

THIS

IS

YOUR

DAY

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THIS IS YOUR DAY

By the same author

YOU CAN'T SLEEP HERE

THIS
IS YOUR
DAY

EDWARD NEWHOUSE

LEE FURMAN, INC • NEW YORK • 1937



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TO
T. N.

*Beckon O beacon, and O sun be soon,
Hollo, bells, over a melting earth!
Let man be many and his sons all sane,
Fearless with fellows, handsome by the hearth.
Break from your trance; start dancing now in town,
And, fences down, the ploughing match with mate.
This is your day, so turn, my comrades, turn
Like infants' eyes like sunflowers to the light.*

- The Magnetic Mountain

by C. DAY LEWIS

GENE TOOK HER ARM WHICH HAD BEEN resting a little heavily across his neck and he turned it gently around to look at the wrist watch. Half awake herself, she let him manipulate the arm, leaving it limp and obedient, and he whispered, "You up, Alma?" in a conscious daylight tone. Alma answered by several negative purrs, progressively louder and articulate, and finally she said "We got time" and kissed his shoulder and burrowed into the pillow. "I have a late class."

"Let's get married," he said, "license and all."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"I mean why do you suggest it now?"

"Just occurred to me."

All the sleep went out of her eyes and she turned toward his shoulder again, so close she had to speak from the corner of her mouth. "Did my folks say anything?"

"No, it just occurred to me."

"It is too solemn a matter," she said. "Won't you give me time to consider it?"

"Tomorrow is Saturday. We could go down to the Municipal Building before noon."

"Is that where you get married?"

"I think so."

"All right," she said. "My folks will love it. You're a darling. I'll wear my brown shoes. It's not every Saturday a girl gets married and it's the only pair I have. Are you sure nobody said anything?"

"I'm sure. But I don't imagine they like this any more than they did a year ago when we started, and if we're to stay here or anywhere else, it would save time and explanations to make it official. I think we've pretty well found out the things we wanted to know. There comes a time in every man's life. Would you reach out and hand me my underwear?"

"Gladly. I like the way you proposed. It was very casual and dignified and you looked very affectionate saying it. Did it take you long to formulate?"

"I thought of it last night after you fell asleep. It didn't seem particularly important, mainly because it isn't, but now it does, mainly because it has all the earmarks of a victory celebration. I'll line up a couple of witnesses today. And don't rub it in about the shoes. Next week's salary, you'll get a pair."

"I wasn't rubbing it in, dummy. I'll hint around so someone will buy me a pair as a wedding gift. Besides, old shoes are appropriate at the ceremony. How long since you've bought a pair? Are you sure the folks haven't said anything?"

"Why, have they been talking to you?"

"Father wouldn't have the courage. He knows I'd throw a fit but he's been nagging Mother all right."

"You can see their point."

"Yes."

"You should have suggested it long ago. I just didn't think."

"Shucks, it ain't a gal's place." She talked pretty flip and felt happy, said things like How come you never wear garters, and Get the hair out of your eyes, darling. She did not want to sleep any more that day, sat up in bed to watch him dress, and thought how his suggestion would do away with all the minor difficulties which had affected her parents, Father especially, as catastrophes. She was glad Gene had not suggested it under the stress of some crisis, like the time she was down with erysipelas and her head was swollen into ugliness, or during the week of the abortion. They hadn't even gone to bed together the night before, he had come in when she was already asleep, and still he suggested it.

Alma had not realized how happy the proposal would make her, independent of its desirability with regard to the folks. Immediately, of course, this was the most pleasing angle. It would void the last and most persistent of Father's dire mumblings about the ways of young men, and it would put an end to the doubts which Mother could never get herself to venture. Father would simply reconcile himself to the idea of having Gene for a son-in-law in the hope that none of the old-country relatives whose opinion he valued would ever learn about the young man's five-month prison experience and meager fifteen-dollar-a-week salary. And if they did find out there was always the explanation that he had served merely as a political prisoner and at one time he had made sixty dollars a week on a newspaper and if he hadn't become a revolutionary, he would be making it yet perhaps maybe. Father might even let himself become fond

of Gene, as Mother had, not that it would matter a great deal. He would stop nagging Mother about this and start on something else.

It was a good thing Mother knew how to take these domestic cross-currents, although the Gene situation had been a little too much in the beginning. She had liked Gene as a boy, had wished her son Harold had other friends like him, and she had been sorry to see the two boys drift apart. But to have Gene return some seven years later at the point of Alma's threats to quit school and leave home, this had been a little too much in the beginning. Alma knew that no amount of threats and reasoning would have prevailed had not Gene won her mother's heart so rapidly. If Harold had any objections in those days, he certainly did not voice them. With Mother swung over, Father didn't figure. Now the old man would be finally placated and Alma was glad; but she was happy too and for reasons completely unrelated to the family.

When Gene had finished shaving, she said, "Shall we get Harold as one of the witnesses?"

"We can't have your brother as a witness."

"Is that the law?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I don't want him anyway. We won't have trouble getting a couple of others."

Alma had only meant to be helpful and she did not press the point. "If you will wait for me ten minutes," she said, "I'll have breakfast with you and walk to the bookshop."

"I'm not going to the bookshop. Medwick left a telephone message for me to meet him at the Center this morning, so I'll wait ten minutes and watch you get into

the pretty green sweater and carry your books to school. What do you suppose he wants?"

"How would I know? Maybe they want to make you a section organizer."

"No, that's done by the district. This is the national office. If they send me out to Seattle, I'll write you a letter. I thought you said ten minutes."

Alma got out of bed and dressed, wearing the pretty sweater. At breakfast she asked Gene if it would be all right to announce their being engaged, and he said sure, he was never one to favor long engagements. Mother worked into the spirit of it and kissed Alma solemnly, but she was really touched and required visible effort to keep herself from doing a how-big-my-little-girl-has-grown-I-remember-you-in-pigtails sequence. As it was, she spent a lot of time fixing Alma's scarf, and they kissed at the door. Walking to the Lexington Avenue subway, Gene grumbled about all the books he had to carry and he said, "Why in the scarlet hell did you have to major in English literature?"

"I tried physics first but I was too dumb. I thought English would be a great relief. Now I know what year Andrew Marvell was born and if pressed, I could tell you when Sir Thomas Wyatt died. In less than four months someone will give me a degree all countersigned and rolled up, and you will have to make room for it in your drawer."

"It'll help you get a job."

"There are no jobs."

"Harold got one."

"Darling, I like to keep my tongue inside my mouth and sometimes inside of yours, but if you ever got a rear

view of my professors, you would never want me to do what Harold did. I'll learn shorthand in the summer months. That will help me more than the degree."

"You'll get located somehow."

"That's right," she said. "Something will turn up, a stitch in time saves nine, honesty is the best policy, and haste makes waste. I wish you had a winter coat."

"We won't have much more winter this year," he said. "I love you."

"I wouldn't be marrying you if you didn't. I'm glad you didn't tell me you were rich until after I had promised. This proves money doesn't mean a thing to me."

"Won't that be enough for the day?"

"I've been noticing it myself," Alma said. "It's a funny way of talking. It kept poor Mother from having the cry she was so aching for. We always talk like this when the things we really want to say might smack of unseemly sentiment. We always thought we were as married as a couple could possibly be, but this business of signing up is still very nice and warming. You were very sweet to suggest it. Doesn't matter if we kid about it a little. Those remarks are just some contemporary forms of gallantry and we're probably doomed to them. Do you remember what I said when you first came into the room after the abortion?"

"Yes."

"Didn't it give me just the proper air of the brave little woman?"

"Yes."

"I remember it because I didn't any more feel like gagging than like dancing a gavotte. It's a way of talking. I mind it only at times."

She knew that he also must have had some feeling about the business of signing up because he got off the subway to walk her into the building, and although there were several girls around, he kissed her cheeks, and patted her behind. Gene had his ways of indicating affection, some of them naïve, like running downstairs to bring her ice cream after a quarrel or paying extravagant compliments when she felt miserable. But when he risked being late for an appointment with Medwick just for the sake of walking her into the building, it was an occasion, and it made Alma forget to smoke her morning locker-room cigarette.

In the study hall she ran into Beatrice Gottlieb, who said, "Will you be at the meeting tomorrow?"

"You need a vote?"

"Maybe. You come anyhow."

"Can't. I'm getting married tomorrow."

"I thought you were married to Gene Marsay."

"It's the same guy, only license and all, this time. Ain't that something?"

"I guess you won't be at the meeting then. Where do you dig up all the excuses? You'll have to come to the Sunday meeting, though."

Beatrice was one of the school's few high-pressure Communists who didn't get in Alma's hair. It was hard to get angry at a girl who had a meeting herself each day. For a long time Beatrice and a few others had tried to draw her more closely into the work because it exasperated them to think that Alma, who had read many of the necessary books and seemed so theoretically sound and so impressive a figure in dealing with faculty, should shirk activity or at any rate fail to assume leadership.

They knew how attached she was to Gene, and they wondered why he could not impress her with the necessity of work; but as matters turned out this term, Alma became useful by virtue of having previously kept in the background. The administration was beginning to employ systematic repressive measures and girls who had done Communist work openly were being bottled up in relentless and ingenious ways. Under threat of expulsion they were made to sign pledges not to participate in extra-curricular activities, their parents were called into conference with the dean, the right to meet on school grounds was revoked. A new crop of leaders, or at least figureheads, was needed and there were very few willing to take the rap.

Alma never did find out whether or not Beatrice Gottlieb and the others had known beforehand of the dean's raid when they had made her chairman of an anti-war meeting in February. Certainly the speaker didn't know, because as soon as the dean and her retinue of office assistants interrupted he stopped speaking and looked to Alma for instructions. Alma was very angry at the interruption and she did not care what might happen. She asked the speaker to go on in disregard of the order and he did so until the dean stepped to the platform. The dean said, "How many of you are aware that as students of the college you are violating regulations by inviting an unauthorized outside speaker?"

No one raised her hand at first, and the dean turned to Alma in the chair, "Are you?"

"Yes, I am. But we did apply for a permit and feel that the violation should be laid at the door of your own unfair and bigoted policies."

The dean went cold with rage then, and repeated her question, and a couple of the girls made the mistake of raising their hands. When the assistants got ready to take their names about a dozen others stood up out of loyalty, but first the dean turned to Alma again and said, "What is your name, Miss chairman?"

Perhaps if the Miss chairman had not been added Alma would have given it, but she narrowed her eyes and said, "What's yours?"

As it happened that piece of insolence saved the situation, because the dean began threatening to have the speaker arrested and actually left to phone for police. Alma asked the speaker if he was ready to be arrested and the young man said he could not afford to be, at the moment. Alma had him take a seat in the audience and Beatrice Gottlieb delivered the talk instead. It was a better talk than the young man could have produced, and the two plainclothesmen who came had no one to arrest.

To date, this incident had had no perceptible consequences and, after all the humiliating persecutions, the meeting was considered rather a triumph. Alma took pride in reporting it to Gene, and since it shattered the last of her chances for a New York teaching job, in the flush of indignation she decided to throw herself into National Student League work. But the indignation petered out and the business meetings were dull and Beatrice's importunities could be parried with a minimum of friction. It did not take long for the other Communists to see that it was easier to do the work themselves than to argue Alma into doing it. None of them became really incensed because it was too easy to laugh with her. No matter how disgruntled Alma was feeling, she usually

smiled when she came into a room and people generally smiled too as soon as they caught sight of her. The day Gene remarked upon this she watched everybody and the thing seemed idiotic after a while. At first she felt good about it; then she reproached herself for being so volatile and easy to get along with, no character at all.

She worried most about lack of character when she thought of the prospects after graduation. With that anti-war meeting, Alma had automatically eased herself out of the job for which she had gone to the trouble of achieving a *magna cum laude* average, and sometimes she was sorry, sometimes not. Sometimes she thought it would have been better to decide to steer clear of Communism from the outset as Harold had done, but more often she had the impulse to chuck college and try to get a commercial job. Had Alma been offered such a job with assurances of a fair chance to retain it she would not have hesitated to give up school. But since neither of her parents had gone for long periods without working, it never became a matter of fundamental privations, and Alma kept going to classes term after term.

At times she imagined that if the worst happened and Father lost his job, she would try to get work in a department or five-and-ten-cent store. All that was speculation and she had no idea where she would go first or how she would be affected by continued refusals. Some of her schoolmates, less attractive and not nearly as bright, were working after hours, while others had projects of advancement lined out in post-graduate work. Also, there were a few whose plans were as confused as her own, but they had an absorbing interest in some subject, one of the sciences or public accounting even, or they had a passion

for playing the piano or running house parties for benefit of the *Daily Worker*. It was when faced with their example that Alma felt most strongly what Gene had carelessly, affectionately, and in jest referred to as lack of character. She nodded too wistfully as he said this, and Gene hastened to qualify it by pointing out that in spite of all, she did display a species of character by refusing to dabble with the piano after she learned that competence was the most she could hope to achieve; also there was character in refusing to use Communism as an "outlet." In the self-scourging of the moment Alma declined to grant anything of the sort, and laid her fundamental indifference simply to a form of laziness, some under-active gland or other. That was much too simple, and as soon as she would isolate an aspect of the problem amenable to analysis, it would become more complicated and deceptively rational. For instance, she had been the joy of her high-school English department, the medalist, in fact, and she entered college with a range of reading unusual in freshmen. On realizing that she was expected to study literary history instead of literature, her readings in the field bifurcated accordingly, with the result that sheer lack of time prevented her from truly developing in either direction. Long afternoons trickled through her fingers, and in January and May the approaching examinations would freeze up most of her extra-curricular channels of thought and leave her too exhausted for projected systematic reading, fit only for certain mild and restful forms of social intercourse which deprived her of solitude without affording her company, theater parties in the second balcony, visits to art galleries, Lewisohn Stadium concerts, occasions often maddening in retro-

spect. When something of significance occurred, like her first night with Gene or the incident at the anti-war meeting, she had not the consciousness of making a decision but of drifting, sometimes voluntarily but generally against will, conscience, habit even.

Four years ago, when she began to "go with boys" Alma had been considered a headstrong, dominating girl, and as a matter of fact, in relation to them, she was all that. They came from a rather fast fraternity set, hard drinking, football game attending, not too dumb boys with fathers in Wall Street, real estate, automobile business, and they had allowances ranging away above Alma's income bracket. It would have been futile for her to compete with their other girls in social advantages, the wearing of clothes, or horse-riding ability, and she was driven to shine by other methods: by wit, the singing of Hungarian songs, doing hot solo dances, and acquiring a reputation for being virtually impossible to seduce. The boys called for her in cars and took her where she wanted to go, and then in quick succession she would drop them or they would drop her. In either case, she went with them on her own terms and for the most part they had submitted.

