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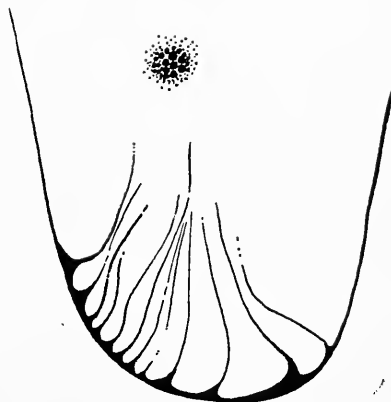
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THE CASTLE

by

SUSAN SETTLEMIRE

We moved into the new neighborhood the spring when I was seven. My father had finally had enough of our old house with its heating problems and the faulty plumbing, and my mother had always found the place too unromantic. I was excited about the move, but I knew I would miss the people on the old street. The day we left, our landlord came to say good-bye. He was about seventy-five, and he cried and gave me a silver dollar. My father made me put it into a savings account although I wanted to keep it as a good-luck piece.

The new house perched on a dirt road so steep that I was surprised that the house didn't slant too. Instead, it sat back under its beech trees, with half of its basement exposed, determined to maintain its balance despite modesty's blandishments. My mother, who could ignore the stubborn nudity of the basement, declared that the house was a cottage from a fairy tale. Her imagination gloried in the diamond-paned front window, the border of lilies-of-the-valley, the dark green shutters, and the pointy roof. It was Mother, too, who made me see the romantic twist in the muddy road and how it seemed to wind up the next hill. "And look at that castle on the top!" she exclaimed. I looked, but all I saw was a wooded slope, capped by a big, once-white frame house whose windows reflected the afternoon sun. Perhaps it was the opaque stare of those windows, but the house immediately fascinated me. My father was much less impressed.

"That" he said, "is a big old empty place on a bad nigra street. I don't want to catch you going up there now."

My father was a very practical man. He cleared the backyard of most of its trees and built a bird feeder, a swing for me, and a lot for Rowena, the setter. I played in the swing and in the sandbox when he built that. Rather, I didn't *play* in the sandbox. I constructed cities

and highways and castles that were really better than the house on the Negro street.

Sometimes Brucie, who lived a block away, came to play with me. I'm not sure how Brucie discovered me, but one day he knocked on the door and asked my mother, "Can your little girl come out and play with me?" I didn't mind, at first anyway, because he told me that he was the only other child in the neighborhood besides his sister, who was only two and didn't count. Usually we would pretend to be pioneers because Davy Crockett was very popular then, but inevitably we fought about which of us was entitled to wear my coonskin cap. Brucie always claimed that a boy ought to have it. But then I would tell him that the cap belonged to me, that I was a year older than he, and that pioneers had hair as long as mine. Brucie wouldn't hit me, because his mother had told him never to hit a girl. Instead he would turn very pink under his white hair, and his pale eyes would brim with moisture. He wouldn't really cry. He would just stand there like that until I either hit him or gave him my gun to play with. I decided that Brucie was a little old sissy, but there was no one else. My mother always told me to be nice to Brucie, that he was "darling." But I heard my father say one day that all the Britains were trash. During our next quarrel, I told Brucie this, and he turned very pink again and went home and didn't come back for a week.

At first I was glad. It was tedious to have to share my toys, especially with a little first-grader who probably didn't know any better than to break things, and who certainly had no idea of how to play pioneers. So I climbed trees when my mother wasn't looking and built my sand cities and told stories to Rowena. But, by the end of five days, my solitary existence had begun to pall. I had run out of ideas for sand construction and stories, and my mother was keeping a close watch on the trees. I tried to read, but the only available book was *Winnie-the-Pooh*, which I'd read a hundred times before. Since it was summer, there was not even school to relieve my boredom. Finally, on the sixth day, after lunch, I took my Brownie knife and my red plastic gun and went to find Brucie. I didn't take my cap because I knew he'd want to wear it.

Brucie was sitting in his front yard playing with a mongrel puppy. I looked at the house, and for the first time I could see why my father said the Brittainns were trash. Everything but the neat little pre-fab house itself was in an awful mess. A push-lawnmower and a broken bicycle and various disconnected bits of machinery were heaped in the carport, and a rusty old Ford sat on cinder blocks beside the house. The lawn was littered with toys. A lot of trash.

"Hey, Brucie," I said. "What you doing?"

"Hey, Jane," he mumbled. "Just messin'." He caught the puppy and lifted its ear. The puppy squirmed. "Hey, come here," Brucie said. "Looka there."

I looked at the ear. Nestled close to its dirty pink inside was a bloated purple ball.

"Tick," said Brucie and wrapped his arm around the dog's neck so that its head couldn't move. Brucie made a face and darted his fingers at the blob. The puppy yelped, but the purple thing came off and wiggled on the grass.

"Yeah, got the head," Brucie said. Then he scrounged into his blue jeans' pocket and pulled out a box of kitchen matches. He lit one and held it onto the tick until it began to sizzle.

I was impressed, but all I said was, "Your mother lets you play with matches?"

"Sure, he answered and put the box back into his pocket.

"Hey, you wanna go exploring?" I asked.

"I reckon. Where we gonna 'slore?"

"Le's go up to that castle on the hill."

"That ain't no castle. Tha's a ol' nigger house. My daddy tol' me."

"My daddy tol' me too, but that doesn't matter. If it isn't a castle, it's a haunted house."

"You sure? Ain't no ghosts'll get us, will they?"

"No, stupid. It's daylight. Anyway, I got my Brownie knife."

"Can I carry it then?"

"No, I brought the gun for you."

Brucie took the gun without much disappointment, and we started off, glowing with the anticipated adventure. We ran up the hill past my house, hoping that my mother wouldn't see us and call us back. We were panting heavily when we got around the bend in the road, and Brucie stopped dead.

"Jane, I'm tired," he said. "Le's go back."

"Brucie is a sissy," I chanted. "Look, stupid, we just started. If you don't wanna go on, you just give me the gun, and you can go home."

"I'll tell your mommy."

"You will not!" I threatened. "I'm bigger'n you, and I'll beat you up. Come on."

Brucie, beaten back into submission, followed me. The road curved again and intersected with a paved street. There were houses on one side, but we crossed and went into the woods on the other side. The trees were low and scrubby, and the ground was covered with honeysuckle vines twined as thick as cloth.

"We gotta blaze a trail," I announced. But Brucie contradicted me.

"Here's a path." So we followed the clay footpath, only mildly aware that it angled down instead of up the hill. It was a tortous thing, twisting away from rocks, joining other, similar trails, crossing exposed pipes which Brucie said were sewers.

"They run the sewers through the woods 'cause niggers is the only ones that come in here."

"Huh!" I grunted. "We're coming here, and besides these aren't real woods. My Paw Paw's got better woods 'n this."

"They is too real," Brucie maintained, but I ignored him because I was afraid that he was right.

The trail ended suddenly in a series of flat, descending rocks.

"Gosh, they look like steps!" I exclaimed. "God made steps for us."

We climbed down the stones and found ourselves on the bank of a muddy little stream. The water was filled with broken glass and rusting cans. On the other side, a path straggled vertically up for some fifteen feet. A slanting oak spread its bare roots to form the top of the bank, and above it the slope was gentler.

"It's dark down here."

"Shut up, Brucie Brittain," I told him. "There may be danger here. But we gotta cross this branch. I'll go first. I'm gonna step on those rocks."

The stream giggled under my feet as I wavered across like a tightrope walker. The rocks were small and unsteady, and I was not surprised when my tennis shoe finally plunged into three inches of water and silt. Brucie squatted on the bank and took off his shoes, which he laid on a rock. Then he waded across to me, carefully avoiding the cans and glass.

When both of us were on the other side, we stood for a minute looking at the muddy ascent.

"We can't walk it," Brucie said.

"Then we're go' haveta climb it." And I proceeded to demonstrate. The path was slick from usage and the recent rain, and I had to claw at rocks and bushes. My knees and fingers were caked with dirt by the time I hoisted myself onto the fat root of the oak tree.

"Come on, Brucie, you can make it." Brucie did make it, emerging as scratched and dirty as I had.

Above the oak, the trail leveled off and was not much steeper than the one on the other side. Our only trouble was the pines which brushed teasingly into our faces and sometimes blocked the path. But finally we could look up and see sky ahead. At our right was the big white house.

"We're at the top, Brucie!" I whispered. Brucie nodded and wiped his dirty pink face with a dirtier hand.

We walked quickly toward the house, although once, when a dog began to bark, Brucie nearly ran back. I grabbed his arm and pulled him to the house. From the back, it was a flat, two-story thing with buckling paint and black windows. The lawn needed mowing.

"Le's go 'round to the front." I said, and dragged Brucie with me. The front view made me understand my father's warning about the Negro street. There were perhaps twenty brown shanties jammed onto each side of a tiny block. Large, mangy dogs loped about noisily. There

were few cars, but the ones we saw gleamed with chrome and radio antennae. Black babies wallowed in the mud of front yards. Older children, half-naked, ran and yelled and laughed at each other. A very small, very old man lay collapsed on the opposite curb. Two women dressed in slips called to each other from their front porch swings. Laughter and raucous music echoed from a tiny store covered with dingy posters that advised us to drink Coca-Cola and try Goody's headache powders. I was dimly aware that there were no other white people around.

"I'm scared," Brucie squeaked. "Le's go."

"Shut up. We haven't seen the house all yet." I began to walk onto the sprawling front porch; and Brucie, even more afraid to be left alone, trotted after me. The porch was uninteresting—bare and dirty, with several packing crates piled into one corner. The front door was screenless and (miracle of miracles!) slightly cracked. "Brucie, we can go in!"

"No!" Brucie said, looking very close to tears now. But when I moved toward the door, he followed me again. The door groaned when I pushed it open, and I jumped, but courage came back as I remembered that pioneers weren't afraid of anything. Anyway, I had Brucie with me. So I walked on in. I was standing in a dim, dusty corridor, facing an ornate staircase. On both sides of the hall were heavy doors, the more sinister because they were shut.

