

box of secret pain, shared

with no one. Will had

concealed his well, laughed

loud,

exploited

perverse
virtues, and never let his
jealousy go wandering. He
thought of himself as slow,
doltish,
conservative,
uninspired. No great dream
lifted him high and no despair
forced self-destruction. He
was always on the edge,
trying to hold on to the rim of
the family with what gifts he
had—care,
and
reason,
application. He kept the
books, hired the attorneys,
called the undertaker, and
eventually paid the bills. The
others didn’t even know they
needed him. He had the
ability to get money and to

keep it. He thought the
Hamiltons despised him for
his one ability. He had loved
them doggedly, had always
been at hand with his money
to pull them out of their
errors. He thought they were
ashamed of him, and he
fought
bitterly
for
their
recognition. All of this was in
the frozen wind that blew
through him.
His slightly bulging eyes
were damp as he stared past
Cal, and the boy asked,
“What’s the matter, Mr.
Hamilton? Don’t you feel
well?”
Will had sensed his

family but he had not
understood them. And they
had accepted him without
knowing there was anything
to understand. And now this
boy
came
along.
Will
understood him, felt him,
sensed him, recognized him.
This was the son he should
have had, or the brother, or
the father. And the cold wind
of memory changed to a
warmth toward Cal which
gripped him in the stomach
and pushed up against his
lungs.
He forced his attention
to the glass office. Cal was
sitting back in his chair,

waiting.

Will did not know how

long his silence had lasted. “I

was

thinking,”

he

said

lamely. He made his voice

stern.

“You

asked

me

something.

I’m

a

businessman. I don’t give

things away. I sell them.”

“Yes, sir.” Cal was

watchful but he felt that Will

Hamilton liked him.

Will said, “I want to

know something and I want

the truth. Will you tell me the truth?”

“I don’t know,” said Cal.

“I like that. How do you know until you know the question? I like that. That’s smart—and honest. Listen—you have a brother. Does your father like him better than you?”

“Everybody does,” said Cal calmly. “Everybody loves Aron.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, sir. At least—yes, I do.”

“What’s the ‘at least’?”

“Sometimes I think he’s stupid but I like him.”

“Now how about your father?”

“I love him,” said Cal.

“And he loves your
brother better.”
“I don’t know.”
“Now, you say you want
to give back the money your
father lost. Why?”
Ordinarily Cal’s eyes
were squinted and cautious,
but now they were so wide
that they seemed to look
around and through Will. Cal
was as close to his own soul
as it is possible to get.
“My father is good,” he
said. “I want to make it up to
him because I am not good.”
“If you do that, wouldn’t
you be good?”
“No,” said Cal. “I think
bad.”
Will had never met
anyone

who

spoke

so

nakedly. He was near to

embarrassment because of the

nakedness, and he knew how

safe Cal was in his stripped

honesty. “Only one more,” he

said, “and I won’t mind if you

don’t answer it. I don’t think I

would answer it. Here it is.

Suppose you should get this

money and give it to your

father—would it cross your

mind that you were trying to

buy his love?”

“Yes, sir. It would. And

it would be true.”

“That’s all I want to ask.

That’s all.” Will leaned

forward and put his hands

against his sweating, pulsing

forehead.

He

could

not

remember when he had been

so shaken. And in Cal there

was a cautious leap of

triumph. He knew he had

won and he closed his face

against showing it.

Will raised his head and

took off his glasses and wiped

the moisture from them.

“Let’s go outside,” he said.

“Let’s go for a drive.”

Will drove a big Winton

now, with a hood as long as a

coffin

and

a

powerful,

panting mutter in its bowels.

He drove south from King
City over the county road,
through the gathering forces
of
spring,
and
the
meadowlarks
flew
ahead,
bubbling melody from the
fence wires. Pico Blanco
stood up against the West
with a full head of snow, and
in the valley the lines of
eucalyptus, which stretched
across the valley to break the
winds, were gleaming silver
with new leaves.
When he came to the
side road that led into the
home draw of the Trask place

Will pulled up on the side of the road. He had not spoken since the Winton rolled out of King City. The big motor idled with a deep whisper. Will, looking straight ahead, said, “Cal—do you want to be partners with me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t like to take a partner without money. I could lend you the money, but there’s only trouble in that.”

“I can get money,” said Cal.

“How much?”

“Five thousand dollars.”

“You—I don’t believe it.”

Cal didn’t answer.

“I believe it,” said Will.

“Borrowed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What interest?”

“None.”

“That’s a good trick.

Where will you get it?”

“I won’t tell you, sir.”

Will shook his head and

laughed. He was filled with

pleasure. “Maybe I’m being a

fool, but I believe you—and

I’m not a fool.” He gunned

his motor and then let it idle

again. “I want you to listen.

Do you read the papers?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We’re going to be in

this war any minute now.”

“That’s what it looks

like.”

“Well, a lot of people

think so. Now, do you know

the present price of beans? I
mean, what can you sell a
hundred
sacks
for
in
Salinas?”
“I’m not sure. I think
about three to three and a half
cents a pound.”
“What do you mean
you’re not sure? How do you
know that?”
“Well, I was thinking
about asking my father to let
me run the ranch.”
“I see. But you don’t
want to farm. You’re too
smart. Your father’s tenant is
named Rantani. He’s a Swiss
Italian, a good farmer. He’s
put nearly five hundred acres

under cultivation. If we can guarantee him five cents a pound and give him a seed loan, he'll plant beans. So will every other farmer around here. We could contract five thousand acres of beans."

Cal said, "What are we going to do with five-cent beans in a three-cent market?

Oh, yes! But how can we be sure?"

Will said, "Are we partners?"

"Yes, sir."

“Yes, Will!”

“Yes, Will.”

“How soon can you get
five thousand dollars?”

“By next Wednesday.”

“Shake!” Solemnly the
stout man and the lean dark
boy shook hands.

Will, still holding Cal’s
hand, said, “Now we’re
partners. I have a contract
with the British Purchasing
Agency. And I have a friend
in the Quartermaster Corps. I
bet we can sell all the dried
beans we can find at ten cents
a pound or more.”

“When can you sell?”

“I’ll sell before we sign
anything. Now, would you
like to go up to the old place
and talk to Rantani?”

“Yes sir,” said Cal.

Will double-clutched the Winton and the big green car lumbered into the side road.

Chapter 42

A war comes always to someone else. In Salinas we were aware that the United States was the greatest and most powerful nation in the world. Every American was a rifleman by birth, and one American was worth ten or twenty foreigners in a fight. Pershing’s expedition into Mexico after Villa had exploded one of our myths for a little while. We had truly believed that Mexicans can’t shoot straight and besides were lazy and stupid.

When our own Troop C came
wearily back from the border
they said that none of this
was true. Mexicans could
shoot straight, goddam it!
And Villa's horsemen had
outridden and outlasted our
town boys. The two evenings
a month of training had not
toughened them very much.
And
last,
the
Mexicans
seemed to have outthought
and outambushed Black Jack
Pershing. When the Mexicans
were joined by their ally,
dysentery, it was godawful.
Some of our boys didn't
really feel good again for
years.

Somehow
we
didn’t
connect
Germans
with
Mexicans. We went right
back to our myths. One
American was as good as
twenty Germans. This being
true, we had only to act in a
stern manner to bring the
Kaiser to heel. He wouldn’t
dare interfere with our trade
—but he did. He wouldn’t
stick out his neck and sink
our ships—and he did. It was
stupid, but he did, and so
there was nothing for it but to
fight him.
The war, at first anyway,
was for other people. We, I,

my family and friends, had
kind of bleacher seats, and it
was pretty exciting. And just
as
war
is
always
for
somebody else, so it is also
true that someone else always
gets killed. And Mother of
God! that wasn’t true either.
The dreadful telegrams began
to sneak sorrowfully in, and it
was
everybody’s
brother.
Here we were, over six
thousand miles from the
anger and the noise, and that
didn’t save us.
It wasn’t much fun then.

The Liberty Belles could
parade in white caps and
uniforms of white sharkskin.
Our uncle could rewrite his
Fourth of July speech and use
it to sell bonds. We in high
school could wear olive drab
and campaign hats and learn
the manual of arms from the
physics teacher, but Jesus
Christ! Marty Hopps dead,
the Berges boy, from across
the street, the handsome one
our little sister was in love
with from the time she was
three, blown to bits!
And
the
gangling,
shuffling loose-jointed boys
carrying
suitcases

were
marching awkwardly down
Main Street to the Southern
Pacific Depot. They were
sheepish, and the Salinas
Band marched ahead of them,
playing the “Stars and Stripes
Forever,” and the families
walking along beside them
were crying, and the music
sounded like a dirge. The
draftees wouldn’t look at
their mothers. They didn’t
dare. We’d never thought the
war could happen to us.
There were some in
Salinas who began to talk
softly in the poolrooms and
the bars. These had private
information from a soldier—
we weren’t getting the truth.
Our men were being sent in

without

guns.

Troopships

were

sunk

and

the

government wouldn’t tell us.

The German army was so far

superior to ours that we didn’t

have a chance. That Kaiser

was a smart fellow. He was

getting

ready

to

invade

America. But would Wilson

tell us this? He would not.

And usually these carrion

talkers were the same ones

who had said one American

was worth twenty Germans in

a scrap—the same ones.
Little groups of British
in their outlandish uniforms
(but they did look smart)
moved about the country,
buying everything that wasn't
nailed down and paying for it
and paying big. A good many
of the British purchasing men
were crippled, but they wore
their uniforms just the same.
Among other things they
bought beans, because beans
are easy to transport and they
don't spoil and a man can
damn well live on them.
Beans were twelve and a half
cents a pound and hard to
find. And farmers wished
they hadn't contracted their
beans for a lousy two cents a
pound above the going price

six months ago.
The nation and the
Salinas Valley changed its
songs. At first we sang of
how we would knock the hell
out of Helgoland and hang
the Kaiser and march over
there and clean up the mess
them damn foreigners had
made. And then suddenly we
sang, “In the war’s red curse
stands the Red Cross nurse.
She’s the rose of No Man’s
Land,” and we sang, “Hello,
central, give me Heaven,
’cause my Daddy’s there,”
and we sang, “Just a baby’s
prayer at twilight, when lights
are low. She climbs upstairs
and says her prayers—Oh,
God! please tell my daddy
thaddy must take care—” I

guess we were like a tough
but inexperienced little boy
who gets punched in the nose
in the first flurry and it hurts
and we wished it was over.

Chapter 43

1

Late in the summer Lee came
in off the street, carrying his
big market basket. Lee had
become
American
conservative in his clothes
since he had lived in Salinas.
He regularly wore black
broadcloth when he went out
of the house. His shirts were
white, his collars high and
stiff, and he affected narrow
black string ties, like those
which once were the badge
for Southern senators. His

hats were black, round of
crown and straight of brim,
and uncrushed as though he
still left room for a coiled
queue. He was immaculate.
Once
Adam
had
remarked
on
the
quiet
splendor of Lee's clothes, and
Lee had grinned at him. "I
have to do it," he said. "One
must be very rich to dress as
badly as you do. The poor are
forced to dress well."
"Poor!" Adam exploded.
"You'll be lending us money
before we're through."
"That might be," said

Lee.

This afternoon he set his heavy basket on the floor.

“I’m going to try to make a winter melon soup,” he said. “Chinese cooking. I have a cousin in Chinatown, and he told me how. My cousin is in the firecracker and fan-tan business.”

“I thought you didn’t have any relatives,” said Adam.

“All Chinese are related, and the ones named Lee are closest,” said Lee. “My cousin is a Suey Dong. Recently he went into hiding for his health and he learned to cook. You stand the melon in a pot, cut off the top carefully, put in a whole

chicken, mushrooms, water chestnuts, leeks, and just a touch of ginger. Then you put the top back on the melon and cook it as slowly as possible for two days. Ought to be good."

Adam was lying back in his chair, his palms clasped behind his head, and he was smiling at the ceiling. "Good, Lee, good," he said.

"You didn't even listen," said Lee.

Adam drew himself upright. He said, "You think you know your own children and then you find you don't at all."

Lee smiled. "Has some

detail of their lives escaped you?" he asked.

Adam chuckled. "I only found out by accident," he said. "I knew that Aron wasn't around very much this summer, but I thought he was just out playing."

"Playing!" said Lee. "He hasn't played for years."

"Well, whatever he does."

Adam continued, "Today I met Mr. Kilkenny—you know, from the high school? He thought I knew all about it. Do you know what that boy is doing?"

"No," said Lee.

“He’s covered all next
year’s work. He’s going to
take examinations for college
and
save
a
year.
And
Kilkenny is confident that he
will pass. Now, what do you
think of that?”
“Remarkable,” said Lee.
“Why is he doing it?”
“Why, to save a year!”
“What does he want to
save it for?”
“Goddam it, Lee, he’s
ambitious.
Can’t
you
understand that?”
“No,” said Lee. “I never

could.”

Adam said, “He never spoke of it. I wonder if his brother knows.”

“I guess Aron wants it to be a surprise. We shouldn’t mention it until he does.”

“I guess you’re right. Do you know, Lee?—I’m proud of him. Terribly proud. This makes me feel good. I wish Cal had some ambition.”

“Maybe he has,” said Lee. “Maybe he has some kind of a secret too.”

“Maybe. God knows we haven’t seen much of him lately either. Do you think it’s good for him to be away so much?”

“Cal’s trying to find himself,” said Lee. “I guess

this personal hide-and-seek is

not

unusual.

And

some

people are ‘it’ all their lives—

hopelessly ‘it’.”

“Just think,” said Adam.

“A whole year’s work ahead.

When he tells us we ought to

have a present for him.”

“A gold watch,” said

Lee.

“That’s

right,”

said

Adam. “I’m going to get one

and have it engraved and

ready. What should it say?”

“The jeweler will tell

you,” said Lee. “You take the

chicken out after two days

and cut it off the bone and put
the meat back."
"What chicken?"
"Winter melon soup,"
said Lee.
"Have we got money
enough to send him to
college, Lee?"
"If we're careful and he
doesn't develop expensive
tastes."
"He wouldn't," Adam
said.
"I didn't think I would—
but I have." Lee inspected the
sleeve of his coat with
admiration.

2

The rectory of St. Paul's
Episcopal Church was large
and rambling. It had been
built for ministers with large

families. Mr. Rolf, unmarried
and simple in his tastes,
closed up most of the house,
but when Aron needed a
place to study he gave him a
large room and helped him
with his studies.
Mr. Rolf was fond of
Aron. He liked the angelic
beauty of his face and his
smooth cheeks, his narrow
hips, and long straight legs.
He liked to sit in the room
and
watch
Aron’s
face
straining with effort to learn.
He understood why Aron
could not work at home in an
atmosphere not conducive to
hard clean thought. Mr. Rolf

felt that Aron was his
product, his spiritual son, his
contribution to the church. He
saw him through his travail of
celibacy and felt that he was
guiding him into calm waters.
Their discussions were
long and close and personal.
“I know I am criticized,” Mr.
Rolf said. “I happen to
believe in a higher church
than some people. No one can
tell me that confession is not
just as important a sacrament
as communion. And you
mind my word—I am going
to
bring
it
back,
but
cautiously, gradually.”

“When I have a church
I’ll do it too.”
“It requires great tact,”
said Mr. Rolf.
Aron said, “I wish we
had in our church, well—
well, I might as well say it. I
wish we had something like
the
Augustines
or
the
Franciscans. Someplace to
withdraw. Sometimes I feel
dirty. I want to get away from
the dirt and be clean.”
“I know how you feel,”
Mr. Rolf said earnestly. “But
there I cannot go along with
you. I can’t think that our
Lord Jesus would want his
priesthood withdrawn from

service to the world. Think how he insisted that we preach the Gospel, help the sick and poor, even lower ourselves into filth to raise sinners from the slime. We must keep the exactness of His example always before

us.”

His eyes began to glow

and his voice took on the

throatiness

he

used

in

sermons. “Perhaps I shouldn’t

tell you this. And I hope you

won’t find any pride in me in

telling it. But there is a kind

of glory in it. For the last five

weeks a woman has been

coming to evening service. I

don’t think you can see her

from the choir. She sits

always in the last row on the

left-hand side—yes, you can

see her too. She is off at an

angle. Yes, you can see her.

She wears a veil and she

always leaves before I can get back after recessional."

"Who is she?" Aron asked.

"Well, you'll have to learn these things. I made very discreet inquiries and you would never guess. She is the—well—the owner of a house of ill fame."

"Here in Salinas?"

"Here in Salinas." Mr. Rolf leaned forward. "Aron, I can see your revulsion. You must get over that. Don't forget our Lord and Mary Magdalene. Without pride I say I would be glad to raise her up."

"What does she want here?" Aron demanded.

"Perhaps what we have

to offer—salvation. It will require great tact. I can see how it will be. And mark my words—these people are timid. One day there will come a tap on my door and she will beg to come in. Then, Aron, I pray that I may be wise and patient. You must believe me—when that happens, when a lost soul seeks the light, it is the highest and most beautiful experience a priest can have. That's what we are for, Aron. That's what we are for."

Mr. Rolf controlled his breathing with difficulty. "I pray God I may not fail," he said.

3

Adam Trask thought of the war in terms of his own now dimly remembered campaign against the Indians. No one knew anything about huge and general war. Lee read European history, trying to discern from the filaments of the past some pattern of the future.

Liza Hamilton died with a pinched little smile on her mouth, and her cheekbones were shockingly high when the red was gone from them.

And

Adam

waited

impatiently for Aron to bring news of his examinations.

The massive gold watch lay

under his handkerchiefs in the top drawer of his bureau, and he kept it wound and set and checked its accuracy against his own watch.

Lee had his instructions.

On the evening of the day of the announcement he was to cook a turkey and bake a cake.

“We’ll want to make a party of it,” Adam said.

“What would you think of champagne?”

“Very nice,” said Lee.

“Did you ever read von Clausewitz?”

“Who is he?”

“Not very reassuring reading,” said Lee. “One bottle of champagne?”

“That’s enough. It’s just

for toasts, you know. Makes a
party of it." It didn't occur to
Adam that Aron might fail.
One
afternoon
Aron
came in and asked Lee,
"Where's father?"
"He's shaving."
"I won't be in for
dinner," said Aron. In the
bathroom he stood behind his
father and spoke to the soap-faced image in the mirror.
"Mr. Rolf asked me to have
dinner at the rectory."
Adam wiped his razor
on a folded piece of toilet
paper. "That's nice," he said.
"Can I get a bath?"
"I'll be out of here in
just a minute," said Adam.
When

Aron
walked
through the living room and
said good night and went out,
Cal and Adam looked after
him. “He got into my
cologne,” said Cal. “I can still
smell him.”
“It must be quite a
party,” Adam said.
“I don’t blame him for
wanting to celebrate. That
was a hard job.”
“Celebrate?”
“The exams. Didn’t he
tell you? He passed them.”
“Oh, yes—the exams,”
said Adam. “Yes, he told me.
A fine job. I’m proud of him.
I think I’ll get him a gold
watch.”
Cal said sharply, “He

didn’t tell you!”

“Oh, yes—yes, he did.

He told me this morning.”

“He didn’t know this

morning,” said Cal, and he

got up and went out.

He walked very fast in

the gathering darkness, out

Central Avenue, past the park

and past Stonewall Jackson

Smart’s house clear to the

place beyond the streetlights

where the street became a

county road and angled to

avoid Tollot’s farm house.

At ten o’clock Lee,

going out to mail a letter,

found Cal sitting on the

lowest step of the front porch.

“What happened to you?” he

asked.

“I went for a walk.”

“What’s the matter with
Aron?”
“I don’t know.”
“He seems to have some
kind of grudge. Want to walk
to the post office with me?”
“No.”
“What are you sitting
out here for?”
“I’m going to beat the
hell out of him.”
“Don’t do it,” said Lee.
“Why not?”
“Because I don’t think
you can. He’d slaughter you.”
“I guess you’re right,”
said Cal. “The son of a
bitch!”
“Watch your language.”
Cal laughed. “I guess I’ll
walk along with you.”
“Did you ever read von

Clausewitz?”

“I never even heard of

him.”

When Aron came home

it was Lee who was waiting

for him on the lowest step of

the front porch. “I saved you

from a licking,” Lee said. “Sit

down.”

“I’m going to bed.”

“Sit down! I want to talk

to you. Why didn’t you tell

your father you passed the

tests?”

“He

wouldn’t

understand.”

“You’ve got a bug up

your ass.”

“I don’t like that kind of

language.”

“Why do you think I

used it? I am not profane by accident. Aron, your father has been living for this."

"How did he know about it?"

"You should have told him yourself."

"This is none of your business."

"I want you to go in and wake him up if he's asleep, but I don't think he'll be asleep. I want you to tell him."

"I won't do it."

Lee said softly, "Aron, did you ever have to fight a little man, a man half your size?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's one of the most embarrassing things in the

world. He won't stop and pretty soon you have to hit him and that's worse. Then you're really in trouble all around."

"What are you talking about?"

"If you don't do as I tell you, Aron, I'm going to fight you. Isn't that ridiculous?"

Aron tried to pass. Lee stood up in front of him, his tiny fists doubled ineffectually, his stance and position so silly that he began to laugh. "I don't know how to do it, but I'm going to try," he said.

Aron nervously backed away from him. And when

finally he sat down on the steps Lee sighed deeply.

"Thank heaven that's over," he said. "It would have been awful. Look, Aron, can't you tell me what's the matter with you? You always used to tell me."

Suddenly Aron broke down. "I want to go away. It's a dirty town."

"No, it isn't. It's just the same as other places."

"I don't belong here. I wish we hadn't ever come here. I don't know what's the matter with me. I want to go away." His voice rose to a wail.

Lee put his arm around the broad

shoulders
to
comfort
him.
“You’re
growing up. Maybe that’s it,”
he said softly. “Sometimes I
think the world tests us most
sharply then, and we turn
inward and watch ourselves
with horror. But that’s not the
worst. We think everybody is
seeing into us. Then dirt is
very dirty and purity is
shining white. Aron, it will be
over. Wait only a little while
and it will be over. That’s not
much relief to you because
you don’t believe it, but it’s
the best I can do for you. Try
to believe that things are
neither so good nor so bad as

they seem to you now. Yes, I can help you. Go to bed now, and in the morning get up early and tell your father about the tests. Make it exciting. He's lonelier than you are because he has no lovely future to dream about. Go through the motions. Sam Hamilton said that. Pretend it's true and maybe it will be. Go through the motions. Do that. And go to bed. I've got to bake a cake—for breakfast. And, Aron—your father left a present on your pillow."

Chapter 44

1

It was only after Aron went away to college that Abra really got to know his family. Aron and Abra had fenced

themselves
in
with
themselves. With Aron gone,
she attached herself to the
other Trasks. She found that
she trusted Adam more, and
loved Lee more, than her own
father.
About Cal she couldn’t
decide. He disturbed her
sometimes
with
anger,
sometimes with pain, and
sometimes with curiosity. He
seemed to be in a perpetual
contest with her. She didn’t
know whether he liked her or
not, and so she didn’t like
him. She was relieved when,
calling at the Trask house,

Cal was not there, to look

secretly

at

her,

judge,

appraise, consider, and look

away when she caught him at

it.

Abra was a straight,

strong, fine-breasted woman,

developed and ready and

waiting to take her sacrament

—but waiting. She took to

going to the Trask house after

school, sitting with Lee,

reading him parts of Aron's

daily letter.

Aron was lonely at

Stanford. His letters were

drenched

with

lonesome

longing for his girl. Together
they were matter of fact, but
from the university, ninety
miles
away,
he
made
passionate love to her, shut
himself off from the life
around him. He studied, ate,
slept, and wrote to Abra, and
this was his whole life.
In the afternoons she sat
in the kitchen with Lee and
helped him to string beans or
slip peas from their pods.
Sometimes she made fudge
and very often she stayed to
dinner rather than go home to
her parents. There was no
subject she could not discuss
with Lee. And the few things

she could talk about to her
father and mother were thin
and pale and tired and mostly
not even true. There Lee was
different also. Abra wanted to
tell Lee only true things even
when she wasn’t quite sure
what was true.
Lee would sit smiling a
little, and his quick fragile
hands flew about their work
as
though
they
had
independent
lives.
Abra
wasn’t aware that she spoke
exclusively of herself. And
sometimes while she talked
Lee’s mind wandered out and

came back and went out again
like a ranging dog, and Lee
would nod at intervals and
make a quiet humming sound.
He liked Abra and he
felt strength and goodness in
her, and warmth too. Her
features
had
the
bold
muscular
strength
which
could result finally either in
ugliness or in great beauty.
Lee, musing through her talk,
thought of the round smooth
faces of the Cantonese, his
own breed. Even thin they
were moon-faced. Lee should
have liked that kind best since

beauty must be somewhat
like ourselves, but he didn't.
When he thought of Chinese
beauty the iron predatory
faces of the Manchus came to
his
mind,
arrogant
and
unyielding faces of a people
who
had
authority
by
unquestioned inheritance.
She said, "Maybe it was
there all along. I don't know.
He never talked much about
his father. It was after Mr.
Trask had the—you know—
the lettuce. Aron was angry
then."

“Why?” Lee asked.

“People were laughing at

him.”

Lee’s

whole

mind

popped back. “Laughing at

Aron? Why at him? He didn’t

have anything to do with it.”

“Well, that’s the way he

felt. Do you want to know

what I think?”

“Of course,” said Lee.

“I figured this out and

I’m

not

quite

finished

figuring. I thought he always

felt—well, kind of crippled—

maybe unfinished, because he

didn’t have a mother.”

Lee's eyes opened wide
and then drooped again. He
nodded. "I see. Do you figure
Cal is that way too?"
"No."
"Then why Aron?"
"Well, I haven't got that
yet. Maybe some people need
things more than others, or
hate things more. My father
hates turnips. He always did.
Never came from anything.
Turnips make him mad, real
mad. Well, one time my
mother was—well, huffy, and
she made a casserole of
mashed turnips with lots of
pepper and cheese on top and
got it all brown on top. My
father ate half a dish of it
before he asked what it was.
My mother said turnips, and

he threw the dish on the floor
and got up and went out. I
don't think he ever forgave
her."
Lee chuckled. "He can
forgive her because she said
turnips. But, Abra, suppose
he'd asked and she had said
something else and he liked it
and had another dish. And
then afterward he found out.
Why,
he
might
have
murdered her."
"I
guess
so.
Well,
anyway, I figure Aron needed
a mother more than Cal did.

And I think he always blamed

his father.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. That’s

what I think.”

“You do get around,

don’t you?”

“Shouldn’t I?”

“Of course you should.”

“Shall I make some

fudge?”

“Not today. We still

have some.”

“What can I do?”

“You can pound flour

into the top round. Will you

eat with us?”

“No. I’m going to a

birthday party, thank you. Do

you

think

he’ll

be

a

minister?”

“How do I know?” said

Lee. “Maybe it’s just an

idea.”

“I hope he doesn’t,” said

Abra, and she clapped her

mouth shut in astonishment at

having said it.

Lee got up and pulled

out the pastry board and laid

out the red meat and a flour

sifter beside it. “Use the back

side of the knife,” he said.

“I know.” She hoped he

hadn’t heard her.

But Lee asked, “Why

don’t you want him to be a

minister?”

“I shouldn’t say it.”

“You

should
say
anything you want to. You
don’t have to explain.” He
went back to his chair, and
Abra sifted flour over the
steak and pounded the meat
with a big knife. Tap-tap—”I
shouldn’t talk like this”—tap-tap.
Lee turned his head
away to let her take her own
pace.
“He goes all one way,”
she said over the pounding.
“If it’s church it’s got to be
high church. He was talking
about how priests shouldn’t
be married.”
“That’s not the way his
last letter sounded,” Lee
observed.
“I know. That was

before.” Her knife stopped its pounding. Her face was young perplexed pain. “Lee, I’m not good enough for him.”

“Now, what do you mean by that?”

“I’m not being funny. He doesn’t think about me. He’s made someone up, and it’s like he put my skin on her. I’m not like that—not like the made-up one.”

“What’s she like?”

“Pure!” said Abra. “Just absolutely pure. Nothing but pure—never a bad thing. I’m not like that.”

“Nobody is,” said Lee.

“He doesn’t know me. He doesn’t even want to know me. He wants that—

white—ghost.”