Life with Gene scarcely ever resolved itself into a choice of dominating or being dominated. At times he would insist on some absurd things, like taking her to a ball game, say, but she did not mind. In the stadium he would lean toward her and talk, spin yarns out of the strange rich knowledge he had of the players' habits, private lives, their traditions and the traditions which ran their tortuous and fantastic courses through the grandstands. Alma had been only five when the family came to New York, and her memories were of the upper East

Side, of roller-skate escapades into Central Park and then of the fraternity dances, a few swimming-nude-at-night cavorts off Bear Mountain; these memories and the reflections they engendered seemed to fade beside Gene's talk. Had Gene entered Alma's life as a stranger, his own crazy, wild life would have lost half its significance for her but here he was, a childhood friend, a New York worker's kid with his idiom and the rock bed of his past so similar to hers, here he was only four years her senior, and he could look back on a score of jobs. He'd been a newspaper man, magic word, and he had ridden fifteen thousand miles in freights hopped at Torreon and Vancouver, lived in railroad sandhouses and a Hooverville and five months in the Welfare Island jail, been clubbed and gassed in demonstrations, and knew at least four of the five essential features of imperialism mentioned in Lenin's definition. From being Gene's companion and wife to revert to fraternity dances or lapse into the deadlly dull routine of her brother Harold's life was inconceivable. Alma had no grand notions about hopping a freight out of Manhattan Transfer with Gene, but whatever one did in his company he would extract from the act a quality of adventure.

Gene ran a workers' bookshop that he had started in Yorkville, and now this was his adventure. After school, on the day he suggested legal marriage, Alma went there hoping to find him in, but she found only Buckeye, sitting at the desk awkwardly, relieved by her presence. Buckeye was another of Gene's adventures. Gene had picked him up at a demonstration before the Japanese consulate, where Buckeye was about to haul off on a cop who shoved him. Then Buckeye talked and acted like a

provocateur. He'd been through the mill, he said, and he was ready for anything. What do you mean anything? Dynamite, he said, TNT, guinea footballs, anything. Gene took him home and started him talking. Buckeye had worked on the construction at Muscle Shoals, run booze through the Mexican border, spent years working big cats in a circus. Where did he get the idea that Communists worked with dynamite and guinea footballs? Don't know but they'd better, otherwise they wouldn't stand a Chinaman's chance in this town. No individual violence, Gene had to explain, it won't do anybody any good to put individuals out of commission. You had to destroy the set-up which made it possible for the rats to function, the set-up which made rats. You people know the workings of it, Buckeye said, but I just served thirty days on a chain gang in Alabama and I'm ready for anything.

Then he wanted to know the difference between a wobbly and a Communist. The first contact he had ever had with the movement was through a couple of wobblies. That was about forty miles out of Seattle, and they were doing construction work on a log conveyor for a paper mill. The thing stretched over a gully about seventy feet in the air and the company was trying to make time, no cinch in zero weather. One morning there was a bad wind and the men refused to ring in, too cold they said. Foreman called the engineer, said now you yellowbellies, why don't you get up there, scared? So Buckeye and another young fellow, just a couple of punks way back in 1930, we went and when we come down lunch time our guts was froze like reefer pipings. Some of the hands were for giving us our lumps, then the two wob-

blies said let us handle this, they're just a couple of young punks don't know from nothing. So they took us on the side and give us a line about how if working stiffs didn't stick together they'll all be out in the cold and they didn't have to tell us about being out in the cold that day. These same two guys took me to the big unemployment demonstration March 6 in Seattle. I went mostly for the car ride being just a punk but if you'd seen them machine-gun nests setting around you wouldn't be so backward about using weapons yourself.

Gene spent a long time nursing violent notions out of Buckeye before he recommended him for the Party, but now Buckeye was literature agent of his unit and made a few dollars selling *Daily Workers* and did most of the Section's mimeographing. He was still a bit lost when customers came asking for a book by subject, not title, and after he showed Alma the new shelves Gene was making in the back room, he stayed behind to do some planing.

By the time Gene arrived Alma had made two sales she was ready to brag about. He looked irritated and his final instructions to Buckeye were curt.

On the street he said to Alma, "Let's go eat at Madarász'. I want to talk."

"Important?"

"Epoch-making," he said wryly, "we're in a jam."

Madarász' Gulyás Grill was in a basement on Eighty-second Street near First Avenue. It had a very small dance floor and a three-piece orchestra which played incessantly, czimbalom, viola and violin. A couple of girls in Hungarian national costume alternated in singing to the few guests and after one or two o'clock they ad-

journed, orchestra and all, to Mrs. Madarász' place upstairs. Alma knew this, but the food was just as good as at home and prepared by a cook who had nothing to do with the upstairs establishment. Although only the czimbalom player was gypsy, the orchestra was still the best for its size in Yorkville. A lazy gray cat rubbed against one's feet, and the elderly Hungarians who frequented the place occasionally took a turn with one of the girls, and Alma had taught Gene the rudiments of *csárdás*. He was not very good. As they came in, the violinist and the viola player stopped, and one of the girls, with the czimbalom gently accompanying, sang the ballad of Rózsa Sándor, who was the great peasant outlaw leader in the revolution of 1848, how on the day of his death his mother had a presentiment and warned him not to go drinking at the inn, but Sándor went, and sure thing, his sweetheart betrayed him to the government. All the forests mourned. The girl sang, leaning against the czimbalom, letting a brown strand of hair fall before her eyes in mock dissipation.

At the table Gene said, "Alma, the Party is sending me out for organization work in a farm area."

The first thing she thought of was the fact that he said "is sending me" instead of "wants to send me," and next thing she wondered if her face showed any of the preposterous emotions which followed one another.

"When?"

"Now. Next week."

"They can't do that."

"Yes they can."

"I suppose they can. Wasn't there anything you could tell them?"

“Medwick gave the assignment and Walker, the organizer from that district, was in town and sat in. I told them I wasn’t familiar with farm work, told them it would take time to train people for the jobs I’m handling here and so it will. But those are the only legs I had to stand on. It seems this Cayuna Farmers League used to be a real mass organization. They started that whole wave of resisting sheriff’s sales but now they have just about fallen apart. They need someone who can visit locals, carry on a correspondence in decent English, get up on a platform without the rattle of his knees drowning out his voice, hold the Party units together, a functionary. It’s a concentration district now, and Walker has his hands full with a big rubber strike, they have no forces available. Walker, of course, criticized himself sharply for neglecting farm work, and Medwick made the inevitable comment about large and unnecessary turnover in functionaries. I don’t know why they picked on me, but they wouldn’t be sending anyone just on a hunch. I could have beefed more effectively if it hadn’t been Medwick, but you remember the story he told us about his wife being shot through the abdomen by coal and iron police. It’s hard to tell a guy like that you’re fond of New York and you hate to leave your girl. As a matter of academic interest, I asked if it would be all right to take my wife along, and Walker said certainly not for the first few months. It looks like a long range proposition. I’ll have to live on the farm of the organization’s president and the district is allowing me three dollars a week.”

“I don’t know what to say, Gene. What do you mean by a long range proposition, how long?”

“No telling.”

"And there wasn't any way of getting out of it?"

"I tried to postpone it a few months so you'd be through with school and we could go together. I harped so much on my usefulness at the section, Medwick had to say nobody was indispensable. Walker said in another few months there wouldn't be any organization to salvage. I have to go next week and that means we'll be separated for a minimum of four months before your finals are cleared up. And even then I'm not sure there will be a place for you in the county of Cayuna."

"There will have to be. Some mess though, in the meantime."

"It's not of my making," Gene said. "Not that it's necessary for me to say so."

"I suppose we should have been prepared for it."

"I wasn't and I'm still not."

"But you're going?"

"I have to."

"I don't know what to say, darling. I guess I haven't got a brave little woman song and dance in me this time. Think I ought to quit school?"

"I haven't thought."

"It'd be kind of dumb, just before graduation."

"Kind of. The whole mess is dumb. That's about as intelligent a comment as I can think of."

"Four months at least," she said. "Was that a very long time in jail?"

"The days were long. Not the months so much."

"Let's have a waltz anyway."

"You're very sweet about it."

"What the hell else can I be? I hope I'll be able to keep it up for a week."

"I wish you'd say what you're thinking."

"It's lousy."

"It's a mess."

"Maybe you'll be no good and they'll send you back," she said.

"Maybe."

"Sure."

"Oh sure."

The czimbalom player grinned with the obsequious smile Hungarian gypsies have to develop and played his Lake Balaton cycle, songs about fishermen and their sweethearts. Alma translated the verses, and some of them were so well suited to the occasion that Gene was certain they had been retouched for the English version. He was grateful for the music. People came in, shaking snow from their hats, and he wondered briefly about Cayuna County weather, and how it would affect the work. With his thumb and forefinger held together he stroked Alma's fingers and he outlined a number of possibilities for getting together before the summer. He knew there was small likelihood of their working out but the faith she placed in them encouraged him.

He had to remind her of the waltz she had asked for, and on the floor they did not do so well until Alma told him to watch the music. Then he did all right for a while but they did not wait for another. Back at the table they sipped drinks until almost midnight, then they decided not to get drunk and took a long walk through the snow before going home. He carried her books in one hand and she held the other under her arm and against her breasts. She said he ought to take her woolen scarf along on the trip because she had a

silk one that would do well in New York, and March would still be very cold in Cayuna County.

At home in bed he made love not in the accustomed leisurely fashion of careless nights but with a desperation that frightened her and made her think perhaps he had not told her everything. Much of the understanding they had established while walking through the snow disappeared then, and during each lull she had impulses to hurt him. At one point she wanted to say I guess the marriage thing doesn't go now. But he fell asleep before she did, and she wanted to keep him more than anything else, and was fearful of losing him or hurting him.

THE TREATY OF UTRECHT WAS SIGNED IN 1713. Under its provisions Philip V was permitted to retain Spain and its colonies on condition that the Spanish and French thrones be never occupied by the same person. Austria received Naples, Milan and the Spanish Netherlands. England acquired Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, the Hudson Bay region and Gibraltar.

Harold placed precise little crosses on the margin of each test paper. When he came to that of Dorothy Schultz he took the book out because he thought he had seen her cheating. The sentences were copied verbatim with only the slightest variation. He paused with the red pencil at his chin and tried to recall exactly how sure he had been of her cheating, but then he decided to let it go until the next period when he would have her recite about the same Treaty of Utrecht. This was not the first time that girl had come to his notice.

On the night of the school's annual stage production, Mrs. Bishop, assistant principal and dramatic coach, had beckoned to him from backstage and he, in a history teacher's capacity, was called upon to decide whether a certain style of blouse belonged to the reign of Queen Anne. The little girl who was to wear it stood waiting

anxiously in her skirt and pink chemise until Mrs. Bishop instructed her to go behind the screen. Harold said Why yes, I think they wore this. The girl smiled because she wanted to wear it, and Mrs. Bishop dismissed him. On the program he made an effort to establish her identity and it turned out she had a small part in the second act and did not play it particularly well. After that he saw Dorothy Schultz in the corridors and heard her talk for the first time at the recorder's office where she reported a cut. She gave the excuse that she had stayed home because the relief investigator was calling that morning and he had to see her father's dependents before including them in the food order. It shocked Harold to think that such a dainty and round little girl should be living on relief. He gave her benefit of the doubt on the cheating, not because she was dainty and round but because she was living on relief. Beauty in his students confounded him and, as a result, with pretty girls he was more scrupulously harsh if anything.

Because it was Friday evening and he had the entire weekend for marking papers and working on his doctor's thesis, Harold took the liberty of becoming engrossed in his own thoughts. He wiped his glasses and turned his chair toward the window. The radiator whistled comfortably and the snow was piling high against the windows across the street, and most of the lights there were being extinguished. Not only Dorothy Schultz, but, according to Gene, forty per cent of the families in that row of tenements were living on relief. Harold was glad to be living on this side of the street. He had a terror of poverty, and an idea that if he were not certain of the next day's or even the next month's meals

he would completely cease to function as an independent thinker. He told this to Gene who naturally scoffed at the last phrase and did not specifically refer to his teaching phony history but both knew what was in the other's mind. "I mean, I would cease to function," Harold said, "in the sense that I would be incapable of dealing in any connected form with concepts even slightly removed from everyday existence. Perhaps if I'd had your childhood and hectic adolescence and spent a couple of years on the bum, it would be different, but I haven't."

This was a modest way of putting it, but Harold thought Gene lacked a certain sensitivity. For instance, the time they entered high school together, Gene had a fight which originated in his refusal to wear a freshman cap, and Harold saw the affair from a classroom window. Gene had taken a bad beating, so bloody that the sophomores themselves stopped it and shoved the cap on him. He took it off and wiped some of the blood with it and threw it to the ground again but the sophomores did not press the point. In the subway he could hardly speak through the bruised mouth, and the next day he was ostracized even by the freshmen, most of whom wore their caps with pride. Gene said Christ, what a lacing, and he did not seem to feel humiliated. Now Harold himself had refused to wear the cap, but he saw no point in going through all the fuss and he thought Gene lacked fineness and sensitivity. It was partly to this lack of sensitivity and understanding that Harold ascribed Gene's scorn for his break with the Communist movement.

In high school the two of them had formed a self-

sufficient unit and baited economics instructors together and had some thrilling schemes for a secret society. There was only one other Communist boy in school, back in '26, one must remember, and they thought him insufferable and so they did not join the Young Communist League. But during their sixth term a few of the school's lunchroom employees struck, and the insufferable boy came to Harold and Gene with a proposal to help picket. After all the Communist talk, to Gene this seemed like a matter of course and a long-awaited delight, but Harold explained that he was not going to risk being kicked out, because teaching was the only profession open to him and he could do more good (the adjective was then synonymous with revolutionary work) by teaching than by digging ditches. Gene had nobody to support, while he, Harold, had responsibilities, and since his parents were going to send him through college, it was only fair that he should reciprocate to some extent. Besides, the lunchroom employees belonged to an American Federation of Labor union, not a really revolutionary one. This argument had then raised a doubt in Gene's own mind, but the excitement of the arrests and his expulsion apparently supplied too many more pressing things to think about. At that time Gene did not treat Harold's reasonings as a defection, and even after being expelled he continued to visit at the house, evenings mostly. They both dropped out of the little revolutionary work they had been doing, but instead of this forming an additional bond, it actually thrust them apart. Later Gene claimed he had been affected by the profound repulsion that is inspired in one less by those who are one's precise op-

posites than by those who share one's shortcomings.

When Gene returned in his new capacity as Alma's unofficial husband, Harold had not seen him for a number of years, and their first unavoidable clashes aggravated an already tense situation. While still at college Harold had suffered some twinges of conscience for not participating in the student movement, but the serviceable theories he had adopted in response to these twinges were of considerable use in the clashes. Dialectical materialism was a fetter upon science. Immediate economic gains on the part of the working class retarded the course of revolution. The Soviet Union's nationalist policy had ruined the Comintern. Of course, by then Gene was a full-time Party worker and knew a little too much and had incontestably the better of it, so that Harold was forced to retire into a less advantageous but safer position: "You know I'm virtually a recluse, I have none of the social graces, I don't speak up at meetings, I'm not a believer, I would do very little good in the Party, temperamentally incapable." From this position he made occasional sallies after some major defeat had been scored against the Party, but by and large, they avoided each other for the sake of peace in the household. Time and again Harold promised himself to discontinue these efforts to justify his having dropped out of the movement.

Now that Harold was working on his doctor's thesis he could bury himself in the work without need of justification because his subject was Negro Revolts Preceding the Civil War. He had undertaken the research at the expressed wish of his departmental head, who did not hide the fact that the material would work in

with a book he longed to write. Harold told Alma he would never have chosen the Negro Revolts paper had it not been for the material's ultimate propaganda possibilities. The movement was badly in need of sound scholarship.

Comfort was one of the prerequisites of sound scholarship, Harold looked at the whistling radiator, and the heat waves, and his crossed legs resting on the ottoman, all the comfortable things. He smiled slightly and reached over for the abridged Funk & Wagnalls. Comfort was "Freedom or relief from pain, annoyance or want; also, anything that contributes to such a state." He slammed the dictionary shut and threw it on the bed.