"Come on, Brucie," I whispered. "It isn't even dark." Brucie tramped stolidly after me, and instinctively we headed for the second floor. The stairs groaned slightly and snagged at our feet with splinters and protruding nails. Upstairs there was a corridor too, but the doors to most of the rooms were open. They were also empty of everything but dust and spiders. Brucie spotted a bathtub sitting on claw feet in the middle of an otherwise bare room. We went over to examine it, but the two cockroaches fighting in it repulsed me. I pulled Brucie away, and we walked out into the hall again. At the far end of the hall was a closed door, and I turned toward it. Again Brucie lagged behind, but the stillness of the house kept me from bullying him about it. This door, too, was unlocked, and it opened easily. I don't know what I expected to find inside, but I was surprised at what I saw. This room, like all the others, was unfurnished and thick with dust; but the whole floor was covered with bottles and jugs. They stood in a haphazard sort of order, some empty, most of them filled with clear or brownish liquid.

"Gosh, Brucie, look!" I exclaimed, too loudly for the silence of the room.

"Tha's liquor. I seen some my daddy had," Brucie whispered.

"Well, what's it doing here?" I asked.

"I know. Bootleggers!" said Brucie darkly.

"What's that?" I asked, intrigued by the word.

"It's these men that sell liquor against the law," Brucie whispered. "My daddy says they's some aroun' here."

"We better go," I said. I shut the door again, and we walked quickly down the stairs. We ran out onto the

porch and nearly collided with soiled khaki knees. "What the hell you kids doin' here?"

My eyes traveled up into the face of the biggest, blackest man I had ever seen. He had a mustache that at first seemed to be only a darker shadow on his dark face. I felt my stomach knot into balls, and my hands went cold, but somehow I had no idea of running.

"We were just looking at the house," I said. "We wanted to see if it was haunted."

"It ain't haunted," the man said. "Ain't nobody to haunt it. Ain't had nobody living in it for years. Just a big ol' thing some white bastard built long time ago. You see anything to make you think it's haunted?"

"No sir," I said. "We just saw a bathtub."

"Anything else?"

"No sir," I gulped, telling myself that even a pioneer would have lied in this instance.

"Well, you ain't got no bus'ness nosin' around. This is private propity, and I'm s'pose' to see don't nobody mess with it. So you kids get the hell out of here."

"Yes sir," I said, and Brucie and I walked away.

We didn't run, although Brucie seemed inclined to. But we walked quickly and wordlessly off the porch and out of the yard. A dog barked again, and two children stopped playing tag to watch us. One of them yelled, "Mama, look yonder." But no one, not even the dog, followed us. We couldn't find our path in the woods, but we plowed through the underbrush in the general direction of home. We still went quickly, without speaking. We crossed the stream farther up; but, though we avoided the steep bank this way, we had to wade through the branch, which was wider and deeper here. The cuff of my shorts got wet; and since I had forgotten to take them off, my tennis shoes pumped out muddy water as I walked. On the other side we found a path which eventually joined the one we had taken before. We trotted up to the street and crossed it.

When we were finally on our own road again, we stopped for breath. The flight had dissolved the knots in my stomach, but I was trembling in the aftermath of fear and the final realization of the danger we had been in. That man might even have been drunk, and he could have murdered us or kidnaped us or something.

"Brucie," I said, "You left your shoes back there at the stream."

"Yeah," he panted. "But I ain't goin' back to get 'em. Them niggers 'ud kill me."

"Brucie, you've been using that bad word all day. You're s'pose' to call 'em colored people."

"My daddy calls 'em niggers," Brucie replied.

"I don't care. My mother says you aren't s'pose' to. Brucie, the house wasn't haunted after all. The man said so."

"You don' believe a ol' nigger, do you?" Brucie demanded skeptically.

"Well, he was a grown man." I answered. "Brucie, what's a bastard?"

But Brucie didn't know either.

YOUNG WIFE OF A SCULPTOR

You think you make my image out of clay,
Girl standing, cut off at the knees, eyes closed;
But now you notice my eye's restlessness
As I stand posing, gazing
Past you out the window where the sound
Lies cool and green, and seemed before to lie
Inside my eyes; now it's drawn back
Leaving a bare strip of shifting sand.

You smile, ask kindly what the trouble is;
I tell you it's the chaos of the room,
The dirty knives and chisels,
The floor cluttered with damp remnants from my figure;
I tell you that, but it's something more that bothers me:
The fact that no disorder seems to bother you.

You say kindly (and no one can know more than I
how kind you are) "Let's talk a moment in the garden;
It's clean and peaceful there where you have planted flowers.

And you, overflowing the garden with your voice
Tell me of rising early
To ride a horse bareback through the fields.
I think of you on some hill's nob
Astride a horse with neck thrust out and bellowing
Into the valley, you with your arms thrown back
As if to encircle all the world; but fearing you would laugh
At my imaginings, saying they were not true,
I look down
At my foot scraping from loam to sand, troubled
For seeing no change in you because of me
Except that you, also, are troubled.

MOLLIE HUGHES

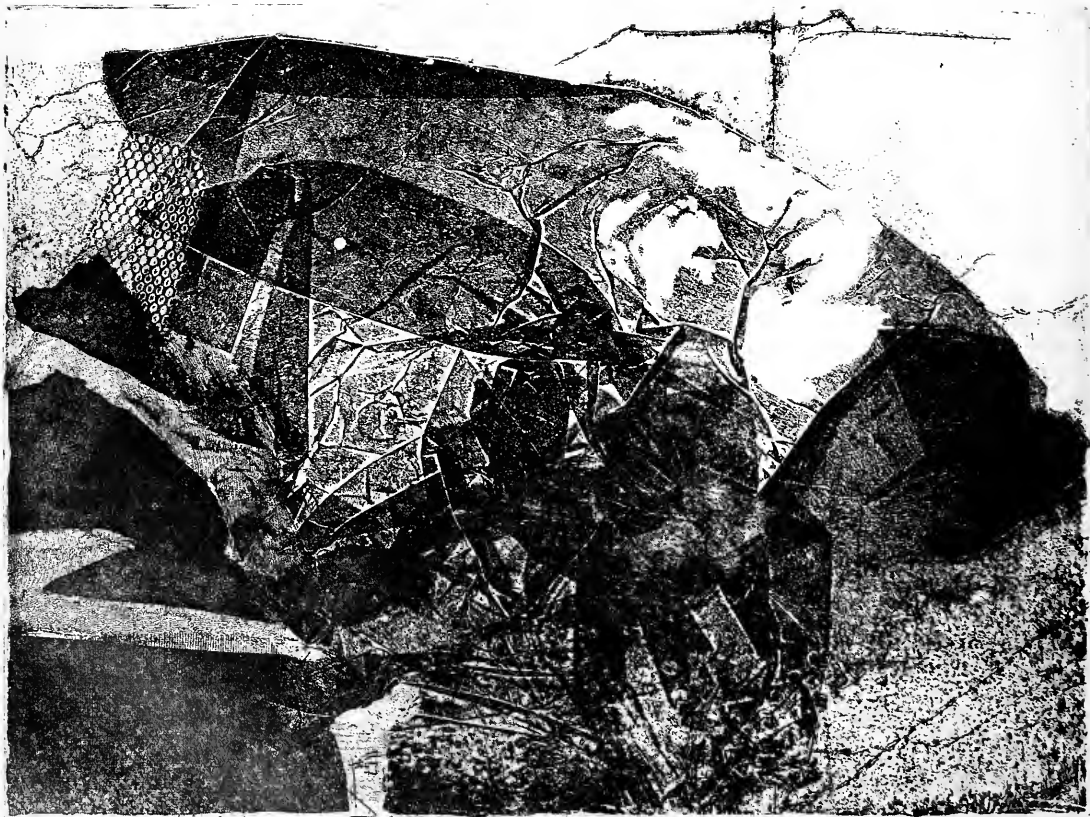




THE CHURCH HAD NEED OF MIRACLES

The Church had need of miracles,
And dredging back three hundred years
Found un-noticed, proud Bolsena
Where when miracles were current
At a doubting priest's first mass
The Host, when broken, bled.
Bolsena then was left to covet
Drops of blood in an altar cloth
Until Rome, having need of proof,
Took Bolsena's unwashed linen
As token for the skeptics
Or treasure for the Pope;
Leaving un-noticed, sad Bolsena
Because in such a doubting time,
The Church had need of miracles.

CAROLINE HORTON



TO CATCH THE DEAD

by

HARRY HUMES

I

His mother's voice sounded all wrong in the dream, the dream that was so lyrically terrifying, but so difficult to remember when he, awake and out of bed, was listening again to his mother's call and his own voice answering, confirming his return to the day that was beginning to renew itself outside, where the cardboard stiffness of night was melting in the early hours of the sun. It promised to be a hot day, good for swimming. *But it would be cool in the mine*, he thought. As he walked toward the bathroom he stopped before a small bookcase and ran his hand across his small collection of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, and disciplined himself once more. *Two more weeks*, he told himself. *Two more weeks* until the university. Fourteen more days, twelve of which he would go down into Joe Irish's small boot-leg hole and dig for coal.

From the bathroom window he gazed momentarily at the familiar scene. The pigeon coop rotted quietly on its cinder block foundation. When his father had been alive, the coop itself had been alive with cooing and fluttering racing birds, sleek, narrow-winged flyers that could travel five hundred miles in a matter of hours. Below it, almost against the wooden fence at the end of the narrow yard, the last of his father's beagles stretched herself backwards through her length and barked once or twice through the wire boundary of the pen. And across the town, the bells of the Polish church were tolling the early mass. He could imagine the incredibly old women in their shapeless clothing hurrying along Second Street toward the soaring facade of St. Stephen's.

Bill Davis turned and looked at himself in the mirror. At twenty his face had a paleness about it that often surprised him. His finger touched the small, blue scar high on his forehead. He remembered the day, almost a year ago, when the piece of coal had fallen from the tunnel's roof; the scar was the result, and it was coal dirt beneath the scar tissue that gave it its peculiar bluish look.