Lee rubbed a piece of cracker. “Don’t you like him? You’re pretty young, but I don’t think that makes any difference.”

“ ’Course I like him. I’m going to be his wife. But I want him to like me too. And how can he, if he doesn’t know anything about me? I used to think he knew me. Now I’m not sure he ever did.”

“Maybe he’s going through a hard time that isn’t permanent. You’re a smart girl—very smart. Is it pretty hard trying to live up to the one—in your skin?”

“I’m always afraid he’ll
see something in me that isn’t
in the one he made up. I’ll get
mad or I’ll smell bad—or
something else. He’ll find
out.”
“Maybe not,” said Lee.
“But it must be hard living
the Lily Maid, the Goddess-Virgin, and the other all at
once. Humans just do smell
bad sometimes.”
She moved toward the
table. “Lee, I wish—”
“Don’t spill flour on my
floor,” he said. “What do you
wish?”
“It’s from my figuring
out. I think Aron, when he
didn’t have a mother—why,
he made her everything good
he could think of.”
“That might be. And

then you think he dumped it all on you." She stared at him and her fingers wandered delicately up and down the blade of the knife. "And you wish you could find some way to dump it all back."

"Yes."

"Suppose he wouldn't like you then?"

"I'd rather take a chance on that," she said. "I'd rather be myself."

Lee said, "I never saw anybody get mixed up in other people's business the way I do. And I'm a man who doesn't have a final answer about anything. Are you going to pound that meat or shall I do it?"

She went back to work.

“Do you think it’s funny to be so serious when I’m not even out of high school?” she asked.

“I don’t see how it could be any other way,” said Lee. “Laughter comes later, like wisdom teeth, and laughter at yourself comes last of all in a mad race with death, and sometimes it isn’t in time.”

Her tapping speeded up and its beat became erratic and nervous. Lee moved five dried lima beans in patterns on the table—a line, an angle, a circle.

The beating stopped. “Is Mrs. Trask alive?”

Lee’s forefinger hung over a bean for a moment and then slowly fell and pushed it

to make the *O* into a *Q*. He
knew she was looking at him.
He could even see in his mind
how her expression would be
one of panic at her question.
His thought raced like a rat
new caught in a wire trap. He
sighed and gave it up. He
turned slowly and looked at
her, and his picture had been
accurate.
Lee
said
tonelessly,
“We’ve talked a lot and I
don’t remember that we have
ever discussed me—ever.”
He smiled shyly. “Abra, let
me tell you about myself. I’m
a servant. I’m old. I’m
Chinese. These three you
know. I’m tired and I’m

cowardly.”

“You’re

not—”

she

began.

“Be silent,” he said. “I

am so cowardly. I will not put

my finger in any human pie.”

“What do you mean?”

“Abra, is your father

mad

at

anything

except

turnips?”

Her face went stubborn.

“I asked you a question.”

“I did not hear a

question,” he said softly and

his voice became confident.

“You did not ask a question,

Abra.”

“I guess you think I’m
too young—” Abra began.
Lee broke in, “Once I
worked for a woman of
thirty-five
who
had
successfully
resisted
experience,
learning,
and
beauty. If she had been six
she would have been the
despair of her parents. And at
thirty-five she was permitted
to control money and the
lives of people around her.
No, Abra, age has nothing to
do with it. If I had anything at
all to say—I would say it to
you.”

The girl smiled at him.

“I’m clever,” she said. “Shall

I be clever?”

“God help me—no,” Lee

protested.

“Then you don’t want

me to try to figure it out?”

“I don’t care what you

do as long as I don’t have

anything to do with it. I guess

no matter how weak and

negative a good man is, he

has as many sins on him as he

can bear. I have enough sins

to trouble me. Maybe they

aren’t

very

fine

sins

compared to some, but, the

way I feel, they’re all I can

take care of. Please forgive

me.”

Abra reached across the table and touched the back of his hand with floury fingers. The yellow skin on his hand was tight and glazed. He looked down at the white powdery smudges her fingers left.

Abra said, “My father wanted a boy. I guess he hates turnips and girls. He tells everyone how he gave me my crazy name. ‘And though I called another, Abra came.’ ”

Lee smiled at her.

“You’re such a nice girl,” he said. “I’ll buy some turnips

tomorrow if you'll come to
dinner."
Abra asked softly, "Is
she alive?"
"Yes," said Lee.
The front door slammed,
and Cal came into the
kitchen. "Hello, Abra. Lee, is
father home?"
"No, not yet. What are
you grinning all over for?"
Cal handed him a check.
"There. That's for you."
Lee looked at it. "I
didn't want interest," he said.
"It's better. I might want
to borrow it back."
"You won't tell me
where you got it?"
"No. Not yet. I've got a
good idea—" His eyes flicked
to Abra.

“I have to go home
now,” she said.
Cal said, “She might as
well be in on it. I decided to
do it Thanksgiving, and
Abra’ll probably be around
and Aron will be home.”
“Do what?” she asked.
“I’ve got a present for
my father.”
“What is it?” Abra
asked.
“I won’t tell. You’ll find
out then.”
“Does Lee know?”
“Yes, but he won’t tell.”
“I don’t think I ever saw
you so—gay,” Abra said. “I
don’t think I ever saw you
gay at all.” She discovered in
herself a warmth for him.
After Abra had gone Cal

sat down. “I don’t know whether to give it to him before Thanksgiving dinner or after,” he said.

“After,” said Lee. “Have you really got the money?”

“Fifteen thousand dollars.”

“Honestly?”

“You mean, did I steal it?”

“Yes.”

“Honestly,” said Cal. “Remember how we had champagne for Aron? We’ll get champagne. And—well, we’ll maybe decorate the dining room. Maybe Abra’ll help.”

“Do you really think your father wants money?”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

“I hope you’re right,”

said Lee. “How have you

been doing in school?”

“Not very well. I’ll pick

up after Thanksgiving,” said

Cal.

2

After school the next day

Abra hurried and caught up

with Cal.

“Hello, Abra,” he said.

“You make good fudge.”

“That last was dry. It

should be creamy.”

“Lee is just crazy about

you. What have you done to

him?”

“I like Lee,” she said

and then, “I want to ask you

something, Cal.”

“Yes?”

“What’s the matter with
Aron?”
“What do you mean?”
“He just seems to think
only about himself.”
“I don’t think that’s very
new. Have you had a fight
with him?”
“No. When he had all
that about going into the
church
and
not
getting
married, I tried to fight with
him, but he wouldn’t.”
“Not get married to you?
I can’t imagine that.”
“Cal, he writes me love
letters now—only they aren’t
to me.”
“Then who are they to?”

“It’s like they were to—

himself.”

Cal said, “I know about

the willow tree.”

She

didn’t

seem

surprised. “Do you?” she

asked.

“Are you mad at Aron?”

“No, not mad. I just

can’t find him. I don’t know

him.”

“Wait around,” said Cal.

“Maybe he’s going through

something.”

“I wonder if I’ll be all

right. Do you think I could

have been wrong all the

time?”

“How do I know?”

“Cal,” she said, “is it

true that you go out late at
night and even go—to—bad
houses?”
“Yes,” he said. “That’s
true. Did Aron tell you?”
“No, not Aron. Well,
why do you go there?”
He walked beside her
and did not answer.
“Tell me,” she said.
“What’s it to you?”
“Is it because you’re
bad?”
“What’s it sound like to
you?”
“I’m not good either,”
she said.
“You’re
crazy,”
said
Cal. “Aron will knock that
out of you.”

“Do you think he will?”

“Why, sure,” said Cal.

“He’s got to.”

Chapter 45

1

Joe Valery got along by watching and listening and, as he said himself, not sticking his neck out. He had built his hatreds little by little— beginning with a mother who neglected him, a father who alternately whipped and slobbered over him. It had been easy to transfer his developing hatred to the teacher who disciplined him

and
the
policeman
who
chased him and the priest
who lectured him. Even
before the first magistrate
looked down on him, Joe had
developed a fine stable of
hates toward the whole world
he knew.
Hate cannot live alone. It
must have love as a trigger, a
goad, or a stimulant. Joe early
developed a gentle protective
love for Joe. He comforted
and flattered and cherished
Joe. He set up walls to save
Joe from a hostile world. And
gradually Joe became proof
against wrong. If Joe got into
trouble, it was because the

world
was
in
angry
conspiracy against him. And
if Joe attacked the world, it
was revenge and they damn
well deserved it—the sons of
bitches. Joe lavished every
care on his love, and he
perfected a lonely set of rules
which might have gone like
this:

1. Don’t believe nobody.
The bastards are after you.
2. Keep your mouth
shut. Don’t stick your neck
out.
3. Keep your ears open.
When they make a slip, grab
on to it and wait.
4. Everybody’s a son of

a bitch and whatever you do
they got it coming.
5. Go at everything
roundabout.
6. Don’t never trust no
dame about nothing.
7. Put your faith in
dough. Everybody wants it.
Everybody will sell out for it.
There were other rules,
but they were refinements.
His system worked, and since
he knew no other, Joe had no
basis of comparison with
other systems. He knew it
was necessary to be smart and
he considered himself smart.
If he pulled something off,
that was smart; if he failed,
that was bad luck. Joe was
not very successful but he got
by and with a minimum of

effort. Kate kept him because she knew he would do anything in the world if he were paid to do it or was afraid not to do it. She had no illusions about him. In her business Joes were necessary. When he first got the job with Kate, Joe looked for the weaknesses on which he lived —vanity, voluptuousness, anxiety or conscience, greed, hysteria. He knew they were there because she was a woman. It was a matter of considerable shock to him to learn that, if they were there, he couldn't find them. This dame thought and acted like a man—only tougher, quicker, and more clever. Joe made a

few
mistakes
and
Kate
rubbed his nose in them. He
developed an admiration for
her based on fear.
When he found that he
couldn’t get away with some
things, he began to believe he
couldn’t
get
away
with
anything. Kate made a slave
of him just as he had always
made slaves of women. She
fed him, clothed him, gave
him orders, punished him.
Once Joe recognized her
as more clever than himself,
it was a short step to the

belief that she was more clever than anybody. He thought that she possessed the two great gifts: she was smart and she got the breaks—and you couldn't want no better than that. He was glad to do her hatchet work—and afraid not to. Kate don't make no mistakes, Joe said. And if you played along with her, Kate took care of you. This went beyond thought and became a habit pattern. When he got Ethel floated over the county line, it was all in the day's work. It was Kate's business and she was smart.

2

Kate did not sleep well when the arthritic pains were bad. She could almost feel her

joints thicken and knot.
Sometimes she tried to think
of
other
things,
even
unpleasant ones, to drive the
pain and the distorted fingers
from her mind. Sometimes
she tried to remember every
detail in a room she had not
seen
for
a
long
time.
Sometimes she looked at the
ceiling and projected columns
of figures and added them.
Sometimes
she
used

memories. She built Mr. Edwards' face and his clothes and the word that was stamped on the metal clasp of his suspenders. She had never noticed it, but she knew the word was "Excelsior."

Often in the night she thought of Faye, remembered her eyes and hair and the tone of her voice and how her hands fluttered and the little lump of flesh beside her left thumbnail, a scar from an ancient cut. Kate went into her feeling about Faye. Did she hate or love her? Did she pity her? Was she sorry she had killed her? Kate inched over her own thoughts like a measuring worm. She found she had no feeling about

Faye. She neither liked nor disliked her or her memory. There had been a time during her dying when the noise and the smell of her had made anger rise in Kate so that she considered killing her quickly to get it over.

Kate remembered how Faye had looked the last time she saw her, lying in her purple casket, dressed in white, with the undertaker's smile on her lips and enough powder and rouge to cover her sallow skin.

A voice behind Kate had said, "She looks better than she has in years." And another voice had answered, "Maybe the same thing would do me some good," and there

was a double snicker. The
first voice would be Ethel,
and the second Trixie. Kate
remembered her own half-humorous reaction. Why, she
had thought, a dead whore
looks like anybody else.
Yes, the first voice must
have been Ethel. Ethel always
got into the night thinking,
and Ethel always brought a
shrinking fear with her, the
stupid, clumsy, nosy bitch—
the lousy old bag. And it
happened very often that
Kate's mind would tell her,
"Now wait a moment. Why is
she a lousy old bag? Isn't it
because you made a mistake?
Why did you float her? If
you'd used your head and
kept her here—"
Kate wondered where

Ethel was. How about one of
those agencies to find Ethel—
at least to find where she
went? Yes, and then Ethel
would tell about that night
and show the glass. Then
there'd be two noses sniffing
instead of one. Yes, but what
difference would that make?
Every time Ethel got a beer in
her she would be telling
somebody. Oh, sure, but they
would think she was just a
buzzed old hustler. Now an
agency
man—no—no
agencies.
Kate spent many hours
with Ethel. Did the judge
have any idea it was a frame
—too simple? It shouldn't
have been an even hundred

dollars. That was obvious.

And how about the sheriff? Joe said they dropped her over the line into Santa Cruz County. What did Ethel tell the deputy who drove her out? Ethel was a lazy old bat. Maybe she had stayed in Watsonville.

There was Pajaro, and that was a railroad section, and then the Pajaro River and the bridge into Watsonville. Lots of section hands went back and forth, Mexicans, some Hindus. That puddlehead

Ethel might have thought she could turn enough tricks with the track workers. Wouldn't it be funny if she had never left Watsonville,
thirty
miles
away? She could even slip in over the line and see her friends if she wanted to. Maybe she came to Salinas sometimes. She might be in Salinas right now. The cops weren't likely to keep too much on the look for her. Maybe it would be a good idea to send Joe over to Watsonville to see if Ethel was there. She might have gone on to Santa Cruz. Joe could look there too. It wouldn't take him long. Joe

could find any hooker in any town in a few hours. If he found her they could get her back somehow. Ethel was a fool. But maybe when he found her it would be better if Kate went to her. Lock the door. Leave a “Do not disturb” sign. She could get to Watsonville, do her business, and get back. No taxis. Take a bus. Nobody saw anybody on the night buses. People sleeping with their shoes off and coats rolled up behind their heads. Suddenly she knew she would be afraid to go to Watsonville. Well, she could

make herself go. It would
stop all this wondering.
Strange she hadn't thought of
sending Joe before. That was
perfect. Joe was good at some
things, and the dumb bastard
thought he was clever. That
was the kind easiest to
handle. Ethel was stupid.
That made her hard to handle.
As her hands and her
mind grew more crooked,
Kate began to rely more and
more on Joe Valery as her
assistant in chief, as her go-between,
and
as
her
executioner. She had a basic
fear of the girls in the house
—not that they were more
untrustworthy than Joe but

that the hysteria which lay
very close to the surface
might at any time crack
through their caution and
shatter their sense of self-preservation and tear down
not only themselves but their
surroundings.
Kate
had
always been able to handle
this ever-present danger, but
now
the
slow-depositing
calcium and the slow growth
of apprehension caused her to
need help and to look for it
from Joe. Men, she knew, had
a little stronger wall against
self-destruction than the kind
of women she knew.
She felt that she could

trust Joe, because she had in her files a notation relating to one Joseph Venuta who had walked away from a San Quentin road gang in the fourth year of a five-year sentence for robbery. Kate had never mentioned this to Joe Valery , but she thought it might have a soothing influence on him if he got out of hand.

Joe brought the breakfast tray every morning—green China tea and cream and toast. When he had set it on her bedside table he made his report and got his orders for the day. He knew that she

was depending on him more and more. And Joe was very slowly and quietly exploring the possibility of taking over entirely. If she got sick enough there might be a chance. But very profoundly Joe was afraid of her.

“Morning,” he said.

“I’m not going to sit up for it, Joe. Just give me the tea. You’ll have to hold it.”

“Hands bad?”

“Yes. They get better after a flare up.”

“Looks like you had a bad night.”

“No,” said Kate. “I had a good night. I’ve got some new medicine.”

Joe held the cup to her lips, and she drank the tea in

little sips, breathing in over it
to cool it. “That’s enough,”
she said when the cup was
only half empty. “How was
the night?”
“I almost came to tell
you last night,” said Joe.
“Hick came in from King
City. Just sold his crop.
Bought
out
the
house.
Dropped seven hundred not
counting what he give the
girls.”
“What was his name?”
“I don’t know. But I
hope he comes in again.”
“You should get the
name, Joe. I’ve told you
that.”

“He was cagey.”

“All the more reason to

get his name. Didn’t any of

the girls frisk him?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, find out.”

Joe

sensed

a

mild

geniality in her and it made

him feel good. “I’ll find out,”

he assured her. “I got enough

to go on.”

Her eyes went over him,

testing and searching, and he

knew something was coming.

“You like it here?” she asked

softly.

“Sure. I got it good

here.”

“You could have it

better—or worse,” she said.

“I like it good here,’’ he

said uneasily, and his mind

cast about for a fault in

himself. “I got it real nice

here.”

She moistened her lips

with

her

arrow-shaped

tongue. “You and I can work

together,” she said.

“Any way you want it,”

he said ingratiatingly, and a

surge of pleasant expectation

grew in him. He waited

patiently. She took a good

long time to begin.

At last she said, “Joe, I

don’t like to have anything

stolen.”

“I didn’t take nothing.”

“I didn’t say you did.”

“Who?”

“I’ll get to it, Joe. Do

you

remember

that

old

buzzard we had to move?”

“You

mean

Ethel

what’s-her-name?”

“Yes. That’s the one.

She got away with something.

I didn’t know it then.”

“What?”

A coldness crept into her

voice. “Not your business,

Joe. Listen to me! You’re a

smart fellow. Where would

you go to look for her?”

Joe’s

mind

worked

quickly, not with reason but

with experience and instinct.

“She was pretty beat up. She

wouldn’t go far. An old

hustler don’t go far.”

“You’re

smart.

You

think

she

might

be

in

Watsonville?”

“There or maybe Santa

Cruz. Anyways, I’ll give odds

she ain’t farther away than

San Jose.”

She caressed her fingers

tenderly. “Would you like to

make five hundred, Joe?”

“You want I should find

her?”

“Yes. Just find her.

When you do, don’t let her

know. Just bring me the

address. Got that? Just tell me

where she is.”

“Okay,” said Joe. “She

must of rolled you good.”

“That’s

not

your

business, Joe.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“You want I should start right

off?”

“Yes. Make it quick,

Joe.”

“Might be a little tough,”

he said. “It’s been a long

time.”

“That’s up to you.”

“I’ll go to Watsonville

this afternoon.”

“That’s good, Joe.”

She was thoughtful. He

knew she was not finished

and that she was wondering

whether she should go on.

She decided.

“Joe, did—did she do

anything—well,

peculiar—

that day in court?”

“Hell, no. Said she was

framed like they always do.”

And

then

something

came back to him that he

hadn’t noticed at the time.

Out of his memory Ethel’s

voice came, saying, “Judge, I

got to see you alone. I got to
tell you something." He tried
to bury his memory deep so
that his face would not speak.
Kate said, "Well, what
was it?"
He had been too late.
His mind leaped for safety.
"There's something," he said
to gain time. "I'm trying to
think."
"Well, think!" Her voice
was edged and anxious.
"Well—" He had it.
"Well, I heard her tell the
cops—let's see—she said
why couldn't they let her go
south. She said she had
relatives in San Luis Obispo."
Kate
leaned
quickly

toward him. “Yes?”

“And the cops said it

was too damn far.”

“You’re

smart,

Joe.

Where will you go first?”

“Watsonville,” he said.

“I got a friend in San Luis.

He’ll look around for me. I’ll

give him a ring.”

“Joe,” she said sharply.

“I want this quiet.”

“For five hundred you’ll

get it quiet and quick,” said

Joe. He felt fine even though

her eyes were suited and

inspective again. Her next

words jarred his stomach

loose from his backbone.

“Joe, not to change the

subject—does

the

name

Venuta mean anything to

you?”

He tried to answer

before his throat tightened.

“Not a thing,” he said.

“Come back as soon as

you can,” Kate said. “Tell

Helen to come in. She’ll take

over for you.”

3

Joe packed his suitcase, went

to the depot, and bought a

ticket for Watsonville. At

Castroville, the first station

north, he got off and waited

four hours for the Del Monte

express from San Francisco

to Monterey, which is at the

end of a spur line. In

Monterey he climbed the

stairs of the Central Hotel,
registered as John Vicker. He
went downstairs and ate a
steak at Pop Ernst's, bought a
bottle of whisky, and retired
to his room.
He took off his shoes
and his coat and vest,
removed his collar and tie,
and lay down on the bed. The
whisky and a glass were on
the table beside the brass bed.
The overhead light shining in
his face didn't bother him. He
didn't notice it. Methodically
he primed his brain with half
a tumbler of whisky and then
he crossed his hands behind
his head and crossed his
ankles and he brought out
thoughts and impressions and
perceptions and instincts and

began matching them.

It had been a good job

and he had thought he had her

fooled. Well, he'd underrated

her. But how in hell had she

got onto it he was wanted?

He thought he might go to

Reno or maybe to Seattle.

Seaport towns—always good.

And

then—now

wait

a

minute. Think about it.

Ethel

didn't

steal

nothing. She had something.

Kate was scared of Ethel.

Five hundred was a lot of

dough to dig out a beat-up

whore. What Ethel wanted to

tell the judge was, number
one, true; and, number two,
Kate was scared of it. Might
be able to use that. Hell!—not
with
her
holding
that
jailbreak over him. Joe wasn’t
going to serve out the limit
with penalties.
But no harm in thinking
about it. Suppose he was to
gamble four years against—
well, let’s say ten grand. Was
that a bad bet? No need to
decide. She knew it before
and didn’t turn him in.
Suppose she thought he was a
good dog.
Maybe Ethel might be a
hole-card.

Now—wait—just think
about it. Maybe it was the
breaks. Maybe he ought to
draw his hand and see. But
she was so goddam smart. Joe
wondered if he could play
against her. But how, if he
just played along?
Joe sat up and filled his
glass full. He turned off his
light and raised his shade.
And as he drank his whisky
he watched a skinny little
woman in a bathrobe washing
her stockings in a basin in a
room on the other side of the
air shaft. And the whisky
muttered in his ears.
It might be the breaks.
God knows, Joe had waited
long enough. God knows, he
hated the bitch with her sharp

little teeth. No need to decide
right now.
He raised his window
quietly and threw the writing
pen from the table against the
window across the air shaft.
He enjoyed the scene of fear
and apprehension before the
skinny dame yanked her
shade down.
With the third glass of
whisky the pint was empty.
Joe felt a wish to go out in the
street and look the town over.
But then his discipline took
over. He had made a rule, and
kept to it, never to leave his
room when he was drinking.
That way a man never got in
trouble. Trouble meant cops,
and cops meant a check-up,
and that would surely mean a

trip across the bay to San Quentin and no road gang for good behavior this time. He put the street out of his mind. Joe had another pleasure he saved for times when he was alone, and he was not aware it was a pleasure. He indulged it now. He lay on the brass bed and went back in time over his sullen and miserable childhood and his fretful and vicious growing up. No luck—he never got the breaks. The big shots got the breaks. A few snatch jobs he got away with, but the tray of pocketknives? Cops came right in his house and got him. Then he was on the books and they never let him alone. Guy in Daly City

couldn’t shag a crate of
strawberries
off
a
truck
without they’d pick up Joe. In
school he didn’t have no luck
neither. Teachers against him,
principal against him. Guy
couldn’t take that crap. Had
to get out.
Out of his memory of
bad luck a warm sadness
grew, and he pushed it with
more memories until the tears
came to his eyes and his lips
quivered with pity for the
lonely lost boy he had been.
And here he was now—look
at him—a rap against him,
working in a whorehouse
when other men had homes

and cars. They were safe and
happy and at night their
blinds were pulled down
against Joe. He wept quietly
until he fell asleep.
Joe got up at ten in the
morning and ate a monster
breakfast at Pop Ernst's. In
the early afternoon he took a
bus
to
Watsonville
and
played
three
games
of
snooker with a friend who
came to meet him in answer
to a phone call. Joe won the
last game and racked his cue.
He handed his friend two ten-dollar bills.

“Hell,” said his friend, “I don’t want your money.”

“Take it,” said Joe.

“It ain’t like I give you anything.”

“You give me plenty. You say she ain’t here and you’re the baby that would know.”

“Can’t tell me what you want her for?”

“Wilson, I tol’ you right first an’ I tell you now, I don’t know. I’m jus’ doing a job of work.”

“Well, that’s all I can do. Seems like there was this convention—what was it?—dentists, or maybe Owls. I don’t know whether she said she was going or I just figured it myself. I got it

stuck in my mind. Give Santa

Cruz

a

whirl.

Know

anybody?”

“I

got

a

few

acquaintances,” said Joe.

“Look up H. V. Mahler,

Hal Mahler. He runs Hal’s

poolroom. Got a game in

back.”

“Thanks,” said Joe.

“No—look, Joe. I don’t

want your money.”

“It ain’t my money—

buy a cigar,” said Joe.

The bus dropped him

two doors from Hal’s place. It

was suppertime but the stud
game was still going. It was
an hour before Hal got up to
go to the can and Joe could
follow
and
make
a
connection. Hal peered at Joe
with large pale eyes made
huge by thick glasses. He
buttoned his fly slowly and
adjusted his black alpaca
sleeve guards and squared his
green
eyeshade.
“Stick
around till the game breaks,”
he said. “Care to sit in?”
“How many playing for
you, Hal?”
“Only one.”

“I’ll play for you.”

“Five bucks an hour,”

said Hal.

“An’ ten per cent if I

win?”

“Well,

okay.

Sandy-haired fella Williams is the

house.”

At one o’clock in the

morning Hal and Joe went to

Barlow’s Grill. “Two rib

steaks and french fries. You

want soup?” Hal asked Joe.

“No. And no french

fries. They bind me up.”

“Me too,” said Hal. “But

I eat them just the same. I

don’t get enough exercise.”

Hal was a silent man

until he was eating. He rarely

spoke unless his mouth was

full. “What’s your pitch?” he
asked around steak.
“Just a job. I make a
hundred bucks and you get
twenty-five—okay?”
“Got to have like proof
—like papers?”
“No. Be good but I’ll get
by without them.”
“Well, she come in and
wants me to steer for her. She
wasn’t no good. I didn’t take
twenty a week off her. I
probably wouldn’t of knew
what become of her only Bill
Primus seen her in my place
and when they found her he
come in an’ ast me about her.
Nice fella, Bill. We got a nice
force here.”
Ethel was not a bad
woman—lazy, sloppy, but

good-hearted. She wanted dignity and importance. She was just not very bright and not very pretty and, because of these two lacks, not very lucky. It would have bothered Ethel if she had known that when they pulled her out of the sand where waves had left her half buried, her skirts were pulled around her ass. She would have liked more dignity.

Hal said, “We got some crazy bohunk bastards in the sardine fleet. Get loaded with ink an’ they go nuts. Way I figure, one of them sardine crews took her out an’ then jus’ pushed her overboard. I don’t see how else she’d get in the water.”

“Maybe she jumped off
the pier?”
“Her?” said Hal through
potatoes. “Hell, no! She was
too blamed lazy to kill
herself. You want to check?”
“If you say it’s her, it’s
her,” said Joe, and he pushed
a twenty and a five across the
table.
Hal rolled the bills like a
cigarette and put them in his
vest pocket. He cut out the
triangle of meat from the rib
steak and put it in his mouth.
“It was her,” he said. “Want a
piece of pie?”
Joe meant to sleep until
noon but he awakened at
seven and lay in bed for quite
a long time. He planned not
to get back to Salinas until

after midnight. He needed
more time to think.
When he got up he
looked in the mirror and
inspected the expression he
planned to wear. He wanted
to look disappointed but not
too disappointed. Kate was so
goddam clever. Let her lead.
Just follow suit. She was
about as wide open as a fist.
Joe had to admit that he was
scared to death of her.
His caution said to him,
“Just go in and tell her and
get your five hundred.”
And he answered his
caution savagely, “Breaks.
How many breaks did I ever
get? Part of the breaks is
knowing a break when you
get it. Do I want to be a lousy

pimp all my life? Just play it close. Let her do the talking. No harm in that. I can always tell her later like I just found out if it don't go good."

"She could have you in a cell block in six hours flat."

"Not if I play 'em close. What I got to lose? What breaks did I ever get?"