As an undergraduate he had thought that freedom from immediate pain, annoyance and want would come with his bachelor's degree. Then there was no rest until his appointment as a substitute, then until the permanent teaching position in the New York high-school system; and now, only the trappings of comfort. Now he thought that comfort would only come when he got himself a girl.

The snow fell straight and lazy, and toward midnight the heat waves above the radio became attenuated. A tailless cat bounded across the snow and shook its forelegs in a doorway. Alma and Gene turned in from First Avenue, clinging together.

Harold, why don't you get yourself a nice girl, Alma had said at breakfast. Harold's smile said How do you know I don't have one, and he himself said They cost too much, and Gene said Why, they're a drug on the market. I don't mean money, Harold said. There was a period of silence then and he didn't know whether

they were not pressing the point out of consideration for his virginity or because they believed his next smile which said I've been through it all and found it wanting.

The street lamp illuminated Gene's face and made the hollows under his high cheekbones even larger. He was leaning over Alma and talking close to her ear. If they were talking about Harold, he was saying Chump did this or did that, the Chump. Of late Gene had taken to calling him Chump. Harold would never have noticed it but the first time Gene used that expression Harold was marking papers for the head of the department, strictly volunteer work. Perhaps it was just that Gene liked the sound of the word, because he called everybody Chump for a while, but Harold felt that he put a certain emphasis on it at times. As he passed under the street lamp, through the snow his smile seemed malevolent, almost evil to Harold. Alma's hair was white with the snowflakes.

Harold grasped the window sill and the Phi Beta Kappa key brushed across the back of his fingers. He thought that as soon as his worries about the doctor's thesis were over, he would set out to find himself a mistress and walk with her through the snow, clinging to her so that she would be able to press the back of his hand against her breasts. He would talk intimately into her ear and tiny snowflakes would glisten on the stray hairs around that ear, fluffy golden hair like that of Dorothy Schultz or the girl two seats behind her.

There was no reason why, if he put his mind to it, he should not be able to come to an understanding with someone. Everybody but Alma would admit he was handsomer than Gene. To take off the few excess

pounds around the waist and hips was only a matter of a month's handball playing. Harold studied his reflection in the window and tried the smile which showed strong, white and even teeth and the upward curve of that moustache which Mother admired so. Once many years ago she had rumped his hair and said those ringlets will be some pretty young lady's life and joy, and the ringlets were still there. If only he had gone to a co-ed high-school and had taken up football instead of the unappreciated lacrosse.

He stood up and bent his right arm in the ball carrier's position and straightarmed four opposing players, scattered them sprawling across the gridiron. He stopped short before the mirror and tightened the sleeve around his large biceps. If that hint of a double chin could be removed and the forehead made a little wider and the eyebrows plucked a bit, he would become a startlingly handsome man. He held his head high and that made the hint of a double chin disappear.

Gene and Alma walked through the hall. They must have seen the light in his room but they did not say good night, went straight to their own room and closed the door. Once in the summer they had left the door open to create a draft and Harold who had been studying late went past to the bathroom in his slippers. Subsequently he often tried that but never with the same results.

After their stirrings were no longer audible, Harold changed to his slippers and tiptoed through the hall, unsteady and quivering. He looked through the keyhole but Gene must have hung his hat or something on the knob because there was nothing but the blackest kind of darkness.

THE SUN WAS STILL TUGGING AWAY FROM Randalls Island when Mrs. Darvas sat up in bed quickly but with care not to awaken her husband. Now as always when she fumbled for hairpins under the pillow she promised herself to buy a new set, of a different shade because her hair had finally turned all white, not the mottled gray of her forties but a shiny and austere silver. Rudolf, also fifty-two, had only recently begun to grow streaky near the temples. His snoring acquired more resonance with the years.

Even before she washed, Mrs. Darvas went to look at her children. Harold slept lightly, his large body restless under the quilt and the black curls graceful against the pillow. When she bent down and he brought his arm around to return the kiss, Mrs. Darvas could have cried to think how gentle and full of affection he had been as a boy. It was only the briefest sort of kiss but no sooner had he instinctively returned it than he also murmured "Let me sleep, Mom" and drew the quilt above his chin.

Then she remembered having looked at the clock after midnight, and that Alma hadn't been home from school yet and even if it was Friday and Gene certain

to be with her, Mrs. Darvas worried. She opened the second door, hesitating to enter at first, still smarting under Harold's tone, her large gray eyes dim with tears and sad in the dim light. Mrs. Darvas often wanted to kiss Gene's brown head at the same time that she kissed Alma's but she could not bring herself to do it. However, once or twice he had lifted her from the ground, refusing to release his hold until she did kiss him. Alma would laugh then.

This boy brought such merriment into the house, and he made at least one of her family apparently contented for the first time in America. She herself did not much relish the idea of his coming to live there when Alma proposed it but now that even Mr. Darvas was convalescing from the disgrace, she joined him in the wish that their son had been more like the other boy. Neither Rudolf nor she ever repeated that wish, because it was made in an unguarded moment and both grew ashamed of it. Ten years ago assurance that Harold would be a high-school teacher with a secure livelihood might have given meaning to her struggles; it was impossible to foresee that his own struggle to obtain that livelihood would be one of the wedges to force him apart from everyone, including herself. Had Harold once showed more than a dutiful civility these past few years, she might have had ground to suppose that his reserve was mere preoccupation beyond which lay love, latent and awaiting suitable occasion to come into the open. Certainly opportunity had offered itself three months ago when the dressmaking firm which had employed her for seven years folded up. It remained for Gene to say, "Well, isn't it about time for you to read a couple of

good books," and to force her into an armchair with the nearest Hungarian volume which happened to be her favorite, Gorky's *The Mother*. Harold said, "It's a lucky thing this happened after I got my appointment," and increased his weekly contribution to the family budget from ten to twenty dollars.

Alma and Gene were sound sleepers, and Mrs. Darvas felt safe in bending over to kiss her daughter. This time Alma turned slowly toward Gene and placed her hand on his shoulder. Mrs. Darvas withdrew and washed up and put on her house dress and went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. It was scarcely past six, but her motions were hurried and skilful with the economy of the trained manual worker. She squeezed nine oranges, one for herself and two each for the others, a ritual of many years' standing. Now that she was no longer holding a job of her own, Mrs. Darvas felt she should pay more attention to housekeeping, and she set the table with care, folding the napkins into triangles and transferring the sweet cream from bottle to pitcher. As the water in the coffee pot came to a boil she awakened Rudolf who groaned and cleared his throat. Just as his snoring acquired resonance with the years, his groans became more profound and his phlegm more gurglesome. In certain ways Rudolf was beginning to relapse into a dotage, and in others he remained too damned youthful for a tired woman well past her change of life. He would advance upon her abjectly and with desperate apologies and a maddening, servile, persistent vigor that was impossible to ward off. And on just such a morning-after he was even more abject than usual, and miserable, and ingratiating with guilt.

He came out of the bedroom, adjusting his tie and he said, "It has been weeks since you've been to a show. I think I'll pack you up and carry you off to the Orpheum tonight. You get mildewed just sitting home night after night, what do you say? Call for me at the store, what do you say?"

Life with Rudolf was a series of such inexorable formulas. Had she responded to this particular formula he would have gone to the movies every second day, always maintaining that it was for her sake. If on the contrary she had voiced a refusal, he would have felt compelled to run through another worn rigmarole, a whining and benevolent reproach that she was killing herself with sacrifices and stripping her life of all human semblance. In the past few years his formulas had become so set that they impinged on her consciousness only slightly more than would a leaking faucet which one occasionally decides to have fixed. But these whinings seemed to exasperate Harold and Alma, who were both rude to their father. (That's America for you, said Rudolf.) They would be so rude and so scathingly contemptuous that Mrs. Darvas, by nature of all that might be considered instinctive in her, would fly to his aid in an effort to ward off what she knew were cruel injuries.

Alone with Alma, she would apologize for him and try to explain his loneliness, but Alma insisted that these excuses were feeble and no justification for all the annoying idiocies. Afterward, Mrs. Darvas would reproach herself for having entered into controversy before the children. And when Alma demanded to know how she could possibly have married him in the first place, she

had said that he was different in those days, and then she again reproached herself for having intensified the child's contempt for him. "Perhaps," she added, "no, not perhaps but surely, I was different too. I looked up to him because he was educated and handsome and all the other girls wanted him for themselves."

Thinking back on the years in Hungary, Mrs. Darvas liked to dwell on how attractive he had been, and she liked to slur over the fact that Rudolf had been cajoled into marrying her. From the age of ten to twenty-five Mrs. Darvas had worked in her sister's dressmaking shop, and when that sister no longer needed her she was married off to Rudolf, the handsome, educated Rudolf who had to be supported for some five years before he blundered into a minor government sinecure. And even when he had that job it was her own dressmaking shop which bore most of the family burden.

All that time in Hungary, Rudolf had scarcely spent a week-end at home. He became handsomer with the years, and at the cafés he cut a pleasant, almost impressive figure among his set of lower ministry officials. When the Communists took power after the war, Rudolf retained his job because he was considered harmless and because his wife was one of the few people who, being put in charge of a clothing factory, ran it honestly and with efficiency. Then, during the days of the white terror, he was fortunate to escape without a jail sentence but in the end the blacklists got him. Mrs. Darvas returned to her shop and kept the family from destitution and saved to achieve her old dream, the trip to America.

Rudolf Darvas put up the battle of his marital life to stay in Hungary, and if any one episode could be said

to have broken a man, it was the loss of that battle. Before he even had a chance to see the Woolworth Building he was whisked into a bakery job by one of his wife's brothers. There he had to stand before a conveyor that led to the ovens and carve a slit into each loaf of dough. Another man stood next to him and smeared the loaves with grease. The next day they slowed up the conveyor slightly and fired the other man and Rudolf Darvas had to do both the slitting and the smearing. That evening when he returned to the flat on Seventy-eighth Street he was so tired that he just lay on the bed and trembled, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, just trembled, sometimes violently. He worked at that job for three years. Afterward, in trying to understand him, Mrs. Darvas concluded that it was the bakery which had whipped her husband into the abjection Alma despised.

"Then you're not coming to the movies tonight?" he said.

She shook her head and applied herself with more than necessary attention to the whipping of cream for Gene's coffee. Harold had stopped eating it since his decision to lose weight. She looked at the clock to see if it was time to wake anyone, and remembered it was Saturday.

"I guess we'll go tomorrow," he said. He left, ostensibly to fetch his jacket, but suddenly Mrs. Darvas heard Harold's voice shouting and she hurried into the hall.

Harold was raging. As she entered the room he turned from Rudolf to her. "What the hell does he have to come tramping through the room for, at this time of the morning? Just because he is up he can't bear to see

anybody else resting. What the hell does he think I do all week round, play? Look at the silly grin on him."

"Don't talk that way to your father," she said.

"Well, look at him. Now he's got the sleep out of my eyes, he's grinning. The least he could do is take his face away."

"Harold, that's no way to talk to your father."

He flung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his underwear. "A lot he cares, just so long as he gets his own damn sleep."

Mrs. Darvas led her husband out of the room. He was mumbling his "Send them through college and this is what you get" formula, and even she had to admit his grin was silly, but Harold should not be so rough, she thought. During breakfast Mr. Darvas described how he had bought this morning's paper late last night, and before he even had a chance to turn the pages Harold snatched it off the table and took it into his room, and now when a man simply walks quietly through his own apartment to get the paper he bought so he can read it on the streetcar going to work, and hard work it is, this is what happens. His lordship wasn't so particular about who walked across the room before he got that job. Break your back to send them through college and this is the thanks. It isn't that I want him to be grateful, I didn't give him his education because I wanted to get something in return. I don't want his respect just because I'm his father, but the least he could do would be to treat the people around him like human beings. A couple of sound thrashings when he was about ten would have knocked all this insolence out of him.

"Here is your muffler," Mrs. Darvas said. She saw

him out at the door and returned to find Harold and Gene drinking their orange juice. "Sometimes I wish you wouldn't be so rude," she said.

"What does he have to come poking around for every morning? He can't bear to see anybody sleeping when he's up," Harold said.

"There are other ways of letting him know. You're just as inconsiderate. Your shouting might just as well have awakened your sister."

"Ah, he's a pain, him and his silly grin."

"He's lonely," Mrs. Darvas said.

She waited on them skilfully and with tender knowledge of what they liked and wanted. The black curly head and the brown head bent over the cups silently and two dashes of whipped cream made the brown head turn around in a briefly appreciative motion. The brown eyes were clouded and the lines under them drawn. Gene held himself aloof from these embroilments and Mrs. Darvas attributed the drawn lines to his annoyance with the bickerings. To Harold, however, the drawn lines appeared as an effort to impress people with the rare quality and elevated sentiments of a mind above picayunes, and he made an attempt to involve Gene by appealing for sympathy. Gene did nod slightly at the indictment of Mr. Darvas but Mrs. Darvas failed to notice this. She was stacking dishes in the sink and listening to the flow of Harold's talk, much of which was in an English far removed from her understanding of the language. Gene made no remarks at all, and his silence led Mrs. Darvas to believe that her son was saying clever and valuable things which the other boy did not wish to interrupt.

Again she fell into her familiar pastime of comparing the two, and thought that if Gene was more mature and got along with people so much better, it was because he had gone through so many contacts and clashes with the outside world and these had rubbed the edges off him, while Harold was just emerging from academic life and might turn out just as balanced. After all, in those inaccessible reaches of thought where Harold moved during the hours of study and now instruction, he was probably a person of much substance and subtlety. The cultivation of Harold's Hungarian vocabulary had been cut short when he was nine, and no wonder he had difficulty in communicating his subtle and substantial thoughts. Mrs. Darvas hoped it was mostly this barrier of language that kept them from the true and complete intimacy which she felt they had enjoyed ten years ago and which, according to Alma, was nothing but one of her sentimental ideas. Until the time that Alma became so attached to Gene she had sneered and sometimes snarled at many words that meant a great deal to her mother: intimacy, honesty, goodness, meanness, gossip. Being with Gene had helped Alma toward becoming a woman, Mrs. Darvas thought, but she was certain that being with a girl would not help Harold to become more of a man. At his present stage a girl would simply twist Harold about her finger and perhaps make of him a spineless and dependent Rudolf.

As she considered this idea, she was struck by the thought that perhaps her wishing Harold to remain single for a while was actuated by a mere selfish fear of insecurity. All during the last three months, which formed the longest period that she had ever been out

of a job, Mrs. Darvas felt intolerably that she was a burden. She dreaded the notion that since Harold had just received his permanent appointment he might suppose she was neglecting to search for a job on that account. As a matter of fact she tried very hard, but because she appeared to be so fragile and had silver hair, there was little possibility. And it pained her not to be able any longer to supplement her devotion by the tangible gifts which caused joy all around. Little things like a good breakfast were not enough. Now that she did not have so many ways of showing her love and her generosity Mrs. Darvas was apprehensive lest her children think she had undergone a change, and for the first time she began to call attention to her goodness with the persistence that comes of uncertainty.