Anxious to begin the day, he washed and dressed quickly. In the kitchen he made his own breakfast, after which he hurried through a cigarette, then left the house to begin the mile walk to the mine. He skirted the American Legion memorial with its clumsy cannon and rows of white, flag-tipped crosses, still there from Memorial Day. He could remember the time when he and his friends had irreverently used similar crosses for swords. Crossing the railroad track that flanked the south edge of the narrow valley in which the town lay, he leaned forward to begin the climb. He could have ridden to the coal hole with the other four men who worked it, but he enjoyed the walk and the clear sounds of the morning. When he reached the old team road, he walked along it until he came to a clearing which overlooked the town. He was in the habit of stopping there for several minutes. Lighting a cigarette, he looked down at the dusty town. Its shape always reminded him of an hour glass. The north wall of the mountain bulged, so that the middle of the town narrowed, then spread out again at each end. He thought that even the houses in the middle of town had an odd, squeezed look about them.

His eyes moved toward the ruins of what had been the largest of the Philadelphia owned mines. It sat wearily on a small shelf on the side of the mountain. His father had been fire-boss there, until he and eighteen other men were trapped a mile underground by an explosion and a fire. They had tried for days to dig them out, but finally gave up and closed the mine for good. The owners of the mine had marked the spot with nineteen stones that stood questioningly in the shadow of the skeleton-like tower that rose over the boarded-up entrance. Billy felt the familiar stirring of something not resolved.

Looking off to his right, his eyes drawn by the railroad tracks that reached out of sight, he caught the flash of sun off the surface of the Mully, an abandoned stripping hole that was filled with clear water. He used to swim there, until that day two years ago when Jim had drowned. A shudder swept over him as he vividly recalled it. He forced it out of his thoughts. He crushed his cigarette beneath his boot, and turned toward the path that led upward through a narrow strip of woods that formed a bridge between two yawning holes. Each of the holes was several hundred feet deep. The entire area was pock marked with such holes, and when he was younger he had

had nightmares about falling into one. Suddenly a grouse exploded out of a clump of bushes off to his right. He instinctively aimed at it as it zigzagged between the trees. The bird set his wings and Billy watched it dip out of sight. It always surprised him to flush grouse this low on the mountain.

He climbed across a small camel back ridge; then, partly sliding, partly in control, he worked his way diagonally across a long, sloping slate wall. At the bottom he walked until he came to a dirt road that led to the mine. He could see the top of it above the trees, and soon he was close enough to hear the crisp voice of Joe Irish and the clanking of tools being prepared for the day's work. He knew it would be a hard day. After they had finished work yesterday, Joe Irish had fired a shot, and there would be a lot of coal and rock blasted free by the dynamite.

As Billy walked into the tin roofed shed, he heard the growling noise of the old truck that was used to lower and raise the small buggy along the tracks that led four hundred feet into the mine. He looked at the frighteningly thin cable that led like the apex of a triangle from the buggy up to a pulley, then ran back and down to where it was wound around a drum attached to the rear axle of the truck. A heavy platform of logs held the truck securely in place. Inside the small shed the noise of the truck was deafening. Billy wondered how Tony, the lift operator, could stand it.

Tony was in the cab of the truck making test runs. He worried about things like the brakes failing, sending the buggy hurtling down into the mine; or about bringing the buggy up too fast and running it right off the top of the platform. Any number of things worried Tony, and he cursed the earth in Polish, constantly.

Billy waved hello to the others and watched, for a time, as Tony lowered the buggy into the mine, then brought it to the surface. After the steel buggy emerged from the brooding hole, it continued upward along the rails that were secured to the tippel, until the wheels were stopped by two wooden blocks. At this point the buggy's load would be dumped into the large drum truck which was parked directly below the high wooden framework.

"Hey, Billy!" Irish called above the noise. "Let's go, let's go."

Fritz Bensinger, who was called simply the Dutchman, and who was the third miner who worked inside the mine, winked at Billy and said loudly enough for Irish to hear, "Such a small country they come from to be so loud."

Billy smiled at the familiar joking with which the men began the day.

"You, too, Dutchman. Let's shake it up a bit, if you please."

Billy took his lamp from the shelf and filled it with carbide. He placed more carbide in a small container, then put the container in his pocket. When they were inside he would pour a few drops of water through an opening on the top of the lamp, and then spin the flint wheel to spark a thin jet of flame into existence. He attached the lamp to his hard hat, picked up his tools, and followed the others outside.

Tony had lowered the buggy to the mouth of the mine. The three of them, Irish, the Dutchman and himself, would ride the buggy down. They would not come up

until late afternoon. Billy looked up at the sky. Three crows were flying along the side of the mountain. *The wrong valley*, he said to them silently. *Nothing but coal in this one. The corn for your breakfast is in the next.* He climbed into the buggy beside the other two miners and considered how they must look like pencils in one of those plastic holders. Irish waved to Tony, and the buggy began to roll into the mine. Billy watched the sky grow smaller and smaller, and he felt the damp coolness of the air on his face. Irish was talking to them about how much coal they would dig today. He listened to Irish, and then to the steady clack, clack, clack of the wheels against the joints of the rails. It reminded him of something. In the darkness of the mine he tried to remember what it was, but all he could think of was the way stones sound when struck together under water. The clacking of the wheels had the same hollow, sharp sound. Looking toward the small opening, becoming more and more like a pinhole in the surface of the earth, then disappearing altogether, he thought for a moment about the end of all this, and about the beginning of something new at the university. The air was now beginning to feel heavy, and he could smell the dynamite fumes.

II

In the truck Tony watched for the white paint on the cable that meant that the buggy was at the bottom level. He slowed its descent, and watched. Another layer of cable peeled off the drum before the white mark appeared.

At the bottom the three men crawled out of the buggy and lit their lamps. The white carbide jets of fire hissed and gave to the darkness a strange, dancing light that pushed the blackness away, momentarily, only to be consumed by it a short distance away. "You two start loadin'," Irish said. "I'm goin to check the air hole." He walked down the tunnel toward the jagged shaft that provided cross-ventilation and sometimes served as an escape route in case of trouble. Billy watched him moving away, his lamp flickering eerily in the dark; then he and the Dutchman headed toward the exposed vein of coal that was laid bare by the dynamite. The heavy timbers that supported the ceiling creaked and groaned under the downward thrust of the mountain. Billy had worried about them in the beginning, but he had grown accustomed to the noise; and although he never felt completely safe, he no longer fretted about it as he had earlier.

The Dutchman was grumbling about having to work underground instead of on top. He was thinking about how it would be to plow a field again and to harvest in the fall. One day, he thought, he would return to the farm. He stopped to inspect a cross timber that looked particularly weak to him. "These timbers don't last worth a damn. We'll all get killed if that damn Irishman don't get us some new timber."

Billy knew the Dutchman was talking to himself, so he merely looked at the timber and thought that it didn't look as bad as the other man seemed to think. Then they were walking through the tunnel again. The light from their lamps pulled them onward, almost as if they really had no say in the matter of their movement. Always, at such times, Billy felt as if he were encased in

a bubble of light with the darkness ahead and behind him, and that he was suspended somewhere between, like the bubble of a level. Something scurried ahead of them in the dark. He wondered how the rats managed to last in a place where there was little or no food. And then he remembered his father telling him about how miners who had been trapped by a cave in had eaten the rats. Now they were nearing the main coal vein. Billy saw the light from their lamps shattered into hundreds of glossy eruptions of reflection off the many sharp edges and planes of the coal, so black and so shining. The vein was almost two feet deep and several hundred feet long. Compressed between layers of rock and slate, it rose and fell in waves that reached far back into the past, to the carboniferous age when the swamps were already beginning to solidify, marking the beginning of the long process that had compressed the swamp gas and vegetation into fuel. Somehow he felt connected with it, and as he walked up a slight grade, he wondered would he ever really be severed from the dark. Thoughts of the university filtered through his mind. He shut them out, and listened to the Dutchman's mumbled conversation with the mine, with the ever present water and the rats, and occasionally with himself. Then they reached the section of the vein they had dynamited the previous afternoon. The dust had settled, but the air was still harsh with the acid stink of the explosion.

III

They had been digging for an hour, clearing the coal and rock that littered the floor of the mine. Shoveling the loose coal was easy, but now they were ready to use picks to remove part of the vein that had not fallen. The Dutchman wiped his face with his dirty hand, leaving a black smear across the bridge of his nose, then swung his pick in a long downward arc. Billy was standing some distance away when his ears were almost split apart by the explosion erupting from the other man's pick when it struck the coal. A rush of wind knocked him down and he felt his face being cut into by flying coal and rock chips; then he was spinning downward through a rumbling noise, and something was pushing on him, pushing him down out of the air. He struggled upward, back to consciousness, fighting for air and movement. It was totally dark. From far away he thought he heard a groaning noise, but it was muffled by another fall of rock and dirt and coal. When he tried to move he couldn't. A small prop lay across his chest, and a large piece of rock that had almost fallen on him, lay solidly on the end of the prop. Both arms were free, but a dull pain was beginning in the left one. He called to the Dutchman, and from the darkness came the same groaning sound he had heard earlier. He called again, but there was no answer; just the dark and the dust that enveloped him and filled his mouth and nose when he struggled to breathe against the log that pinned him. He tried to shift his body, but when he did, a terrible pain slashed through his legs, and he felt himself falling again, down and down into the other blackness, but once more he fought back up and tried to fight his rising panic.

Tony was sitting in the cab of the truck when he heard the heavy thump of the explosion. Minutes later, he saw the smoke come pouring from the mine opening. He ran to the entrance and shouted down. There was no answer; only the smoke that choked him. When it began to thin out, he started climbing down into the hole, fearful of what he might find. Halfway down he shouted again. Irish answered him. Tony waited for Irish to climb to where he was waiting.

"The Dutchman and the kid are trapped," Irish said.

"What happened?" Tony asked.

Irish shrugged and said, "I was over at the air hole working. Go back up and get some men to help dig."

Tony started up, cursing the mine; and Irish went back down, cursing his luck. He was thinking that he might be forced to close the mine because of this.

Billy was lifting some of the smaller rocks away with his right hand, stopping, often, to listen; and once, when he heard the groaning again, he called out, only to realize that it was he who had been groaning. Again he called out, first to the Dutchman, then to anyone, but there was no one and nothing.