4

Kate was feeling better. The new medicine seemed to be doing her some good. The pain in her hands was abated, and it seemed to her that her fingers were straighter, the knuckles not so swollen. She had had a good night's sleep, the first in a long time, and she felt good, even a little excited. She planned to have

a boiled egg for breakfast.
She got up and put on a
dressing gown and brought a
hand mirror back to the bed.
Lying
high
against
the
pillows, she studied her face.
The
rest
had
done
wonders. Pain makes you set
your jaw, and your eyes grow
falsely bright with anxiety,
and the muscles over the
temples and along the cheeks,
even the weak muscles near
to the nose, stand out a little,
and that is the look of
sickness and of resistance to

suffering.

The difference in her rested face was amazing. She looked ten years younger. She opened her lips and looked at her teeth. Time to go for a cleaning. She took care of her teeth. The gold bridge where the molars were gone was the only repair in her mouth. It was remarkable how young she looked, Kate thought. Just one night's sleep and she snapped back. That was another thing that fooled them. They thought she would be weak and delicate. She smiled to herself—delicate like a steel trap. But then she always took care of herself—no liquor, no drugs, and recently she had stopped

drinking coffee. And it paid
off. She had an angelic face.
She put the mirror a little
higher so that the crepe at her
throat did not reflect.
Her thought jumped to
that other angelic face so like
hers—what was his name?—
what the hell was his name—
Alec? She could see him,
moving slowly past, his white
surplice edged with lace, his
sweet chin down and his hair
glowing
under
the
candlelight. He held the
oaken staff and its brass cross
angled ahead of him. There
was
something
frigidly

beautiful

about

him,

something untouched and

untouchable.

Well,

had

anything or anybody ever

really touched Kate—really

got through and soiled her?

Certainly not. Only the hard

outside had been brushed by

contacts. Inside she was intact

—as clean and bright as this

boy Alec—was that his

name?

She chuckled—mother

of two sons—and she looked

like a child. And if anyone

had seen her with the blond

one—could they have any

doubt? She thought how it

would be to stand beside him in a crowd and let people find out for themselves. What would—Aron, that was the name—what would he do if he knew? His brother knew. That smart little son of a bitch —wrong word—must not call him that. Might be too true. Some people believed it. And not smart bastard either— born in holy wedlock. Kate laughed aloud. She felt good. She was having a good time. The smart one—the dark one—bothered her. He was like Charles. She had respected Charles—and

Charles would probably have killed her if he could. Wonderful medicine—it not only stopped the arthritic pain, it gave her back her courage. Pretty soon she could sell out and go to New York as she had always planned. Kate thought of her fear of Ethel. How sick she must- have been—the poor dumb old bag! How would it be to murder her with kindness? When Joe found her, how about—well, how about taking her on to New York? Keep her close.

A funny notion came to Kate. That would be a comical murder, and a murder no one

under

any

circumstances could solve or

even suspect. Chocolates—

boxes of chocolates, bowls of

fondant, bacon, crisp bacon—

fat, port wine, and then

butter, everything soaked in

butter and whipped cream; no

vegetables, no fruit—and no

amusement either. Stay in the

house, dear. I trust you. Look

after things. You're tired. Go

to bed. Let me fill your glass.

I got these new sweets for

you. Would you like to take

the box to bed? Well, if you

don't feel good why don't

you take a physic? These

cashews are nice, don't you

think? The old bitch would

blow up and burst in six

months. Or how about a tapeworm? Did anyone ever use tapeworms? Who was the man who couldn't get water to his mouth in a sieve—Tantalus?

Kate's lips were smiling sweetly and a gaiety was coming over her. Before she went it might be good to give a party for her sons. Just a simple little party with a circus afterward for her darlings—her jewels. And then she thought of Aron's beautiful face so like her own and a strange pain—a little collapsing pain—arose in her chest. He wasn't smart. He couldn't protect himself. The dark

brother

might
be
dangerous. She had felt his
quality. Cal had beaten her.
Before she went away she
would teach him a lesson.
Maybe—why, sure—maybe a
dose of the clap might set that
young man back on his heels.
Suddenly she knew that
she did not want Aron to
know about her. Maybe he
could come to her in New
York. He would think she had
always lived in an elegant
little house on the East Side.
She would take him to the
theater, to the opera, and
people
would
see
them

together and wonder at their loveliness, and recognize that they were either brother and sister or mother and son. No one could fail to know. They could go together to Ethel's funeral. She would need an oversized coffin and six wrestlers to carry it. Kate was so filled with amusement at her thoughts that she did not hear Joe's knocking on the door. He opened it a crack and looked in and saw her gay and smiling face.

"Breakfast," he said and nudged the door open with the edge of the linen-covered tray. He pushed the door closed with his knee. "Want it there?" he asked and gestured toward the gray room with his

chin.

“No. I’ll have it right

here. And I want a boiled egg

and a piece of cinnamon

toast. Four and a half minutes

on the egg. Make sure. I don’t

want it gooey.”

“You must feel better,

ma’am.”

“I do,” she said. “That

new medicine is wonderful.

You look dragged by dogs,

Joe. Don’t you feel well?”

“I’m all right,” he said

and set the tray on the table in

front of the big deep chair.

“Four and a half minutes?”

“That’s right. And if

there’s a good apple—a crisp

apple—bring that too.”

“You ain’t et like this

since I knew you,” he said.

In the kitchen, waiting
for the cook to boil the egg,
he was apprehensive. Maybe
she knew. He'd have to be
careful. But hell! she couldn't
hate him for something he
didn't know. No crime in
that.
Back in her room he
said, "Didn't have no apples.
He said this was a good
pear."
"I'd
like
that
even
better," said Kate.
He watched her chip off
the egg and dip a spoon into
the shell. "How is it?"
"Perfect!" said Kate.
"Just perfect."

“You look good,” he
said.
“I feel good. You look
like hell. What’s the matter?”
Joe went into it warily.
“Ma’am, there ain’t nobody
needs five hundred like I do.”
She
said
playfully,
“There isn’t *anyone* who
needs—”
“What?”
“Forget it. What are you
trying to say? You couldn’t
find her—is that it? Well, if
you did a good job looking,
you’ll get your five hundred.
Tell me about it.” She picked
up the salt shaker and
scattered a few grains into the
open eggshell.

Joe put an artificial joy
on his face. “Thanks,” he
said. “I’m in a spot. I need it.
Well, I looked in Pajaro and
Watsonville. Got a line on her
in Watsonville but she’d went
to Santa” Cruz. Got a smell of
her there but she was gone.”
Kate tasted the egg and
added more salt. “That all?”
“No,” said Joe. “I went it
blind there. Dropped down to
San Luis an’ she had been
there too but gone.”
“No trace? No idea
where she went?”
Joe fiddled with his
fingers. His whole pitch,
maybe
his
whole
life,

depended on his next words,
and he was reluctant to say
them.
“Come on,” she said at
last. “You got something—
what is it?”
“Well, it ain’t much. I
don’t know what to think of
it.”
“Don’t think. Just tell.
I’ll think,” she said sharply.
“Might not even be
true.”
“For Christ’s sake!” she
said angrily.
“Well, I talked to the last
guy that seen her. Guy named
Joe, like me—”
“Did
you
get
his

grandmother's name?" she asked sarcastically.

"This guy Joe says she loaded up on beer one night an' she said how she's going to come back to Salinas an' lay low. Then she dropped out of sight. This guy Joe didn't know nothing more."

Kate was startled out of control. Joe read her quick start, the apprehension, and then the almost hopeless fear and weariness. Whatever it was, Joe had something. He had got the breaks at last.

She looked up from her lap and her twisted fingers.

"We'll forget the old fart," she said. "You'll get your five hundred, Joe."

Joe breathed shallowly,

afraid that any sound might
drag her out of her self-absorption. She had believed
him. More than that, she was
believing things he had not
told her. He wanted to get out
of the room as quickly as
possible. He said, “Thank
you, ma’am,” but very softly,
and he moved silently toward
the door.
His hand was on the
knob when she spoke with
elaborate casualness. “Joe, by
the way—”
“Ma’am?”
“If you should hear
anything about—her, let me
know, will you?”
“I sure will. Want me to
dig into it?”
“No. Don’t bother. It
isn’t that important.”

In his room, with the
door latched, Joe sat down
and folded his arms. He
smiled
to
himself.
And
instantly he began to work
out the future course. He
decided to let her brood on it
till, say, next week. Let her
relax, and then bring up Ethel
again. He did not know what
his weapon was or how he
was going to use it. But he
did know that it was very
sharp and he itched to use it.
He would have laughed out
loud if he had known that
Kate had gone to the gray
room and locked its door, and
that she sat still in the big

chair and her eyes were closed.

PART FIVE

Chapter 46

Sometimes, but not often, a rain comes to the Salinas Valley in November. It is so rare that the *Journal* or the *Index* or both carry editorials about it. The hills turn to a soft green overnight and the air smells good. Rain at this time is not particularly good in an agricultural sense unless it is going to continue, and this is extremely unusual. More commonly, the dryness comes back and the fuzz of grass withers or a little frost curls it and there's that amount of seed wasted.

The war years were wet

years, and there were many
people
who
blamed
the
strange intransigent weather
on the firing of the great guns
in France. This was seriously
considered in articles and in
arguments.
We didn’t have many
troops in France that first
winter, but we had millions in
training, getting ready to go
—painful as the war was, it
was
exciting
too.
The
Germans were not stopped. In
fact, they had taken the
initiative

again,
driving
methodically toward Paris,
and God knew when they
could be stopped—if they
could be stopped at all.
General Pershing would save
us if we could be saved. His
trim, beautifully uniformed
soldierly figure made its
appearance in every paper
every day. His chin was
granite and there was no
wrinkle on his tunic. He was
the epitome of a perfect
soldier. No one knew what he
really thought.
We knew we couldn’t
lose and yet we seemed to be
going about losing. You
couldn’t buy flour, white
flour, any more without

taking four times the quantity
of brown flour. Those who
could afford it ate bread and
biscuits made with white
flour and made mash for the
chickens with the brown.
In the old Troop C
armory the Home Guard
drilled, men over fifty and not
the best soldier material, but
they took setting-up exercises
twice a week, wore Home
Guard buttons and overseas
caps, snapped orders at one
another,
and
wrangled
eternally about who should be
officers. William C. Burt died
right on the armory floor in
the middle of a push-up. His
heart couldn’t take it.

There were Minute Men
too, so called because they
made one-minute speeches in
favor of America in moving-picture
theaters
and
in
churches. They had buttons
too.
The
women
rolled
bandages and wore Red Cross
uniforms and thought of
themselves as Angels of
Mercy.
And
everybody
knitted
something
for
someone.

There
were
wristlets, short tubes of wool
to keep the wind from
whistling up soldiers' sleeves,
and
there
were
knitted
helmets with only a hole in
front to look out of. These
were designed to keep the
new tin helmets from freezing
to the head.
Every bit of really first-grade leather was taken for
officers' boots and for Sam
Browne belts. These belts
were handsome and only
officers could wear them.
They consisted of a wide belt
and a strip that crossed the
chest and passed under the

left epaulet. We copied them
from the British, and even the
British had forgotten their
original purpose, which was
possibly to support a heavy
sword. Swords were not
carried except on parade, but
an officer would not be
caught dead without a Sam
Browne belt. A good one cost
as
much
as
twenty-five
dollars.
We learned a lot from
the British—and if they had
not been good fighting men
we wouldn’t have taken it.
Men began to wear their
handkerchiefs in their sleeves
and some foppish lieutenants

carried swagger sticks. One
thing we resisted for a long
time, though. Wrist-watches
were just too silly. It didn't
seem likely that we would
ever copy the Limeys in that.
We had our internal
enemies
too,
and
we
exercised vigilance. San Jose
had a spy scare, and Salinas
was not likely to be left
behind—not the way Salinas
was growing.
For about twenty years
Mr. Fenchel had done hand
tailoring in Salinas. He was
short and round and he had an
accent that made you laugh.
All day he sat cross-legged on

his table in the little shop on
Alisal Street, and in the
evening he walked home to
his small white house far out
on Central Avenue. He was
forever painting his house
and the white picket fence in
front of it. Nobody had given
his accent a thought until the
war came along, but suddenly
we knew. It was German. We
had
our
own
personal
German. It didn’t do him any
good to bankrupt himself
buying war bonds. That was
too easy a way to cover up.
The
Home
Guard

wouldn’t take him in. They
didn’t want a spy knowing
their
secret
plans
for
defending Salinas. And who
wanted to wear a suit made
by an enemy? Mr. Fenchel sat
all day on his table and he
didn’t have anything to do, so
he basted and ripped and
sewed and ripped on the same
piece of cloth over and over.
We used every cruelty
we could think of on Mr.
Fenchel. He was our German.
He passed our house every
day, and there had been a
time when he spoke to every
man and woman and child
and dog, and everyone had

answered. Now no one spoke
to him, and I can see now in
my mind his tubby loneliness
and his face full of hurt pride.
My little sister and I did
our part with Mr. Fenchel,
and it is one of those
memories of shame that still
makes me break into a sweat
and tighten up around the
throat. We were standing in
our front yard on the lawn
one evening and we saw him
coming with little fat steps.
His black homburg was
brushed and squarely set on
his head. I don't remember
that we discussed our plan but
we must have, to have carried
it out so well.
As he came near, my
sister and I moved slowly

across the street side by side.
Mr. Fenchel looked up and
saw us moving toward him.
We stopped in the gutter as
he came by.
He broke into a smile
and said, “Gut efning, Chon.
Gut efning, Mary.”
We stood stiffly side by
side and we said in unison,
“Hoch der Kaiser!”
I can see his face now,
his startled innocent blue
eyes.
He
tried
to
say
something and then he began
to cry. Didn’t even try to
pretend he wasn’t. He just
stood there sobbing. And do

you know?—Mary and I
turned around and walked
stiffly across the street and
into our front yard. We felt
horrible. I still do when I
think of it.
We were too young to
do a good job on Mr.
Fenchel. That took strong
men—about thirty of them.
One Saturday night they
collected in a bar and
marched in a column of fours
out Central Avenue, saying,
“Hup! Hup!” in unison. They
tore down Mr. Fenchel’s
white picket fence and burned
the front out of his house. No
Kaiser-loving son of a bitch
was going to get away with it
with us. And then Salinas
could hold up its head with

San Jose.
Of course that made
Watsonville get busy. They
tarred and feathered a Pole
they thought was a German.
He had an accent.
We of Salinas did all of
the things that are inevitably
done in a war, and we thought
the inevitable thoughts. We
screamed over good rumors
and died of panic at bad
news. Everybody had a secret
that
he
had
to
spread
obliquely to keep its identity
as a secret. Our pattern of life
changed in the usual manner.
Wages and prices went up. A

whisper of shortage caused us
to buy and store food. Nice
quiet ladies clawed one
another
over
a
can
of
tomatoes.
It wasn’t all bad or
cheap or hysterical. There
was heroism too. Some men
who could have avoided the
army enlisted, and others
objected to the war on moral
or religious grounds and took
the walk up Golgotha which
normally comes with that.
There were people who gave
everything they had to the
war because it was the last
war and by winning it we

would remove war like a
thorn from the flesh of the
world and there wouldn’t be
any
more
such
horrible
nonsense.
There is no dignity in
death in battle. Mostly that is
a splashing about of human
meat and fluid, and the result
is filthy, but there is a great
and almost sweet dignity in
the sorrow, the helpless, the
hopeless sorrow, that comes
down over a family with the
telegram. Nothing to say,
nothing to do, and only one
hope—I hope he didn’t suffer
—and what a forlorn and last-choice hope that is. And it is
true that there were some

people who, when their
sorrow was beginning to lose
its savor, gently edged it
toward
pride
and
felt
increasingly
important
because of their loss. Some of
these even made a good thing
of it after the war was over.
That is only natural, just as it
is natural for a man whose
life function is the making of
money to make money out of
a war. No one blamed a man
for that, but it was expected
that he should invest a part of
his loot in war bonds. We
thought we invented all of it
in Salinas, even the sorrow.

Chapter 47

1

In the Trask house next to Reynaud's Bakery, Lee and Adam put up a map of the western front with lines of colored pins snaking down, and this gave them a feeling of participation. Then Mr. Kelly died and Adam Trask was appointed to take his place on the draft board. He was the logical man for the job. The ice plant did not take up much of his time, and he had a clear service record and an honorable discharge himself.

Adam Trask had seen a war—a little war of maneuver

and butchery, but at least he had experienced the reversal of the rules where a man is permitted to kill all the humans he can. Adam didn't remember his war very well. Certain sharp pictures stood out in his memory, a man's face, the piled and burning bodies, the clang of saber scabbards at fast trot, the uneven, tearing sound of firing carbines, the thin cold voice of a bugle in the night. But Adam's pictures were frozen. There was no motion or emotion in them— illustrations in the pages of a book, and not very well

drawn.

Adam worked hard and honestly and sadly. He could not get over the feeling that the young men he passed to the army were under sentence of death. And because he knew he was weak, he grew more and more stern and painstaking and much less likely to accept an excuse or a borderline disability. He took the lists home with him, called on parents, in fact, did much more work than was expected of him. He felt like a hanging judge who hates the gallows.

Henry Stanton watched Adam grow more gaunt and more silent, and Henry was a man who liked fun—needed

it. A sour-pussed associate could make him sick.

"Relax," he told Adam. "You're trying to carry the weight of the war. Now, look —it's not your responsibility. You got put in here with a set of rules. Just follow the rules and relax. You aren't running the war."

Adam moved the slats of the blind so that the late afternoon sun would not shine in his eyes, and he gazed down at the harsh parallel lines the sun threw on his desk. "I know," he said wearily. "Oh, I know that! But, Henry, it's when there's a choice, and it's my own judgment of the merits, that's when it gets me. I passed

Judge Kendal's boy and he
was killed in training."
"It's not your business,
Adam. Why don't you take a
few drinks at night? Go to a
movie—sleep on it." Henry
put
his
thumbs
in
the
armholes of his vest and
leaned back in his chair.
"While we're talking about it,
Adam, it seems to me it don't
do a candidate a damn bit of
good for you to worry. You
pass boys I could be talked
into letting off."
"I know," said Adam. "I
wonder how long it will
last?"

Henry inspected him
shrewdly and took a pencil
from his stuffed vest pocket
and rubbed the eraser against
his big white front teeth. “I
see what you mean,” he said
softly.
Adam looked at him,
startled. “What do I mean?”
he demanded.
“Now don’t get huffy. I
never thought I was lucky
before, just having girls.”
Adam traced one of the
slat shadows on his desk with
his forefinger. “Yes,” he said
in a voice as soft as a sigh.
“It’s a long time before
your boys will be called up.”
“Yes.” Adam’s finger
entered a line of light and slid
slowly back.

Henry said, “I’d hate to

__”

“Hate to what?”

“I was just wondering

how I’d feel if I had to pass

on my own sons.”

“I’d resign,” said Adam.

“Yes. I can see that. A

man would be tempted to

reject them—I mean, his

own.”

“No,” said Adam. “I’d

resign because I couldn’t

reject them. A man couldn’t

let his own go free.”

Henry laced his fingers

and made one big fist of his

two hands and laid the fist on

the desk in front of him. His

face was querulous. “No,” he

said, “you’re right. A man

couldn’t.” Henry liked fun

and avoided when he could
any solemn or serious matter,
for he confused these with
sorrow. “How’s Aron doing
at Stanford?”
“Fine. He writes that it’s
hard but he thinks he’ll make
out all right. He’ll be home
for Thanksgiving.”
“I’d like to see him. I
saw Cal on the street last
night. There’s a smart boy.”
“Cal didn’t take college
tests a year ahead,” said
Adam.
“Well, maybe that’s not
what he’s cut out for. I didn’t
go to college. Did you?”
“No,” said Adam. “I
went into the army.”
“Well,
it’s

a

good

experience.

I’ll

bet

you

wouldn’t take a good bit for

the experience.”

Adam stood up slowly

and picked his hat from the

deer horns on the wall. “Good

night, Henry,” he said.

2

Walking

home,

Adam

pondered his responsibility.

As he passed Reynaud’s

Bakery

Lee

came

out,

carrying a golden loaf of
French bread.
“I have a hunger for
some garlic bread,” Lee said.
“I like it with steak,”
said Adam.
“We’re having steak.
Was there any mail?”
“I forgot to look in the
box.”
They entered the house
and Lee went to the kitchen.
In a moment Adam followed
him and sat at the kitchen
table.
“Lee,”
he
said,
“suppose we send a boy to
the army and he is killed, are
we responsible?”
“Go on,” said Lee. “I

would rather have the whole
thing at once."
"Well, suppose there's a
slight doubt that the boy
should be in the army and we
send him and he gets killed."
"I see. Is it responsibility
or blame that bothers you?"
"I don't want blame."
"Sometimes
responsibility is worse. It
doesn't carry any pleasant
egotism."
"I was thinking about
that time when Sam Hamilton
and you and I had a long
discussion about a word,"
said Adam. "What was that
word?"
"Now I see. The word
was *timshel*."
"*Timshel*— and you said

—”

“I said that word carried

a man’s greatness if he

wanted to take advantage of

it.”

“I

remember

Sam

Hamilton felt good about it.”

“It set him free,” said

Lee. “It gave him the right to

be a man, separate from every

other man.”

“That’s lonely.”

“All great and precious

things are lonely.”

“What

is

the

word

again?”

“*Timshel*—thou

mayest.”

3

Adam looked forward to
Thanksgiving
when
Aron
would come home from
college. Even though Aron
had been away such a short
time Adam had forgotten him
and changed him the way any
man changes someone he
loves. With Aron gone, the
silences were the result of his
going, and every little painful
event was somehow tied to
his absence. Adam found
himself talking and boasting
about his son, telling people
who weren’t very interested
how smart Aron was and how
he had jumped a year in

school. He thought it would be a good thing to have a real celebration at Thanksgiving to let the boy know his effort was appreciated.

Aron lived in a furnished room in Palo Alto, and he walked the mile to and from the campus every day. He was miserable. What he had expected to find at the university had been vague and beautiful. His picture—never really inspected—had been of clean-eyed young men and immaculate girls, all in academic robes and converging on a white temple on the crown of a wooded hill

in the evening. Their faces
were shining and dedicated
and their voices rose in
chorus and it was never any
time but evening. He had no
idea where he had got his
picture of academic life—
perhaps
from
the
Doré
illustrations
of
Dante’s
Inferno with its massed and
radiant
angels.
Leland
Stanford University was not
like that. A formal square of
brown sandstone blocks set
down in a hayfield; a church

with an Italian mosaic front;
classrooms of varnished pine;
and the great world of
struggle and anger re-enacted
in the rise and fall of
fraternities. And those bright
angels were youths in dirty
corduroy
trousers,
some
study-raddled
and
some
learning the small vices of
their fathers.
Aron, who had not
known he had a home, was
nauseatingly homesick. He
did not try to learn the life
around him or to enter it. He
found the natural noise and
fuss

and
horseplay
of
undergraduates
horrifying,
after his dream. He left the
college dormitory for a dreary
furnished room where he
could decorate another dream
which had only now come
into being. In the new and
neutral hiding place he cut the
university out, went to his
classes and left as soon as he
could, to live in his new-found memories. The house
next to Reynaud's Bakery
became warm and dear, Lee
the epitome of friend and
counselor, his father the cool,
dependable
figure
of

godhead, his brother clever
and delightful, and Abra—
well, of Abra he made his
immaculate
dream
and,
having created her, fell in
love with her. At night when
his studying was over he went
to his nightly letter to her as
one goes to a scented bath.
And as Abra became more
radiant,
more
pure
and
beautiful,
Aron
took
an
increasing joy in a concept of
his own wickedness. In a

frenzy he poured joyous abjectness on paper to send to her, and he went to bed purified, as a man is after sexual love. He set down every evil thought he had and renounced it. The results were love letters that dripped with longing and by their high tone made Abra very uneasy. She could not know that Aron's sexuality had taken a not unusual channel.

He had made a mistake.

He could admit the mistake but as yet he could not reverse himself. He made a compact with himself. At Thanksgiving he would go home, and then he would be sure. He might never come back. He remembered that

Abra had once suggested that
they go to live on the ranch,
and that became his dream.
He remembered the great
oaks and the clear living air,
the clean sage-laced wind
from the hills and the brown
oak leaves scudding. He
could
see
Abra
there,
standing under a tree, waiting
for him to come in from his
work. And it was evening.
There, after work of course,
he could live in purity and
peace with the world, cut off
by the little draw. He could
hide from ugliness—in the
evening.

Chapter 48

1

Late in November the Nigger
died and was buried in black
austerity,
as
her
will
demanded. She lay for a day
in Muller's Funeral Chapel in
an ebony and silver casket,
her lean and severe profile
made even more ascetic by
the four large candles set at
the four corners of the casket.
Her little black husband
crouched like a cat by her
right shoulder, and for many
hours he seemed as still as
she. There were no flowers,
as ordered, no ceremony, no
sermon, and no grief. But a
strange and catholic selection

of citizens tiptoed to the
chapel door and peered in and
went
away—lawyers
and
laborers and clerks and bank
tellers, most of them past
middle age. Her girls came in
one at a time and looked at
her for decency and for luck
and went away.
An institution was gone
from Salinas, dark and fatal
sex, as hopeless and deeply
hurtful as human sacrifice.
Jenny's place would still
jangle with honky-tonk and
rock with belching laughter.
Kate's would rip the nerves to
a sinful ecstasy and leave a
man shaken and weak and
frightened at himself. But the

somber
mystery
of
connection that was like a
voodoo offering was gone
forever.
The funeral was also by
order of the will, the hearse
and one automobile with the
small black man crouched
back in a corner. It was a gray
day, and when Muller's
service had lowered the
casket with oiled and silent
winches the hearse drove
away and the husband filled
the grave himself with a new
shovel. The caretaker, cutting
dry weeds a hundred yards
away, heard a whining carried
on the wind.
Joe Valery had been

drinking a beer with Butch
Beavers at the Owl, and he
went with Butch to have a
look at the Nigger. Butch was
in a hurry because he had to
go out to Natividad to auction
a small herd of white-face
Herefords for the Tavernettis.
Coming
out
of
the
mortuary, Joe found himself
in step with Alf Nichelson—
crazy Alf Nichelson, who was
a survival from an era that
was past. Alf was a jack-of-all-trades, carpenter, tinsmith,
blacksmith,
electrician,
plasterer, scissors grinder,
and cobbler. Alf could do
anything, and as a result he

was
a
financial
failure
although he worked all the
time. He knew everything
about everybody back to the
beginning of time.
In the past, in the period
of his success, two kinds of
people had access to all
homes and all gossip—the
seamstress and the handy
man. Alf could tell you about
everybody on both sides of
Main Street. He was a vicious
male
gossip,
insatiably
curious
and
vindictive

without malice.

He looked at Joe and

tried to place him. “I know

you,” he said. “Don’t tell

me.”

Joe edged away. He was

wary of people who knew

him.

“Wait a minute. I got it.

Kate’s. You work at Kate’s.”

Joe sighed with relief.

He had thought Alf might

have known him earlier.

“That’s

right,”

he

said

shortly.

“Never forget a face,”

said Alf. “Seen you when I

built that crazy lean-to for

Kate. Now why in hell did

she want that for? No
window.”
“Wanted it dark,” said
Joe, “Eyes bother her.”
Alf sniffed. He hardly
ever believed anything simple
or good about anybody. You
could say good morning to
Alf and he’d work it around
to a password. He was
convinced that everyone lived
secretly and that only he
could see through them.
He jerked his head back
at Muller’s. “Well, it’s a
milestone,” he said. “Nearly
all the old-timers gone. When
Fartin’ Jenny goes that’ll be
the end. And Jenny’s getting
along.”
Joe was restless. He
wanted to get away—and Alf

knew he did. Alf was an expert in people who wanted to get away from him. Come to think of it, maybe that is why he carried his bag of stories. No one really went away when he could hear some juicy stuff about someone. Everybody is a gossip at heart. Alf was not liked for his gift but he was listened to. And he knew that Joe was on the point of making an excuse and getting out. It occurred to. him that he didn't know much about Kate's place lately. Joe might trade him some new stuff for some old stuff. "The old days

was pretty good," he said. "

'Course you're just a kid."

"I got to meet a fella,"

said Joe.

Alf pretended not to hear

him. "You take Faye," he

said. "She was a case," and,

parenthetically, "You know

Faye

run

Kate's

place.