After the two boys were gone, she cleaned up the kitchen and Harold's room and her own. She thought that if ever again a piece of money came her way, it would be spent on a desk for Harold, one befitting his new position, dull but smooth walnut finish, with a blotter and cubbyholes or baskets for the papers he was forever marking. She folded up his pajamas and brushed his sheet with her palms, dusted some of the rough-covered textbooks. Their furniture was getting old and creaky. On Sunday, after the cushion that had been promised to the International Labor Defense bazaar was finished, she would have to attend to the slip covers which were in need of mending. By keeping the slip covers clean and in repair the everyday appearance of the furniture could be enhanced. Before company came she would remove them.

Cleaning under her son's bed, she found a pair of

socks and threw them into the bathroom sink where Alma's stockings were soaking. Once in the bathroom, she noted around the tub a ring of dirt left by Rudolf. She scrubbed that off and unwrapped a new roll of toilet paper and threw the wrapper into the wastebasket and placed the wastebasket in the dumbwaiter, and most of the morning was gone. About half-past eleven the noise of the shower told her that Alma was up, and she set out the fourth tall glass of orange juice, this one slightly sweetened.

When Mrs. Darvas saw that her daughter had the same lines under the eyes that she had earlier observed on Gene's face she concluded that the two had come in very late and made no remark for fear of being considered meddling. But the orange juice was not half drained before she learned what Gene was preparing to do, and she admired the calmness and the intelligence with which the subject was introduced and its implications described. What superior ways these children had. Instead of her guiding them, they were educating her by instruction and example. Often she had the feeling that she was just growing up with her daughter. Only in the last few years had Mrs. Darvas started to read, and all the books were selected by Alma from the Hungarian shelves of the public library. She read these slowly and with great excitement. They made her believe that she had only just begun to live, and they illuminated entire periods of her existence with a strange and at times terrifying light.

Again, a stray comment from Alma while the volumes were being exchanged would illuminate entire sections of the book itself, exceedingly important as-

pects that had passed by her unperceived. When Alma had an early class they rode together on the Third Avenue trolley, and some of their most intimate moments had been experienced while talking about the Hungarian books which were mostly translations of classics. In her enthusiasm Mrs. Darvas would point to passages that struck her as especially profound and would wonder in awe as Alma disparaged them with an ease and firmness of manner. Famous authors too, writers whose names had a familiar ring even to her. When she read *Thaïs*, the unfolding of Paphnutius' self-deception and Anatole France's statement that people deceive others best while they deceive themselves, caused her to utter a joyful little cry of discovery. Alma said she did not think that was a particularly incisive profundity and she talked all around the subject. Talk like that made Mrs. Darvas inordinately proud of Alma and she rather liked it when the latter laughed in delight at her own naïve observation after reading the book: It certainly goes to show you about priests. She revelled in her intellectual renaissance and regretted that Rudolf declined to partake of it.

At the same time the profundities made it seem as though her life had been spent very uselessly and stupidly. There had been a time when she thought that by working hard and sheltering her children from ugly realities, which she herself usually refused to recognize, she could help them toward happiness. These books worked out the ugly realities so much more clearly and completely than she had ever been able to catalogue them, and that must have been one of the things which made Harold and Alma so dissatisfied and cynical-like.

She began to separate some strips of bacon and to get ready a couple of eggs, but Alma said the orange juice would be sufficient and from that moment she watched her daughter more closely and saw that the calmness with which she discussed Gene's prospective going was only a calmness of manner, and that the girl was greatly agitated. Contrary to her own habit of turning pale during moments of stress, Alma was flushed and, also, devoid of the usual volubility. When Alma withdrew into her room and sat on the unmade bed, Mrs. Darvas followed anxiously and tried to find out if there had been a quarrel. This irritated Alma and shattered the calmness of manner. Mrs. Darvas was frightened to hear that her daughter considered the possibility of quitting school to go with Gene. Occasionally out-of-town organizations would have to be put up at the house overnight, and from their stories and from her experiences in Hungary she knew what Party work meant.

Mrs. Darvas described the position of a girl who was dependent on a man for a livelihood and asked what had become of her determination to become a self-supporting person?

"Nothing," Alma said.

Mrs. Darvas tried to reason. She said that if it was only a matter of a few months before Gene would be back, why couldn't Alma just buckle down to her studies and finish up the year so she'd have a better chance for a job and a life together with Gene, whose way of living was certainly no guaranty of security in the future.

Alma's face had a look of concentration and, without

appearing to have heard Mrs. Darvas, she folded her hand behind her head and lay slowly back on the crumpled pillows and stared at various points around the ceiling and bit her lips gently.

All these things were done in a manner that alarmed Mrs. Darvas, who said everything will be all right.

Alma shifted her gaze to the top of her mother's head, and her hands on to the other's thigh, which she patted three or four times.

Alma is right, Mrs. Darvas thought. I should not be giving people advice. Even if they took it, which they never do, I am not the one to give it because chances are that it would be all wrong, and I might not be important to this girl but she is very important to me. I would dread to give her the wrong advice. Remember, I used to beg Harold to study hard and he would not, but after I resigned myself that he should be a poor scholar he set to studying all by himself. These children have to work out their own problems. I have done my best to help them along their road by keeping them clothed and fed, but now it seems I have done wrong. Alma can't make up her mind because I have kept her sheltered and now she does not know how to make decisions. And yet, Harold, didn't he make his decision? No, I think it was somehow made for him. This boy, Gene, knows what he is going after in the same way I knew what I was going after when I insisted on coming to America and when I fought to keep my family together, clothed and sheltered. But my little daughter does not know where she is going. I didn't either, at her age. I did, not so long ago, but now again I do not. I'm not the one to advise her.

Mrs. Darvas said, "It's only a matter of a few months. Things will turn out all right."

Alma said, "You're doing the best you can, Mom. This is my funeral. Maybe it'll be a year and then what?"

A LOT OF THE OPERATIONS IN A VEGETABLE store require no thinking at all when one has performed them as many times as Mr. Darvas had, so while he polished the extra-fancy apples or shook the dirt off celery he used to think up the things he would say to the Hungarian customers. Around Lexington Avenue and Seventy-ninth Street there was sure to be a Hungarian in every batch of six, and they were an appreciative and satisfying audience. They wondered why a man with all that old-world culture and charm wasted a dozen years of his life clerking in a vegetable store, even if it was in a high-class neighborhood. Mr. Darvas said that's America, and no matter how degrading it was to argue with a housewife who came back two weeks later to argue that she had been short-weighted on the mushrooms, it was still better than sitting in a stuffy office looking at the same faces all day. He said he knew that as long as Shahbenderian had the store he would have the job, because nobody would fire a man who could be trusted with the buying as well as the cash register, and who had a real way with customers. Twenty-five dollars a week was not a lot, but how many high-pressure salesmen could look back and say they averaged

that much in the past twelve years? And how many native-born Americans who had nothing but their two strong arms for support could say they had sent their children to college and lived to see them assume positions of responsibility and prestige?

Had the customer ever met his boy Harold? Quite a kid. Came out among the first ten in a license examination taken by over a thousand candidates, all star history students. The pretty girl who just walked out with the pound of string beans, that was his daughter. Chic? Certainly, but she had nothing on her mother. (If the customer hadn't been fat, Mr. Darvas would have boasted of his wife's slimness.) That daughter was getting ready to take the same license examination, only in English literature. While a lot of damnfool Yankees were blowing their earnings on Fords for the sake of a hot afternoon's driving, he produced two specimens of humanity which stood up with anybody's pair. Some colts. I wouldn't advise you to buy those carrots this morning if you're going to use them for supper. There'll be better bunches in the afternoon shipment.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Darvas was prouder of his wife than he was of the children. They overwhelmed and terrified him, Harold with a somber indifference and occasional outbursts, and Alma with her raillery and bluestocking carelessness. Her mother now, she was a different story altogether.

In America Mr. Darvas did not have his ministry friends and he could not go to any clubs because after hours he was always too tired, and besides, he had no money for gallivanting about, so he stayed at home and became acquainted with his wife and began to think she

was a very fine woman. After he forgot how he had abused her in Hungary, he could even summon enough indignation to grumble a little about her failure to treat him with more attentiveness. He grumbled about the dribbles of cash she continued to send to the old country, and about the disproportionate life insurance she insisted that they carry, and about the fact that of late she had refused to sleep with him. He complained of acid stomach and heartburn, and blamed her for Alma's upbringing. He complimented her upon the meals she cooked, and ate a lot, and said he would go crazy if he had to keep working in the vegetable store. He hinted at borrowing on the insurance for a trip to Hungary. He read the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* and kept up with the Budapest theatrical gossip. To win his wife back he mustered some youthful charm in telling of rich customers' maddening idiosyncrasies, and toward the end of these grimly amusing anecdotes he would lean back in the chair and cough slightly, to commemorate his achievement. Then Mrs. Darvas would nod and perhaps ask what he had been saying. He said he felt his life had been a tragic waste. Mr. Darvas feared and of course hated the proprietor of the vegetable store, Sam Shahbenderian. He hated Mrs. Sedley who sent her chauffeur around to collect three cents deposit on a bottle but he liked Mrs. Varga who understood Hungarian and appreciated his quotations from Petöfi.

He had a discussion with his wife on the subject of Gene's departure. He said he thought Alma had it coming to her. Said he had nothing against Gene personally, that he was a nice boy, but had better give up this business of saving society. Didn't I have my fling at Com-

munism and what came of it? Remember those few months in Hungary when everybody became a Bolshevik and how quickly they disavowed it when the white terror came, and how those of us who had too much explaining to do were left in the lurch? People aren't worth saving. Let them wallow in their own filth, the swine. If they refuse to see what's good for them, why should those of us who know what's what break our necks trying to open their eyes? Why should a boy like that run around ruining his life, and Alma's in the bargain? If that boy put his mind to getting a decent job and holding on to it, he'd have ten times the chances of doing some good in this world. Those Communists in Budapest *sem voltak jobbak a Deákné vásznánál*, they weren't any better than they should be.

That last remark made Mrs. Darvas turn violently on her husband. She said it wasn't her place to discuss their theories, she didn't know anything about them. But nobody could tell her that Communists weren't the best people on earth. She had seen them in action and nobody could tell her different. Taking vast storehouses full of cloth and flannel and making thousands of dresses for shivering peasant girls, that was her idea of goodness. Transforming the great noble estates on Lake Balaton into rest homes for workers, that wasn't evil so far as she could see. Did László Jenő or Corvin Otto live in palaces during the Commune or did they go through hardships with the rest of the workers? You saw them, Rudolf, tell me. In those last days when they knew it was death to hang on, did they stick or run away? Maybe I love Alma and Gene too much to want to see him break his head against a stone wall but don't tell

me Communists aren't any better than they should be.

"Then you do admit he's breaking his head against a stone wall?" Mr. Darvas said.

"I don't admit anything."

"I say a man's first responsibility is to make a living for himself and his family."

"You didn't always think so."

"I do now," Mr. Darvas said. "A man must make a living."

Instead of being angry, Mr. Darvas was very proud that his wife should have so much natural wit, and still he was glad to be on his way to the store. Hard as the work was, it afforded him more peace of mind than the complicated affairs and people of his household. That afternoon he happened to be alone when Mrs. Varga and her little bull terrier came to buy some heads of lettuce and a grapefruit. He got to reminiscing about the ruins at Visegrád and the Buda mountains. He said there was no other river like the Danube at Budapest, what with St. Gellert's Mount overlooking and St. Margaret's Isle in the middle and the concourse on the Pest side. He said people in America didn't know how to live and described the wine and the gypsies in the garden of a little inn just below Pestszenterzsébet, formerly Erzsébetfalva. The serenades under the elms and the good black bread of Soroksár, where Napoleon had camped. The harvest festivals and the whitewashed straw-thatched cottages and the campfires of fishermen on the Tisza and the military concerts where the girls came in broad-brimmed hats and the red boots they wore to church, red ribbons in their pigtails. America had no heart, no

traditions, no culture. The choice between Tokay of a decent vintage and a gallon of gasoline.

"That's exactly right," Mrs. Varga said. "No heart."

Mr. Darvas picked out the best grapefruit he had. It was large, yellow and firm, without any soft spots or blemishes.

"Oh, you bad dog," Mrs. Varga said, tugging at the leash, "stop that this instant. Princey, do you hear? Oh, Mr. Darvas, I'm afraid the damage is done. I can't imagine how he could, after all the time we spent breaking him in. Come here, you hound, get away from there."

"No damage, the boy'll be right in. Charge it, I suppose?"

"Please. And I'm terribly sorry."

After he had entered the bill and Mrs. Varga was well out of sight he went for sawdust and a broom, because this was the boy's day off and Shahbenderian was due back any minute. When he got through cleaning up he checked on a shipment of mushroom sauce and macaroni.

"TAKE A SEAT, DARVAS," SAID THE HEAD OF the history department. "Cigarette? Go ahead, take one. I've smoked for thirty years and never contracted the habit." He winked.

Harold laughed. Gay old cuss. Harold disliked Dr. Canfield, who shoved all the administrative work on to the younger instructors and made them mark his papers, but there was no denying he was a gay old cuss.

"Loosen up, man," Dr. Canfield said. "You know, there isn't enough social life in our department. Have you, for instance, ever had a real talk with Miss Lieber?"

"No, I just greet her in the corridors."

"She is quite a character, a little hysterical but quite a character. I must tell you a joke about her. We were looking over the art department exhibit in the gym, and she says, After all, it's men who make the best designs. I turned to Wagner and I said under my breath, What designing men could she ever have met? Wagner tells me she heard it. I haven't been able to face her since." He laughed.

Harold laughed.

"I tell you there ought to be a regulation that women

instructors must be married by thirty-five. Either we run a history department or a hysterics department."

Harold laughed again. Dr. Canfield was a gay old cuss.

Dr. Canfield said, "Lieber has been faculty advisor of the Current Events Club, but this term we don't feel she will be able to handle it. That's a lively bunch there, and they're having some lively sessions. Another thing, I understand the Communist students have adopted that club as their base of operations. They always work in a pack. You'll be able to handle them better than Lieber. It isn't as though the department were trying to stifle discussion, but you know the sections these kids come from. It's children from just such home influences that are mostly in need of guidance. Hysterics cannot be guided by hysterics. It was at their last session that the whole shameful campus fiasco was got up. You take that club over and let them discuss anything under the sun but for God's sake talk sense to them. A minimum of common-sense guidance can head off all the hysterics."

"I doubt if I'm quite the man for that."

"No false modesty," Dr. Canfield said. "I know people. When a person of ordinary intelligence, and I flatter myself as being one, has lived to see his moustache turn white and kept his eyes open, he learns to size up people pretty accurately."

"I'm a little jammed with work right now. These papers for instance."

"Anybody can mark papers but I feel you're the man for this job. I know these kids. I have worked with them all my life. They're not a bad sort. They would not be going in for these absurdities if they realized what it was all about. You're levelheaded."

"I shouldn't like to hurt Miss Lieber's feelings."

"My boy, can there be talk of feelings in the case of a fifty-year-old virgin? Come, you're making too many excuses." The bell rang and they stood up together. Dr. Canfield put his arm around Harold's shoulder and walked with him to the door. Dr. Canfield was a gay old cuss and kindly, but accustomed to having his assignments carried out, and there was nothing Harold could do.

He said, "All right, I'll meet with them next week." Back in his own classroom he felt he should have put up more of a fight. Still, there was no point in his antagonizing the old man. As a matter of fact, he might prove to be a great help to the radical students in the Current Events Club. Frank Coletti was sitting in the wrong chair. He was the all-scholastic pitcher. Harold thought if that boy had been brought up in another neighborhood he would never have become so good a pitcher and the tomato would never have hit the speaker and there would not have been the campus fiasco. There would have been no need for a new faculty advisor of the Current Events Club.