The explosion had shattered the oak timbers that had supported the ceiling, which had fallen, closing off the tunnel from the rest of the mine. The Dutchman lay almost completely covered, crushed by the explosion, then by the cave-in. A strange sound bubbled out of his mouth. His hand still held the remains of the smashed pick handle. During fleeting moments of consciousness he tried to call to Billy, but it was a strange sound that he made, a guttural groan that he did not recognize as his own voice. Then he lapsed into unconsciousness again, his harsh breathing battling to continue, but foundering, frequently, into staccato rushes of breath, as the weight of the mass which covered him settled more and more into a permanent position.

Above the town the siren's whine rose an fell, and people rushed from their homes and gathered in clusters. They hung there along the streets like fruit, and shook their heads negatively to each other's questions. A rescue crew was already on its way to the mine. Most of the men were veteran miners who had brought both the living and the dead from the ruins of other mines. They were hard and experienced men, several of them covered with blue scars, a couple with one or more fingers missing, and all of them rallying to the hope against hope that was everything to them during such times. With them rode a mine inspector who had vowed to close every boot-leg hole on the mountain. None of the men liked him. His name was Ed Chambers, and he regarded Joe Irish as an outlaw. When they reached the mine, they gathered at the shed and looked at Joe Irish's rough sketch of the mine.

"This is where they are," he said, as he pointed to a spot on the map. "In the bottom tunnel." He tapped his finger several times on the sketch of the mine.

"What caused the explosion?" asked Chambers.

"Near as I can figure, musta been a stick of dynamite that didn't go off when I fired that shot yesterday."

"You know you're supposed to fire the sticks separately and count the shots. Did you?"

"Sure," Joe Irish lied.

"I'll just bet you did," Chambers said sarcastically. Irish ignored him and said, "The tunnel is open to this point." His fingers pointed to the map. "The top is down along here." He moved his finger along the pencil outline of the tunnel.

"Where's the air hole?" one of the men asked.

"Too far away to do any good. It's on the other side of the cave-in."

They continued talking for several minutes, then they began to prepare for their descent.

Billy Davis felt himself whirling downward. He called to the Dutchman three times before he sank from waking and from the throbbing pain in his legs. Then he was spinning in dizzying circles in the dark, green water, and he saw jagged rocks below him and the shattered sun above him on the surface. He was looking for someone among the rocks, but it all seemed to be so far away. He could hear a familiar voice and the words it used he had pushed far inside him for a long time; he had suppressed the words and the voice, so that only in dreams did he hear them, although sometimes when he was awake his mind reached down and brought it all to the surface.

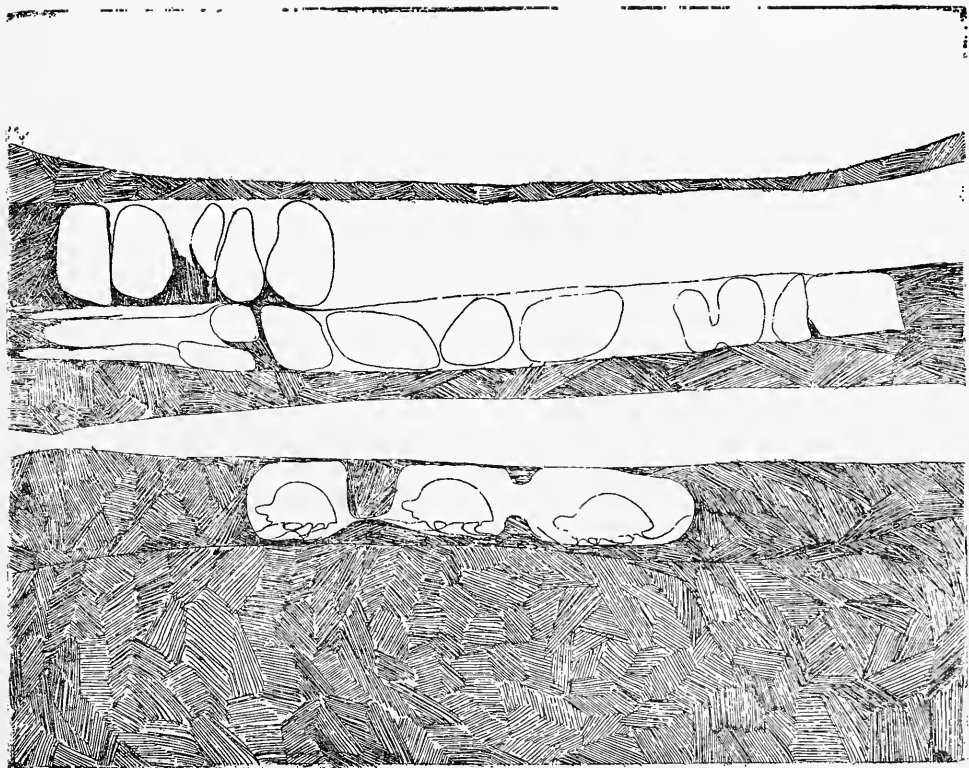
Then, through the green shadows of the water and among the other faces on the rocks, all of the dead faces, he saw Jim and could hear again all they had planned and talked about that summer. And now the plans all floated water logged and lifeless and out of reach, the way a person's limbs seem to drift out of reach when he is floating on his back. Suddenly he could hear his own voice yelling, *Don't dive, Jim. Don't. The Rocks. Not again.* The sound of his voice dissolved into a shape that was shuffling toward him through the dark that had rearranged itself into beads of black, and a large, shadowy head moved sluggishly from side to side as the form grew and padded toward him, and he was drawn toward it and repulsed by it as he saw chunks fly out of it and toward him. He was overcome by a paroxysm of nausea, and he was returned, momentarily, to consciousness by the waves of sickness that shook his entire body. Before he slid away from the pain again, he thought he heard a knocking somewhere, a steady knocking like at night when someone knocks against a sleeping house and has to keep knocking, knocking on the door. The sound faded as he called to Jim, called over and over again, until the rocks echoed the word, and shot it to the surface where it flew into pieces and vanished. He heard his own voice: *Jim, I'll go, too. I'll meet you there when I . . .* His voice trailed off into swimming motions, and he was drawn to the rocks where a form hung weightlessly, a

jagged red wound on the obscured skull; he was falling into the wound, feeling its pulsating rhythm all around him. Then it was gone, and another face, vague and shimmering, rose from the rocks, but he could never reach it. *Wait, he cried into the darkness. Father, don't leave. Wait for me.*

The rescue team took the cave-in apart rock by rock, knowing that each rock they removed might trigger a new fall. They worked silently, and with as much haste as was possible, for about an hour, then slowed their pace when they were within several feet of where Irish thought Billy and the Dutchman lay.

And through the whiteness he heard the knocking again. All the faces were gone and somehow the knocking relaxed and soothed him, found its way into the dark cavity in which he had hidden all who had died on him. He felt that he had expelled them, denied them for something else, although he wasn't sure what that something was. He thought it might be death and he thought about dying, but the knocking was getting louder and louder. Slowly he returned to the weight of the log across his body and to the numbness that replaced the pain. He called to the Dutchman, but heard no answer. Billy listened to the cautious digging noises that seemed to be almost on top of him. The sound lulled him to sleep, a patient, hopeful sleep, in which he floated and waited, not looking for anyone, no longer calling to the dead. Then he was vaguely aware of the abrupt cessation of the pressure on his chest and the resumption of the pain in his legs, although it was not so bad as earlier. Shadowy figures lifted him and carried him out of the tunnel. They placed him inside the buggy. Two men held him as the ascent began.

As the buggy rose, Billy could feel the air warming, and when they reached the top, the brilliance of the sun caused his eyes to ache. Then he was dimly aware of someone hovering over him and touching the pain in his legs. A hand was touching his face, a hand, he thought, that was connected to the person who was crying. He moved his arm slightly when he felt something prick it, hearing, as he did so, a voice that said to someone that he would be all right. As he was lifted into the waiting ambulance, he felt that he had caught up with the dead and had passed them, passed all of them, the old dead and the newly dead, and now he could leave them behind. A warmth pervaded his body that he felt was connected to the stinging in his arm. Then he began to drift toward a song that was beginning a long way off, and his body was gently rocked by the rhythm of the ambulance as it moved away over the deeply rutted dirt road.



WHILE THE OCEAN TURNS

I see
their long, thin stems

—straighter than the white ribs of
a perch
sea-snails
have partially devoured
on a shelf-rock near the tide—

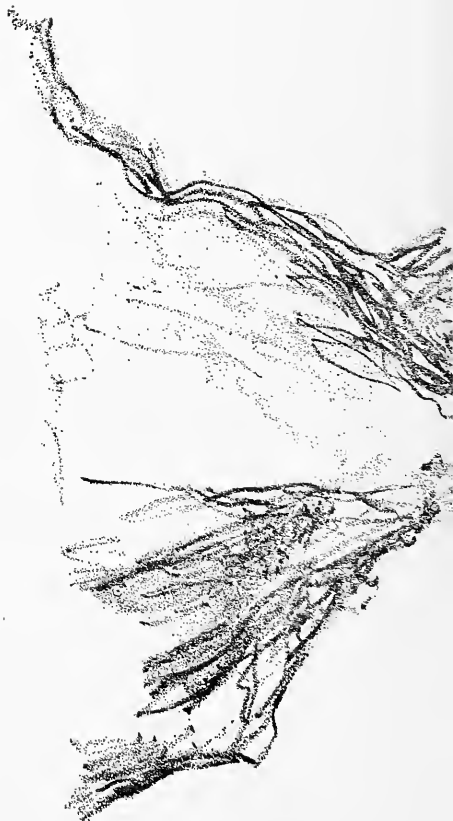
the thin, green
stems themselves
rising to my shoulder's height,
the fork of blooms widened
from the flower's green,
narrow brain,

and know

the waves are taking
rotten flakes
like blossoms
from the perch's side

while Queen Anne's Lace
illuminates the hill, conceals
the sudden prospect of the cliff,
consumes me.

WILLIAM PITT ROOT





TOUGH LUCK

by

ROBERTA ENGLEMAN

She fled down the dark street, looking neither to the left nor to the right. Strictly speaking it was not a head-long, heart-pounding flight, but her purpose was the same: escape. She could still hear the music from the party. The party had not wanted her, and now the hot darkness did not seem to want her either, but she went into it gladly. Maybe, she reflected, she had not wanted the party, in spite of all the promises she had made to Judy and her mother.