Nobody really knows how

Kate come to own it. It was

pretty mysterious, and there

was some that had their

suspicions." He saw with

satisfaction that the fella Joe

was going to meet would wait

a long time.

"What

was

they
suspicious about?" Joe asked.
"Hell, you know how
people talk. Probably nothing
in it. But I got to admit it
looked kind of funny."
"Like to have a beer?"
Joe asked.
"Now you got something
there," said Alf. "They say a
fella jumps from a funeral to
the bedroom. I ain't as young
as I was. Funeral makes me
thirsty. The Nigger was quite
a citizen. I could tell you stuff
about her. I've knew her for
thirty-five—no, thirty-seven
years."
"Who was Faye?" Joe
asked.
They went into Mr.
Griffin's saloon. Mr. Griffin

didn’t like anything about
liquor, and he hated drunks
with a deadly scorn. He
owned and operated Griffin’s
Saloon on Main Street, and
on a Saturday night he might
refuse to serve twenty men he
thought had had enough. The
result was that he got the best
trade in his cool, orderly,
quiet place. It was a saloon in
which to make deals and to
talk
quietly
without
interruption.
Joe and Alf sat at the
round table at the back and
had three beers apiece. Joe
learned everything true and
untrue,
founded

and
unfounded,
every
ugly
conjecture. Out of it he got
complete confusion but a few
ideas. Something might have
been not exactly on the level
about the death of Faye. Kate
might be the wife of Adam
Trask. He hid that quickly—
Trask might want to pay off.
The Faye thing might be too
hot to touch. Joe had to think
about that—alone.
At the end of a couple of
hours Alf was restive. Joe had
not played ball. He had traded
nothing, not one single piece
of information or guess. Alf
found himself thinking, Fella
that close-mouthed must have

something to hide. Wonder

who would have a line on
him?
Alf
said
finally,
“Understand, I like Kate. She
gives me a job now and then
and she’s generous and quick
to pay. Probably nothing to
all the palaver about her. Still,
when you think of it, she’s a
pretty cold piece of woman.
She’s got a real bad eye. You
think?”
“I get along fine,” said
Joe.
Alf was angry at Joe’s
perfidy, so he put in a needle.
“I had a funny idea,” he said.
“It was when I built that lean-to without no window. She
laid that cold eye on me one

day and the idea come to me. If she knew all the things I heard, and she was to offer me a drink or even a cupcake —why, I'd say, 'No thank you, ma'am,' "

"Me and her get along just fine," said Joe. "I got to meet a guy."

Joe went to his room to think. He was uneasy. He jumped up and looked in his suitcase and opened all the bureau drawers. He thought somebody had been going through his things. Just came to him. There was nothing to find. It made him nervous. He tried to arrange the things he had heard.

There was a tap on the door and Thelma came in, her

eyes swollen and her nose
red. “What’s got into Kate?”
“She’s been sick.”
“I don’t mean that. I was
in the kitchen shaking up a
milkshake in a fruit jar and
she came in and worked me
over.”
“Was
you
maybe
shaking up a little bourbon in
it?”
“Hell, no. Just vanilla
extract. She can’t talk like
that to me.”
“She did, didn’t she?”
“Well, I won’t take it.”
“Oh, yes, you will,” said
Joe. “Get out, Thelma!”
Thelma looked at him
out of her dark, handsome,

brooding
eyes,
and
she
regained the island of safety a
woman depends on. “Joe,”
she asked, “are you really just
pure son of a bitch or do you
just pretend to be?”
“What do you care?” Joe
asked.
“I don’t,” said Thelma.
“You son of a bitch.”

2

Joe planned to move slowly,
cautiously, and only after
long consideration. “I got the
breaks, I got to use ’em
right,” he told himself.
He went in to get his
evening orders and took them
from the back of Kate’s head.

She was at her desk, green eyeshade low, and she did not look around at him. She finished her terse orders and then went on, “Joe, I wonder if you’ve been attending to business. I’ve been sick. But I’m well again or very nearly well.”

“Something wrong?”

“Just a symptom. I’d rather Thelma drank whisky than vanilla extract, and I don’t want her to drink whisky. I think you’ve been slipping.”

His mind scurried for a hiding place. “Well, I been busy,” he said.

“Busy?”

“Sure. Doing that stuff for you.”

“What stuff?”

“You

know—about

Ethel.”

“Forget Ethel!”

“Okay,” said Joe. And

then it came without his

expecting it. “I met a fella

yesterday said he seen her.”

If Joe had not known her

he would not have given the

little pause, the rigid ten

seconds of silence, its due.

At the end of it Kate

asked softly, “Where?”

“Here.”

She turned her swivel

chair slowly around to face

him. “I shouldn’t have let you

work in the dark, Joe. It’s

hard to confess a fault but I

owe it to you. I don’t have to

remind you I got Ethel floated out of the county. I thought she'd done something to me."

A melancholy came into her voice. "I was wrong. I found out later. It's been working on me ever since. She didn't do anything to me. I want to find her and make it up to her. I guess you think it's strange for me to feel that way."

"No, ma'am."

"Find her for me, Joe. I'll feel better when I've made it up to her—the poor old girl."

"I'll try, ma'am."

"And, Joe—if you need any money, let me know. And if you find her, just tell her what I said. If she doesn't

want to come here, find out
where I can telephone her.
Need any money?”
“Not right now, ma’am.
But I’ll have to go out of the
house more than I ought.”
“You go ahead. That’s
all, Joe.”
He
wanted
to
hug
himself. In the hall he gripped
his elbows and let his joy run
through him. And he began to
believe he had planned the
whole thing. He went through
the darkened parlor with its
low early evening spatter of
conversation.
He
stepped

outside and looked up at the
stars swimming in schools
through
the
wind-driven
clouds.
Joe
thought
of
his
bumbling father—because he
remembered something the
old man had told him. “Look
out for a soup carrier,” Joe’s
father had said. “Take one of
them dames that’s always
carrying soup to somebody—
she wants something, and
don’t you forget it.”
Joe
said
under

his
breath, “A soup carrier. I
thought she was smarter than
that.” He went over her tone
and words to make sure he
hadn’t missed something. No
—a soup carrier. And he
thought of Alf saying, “If she
was to offer a drink or even a
cupcake—”

3

Kate sat at her desk. She
could hear the wind in the tall
privet in the yard, and the
wind and the darkness were
full of Ethel—fat, sloppy
Ethel oozing near like a
jellyfish. A dull weariness
came over her.

She went into the lean-to, the gray room, and closed
the door and sat in the
darkness, listening to the pain

creep back into her fingers.
Her
temples
beat
with
pounding blood. She felt for
the capsule hanging in its
tube on the chain around her
neck, she rubbed the metal
tube, warm from her breast,
against her cheek, and her
courage came back. She
washed her face and put on
make-up, combed and puffed
her
hair
in
a
loose
pompadour. She moved into
the hall and at the door of the
parlor she paused, as always,

listening.

To the right of the door

two girls and a man were

talking. As soon as Kate

stepped

inside

the

talk

stopped instantly. Kate said,

“Helen, I want to see you if

you aren’t busy right now.”

The girl followed her

down the hall and into her

room. She was a pale blond

with a skin like clean and

polished bone. “Is something

the matter, Miss Kate?” she

asked fearfully.

“Sit

down.

No.

Nothing’s the matter. You

went to the Nigger's funeral."

"Didn't you want me

to?"

"I don't care about that.

You went."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tell me about it."

"What about it?"

"Tell me what you

remember—how it was."

Helen said nervously,

"Well, it was kind of awful

and—kind of beautiful."

"How do you mean?"

"I

don't

know.

No

flowers, no nothing, but there

was—there was a—well, a

kind of—dignity. The Nigger

was just laying there in a

black wood coffin with the

biggest

goddam

silver

handles. Made you feel—I

can’t say it. I don’t know how

to say it.”

“Maybe you said it.

What did she wear?”

“Wear, ma’am?”

“Yes—wear.

They

didn’t bury her naked, did

they?”

A struggle of effort

crossed Helen’s face. “I don’t

know,” she said at last. “I

don’t remember.”

“Did you go to the

cemetery?”

“No, ma’am. Nobody

did—except him.”

“Who?”

“Her man.”

Kate

said

quickly—

almost too quickly, “Have

you

got

any

regulars

tonight?”

“No, ma’am. Day before

Thanksgiving. Bound to be

slow.”

“I’d

forgotten,”

said

Kate. “Get back out.” She

watched the girl out of the

room and moved restlessly

back to her desk. And as she

looked at an itemized bill for

plumbing

her

left

hand

strayed to her neck and

touched the chain. It was

comfort and reassurance.

Chapter 49

1

Both Lee and Cal tried to

argue Adam out of going to

meet the train, the Lark night

train from San Francisco to

Los Angeles.

Cal said, “Why don’t we

let Abra go alone? He’ll want

to see her first.”

“I think he won’t know

anybody else is there,” said

Lee. “So it doesn’t matter

whether we go or not.”

“I want to see him get

off the train," said Adam.
"He'll be changed. I want to
see what change there is."
Lee said, "He's only
been gone a couple of
months. He can't be very
changed, nor much older."
"He'll
be
changed.
Experience will do that."
"If you go we'll all have
to go," said Cal.
"Don't you want to see
your brother?" Adam asked
sternly.
"Sure, but he won't want
to see me—not right at first."
"He will too," said
Adam. "Don't you underrate
Aron."
Lee threw up his hands.

“I guess we all go,” he said.
“Can you imagine?” said
Adam. “He’ll know so many
new things. I wonder if he’ll
talk different. You know,
Lee, in the East a boy takes
on the speech of his school.
You can tell a Harvard man
from a Princeton man. At
least that’s what they say.”
“I’ll listen,” said Lee. “I
wonder what dialect they
speak at Stanford. “ He
smiled at Cal.
Adam didn’t think it was
funny. “Did you put some
fruit in his room?” he asked.
“He loves fruit.”
“Pears and apples and
muscat grapes,” said Lee.
“Yes, he loves muscats.
I

remember

he

loves

muscats.”

Under Adam’s urging

they got to the Southern

Pacific Depot half an hour

before the train was due.

Abra was already there.

“I can’t come to dinner

tomorrow, Lee,” she said.

“My father wants me home.

I’ll come as soon after as I

can.”

“You’re

a

little

breathless,” said Lee.

“Aren’t you?”

“I guess I am,” said Lee.

“Look up the track and see if

the block’s turned green.”

Train schedules are a
matter of pride and of
apprehension
to
nearly
everyone. When, far up the
track,
the
block
signal
snapped from red to green
and the long, stabbing probe
of the headlight sheered the
bend and blared on the
station, men looked at their
watches and said, “On time.”
There was pride in it,
and relief too. The split
second has been growing
more and more important to
us. And as human activities
become more and more

intermeshed and integrated,
the split tenth of a second will
emerge, and then a new name
must be made for the split
hundredth, until one day,
although I don't believe it,
we'll say, "Oh, the hell with
it. What's wrong with an
hour?" But it isn't silly, this
preoccupation
with
small
time units. One thing late or
early can disrupt everything
around it, and the disturbance
runs outward in bands like the
waves from a dropped stone
in a quiet pool.
The Lark came rushing
in as though it had no
intention of stopping. And
only when the engine and

baggage cars were well past
did the air brakes give their
screaming
hiss
and
the
straining iron protest to a halt.
The train delivered quite
a crowd for Salinas, returning
relatives
home
for
Thanksgiving, their hands
entangled in cartons and gift-wrapped paper boxes. It was
a moment or two before his
family could locate Aron.
And then they saw him, and
he seemed bigger than he had
been.
He was wearing a flat-topped, narrow-brimmed hat,
very stylish, and when he saw
them he broke into a run and

yanked off his hat, and they
could see that his bright hair
was clipped to a short brush
of a pompadour that stood
straight up. And his eyes
shone so that they laughed
with pleasure to see him.
Aron
dropped
his
suitcase and lifted Abra from
the ground in a great hug. He
set her down and gave Adam
and Cal his two hands. He put
his
arms
around
Lee's
shoulders and nearly crushed
him.
On the way home they
all talked at once. "Well, how

are you?”

“You look fine.”

“Abra, you’re so pretty.”

“I am not. Why did you

cut your hair?”

“Oh, everybody wears it

that way,”

“But you have such nice

hair.”

They hurried up to Main

Street and one short block

and around the corner on

Central past Reynaud’s with

stacked French bread in the

window

and

black-haired

Mrs. Reynaud waved her

flour-pale hand at them and

they were home.

Adam

said,

“Coffee,

Lee?”

“I made it before we left.

It’s on the simmer.” He had

the

cups

laid

out

too.

Suddenly they were together

—Aron and Abra on the

couch, Adam in his chair

under the light, Lee passing

coffee, and Cal braced in the

doorway to the hall. And they

were silent, for it was too late

to say hello and too early to

begin other things.

Adam did say, “I’ll want

to hear all about it. Will you

get good marks?”

“Finals aren’t until next

month, Father."

"Oh, I see. Well, you'll

get good marks, all right. I'm

sure you will."

In spite of himself a

grimace

of

impatience

crossed Aron's face.

"I'll bet you're tired,"

said Adam. "Well, we can

talk tomorrow."

Lee said, "I'll bet he's

not. I'll bet he'd like to be

alone."

Adam looked at Lee and

said, "Why, of course—of

course. Do you think we

should all go to bed?"

Abra solved it for them.

"I can't stay out long," she

said. "Aron, why don't you

walk me home? We'll be
together tomorrow."
On the way Aron clung
to her arm. He shivered.
"There's going to a frost," he
said.
"You're glad to be
back."
"Yes, I am. I have a lot
to talk about."
"Good things?"
"Maybe. I hope you
think so."
"You sound serious."
"It is serious."
"When do you have to
go back?"
"Not
until
Sunday
night."
"We'll have lots of time.

I want to tell you some things
too. We have tomorrow and
Friday and Saturday and all
day Sunday. Would you mind
not coming in tonight?"
"Why not?"
"I'll tell you later."
"I want to know now."
"Well, my father's got
one of his streaks."
"Against me?"
"Yes. I can't go to
dinner with you tomorrow,
but I won't eat much at home,
so you can tell Lee to save a
plate for me."
He was turning shy. She
could feel it in the relaxing
grip on her arm and in his
silence, and she could see it
in his raised face. "I shouldn't
have told you that tonight."

“Yes, you should,” he
said slowly. “Tell me the
truth. Do you still—want to
be with me?”
“Yes, I do.”
“Then all right. I’ll go
away
now.
We’ll
talk
tomorrow.”
He left her on her porch
with the feeling of a light-brushed kiss on her lips. She
felt hurt that he had agreed so
easily, and she laughed sourly
at herself that she could ask a
thing and be hurt when she
got it. She watched his tall
quick
step
through
the

radiance
of
the
corner
streetlight. She thought, I
must be crazy. I've been
imagining things.

2

In his bedroom after he had
said his good night, Aron sat
on the edge of his bed and
peered down at his hands
cupped between his knees. He
felt let down and helpless,
packed like a bird's egg in the
cotton
of
his
father's
ambition for him. He had not
known its strength until
tonight, and he wondered

whether he would have the strength to break free of its soft, persistent force. His thoughts would not coagulate. The house seemed cold with a dampness that made him shiver. He got up and softly opened his door. There was a light under Cal's door. He tapped and went in without waiting for a reply.

Cal sat at a new desk. He was working with tissue paper and a bolt of red ribbon, and as Aron came in he hastily covered something on his desk with a large blotter.

Aron smiled.

"Presents?"

"Yes," said Cal and left

it at that.

“Can I talk to you?”

“Sure! Come on in. Talk

low or Father will come in.

He hates to miss a moment.”

Aron sat down on the

bed. He was silent so long

that Cal asked, “What’s the

matter—you got trouble?”

“No, not trouble. I just

wanted to talk to you. Cal, I

don’t want to go on at

college.”

Cal’s

head

jerked

around. “You don’t? Why

not?”

“I just don’t like it.”

“You

haven’t

told

Father, have you? He'll be
disappointed. It's bad enough
that I don't want to go. What
do you want to do?"
"I thought I'd like to
take over the ranch."
"How about Abra?"
"She told me a long time
ago that's what she'd like."
Cal studied him. "The
ranch has got a lease to run."
"Well,
I
was
just
thinking about it."
Cal said, "There's no
money in farming."
"I don't want much
money. Just to get along."
"That's not good enough
for me," said Cal. "I want a

lot of money and I'm going to get it too."

"How?"

Cal felt older and surer than his brother. He felt protective toward him. "If you'll go on at college, why, I'll get started and lay in a foundation. Then when you finish we can be partners. I'll have one kind of thing and you'll have another. That might be pretty good."

"I don't want to go back. Why do I have to go back?"

"Because Father wants you to."

"That won't make me go."

Cal stared fiercely at his brother, at the pale hair and the

wide-set
eyes,
and
suddenly he knew why his
father loved Aron, knew it
beyond doubt. “Sleep on it,”
he said quickly. “It would be
better if you finish out the
term at least. Don’t do
anything now.”
Aron got up and moved
toward the door. “Who’s the
present for?” he asked.
“It’s for Father. You’ll
see
it
tomorrow—after
dinner.”
“It’s not Christmas.”
“No,” said Cal, “it’s
better than Christmas.”
When Aron had gone

back
to
his
room
Cal
uncovered his present. He
counted the fifteen new bills
once more, and they were so
crisp they made a sharp,
cracking
sound.
The
Monterey County Bank had
to send to San Francisco to
get them, and only did so
when the reason for them was
told. It was a matter of shock
and disbelief to the bank that
a
seventeen-year-old
boy
should, first, own them, and,

second, carry them about. Bankers do not like money to be lightly handled even if the handling is sentimental. It had taken Will Hamilton's word to make the bank believe that the money belonged to Cal, that it was honestly come by, and that he could do what he wanted to with it.

Cal wrapped the bills in tissue and tied it with red ribbon finished in a blob that was faintly recognizable as a bow. The package might have been a handkerchief. He concealed it under the shirts in his bureau and went to bed. But he could not sleep. He was excited and at the same time shy. He wished the day was over and the gift given.

He went over what he

planned to say.

“This is for you.”

“What is it?”

“A present.”

From then on he didn’t

know what would happen. He

tossed and rolled in bed, and

at dawn he got up and dressed

and crept out of the house.

On Main Street he saw

Old Martin sweeping the

street with a stable broom.

The

city

council

was

discussing the purchase of a

mechanical

sweeper.

Old

Martin hoped he would get to

drive it, but he was cynical
about it. Young men got the
cream
of
everything.
Bacigalupi's garbage wagon
went by, and Martin looked
after it spitefully. *There* was a
good business. Those wops
were getting rich.
Main Street was empty
except for a few dogs sniffing
at closed entrances and the
sleepy activity around the San
Francisco Chop House. Pet
Bulene's new taxi was parked
in front, for Pet had been
alerted the night before to
take the Williams girls to the
morning
train
for

San

Francisco.

Old Martin called to Cal,

“Got

a

cigarette,

young

fella?”

Cal stopped and took out

his cardboard box of Murads.

“Oh,

fancy

ones!”

Martin said. “I ain’t got a

match either.”

Cal lighted the cigarette

for him, careful not to set fire

to the grizzle around Martin’s

mouth.

Martin leaned on the

handle of his brush and

puffed

disconsolately.

“Young

fellas

gets

the

cream,” he said. “They won’t

let me drive it.”

“What?” Cal asked.

“Why, the new sweeper.

Ain’t you heard? Where you

been, boy?” It was incredible

to him that any reasonably

informed human did not

know about the sweeper. He

forgot

Cal.

Maybe

the

Bacigalupis would give him a

job.

They

were

coining
money. Three wagons and a
new truck.
Cal turned down Alisal
Street, went into the post
office, and looked in the glass
window of box 632. It was
empty. He wandered back
home and found Lee up and
stuffing a very large turkey.
“Up all night?” Lee
asked.
“No. I just went for a
walk.”
“Nervous?”
“Yes.”
“I don’t blame you. I
would be too. It’s hard to give
people things—I guess it’s
harder to be given things,
though. Seems silly, doesn’t
it? Want some coffee?”

“I don’t mind.”

Lee wiped his hands and poured coffee for himself and for Cal. “How do you think Aron looks?”

“All right, I guess.”

“Did you get to talk to him?”

“No,” said Cal. It was easier that way. Lee would want to know what he said. It wasn’t Aron’s day. It was Cal’s day. He had carved this day out for himself and he wanted it. He meant to have it.

Aron came in, his eyes still misty with sleep. “What time do you plan to have dinner, Lee?”

“Oh, I don’t know—three-thirty or four.”

“Could you make it
about five?”
“I guess so, if Adam
says it’s all right. Why?”
“Well, Abra can’t get
here before then. I’ve got a
plan I want to put to my
father and I want her to be
here.”
“I guess that will be all
right,” said Lee.
Cal got up quickly and
went to his room. He sat at
his desk with the student light
turned on and he churned
with
uneasiness
and
resentment. Without effort,
Aron was taking his day away
from him. It would turn out to
be

Aron’s
day.
Then,
suddenly, he was bitterly
ashamed. He covered his eyes
with his hands and he said,
“It’s
just
jealousy.
I’m
jealous. That’s what I am. I’m
jealous. I don’t want to be
jealous.” And he repeated
over and over, “Jealous—
jealous—jealous,” as though
bringing it into the open
might destroy it. And having
gone this far, he proceeded
with
his
self-punishment.
“Why am I giving the money

to my father? Is it for his
good? No. It’s for my good.
Will Hamilton said it—I’m
trying to buy him. There’s not
one decent thing about it.
There’s not one decent thing
about
me.
I
sit
here
wallowing in jealousy of my
brother. Why not call things
by their names?”
He whispered hoarsely
to himself. “Why not be
honest? I know why my
father
loves
Aron.
It’s
because he looks like her. My

father never got over her. He may not know it, but it's true. I wonder if he does know it. That makes me jealous of her too. Why don't I take my money and go away? They wouldn't miss me. In a little while they'd forget I ever existed—all except Lee. And I wonder whether Lee likes me. Maybe not." He doubled his fists against his forehead. "Does Aron have to fight himself like this? I don't think so, but how do I know? I could ask him. He wouldn't say."

Cal's mind careened in anger at himself and in pity for himself. And then a new voice came into it, saying coolly and with contempt, "If

you’re being honest—why
not say you are enjoying this
beating
you’re
giving
yourself? That would be the
truth. Why not be just what
you are and do just what you
do?” Cal sat in shock from
this thought. Enjoying?—of
course. By whipping himself
he protected himself against
whipping by someone else.
His mind tightened up. Give
the money, but give it lightly.
Don’t depend on anything.
Don’t foresee anything. Just
give it and forget it. And
forget it now. Give—give.
Give the day to Aron. Why
not? He jumped up and
hurried out to the kitchen.

Aron was holding open
the skin of the turkey while
Lee forced stuffing into the
cavity. The oven cricked and
snapped with growing heat.
Lee said, “Let’s see,
eighteen
pounds,
twenty
minutes to the pound—that’s
eighteen times twenty—that’s
three hundred and sixty
minutes, six hours even—
eleven to twelve, twelve to
one—” He counted on his
fingers.
Cal said, “When you get
through, Aron, let’s take a
walk.”
“Where
to?”
Aron

asked.

“Just around town. I

want to ask you something.”

Cal led his brother

across the street to Berges

and Garrisiere, who imported

fine wines and liquors. Cal

said, “I’ve got a little money,

Aron. I thought you might

like to buy some wine for

dinner. I’ll give you the

money.”

“What kind of wine?”

“Let’s make a real

celebration.

Let’s

get

champagne—it can be your

present.”

Joe

Garrisiere

said,

“You
boys
aren’t
old
enough.”
“For dinner? Sure we
are.”
“Can’t sell it to you. I’m
sorry.”
Cal said, “I know what
you can do. We can pay for it
and you can send it to our
father.”
“That I can do,” Joe
Garrisiere said. “We’ve got
some Oeil de Perdrix—” His
lips pursed as though he were
tasting it.
“What’s
that?”
Cal
asked.

“Champagne—but very pretty, same color as a partridge eye—pink but a little darker than pink, and dry too. Four-fifty a bottle.”

“Isn’t that high?” Aron asked.

“Sure it’s high!” Cal laughed. “Send three bottles over, Joe.” To Aron he said, “It’s your present.”

3

To Cal the day was endless. He wanted to leave the house and couldn’t. At eleven o’clock Adam went to the closed draft-board office to brood over the records of a new batch of boys coming up. Aron seemed perfectly calm. He sat in the living room, looking at cartoons in

old numbers of the *Review of Reviews.* From the kitchen the odor of the bursting juices of roasting turkey began to fill the house.

Cal went into his room and took out his present and laid it on his desk. He tried to write a card to put on it. “To my father from Caleb”—“To Adam Trask from Caleb Trask.” He tore the cards in tiny pieces and flushed them down the toilet.

He thought, Why give it

to

him

today?

Maybe

tomorrow I could go to him quietly and say, This is for you, and then walk away.

That would be easier. “No,” he said aloud. “I want the others to see.” It had to be that way. But his lungs were compressed and the palms of his hands were wet with stage fright. And then he thought of the morning when his father got him out of jail. The warmth and closeness—they were the things to remember —and his father’s trust. Why, he had even said it. “I trust you.” He felt much better then.

At about three o’clock he heard Adam come in and there was the low sound of voices conversing in the living room. Cal joined his father and Aron.

Adam was saying, “The

times are changed. A boy must be a specialist or he will get nowhere. I guess that's why I'm so glad you're going to college."

Aron said, "I've been thinking about that, and I wonder."

"Well, don't think any more. Your first choice is right. Look at me. I know a little bit about a great many things and not enough about any one of them to make a living in these times."

Cal sat down quietly.

Adam did not notice him. His face was concentrated on his thought.

"It's natural for a man to want his son to succeed," Adam went on. "And maybe I

can see better than you can.”
Lee looked in. “The
kitchen scales must be way
off,” he said. “The turkey’s
going to be done earlier than
the chart says. I’ll bet that
bird doesn’t weigh eighteen
pounds.”
Adam said, “Well, you
can keep it warm,” and he
continued,
“Old
Sam
Hamilton saw this coming.
He said there couldn’t be any
more universal philosophers.
The weight of knowledge is
too great for one mind to
absorb. He saw a time when
one man would know only
one little fragment, but he
would know it well.”

“Yes,” Lee said from the doorway, “and he deplored it. He hated it.”

“Did he now?” Adam asked.

Lee came into the room. He held his big basting spoon in his right hand, and he cupped his left under the bowl for fear it would drip on the carpet. He came into the room and forgot and waved his spoon and drops of turkey fat fell to the floor. “Now you question it, I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t know whether he hated it or I hate it for him.”

“Don’t get so excited,” said Adam. “Seems to me we can’t discuss anything any more but you take it as a

personal insult.”

“Maybe the knowledge
is too great and maybe men
are growing too small,” said
Lee. “Maybe, kneeling down
to atoms, they’re becoming
atom-sized in their souls.
Maybe a specialist is only a
coward, afraid to look out of
his little cage. And think what
any specialist misses—the
whole world over his fence.”

“We’re
only
talking
about making a living.”

“A living—or money,”
Lee said excitedly. “Money’s
easy to make if it’s money
you want. But with a few
exceptions people don’t want
money. They want luxury and

they want love and they want admiration."

"All right. But do you have any objection to college? That's what we're talking about."

"I'm sorry," said Lee. "You're right, I do seem to get too excited. No, if college is where a man can go to find his relation to his whole world, I don't object. Is it that? Is it that, Aron?"

"I don't know," said Aron.

A hissing sound came from the kitchen. Lee said, "The goddam giblets are boiling over," and he bolted

through the door.

Adam gazed after him affectionately. “What a good man! What a good friend!”

Aron said, “I hope he lives to be a hundred.”

His father chuckled.

“How do you know he’s not a hundred now?”

Cal asked, “How is the ice plant doing, Father?”

“Why, all right. Pays for itself and makes a little profit. Why?”

“I thought of a couple of things to make it really pay.”

“Not today,” said Adam quickly. “Monday, if you remember, but not today. You know,” Adam said, “I don’t

remember when I've felt so good. I feel—well, you might call it fulfilled. Maybe it's only a good night's sleep and a good trip to the bathroom. And maybe it's because we're all together and at peace." He smiled at Aron. "We didn't know what we felt about you until you went away."