"Mr. Coletti, would you consider evacuating Miss Schultz's chair and assuming possession of your own?"

The boy moved into his own seat, flushed and embarrassed.

"Mr. Coletti, tell us, what grade did you achieve in this examination of your week's studies?"

"Zero."

"And why?"

"I didn't know the answers."

"Why didn't you know the answers?"

"I didn't study."

"Why didn't you study?"

"I don't know."

"Not a very effective reply, is it?"

"It's the only one I got."

"What were the questions?"

"I don't know."

"Did you look them up after class?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you don't remember a single one?"

"No, sir."

"How singular. Will someone refresh Mr. Coletti's memory?"

Treaty of Utrecht. Boundaries, Electorate of Brandenburg. War of Austrian Succession.

"How many of these can you answer, Mr. Coletti, with the newly gained knowledge at your disposal?"

"None of them."

"But you did look them up after class?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Coletti, why do you go to school?"

"To learn something."

"How much progress have you made along those lines in the little matter of history?"

"Not very much, sir."

"Who played first base for the New York Giants last year?"

"Terry."

"Is he going to play this year?"

"Sure, he's manager."

"That will be all, student Coletti. I'm glad to note you have an alert and inquiring mind."

Coletti sat cowed. He would be certain to fail. Very few of Harold's pupils failed. He was a good and responsible teacher. The Electorate of Brandenburg was bounded on the south by the Electorate of Saxony. Austria received Naples, Milan and the Spanish Netherlands. England acquired Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, the Hudson Bay region and Gibraltar. Tie it up. Trends. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Impossible to use the expression "class struggle," but there were ways of getting around it. Last year he had assigned Engels' *Peasant War* as outside reading, and Frank Daniels, the Communist, had stayed after school and said very innocently, "Mr. Darvas, are you a comrade?"

This year Harold was more careful and he assigned James Harvey Robinson instead. This year too he introduced personal consultations, earning a nod from Dr. Canfield and envy from the lazier veterans. He liked to experiment with methods of teaching and he liked to see students pass examinations, entirely aside from the enhancement of his own prestige. It was good to answer the questions of intelligent students and to see backward ones improve their standing as a result of the consultations. Equanimity deserted him only in rare cases like Coletti's, and there he did not regret having jumped on the all-scholastic pitcher.

That boy could do with a little discouragement. Coletti's infielders surrounded him in the lunchroom as well as on the field, and around the ring of infielders was always a fringe of fluff, badly applied cosmetics, tailored blouses, rolled stockings. Coletti had learned to pretend not to be affected by admiration. In the game against

Commerce, which was Lou Gehrig's old school and a perpetual contender, he had struck out three in a row with runners on second and third, and in the short walks from mound to dugout and in the warm-ups before the grandstand he had acquired an ease of manner which at first confounded Harold. That was the ease Gene and Alma had, which Mrs. Darvas did not have, and which Harold wanted. It was bad for the morale of the class to have as poor a student as Coletti so self-possessed. Harold did not approve of threatening an athlete with ineligibility; he wanted Coletti to feel ridiculous solely on the basis of scholarship. That long questioning had definitely put Coletti in a bad light because the class, especially the girls, had laughed at him and he sat really cowed and without the assurance that if traffic around the bases became too heavy he could always bear down and blaze them across. In the course of the period Harold called on him for a difficult recitation and Coletti again made a fool of himself.

The girls were always first to laugh. When Harold noted this he thought he was becoming more and more conversant with feminine psychology and at home he began to make many observations on the girls' behavior. In fact, he said, a high school was just the place to study them because their ways and wiles were still in rudimentary and obvious forms, and that after they passed eighteen these ways and wiles underwent changes of refinement and emphasis only. He said their attempts to impress or captivate him were amusing. There were the ordinary leg-crossings and posturings, but also they pretended to be interested in some aspect of their lessons or,

besides writing the required name and class at the top of their papers, they also wrote Mr. H. Darvas.

Some years ago Alma had persuaded Harold to read an English novel and he had been much struck by a passage couched in terms of the cookery book. He consulted it several times. "Yes, they're in awe of one," read the passage, "but at the same time they adore. One's so understanding, one knows so much about life in general and their souls in particular, and one isn't a bit flirtatious or saucy like ordinary men, not a bit. They feel they could trust one absolutely; and so they can for the first weeks. One has to get them used to the trap: quite tame and trusting, trained not to shy at an occasional brotherly pat on the back or an occasional chaste uncle-ish kiss on the forehead. And meanwhile one coaxes out their little confidences, one makes them talk about love, one talks about it oneself in a man-to-man sort of way, as though they were one's own age and as sadly disillusioned and bitterly knowing as oneself—which they find terribly shocking (though of course they don't say so), but oh, so thrilling, so enormously flattering. They simply love you for that. Well then, finally when the moment seems ripe and they're thoroughly domesticated and no more frightened, one stages the dénouement. Tea in one's rooms—one gets them thoroughly used to coming with absolute impunity to one's rooms—and they're going out to dinner with one, so that there's no hurry. The twilight deepens, one talks disillusionedly and yet feelingly about the amorous mysteries; one produces cocktails—very strong—and goes on talking so that they ingurgitate them absent-mindedly without reflection. And sitting on the floor at their feet, one begins very

gently stroking their ankles in an entirely platonic way, still talking about amorous philosophy, as though one were quite unconscious of what one's hands were doing. If that's not resented and the cocktails have done their work, the rest shouldn't be difficult. So, at least, I've always found.

"But it's then, when they've become one's mistress that the fun really begins. It's then one deploys all one's Socratic talents. One develops their little temperaments, one domesticates them—still so wisely and sweetly and patiently—to every outrage of sensuality. It can be done, you know; the more easily, the more innocent they are. They can be brought in perfect ingenuousness to the most astonishing pitch of depravity."

Harold did not refer to this passage with uncritical acceptance, he picked flaws in it to indicate familiarity with the process. At the same time he disclaimed ever having performed it with an archness that led one to conjecture about his own subtler and more merciful methods. He spoke of the high-school girls' antics with a tolerance that worked the desired impression even on Alma who could observe him at such close range. The fact that the victims were never in evidence she attributed to her brother's circumspection, a quality she did not ordinarily admire. Her warning to be careful of his job flattered him but his reassurance, besides dwelling on the absurdity of such a supposition, managed to contain a vague and ostensibly unguarded reference to a furnished room downtown.

Now for all their cute tricks and provocative little breasts, students did not figure in Harold's calculations; he had worked too hard to get the job. Perhaps also they

were a little too stupid but of that he was not sure. He thought that someone like Alma would immediately see through his inexperience. The best sort of person would have been another teacher, financially independent, versed in amorous theory but gullible in regard to his pretensions to same and appreciative of his historical knowledge. But when he came across approximations of this ideal he proceeded on the assumption that one lost caste by admitting momentary unattachment. Twice he unwittingly scared off prospects by referring to a beautiful, wealthy and cultured mistress.

No, the school girls were taboo, and yet there was no telling how far a girl like Dorothy Schultz would go. She was probably near seventeen and every time you looked at her she was doing something inviting. With her back turned she would drop a pencil and bend for it so the skirt would tighten, and before she had straightened up she might manage to glance over her shoulder through a golden curl. She lived on relief, Harold knew, and probably would welcome a good time, and probably the high-school boys could not afford what she might consider a good time. An orchestra seat to a current hit and a night club with Spanish atmosphere and a floor show. If he started taking dancing lessons now, in a year he would be an expert and by then she would be out of high school. Must ask Alma for the address of a good Spanish night club, she would remember from fraternity days. Did Gene ever have a virgin? Must have.

All that went out of Harold's head when Dorothy Schultz came for her consultation. He looked up the month's marks and saw that they were only slightly above water level and asked whether she did homework

regularly. She said she had, but that her mind was full of worries. That was an unusual answer for a student to make, and because she was a girl Harold hesitated to ask what these worries were.

He smiled and said, "Well Miss, couldn't you put boys out of your mind for forty-five minutes a day? That's all it would take to become an *A* student in history. It's really the simplest subject on the curriculum."

"It isn't boys, sir, it's my family. My father is a bricklayer and he got a small one-week job of repairing and he didn't report it to the investigator so now they cut us off relief. We don't know what we're going to do from one day to the next."

"Can't you prove that the job lasted only a week?"

"Sure we can but it doesn't do any good. When they want to cut you off they use any old excuse. It's happened to us before. I guess after a while they will take us back but in the meantime a girl can't help worrying. That takes your mind off school work. But I'm passing, aren't I?"

"Just about."

"I wouldn't like to flunk," she said. "I got enough to worry about."

Of course then he could not ask if she had cheated on the Treaty of Utrecht exam. He told her that worrying would not bring the relief check any sooner and that the best way to put those things out of mind was to throw herself into school work. She would find that it would be a great help to her later on.

Dorothy Schultz did not speak as though they were sitting in the history department office at all. She looked straight at Harold and rested both her forearms unaf-

fectedly on the desk. Her manner was warm and confident. It made Harold feel like a wise and kind uncle, not the pseudo-uncle of the English novel, but really friendly and helpful. He had occasion to say several balanced and sensible things because she discussed her situation readily and in some detail. She said all she wanted now was a high-school diploma, and that passable marks would satisfy her. Saturdays she worked in one of the department stores, and the section manager liked her, so that once she could show the diploma there was a chance for a job. Her family's only income now was the three dollars she made Saturdays. Mr. Darvas could see how important a full-time job would be. In a five-day week she could make as much as eighteen dollars with commission.

It made the Treaty of Utrecht seem a little remote and not very important. Harold felt that he had just had a glimpse into this little girl's heart and that it was a good heart. He felt that her confidences had an honest and touching quality. He wanted to help her, but of course there could be no question of offering money, so he prolonged the conference and nodded sympathetically. When she finally stood up she said something very surprising.

She said, "I wonder if you could be a little less hard on Frank Coletti. I know he is very bad in history but he's got his troubles too. If you could only be a little less hard on him for a while. His mother died this week."

All Harold could say was that Coletti had been a very weak student all term, long before his mother died. He concluded that Dorothy Schultz and Frank Coletti must be sweethearts, and he did not feel any more leniently

disposed toward the pitcher, dead mother or no. What he said about Coletti's having been a weak student all term seemed to confuse Dorothy Schultz but at the door she said another surprising thing. She turned back with that glance across the shoulder which he had already noted and said the surprising thing, and left quickly. He did not know whether it was Dorothy Schultz's parting comment that threw him so completely off stride or if it was Alma's unexpected appearance immediately following. Alma had never before called at the school.

"Do you know what that girl just said to me? Did you hear what she said?"

"No," Alma said. "Tell me."

"She said, why don't you smile more often in class, Mr. Darvas? You really have a very nice smile. Can you beat that?"

"Sure I can," Alma said.

Harold was altogether off stride. No student had ever said anything like that. They had muttered things under the breath, and some tough kids had cursed him audibly, or girls had winked at him apropos of some little joke but none of them had ever said anything straight out like that, not one of them had ever traversed the gap between instructor and pupil with such apparent certainty and lack of effort. The idea he had formed of Dorothy Schultz in the course of their talk was completely disrupted. He didn't know what to think of her now. That dainty creature living in a home with an income of three dollars, running around with the imbecile Coletti. Smile more often in class.

"Will you be busy this afternoon?" Alma said. "I want you to come help me see Gene off."

"Impossible," Harold said. "Busy."

"I have my reasons for wanting you to come."

"Can't do it."

"Have to."

"Can't. Truly I can't."

"I'll tell you what it is, Harold. I don't want to go home alone. Gene didn't think I ought to come to the station but I want to and I don't fancy the idea of the trip home. I'll probably want to take a drink and I want someone to be with me. You come and keep out of the way while we're saying goodbye, then take me to Madarász' Gulyás Grill in a taxi and don't forget to tell me everything will be all right, time heals all and he won't be gone long. Do this, will you, kid?"

Harold was used to discipline in his school work, and if Dorothy Schultz had not thrown him off stride he would not have accompanied his sister. As it was, he felt considerably out of place while Gene and Alma were saying goodbye, and he was curious about their conversation. He stood aside discreetly but he could hear everything they said.

Gene and Alma sat on a bench in the waiting room. She had her hand on his knee.

She said, "Darling, why are they sending you there?"

"Walker gave them a line on shortage of forces. I suppose Medwick had seen me cutting up and acting carefree a couple of times and figured I was young and footloose and field work would do me good."

"Is that why?"

"Maybe. Probably. I was just figuring about it on the way here."

"I don't want you to go."

"Well," he said, "I'm going now. I'll manage to see you soon."

"Will you be back for a visit?"

"No, I mean July."

"That isn't soon."

"It's four months," he said. "I know that isn't soon. I'll make a place for you out there by then."

"Darling, don't have any girls."

"No."

"But you will. I know what happens."

"No, you don't have to say that. You know I never have."

"I know. But this time I won't be there."

"Don't talk like that."

"All right, I won't," she said. "But I know what happens."

"Nothing happens. In July we'll be together again. Don't get drunk."

"I won't," Alma said.

"You will," he said. "I know what happens. You can get drunk but have a couple of friends around. No, don't have them around. Just don't get drunk at all."

"I can afford to get drunk. I wouldn't want anybody else, drunk or sober."

"Take care of yourself," Gene said. "They're opening the gates. I have to go now. Make your mother write to me."

Harold offered to help with the suitcase but Gene

took it himself. "Well, so long," Harold said. "Come for baby soon. We'll see that she doesn't fade into nothingness."

"Hold the fort, Professor," Gene said.

They kissed too long and too often, Harold thought. He did not like to be called Professor. When Gene disappeared down the staircase Alma cried a little.

She wiped her eyes and said, "I see you're getting ready to say Steady, kid. Don't."

"I wasn't going to say anything," Harold said. He wondered if Gene had said Professor ironically. Harold had meant to say something to the effect that in spite of political differences there was no reason why they should not correspond with each other, some such skilfully worded no-hard-feelings remark. But now he didn't know what Gene meant by "Hold the fort, Professor." He didn't see why they should have gone so sloppy toward the end. He told himself it made no difference whether Gene came or went, but after he was alone with Alma he felt relieved in spite of her little, silent crying jag. He was sorry for her but if Comrade Marsay was enough of a fool to risk her happiness at the caprice of some Party bureaucrat and she was enough of a fool to depend on a guy like that, well then . . .

He wished he were going some place, and thought that as soon as he got his doctor's degree he would spend an entire vacation just traveling. Harold had never been west of the Hudson. When people told him he did not know America he said that even in New York there were too many things for any one man to see, but this was just something he said and it weakened one of his main contentions about the Communist Party here.

Gene's visitors were forever asking him for specific objections to the Communist tactics he criticized, and Harold disclaimed being a trade-union expert or anything like that but said that the C.P. failed to adapt itself to American conditions. He longed to prefix some comment by "Now the time I was in Colorado" not only in reference to a discussion of Party tactics but because on his eighth birthday one of the Budapest aunts had presented him with a set of cowboy-Indian stories by Karl May, and words like Colorado or Sioux had a sweet, mysterious childhood timbre.