Her sister Judy had gotten her invited to the party. It was to be at the home of a friend Judy had made at school. (She made herself substitute the word "made" for "latched onto.") She had not gone to college, which might not have mattered but for the feeling that Judy, the elder, or Mother, or somebody had owed it to her. She protested the invitation, feeling it a half baked effort at appeal, but Judy had insisted.

"You'll have a good time, Marguerite. It's all in your mind."

"You bet," she muttered, twisting uncomfortably in Judy's dress.

"Stop it. You want the hem to be crooked?" Judy had said, mouth full of pins. Then she removed them and said as causally as she could, "There's nothing wrong with being a receptionist."

So Marquerite had gone, in Judy's hemmed-up dress and escorted by Judy's date's friend. She had gone with apprehension and reluctance, and what little optimism she had was being buried by an uneasy feeling of being condescended to.

She slowed her pace for a moment, so that the noise of her own locomotion did not fill her ears. There was no more party music, but she was still in that same rather prosperous section of town—big houses and big green lawns. The exercise had made her warm, and now the darkness seemed like a huge, furry blanket enfolding her. She remembered passing a small ice-cream parlor a block ago. She retraced her steps and went back to order a cone. The eternal, unwavering fluorescence of the place made her uncomfortable, so she wrapped the cone in some thin paper and took it out into the night again, feeling as she passed into the darkness a slow, thick drop of ice cream fall onto Judy's dress.

Judy had done well enough in finding her a date. Apparently he had been well briefed that he was not to talk about college. ("She wanted to go, but with me already a sophomore and Mother the way she is. well—. But she is very smart. I know you'll like her.")

Marquerite could imagine.

At first it had gone well. The house where the party was held, though spacious and bristling with antennae and electronic luxuries, had not been pretentious. The other couples floated from room to room, and when they saw her they invariably produced smiles that never quite made it to their eyes and floated on.

Her date was named Peter, and his first action had been to select a smile and ask if she knew Cosmo's Cafeteria on her street, for he liked the food there very much.

"Yes," she had said, feeling an initial surge of optimism. "Especially the shrimp."

"Our college cafeteria has fairly decent shrimp, but you know how college food—" The smile faltered. "Well anyway, I've had better shrimp in New York. There's a nice place not far from Shea Stadium."

He paused, and she nodded dumbly.

"When I visited the World's Fair this summer I saw the Mets," he continued as if by way of explanation. "Do you like them?"

"Oh yes," she said eagerly. "We have a lot in common. I mean—"

"Oh," he said. "Well—ah—have you been to New York?"

"Judy has—Judy went to the World's Fair."

"I guess she told you about it."

"Some."

And so they had exhausted all the pavilions, one by one. And after she had navigated those narrow little channels of rapport, the ship beached entirely. In her mind they were like two people sitting on an elephant and trying to pretend it wasn't there. After a half hour of avoiding the subject of frat parties, college boards, and the shrew in the student aid office (especially that), she had fled the kitchen in search of water to cool her hopelessly tied tongue.

It did not take Judy long, forehead puckering in annoyance, to track her down.

"What's the matter, Marguerite?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, dumping the contents of the glass down the drain. "Apologize to Peter for me."

"Why? He thinks you're great."

"I'll bet." She turned to go.

"Where're you going?"

"Home."

"You're not. You go right back—"

Marguerite slammed down the glass.

"All right, go pout," said Judy, pouting. "Give up. But it wasn't exactly easy for me to get you such a good date. He's practically sure to be Phi Beta Kappa, and he was pledged—"

Marguerite could hear his pedigree coming any minute.

"Sure he's nice, but we don't get along."

"You're just being contrary. You could like him if you tried."

"I have tried. Anyway you make it sound like grabbing the brass ring."

"Please come on. I've got to go back. My date'll wonder what happened to me." Judy swelled in indignation, as if her little sister had committed a deadly sin.

Marguerite looked at the ceiling and said, "I'll be right there."

"You're sure."

"Yes, yes."

"Good," said Judy cheerfully. "Hurry now." She grinned and went back to her date, hoping that she had fixed everything.

Marguerite waited a moment before she slipped into the back bedroom, unearched her sweater, and slipped out.

There had been no point in going home. Her mother wanted her to go to the party as much as Judy did. It was her way of making up. Marguerite decided to tell her a white or at least a grey-ish lie and say that she had had a wonderful time, hoping that Judy would be kind enough not to deceive her. So there she was, killing time, ambling indirectly homeward, and licking a raspberry royal ice cream cone.

The big lawns had disappeared by now, and houses were closer to the street, close enough to exhale life. It was a goulash of sounds. The oppressive night made the windows wider and everything seem closer together.

and she could sort out the different sounds, which were mostly electronic. One window poured forth television tommy guns. Others let out the sound of big stereos playing Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto or the William Tell Overture. Sometimes human sounds filtered out.

"Did I tell you Mrs. McGhee moved out to her sister's last week?"

"Yeah. You told me."

"Funny she didn't tell anybody sooner. She was packed and ready to go before anybody found out. Isn't it funny?"

"Yeah."

"Don't you guess she couldn't make ends meet. She must have been, ashamed."

"Mustaben."

The rest of the conversation drifted out of her hearing. One of the houses, a little smaller and closer to the street than the others, was playing some kind of half-familiar saddyish flute music from a radio. The music picked up as she came closer, and the trumpets began ordering the rest of the instruments around, stampeding the fiddles for a moment, and then the music righted itself. Marguerite felt drawn to the ordered rightness of it, and she walked a little slower, tossing the wad of paper from the ice cream into the bushes beneath the windows.

At first she thought it was an animal that had startled her by scuttling back into the shrubbery. She stopped and caught her breath when the paper came flying back out of the bushes and the little animal spoke to her.

"I wasn't doing anything. I was just going, really I was. Don't tell."

Marguerite peered into the thickest of arborvitae. "I won't," she replied automatically, as if she always answered bushes. "In the first place I don't know anybody to tell."

A little girl's head emerged, turtle fashion. "Thanks," she said, and she started to withdraw again. The fiddles trotted on.

"Hey, wait."

"Shh," said the bushes.

Marguerite lowered her voice and bent down. "What are you doing in there?"

"Listening." Apprehension was gone out of the child's voice. She reminded Marguerite no longer of a frightened animal but of a miniature lady in an imaginary velvet opera box.

Marguerite, however, was persistent. She felt the need of something interesting to change the subject with when the time came to explain her desertion, and this seemed admirable.

"Well—isn't it sticky in there?"

"Of course it is." The child stuck her head out, frowning with impatience. "I don't mind."

The music stamped its feet in several imperious chords, as if, too, were annoyed, and stopped. The silence lasted a moment, and the music, having regained its composure, started again, sedately. The child grinned, but her face fell when the music was cut off by a plastic pop. Forgetting her annoyance at Marguerite, she sighed. "They turned it off again before I could hear what it was. I guess they knew." Then she cocked her head thoughtfully at Marguerite, as if the troublesome intruder might be useful.

"Do you know what it was?"
"I think," whispered Marguerite, "it's the overture to an opera. La Forza del Destino."

"The what del what? What does that mean?"
"Tough luck," she replied, thinking of a joke her father had once made.

"You mean really? Who'd do a thing like that?"
"Verdi," Marguerite replied. "He wrote operas."
"Oh, Singing." The little shoulders shrugged. "They don't listen to singing. I guess that's why they turned the radio off."

"Maybe so." Marguerite straightened up and started to walk away.

"Hey!" exclaimed the little girl. "How do you know?"
"Shh!" The shrill voice had been rising. Marguerite could envision heads coming out of windows all over the neighborhood.

"Be quiet, those opera haters'll hear you."
The child stood up gingerly. "Okay," she whispered. She maneuvered out of the bushes and brushed the brown prickles off herself. Marguerite supposed she was about ten, dressed in shorts and a red cotton shirt that advertised a local summer camp and the name Jackie.

Their conversation seemed to be finished, so Marguerite walked away. The child, however, followed her, so after several seconds she turned around and looked a question at her.

"This is the way home," Jackie said.
"Oh." Marguerite turned again and went on, and the little girl went on just as she had before, three paces behind.

Other sounds, televisions and radios, had begun to supplant the music they had heard. From behind her Marguerite could hear the child trying to hum snatches of it, but the snatches got smaller and shorter. Finally the child could not stand it anymore.

"How," she called, "did you know what it was?"
Without slowing down, Marguerite turned her head.
"My father used to take me to the opera every trip we made to New York before he died. He liked operas."
"Oh, My father's dead too. But my brother works in the ice cream place. I go to wait for him every night in the summer."

"That's why you were sitting under the bushes."
"Yeah. We've got a radio at home, but I can't find the right station. Anyway my sister Betty plays it all the time."

"It's a different kind of radio. Not like you have, I guess."

"Oh." Jackie swung around a lamp post. "I figured."
They resumed their silence and walked along again for a few paces, listening to the sound of their own footsteps. The houses were becoming nondescript. Sometimes there were television sounds, but mostly all they could hear was tinny radios.

"Do you like that kind of music?" asked Marguerite, feeling two little eyes on the back of her neck.

Jackie did a sort of skip and jump. "Oh golly!" she said, bouncing along on one foot. "Oh golly!" Then she looked down, and she said hesitantly, "Yeah, sort of." She pointed her chin at the sky and jammed her fists tomboyishly in her pockets. Out of the corner of her

eye Marguerite watched her march on like that for a moment.

"Does it really mean tough luck?"
"The Force of Destiny," Marguerite amended herself.
"Oh. It sounds like bad luck. I mean—sad—like something bad had happened to you and you didn't know how to get over it. Do you ever feel like that?"

Marguerite rubbed at the spot on her sister's dress.
"Sometimes."

"I bet you know an awful lot."
"No. I don't go to school. I have to stay with Mother. She's had a heart condition since I was about your age."

Marguerite looked around in order to receive the child's sympathetic look, but she was craning her neck up as if she were star gazing.

"That's music," said Jackie absently, "is like the guy that wrote it had been up there and back. It's like he'd been up where God lives. Don't you think?"