"I was homesick," Aron confessed. "The first few days I thought I'd die of it."

Abra came in with a little rush. Her cheeks were pink and she was happy. "Did you notice there's snow on Mount Toro?" she asked.

"Yes, I saw it," Adam said. "They say that means a good year to come. And we

could use it.”

“I just nibbled,” said

Abra. “I wanted to be hungry

for here.”

Lee apologized for the

dinner like an old fool. He

blamed the gas oven which

didn’t heat like a good wood

stove. He blamed the new

breed of turkeys which lacked

a something turkeys used to

have. But he laughed with

them when they told him he

was acting like an old woman

fishing for compliments.

With the plum pudding

Adam

opened

the

champagne, and they treated

it

with

ceremony.

A

courtliness settled over the

table. They proposed toasts.

Each one had his health

drunk, and Adam made a

little speech to Abra when he

drank her health.

Her eyes were shining

and under the table Aron held

her hand. The wine dulled

Cal’s nervousness and he was

not afraid about his present.

When

Adam

had

finished his plum pudding he

said, “I guess we never have

had

such

a

good

Thanksgiving."

Cal reached in his jacket

pocket, took out the red-ribboned

package,

and

pushed it over in front of his

father.

"What's this?" Adam

asked.

"It's a present."

Adam was pleased. "Not

even Christmas and we have

presents. I wonder what it can

be!"

"A handkerchief," said

Abra.

Adam slipped off the

grubby bow and unfolded the

tissue paper. He stared down

at the money.

Abra said, "What is it?"

and stood up to look. Aron

leaned forward. Lee, in the
doorway, tried to keep the
look of worry from his face.
He darted a glance at Cal and
saw the light of joy and
triumph in his eyes.
Very
slowly
Adam
moved his fingers and fanned
the gold certificates. His
voice seemed to come from
far away. “What is it? What
—” He stopped.
Cal swallowed. “It’s—I
made it—to give to you—to
make up for losing the
lettuce.”
Adam raised his head
slowly. “You made it? How?”
“Mr.
Hamilton—we

made it—on beans." He hurried on, "We bought futures at five cents and when the price jumped—It's for you, fifteen thousand dollars. It's for you."

Adam touched the new bills so that their edges came together, folded the tissue over them and turned the ends up. He looked helplessly at Lee. Cal caught a feeling—a feeling of calamity, of destruction in the air, and a weight of sickness overwhelmed him. He heard his father say, "You'll have to

give it back."

Almost as remotely his own voice said, "Give it back? Give it back to who?"

"To the people you got it from."

"The British Purchasing Agency? They can't take it back. They're paying twelve and a half cents for beans all over the country."

"Then give it to the farmers you robbed."

"Robbed?" Cal cried.

"Why, we paid them two cents a pound over the market. We didn't rob them."

Cal felt suspended in space, and time seemed very slow. His father took a long time to answer. There seemed to be long spaces between his

words. “I send boys out,” he said. “I sign my name and they go out. And some will die and some will lie helpless without arms and legs. Not one will come back untorn. Son, do you think I could take a profit on that?”

“I did it for you,”. Cal said. “I wanted you to have the money to make up your loss.”

“I don’t want the money, Cal. And the lettuce—I don’t think I did that for a profit. It was a kind of game to see if I could get the lettuce there, and I lost. I don’t want the money.”

Cal looked straight

ahead. He could feel the eyes of Lee and Aron and Abra crawling on his cheeks. He kept his eyes on his father's lips.

"I like the idea of a present," Adam went on. "I thank you for the thought—"

"I'll put it away. I'll keep it for you," Cal broke in.

"No. I won't want it ever. I would have been so happy if you could have given me—well, what your brother has—pride in the thing he's doing, gladness in his progress. Money, even clean money, doesn't stack up with that." His eyes widened a little and he said, "Have I made you angry, son? Don't be angry. If you want to give

me a present—give me a
good life. That would be
something I could value.”
Cal felt that he was
choking.
His
forehead
streamed with perspiration
and he tasted salt on his
tongue. He stood up suddenly
and his chair fell over. He ran
from the room, holding his
breath.
Adam called after him,
“Don’t be angry, son.”
They let him alone. He
sat in his room, his elbows on
his desk. He thought he
would cry but he did not. He
tried to let weeping start but
tears could not pass the hot
iron in his head.

After
a
time
his
breathing steadied and he
watched his brain go to work
slyly, quietly. He fought the
quiet hateful brain down and
it slipped aside and went
about its work. He fought it
more weakly, for hate was
seeping all through his body,
poisoning every nerve. He
could feel himself losing
control.
Then there came a point
where the control and the fear
were gone and his brain cried
out in an aching triumph. His
hand went to a pencil and he
drew tight little spirals one
after another on his blotting

pad. When Lee came in an
hour
later
there
were
hundreds of spirals, and they
had become smaller and
smaller. He did not look up.
Lee closed the door
gently. “I brought you some
coffee,” he said.
“I don’t want it—yes, I
do. Why, thank you, Lee. It’s
kind of you to think of it.”
Lee said, “Stop it! Stop
it, I tell you!”
“Stop what? What do
you want me to stop?”
Lee said uneasily, “I told
you once when you asked me
that it was all in yourself. I
told you you could control it

—if you wanted.”

“Control what? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Lee said, “Can’t you hear me? Can’t I get through to you? Cal, don’t you know what I’m saying?”

“I hear you, Lee. What are you saying?”

“He couldn’t help it, Cal. That’s his nature. It was the only way he knew. He didn’t have any choice. But you have. Don’t you hear me? You have a choice.”

The spirals had become so small that the pencil lines ran together and the result was a shiny black dot.

Cal said quietly, “Aren’t you making a fuss about

nothing?

You

must

be

slipping. You'd think from

your tone that I'd killed

somebody. Come off it, Lee.

Come off it."

It was silent in the room.

After a moment Cal turned

from his desk and the room

was empty. A cup of coffee

on the bureau top sent up a

plume of vapor. Cal drank the

coffee scalding as it was and

went into the living room.

His father looked up

apologetically at him.

Cal said, "I'm sorry,

Father. I didn't know how

you felt about it." He took the

package of money from

where it lay on the mantel
and put it in the inside pocket
of his coat where it had been
before. “I’ll see what I can do
about this.” He said casually,
“Where are the others?”
“Oh, Abra had to go.
Aron walked with her. Lee
went out.”
“I guess I’ll go for a
walk,” said Cal.

4

The November night was
well fallen. Cal opened the
front door a crack and saw
Lee’s shoulders and head
outlined against the white
wall of the French Laundry
across the street. Lee was
sitting on the steps, and he
looked lumpy in his heavy
coat.

Cal closed the door

quietly

and

went

back

through the living room.

“Champagne

makes

you

thirsty,” he said. His father

didn’t look up.

Cal slipped out the

kitchen door and moved

through Lee’s waning kitchen

garden. He climbed the high

fence, found the two-by-twelve plank that served as a

bridge across the slough of

dark water, and came out

between Lang’s Bakery and

the

tinsmith’s

shop

on

Castroville Street.

He walked to Stone

Street where the Catholic

church is and turned left,

went past the Carriaga house,

the Wilson house, the Zabala

house, and turned left on

Central

Avenue

at

the

Steinbeck house. Two blocks

out Central he turned left past

the West End School.

The poplar trees in front

of the schoolyard were nearly

bare, but in the evening wind

a few yellowed leaves still

twisted down.

Cal’s mind was numb.

He did not even know that the

air was cold with frost
slipping down from the
mountains.
Three
blocks
ahead he saw his brother
cross under a streetlight,
coming toward him. He knew
it was his brother by stride
and posture and because he
knew it.
Cal slowed his steps, and
when Aron was close he said,
“Hi. I came looking for you.”
Aron said, “I’m sorry
about this afternoon.”
“You couldn’t help it—
forget it.” He turned and the
two walked side by side. “I
want you to come with me,”
Cal said. “I want to show you
something.”

“What is it?”

“Oh, it’s a surprise. But

it’s very interesting. You’ll be

interested.”

“Well, will it take long?”

“No, not very long. Not

very long at all.”

They

walked

past

Central

Avenue

toward

Castroville Street.

5

Sergeant

Axel

Dane

ordinarily opened the San

Jose recruiting office at eight

o’clock, but if he was a little

late Corporal Kemp opened

it, and Kemp was not likely to complain. Axel was not an unusual case. A hitch in the U.S. Army in the time of peace between the Spanish war and the German war had unfitted him for the cold, unordered life of a civilian. One month between hitches convinced him of that. Two hitches in the peacetime army completely unfitted him for war, and he had learned enough method to get out of it. The San Jose recruiting station proved he knew his way about. He was dallying with the youngest Ricci girl and she lived in San Jose. Kemp hadn't the time in, but he was learning the basic rule. Get along with the

topkick and avoid all officers
when possible. He didn’t
mind
the
gentle
riding
Sergent Dane handed out.
At
eight-thirty
Dane
entered the office to find
Corporal Kemp asleep at his
desk and a tired-looking kid
sat waiting. Dane glanced at
the boy and then went in back
of the rail and put his hand on
Kemp’s shoulder.
“Darling,” he said, “the
skylarks are singing and a
new dawn is here.”
Kemp raised his head
from his arms, wiped his nose

on the back of his hand, and
sneezed. “That’s my sweet,”
the sergeant said. “Arise, we
have a customer.”
Kemp
squinted
his
crusted eyes. “The war will
wait,” he said.
Dane
looked
more
closely at the boy. “God! he’s
beautiful. I hope they take
good care of him. Corporal,
you may think that he wants
to bear arms against the foe,
but I think he’s running away
from love.”
Kemp was relieved that
the sergeant wasn’t quite
sober. “You think some dame

hurt him?" He played any
game his sergeant wished.
"You think it's the Foreign
Legion?"
"Maybe he's running
away from himself."
Kemp said, "I saw that
picture. There's one mean son
of a bitch of a sergeant in it."
"I don't believe it," said
Dane. "Step up, young man.
Eighteen, aren't you?"
"Yes, sir."
Dane turned to his man.
"What do you think?"
"Hell!" said Kemp. "I
say if they're big enough,
they're old enough."
The sergeant said, "Let's
say you're eighteen. And
we'll stick to it, shall we?"
"Yes, sir."

“You just take this form
and fill it out. Now you figure
out what year you were born,
and you put it down right
here, and you remember it.”

Chapter 50

1

Joe didn’t like for Kate to sit
still and stare straight ahead
—hour after hour. That meant
she was thinking, and since
her face had no expression
Joe had no access to her
thoughts. It made him uneasy.
He didn’t want his first real
good break to get away from
him.
He had only one plan
himself—and that was to
keep her stirred up until she
gave herself away. Then he
could jump in any direction.

But how about it if she sat
looking at the wall? Was she
stirred up or wasn’t she?
Joe knew she hadn’t
been to bed, and when he
asked whether or not she
wanted breakfast she shook
her head so slowly that it was
hard to know whether she had
heard him or not.
He
advised,
himself
cautiously,
“Don’t
do
nothing! Just stick around and
keep your eyes and ears
open.” The girls in the house
knew
something
had

happened but no two of them
had the same story, the
goddam chickenheads.
Kate was not thinking.
Her mind drifted among
impressions the way a bat
drifts and swoops in the
evening. She saw the face of
the blond and beautiful boy,
his eyes mad with shock. She
heard his ugly words aimed
not so much at her as at
himself. And she saw his dark
brother leaning against the
door and laughing.
Kate had laughed too—
the quickest and best self-protection. What would her
son do? What had he done
after he went quietly away?
She thought of Cal's
eyes with their look of
sluggish and fulfilled cruelty,

peering at her as he slowly closed the door.

Why had he brought his brother? What did he want? What was he after? If she knew she could take care of herself. But she didn't know. The pain was creeping in her hands again and there was a new place. Her right hip ached angrily when she moved. She thought, So the pain will move in toward the center, and sooner or later all the pains will meet in the center and join like rats in a clot.

In spite of his advice to himself, Joe couldn't let it alone. He carried a pot of tea to her door, knocked softly, opened the door, and went in.

As far as he could see she
hadn’t moved.
He said, “I brought you
some tea, ma’am.”
“Put it on the table,” she
said, and then as a second
thought, “Thank you, Joe.”
“You don’t feel good,
ma’am?”
“The pain’s back. The
medicine fooled me.”
“Anything I can do?”
She raised her hands.
“Cut
these
off—at
the
wrists.” She grimaced with
the extra pain lifting her
hands had caused. “Makes
you feel hopeless,” she said
plaintively.

Joe had never heard a
tone of weakness in her
before and his instinct told
him it was time to move in.
He said, “Maybe you don’t
want me to bother you but I
got some word about that
other.” He knew by the little
interval before she answered
that she had tensed.
“What other?” she asked
softly.
“That dame, ma’am.”
“Oh! You mean Ethel!”
“Yes, ma’am.”
“I’m getting tired of
Ethel. What is it now?”
“Well, I’ll tell you like it
happened.
I
can’t
make

nothing out of it. I'm in Kellogg's cigar store and a fella come up to me. 'You're Joe?' he says, an' I tell him, 'Who says?' 'You was lookin' for somebody,' he says. 'Tell me about it,' I says. Never seen the guy before. So he says, 'That party toi' me she wants to talk to you.' An' I told him, 'Well, why don't she?' He gives me the long look an' he says, 'Maybe you forgot what the judge said.' I guess he means about her coming back." He looked at Kate's face, still and pale, the eyes looking straight ahead.

Kate said, “And then he
asked you for some money?”
“No, ma’am. He didn’t.
He says something don’t
make no sense. He says,
‘Does Faye mean anything to
you?’ ‘Not a thing,’ I tol’
him. He says, ‘Maybe you
better talk to her.’ ‘Maybe,’ I
says, an’ I come away. Don’t
make no sense to me. I
figured I’d ask you.”
Kate asked, “Does the
name Faye mean anything to
you?”
“Not a thing.”
Her voice became very
soft. “You mean you never
heard that Faye used to own
this house?”
Joe felt a sickening jolt
in the pit of his stomach.

What

a

goddam

fool!

Couldn’t keep his mouth shut.

His mind floundered. “Why

—why come to think of it, I

believe I did hear that—

seemed like the name was

like Faith.”

The sudden alarm was

good for Kate. It took the

blond head and the pain from

her. It gave her something to

do. She responded to the

challenge with something like

pleasure.

She

laughed

softly.

“Faith,” she said under her

breath. “Pour me some tea,

Joe.”

She did not appear to
notice that his hand shook
and that the teapot spout
rattled against the cup. She
did not look at him even
when he set the cup before
her and then stepped back out
of range of her eyes. Joe was
quaking with apprehension.
Kate said in a pleading
voice, “Joe, do you think you
could help me? If I gave you
ten thousand dollars, do you
think
you
could
fix
everything up?” She waited
just a second, then swung
around and looked full in his
face.

His eyes were moist. She
caught him licking his lips.
And at her sudden move he
stepped back as though she
had struck at him. Her eyes
would not let him go.
“Did I catch you out,
Joe?”
“I don’t know what
you’re getting at, ma’am.”
“You go and figure it out
—and then you come and tell
me. You’re good at figuring
things out. And send Therese
in, will you?”
He wanted to get out of
this room where he was
outpointed and outfought.
He’d made a mess of things.
He wondered if he’d bollixed
up the breaks. And then the
bitch had the nerve to say,

“Thank you for bringing tea.
You’re a nice boy.”
He wanted to slam the
door, but he didn’t dare.
Kate got up stiffly,
trying to avoid the pain of
moving her hip. She went to
her desk and slipped out a
sheet of paper. Holding the
pen was difficult.
She wrote, moving her
whole arm. “Dear Ralph: Tell
the sheriff it wouldn’t do any
harm to check on Joe
Valery’s fingerprints. You
remember Joe. He works for
me. Mrs. Kate.” She was
folding
the
paper
when
Therese came in, looking

frightened.

“You want me? Did I do something? I tried my best. Ma’am, I ain’t been well.”

“Come here,” Kate said, and while the girl waited beside the desk Kate slowly addressed the envelope and stamped it. “I want you to run a little errand for me,” she said. “Go to Bell’s candy store and get a five-pound box of mixed chocolates and a one-pound box. The big one is for you girls. Stop at Krough’s drugstore and get me two medium toothbrushes and a can of tooth powder—you know, that can with a spout?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Therese was greatly relieved.

“You’re a good girl,”

Kate went on. “I’ve had my

eye on you. I’m not well,

Therese. If I see that you do

this

well,

I’ll

seriously

consider

putting

you

in

charge

when

I

go

the

hospital.”

“You

will—are—are

you going to the hospital?”

“I don’t know yet, dear.

But I'll need your help. Now here's some money for the candy. Medium toothbrushes —remember."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Shall I go now?"

"Yes, and kind of creep out, will you? Don't let the other girls know what I told you."

"I'll go out the back way." She hurried toward the door.

Kate said, "I nearly forgot. Will you drop this in a mailbox?"

"Sure I will, ma'am. Sure I will. Anything else?"

"That's all, dear."

When the girl was gone Kate rested her arms and hands on the desk so that

each crooked finger was

supported.

Here

it

was.

Maybe

she

had

always

known. She must have—but

there was no need to think of

that now. She would come

back to that. They would put

Joe away, but there'd be

someone else, and there was

always Ethel. Sooner or later,

sooner or later—but no need

to think about that now. She

tiptoed her mind around the

whole subject and back to an

elusive thing that peeped out

and then withdrew. It was

when she had been thinking
of her yellow-haired son that
the fragment had first come to
her mind. His face—hurt,
bewildered, despairing—had
brought
it.
Then
she
remembered.
She was a very small girl
with a face as lovely and
fresh as her son's face—a
very small girl. Most of the
time she knew she was
smarter and prettier than
anyone else. But now and
then a lonely fear would fall
upon her so that she seemed
surrounded by a tree-tall
forest of enemies. Then every
thought and word and look

was aimed to hurt her, and she had no place to run and no place to hide. And she would cry in panic because there was no escape and no sanctuary. Then one day she was reading a book. She could read when she was five years old. She remembered the book—brown, with a silver title, and the cloth was broken and the boards thick. It was *Alice in Wonderland.* Kate moved her hands slowly and lifted her weight a little from her arms. And she could see the drawings—Alice with long straight hair. But it was the bottle which said, “Drink me” that had changed her life. Alice had taught her that.

When the forest of her
enemies surrounded her she
was prepared. In her pocket
she had a bottle of sugar
water and on its red-framed
label she had written, “Drink
me.” She would take a sip
from the bottle and she would
grow smaller and smaller. Let
her enemies look for her then!
Cathy would be under a leaf
or looking out of an anthole,
laughing. They couldn’t find
her then. No door could close
her out and no door could
close her in. She could walk
upright under a door.
And always there was
Alice to play with, Alice to
love her and trust her. Alice
was
her

friend,
always
waiting to welcome her to
tinyness.
All this so good—so
good that it was almost worth
while to be miserable. But
good as it was, there was one
more thing always held in
reserve. It was her threat and
her safety. She had only to
drink the whole bottle and she
would dwindle and disappear
and cease to exist. And better
than all, when she stopped
being, she never would have
been. This was her darling
safety. Sometimes in her bed
she would drink enough of
“Drink me” so that she was a
dot as small as the littlest
gnat. But she had never gone

clear out—never had to. That
was her reserve—guarded
from everyone.
Kate shook her head
sadly, remembering the cut-off little girl. She wondered
why she had forgotten that
wonderful trick. It had saved
her from so many disasters.
The light filtering down at
one through a clover-leaf was
glorious. Cathy and Alice
walked
among
towering
grass, arms around each other
—best friends. And Cathy
never had to drink all of
“Drink me” because she had
Alice.
Kate put her head down
on the blotter between her
crooked hands. She was cold

and

desolate,

alone

and

desolate. Whatever she had

done, she had been driven to

do. She was different—she

had something more than

other people. She raised her

head and made no move to

wipe her streaming eyes. That

was true. She was smarter

and

stronger

than

other

people. She had something

they lacked.

And right in the middle

of her thought, Cal's dark

face hung in the air in front of

her and his lips were smiling

with cruelty. The weight
pressed down on her, forcing
her breath out.
They had something she
lacked, and she didn't know
what it was. Once she knew
this, she was ready; and once
ready, she knew she had been
ready for a long time—
perhaps all of her life. Her
mind
functioned
like
a
wooden mind, her body
moved crookedly like a badly
operated marionette, but she
went
steadily
about
her
business.

It was noon—she knew
from the chatter of the girls in
the dining room. The slugs
had only just got up.
Kate had trouble with
the doorknob and turned it
finally by rolling it between
her palms.
The girls choked in the
middle of laughter and looked
up at her. The cook came in
from the kitchen.
Kate was a sick ghost,
crooked and in some way
horrible. She leaned against
the dining-room wall and
smiled at her girls, and her
smile frightened them even
more, for it was like the
frame for a scream.
“Where’s Joe?” Kate
asked.

“He went out, ma’am.”

“Listen,” she said. “I’ve had no sleep for a long time. I’m going to take some medicine and sleep. I don’t want to be disturbed, I don’t want any supper. I’ll sleep the clock around. Tell Joe I don’t want anybody to come near me for anything until tomorrow morning. Do you understand?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they said.

“Good night, then. It’s afternoon but I mean good night.”

“Good night, ma’am,” they chorused obediently.

Kate turned and walked

crabwise back to her room.
She closed her door and
stood looking around, trying
to form her simple procedure.
She went back to her desk.
This time she forced her
hand, in spite of the pain, to
write
plainly.
“I
leave
everything I have to my son
Aron Trask.” She dated the
sheet and signed it “Catherine
Trask.” Her fingers dwelt on
the page, and then she got up
and left her will face upward
on the desk.
At the center table she
poured cold tea into her cup
and carried the cup to the
gray room in the lean-to and

set it on the reading table.
Then she went to her dressing
table and combed her hair,
rubbed a little rouge all over
her face, covered it lightly
with powder, and put on the
pale lipstick she always used.
Last she filed her nails and
cleaned them.
When she closed the
door to the gray room the
outside light was cut off and
only the reading lamp threw
its cone on the table. She
arranged the pillows, patted
them up, and sat down. She
leaned
her
head
experimentally against the
down pillow. She felt rather
gay, as though she were

going to a party. Gingerly,
she fished the chain out from
her bodice, unscrewed the
little tube, and shook the
capsule into her hand. She
smiled at it.
“Eat me,” she said and
put the capsule in her mouth.
She picked up the tea
cup. “Drink me,” she said and
swallowed the bitter cold tea.
She forced her mind to
stay on Alice—so tiny and
waiting. Other faces peered in
from the sides of her eyes—
her father and mother, and
Charles, and Adam, and
Samuel Hamilton, and then
Aron, and she could see Cal
smiling at her.
He didn’t have to speak.
The glint of his eyes said,

“You
missed
something.
They had something and you
missed it.”
She thrust her mind back
to Alice. In the gray wall
opposite there was a nail
hole. Alice would be in there.
And she would put her arm
around Cathy’s waist, and
Cathy would put her arm
around Alice’s waist, and
they would walk away—best
friends—and tiny as the head
of a pin.
A
warm
numbness
began to creep into her arms
and legs. The pain was going
from her hands. Her eyelids

felt heavy—very heavy. She
yawned.
She thought or said or
thought, “Alice doesn’t know.
I’m going right on past.”
Her eyes closed and a
dizzy nausea shook her. She
opened her eyes and stared
about in terror. The gray
room darkened and the cone
of light flowed and rippled
like water. And then her eyes
closed again and her fingers
curled as though they held
small breasts. And her heart
beat
solemnly
and
her
breathing slowed as she grew
smaller and smaller and then
disappeared—and she had

never been.

2

When Kate dismissed him
Joe went to the barbershop, as
he always did when he was
upset. He had his hair cut and
an egg shampoo and tonic.
He had a facial massage and a
mud pack, and around the
edges he had his nails
manicured, and he had his
shoes shined. Ordinarily this
and a new necktie set Joe up,
but he was still depressed
when he left the barber with a
fifty-cent tip.
Kate had trapped him
like a rat—caught him with
his pants down. Her fast
thinking left him confused
and helpless. The trick she
had of leaving it to you

whether she meant anything
or not was no less confusing.
The night started dully,
but then sixteen members and
two pledges from Sigma
Alpha
Epsilon,
Stanford
chapter, came in hilarious
from a pledge hazing in San
Juan. They were full of
horseplay.
Florence, who smoked
the cigarette in the circus, had
a hard cough. Every time she
tried, she coughed and lost it.
And the pony stallion had
diarrhea.
The
college
boys
shrieked and pounded each

other in their amusement.

And

then

they

stole

everything that wasn't nailed

down.

After they had left, two

of the girls got into a tired

and monotonous quarrel, and

Therese turned up with the

first symptoms of the old Joe.

Oh, Christ, what a night!

And down the hall that

brooding dangerous thing was

silent behind its closed door.

Joe stood by the door before

he went to bed and he could

hear nothing. He closed the

house at two-thirty and was in

bed by three—but he couldn't

sleep. He sat up in bed and

read seven chapters of *The Winning of Barbara Worth,* and when it was daylight he went down to the silent kitchen and made a pot of coffee.

He rested his elbows on the table and held the coffee mug with both hands.

Something had gone wrong and Joe couldn't figure what it was. Maybe she'd found out that Ethel was dead. He'd have to watch his step. And then he made up his mind, and made it up firmly. He would go in to see her at nine and he'd keep his ears open. Maybe he hadn't heard right.

Best thing would be to lay it on the line and not be a hog. Just say he'd take a thousand bucks and get the hell out, and if she said no he'd get the hell out anyway. He was sick of working with dames. He could get a job dealing faro in Reno—regular hours and no dames. Maybe get himself an apartment and fix it up—big chairs and a davenport. No point in beating his brains out in this lousy town. Better if he got out of the state anyway. He considered going right now—just get up from this table, climb the stairs, two minutes to pack a suitcase, and gone. Three or four minutes at the most. Don't tell nobody nothing.

The idea appealed to him.
The breaks about Ethel might
not be as good as he thought
at first, but a thousand bucks
was a stake. Better wait.
When the cook came in
he was in a bad mood. He had
a developing carbuncle on the
back of his neck and the skin
from the inside of an eggshell
stretched over it to draw it to
a head. He didn't want
anybody
in
his
kitchen
feeling the way he did.
Joe went back to his
room and read some more
and then he packed his
suitcase. He was going to get
out any way it went.

At nine o'clock he
knocked gently on Kate's
door and pushed it open. Her
bed had not been slept in. He
set down the tray and went to
the door of the lean-to and
knocked and knocked again
and then called. Finally he
opened the door.
The cone of light fell on
the reading stand. Kate's head
was deeply cushioned in the
pillow.
"You must have slept all
night here," Joe said. He
walked around in front of her,
saw bloodless lips and eyes
shining dully between half-closed lids, and he knew she
was dead.
He moved his head from
side to side and went quickly
into the other room to make

sure that the door to the hall
was closed. With great speed
he went through the dresser,
drawer by drawer, opened her
purses, the little box by her
bed—and he stood still. She
didn't have a goddam thing—
not even a silver-backed
hairbrush.
He crept to the lean-to
and stood in front of her—not
a ring, not a pin. Then he saw
the little chain around her
neck and lifted it clear and
unsnapped the clasp—a small
gold watch, a little tube, and
two
safe-deposit
keys,
numbers 27 and 29.
"So that's where you got
it, you bitch," he said.

He slipped the watch off
the thin chain and put it in his
pocket. He wanted to punch
her in the nose. Then he
thought of her desk.
The two-line holograph
will attracted him. Somebody
might pay for that. He put it
in his pocket. He took a
handful of papers from a
pigeonhole—bills
and
receipts; next hole, insurance;
next, a small book with
records of every girl. He put
that in his pocket too. He took
the rubber band from a packet
of brown envelopes, opened
one,
and
pulled
out

a

photograph. On the back of

the picture, in Kate's neat,

sharp handwriting, a name

and address and a title.

Joe laughed aloud. This

was the real breaks. He tried

another envelope and another.