During the vacation after his senior year he had even started out to hitch-hike to Washington, D. C. He did not tell anyone; he was going to let them worry for a couple of days, and then he was going to send them a card from there. He took a few dollars and went downtown to the Holland Tunnel, where one could hit the Lincoln Highway. There were a lot of cops stationed at each end of that tunnel, examining cars, asking questions sometimes, and when Harold came into the Plaza and saw all the cops standing around he hesitated to thumb anybody. He was sure the cops had been stationed there to prevent hitch-hiking. They had empty rock faces and dewlaps around the stiff blue collars. Harold waited to see if there were any others asking for rides and he circled the Plaza for over an hour. Then he walked back to Fifth Avenue and took the bus uptown to Forty-second Street Library. On the way he made a study of pedestrians' faces and found that they were strained and grimy.

He would have joined one of those eternal desultory discussions on the library steps but he thought it would

be more profitable to go in and finish Beard's book. He noted that Beard's treatment of the most significant currents in the epoch of imperialism was worse than inadequate, downright misleading. Simons was too sketchy and the others were nothing but more or less fruitful source books. A true historical materialist's history of the United States remained to be written, and if Harold could write one that would be used as the text in all the workers' schools, his abstention from day-to-day revolutionary activity would be brilliantly justified. His writing was clumsy but the ideas would shine through. Besides, Alma could polish up the paraphrasing, etc. It would give her something to do. After a while, he abandoned this idea of a general work because he said that it would of necessity be superficial and that such gifts as he possessed were of a painstaking, analytical nature and he would do original research which the movement was also badly in need of. Perhaps Gene meant something like that when he said hold the fort. It was with the idea of hearing more about Gene that he consented to accompanying Alma to Madarász' Gulyás Grill. Anyway, so far as work was concerned the day was killed because too many things had happened and he would not be able to concentrate. Harold had not had such a vivid day for the longest time.

They had not been in the restaurant more than a few minutes when he remarked to this effect, and added that his senses must be curiously alert, since even the Grill appeared to be possessed of some strange and inexplicable attributes, the heavy curtains, the behavior of the waitress.

"She is not used to seeing me without Gene," Alma said.

"It's a funny place."

"I guess you don't know a whorehouse when you see one," she said. "You never did go to one, did you?"

"No. For the same reason that I never learned how to dance. I never had to. Is this really a joint?" He felt that the use of the word did not impart sufficient casualness to his tone. "This block is mangy with them." For all that, he was exquisitely stirred and he scrutinized the place with great excitement and prefigurations. The checkered tablecloths oozed of vice. He neglected to marvel at Alma's drinking capacity and at her silence. He had only the most fleeting thought of the bill she was piling up, and the grenadine swirled pink toward the bottom of his untouched bacardi.

FROM SEVERAL UNSUCCESSFUL TALKS AT the Party's district office, Gene concluded that he was being assigned to a section which had been neglected for years, and he was still completely at a loss as to why he had been chosen. For a long time the Party had frowned upon the arbitrary snatching of organizers from one district and transplanting them into another. The practice had vitiated much good work and demoralized entire organizations as well as organizers. Gene knew nothing about Walker personally and he had no reason to believe that the man had pleaded tragic shortage of forces simply to cover up his own incompetence. Yet that was a possibility. On the other hand, it was just possible that Medwick had sent him out to soak up experience in preparation for a more important job. In that case, he might at least have said so. The notion of being an unconscious instrument was revolting.

It would have been insufficient to consider the problem merely from the angle of Party discipline. As a matter of fact, after his first few months in the Party he had not thought much about the obedience aspect of discipline; there was no occasion for it; he had received his assignments or chosen them generally on the basis of apti-

tude and in that sense they had chosen themselves. Now it would have been easy for Gene to base his resentment on the grounds that he knew nothing about farm work. Then the problem would have resolved itself into one of Party discipline; then even questioningly, unwillingly, he would have arrived in Cayuna County ready for work. But Alma apparently complicated the skein beyond unraveling. Had it not been for her he might even have welcomed the new work. Under the circumstances he was prepared to find it dull and prepared to think of himself as incompetent and a poor Communist.

Discipline was not obedience. "It's not through obedience that men go out of their way to get killed," a Chinese Communist had said, "nor through obedience that they kill. . . ." It was not through obedience that Gene had left Alma. Whether or not it was discipline he thought he would find out in the course of the farm work. Gene had no doubts about his fundamental, implicit loyalty to the Party, but that alone was not Communist discipline.

At dawn the old bus dropped him in the town of Cayuna which was not large enough to have a station, so he sat on the large valise and rested his feet on the typewriter. Cayuna and the elms which shaded its houses and the lawn mowers in the window of its hardware store and the cold murky morning were like another dawn many years ago in Scott City, Kansas. There he had hopped off a long refrigerator drag. It was hotshot and he had held it down clear through Colorado in thirty-below weather. At some junction they had dropped his empty, and in hopes that he might find another, Gene had nailed it again on the run but the refrigerators had

been locked and the wind too cold and strong for prowling along the tops. He had to settle between two cars, standing on a low rung and holding on to the one near his eyes. He had not slept the night before, and to keep awake he had to knock his forehead against the rung. The drag would not pull up. When it finally had to stop before the big Colorado hump to take on two extra engines, Gene tried to get off but his hands would not open. He had to swing the weight of his body to force the fingers from the rung and then they would not close. The brakies let him thaw out near the engine, and although he found no empty, he did hit on a tanker and sat through to Scott City where the dawn was like the dawn in Cayuna and in every small American town. There were the elms and the brass doorknobs and the brick movie house with its poster. There was the Second Union National Bank with grated windows and the A. & P. and two saloons and a town pump. He sat on the large valise and rested his feet on the typewriter. Even the courthouse looked like the courthouse in Scott City, Kansas, and the courthouses of many American towns. Perhaps he only thought so because his mood of indecision was similar to moods he had had while hitting the road. He had not been able to sleep in the bus and his eyelids were just as heavy as they had been in Scott City. When a great old Dodge pulled up and a bull-necked farmer in overalls got out and looked at his city clothes Gene did not like it.

"You must be Eugene Marsay," the farmer said. "I'm Mike Ogrodnik. Let me take your suitcase."

Gene could not make out whether the man spoke with a slight foreign accent or some local dialect. He was glad

the district organizer had not talked much about individual comrades. These thumbnail sketches always proved inaccurate, and he preferred a clean slate in sizing up people with whom he was to work. The only person whom Walker had discussed was the president of the Cayuna Farmers League, Jasper Finch, "good native element but raw."

Mike Ogrodnik insisted on carrying both the valise and the typewriter, and as he bent over to place them in the back seat, the lower part of his body loomed big even against the primeval Dodge. He must have weighed two-twenty. As soon as they got in Mike Ogrodnik asked Gene if he had ever done organizing before and Gene gave his Party history briefly. They were driving across a bridge over the swollen Willow Run.

"I bet you don't know what a singletree is," Mike Ogrodnik said.

"I don't."

"You'll learn. I was against your coming here in the first place but now I don't care because you look like a good comrade. The way we're fixed, we can't support a functionary. The district has an idea we got an organization here but you'll find different. On paper we got six locals of the League and four Party units. All we really got is the Willow Run local and about twenty Party members who meet and pay dues and holler that something ought to be done. We run a dance the other week, made a few dollars so you will have a little money to get by for a while. There is no worry about eating because you will stay at my farm and wherever you are, the comrades will attend to your meals. Still in all, I can't see how you'll get around without a car. This one

is on its last legs and my wife Anna nurses it like a baby, she won't let you run it much. The Pine Hill unit is a long way from my place, half of it dirt road. You will have to have a car."

"If somebody's got a wreck I can put it in shape with a minimum of expense."

"That's the boy," Mike Ogrodnik said. "And you'll need some rubber boots to get past my lane. I will give you Anna's old pair."

Mike's own muddy boots shuffled near the clutch and the accelerator, and he talked loudly with grunts and slapped his thighs when he grunted. Gene's well-shined shoes rested incongruously against the worn floorboard. They were driving on a macadamized road along the Willow Run, and a huckster and some farmers passed them, waving to Mike.

"They all know old Mike Ogrodnik," he said, "every farmer in the township and near half of them across the ridge. I've been feeding them pamphlets for thirty years. A lot of these Ku Kluxers have my place spotted too. If the vigilantes ever clamp down, and there's a good chance they might as soon as we get stronger, they know where to call first. I got two shotguns but they wouldn't be much help. Two summers ago I fired one for the first time and it kicked my shoulder so I couldn't work for a week. A big tramp chow used to come and grab chickens from under my nose and once I laid for him and got within ten feet of the bugger but this gun near took my shoulder off and he got away. Jasper is the one for shooting. He's got a little hunting bitch and when they go out together his family is sure of one meal anyway. Last December when they didn't have anything

to eat and he didn't have any money for shells even, he took a chance on putting up a salt lick back of his barn and shot two deer. He had a hell of a time explaining it because the game warden followed the tracks and if it hadn't been such a big herd, the snow would have given Jasper dead away. For awhile I thought it would be better if you stayed over at his place. He has a personal following among the farmers here but he needs a lot of political education, even if he has been meeting with the district committee. I'll tell you more about that later. See, all Jasper's got to live on is his disability allowance and he couldn't feed another mouth. I'm not so sure the district will come through with those three dollars a week."

"They will."

"I'm not sure and don't you be so sure. But you won't starve at my place. See that rabbit scuttle into the hedge? Jasper woulda stopped the car and picked him right off."

For the entire drive along Willow Run he talked, full of opinions and information. Gene was unfamiliar with the names, and sleepy, and he could not retain most of it. Afterward when he came to see how fundamentally accurate and acute those judgments were he wondered where he had heard them before. The Dodge bucked and sloshed past a mailbox into the lane, and an old woman, looking considerably older than Mike, waved violently from the porch. Mike said, "I wonder what's eating her. Women are funny. You know what the Ukrainians say? Never believe a horse when he sweats or a woman when she cries. Some cook, though."

She toddled through the mud in agitation but she did not forget to greet Gene politely. She said, "It's filled

the whole cellar with water. Hurry up, Mike, hurry up.”

One of the veins from the Willow Run swamp had worked its way through the concrete and water stood waist high in the cellar. Anna Ogrodnik had noticed it after Mike left and had time only to salvage a couple of full egg crates and a sack of potatoes. A lot of preserves, and Mike's electric well-pump were flooded. Anna yelled at him in Ukrainian but to be polite to Gene, he answered her in English and cursed the goddam Dutchman who had built the house over a hundred years ago. Said the only thing was to bale first and fill up the hole after, and since the water was no longer rising, he wanted his breakfast, a man can't work on an empty stomach. He waded in and made sure about the hole and said a farmer can't expect to get the breaks all year round. While Anna got the food ready, Gene changed into work clothes to help with the baling and Mike brought in three baskets of corn cobs and a log of birch and started a blaze so they would be able to warm themselves periodically. At the table he ate a large plateful of prunes and set before himself a bowl which he filled with three sliced cucumbers, several onions and a bottle of sour goat's milk, and he ate that and also some soft boiled eggs. Gene had forgotten to speak about not having slept all night but now of course he could not say it and as soon as Mike finished his tea they went downstairs. Mike had the longer boots so he stood nearer the bottom of the stairs and handed up the buckets two at a time, large wooden buckets the size of buttermilks, and Gene dumped them first to one side of the lane, then when that got too soggy, across the lawn.

They did this for several hours, resting sometimes be-

fore the great kitchen fireplace. Mike talked incessantly but this time Gene really couldn't listen because he was so exhausted. At one point, when he was about to put a stop to the baling he saw Mike Ogrodnik wink to his wife. Mike was putting Gene through one of his private tests. Soon Gene caught a second wind and took shorter trips pouring, so Mike began to puff below and said now that the electric pump was above the water line they could leave the rest for the afternoon. Also, that he was not as young as he used to be. He said rain or shine, the chickens have to be fed, and in thirty years of farming some dampness is bound to get into your bones, he had a touch of rheumatism, nothing serious, he could still step the polka with the best of them, Gene should have seen him at the dance they threw the other week, had about six whirls of it with Mrs. Jencic from the Bellville Local, a big piece but lively.

Anna leaned out of the pantry and said she didn't see what Mike admired in that woman, didn't attend the meetings even. Mike banged on the armchair in delight and said Comrade Marsay, you might as well make up your mind, you can't keep anything from this old woman, she hears everything she shouldn't hear, don't mistake me now, she isn't loose or anything and she'll blush if she hears something out of the way but she likes to listen in anyhow and you don't know she knows until years later, it all comes out in the wash. Listen Anna, he said, you can't tell me that Mrs. Jencic isn't a lively one for her age and weight. Anna set the table silently and wouldn't be drawn in until Mike slapped her behind, then she turned red and said, Mike, you never know where to stop. That's right, Mike said, I wouldn't be

married to you if I did, you and your big feet. Mike, she said. All right, he said, I guess I better stop now, even Lenin had to retreat with the Nep but he never gave up his principles and you have big feet. Mike, she said, shut up and get the brooder stoves out of that woodshed before them chicks get here.

After Mike went out, she said, Comrade Marsay, my husband is rough, you mustn't mind him because a good heart he has and he don't mean anything bad.

She took him upstairs into the room he was to occupy, a large light room with dandelions on the wallpaper and a basin on the dresser and a trunk on the bed. Not so extra, but, . . . said Anna and raised her hands Jewishly. She had the Jewish admiration of educated people and tried to make him feel as comfortable as possible, smoothed the pillow over and over. She chattered as she put the room in order, constantly apologizing for Mike's roughness and ways, and when Gene told her he was not a college boy at all, she said never mind, you have to get used to everything, you will see after what a good fella Mike is. There were no meetings that evening or the next so all he could do was find out about Mike and Anna and about their opinions of the various comrades and the neighbors. He followed Mike through the chicken houses and handed him buckets of water but Mike was proud of still being able to do his work and said take it easy, boy, look around the first couple of days.

Mike was proud of having farmed this place on the Willow Run for thirty years and of having been an active Bolshevik back in Ekaterinoslav and of having had the sense to smuggle in copies of *Vperiod*, the journal

Lenin started after the Mensheviks took over Iskra. This was a difficult thing to do because Anna was then a Menshevik and he loved her. They had a quarrel and she came to America but Mike followed her, and they made up because the quarrel did not seem so immediate on the banks of the Willow Run. For about twenty years they were the only Party members in Cayuna County and the only subscribers to the Ukrainian and Jewish dailies. Mike subscribed to the *Daily Worker* too, but mostly out of duty. *Vperiod* had been the paper, he said.

He was proud of having been a Party member so long and of having to wear the only size nineteen collar in the valley. He had a great tanned bald forehead and sky blue eyes with little laughing crow's feet near the corners and enormous calloused fingers that never straightened out completely. When he felt playful he tried to imitate a monkey by thrusting his tongue under the upper lip and letting his heavy arms dangle even lower. He had a big belly but his chest was so big too that you could not notice, and he claimed the belly was part of the chest and challenged people to punch it with their fists. Sometimes they did that.