Marguerite nodded.
"I bet he felt like he could reach out and touch that star right—there." Jackie jumped up as if she were making a basketball goal. She continued to bounce along the street, trying to hum scraps of music again.

Marguerite found herself delving into her memory to the time in New York when her father in his black suit and she in that funny blue hat had sat very high in the fourth tier and had shared the opera glasses. She cupped her hand around her eye as if adjusting the glasses, and suddenly the memory came in strong. She pursed her lips and whistled the flute melody.

She walked on, but Jackie stopped to concentrate. She eventually reproduced a thin but unmistakable trickle of sound. Marguerite stopped and turned to look, and they both laughed delightedly. Jackie ran to catch up, and all pretence of being strangers was gone. After that both of them, reluctant to return to their respective homes, dragged their feet along together, and they talked.

There were several children in Jackie's family. Bill and Ben and Carrie worked, but Betty didn't have a job. Gegg was just a baby. Jackie was going to work at the dry cleaners when she was old enough, even if Betty thought it was an awful job. After the family biography there were the special things: the first night she heard the music out the window, the prize paper she wrote in the fourth grade ("What Freedom Means to Me"), and a little Austrian man who lived across the street from her. He ate prodigious amounts of crackerjacks and always gave her the prize.

"It's like getting flowers and things from the king of Austria," Jackie concluded.

"Austria doesn't have a king."
"Oh well."

And Jackie in turn had been regaled with Marguerite's history up until her graduation from high school. The rest, she intimated, was a total loss.

"Gee," said Jackie, shaking her head. "That's like the opera."

"The force of destiny?" asked Marguerite, tone ponderous with the burden of fate.

"Tough luck," the child replied.

The radios had stopped, and the night was quieter. By the time Marguerite could think of a suitable reply,

Jackie had begun looking very uncomfortable. Marguerite glanced down the street. A big girl in blue pants and a shirt like Jackie's was approaching them.

"Jackie?" she said.

"Yeah, Betty."

"Where've you been?"

"Walking."

Marguerite sidled off down the street to avoid a confrontation.

"Well you come on," said Betty. "Mama wants me to roll her hair, and somebody's got to watch the baby."

"I better go meet Bill."

"You come on. Bill can meet himself."

Marguerite turned and waved to Jackie as she was being taken in tow by the older girl.

"Tough luck," she mouthed, and Jackie stifled a giggle behind her sister's back. The child was pulled into one of the houses, and Marguerite, looking at her watch, walked away.

When Judy arrived on the front porch of their house she found Marguerite in the swing, squeaking back and forth.

"Good lord, Marguerite," she whispered raspishly, "I hope the boys didn't see you. You should have seen me explaining how you got sick and took a cab home."

"Are you going to tell Mother?"

"I don't know," Judy replied, "I don't know what to do."

Wishing she could see her sister's face, Marguerite offered, "If I promise to behave from now on?"

"You promised you weren't going home, too."

Marguerite went to the banister and traced the constellations on the southern horizon.

"Cross my heart, Judy. Cross my heart and hope to die."



FOR BETH, ON HER BIRTHDAY

Beth, who never was Elizabeth,
For fear she might be Liz, is growing old.

Elected twin in laughter, you
Comprise the stronger part. (I laugh
In fear, and you, with love. I
Envy you your greater scope.)
You come to talk of literature
And art and neighbor's gossip
And you love them all, my Beth,
Eleven now. You emulate
Your brother's cherub looks,
But only parody the style:
Your firework eye belies,
In mischief, what you might achieve.
You captivate your wrinkled friends,
Your truest friends, like me at least
Eight years or more beyond
And jealous of your laughter. But
You, my Beth, are growing old.
Eleven now.

SUSAN SETTLEMYRE



THE CARD PLAYER

Alone now with my solitary game,
What secrets am I laying to divine,
Slapped down within their calculated frame?
I dealt them, and the order must be mine.
Now show your mottled faces, black and red
Nobility. Of all, the heart is best,
But diamonds flaunt their brittle shield instead
To spoil my schemes and hold the rows compressed.
This is devised morality, I grant,
A means to keep my private, unmarked score.
Compliance with my fantasy is scant:
My cards refuse, consider me no more
Ordainer, only reason-crazy fool.
My ordered deck will not accept my rule.

SUSAN SETTLEMIRE



THE WAVERING FIELD

The plow has stung the farmer's hands with callous.
Waiting for the boy, he attempts to balance
his body's exhaustion with the land's. From above
the sun's oceanic glare discovers
the wavering field where seeds root in the waste
of crops plowed under. He runs with sweat.
His face and raised arm gleam. Both feet
hidden in the broken earth, he leans
against the stock and shades his eyes—his legs
a clay of sweat and dust smoked from the acres
his plow has cut—to watch his youngest son,
run against the shimmering horizon,
run from the house and past the family graveyard.
A mason jar of water shines in his arms.

WILLIAM PITT ROOT



TODAY AND THEN TOMORROW

by

THOMAS W. MOLYNEUX

I

When the bell rang, he went last from the classroom. He sat for a minute at his desk while the others passed, and then, holding the brown bag which contained his lunch between thumb and index finger, moving seemingly without willful slowness but rather with petty, particular, preoccupied indolence, he walked out the door and along the hall. At the end of the hall, where the others had turned left toward the lunchroom, he turned right, went along that hall, down the three low broad steps at its end, turned left and then right again to the small dusk corner behind the study hall in which the public telephone booth was set.

He stood then before the booth, the bag now held in both hands before him, seeming to pull his heaviness some forward, with an air that waiting here for this was no worse than waiting somewhere else for something else, while the boy already in the booth completed his call.

He still stood there when the other boy hung up and stepped from the booth. The other boy was taller than he and, of course, leaner. The other boy began to pass. Then, suddenly, he noticed Gibby, and he stopped, and a rectangular smile came taunting upon his rectangular face. Gibby, too, smiled, his features thin and tight on his round face; he smiled with a quick twitch, as though at once submitting to and mocking the other's mockery. But, though he smiled, his face did not open, only popped, stretched, distorted, shined.

"Why, Gibby," said the other. "I didn't see you waiting. Another call, eh, Gibby?"

"Yes."

"Who do you call every day, Gibby? Who would talk to you everyday?" His tone undulated extremely, like that of an old woman speaking to a child, and the voice had still a fundamental harsh disbelief about it.

Gibby's smile held rigid on his face, its thin line seeming to support the two pink dimples which boomed in his cheeks. Then the other reached and pinched one of the dimples and twisted it.

"Gibby, you're just pathetic, aren't you?" he said.

When the other released his dimple, Gibby smiled again.

The other shook his head with the same exaggerated swing his tone of voice had held. He turned away and went round the corner toward the lunchroom.

"Albert Sheridan," said Gibby. "Sigh."

He stepped into the phone booth and closed the door about three quarters of the way, until the light in the booth came on. Inside, he opened the lunchbag and placed the two wrapped sandwiches, the napkin, and orange he drew from it on the ledge beneath the phone. He ate the first sandwich and then the second, depositing the wax paper from each in the bag. Every once in a while, he dabbed at the corners of his mouth with the napkin.

Sometimes, echoing in the high halls outside the booth, Gibby could hear the clack of heels as others passed by, and sometimes, briefly, the wordless lines of their voices. But mostly it was quiet outside. The booth sat away from the corner and was loose to rock, so that when Gibby shifted his weight, the booth too shifted and he heard the single bump as it settled to a new balance.

Gibby took a mechanical pencil and, with the point retracted, he gouged a crossline through one of the notches he had long before gouged in rows into the wood of the booth door. He looked at tomorrow's notch, and wished that by crossing it out, he could make today tomorrow and tomorrow nearly gone. Without counting, he knew that only seventeen remained until the end of the term in January, when they would ask him to leave. The circled notch about two thirds along the second of the three rows indicated the end of football season. When he had crossed that one off, Gibby had said aloud, "Sigh, sigh," knowing that the worst was past.

After he had finished the lunch and crumpled its remains into the bag, Gibby continued to sit in the booth. The light of the booth shone directly down upon him, spotlighting him starkly in the dusk corner. His face was perfectly round, his features all narrow and thinly lined within it. While he sat there, under the cutting glare of light, only the line smooth mouth moved. And only the tips of that, seeming to curl up sometimes, like the bright red runners on a new sled. But the movement was barely perceptible, and even when his round face held straight, there sat on it a surface thinness at once submissive and mocking, so that an observer would have been hesitant to say about the lip movement. Beneath the roundness of his face, Gibby's body rolled, seemingly boneless, the light cutting into it and leaving a thin black line of shadow across his white shirt in the groove between the wave of his chest and the wave of his stomach. His small feet pushed firmly against the floor of the booth. His small, puffed hands folded together and rested lightly against his stomach.

Along the hall, the door to the outside opened, and an edge of the outside light fell down through the dense dust motes of the hall, and lay narrow and pale on the floor. The voices came along the hall then, and Gibby reached and pulled the door of the booth wholly to. First his left and then his right shoulder swelled backwards, as Gibby squirmed deeper into the booth. His hands on his lap twined more tightly.

There were six boys. They were almost past him when one of them stopped, dramatically abrupt, and said, "There's Gibby."

Across the straight surface of light and through the window of the booth, marked with finger prints and words in smudged ball pen ink, Gibby smiled.

"Albert Sheridan," said Gibby. "Sigh."

"Hiiah, Gibby," said one.

"Gonna make another call, Gibby?" said another.

The boys gathered outside the booth. Gibby smiled out at them.

"Want some privacy, Gibby?" said Albert.

Gibby's smile tightened.

"Let's give Gibby some privacy," said another.

Then they were behind the booth, on the side where the rack for the phone book juttied out. Gibby's shoulders closed, and his eyes closed completely; his hands pressed flat against the nubbed walls of the booth. Through their laughing and their pell mell piled words, he heard the bump bump bump of the booth. His bottom slid from the seat and he pressed his feet more firmly against the floor of the booth. He opened his eyes once, saw that now the booth looked out half to hall and half to wall, and, then quickly, shut the eyes again. The bumping slowed now, but when it came, it came with a greater thump, and the booth reared back from it and bumped twice again in echo. Above and across him the light spluttered.