A gold mine—guy could live

for years on these. Look at

that fat-ass councilman! He

put the band back. In the top

drawer eight ten-dollar bills

and a bunch of keys. He

pocketed the money too. As

he opened the second drawer

enough to see that it held

writing paper and sealing wax

and ink there was a knock on

the door. He walked to it and

opened it a crack.

The cook said, "Fella out

here wants to see ya.”

“Who is he?”

“How the hell do I

know?”

Joe looked back at the

room and then stepped out,

took the key from the inside,

locked the door, and put the

key in his pocket. He might

have overlooked something.

Oscar

Noble

was

standing in the big front

room, his gray hat on his head

and

his

red

mackinaw

buttoned up tight around his

throat. His eyes were pale

gray—the same color as his

stubble whiskers. The room
was in semidarkness. No one
had raised the shades yet.
Joe came lightly along
the hall, and Oscar asked,
“You Joe?”
“Who’s asking?”
“The sheriff wants to
have a talk with you.”
Joe felt ice creeping into
his stomach. “Pinch?” he
asked. “Got a warrant?”
“Hell, no,” said Oscar.
“We got nothing on you. Just
checking up. Will you come
along?”
“Sure,” said Joe. “Why
not?”
They went out together.
Joe shivered. “I should of got
a coat.”
“Want to go back for

one?”

“I guess not,” said Joe.

They

walked

toward

Castroville

Street.

Oscar

asked, “Ever been mugged or

printed?”

Joe was quiet for a time.

“Yes,” he said at last.

“What for?”

“Drunk,” said Joe. “Hit a

cop.”

“Well, we’ll soon find

out,” said Oscar and turned

the corner.

Joe ran like a rabbit,

across the street and over the

track toward the stores and

alleys of Chinatown.

Oscar had to take a
glove off and unbutton his
mackinaw to get his gun out.
He tried a snap shot and
missed.
Joe began to *zigzag*. He
was fifty yards away by now
and nearing an opening
between two buildings.
Oscar stepped to a
telephone pole at the curb,
braced his left elbow against
it, gripped his right wrist with
his left hand, and drew a bead
on the entrance to the little
alley. He fired just as Joe
touched the front sight.
Joe splashed forward on
his face and skidded a foot.
Oscar
went
into

a

Filipino poolroom to phone, and when he came out there was quite a crowd around the body.

Chapter 51

1

In 1903 Horace Quinn beat Mr. R. Keef for the office of sheriff. He had been well trained as the chief deputy sheriff. Most of the voters figured that since Quinn was doing most of the work he might as well have the title. Sheriff Quinn held the office until 1919. He was sheriff so long that we growing up in Monterey County thought the words “Sheriff” and “Quinn” went together naturally. We could not imagine anyone

else being sheriff. Quinn grew old in his office. He limped from an early injury. We knew he was intrepid, for he had held his own in various gunfights; besides, he looked like a sheriff—the only kind we knew about. His face was broad and pink, his white mustache shaped like the horns of a longhorn steer. He was broad of shoulder, and in his age he developed a portliness which only gave him more authority. He wore a fine Stetson hat, a Norfolk jacket, and in his later years carried his gun in a shoulder holster. His old belt holster tugged at his stomach too much. He had known his county in 1903 and he knew

it and controlled it even better
in
1917.
He
was
an
institution, as much a part of
the Salinas Valley as its
mountains.
In all the years since
Adam’s
shooting
Sheriff
Quinn had kept track of Kate.
When Faye died, he knew
instinctively that Kate was
probably responsible, but he
also knew he hadn’t much of
any chance of convicting her,
and a wise sheriff doesn’t butt
his
head

against
the
impossible. They were only a
couple of whores, after all.
In
the
years
that
followed, Kate played fair
with him and he gradually
achieved a certain respect for
her. Since there were going to
be houses anyway, they had
better be run by responsible
people. Every so often Kate
spotted a wanted man and
turned him in. She ran a
house which did not get into
trouble. Sheriff Quinn and
Kate got along together.
The
Saturday

after
Thanksgiving, about noon,
Sheriff Quinn looked through
the papers from Joe Valery's
pockets. The .38 slug had
splashed off one side of Joe's
heart
and
had
flattened
against the ribs and torn out a
section as big as a fist. The
manila envelopes were glued
together
with
blackened
blood. The sheriff dampened
the papers with a wet
handkerchief to get them
apart. He read the will, which
had been folded, so that the
blood was on the outside. He

laid it aside and inspected the
photographs in the envelopes.
He sighed deeply.
Every
envelope
contained a man's honor and
peace of mind. Effectively
used, these pictures could
cause half a dozen suicides.
Already Kate was on the table
at Muller's with the formalin
running into her veins, and
her stomach was in a jar in
the corner's office.
When he had seen all of
the pictures he called a
number. He said into the
phone, "Can you drop over to
my office? Well, put your
lunch off, will you? Yes, I
think
you'll

see
it's
important. I'll wait for you."
A few minutes later
when the nameless man stood
beside his desk in the front
office of the old red county
jail behind the courthouse,
Sheriff Quinn stuck the will
out in front of him. "As a
lawyer, would you say this is
any good?"
His visitor read the two
lines and breathed deep
through his nose. "Is this who
I think it is?"
"Yes."
"Well, if her name was
Catherine Trask and this is
her handwriting, and if Aron
Trask is her son, this is as
good as gold."

Quinn lifted the ends of
his fine wide mustache with
the back of his forefinger.
“You knew her, didn’t you?”
“Well, not to say know. I
knew who she was.”
Quinn put his elbows on
his desk and leaned forward.
“Sit down, I want to talk to
you.”
His visitor drew up a
chair. His fingers picked at a
coat button.
The sheriff asked, “Was
Kate blackmailing you?”
“Certainly
not.
Why
should she?”
“I’m asking you as a
friend. You know she’s dead.
You can tell me.”

“I don’t know what
you’re getting at—nobody’s
blackmailing me.”
Quinn
slipped
a
photograph from its envelope,
turned it like a playing card,
and skidded it across the
desk.
His visitor adjusted his
glasses
and
the
breath
whistled in his nose. “Jesus
Christ,” he said softly.
“You didn’t know she
had it?”
“Oh, I knew it all right.
She let me know. For Christ’s
sake, Horace—what are you

going to do with this?”
Quinn took the picture
from his hand.
“Horace, what are you
going to do with it?”
“Burn it.” The sheriff
ruffled the edges of the
envelopes with his thumb.
“Here’s a deck of hell,” he
said. “These could tear the
county to pieces.”
Quinn wrote a list of
names on a sheet of paper.
Then he hoisted himself up
on his game leg and went to
the iron stove against the
north wall of his office. He
crunched up the *Salinas*
Morning Journal and lighted
it and dropped it in the stove,
and when it flared up he
dropped the manila envelopes

on the flame, set the damper,
and closed the stove. The fire
roared and the flames winked
yellow
behind
the
little
isinglass windows in the front
of the stove. Quinn brushed
his hands together as though
they
were
dirty.
“The
negatives were in there,” he
said. “I’ve been through her
desk. There weren’t any other
prints.”
His visitor tried to speak
but his voice was a husky
whisper.
“Thank

you,

Horace.”

The sheriff gimped to

his desk and picked up his

list. “I want you to do

something for me. Here’s a

list. Tell everyone on this list

I’ve burned the pictures. You

know them all, God knows.

And they could take it from

you. Nobody’s holy. Get each

man alone and tell him

exactly what happened. Look

here!” He opened the stove

door and poked the black

sheets

until

they

were

reduced to powder. “Tell

them that,” he said.

His visitor looked at the

sheriff, and Quinn knew that there was no power on earth that could keep this man from hating him. For the rest of their lives there would be a barrier between them, and neither one could ever admit it.

“Horace, I don’t know how to thank you.”

And the sheriff said in sorrow, “That’s all right. It’s what I’d want my friends to do for me.”

“The goddam bitch,” his visitor said softly, and Horace Quinn knew that part of the curse was for him.

And

he

knew

he

wouldn’t be sheriff much
longer. These guilt-feeling
men could get him out, and
they would have to. He
sighed and sat down. “Go to
your lunch now,” he said.
“I’ve got work to do.”
At quarter of one Sheriff
Quinn turned off Main Street
on
Central
Avenue.
At
Reynaud’s Bakery he bought
a loaf of French bread, still
warm and giving off its
wonderful smell of fermented
dough.
He used the hand rail to
help himself up the steps of
the Trask porch.
Lee answered the door, a

dish towel tied around his middle. “He’s not home,” he said.

“Well, he’s on his way. I called the draft board. I’ll wait for him.”

Lee moved aside and let him in and seated him in the living room. “You like a nice cup of hot coffee?” he asked.

“I don’t mind if I do.”

“Fresh made,” said Lee and went into the kitchen.

Quinn looked around the comfortable sitting room. He felt that he didn’t want his office much longer.

He remembered hearing a doctor say, “I love to deliver a baby,

because if I do my work well,
there's joy at the end of it."
The sheriff had thought often
of that remark. It seemed to
him that if he did his work
well there was sorrow at the
end of it for somebody. The
fact that it was necessary was
losing its weight with him.
He would be retiring soon
whether he wanted to or not.
Every
man
has
a
retirement picture in which he
does those things he never
had time to do—makes the
journeys, reads the neglected
books he always pretended to
have read. For many years the
sheriff dreamed of spending

the shining time hunting and
fishing—wandering in the
Santa Lucia range, camping
by half-remembered streams.
And now that it was almost
time he knew he didn't want
to do it. Sleeping on the
ground would make his leg
ache. He remembered how
heavy a deer is and how hard
it is to carry the dangling
limp body from the place of
the kill. And, frankly, he
didn't
care
for
venison
anyway. Madame Reynaud
could soak it in wine and lace
it with spice but, hell, an old
shoe would taste good with
that treatment.

Lee
had
bought
a
percolator. Quinn could hear
the water spluttering against
the glass dome, and his long-trained
mind
made
the
suggestion that Lee hadn’t
told the truth about having
fresh-made coffee.
It was a good mind the
old man had—sharpened in
its work. He could bring up
whole faces in his mind and
inspect them, and also scenes
and conversations. He could
play them over like a record
or a film. Thinking of
venison, his mind had gone

about cataloguing the sitting
room and his mind nudged
him, saying, “Hey, there’s
something
wrong
here—
something strange.”
The sheriff heeded the
voice and looked at the room
—flowered
chintz,
lace
curtains, white drawn-work
table cover, cushions on the
couch covered with a bright
and impudent print. It was a
feminine room in a house
where only men lived.
He thought of his own
sitting room. Mrs. Quinn had
chosen,
bought,

cleaned,
every single thing in it except
a pipestand. Come to think of
it, she had bought the
pipestand for him. There was
a woman's room too. But this
was a fake. It was too
feminine—a woman's room
designed by a man—and
overdone, too feminine. That
would
be
Lee.
Adam
wouldn't even see it, let alone
put
it
together—no—Lee
trying to make a home, and
Adam not even seeing it.
Horace
Quinn

remembered
questioning
Adam so very long ago,
remembered him as a man in
agony. He could still see
Adam's haunted and horrified
eyes. He had thought then of
Adam as a man of such
honesty that he couldn't
conceive anything else. And
in the years he had seen much
of Adam. They both belonged
to the Masonic Order. They
went through the chairs
together. Horace followed
Adam as Master of the Lodge
and both of them wore their
Past Master's pins. And
Adam had been set apart—an
invisible wall cut him off
from the world. You couldn't
get into him—he couldn't get

out to you. But in that old
agony there had been no wall.
In his wife Adam had
touched the living world.
Horace thought of her now,
gray and washed, the needles
in her throat and the rubber
formalin tubes hanging down
from the ceiling.
Adam could do no
dishonesty. He didn't want
anything. You had to crave
something to be dishonest.
The sheriff wondered what
went on behind the wall, what
pressures, what pleasures and
achings.
He shifted his behind to
ease the pressure on his leg.
The house was still except for
the bouncing coffee. Adam
was long coming from the

draft board. The amused
thought came to the sheriff,
I'm getting old, and I kind of
like it.
Then he heard Adam at
the front door. Lee heard him
too and darted into the hall.
"The sheriff's here," said Lee,
to warn him perhaps.
Adam came in smiling
and held out his hand. "Hello,
Horace—have you got a
warrant?" It was a damn good
try at a joke.
"Howdy," Quinn said.
"Your man is going to give
me a cup of coffee."
Lee went to the kitchen
and rattled dishes.
Adam said, "Anything
wrong, Horace?"
"Everything's

always
wrong in my business. I'll
wait till the coffee comes."
"Don't mind Lee. He
listens anyway. He can hear
through a closed door. I don't
keep anything from him
because I can't."
Lee came in with a tray.
He was smiling remotely to
himself, and when he had
poured the coffee and gone
out Adam asked again, "Is
there
anything
wrong,
Horace?"
"No, I don't think so.
Adam, was that woman still
married to you?"
Adam
became

rigid.

“Yes,” he said. “What’s the matter?”

“She killed herself last night.”

Adam’s face contorted and his eyes swelled and glistened with tears. He fought his mouth and then he gave up and put his face down in his hands and wept.

“Oh, my poor darling!” he said.

Quinn sat quietly and let him have it out, and after a time Adam’s control came back and he raised his head.

“Excuse me, Horace,” he said.

Lee came in from the kitchen and put a damp towel in his hands, and Adam

sponged his eyes and handed it back.

"I didn't expect that," Adam said, and his face was ashamed. "What shall I do? I'll claim her. I'll bury her."

"I wouldn't," said Horace. "That is, unless you feel you have to. That's not what I came about." He took the folded will from his pocket and held it out.

Adam shrank from it. "Is —is that her blood?"

"No, it's not. It's not her blood at all. Read it."

Adam read the two lines and went right on staring at the paper and beyond it. "He doesn't know—she is his

mother.”

“You never told him?”

“No.”

“Jesus Christ!” said the sheriff.

Adam said earnestly, “I’m sure he wouldn’t want anything of hers. Let’s just tear it up and forget it. If he knew, I don’t think Aron would want anything of hers.”

“ ’Fraid you can’t,” Quinn said. “We do quite a few illegal things. She had a safe-deposit box. I don’t have to tell you where I got the will or the key. I went to the bank. Didn’t wait for a court order. Thought it might have a bearing.” He didn’t tell Adam he thought there might

be more pictures. “Well, Old Bob let me open the box. We can always deny it. There’s over a hundred thousand dollars in gold certificates. There’s money in there in bales—and there isn’t one goddam thing in there but money.”

“Nothing?”

“One other thing—a marriage certificate.”

Adam leaned back in his chair. The remoteness was coming down again, the soft protective folds between himself and the world. He saw his coffee and took a sip

of it. “What do you think I ought to do?” he asked steadily and quietly.

“I can only tell you what I’d do,” Sheriff Quinn said. “You don’t have to take my advice. I’d have the boy in right now. I’d tell him everything—every single thing. I’d even tell him why you didn’t tell him before. He’s—how old?”

“Seventeen.”

“He’s a man. He’s got to take it some time. Better if he gets the whole thing at once.”

“Cal knows,” said Adam. “I wonder why she made the will to Aron?”

“God knows. Well, what
do you think?”
“I don’t know, and so
I’m going to do what you say.
Will you stay with me?”
“Sure I will.”
“Lee,”
Adam
called,
“tell Aron I want him. He has
come home, hasn’t he?”
Lee
came
to
the
doorway. His heavy lids
closed for a moment and then
opened. “Not yet. Maybe he
went back to school.”
“He would have told me.
You know, Horace, we drank
a lot of champagne on

Thanksgiving. Where's Cal?"

"In his room," said Lee.

"Well, call him. Get him

in. Cal will know."

Cal's face was tired and

his shoulders sagged with

exhaustion, but his face was
pinched and closed and crafty
and mean.
Adam asked, “Do you
know where your brother is?”
“No, I don’t,” said Cal.
“Weren’t you with him
at all?”
“No.”
“He hasn’t been home
for two nights. Where is he?”
“How do I know?” said
Cal. “Am I supposed to look
after him?”
Adam’s
head
sank
down, his body jarred, just a
little quiver. In back of his
eyes a tiny sharp incredibly
bright blue light flashed. He

said thickly, “Maybe he did
go back to college.” His lips
seemed
heavy
and
he
murmured like a man talking
in his sleep. “Don’t you think
he went back to college?”
Sheriff Quinn stood up.
“Anything I got to do I can do
later. You get a rest, Adam.
You’ve had a shock.”
Adam looked up at him.
“Shock—oh, yes. Thank you,
George. Thank you very
much.”
“George?”
“Thank you very much,”
said Adam.
When the sheriff had
gone, Cal went to his room.

Adam leaned back in his
chair, and very soon he went
to sleep and his mouth
dropped open and he snored
across his palate.
Lee watched him for a
while before he went back to
his kitchen. He lifted the
breadbox and took out a tiny
volume bound in leather, and
the gold tooling was almost
completely worn away— *The*
Meditations
of
Marcus
Aurelius
in
English
translation.
Lee wiped his steel-rimmed spectacles on a dish
towel. He opened the book
and leafed through. And he

smiled
to
himself,
consciously
searching
for
reassurance.
He read slowly, moving
his lips over the words.
“Everything is only for a day,
both that which remembers
and
that
which
is
remembered.
“Observe constantly that
all things take place by
change, and accustom thyself
to consider that the nature of
the universe loves nothing so
much as to change things

which are and to make new
things
like
them.
For
everything that exists is in a
manner the seed of that which
will be."
Lee glanced down the
page. "Thou wilt die soon and
thou are not yet simple nor
free from perturbations, nor
without suspicion of being
hurt by external things, nor
kindly disposed towards all;
nor dost thou yet place
wisdom only in acting justly."
Lee looked up from the
page, and he answered the
book as he would answer one
of his ancient relatives. "That
is true," he said. "It's very

hard. I'm sorry. But don't
forget that you also say,
'Always run the short way
and the short way is the
natural'—don't forget that."
He let the pages slip past his
fingers to the fly leaf where
was written with a broad
carpenter's pencil, "Sam'l
Hamilton."
Suddenly Lee felt good.
He wondered whether Sam'l
Hamilton had ever missed his
book or known who stole it. It
had seemed to Lee the only
clean pure way was to steal it.
And he still felt good about it.
His fingers caressed the
smooth leather of the binding
as he took it back and slipped
it under the breadbox. He said
to himself, "But of course he

knew who took it. Who else would have stolen *Marcus Aurelius*?”He went into the sitting room and pulled a chair near to the sleeping Adam.

2

In his room Cal sat at his desk, elbows down, palms holding his aching head together,
hands
pushing
against the sides of his head. His stomach churned and the sour-sweet smell of whisky was on him and in him, living in his pores, in his clothing, beating sluggishly in his head.

Cal had never drunk before, had never needed to.

But going to Kate's had been
no relief from pain and his
revenge had been no triumph.
His memory was all swirling
clouds and broken pieces of
sound and sight and feeling.
What now was true and what
was imagined he could not
separate. Coming out of
Kate's he had touched his
sobbing brother and Aron had
cut him down with a fist like
a whip. Aron had stood over
him in the dark and then
suddenly turned and ran,
screaming
like
a
brokenhearted
child.
Cal
could still hear the hoarse

cries over running footsteps. Cal had lain still where he had fallen under the tall privet in Kate's front yard. He heard the engines puffing and snorting by the roundhouse and the crash of freight cars being assembled. Then he had closed his eyes and, hearing light steps and feeling a presence, he looked up. Someone was bending over him and he thought it was Kate. The figure moved quietly away.

After a while Cal had stood up and brushed himself and walked toward Main Street. He was surprised at how casual his feeling was. He sang softly under his breath, "There's a rose that

grows in no man’s land and
‘tis wonderful to see—”
On Friday Cal brooded
the whole day long. And in
the evening Joe Laguna
bought the quart of whisky
for him. Cal was too young to
purchase. Joe wanted to
accompany Cal, but Joe was
satisfied with the dollar Cal
gave him and went back for a
pint of grappa.
Cal went to the alley
behind the Abbot House and
found the shadow behind a
post where he had sat the
night he first saw his mother.
He sat cross-legged on the
ground, and then, in spite of
revulsion and nausea, he
forced
the

whisky

into

himself. Twice he vomited

and then went on drinking

until the earth tipped and

swayed and the streetlight

spun majestically in a circle.

The bottle slipped from

his hand finally and Cal

passed

out,

but

even

unconscious he still vomited

weakly. A serious, short-haired dog-about-town with a

curling tail sauntered into the

alley, making his stations, but

he smelled Cal and took a

wide circle around him. Joe

Laguna

found

him

and

smelled him too. Joe shook

the bottle leaning against

Cal's leg and Joe held it up to

the streetlight and saw that it

was one-third full. He looked

for the cork and couldn't find

it. He walked away, his

thumb over the neck to keep

the whisky from sloshing out.

When in the cold dawn a

frost awakened Cal to a sick

world he struggled home like

a broken bug. He hadn't far to

go, just to the alley mouth

and then across the street.

Lee heard him at the

door

and

smelled

his

nastiness as he bumped along

the hall to his room and fell over on his bed. Cal's head shattered with pain and he was wide awake. He had no resistance against sorrow and no device to protect himself against shame. After a while he did the best he could. He bathed in icy water and scrubbed and scratched his body with a block of pumice stone, and the pain of his scraping seemed good to him. He knew that he had to tell his guilt to his father and beg his forgiveness. And he had to humble himself to Aron, not only now but always. He could not live without that. And yet, when he was called out and stood in the room with Sheriff Quinn

and his father, he was as raw
and angry as a surly dog and
his hatred of himself turned
outward toward everyone—a
vicious cur he was, unloved,
unloving.
Then he was back in his
room and his guilt assaulted
him and he had no weapon to
fight it off.
A panic for Aron arose
in him. He might be injured,
might be in trouble. It was
Aron who couldn't take care
of himself. Cal knew he had
to bring Aron back, had to
find him and build him back
the way he had been. And this
had to be done even though
Cal sacrificed himself. And
then the idea of sacrifice took
hold of him the way it does

with all guilty-feeling men. A
sacrifice might reach Aron
and bring him back.
Cal went to his bureau
and got the flat package from
under his handkerchiefs in his
drawer. He looked around the
room and brought a porcelain
pin tray to his desk. He
breathed deeply and found
the cool air good tasting. He
lifted one of the crisp bills,
creased it in the middle so'
that it made an angle, and
then he scratched a match
under his desk and lighted the
bill. The heavy paper curled
and blackened, the flame ran
upward, and only when the
fire was about his fingertips
did Cal drop the charred chip
in the pin tray. He stripped

off another bill and lighted it.
When six were burned
Lee
came
in
without
knocking. “I smelled smoke,”
and then he saw what Cal was
doing. “Oh!” he said.
Cal braced himself for
intervention but none came.
Lee folded his hands across
his middle and stood silently
—waiting.
Cal
doggedly
lighted bill after bill until all
were burned, and then he
crushed the black chips down
to powder and waited for Lee
to comment, but Lee did not
speak or move.

At last Cal said, “Go
ahead—you want to talk to
me. Go ahead!”
“No,” said Lee, “I don’t.
And if you have no need to
talk to me—I’ll stay a while
and then I’ll go away. I’ll sit
down here.” He squatted in a
chair, folded his hands, and
waited. He smiled to himself,
the expression that is called
inscrutable.
Cal turned from him. “I
can outsit you,” he said.
“In a contest maybe,”
said Lee. “But in day to day,
year to year—who knows?—
century to century sitting—
no, Cal. You’d lose.”
After a few moments
Cal said peevishly, “I wish
you’d get on with your

lecture.”

“I don’t have a lecture.”

“What the hell are you

doing here then? You know

what I did, and I got drunk

last night.”

“I suspect the first and I

can smell the second.”

“Smell?”

“You still smell,” said

Lee.

“First time,” said Cal. “I

don’t like it.”

“I don’t either,” said

Lee. “I’ve got a bad stomach

for liquor. Besides it makes

me playful, intellectual but

playful.”

“How do you mean,

Lee?”

“I can only give you an

example. In my younger days

I played tennis. I liked it, and it was also a good thing for a servant to do. He could pick up his master's flubs at doubles and get no thanks but a few dollars for it. Once, I think it was sherry that time, I developed the theory that the fastest and most elusive animals in the world are bats. I was apprehended in the middle of the night in the bell tower of the Methodist Church in San Leandro. I had a racquet, and I seem to have explained to the arresting officer that I was improving my backhand on bats."

Cal laughed with such

amusement that Lee almost
wished he had done it.
Cal said, “I just sat
behind a post and drank like a
pig.”
“Always animals—”
“I was afraid if I didn’t
get drunk I’d shoot myself,
Cal interrupted.
“You’d never do that.
You’re too mean,” said Lee.
“By the way, where is Aron?”
“He ran away. I don’t
know where he went. “He’s
not too mean,” said Lee
nervously. “I know it. That’s
what I thought about. You
don’t think he would, do you,
Lee?”
Lee
said
testily,

“Goddam it, whenever a person wants reassurance he tells a friend to think what he wants to be true. It’s like asking a waiter what’s good tonight. How the hell do I know?”

Cal cried, “Why did I do it—why did I do it?”

“Don’t make it complicated,” Lee said. You know why you did it. You were mad at him, and you were mad at him because your father hurt your feelings. That’s not difficult. You were just mean.”

“I guess that’s what I wonder—why I’m mean. Lee, I don’t want to be mean. Help

me, Lee!”

“Just a second,” Lee

said. “I thought I heard your

father.” He darted out the

door.

Cal heard voices for a

moment and then Lee came

back to the room. “He’s

going to the post office. We

never

get

any

mail

in

midafternoon. Nobody does.

But every man in Salinas

goes to the post office in the

afternoon.”

“Some get a drink on the

way, said Cal. “I guess it is a

kind of a habit and a kind of a

rest. They see their friends.”

And Lee said, “Cal—I don’t
like your father’s looks. He’s
got a dazed look. Oh, I forgot.
You
don’t
know.
Your
mother committed suicide last
night.”
Cal said, “Did she?” and
then he snarled, I hope it hurt.
No, I don’t want to say that. I
don’t want to think that.
There it is again. There it is! I
don’t—want
it—Lee
scratched a spot on his head,
and that started his whole
head to itching, and he
scratched it all over, taking
his time. It gave him the
appearance of deep thought.

He said, “Did burning the

money

give

you

much

pleasure?”

“I—I guess so.”

“And are you taking

pleasure from this whipping

you’re giving yourself? Are

you enjoying your despair?”

“Lee!”

“You’re pretty full of

yourself. You’re marveling at

the tragic spectacle of Caleb

Trask—Caleb

the

magnificent,

the

unique.

Caleb whose suffering should

have its Homer. Did you ever

think of yourself as a snot-nose kid—mean sometimes,
incredibly
generous
sometimes? Dirty in your
habits, and curiously pure in
your mind. Maybe you have a
little more energy than most,
just energy, but outside of
that you're very like all the
other snot-nose kids. Are you
trying to attract dignity and
tragedy to yourself because
your mother was a whore?
And if anything should have
happened to your brother,
will you be able to sneak for
yourself the eminence of
being a murderer, snot-nose?"
Cal turned slowly back
to his desk. Lee watched him,
holding his breath the way a
doctor

watches
for
the
reaction to a hypodermic. Lee
could see the reactions flaring
through Cal—the rage at
insult, the belligerence, and
the hurt feelings following
behind and out of that—just
the beginning of relief.
Lee sighed. He had
worked so hard, so tenderly,
and his work seemed to have
succeeded. He said softly,
“We’re a violent people, Cal.
Does it seem strange to you
that I include myself? Maybe
it’s true that we are all
descended from the restless,
the nervous, the criminals, the
arguers and brawlers, but also
the brave and independent

and generous. If our ancestors had not been that, they would have stayed in their home plots in the other world and starved over the squeezed-out soil."

Cal turned his head toward Lee, and his face had lost its tightness. He smiled, and Lee knew he had not fooled the boy entirely. Cal knew now it was a job—a well-done job—and he was grateful.

Lee went on, "That's why I include myself. We all have that heritage, no matter what old land our fathers left. All colors and blends of Americans have somewhat the same tendencies. It's a breed—selected

out

by

accident.

And

so

we’re

overbrave and overfearful—

we’re kind and cruel as

children. We’re overfriendly

and

at

the

same

time

frightened of strangers. We

boast and are impressed.