He scarcely ever just spoke, he shouted or guffawed, and sang. He did not know any American songs, only Ukrainian ones, and he liked to have the radio on, even when he was not listening. Times when he felt really good he laughed so loudly and so long that people who had not been with him before were puzzled and looked at each other. He would laugh to himself in the fields, and while he was resting his horse, Kitty, he would get to singing the Ukrainian songs and throw the lines from around his middle and dance with small mincing steps

along the furrow. Mike would rather be out pitching hay or cultivating than most anything else, Anna said, he certainly preferred it to fussing about the flock of some two thousand white leghorns which were his bread and butter. The flock supplied enough manure for his forty acres which in turn produced almost enough feed to last the year round. Mike Ogradnik made a better go of it than any of the small farmers in the valley because Anna had a business head and he was a glutton for dirty work. They hired help only at harvest time, and his deep brown sod could be made to yield well over a hundred bushels of corn per acre and he vaccinated his flock without fail, shifted the coops from field to field so that no disease ever got started, he knew how to feed and got the breaks several years running. He had no bank balance and he had to save for a month to get a pair of special shoes for Anna's feet, but his taxes and interest were up to date.

In less than a week Gene heard favorable comments on Mike's farming ability from all kinds of sources, including the county agent himself, but he did not realize what a great help this was in keeping the few League members together until several people had remarked on the way Jasper Finch let his place get run down. Even John Onda, who was a Party member and a friend of Jasper's, said a man could understand where a fellow bumps into a streak of seedy luck like a note being called or a tuberculosis test taking most of your herd but that don't mean you let your machinery go rusty or let the weeds and the cutworms kill most of your truck patch. Some tin cans would have saved those tomato plants last year, just a matter of getting a sackful off somebody.

Farmers and especially their wives took everything personal, Mike said, and they were apt to judge an organization by the head man. Now we know Jasper was gassed in the war and he can't put in a day's work like you and me but that's no excuse for a weedy truck patch. If he put those kids to work on it instead of letting them go beg meals from everybody on the ridge, why maybe they wouldn't have to go begging. We all gave Jasper a hand last year. John gave him a couple of shoats, and his seed he got off me. This leadership bug of his just about killed him as a farmer.

Gene could see how one of his jobs would be to keep Jasper Finch and Mike Ogradnik from each other's throats. Walker had been right in thinking highly of Jasper's possibilities, but after two years of existence Jasper's local could still never summon a meeting of more than eight or ten, while the Willow Run local which Mike was running singlehanded had open meetings of as many as sixty. Mike of course had easier sailing. Most of the farmers in the valley were foreigners, peasants from the old country, miners in the soft coal for a decade or two, now settled here with large families. They could not go back to mining and industry because they were too old. They had sunk their savings in the land and it had become a matter of keeping some jumps ahead of the sheriff. They were dairy people for the most part, with herds ranging from five to twenty cows, but they had industrial backgrounds, fingers missing here and there, and they knew what organization meant. They came to Andy's Rink every two weeks and had their beers, waited for the League to grow, paid dues and brought their families. Some of these sixty in the

Willow Run local had run off a couple of penny sales in 1933 and there had not been any sheriffings since then, not in the township anyway.

They looked like wonderful people to Gene and at the first meeting of the local he knew he would not maneuver to get back to New York but would try somehow to bring Alma out. At that meeting the farmers voted to send a carload of food to the rubber strikers but otherwise there had not been anything particularly inspiring. Effective as Mike could be with individual contacts, he was a poor chairman, and most of that evening was frittered away in the accounting for dance receipts; no mention of local problems, relief or production credit. The Party members held an obvious caucus just before the meeting and when Gene called this to Mike's attention he shrugged and said there was no secret about it. Then at the section committee meeting in Jasper's farmhouse Gene spoke of this along with other matters, and Mike looped the suspenders over his shoulders, said I guess you're right, Party members should come to a meeting with decisions all made at the unit, I guess I know when I'm wrong. About the other matters, the literature distribution, the study circle, the relief delegation, Mike also guessed Gene was right and the other comrades nodded too.

They agreed too readily, Gene thought. Apparently Party work in the county had been so slipshod and stagnant that they considered simple organizational measures as flashes of insight from the brain of a Bolshevik genius. He had to throw out several stimulants for discussion before Jasper Finch cleared his throat and addressed himself personally to Gene, not to the chairman

or the committee as a whole. Jasper Finch wanted to know exactly why he had been appointed a member of the district committee anyway. Farm work always came last on the agenda, often as not it had to be tabled. Whenever he made a report, they listened politely but never had anything constructive to say. All the district ever did was to send out the dues stamps and the quotas for various membership and circulation drives. Every time Jasper brought this to their attention they criticized themselves and each other but not once did they really do anything. There hadn't been a speaker down here from the district in fully a year. What did Comrade Marsay propose to do about bringing the district and the section into closer working relations?

Mike Ogrodnik said, let me answer that. Jasper, they didn't send a speaker because we ain't enough of an organization to make it worth his while. You've been going to town for these meetings and staying there two, three days in the week and you ain't done a stitch of work around the section. You're the fellow that should have been doing the things Comrade Gene is doing but you just didn't know enough, same as I didn't, only I don't blame it on the district. You've been playing the big leader, letting your farm go to pieces, but you can't be a leader without followers because then people laugh at you. That's right, yes? Everything the district has is going into this rubber strike. Still in all they thought enough of us to send Comrade Gene, and even if they don't send the three dollars a week, we got no kick coming. Just let's you and me and the rest go to work here and we'll be getting all the biggest speakers in the country.

Mike's face was very red as he spoke and his voice so loud that Jasper's kids peered out of their bedroom upstairs.

Jasper Finch said, Mike you don't have to holler so loud because we can hear you. In fact, you don't have to talk at all because we heard all these things before. It takes me all of three days to get back from town sometimes because I have to wait for a hitch. You're as big as a Clydesdale stallion and you never been gassed in the war. I can't walk thirty miles a day. You got this old Dodge to run around in but even if I had a car I wouldn't have the money for gas. Comrade Gene here is young and he can take a chance on getting around. Who got Unit 3 to join us in a body? Who got the unemployment insurance bill indorsed by the American Legion Post? You got no call to criticize me and my personal life. I run my place the best I can with the resources I got. It isn't like I had your patch where you can plow a furrow with the heel of your boots. I am not going to break what's left of my spine just so when the Second Union National gets good and ready to put its finger on my seventy acres of assorted minerals I can say here sir, here's a field of grain you can sell to buy your baby a silver rattle. I haven't been able to pay taxes for three years and they won't let it slide for another. I know what I'm doing. I'm not saying I would not have done more work around the place and around the section if it hadn't been for these trips to town but that is just why I want this whole question of the district cleared up. What's the good of my going there?

Mike said, "I thought you liked going."

"Comrades," the chairman said, "ask for the floor if you want to talk."

It went back and forth like that for a while until Gene said something about the necessity of central leadership and everybody agreed with that. Jasper Finch's children were still peering out of the bedroom door. Their night-shirts were dirty and ragged. Their mother was large with the fifth child. She was Jasper's second wife and she came from an orphan asylum in Terre Haute. Her forearms were as long as Mike Ogrodnik's, and almost as big, and these yellow dry forearms had varicose veins. Martha Finch had a lovely voice and led the singing of the Internationale at the end of each meeting. Looking at her hands, Gene thought how impossible it would have been to send for Alma in the near future, and driving down the ridge road, he told Mike what Alma was like and how impossible it would be to send for her now. Mike said, "You're a lucky guy to have a girl like that, if she's really like that I mean, if it isn't just that you're in love." Looking at Mike's curved and calloused fingers around the wheel and remembering Martha Finch's yellow dry forearms, he thought that were he and Alma to continue together she would soon have hands like that perhaps, and she might not be able to go through with it.

At seventeen his own hands had been calloused like that from working in the Nolan Tool and Die Works of Long Island City, then the following year, in the *Times* composing room, the callouses disappeared and there was black ink up to the elbows and smears on the white of his biceps even. When he became slip boy for the rummies who covered police headquarters his fingers

were dirty only certain times of the day, when he handled the freshly printed editions, but when he started covering stories himself the hands had to be clean all day for about four years. One of those years his hands had been particularly soft because the girl he lived with used to buy an expensive brand of toilet soap, and once for fun she gave him a manicure, and he was young enough to blush when she asked how come the nails on both middle fingers were pared to the flesh.

He now thought of those four years on the paper as a kind of interlude. It had lasted the longest of any of his jobs and it broke the continuity of a succession of minor industrial accidents, discharge envelopes, headwaiters and tough foremen. With only the brief transition of the slip-boy period, it brought him from furnished rooms on the West Side and the Saturday nights of the punch pressroom's bachelor quarters into a kitchenette apartment off Sheridan Square and a series of triangles with people's wives or sweethearts, slippers brown, black, yellow, with and without pompons, lying overturned under the couch.

And four years he had that job with nothing much to do after hours except to watch in a none too detached manner the formations of the triangles into multilaterals of unholy dimensions and incalculable characteristics, see what the next woman was going to get out of him and bring out in him, see how he would ditch her, how they would taper off, and to sit in the Charles Street basement, secure in the bartender's false assurances of unlimited credit, talking polysyllables to girls, hollow little cruelties, violations of confidences, knifing of friends who were not friends at all, four years reporting stories

which lost all meaning in the required formulations, the office gossip, long sunny dull afternoons in the Yankee Stadium, what are your plans for the outfield next year, will the Babe last, all the time an obscure sensation of having been sidetracked, the loss of continuity in his life, an obscure sensation, distressing but not desperate, nothing was desperate then, all the formative elements for such drastic emotion seemed to have been drained off, dissipated in multilaterals. Eileen restored a tranquillity, she asked for nothing that he was not prepared and even anxious to give, and she was grateful and wrapped him into affectionate months of sweet isolation, sensuality and Yardley's lavender, the months so lulling and full of three great French novelists whom he read then for the first time, and so oppressive after the loss of his job and the awareness of his dependence on her.

He ran from Eileen into another isolation, bitter this time, and in the municipal flophouse and Central Park a piece of naphtha soap was a piece of luck and the familiar lines of ingrained dirt settled back into the old tracks. He was little given to self-analysis and indulged in it of late mostly as a concession to Alma, but, talking to her about this period, he discovered a lot of threads that ran together and crossed in the fabric of those months on the bum. If the park bench was the dead end of his side-track, then the violent social life of the Hooverville he helped to build threw him back onto the main line he had traveled for his first score of years. Connie Meade, his shack buddy, had worked alternately as shear helper, heater and drill-press operator in Wilkes-Barre. Grogan was a marble cutter from Pater-son. Chuck Andor, the comrade, had been a taxi-driver,

Hulm a dockwalloper, Fletcher a lumber-worker, and Benjamin Hopkins, a mine-carpenter. Gene himself had done too much manual work to have notions about its intrinsic nobility, etc., but the daily hoarding for mulligan and the creating and sharing of primitive comforts in the geographical center of an enormous and hostile city reawakened a species of social feeling and many of his youthful antagonisms, cops in particular. Helping Chuck Andor to form an unemployment council in the Hooverville was more an expression of personal solidarity with his companions and personal hatred of the people who were visibly shattering their lives than of any political understanding. And barricading himself, Connie, and a few others inside the shack when police came to evict them was still largely a gesture of the newspaper days. Only in the course of the trial, which he attended with a bandaged head, only after the long talks with the International Labor Defense attorneys, did he stop thinking of it as a desperate gag.

Gene gave his first "politically developed" speech on the witness stand, and he went to jail with an armful of revolutionary literature that enabled him to augment and recast that speech a dozen times in his imagination, and finally, at the banquet given him after the five months by the I.L.D. branch committee which had visited the jail several times, he delivered it in the new form. Accordingly, Gene entered the movement as a hero of sorts and he had a trying time at envelope licking, mimeographing and wall newspapers. With a four-year training in one of the world's most efficient newspaper organizations, he thought the comrades were inept, waste-

ful of energy, lacking in enterprise, and, strangely enough, it was Alma who helped him adapt himself.

Although at the time Alma was not connected with any organization, all her friends belonged to the National Student League; she had followed the revolutionary press for a much longer time than Gene had, and her knowledge of the movement was more contemporary, she knew names, she had been to a lot of dances and benefit performances, and she had seen several changes in policy and had not bothered her head about them much. She let him blow off steam about his early troubles and assured him that there were a lot of old timers who felt the same way and that they were not traitors at all but Party workers in good standing. Doing the actual work, he soon found out these things for himself and advanced beyond her in maturity of perspective, but she kept sufficiently abreast to be at least intelligent about Party matters when she ventured to comment.

Before he had found his level and aptitudes in the movement he had undertaken all kinds and all quantities of work that no one man could possibly carry out, thinking this was expected of him, and in the anxiety to rid himself of many habits of long standing he ran into considerable difficulty. Alma shared some of these habits, in a milder form as befitted her temperament perhaps. She too liked her liquor and to stay up nights talking, and that helped. By the time Gene had worked out a routine, he and Alma had also worked out a home arrangement that spared them most of the petty irritations of domestic life. After all, Gene paid his share of the rent and board while the major burden was on the Darvas family, and he was away five nights in the week, and their room

was large, and Alma had no house work. They laughed at the same puns and threw up their hands together at the accepted design of the then proposed Palace of Soviets, and they had got to thinking that if it weren't for this and that, they would be a happily married couple. Sometimes, usually in agitation over her lack of prospects, Alma would be thrown into moods inaccessible to him and he could no more talk her out of them than she could talk him out of the momentary bad tempers occasioned by ticklish fraction work. But they were both learning to steer clear of intrusions and they had each other's bodies for escape. In the wakeful nights of talking about people and their own relations to people they had worked out some common denominators, because neither had reached the plane on which more mature individuals operated, where self-analysis outweighed self-esteem, but working hand in hand it seemed they were making the climb faster and smoother.

Gene knew that to make a decent beginning in organizing Cayuna farmers at least a year was necessary, and to be separated from Alma for that long a time was out of the question, he thought. In a year she would more than likely be sleeping with someone, if only to relieve a condition, and in spite of elaborate theories, the idea was a torment. This occurred to him while Mike was still driving along the ridge road, and he said, "We will have to find some way to bring my wife out here."

"She a Party comrade?" Mike said.

"Not in New York but she would be out here where the issues are clear and the distractions fewer."

"In other words you want her here."

"What do you think?"

"Everything in its turn," Mike said. "I can see we'll have to think about it. I like a good-looking girl in the house."

At night Gene sat high up on the lumpy mattress, and the Willow Run rapids hummed past the woods, the moonlight streamed cold and full of the contours and flavors of other years. In New York he had forgotten about the moon. The gravel ridge road was white in the moon, hard and crunchy up the hillside and muddy past the grade and Mike had to drive Gene up and down that road most every night because Anna would not stand for anyone else at the wheel of the Dodge, our life is dependent on the car, she said, you know I am a good Party member, Comrade Gene, I do mine share and Mike does more than his but nobody can be a good Party member without he should eat first. So by the time Mike had taken Gene to the four units and whatever there was of the locals, the new chicks came in and Mike had to be up all hours of the night and Gene had to thumb his way or arrange to have someone pick him up, or just walk.

Sometimes when he came home Mike was already up and at the brooder stoves and then Anna was shame-faced all next day but the Dodge was her baby. Gene sloshed along the west slope of the ridge road, circling the ruts and his long legs sank ankle-deep in the cow trails. The Cayuna lights seemed near but soon he got their range and knew they were really far down the valley, and once a great monkey faced owl started from the hollow of a chestnut tree at the turn of the Demster Pike where Jeffery Hutchins lived with his wife and nine children. Webster, the oldest, used to raise his hand

in greeting but the others just pressed their unwashed faces against the window toward the road and when Gene waved to them they looked at each other and hesitated.