It did not matter. It did not matter. It didn't matter. The first time it had mattered, but it did not matter now.

Both of Gibby's small hands clenched tight and flat on the ledge beneath the phone. The knuckles of his thumbs on top were red and the flesh at their edges white. He pinched at the ledge. His round face was smooth and rigid and closed. Beneath it, his shoulders were closed.

It did not matter. There were seventeen more days with Christmas between and it did not matter. The first time he had wet himself, but now it did not matter.

He opened his eyes. Before him, the wall popped. He threw his arms across his face and stamped his feet forward. Then the top of the booth snapped against the wall. The booth rolled back. Gibby pulled forward upon himself. Now it was dark. Briefly, in outline, in the glass of the booth, he saw his round face and the dark line of his shut lips. Then he closed his eyes. Again the booth banged the wall. Though still his eyes were closed, he knew the light had come back on.

The first time the light had shut off first thing. And he had had to stay there with his pant leg cold against his own leg, stinking. But now it did not matter. He had stayed there in the dark and the cold smell for two hours and when he had returned they had made him write *I shall be punctual* one hundred times for the two classes he had missed. And anyhow, someone had seen that the press had gone out of his pant leg and that the material still was heavy and discolored, and had guessed.

Then the rocking of the booth ceased.

"Are you all right in there, Gibby?" called a voice, muffled but still with the taunting clear.

Gibby's lips turned, as by reflex, into a quick smile, mocking unknown the outside voice. Gibby opened his eyes. The light in the booth shone and before him, through the smudged glass, he could see the green of the wall. After a second, he stood up, hiked his jacket more smoothly onto his shoulders, and sat again on the edge of the seat.

"One more for good measure," said Albert Sheridan's voice.

Again Gibby's body closed upon itself. But, even as he reacted, the booth bent forward and cracked against the wall. Already, the booth was rocking back when Gibby's arms glanced from his sides. His face hit into the handle of the door and he felt the ledge beneath the phone into his chest.

The second time he had cried. The first time he had wet himself and the second time he had cried, and both times he had missed classes and been punished. But now it did not matter. The first time the pant leg had pressed into his leg and made him shiver. But now it could not matter.

He felt his face. The skin beside his nose was numb. Between the skin and his finger, blood smeared like grease. Gibby took his handkerchief and wiped the blood away. He looked at the handkerchief. Then he wiped more blood and blew his nose. His eyes watered and smarted, but he was not crying, though the second time he had cried. He tilted his head back and pressed the handkerchief to his nose.

Outside, first it was quiet. Then someone said, "Let's rock it some more," and Albert Sheridan said, "No, that's enough." Then Gibby heard them leaving.

He drew his finger softly along his face. Though he felt the finger moving there, the skin beside his nose felt somehow numb, as though a crust had formed there. He took the handkerchief from his nose and picked the drying patches of blood from the rim.

For a time, Gibby sat, watching out at the green wall. His round face was terribly smooth, and the narrow features made little impression upon it. Once, he said, rather as an afterthought, "Ouch." And once he closed his eyes. Then, the eyelids came down, smooth and rounded as the skin on his cheeks, and his long lashes curved, indicating his eyes as his red lip line indicated his mouth, and having the same thin definite and at once ambiguous quality, fulfilling the doll's symmetry of his face.

Finally, he took a dime from his pocket, inserted it in the phone, and dialed the operator.

He said, "May I please have the number for the St. David's Day School?"

When the operator told him the number, he repeated it. He thanked her, hung up, and waited for his dime to return. Then he called the school number.

"May I speak to Dr. Warren?" he said.

Miss Bauer's voice at the other end said, "The headmaster is at lunch. Who's calling please?"

"This is Gibby Leslie. I'm afraid I've gotten myself stuck in the phone booth, and I wondered if Dr. Warren would come let me out."

"Stuck in the phone booth?"

"Well, it's gotten turned round toward the wall."

"You mean someone turned it around on you?"

"Yes," said Gibby.

"I'll get someone, Gibby. Just stay there," said Miss Bauer.

"Yes," said Gibby. "Thank you."

After a while, Gibby heard the flat steps of a man's long strides along the hall and then down the low broad

steps at its end. He could also hear the clacking of Miss Bauer's high heels. Gibby reached and picked his crumpled lunchbag from the floor. He sat more deeply in the booth, and folded his small puffed hands loosely in his lap.

II

On the first day, first thing, the headmaster had said, "Well, Gibby boy, are you going to be as good a halfback as your father was?"

After a minute, his mother said, "Well, he's certainly going to try." Her voice laughed all along the little phrase.

And then, the headmaster: "Well, he certainly has the size."

I am fat. My father had a beautiful physique and, were he alive today, he would be ashamed to have so fat a son. But he would be proud of me for being here. He loved St. David's.

The floors were flagstone and the walls were green. They walked along the hall from the headmaster's office and down the three low broad steps at its end, turned left into the darker hall behind the study hall, the floor of which was dusty concrete.

"This is the study hall," said Dr. Warren.

They went up the stairs at the end of the hall. Dr. Warren wore a bow tie striped green and white for St. David's. The collars of his button down shirt were unbuttoned.

He was saying, "Yes, we were lucky to have an opening. Of course, we've such a long waiting list. But then Gibby is Walter's son. And yours."

And his mother: "Well, this was always where Walter wanted Gibby to come. He always said, no boarding school for him and no boarding school for his boy."

I will have to play football. I will have to learn. But it will be easy for me, it will come naturally. My father was so good.

In the upstairs hall, they stopped, and Dr. Warren showed them Gibby's father's name on the plaque. ST. DAVID'S SCHOOL, 120 YARD HIGH HURDLES, 1938. WALTER G. LESLIE, JR. 12 SECONDS.

"It's still the record," said Dr. Warren. "Maybe it's been holding out for Gibby. Maybe in a couple years, Gibby will break it."

They all will like me here because they all will remember my father. And they all liked him. I will have to learn to play football. I will have to lose weight.

"It's not just for Walter I wanted Gibby to come here. Dr. Warren," said his mother. "Really, it's more for Gibby himself. To get somehow to feel his father. I want him to know how important his father was, how fine. I wanted him to come here because I feel that part of his father is still here. And I want him to know whatever of Walter he can."

"Yes," said Dr. Warren.

Then, "This is the auditorium," said Dr. Warren.

The walls in the auditorium were white. On the wall, in gold letters outlined in green, they saw Gibby's father's name again.

They must like me.

On the football field, Dr. Warren introduced him to the coach. Dr. Warren was taller than the coach. As he reached out to pat Gibby goodbye, the veins in his hand ran long between the large brown freckles.

"Well," said the coach, "have you ever played before?"

"Not really. Not with a real team. But my father played."

"Yes, I know your father played. Well, put your helmet on. We always wear our helmets out here. The whole time."

Further along the field, the junior varsity was practicing. And, beyond them, on the big field, the varsity was round in a circle doing calisthenics. The calls popped, hunh, hoo, hee, hoor, hunh, hoo, huge coughs in the distance.

"What position do you play, Leslie?"

"My father played halfback."

"But what position do you play?"

Smile. "I don't know."

"Try guard."

My father played halfback. This coach doesn't like me. But he will. I will be good. Naturally. My father played halfback. He never played junior varsity, always for the varsity. Sometimes, my father did not wear a helmet.

"Lean forward. Put some weight on that hand. I can just knock it out from under you."

The coach's hand slapped across Gibby's arm, and the arm flung aside. For a second, Gibby hung there, tottered on his flexed legs, then he plunged flat and forward.

"Again. Lean on the arm. It's got to support you. It's got to be stable."

He doesn't want me to smile.

"No, Leslie, no. Lean forward. You look like some rich boy draftee on his first try at the latrine. You're not protecting yourself, you're getting set to hit. You look like you're squatting back to a latrine. And all ready to fall in."

The coach's arms shot out and hit his bundled shoulders. The pads clacked. For a second, he straightened up, and then he fell back on his butt. All of them, around him, laughed.

Once you learn the fundamentals, the rest is easy. If my father had not been killed, if it weren't for the war, I'd know all this now. I'd just know it and I'd be the best. And I'd have a beautiful physique like my father.

After the games, the mothers served cokes and pretzels. And you filled your helmet with pretzels and went into the locker room. That was the smell of St. David's. It was a cold smell and a sharp one. Everyone had to take a shower. And everyone had to wear a supporter, because they were old enough now.

"So this is Walter's son," said the woman. "Yes, he has Walter's eyes, I see that."

Gibby sat on the grey bench. The window before him was open. Across his body, the air danced coolly. In the open space, he could see the strip of heightened green and blue of the outside day. The glass in the window was

greyed and nubbed, so that only a dull light passed through. After a minute, he unlaced his shoes and jersey. He took a pretzel from his helmet and chewed slowly at it, seeming to draw it into whatever reverie he was about.

I will get better. Already, I am stronger. And it doesn't hurt so now to run the laps. My eyes don't hurt anymore. Now, I lean forward, and I keep my eyes open when I hit.

I have to go in and shower. Maybe no one will snap me. Maybe no one will say anything.

From the shower room and along the aisles, came vague calls. The other bench in the aisle with Gibby scraped grudgingly across the concrete floor. Sometimes, he could smell the mint medicated locker room smell and sometimes the air from the outside cut through it.

"Leslie, you're just pathetic," said the coach.

Albert Sheridan and Philip McCreary were still in the aisle.

Smile.

"Don't give me that damned smile," said the coach.

The other two boys were standing, naked, listening. Gibby stood, wearing only his supporter.

"You're fat," said the coach, "fat and pink. I put you in today because I knew what a fine football player your father was. But, Leslie, you're yellow."

That isn't so. That isn't so. How was I yellow?

"Fat and pink and yellow. Pathetic."

No, I wasn't yellow. I'm not. My father would be ashamed of a coward. Sometimes, he played without a helmet. And I would too. Ask me to. Let me. I would.

There were thirty four days to go. Six till the end of football season. When the test was over, he could go and cross off today. He had filled in all the 0's and 8's on the mimeographed test. They would ask him to leave in January. Then he would have to go back to public school. Dr. Warren had already promised. And his mother had, too, though she had cried and said she would find a military school where he'd see how he liked it.