We’re oversentimental and

realistic. We are mundane

and materialistic—and do you

know of any other nation that

acts for ideals? We eat too

much. We have no taste, no

sense of proportion. We
throw our energy about like
waste. In the old lands they
say of us that we go from
barbarism
to
decadence
without
an
intervening
culture. Can it be that our
critics have not the key or the
language of our culture?
That's what we are, Cal—all
of us. You aren't very
different."
"Talk away," said Cal,
and he smiled and repeated,
"Talk away."
"I don't need to any
more,"
said

Lee.

“I’m

finished now. I wish your

father would come back. He

worries me.” And Lee went

nervously out.

In the hall just inside the

front door he found Adam

leaning against the wall, his

hat low over his eyes and his

shoulders slumped.

“Adam,

what’s

the

matter with you?”

“I don’t know. Seem

tired. Seem tired.”

Lee took him by the

arm, and it seemed that he

had to guide him toward the

living

room.

Adam
fell
heavily into his chair, and
Lee took the hat from his
head. Adam rubbed the back
of his left hand with his right.
His eyes were strange, very
clear but unmoving. And his
lips were dry and thickened
and his speech had the sound
of a dream talker, slow and
coming from a distance. He
rubbed his hand harshly.
“Strange thing,” he said, “I
must have fainted—in the
post office. I never faint. Mr.
Pioda helped me up. Just for a
second it was, I guess. I never
faint.”
Lee asked, “Was there
any mail?”
“Yes—yes—I

think
there was mail." He put his
left hand in his pocket and in
a moment took it out. "My
hand is kind of numb," he
said
apologetically
and
reached across with his right
hand and brought out a
yellow government postcard.
"Thought I read it," he
said. "I must have read it."
He held it up before his eyes
and then dropped the card in
his lap. "Lee, I guess I've got
to get glasses. Never needed
them in my life. Can't read it.
Letters jump around."
"Shall I read it?"
"Funny—well, I'll go
first thing for glasses. Yes,

what does it say?”

And Lee read,” ‘Dear

Father, I’m in the army. I told

them I was eighteen. I’ll be

all right. Don’t worry about

me. Aron.’ ”

“Funny,” said Adam.

“Seems like I read it. But I

guess I didn’t.” He rubbed his

hand.

Chapter 52

1

That winter of 1917-1918

was a dark and frightened

time. The Germans smashed

everything in front of them.

In three months the British

suffered

three

hundred

thousand casualties. Many

units of the French army were

mutinous. Russia was out of
the war. The German east
divisions, rested and re-equipped, were thrown at the
western
front.
The
war
seemed hopeless.
It was May before we
had as many as twelve
divisions in the field, and
summer had come before our
troops began to move across
the sea in numbers. The
Allied generals were fighting
each
other.
Submarines
slaughtered
the
crossing
ships.

We learned then that war
was not a quick heroic charge
but
a
slow,
incredibly
complicated
matter.
Our
spirits sank in those winter
months. We lost the flare of
excitement and we had not
yet put on the doggedness of
a long war.
Ludendorff
was
unconquerable.
Nothing
stopped him. He mounted
attack after attack on the
broken armies of France and
England. And it occurred to

us that we might be too late,
that soon we might be
standing alone against the
invincible Germans.
It was not uncommon
for people to turn away from
the war, some to fantasy and
some to vice and some to
crazy gaiety. Fortunetellers
were in great demand, and
saloons
did
a
roaring
business. But people also
turned inward to their private
joys and tragedies to escape
the
pervasive
fear
and
despondency. Isn’t it strange

that today we have forgotten
this? We remember World
War I as quick victory, with
flags and bands, marching
and horseplay and returning
soldiers,
fights
in
the
barrooms with the goddam
Limeys who thought they had
won the war. How quickly we
forgot that in that winter
Ludendorff could not be
beaten and that many people
were preparing in their minds
and spirits for a lost war.

2

Adam
Trask
was
more

puzzled than sad. He didn't have to resign from the draft board. He was given a leave of absence for ill health. He sat by the hour rubbing the back of his left hand. He brushed it with a harsh brush and soaked it in hot water. "It's circulation," he said. "As soon as I get the circulation back it'll be all right. It's my eyes that bother me. I never had trouble with my eyes. Guess I'll have to get my eyes tested for glasses. Me with glasses! Be hard to get used to. I'd go today but I feel a little dizzy." He felt more dizzy than he would admit. He could not

move about the house without
a hand brace against a wall.
Lee often had to give him a
hand-up out of his chair or
help him out of bed in the
morning and tie his shoes
because he could not tie knots
with his numb left hand.
Almost daily he came
back
to
Aron.
“I
can
understand why a young man
might want to enlist,” he said.
“If Aron had talked to me, I
might have tried to persuade
him against it, but I wouldn’t
have forbidden it. You know
that, Lee.”
“I know it.”

“That’s what I can’t
understand. Why did he sneak
away? Why doesn’t he write?
I thought I knew him better
than that. Has he written to
Abra? He’d be sure to write
to her.”
“I’ll ask her.”
“You do that. Do that
right away.”
“The training is hard.
That’s
what
I’ve
heard.
Maybe they don’t give him
time.”
“It doesn’t take any time
to write a card.”
“When you went in the
army, did you write to your
father?”

“Think you’ve got me
there, don’t you? No, I didn’t,
but I had a reason. I didn’t
want to enlist. My father
forced me. I was resentful.
You see, I had a good reason.
But Aron—he was doing fine
in college. Why, they’ve
written, asking about him.
You read the letter. He didn’t
take any clothes. He didn’t
take the gold watch.”
“He wouldn’t need any
clothes in the army, and they
don’t want gold watches there
either. Everything’s brown.”
“I guess you’re right.
But I don’t understand it. I’ve
got to do something about my
eyes. Can’t ask you to read
everything to me.” His eyes
really troubled him. “I can

see a letter," he said. "But the words jumble all around." A dozen times a day he seized a paper or a book and stared at it and put it down.

Lee read the papers to him to keep him from getting restless, and often in the middle of the reading Adam went to sleep.

He would awaken and say, "Lee? Is that you, Cal? You know I never had any trouble with my eyes. I'll just go tomorrow and get my eyes tested."

About the middle of February Cal went into the kitchen and said, "Lee, he talks about it all the time. Let's get his eyes tested."

Lee

was
stewing”
apricots. He left the stove and
closed the kitchen door and
went back to the stove. “I
don’t want him to go,” he
said.
“Why not?”
“I don’t think it’s his
eyes. Finding out might
trouble him. Let him be for a
while. He’s had a bad shock.
Let him get better. I’ll read to
him all he wants.”
“What do you think it
is?”
“I don’t want to say. I’ve
thought maybe Dr. Edwards
might just come by for a
friendly call—just to say
hello.”
“Have it your own way,”

said Cal.

Lee said, “Cal, have you

seen Abra?”

“Sure, I see her. She

walks away.”

“Can’t you catch her?”

“Sure—and

I

could

throw her down and punch

her in the face and make her

talk to me. But I won’t.”

“Maybe if you’d just

break the ice. Sometimes the

barrier is so weak it just falls

over when you touch it. Catch

up with her. Tell her I want to

see her.”

“I won’t do it.”

“You feel awful guilty,

don’t you?”

Cal did not answer.

“Don’t you like her?”

Cal did not answer.

“If you keep this up,

you’re going to feel worse,

not better. You’d better open

up. I’m warning you. You’d

better open up.”

Cal cried, “Do you want

me to tell Father what I did?

I’ll do it if you tell me to.”

“No, Cal. Not now. But

when he gets well you’ll have

to. You’ll have to for

yourself. You can’t carry this

alone. It will kill you.”

“Maybe I deserve to be

killed.”

“Stop that!” Lee said

coldly. “That can be the

cheapest

kind

of

self-indulgence. You stop that!”

“How do you go about

stopping it?” Cal asked.

Lee changed the subject.

“I don’t understand why Abra

hasn’t been here—not even

once.”

“No reason to come

now.”

“It’s

not

like

her.

Something’s wrong there.

Have you seen her?”

Cal scowled. “I told you

I have. You’re getting crazy

too. Tried to talk to her three

times. She walked away.”

“Something’s

wrong.

She’s a good woman—a real

woman.”

“She’s a girl,” said Cal.

“It sounds funny you calling her a woman.”

“No,” Lee said softly.

“A few are women from the moment they’re born. Abra has the loveliness of woman, and the courage—and the strength—and the wisdom. She knows things and she accepts things. I would have bet she couldn’t be small or mean or even vain except when it’s pretty to be vain.”

“You sure do think well of her.”

“Well enough to think she wouldn’t desert us.” And he said, “I miss her. Ask her to come to see me.”

“I told you she walked

away from me.”

“Well, chase her then.

Tell her I want to see her. I

miss her.”

Cal asked, “Shall we go

back to my father’s eyes

now?”

“No,” said Lee.

“Shall we talk about

Aron?”

“No.”

3

Cal tried all the next day to

find Abra alone, and it was

only after school that he saw

her ahead of him, walking

home. He turned a corner and

ran along the parallel street

and then back, and he judged

time and distance so that he

turned in front of her as she

strolled along.

“Hello,” he said.

“Hello. I thought I saw

you behind me.”

“You did. I ran around

the block to get in front of

you. I want to talk to you.”

She

regarded

him

gravely. “You could have

done that without running

around the block.”

“Well, I tried to talk to

you in school. You walked

away.”

“You were mad. I didn’t

want to talk to you mad.”

“How do you know I

was?”

“I could see it in your

face and the way you walked.

You’re not mad now.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Do you want to take my

books?” She smiled.

A warmth fell on him.

“Yes—yes, I do.” He put her

schoolbooks under his arm

and walked beside her. “Lee

wants to see you. He asked

me to tell you.”

She was pleased. “Does

he? Tell him I’ll come.

How’s your father?”

“Not very well. His eyes

bother him.”

They walked along in

silence until Cal couldn’t

stand it any more. “You know

about Aron?”

“Yes.”

She

paused.

“Open my binder and look

next to the first page.”

He shifted the books. A penny postcard was in the binder. “Dear Abra,” it said. “I don’t feel clean. I’m not fit for you. Don’t be sorry. I’m in the army. Don’t go near my father. Good-by, Aron.”

Cal snapped the book shut. “The son of a bitch,” he said under his breath.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“I heard what you said.”

“Do you know why he went away?”

“No. I guess I could figure out—put two and two together. I don’t want to. I’m not ready to—that is, unless you want to tell me.”

Suddenly

Cal

said,

“Abra—do you hate me?”

“No, Cal, but you hate

me a little. Why is that?”

“I—I’m afraid of you.”

“No need to be.”

“I’ve hurt you more than

you know. And you’re my

brother’s girl.”

“How have you hurt me?

And I’m *not* your brother’s

girl.”

“All right,” he said

bitterly, “I’ll tell you—and I

don’t want you to forget you

asked me to. Our mother was

a whore. She ran a house here

in town. I found out about it a

long time ago. Thanksgiving

night I took Aron down and

showed her to him. I—”

Abra broke in excitedly,

“What did he do?”

“He

went

mad—just

crazy. He yelled at her.

Outside he knocked me down

and ran away. Our dear

mother killed herself; my

father—he’s—there’s

something wrong with him.

Now you know about me.

Now you have some reason to

walk away from me.”

“Now I know about

him,” she said calmly.

“My brother?”

“Yes, your brother.”

“He was good. Why did

I say *was?* He *is* good. He’s

not mean or dirty like me.”

They had been walking

very slowly. Abra stopped
and Cal stopped and she
faced him.
“Cal,” she said, “I’ve
known about your mother for
a long, long time.”
“You have?”
“I heard my parents
talking when they thought I
was asleep. I want to tell you
something, and it’s hard to
tell and it’s good to tell.”
“You want to?”
“I have to. It’s not so
terribly long ago that I grew
up and I wasn’t a little girl
any more. Do you know what
I mean?”
“Yes,” said Cal.
“You sure you know?”
“Yes.”
“All right then. It’s hard

to say now. I wish I'd said it then. I didn't love Aron any more."

"Why not?"

"I've tried to figure it out. When we were children we lived in a story that we made up. But when I grew up the story wasn't enough. I had to have something else, because the story wasn't true any more."

"Well—"

"Wait—let me get it all out. Aron didn't grow up. Maybe he never will. He wanted the story and he wanted it to come out his way. He couldn't stand to have it come out any other way."

"How about you?"

“I don’t want to know
how it comes out. I only want
to be there while it’s going
on. And, Cal—we were kind
of strangers. We kept it going
because we were used to it.
But I didn’t believe the story
any more.”
“How about Aron?”
“He was going to have it
come out his way if he had to
tear the world up by the
roots.”
Cal stood looking at the
ground.
Abra said, “Do you
believe me?”
“I’m trying to study it
out.”
“When you’re a child
you’re
the

center

of

everything.

Everything

happens

for

you.

Other

people? They're only ghosts

furnished for you to talk to.

But when you grow up you

take your place and you're

your own size and shape.

Things go out of you to

others and come in from other

people. It's worse, but it's

much better too. I'm glad you

told me about Aron."

"Why?"

"Because now I know I

didn't make it all up. He

couldn't stand to know about

his mother because that's not
how he wanted the story to go
—and he wouldn't have any
other story. So he tore up the
world. It's the same way he
tore me up—Abra—when he
wanted to be a priest."
Cal said, "I'll have to
think."
"Give me my books,"
she said. "Tell Lee I'll come.
I feel free now. I want to
think too. I think I love you,
Cal."
"I'm not good."
"Because
you're
not
good."
Cal
walked
quickly

home.

“She’ll

come

tomorrow,” he told Lee.

“Why, you’re excited,”

said Lee.

4

Once in the house Abra

walked on her toes. In the hall

she moved close to the wall

where the floor did not creak.

She put her foot on the lowest

step of the carpeted stairs,

changed her mind, and went

to the kitchen.

“Here you are,” her

mother said. “You didn’t

come straight home.”

“I had to stay after class.

Is Father better?”

“I guess so.”

“What does the doctor

say?”

“Same thing he said at

first—overwork. Just needs a

rest.”

“He

hasn’t

seemed

tired,” said Abra.

Her mother opened a bin

and took out three baking

potatoes and carried them to

the sink. “Your Father’s very

brave, dear. I should have

known. He’s been doing so

much war work on top of his

own work. The doctor says

sometimes a man collapses

all at once.”

“Shall I go in and see

him?”

“You know, Abra, I’ve

got a feeling that he doesn’t

want to see anybody. Judge
Knudsen phoned and your
father said to tell him he was
asleep.”
“Can I help you?”
“Go change your dress,
dear. You don’t want to get
your pretty dress soiled.
Abra tiptoed past her
father’s door and went to her
own room. It was harsh bright
with
varnish,
papered
brightly. Framed photographs
of her parents on the bureau,
poems framed on the walls,
and her closet—everything in
its place, the floor varnished,
and
her
shoes

standing
diligently side by side. Her
mother did everything for her,
insisted on it—planned for
her, dressed her.
Abra had long ago given
up having any private things
in her room, even any
personal thing. This was of
such long standing that Abra
did not think of her room as a
private place. Her privacies
were of the mind. The few
letters she kept were in the
sitting room itself, filed
among the pages of the two-volume *Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant,* which to the best of
her knowledge had never
been opened by anyone but
herself since it came off the
press.
Abra felt pleased, and

she did not inspect the reason.
She knew certain things
without question, and such
things she did not speak
about. For example, she knew
that her father was not ill. He
was hiding from something.
Just as surely she knew that
Adam Trask was ill, for she
had seen him walking along
the street. She wondered
whether her mother knew her
father was not ill.
Abra slipped off her
dress and put on a cotton
pinafore,
which
was
understood to be for working
around
the
house.

She
brushed her hair, tiptoed past
her father's room, and went
downstairs. At the foot of the
stairs she opened her binder
and took out Aron's postcard.
In the sitting room she shook
Aron's letters out of Volume
II of the *Memoirs,* folded
them tightly, and, raising her
skirt, tucked them under the
elastic which held up her
panties. The package made
her a little lumpy. In the
kitchen she put on a full
apron to conceal the bulge.
"You can scrape the
carrots," her mother said. "Is
that water hot?"
"Just coming to a boil."
"Drop a bouillon cube in
that cup, will you, dear? The

doctor says it’ll build your
father up.”
When her mother carried
the steaming cup upstairs,
Abra opened the incinerator
end of the gas stove, put in
the letters, and lighted them.
Her mother came back,
saying, “I smell fire.”
“I lit the trash. It was
full.”
“I wish you’d ask me
when you want to do a thing
like that,” her mother said. “I
was saving the trash to warm
the kitchen in the morning.”
“I’m sorry, Mother,”
Abra said. “I didn’t think.”
“You should try to think
of these things. It seems to
me
you’re

getting
very
thoughtless lately.”
“I’m sorry, Mother.”
“Saved is earned,” said
her mother.
The telephone rang in
the dining room. Her mother
went to answer it. Abra heard
her mother say, “No, you
can’t see him. It’s doctor’s
orders. He can’t see anyone—
no, not anyone.”
She came back to the
kitchen.
“Judge
Knudsen
again,” she said.

Chapter 53

1

All during school next day
Abra felt good about going to

see Lee. She met Cal in the hall between classes. “Did you tell him I was coming?”

“He’s started some kind of tarts,” said Cal. He was dressed in his uniform—choking high collar, ill-fitting tunic, and wrapped leggings.

“You’ve got drill,” Abra said. “I’ll get there first. What kind of tarts?”

“I don’t know. But leave me a couple, will you? Smelled like strawberry. Just leave me two.”

“Want to see a present I got for Lee? Look!” She opened a little cardboard box. “It’s a new kind of potato peeler. Takes off just the skin. It’s easy. I got it for Lee.”

“There go my tarts,” said

Cal, and then, “If I’m a little late, don’t go before I get there, will you?”

“Would you like to carry my books home?”

“Yes,” said Cal.

She looked at him long, full in the eyes, until he wanted to drop his gaze, and then she walked away toward her class.

2

Adam had taken to sleeping late, or, rather, he had taken to sleeping very often—short sleeps during the night and during the day. Lee looked in on him several times before he found him awake.

“I

feel

fine

this
morning," Adam said.
"If you can call it
morning. It's nearly eleven
o'clock."
"Good Lord! I have to
get up."
"What for?" Lee asked.
"What for? Yes, what
for! But I feel good, Lee. I
might walk down to the draft
board. How is it outside?"
"Raw," said Lee.
He helped Adam get up.
Buttons and shoelaces and
getting things on frontways
gave Adam trouble.
While Lee helped him
Adam said, "I had a dream—
very real. I dreamed about my
father."
"A great old gentleman

from all I hear," said Lee. "I
read
that
portfolio
of
clippings
your
brother's
lawyer sent. Must have been
a great old gentleman."
Adam looked calmly at
Lee. "Did you know he was a
thief?"
"You must have had a
dream," said Lee. "He's
buried at Arlington. One
clipping
said
the
Vice
President was at his funeral,
and the Secretary of War.

You know the *Salinas Index*
might like to do a piece about
him—in wartime, you know.
How would you like to go
over the material?”
“He was a thief,” said
Adam. “I didn’t think so
once, but I do now. He stole
from the G.A.R.”
“I don’t believe it,” said
Lee.
There were tears in
Adam’s eyes. Very often
these
days
tears
came
suddenly to Adam. Lee said,
“Now you sit right here and
I’ll bring you some breakfast.
Do you know who’s coming
to see us this afternoon?

Abra.”

Adam said, “Abra?” and then, “Oh, sure, Abra. She’s a nice girl.”

“I love her,” said Lee simply. He got Adam seated in front of the card table in his bedroom. “Would you like to work on the cutout puzzle while I get your breakfast?”

“No, thank you. Not this morning. I want to think about the dream before I forget it.”

When Lee brought the breakfast tray Adam was asleep in his chair. Lee awakened him and read the *Salinas Journal* to him while he ate and then helped him to the toilet.

The kitchen was sweet
with tarts, and some of the
berries had boiled over in the
oven and burned, making the
sharp,
bitter-sweet
smell
pleasant and astringent.
There was a quiet rising
joy in Lee. It was the joy of
change.
Time's
drawing
down for Adam, he thought.
Time must be drawing down
for me, but I don't feel it. I
feel immortal. Once when I
was very young I felt mortal
—but not any more. Death
has receded. He wondered if
this were a normal way to
feel.

And he wondered what
Adam meant, saying his
father was a thief. Part of the
dream, maybe. And then
Lee's mind played on the way
it often did. Suppose it were
true—Adam, the most rigidly
honest man it was possible to
find, living all his life on
stolen money. Lee laughed to
himself—now this second
will, and Aron, whose purity
was a little on the self-indulgent side, living all his
life on the profits from a
whorehouse. Was this some
kind of joke or did things
balance so that if one went
too far in one direction an
automatic slide moved on the
scale and the balance was re-established?
He thought of Sam
Hamilton. He had knocked on

so many doors. He had the most schemes and plans, and no one would give him any money. But of course—he had so much, he was so rich. You couldn't give him any more. Riches seem to come to the poor in spirit, the poor in interest and joy. To put it straight—the very rich are a poor bunch of bastards. He wondered if that were true.

They
acted
that
way
sometimes.

He
thought
of
Cal
burning the money to punish

himself. And the punishment hadn't hurt him as badly as the crime. Lee said to himself, "If there should happen to be a place where one day I'll come up with Sam Hamilton, I'll have a lot of good stories to tell him," and his mind went on, "But so will he!"

Lee went in to Adam and found him trying to open the box that held the clippings about his father.

3

The wind blew cold that afternoon. Adam insisted on going to look in on the draft board. Lee wrapped him up and started him off. "If you feel faint at all, just sit down wherever you are," Lee said.

“I will,” Adam agreed.
“I haven’t felt dizzy all day.
Might stop in and have Victor
look at my eyes.”
“You wait till tomorrow.
I’ll go with you.”
“We’ll see,” said Adam,
and he started out, swinging
his arms with bravado.
Abra came in with
shining eyes and a red nose
from the frosty wind, and she
brought such pleasure that
Lee giggled softly when he
saw her.
“Where are the tarts?”
she demanded. “Let’s hide
them from Cal.” She sat
down in the kitchen. “Oh, I’m
so glad to be back.”
Lee started to speak and
choked and then what he

wanted to say seemed good to
say—to say carefully. He
hovered over her. “You
know, I haven’t wished for
many things in my life,” he
began. “I learned very early
not to wish for things.
Wishing just brought earned
disappointment.”
Abra said gaily, “But
you wish for something now.
What is it?”
He blurted out, “I wish
you were my daughter—” He
was shocked at himself. He
went to the stove and turned
out
the
gas
under
the
teakettle, then lighted it

again.

She said softly, “I wish

you were my father.”

He glanced quickly at

her and away. “You do?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why?”

“Because I love you.”

Lee went quickly out of

the kitchen. He sat in his

room, gripping his hands

tightly together until he

stopped choking. He got up

and took a small carved

ebony box from the top of his

bureau. A dragon climbed

toward heaven on the box. He

carried the box to the kitchen

and laid it on the table

between Abra’s hands. “This

is for you,” he said, and his

tone had no inflection.

She opened the box and looked down on a small, dark green jade button, and carved on its surface was a human right hand, a lovely hand, the fingers curved and in repose. Abra lifted the button out and looked at it, and then she moistened it with the tip of her tongue and moved it gently over her full lips, and pressed the cool stone against her cheek.

Lee said, “That was my mother’s only ornament.”

Abra got up and put her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek, and it was the only time such a thing had ever happened in his whole life.

Lee

laughed.

“My

Oriental calm seems to have

deserted me,” he said. “Let

me make the tea, darling. I’ll

get hold of myself that way.”

From the stove he said, “I’ve

never used that word—never

once to anybody in the

world.”

Abra said, “I woke up

with joy this morning.”

“So did I,” said Lee. “I

know what made me feel

happy. You were coming.”

“I was glad about that

too, but—”

“You are changed,” said

Lee. “You aren’t any part a

little girl any more. Can you

tell me?”

“I burned all of Aron’s

letters.”

“Did he do bad things to

you?”

“No. I guess not. Lately

I never felt good enough. I

always wanted to explain to

him that I was not good.”

“And now that you don’t

have to be perfect, you can be

good. Is that it?”

“I guess so. Maybe

that’s it.”

“Do you know about the

mother of the boys?”

“Yes. Do you know I

haven’t tasted a single one of

the tarts?” Abra said. “My

mouth is dry.”

“Drink some tea, Abra.

Do you like Cal?”

“Yes.”

Lee

said,

“He’s

crammed full to the top with

every good thing and every

bad thing. I’ve thought that

one single person could

almost with the weight of a

finger—”

Abra bowed her head

over her tea. “He asked me to

go to the Alisal when the wild

azaleas bloom.”

Lee put his hands on the

table and leaned over. “I

don’t want to ask you

whether, you are going,” he

said.

“You don’t have to,”

said Abra. “I’m going.”

Lee sat opposite her at

the table. “Don’t stay away

from this house for long,” he

said.

“My father and mother

don’t want me here.”

“I only saw them once,”

Lee said cynically. “They

seemed to be good people.

Sometimes,

Abra,

the

strangest

medicines

are

effective. I wonder if it would

help if they knew Aron has

just inherited over a hundred

thousand dollars.”

Abra nodded gravely

and fought to keep the

corners of her mouth from

turning up. “I think it would

help,” she said. “I wonder

how I could get the news to

them.”

“My dear,” said Lee, “if I heard such a piece of news I think my first impulse would be to telephone someone. Maybe you’d have a bad connection.”

Abra nodded. “Would you tell her where the money came from?”

“That I would not,” said Lee.

She looked at the alarm clock hung on a nail on the wall. “Nearly five,” she said. “I’ll have to go. My father isn’t well. I thought Cal might get back from drill.”

“Come back very soon,” Lee said.

4

Cal was on the porch when

she came out.

“Wait for me,” he said,

and he went into the house

and dropped his books.

“Take good care of

Abra’s books,” Lee called

from the kitchen.

The winter night blew in

with frosty wind, and the

street

lamps

with

their

sputtering

carbons

swung

restlessly

and

made

the

shadows dart back and forth

like a runner trying to steal

second base. Men coming
home from work buried their
chins in their overcoats and
hurried toward warmth. In the
still night the monotonous
scattering
music
of
the
skating rink could be heard
from many blocks away.
Cal said, “Will you take
your books for a minute,
Abra? I want to unhook this
collar. It’s cutting my head
off.” He worked the hooks
out of the. eyes and sighed
with relief. “I’m all chafed,”
he said and took her books
back. The branches of the big
palm tree in Berges’s front
yard were lashing with a dry

clatter, and a cat meowed
over and over and over in
front of some kitchen door
closed against it.
Abra said, “I don’t think
you make much of a soldier.
You’re too independent.”
“I could be,” said Cal.
“This drilling with old Krag-Jorgensens seems silly to me.
When the time comes, and I
take an interest, I’ll be good.”
“The
tarts
were
wonderful,” said Abra. “I left
one for you.”
“Thanks. I’ll bet Aron
makes a good soldier.”
“Yes, he will—and the
best-looking soldier in the
army. When are we going for
the azaleas?”

“Not until spring.”

“Let’s go early and take

a lunch.”

“It might be raining.”

“Let’s go anyway, rain

or shine.”

She took her books and

went into her yard. “See you

tomorrow,” she said.

He did not turn toward

home. He walked in the

nervous night past the high

school and past the skating

rink—a floor with a big tent

over it, and a mechanical

orchestra clanging away. Not

a soul was skating. The old

man who owned it sat

miserably

in

his

booth,

flipping the end of a roll of
tickets against his forefinger.
Main
Street
was
deserted. The wind skidded
papers on the sidewalk. Tom
Meek, the constable, came
out of Bell's candy store and
fell into step with Cal. "Better
hook
that
tunic
collar,
soldier," he said softly.
"Hello, Tom. The damn
thing's too tight."
"I don't see you around
the town at night lately."
"No."
"Don't tell me you
reformed."

“Maybe.”

Tom prided himself on

his ability to kid people and

make it sound serious. He

said, “Sounds like you got a

girl.”

Cal didn’t answer.

“I heard your brother

faked his age and joined the

army. Are you picking off his

girl?”

“Oh, sure—sure,” said

Cal.

Tom’s

interest

sharpened. “I nearly forgot,”

he

said.

“I

hear

Will

Hamilton is telling around

you made fifteen thousand
dollars in beans. That true?"
"Oh, sure," said Cal.
"You're just a kid. What
are you going to do with all
that money?"
Cal grinned at him. "I
burned it up."
"How do you mean?"
"Just set a match to it
and burned it."
Tom looked into his
face. "Oh, yeah! Sure. Good
thing to do. Got to go in here.
Good night." Tom Meek
didn't like people to kid him.
"The young punk son of a
bitch," he said to himself.
"He's getting too smart for
himself."
Cal moved slowly along
Main Street, looking in store

windows.

He

wondered

where Kate was buried. If he

could find out, he thought he

might take a bunch of

flowers, and he laughed at

himself for the impulse. Was

it good or was he fooling

himself? The Salinas wind

would

blow

away

a

tombstone, let along a bunch

of carnations. For some

reason he remembered the

Mexican name for carnations.

Somebody must have told

him when he was a kid. They

were called Nails of Love—

and marigolds, the Nails of

Death. It was a word like nails— *claveles*. Maybe he'd better put marigolds on his mother's grave.

"I'm beginning to think like Aron," he said to himself.

Chapter 54

1

The winter seemed reluctant to let go its bite. It hung on cold and wet and windy long after its time. And people repeated, "It's those damned big guns they're shooting off in France—spoiling the weather in the whole world."

The grain was slow coming up in the Salinas

Valley, and the wildflowers
came so late that some people
thought they wouldn't come
at all.
We knew—or at least
we were confident—that on
May Day, when all the
Sunday School picnics took
place in the Alisal, the wild
azaleas that grew in the skirts
of the stream would be in
bloom. They were a part of
May Day.
May Day was cold. The
picnic was drenched out of
existence by a freezing rain,
and there wasn't an-open
blossom on the azalea trees.
Two weeks later they still
weren't out.
Cal hadn't known it
would be like this when he

had made azaleas the signal
for his picnic, but once the
symbol was set it could not
be violated.
The
Ford
sat
in
Windham's shed, its tires
pumped up, and with two
new dry cells to make it start
easily on Bat. Lee was alerted
to make sandwiches when the
day came, and he got tired of
waiting and stopped buying
sandwich bread every two
days.
"Why don't you just go
anyway?" he said.
"I can't," said Cal. "I
said azaleas."
"How will you know?"

“The Silacci boys live
out there, and they come into
school every day. They say it
will be a week or ten days.”
“Oh, Lord!” said Lee.
“Don’t
overtrain
your
picnic.”
Adam’s
health
was
slowly
improving.
The
numbness was going from his
hand. And he could read a
little—a little more each day.
“It’s only when I get
tired that the letters jump,” he
said. “I’m glad I didn’t get
glasses to ruin my eyes. I

knew my eyes were all right.”

Lee nodded and was

glad. He had gone to San

Francisco for the books he

needed and had written for a

number of separates. He

knew about as much as was

known about the anatomy of

the brain and the symptoms

and severities of lesion and

thrombus. He had studied and

asked questions with the

same unwavering intensity as

when he had trapped and

pelted and cured a Hebrew

verb. Dr. H. C. Murphy had

got to know Lee very well

and

had

gone

from

a

professional impatience with a Chinese servant to a genuine admiration for a scholar. Dr. Murphy had even borrowed some of Lee's news separates and reports on diagnosis and practice. He told Dr. Edwards, "That Chink knows more about the pathology of cerebral hemorrhage than I do, and I bet as much as you do." He spoke with a kind of affectionate anger that this should be so. The medical profession is unconsciously

irritated by lay knowledge.

When

Lee

reported

Adam's improvement he said,

"It does seem to me that the

absorption is continuing—"

"I had a patient," Dr.

Murphy said, and he told a

hopeful story.

"I'm always afraid of

recurrence," said Lee.

"That you have to leave

with the Almighty," said Dr.

Murphy. "We can't patch an

artery like an inner tube. By

the way, how do you get him

to let you take his blood

pressure?"

"I bet on his and he bets

on mine. It's better than horse

racing."

“Who wins?”

“Well, I could,” said

Lee. “But I don’t. That would

spoil the game—and the

chart.”

“How do you keep him

from getting excited?”

“It’s my own invention,”

said

Lee.

“I

call

it

conversational therapy.”

“Must take all your

time.”

“It does,” said Lee.

2

On May 28, 1918, American

troops carried out their first

important

assignment

of
World War I. The First
Division, General Bullard
commanding, was ordered to
capture
the
village
of
Cantigny. The village, on
high ground, dominated the
Avre River valley. It was
defended by trenches, heavy
machine guns, and artillery.
The front was a little over a
mile wide.
At 6:45 A.M., May 28,
1918, the attack was begun
after one hour of artillery
preparation. Troops involved
were the 28th Infantry (Col.
Ely), one battalion of the 18th
Infantry (Parker), a company

of the First Engineers, the
divisional
artillery
(Summerall), and a support of
French tanks and flame
throwers.
The
attack
was
a
complete success. American
troops entrenched on the new
line
and
repulsed
two
powerful
German
counterattacks.
The
First
Division

received the congratulations
of Clemenceau, Foch, and
Pétain.

3

It was the end of May before
the Silacci boys brought the
news that the salmon-pink
blossoms of the azaleas were
breaking free. It was on a
Wednesday, as the nine
o'clock bell was ringing, that
they told him.

Cal
rushed
to
the
English classroom, and just as
Miss Norris took her seat on
the little stage he waved his
handkerchief and blew his
nose loudly. Then he went
down to the boys' toilet and

waited until he heard through
the wall the flush of water on
the girlside. He went out
through the basement door,
walked close to the red brick
wall, slipped around the
pepper tree, and, once out of
sight of the school, walked
slowly along until Abra
caught up with him.
“When’d
they
come
out?” she asked.
“This morning.”
“Shall
we
wait
till
tomorrow?”
He looked up at the gay
yellow sun, the first earth-warming sun of the year. “Do

you want to wait?”

“No,” she said.

“Neither do I.”

They broke into a run—

bought bread at Reynaud’s

and joggled Lee into action.

Adam heard loud voices

and looked into the kitchen.

“What’s the hullabaloo?” he

asked.

“We’re going on a

picnic,” said Cal.

“Isn’t it a school day?”

Abra said, “Sure it is.

But it’s a holiday too.”

Adam smiled at her.

“You’re pink as a rose,” he

said.

Abra cried, “Why don’t

you come along with us?

We’re going to the Alisal to

get azaleas.”

“Why, I’d like to,”
Adam said, and then, “No, I
can’t. I promised to go down
to the ice plant. We’re putting
in some new tubing. It’s a
beautiful day.”
“We’ll bring you some
azaleas,” Abra said.
“I like them. Well, have
a good time.”
When he was gone Cal
said, “Lee, why don’t you
come with us?”
Lee looked sharply at
him. “I hadn’t thought you
were a fool,” he said.
“Come on!” Abra cried.
“Don’t be ridiculous,”
said Lee.

4

It’s a pleasant little stream
that gurgles through the

Alisal against the Gabilan
Mountains on the east of the
Salinas Valley. The water
bumbles over round stones
and washes the polished roots
of the trees that hold it in.
The smell of azaleas and
the sleepy smell of sun
working
with
chlorophyll
filled the air. On the bank the
Ford car sat, still breathing
softly from its overheating.
The back seat was piled with
azalea branches.
Cal and Abra sat on the
bank among the luncheon
papers. They dangled their
feet in the water.
“They
always

wilt

before you get them home,”

said Cal.

“But they’re such a good

excuse, Cal,” she said. “If

you won’t I guess I’ll have to

__”

“What?”

She reached over and

took his hand. “That,” she

said.

“I was afraid to.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“I wasn’t.”

“I guess girls aren’t

afraid of near as many

things.”

“I guess not.”

“Are you ever afraid?”

“Sure,” she said. “I was

afraid of you after you said I

wet my pants.”

“That was mean,” he

said. “I wonder why I did it,”

and suddenly he was silent.

Her fingers tightened

around his hand. “I know

what you’re thinking. I don’t

want you to think about that.”

Cal looked at the curling

water and turned a round

brown stone with his toe.

Abra said, “You think

you’ve got it all, don’t you?

You think you attract bad

things—”

“Well—”

“Well, I’m going to tell

you something. My father’s

in trouble.”

“How in trouble?”

“I haven’t been listening

at doors but I’ve heard

enough. He’s not sick. He’s

scared.

He’s

done

something.”

He turned his head.

“What?”

“I think he’s taken some

money from his company. He

doesn’t know whether his

partners are going to put him

in jail or let him try to pay it

back.”

“How do you know?”

“I heard them shouting

in his bedroom where he’s

sick. And my mother started

the phonograph to drown

them out.”

He said, “You aren’t

making it up?”

“No. I’m not making it

up.”

He shuffled near and put

his head against her shoulder

and his arm crept timidly

around her waist.

“You see, you’re not the

only one—” She looked

sideways at his face. “Now

I’m afraid,” she said weakly.

5

At three o’clock in the

afternoon Lee was sitting at

his desk, turning over the

pages of a seed catalogue.

The pictures of sweet peas

were in color.

“Now these would look

nice on the back fence.

They’d screen off the slough.

I wonder if there’s enough

sun.” He looked up at the

sound of his own voice and

smiled to himself. More and
more he caught himself
speaking aloud when the
house was empty.
“It’s age,” he said aloud.
“The slowing thoughts and
—” He stopped and grew
rigid for a moment. “That’s
funny—listening
for
something. I wonder whether
I left the teakettle on the gas.
No—I
remember.”
He
listened
again.
“Thank
heaven I’m not superstitious.
I could hear ghosts walk if I’d
let myself. I could—”
The front doorbell rang.

“There it is. That’s what
I was listening for. Let it ring.
I’m not going to be led
around by feelings. Let it
ring.”
But it did not ring again.
A black weariness fell
on Lee, a hopelessness that
pressed his shoulders down.
He laughed at himself. “I can
go
and
find
it’s
an
advertisement under the door
or I can sit here and let my
silly old mind tell me death is
on the doorstep. Well, I want
the advertisement.”
Lee sat in the living
room and looked at the

envelope in his lap. And
suddenly he spat at it. “All
right,” he said. “I’m coming
—goddam you,” and he
ripped it open and in a
moment laid it on the table
and turned it over with the
message down.
He stared between his
knees at the floor. “No,” he
said, “that’s not my right.
Nobody has the right to
remove any single experience
from another. Life and death
are promised. We have a right
to pain.”
His stomach contracted.
“I haven’t got the courage.
I’m a cowardly yellow belly.
I couldn’t stand it.”
He
went

into

the

bathroom and measured three

teaspoons of elixir of bromide

into a glass and added water

until the red medicine was

pink. He carried the glass to

the living room and put it on

the table. He folded the

telegram and shoved it in his

pocket. He said aloud, “I hate

a coward! God, how I hate a

coward!” His hands were

shaking

and

a

cold

perspiration dampened his

forehead.

At four o’clock he heard

Adam

fumbling

at
the
doorknob. Lee licked his lips.
He stood up and walked
slowly to the hall. He carried
the glass of pink fluid and his
hand was steady.

Chapter 55

1

All of the lights were on in
the Trask house. The door
stood partly open, and the
house was cold. In the sitting
room Lee was shriveled up
like a leaf in the chair beside
the lamp. Adam's door was
open and the sound of voices
came from his room.
When Cal came in he
asked, "What's going on?"
Lee looked at him and
swung his head toward the

table where the open telegram
lay. “Your brother is dead,”
he said. “Your father has had
a stroke.”
Cal started down the
hall.
Lee said, “Come back.
Dr. Edwards and Dr. Murphy
are in there. Let them alone.”
Cal stood in front of
him. “How bad? How bad,
Lee, how bad?”
“I don’t know.” He
spoke as though recalling an
ancient thing. “He came
home tired. But I had to read
him the telegram. That was
his right. For about five
minutes he said it over and
over to himself out loud. And
then it seemed to get through
into his brain and to explode

there.”

“Is he conscious?”

Lee said wearily, “Sit

down and wait, Cal. Sit down

and wait. Get used to it. I’m

trying to.”

Cal

picked

up

the

telegram and read its bleak

and dignified announcement.

Dr. Edwards came out,

carrying his bag. He nodded

curtly, went out, and closed

the door smartly behind him.

Dr. Murphy set his bag

on the table and sat down. He

sighed. “Dr. Edwards asked

me to tell you.”

“How

is

he?”

Cal

demanded.

“I’ll tell you all we

know. You’re the head of the

family now, Cal. Do you

know what a stroke is?” He

didn’t wait for Cal to answer.

“This one is a leakage of

blood in the brain. Certain

areas of the brain are affected.

There have been earlier

smaller leakages. Lee knows

that.”

“Yes,” said Lee.

Dr. Murphy glanced at

him and then back at Cal.

“The left side is paralyzed.

The

right

side

partly.

Probably there is no sight in the left eye, but we can't determine that. In other words, your father is nearly helpless."

"Can he talk?"

"A little—with difficulty. Don't tire him."

Cal struggled for words.

"Can he get well?"

"I've heard of reabsorption cases this bad but I've never seen one."

"You mean he's going to die?"

"We don't know. He might live for a week, a month, a year, even two years. He might die tonight."

“Will he know me?”

“You’ll have to find that

out for yourself. I’ll send a

nurse tonight and then you’ll

have

to

get

permanent

nurses.” He stood up. “I’m

sorry, Cal. Bear up! You’ll

have to bear up.” And he

said, “It always surprises me

how people bear up.” They

always do. Edwards will be in

tomorrow. Good night.” He

put his hand out to touch

Cal’s

shoulder,

but

Cal

moved away and walked

toward his father’s room.

Adam’s
head
was
propped up on pillows. His
face was calm, the skin pale;
the
mouth
was
straight,
neither
smiling
nor
disapproving. His eyes were
open, and they had great
depth and clarity, as though
one could see deep into them
and as though they could see
deep into their surroundings.
And the eyes were calm,
aware but not interested.
They turned slowly toward
Cal as he entered the room,

found his chest, and then rose
to his face and stayed there.
Cal sat down in the
straight chair beside the bed.
He said, “I’m sorry, Father.”
The eyes blinked slowly
the way a frog blinks.
“Can you hear me,
Father? Can you understand
me?” The eyes did not change
or move. “I did it,” Cal cried.
“I’m responsible for Aron’s
death and for your sickness. I
took him to Kate’s. I showed
him his mother. That’s why
he went away. I don’t want to
do bad things—but I do
them.”
He put his head down on
the side of the bed to escape
the terrible eyes, and he could
still see them. He knew they

would be with him, a part of
him, all of his life.
The doorbell rang. In a
moment Lee came to the
bedroom, followed by the
nurse—a
strong,
broad
woman with heavy black
eyebrows.
She
opened
breeziness as she opened her
suitcase.
“Where’s my patient!
There he is! Why, you look
fine! What am I doing here?
Maybe you better get up and
take care of me, you look
good. Would you like to take
care of me, big handsome
man?” She thrust a muscular

arm under Adam’s shoulder
and effortlessly hoisted him
toward the head of the bed
and held him up with her
right arm while with her left
she patted out the pillows and
laid him back.
“Cool pillows,” she said.
“Don’t
you
love
cool
pillows? Now, where’s the
bathroom? Have you got a
duck and a bedpan? Can you
put a cot in here for me?”
“Make a list,” said Lee.
“And if you need any help—
with him—”
“Why would I need
help? We’ll get along just
fine,

won’t

we,

sugar-sweetie?”

Lee and Cal retired to

the kitchen. Lee said, “Before

she came I was going to urge

you to have some supper—

you know, like the kind of

person who uses food for any

purpose good or bad? I bet

she’s that way. You can eat or

not eat, just as you wish.”

Cal grinned at him. “If

you’d tried to make me, I’d

have been sick. But since you

put it that way, I think I’ll

make a sandwich.”

“You

can’t

have

a

sandwich.”

“I want one.”

“It all works out,” said Lee, “true to outrageous form. It’s kind of insulting that everyone reacts about the same way.”

“I don’t want a sandwich,” Cal said. “Are there any tarts left?”

“Plenty—in the breadbox. They may be a little soaky.”

“I like them soaky,” Cal said. He brought the whole plate to the table and set it in front of him.

The nurse looked into the kitchen. “These look

good,” she said and took one, bit into it, and talked among her chewings. “Can I phone Krough’s drugstore for the things I need? Where’s the phone? Where do you keep the linen? Where’s the cot you’re going to bring in? Are you through with this paper? Where did you say the phone is?” She took another tart and retired.

Lee asked softly, “Did he speak to you?”

Cal shook his head back and forth as though he couldn’t stop.

“It’s going to be dreadful. But the doctor is

right.

You

can

stand

anything. We're wonderful

animals that way."

"I am not." Cal's voice

was flat and dull. "I can't

stand it. No, I can't stand it. I

won't be able to. I'll have to

—I'll have to—"

Lee gripped his wrist

fiercely. "Why, you mouse—

you nasty cur. With goodness

all around you—don't you

dare suggest a thing like that!

Why is your sorrow more

refined than my sorrow?"

"It's not sorrow. I told

him what I did. I killed my

brother. I'm a murderer. He

knows it."

“Did he say it? Tell the
truth—did he say it?”
“He didn’t have to. It
was in his eyes. He said it
with
his
eyes.
There’s
nowhere I can go to get away
—there’s no place.”
Lee sighed and released
his wrist. “Cal”—he spoke
patiently—“listen
to
me.
Adam’s brain centers are
affected. Anything you see in
his eyes may be pressure on
that part of his brain which
governs his seeing. Don’t you
remember?—he
couldn’t

read. That wasn’t his eyes—
that was pressure. You don’t
know he accused you. You
don’t know that.”
“He accused me. I know
it. He said I’m a murderer.”
“Then he will forgive
you. I promise.”
The nurse stood in the
doorway. “What are you
promising,
Charley?
You
promised me a cup of
coffee.”
“I’ll make it now. How
is he?”
“Sleeping like a baby.
Have you got anything to
read in this house?”
“What would you like?”
“Something to take my

mind off my feet.”

“I’ll bring the coffee to you. I’ve got some dirty stories written by a French queen. They might be too—”

“You bring ’em with the coffee,” she said. “Why don’t you get some shuteye, sonny? Me and Charley’ll hold the fort. Don’t forget the book, Charley.”

Lee set the percolator on the gas jet. He came to the table and said, “Cal!”

“What do you want?”

“Go to Abra.”

2

Cal stood on the neat porch and kept his finger on the bell until the harsh overlight flashed on and the night bolt rasped

and

Mrs.

Bacon

looked out. “I want to see

Abra,” Cal said.

Her mouth dropped open

in amazement. “You want

what?”

“I want to see Abra.”

“You can’t. Abra’s gone

to her room. Go away.”

Cal shouted, “I tell you I

want to see Abra.”

“You go away or I’ll call

the police.”

Mr. Bacon called, “What

is it? Who is it?”

“Never you mind—go

back to bed. You aren’t well.

I’ll handle this.”

She turned back to Cal.

“Now you get off the porch.

And if you ring the bell again
I'll phone the police. Now,
get!" The door slammed, the
bolt scraped, and the hard
overlight went off.
Cal stood smiling in the
dark for he thought of Tom
Meek lumbering up, saying,
"Hello, Cal. What you up
to?"
Mrs.
Bacon
shouted
from inside. "I see you. Go
on now! Get off the porch!"
He walked slowly down
the walk and turned toward
home, and he hadn't gone a
block before Abra caught up
with him. She was panting
from her run. "Got out the
back way," she said.

“They’ll find you gone.”

“I don’t care.”

“You don’t?”

“No.”

Cal said, “Abra, I’ve

killed my brother and my

father is paralyzed because of

me.”

She took his arm and

clung to it with both hands.

Cal said, “Didn’t you

hear me?”

“I heard you.”

“Abra, my mother was a

whore.”

“I know. You told me.

My father is a thief.”

“I’ve got her blood,

Abra.

Don’t

you

understand?”

“I’ve got his,” she said.
They walked along in
silence while he tried to
rebalance himself. The wind
was cold, and they quickened
their steps to keep warm.
They
passed
the
last
streetlight on the very edge of
Salinas, and blackness lay
ahead of them and the road
was unpaved and sticky with
black ’dobe mud.
They had come to the
end of the pavement, to the
end of the streetlights. The
road under their feet was
slippery with spring mud, and
the grass that brushed against
their legs was wet with dew.

Abra asked, “Where are
we going?”
“I wanted to run away
from
my
father’s
eyes.
They’re right in front of me
all the time. When I close my
eyes I still see them. I’ll
always see them. My father is
going to die, but his eyes will
still be looking at me, telling
me I killed my brother.”
“You didn’t.”
“Yes, I did. And his eyes
say I did.”
“Don’t talk like that.
Where are we going?”
“A little farther. There’s
a ditch and a pump house—
and a willow tree. Do you

remember the willow tree?”

“I remember it.”

He said, “The branches

come down like a tent and

their tips touch the ground.”

“I know.”

“In the afternoons—the

sunny afternoons—you and

Aron would part the branches

and go inside—and no one

could see you.”

“You watched?”

“Oh, sure. I watched.”

And he said, “I want you to

go inside the willow tree with

me. That’s what I want to

do.”

She stopped and her

hand pulled him to a stop.

“No,” she said. “That’s not

right.”

“Don’t you want to go in

with me?”

“Not if you’re running

away—no, I don’t.”

Cal said, “Then I don’t

know what to do. What shall I

do? Tell me what to do.”

“Will you listen?”

“I don’t know.”

“We’re going back,” she

said.

“Back? Where?”

“To

your

father’s

house,” said Abra.

3

The light of the kitchen

poured down on them. Lee

had lighted the oven to warm

the chilly air.

“She made me come,”

said Cal.

“Of course she did. I
knew she would.”
Abra said, “He would
have come by himself.”
“We’ll
never
know
that,” said Lee.
He left the kitchen and
in a moment he returned.
“He’s still sleeping.” Lee set
a stone bottle and three little
translucent porcelain cups on
the table.
“I remember that,” said
Cal.
“You ought to.” Lee
poured the dark liquor. “Just
sip it and let it run around
your tongue.”
Abra put her elbows on
the kitchen table. “Help him,”

she said. “You can accept
things, Lee. Help him.”
“I don’t know whether I
can accept things or not,” Lee
said. “I’ve never had a chance
to try. I’ve always found
myself with some—not less
uncertain but less able to take
care of uncertainty. I’ve had
to do my weeping—alone.”
“Weeping? You?”
He said, “When Samuel
Hamilton died the world went
out like a candle. I relighted it
to see his lovely creations,
and I saw his children tossed
and torn and destroyed as
though some vengefulness
was at work. Let the ng-ka-py
run back on your tongue.”
He went on, “I had to
find out my stupidities for

myself.

These

were

my

stupidities: I thought the good

are destroyed while the evil

survive and prosper.

“I thought that once an

angry and disgusted God

poured molten fire from a

crucible to destroy or to

purify his little handiwork of

mud.

“I

thought

I

had

inherited both the scars of the

fire and the impurities which

made the fire necessary—all

inherited, I thought. All

inherited. Do you feel that

way?”

“I think so,” said Cal.

“I don’t know,” Abra

said.

Lee shook his head.

“That isn’t good enough. That

isn’t good enough thinking.

Maybe—” And he was silent.

Cal felt the heat of the

liquor

in

his

stomach.

“Maybe what, Lee?”

“Maybe you’ll come to

know that every man in every

generation is refired. Does a

craftsman, even in his old

age, lose his hunger to make a

perfect cup—thin, strong,

translucent?” He held his cup

to the light. “All impurities

burned out and ready for a
glorious flux, and for that—
more fire. And then either the
slag heap or, perhaps what no
one in the world ever quite
gives up, perfection," He
drained his cup and he said
loudly, "Cal, listen to me.
Can you think that whatever
made
us—would
stop
trying?"
"I can't take it in," Cal
said. "Not now I can't."
The heavy steps of the
nurse sounded in the living
room. She billowed through
the door and she looked at
Abra, elbows on the table,
holding her cheeks between
her palms.

The nurse said, “Have
you got a pitcher? They get
thirsty. I like to keep a pitcher
of water handy. You see,” she
explained,
“they
breathe
through their mouths.”
“Is he awake?” Lee
asked. “There’s a pitcher.”
“Oh, yes, he’s awake
and rested. And I’ve washed
his face and combed his hair.
He’s a good patient. He tried
to smile at me.”
Lee stood up. “Come
along, Cal. I want you to
come too, Abra. You’ll have
to come.”
The nurse filled her
pitcher at the sink and
scurried ahead of them.

When they trooped into
the bedroom Adam was
propped high on his pillows.
His white hands lay palms
down on either side of him,
and the sinews from knuckle
to wrist were tight drawn. His
face was waxen, and his
sharp
features
were
sharpened.
He
breathed
slowly between pale lips. His
blue eyes reflected back the
night light focused on his
head.
Lee and Cal and Abra
stood at the foot of the bed,
and Adam's eyes moved
slowly from one face to the

other, and his lips moved just
a little in greeting.
The nurse said, “There
he is. Doesn’t he look nice?
He’s my darling. He’s my
sugar pie.
“Hush!” said Lee.
“I won’t have you tiring
my patient.”
“Go out of the room,”
said Lee.
“I’ll have to report this
to the doctor.”
Lee whirled toward her.
“Go out of the room and
close the door. Go and write
your report.”
“I’m not in the habit of
taking orders from Chinks.”
Cal said, “Go out now,
and close the door.”
She slammed the door

just loud enough to register
her anger. Adam blinked at
the sound.
Lee said, “Adam!”
The blue wide eyes
looked for the voice and
finally found Lee’s brown
and shining eyes.
Lee said, “Adam, I don’t
know what you can hear or
understand. When you had
the numbness in your hand
and your eyes refused to read,
I found out everything I
could. But some things no
one but you can know. You
may, behind your eyes, be
alert and keen, or you may be
living in a confused gray
dream. You may, like a
newborn child, perceive only
light and movement.

“There’s damage in your
brain, and it may be that you
are a new thing in the world.
Your
kindness
may
be
meanness now, and your
bleak honesty fretful and
conniving. No one knows
these things except you.
Adam! Can you hear me?”
The blue eyes wavered,
closed slowly, then opened.
Lee said, “Thank you,
Adam. I know how hard it is.
I’m going to ask you to do a
much harder thing. Here is
your son—Caleb—your only
son. Look at him, Adam!”
The pale eyes looked
until they found Cal. Cal’s

mouth moved dryly and made
no sound.
Lee's voice cut in, "I
don't know how long you
will live, Adam. Maybe a
long time. Maybe an hour.
But your son will live. He
will marry and his children
will be the only remnant left
of you." Lee wiped his eyes
with his fingers.
"He did a thing in anger,
Adam, because he thought
you had rejected him. The
result of his anger is that his
brother and your son is dead."
Cal
said,
"Lee—you
can't."
"I have to," said Lee. "If
it kills him I have to. I have

the choice," and he smiled
sadly and quoted, " 'If there's
blame, it's my blame.' "
Lee's shoulders straightened.
He said sharply, "Your son is
marked with guilt out of
himself—out of himself—
almost more than he can bear.
Don't
crush
him
with
rejection. Don't crush him,
Adam."
Lee's breath whistled in
his throat. "Adam, give him
your blessing. Don't leave
him alone with his guilt.
Adam, can you hear me?
Give him your blessing!"
A
terrible

brightness
shone in Adam's eyes and he
closed them and kept them
closed. A wrinkle formed
between his brows.
Lee said, "Help him,
Adam—help him. Give him
his chance. Let him be free.
That's all a man has over the
beasts. Free him! Bless him!"
The whole bed seemed
to
shake
under
the
concentration. Adam's breath
came quick with his effort
and then, slowly, his right
hand lifted—lifted an inch
and then fell back.
Lee's face was haggard.
He moved to the head of the

bed and wiped the sick man's
damp face with the edge of
the sheet. He looked down at
the
closed
eyes.
Lee
whispered,
"Thank
you,
Adam—thank you, my friend.
Can you move your lips?
Make your lips form his
name."
Adam looked up with
sick weariness. His lips
parted and failed and tried
again. Then his lungs filled.
He expelled the air and his
lips combed the rushing sigh.
His whispered word seemed
to hang in the air:

“Timshel!”

His eyes closed and he

slept.

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