My father is ashamed of me right now. I have made my mother ashamed before my father. And I have shamed my father before all these others, who do not like me. They ought to have liked me. My father was a star here when most of their fathers were in some public school.

The teacher said, "Why aren't you writing, Leslie? You've only got fifteen minutes more."

"I've got writer's cramp."

"Why don't you just give up, Leslie?"

"Yes." Smile.

In fifteen more minutes, I can cross today off. One day at a time. Then there will be thirty three and five. If I could just cross them all off and have it all over. But you have to wait. One day at a time. When I was sick, I got to cross off three days at once, when I came back. But I won't get sick again, not for her to believe. One day at a time.

He handed in the empty test sheet.

My father wasn't good in algebra either.

While the others passed out, he sat still at his desk. His lunch was at his feet. He retracted the point on his mechanical pencil.

"Do you want to do it during lunch, Gibby?" said the teacher. "I'll stay if you want and you can have the extra hour."

"No, thank you." Smile.

"Leslie, what is it with you? You can do this work. Easily. I knew your father, and I want to tell you, he'd be ashamed of you now. He never did anything that he didn't try to do his best."

My father is dead. I don't want a father. I don't want a father. I haven't got a father and I don't want one.

III

Gibby drew his finger across his cheek. Beside his nose, the strip of skin continued to respond to touch unsurely, as though a crust had formed upon it. But, when he had looked in the mirror, it had not been discoloured.

Now that football season was over, the schoolbus left at 3:15. But that left still forty five minutes to wait. Gibby sat on the bank of now brown grass. Above and before him, the sky seemed to step away from him in white rimmed banks. He leaned back against the fence of the tennis courts and hugged his arms about himself. Tomorrow, when he crossed off the notch, there would be just sixteen more days. But he had to wait until tomorrow, because that was what the notches meant, and they had to be crossed off one day at a time.

Behind the tennis courts, at his back, he could hear voices and, sometimes, single specific exclamations, angry. The bank dropped down sharply before him to the greyed parking lot where the bus would come. When he had first arrived in September, the bank had been an even whole green. Now, sometimes in the mornings, white frost glistened on the individual strands of grass and clover. But, this late in the day, the sun, coming down in geometrical columns from behind the heavy receding grey clouds it outlined, had dried any frost.

Again, Gibby felt the numbed strip of skin beside his nose, shivering some as he did, and wished that today were tomorrow, so that he could cross off the notch and have it be only sixteen days.

He heard steps then on the diagonal dirt path behind him and to his right. After a second, he turned his head, and seeing Dr. Warren, notched his round face into its rigid closed smile. The fronts of Dr. Warren's shoes reared upwards as he walked, and flapped down after the heel had settled. Dr. Warren's grey topcoat was buttoned. Across the top of the small vee of white shirt showing beneath his neck, the green and white St. David's bow tie sat.

Dr. Warren descended two of the steps toward the parking lot, his shoe ends turning up less markedly than along the flat path, before he looked aside, saw Gibby, and nodded his small head.

"Hello, old Gibby," he said.

Gibby continued to smile.

Dr. Warren descended another step. Then he paused, his left leg bent aesthetically at the knee, the foot poised on the step above the right. Finally, he turned round and came back up the steps, and approached Gibby along the edge at the top of the bank.

Still smiling, Gibby got to his feet.

"Well," said Dr. Warren. "Everything all right, old Gibby?"

"Yes, sir," said Gibby.

Dr. Warren stood for a second. His hands, the fingers extended flat, drew from his topcoat pockets, hesitated against his side, and returned again to their envelopes. Gibby saw how long and thin the fingers were. Dr. Warren, standing before Gibby, looked out across the parking lot, looked somewhere past the rust red snow fence at its edge. His face was very small and his features very full within it.

He said, "Well I happen to know they aren't."

"Sir?" said Gibby.

"I happen to know they aren't. I happen to know you are flunking three of four courses."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know you are going to have to leave at the end of the term?"

"Yes, sir," said Gibby. "Seventeen days."

Dr. Warren drew his eyes, round like quarters, steadily across Gibby, and settled them at some point along the cinder track beyond the tennis courts over Gibby's shoulder.

"The wrestling team," said Dr. Warren. "Run every day till the snow comes."

Still, Gibby's face shined, smiling roundly.

"Gibby, we could let you stay another term. For your mother, because it means so much to her that you go where your father went and wanted you to go. And because we don't want to give up on you. We don't like to give up on any boy, not after we accept them, and especially not you, not Walter Leslie's son. We can't believe that you aren't going to show the same stuff as he. I can't. I taught your father English, you know."

Gibby did not answer.

"But we need to be shown that you care, Gibby. That you want to stay here, where your father wanted you. We've got a waiting list, five boys out for every one in, five that can do the work, and we have to know, old Gibby. Think about it. And about your parents. If you want another term, we'll help you, if you want it."

Still, Gibby was quiet.

"Well," said Dr. Warren. "Winter's here, eh old Gibby. That's some tie you've got there. Some tie. Is it some kind of new material?"

He reached out and shuffled the ends of Gibby's tie between his long fingers.

"Yes, sir," said Gibby. "They call it silk."

Dr. Warren's fingers let go the tie. He put his hands, open flat, again into his topcoat pockets. "Yes," he said. He turned and walked back along the edge, and down the steps, and across the parking lot, his toes snapping up before him, his dark form shrinking and dimming toward the street outside the school.

Gibby settled again onto the bank, leaned back and squirmed for a moment against the fence, and was still. He wondered did his mother know of Dr. Warren's offer, and decided she would, knowing that he would learn for sure tonight.

Behind him, the voices had ceased, and now in the stillness other sounds came to him: the wind, and traffic

in the streets beyond, above, the anachronistic spring time buzz of a small plane, an occasional whump of pigeon's wings in takeoff.

At three o'clock, the bell in its tower rang and trailed, rang and trailed, rang and trailed. During football season, that had signalled the beginning of practice. The final ring hung unevenly in the air.

"There's Gibby," someone said.

"No books, Gibby?" said another.

Gibby turned his head and watched them approach along the path.

"Albert Sheridan," said Gibby. "Sigh."

"Gibby's so smart, you know," said Albert Sheridan.

There were three other boys, and now they stood, crowded beside and behind one another on the narrow edge of the bank beside Gibby. Albert Sheridan stood closest to Gibby, his knees almost touching Gibby's shoulder. His head was long and rectangular, and his ears were small and round, jutting out perfectly midway along the length of it. His hands, like his head, were long and roughly flat and squared at their ends.

"Well, Gibby," he said. "Want to go for a trip?"

"No," said Gibby.

"No?"

"Not today," said Gibby.

"Why not today?"

Gibby started to get to his feet. He got both feet flat beneath him, his legs bent flexed and trembling, before the other pushed him. The other pushed with seeming nonchalance, a single sharp thrust of both arms into Gibby's chest. Gibby's shoulders snapped straight and his feet came up and then he dropped flat backwards onto the bank. The other two boys were already there, and, as he hit, his upper arms all socked from the impact, one of them took hold of his foot and lifted it and flung it over his head, on down the bank. They went with him down the bank like that. When he tried to tighten into a ball, they found a foot or a hand out, and they grabbed it, and dragged him by it, and flung it.

His face scraped across the dried dead surface of the bank, and the strip of crusted skin beside his nose hurt more.

There were only seventeen days left, sixteen tomorrow. But no, not today, please not today, why today. Today was already crossed off.

Gibby lay at the bottom of the bank, his legs flung behind him on the bank, his chest and arms and face on the tar of the driveway. After a minute, he got to his feet. He started up the hill, leaning his heavy body forward against its incline, panting already. When he had come about halfway to the fence, Albert Sheridan took two long steps down the bank, and flung the heavy palms into Gibby's chest with the same abrupt thrust he had used before. Gibby straightened and fell backwards, hit his head snap against the frozen bank, and rolled easily, of his own will now, bump bump side over side, lying

perpendicular to the bank's incline, to the bottom. Again, he got up, and again he started up the bank.

"No," he said. "Please not today."

"Why suddenly not today?" said Albert.

Gibby took long steps. He set his foot firmly, his leg trembling at each step, paused, gulped for air and for something more, and then, the supporting back leg trembling now, he brought it up to the other, tottered there with the two legs together, gasped again, and reached the leg forward.

This time, they let him get nearly to the top. Then, the two other boys stepped forward. He turned to his left from the first of them, and the other grabbed his right arm with both hands and flung him by it back down the hill. His small feet hurried beneath him, trying at once to brake his descent and to catch up with his body. They ran under him in short busy little steps, and then they ran past him, and slid beneath him, and as they slid onto the tar of the parking lot, his shoulders slammed and bumped once flat and free against the bank.

Now, he was crying, and, as he started up the bank again, his chest was heaving with the same dry pain that running laps had brought during football season. He could not shut his mouth. The tears ran into it, and the tears and agony and air all gulped together going in and out of his locked mouth. He could not stop the hot dry heaving of his chest.

The two other boys stepped forward again.

"That's enough," said Albert Sheridan.

Gibby came up the hill, gulping, watching the three at the top, each leg trembling with each long step. His fat body bent sharply forward at his waist.

When Gibby set his lead foot on the edge at the top, Albert Sheridan's arm shot out. For a second, he tottered. And then he reset himself.

"Just scratching," said Albert, moving the hand in a stylised motion at the back of his head.

At the top, for a second, his mouth still uncontrollably open, Gibby breathed and breathed. Then he went past the others and ran, fat and dodging, stumbling, along the path beside the tennis courts.

"Look at Gibby run," called one of the three. "Why I'll bet he'd make a football player."

When Gibby reached the telephone booth, he had stopped crying. Still, though, his breath came in dry painful gulps. He leaned for a second on his left forearm against the booth, resting his face also against the forearm.

Finally, he stood, and wiped the arm across his face.

"Albert Sheridan," he said. "Sigh."

He wondered did his mother know yet of Dr. Warren's offer.

He took the mechanical pencil from his pocket, retracted the point, and holding the pencil with both hands, both hands shaking some, he crossed off the next notch.

Tomorrow would not have a notch.