Jeffery Hutchins seemed too old to have so many young children but there they were. After Webster, he had had no children for six years, then they started coming, one a year. The way Mike explained that, he had an accident which cost him the use of one hand, fell from the tractor into the rake, now he couldn't do much else, except make them, one a year. Jeffery stood under the chewing tobacco ad on his barn, leaning against the unpainted boards, leaning close to avoid being hit by loose shingles, and when Mike pulled up he would approach and put one foot on the running board and give the right change with which to buy three stale loaves at the American store. When he did not have the money he would just remove the corncob pipe with his good hand and ask Mike what the weather forecast had been over the radio. Even this he did only out of politeness, because in spite of the fact that Mike loaned him machinery and delivered his supplies all year round, Jeffery Hutchins disliked Mike for being a Communist and for having suggested that he apply for relief with a delegation from the Cayuna Farmers League. For many years Jeffery Hutchins had refused to apply for relief at all, and when he was finally forced to go, he went alone and they sent out an investigator who turned his case down with the notation that the family was still getting a monthly milk check of twenty-two dollars. Then instead of admitting that he should have gone with a delegation, Jeffery said the government has its budget, they know what they

can afford and what they can't, I'm out of luck, but that don't mean I have to go tear the roof off the Capitol, I ain't ready for the poorhouse yet.

"And that's about as far as you'll get with Jeff Hutchins," said Mike.

Through the windowpane those children looked like Jasper Finch's four, and like all hungry and dirty children, great eyes and the skin drawn over large foreheads, and narrow pale lips over the teeth, yellow and chipped at the edges. On their way to school they had to walk through one of Mike's fields, and always they went along the far hedge to avoid running into people. Once, about the middle of March, a couple of days after the chicks were in, Gene was carrying a bucket of mash feed past the summer kitchen and he heard one of the Hutchins twins, Helen, crying under the far hedge. She went to school every second day only, because on the other days Marjorie had to go and they had only one pair of shoes between them.

Marjorie didn't like school, but Helen did, and that day they were supposed to have drawing, so she had started out barefoot, not the first time she did it, except now she gashed her heel on a stalk that protruded from the frozen sod. Gene wanted to carry her into the house, she was so light, but Helen cried all the louder and said either he should carry her home or leave her on the ground, then all the way to the Hutchins place she would not look at him and as they approached, her simpering became more subdued and the tears came only when her eyes would fall on the bloody foot. Nearing the pike, Gene kissed her lightly and this surprised or scared her so, she would not utter a sound, not even in

the kitchen where Mrs. Hutchins cleaned the wound. It was an ugly gash and an effective point of departure for Gene who thought this would be a good time to get Jeffery Hutchins and his wife on a delegation to the relief headquarters at Cayuna.

There was a broken chair lying near the fireplace. Jeffery Hutchins had been using it as a footstool for years. Gene picked it up and turned it this way and that, and asked one of the small boys for some baling wire and a hammer. He whittled a few wedges with his own knife, and while he was fitting the legs and the arms together he told about the relief delegations pulled off in New York, how firmness and sticking up for your rights always helped and the government was run by people who gave only as much as they were forced to give, it wasn't like our own kind were running the works.

Jeffery Hutchins had not thought of Gene as his kind and apparently he could not get over the feeling that Mike Ogrodnik and this educated young fellow were trying to rope him into something illegal. The fact that after the tinkering his old chair stood solid and useful again went a longer way toward changing his opinion of the League's tactics than anything Gene might have said. He shifted his cob from its worn groove a number of times and spat thoughtfully into the flames. Mrs. Hutchins came over and said the chair was as good as new. Gene followed her back to the stove and lifted the lid off one of the pots, sniffing at the contents with a delight not altogether genuine. He put his hand on Mrs. Hutchins' elbow, ever so briefly and slightly, but no man with the exception of an old time sweetheart, way before her marriage, had ever touched her with that tenderness

and attention. She had been listening to Gene all the time and now she drew him into the other room and said if Jeff don't go, I will, and Gene said, you get together as many of the children as possible Saturday morning and wait for me here, I hope Helen's foot is healed by then. We most certainly appreciate your bringing her home, Mrs. Hutchins said.

Saturday morning Mike found four chicks dead in one of the coops and three in another. The rest had simply pecked them to death. First one would take a peck at her neighbor's tail, then if blood showed they would all pile in and the final disemboweling took only a short time. This meant that Mike and Anna had to spend the morning catching chicks which had bloody tails and smearing them up with red enamel so when the others pecked at that, the quinine would get in their noses and discourage them. Mike cursed because he had wanted to go on the delegation in the worst way. This might be a very important turn in the work here, he said, we got to let Gene have the Dodge and as a Party member there is nothing you can say, Anna. She kicked at the front wheel which had the patches, warned Gene against the curve down the river and said for him not to do over thirty miles. She repeated this to John Onda who came with his wife and to Sue Melinkovitch who brought a whole carload of neighbors.

With Mrs. Hutchins and five of the children, they formed one of the biggest crowds Cayuna had seen since the firemen's carnival. Most of the farmers returning from the dairy pulled up for a look, and the clerks in the American and the A. & P. stopped waiting on people. Vern Saunders came out of the saloon and wanted to

know where the fire was, and a man with lather all over his face stood behind the window in Cy Leslie's Tonsorial Parlor. Gene consulted with Onda and Sue Melinkovitch about the advisability of an open air meeting after the delegation had made its call, but they were full of objections and said that a permit would be necessary. Sue had her hands full trying to coax Webster Hutchins to come upstairs with the rest. He was only seventeen and just as gruff and suspicious as his father, and he said a fellow didn't like to see his mother make a fool of herself. Mrs. Hutchins said, Now if anything happens I will never be able to look my husband in the eye again. Please, Mr. Gene, keep everything respectable, Jeff wouldn't stand for his wife and kids going against the law. Folk like us couldn't afford to make an enemy of Squire Webb.

Mrs. Hutchins had been carrying the baby ever since they had got out of the car. Now Gene took it from her and Squire Webb was much bewildered to see this neatly dressed young man with a smiling child come into the office, followed by the swarthy and determined John Onda and the handsome Sue and the Hutchins girls who clustered about their mother, and the neighbor's wife who could not take her eyes off the inkwell, and the Swedish farmer who folded his arms high across the chest, and Webster Hutchins who stood in the doorway and would not come in after repeated invitations. Squire Webb was vaguely grateful to Webster Hutchins because his office staff was all in the outer room and he preferred to have the door open. He thought of another delegation in which he as a senior at Dartmouth had participated, a successful mission which resulted in the res-

toration to eligibility of the first-string left tackle. That had been eight years ago, and since then he had no dealings with any sort of delegation and he was much more bewildered than he looked. He left his cigarette burning on the tray while Gene described the condition of Jeffery Hutchins' family, asking weekly cash relief and clothing and shoes for all eleven people.

Squire Webb was not in the habit of interviewing applicants but through the glass door he had listened to a number of embarrassed, sometimes tearful and always humble pleas, and he was considerably astonished at the dark young man's quiet and resolute tone and command of language. He rang for the Hutchins file card and studied it. He said, "This family is not destitute. Our investigator reports that they receive a monthly check of twenty-two dollars."

"Mr. Hutchins has taxes and interest amounting to nineteen and a half dollars per month," Gene said.

Squire Webb read further down the card and the long ash fell from his burning cigarette. "There are other factors to consider," he said. "Mr. Hutchins has six cows. That is four less than the minimum unit which would be considered by the Rural Rehabilitation Board. No one can hope to run a farm with a producing base of six cows. It has been suggested to Mr. Hutchins that he sell five of them, keeping one for the younger children. The government can't support these unprofitable units. Relief is for the destitute."

"In another year this baby will be able to talk," Gene said, "and he will tell you that not even the younger members of the Hutchins family are accustomed to drinking milk. In the meantime, these six cows remain

their only source of income and they cannot give them up for a meager relief check which might be cut off at the discretion of the legislature or by your own investigator. Mrs. Hutchins has not been able to make a new dress for herself in eight years, and these five children are wearing their Sunday best. They need underwear and shoes and money for food. We believe the government has enough wealth at its disposal to supply these, and that is why we are here to see that they get it."

"I am sure the government is aware of its responsibilities and it has worked out its own ways of dealing with such problems. There is this seventeen-year-old boy, big enough to enlist in the Civilian Conservation Corps. That would automatically give his family an additional twenty-five dollars each month. Is Webster Hutchins here?"

"That's me," Webster said, "but I don't want to go there."

Squire Webb looked at Gene with a there-you-are in his eye. Mrs. Hutchins shook her head at the baby who was putting his fist against Gene's cheek. Both Sue Melinkovitch and the neighbor's wife offered to take the baby but Gene held on and he said, "Mr. Hutchins has use of only one hand. To take away the only person capable of doing a man's work at plowing time would be virtual disaster for the entire family. Aside from that, one doesn't have to be quite seventeen to know that these camps are a form of military training. Webster Hutchins and the Cayuna Farmers League are opposed to imperialist war on principle. Webster has not been eating very regularly but he hopes to, one day, and he would like to remain alive."

"Don't misunderstand me," Squire Webb said. "This office is not forcing anyone to sell his cows or to enlist in the CCC. You people must realize that our funds are limited and cannot be earmarked indiscriminately. We can give these children some shoes and clothing, but their township has about forty dollars left for relief checks and this has to last until the first of next month."

"There is not a pound of flour or a bag of salt left at the Hutchins place. They have to have cash." The baby persisted in playing with Gene's mouth and eyes, and finally Sue had to take him. Gene said, "Let the county apply for an additional apportionment if necessary because we intend to get this relief if it means throwing a daily picketline around the courthouse. A picketline of taxpaying, voting citizens. At the announced rate of a dollar per person, the Hutchins family should be receiving eleven dollars every week."

Squire Webb was making a visible effort to discover what kind of organization and what kind of person he was dealing with. He tried addressing his remarks to Mrs. Hutchins and John Onda but they would look at Gene and the administrator's eyes would wander back to him also. When Gene mentioned a dollar a person, Squire Webb said, "You're not implying that the relief administration has not used its funds to the best advantage? There is a proper place and time for such a charge."

"I have tried to imply that the Hutchins family needs food to keep from starvation and some shoes to keep from freezing."

"I'll see that another investigator goes out."

"That will take time," Gene said, "and unnecessary effort. Mrs. Hutchins here can answer all the questions."

"Everything Mr. Gene told you is gospel truth, sir," Mrs. Hutchins said. "Most of my kids haven't seen a piece of meat since Christmas."

"And that's no lie," John Onda said.

"No, it ain't no lie," the Swedish farmer said.

"I don't doubt you people," said Squire Webb, "and if that is how critical the situation is, I will personally see that something is done. Our funds are limited and we have had to exercise great care to make a little go a long way. No matter how large a family is, eight dollars is our maximum weekly allowance and I will personally see that you receive it to tide you over, Mrs. Hutchins. Now which of the children did you say was in need of clothing?"

"Every blessed one of them," Mrs. Hutchins said. "And shoes too."

"You tell me what the sizes are and I will fill out the order and the woman in the storehouse will give you the items." He turned to Gene. "I'm obliged to you for having interested yourself in this case, but you must understand that we cannot be too careful with the limited funds at our disposal, Mr.—"

"Marsay."

"Mr. Marsay. Our investigators don't have hearts of stone, after all. But you have no conception of how often they have been imposed upon. Investigators take their oath to the government same as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. What again was the name of the organization you represent?"

"The Cayuna Farmers League."

When the group filed out, Squire Webb shook hands with Gene and with Mrs. Hutchins who remained stand-

ing before the desk in astonishment. He patted Marjorie's head and the cheeks of the baby and said he hoped the storehouse would have all the correct sizes in stock. He filled out and signed a draft for sixteen dollars, the first two weeks' allowance, and he handed it to Gene who had to offer the slip several times before Mrs. Hutchins reached out her hand.

All the eyes which had followed them across the courthouse lawn to the administration building now followed them past the town pump to the storehouse. The man who had had lather on his face was shaved clean now and sat before Cy Leslie's Tonsorial Parlor, chewing on a toothpick. In a small town people look at you, Gene thought, that is the big difference. Every time one of the delegates looked at him he smiled, and he tried to catch Mrs. Hutchins' eye but she walked among the children, dazed and holding the sixteen-dollar draft which fluttered audibly. The delegation was still together, walking rather quietly beside Gene, and he did not realize what a tremendous event this had been for them until he came to hand over the clothing and shoes order to the clerk at the storehouse. This clerk had been one of the three teachers fired under the township's retrenchment program, and she was accustomed to treating applicants as school children. She said, "Are you people sure all this is for one family?"

She looked so incredulously and sharply at Gene that he said, "Fill it out in a hurry, ma'am, we are busy people."

Each girl was to have two dresses, and when the clerk began to measure and cut the flimsy material, Gene insisted on Mrs. Hutchins' right to choose her colors at

least. The clerk granted that but she said thread was not included in the order. You put some in all the same, Gene said. But she would not, so he lifted the receiver off without asking her permission, and he called Squire Webb and the Squire said, naturally let the family have all the thread they need.

After everything was together, each member of the delegation had something to carry, each pair of shoes had a bulky box so the Dodge filled up and one of the Hutchins girls had to ride in John Onda's car. With the supplies in hand, the delegation became talkative. Sue and Mrs. Hutchins accosted several townspeople they knew and told them all about it, and the newly shaven man stopped chewing on his toothpick and asked how Squire Webb had acted and exactly what Gene had said to him.

"Eleven pairs of shoes?" the man said. "Would you let me look at them, Mrs. Hutchins?"

"All the right sizes," she said.

"Well, what do you know?" the man said. "What do you know about that?"

DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE MEETING

Alma had no idea why the college unit of the Young Communist League had decided to meet at her home that week, only later she found out, when Beatrice proposed that some member of the Literary Society introduce a resolution supporting the anti-war strike. Very important, Beatrice said, and it should be done by someone not yet openly identified as a Communist. Most of the girls looked at Alma, and much as she disliked making any sort of appearance there was nothing to do but accept it as an assignment. The Literary Society had the largest undergraduate membership of all the clubs and it would be quite an achievement if she could swing them over in a body. Not so long ago Alma might have found some graceful and plausible way of dodging an assignment which involved this kind of effort; she might have felt bad about not feeling bad about it, and she might have related the details to Gene who would promptly have supplied the required conscience.

In New York, among his several Party jobs he had had a dozen or more meetings each week, and no matter how tired he had been at night, he used to talk about the movement, praised individuals and berated in-

efficiencies, and flung about words like leftism, sectarian, the new line, this had always given Alma a sense of participation. She had absorbed many of his attitudes and some of his standards in judging people; she hated racketeering trade-union leaders with a personal hatred, although she had never met one. And when she saw a Russian movie she longed to be like the girl machine gunner or when she traveled in a subway and came across a high-school kid selling the *Daily Worker*, her heart went out to him. Sympathies and attitudes of this sort had sufficed before Gene left.

Now there were days when Alma thought she had become partly inured to the physical fact of his absence and to the nights when she would awaken to find her hands pawing into space, but the sensation of Gene's shoulder against her own and the sound of his slow and blurred inflections would return almost every time she witnessed scenes or objects associated with the movement: a portrait of Hitler in the rotogravure, a copy of the *New Masses* on the newsstand, the elevator boy at school humming "John Brown's Body." Repeatedly she found herself seeking to recapture Gene-moods by carrying on their particular kind of conversation with Beatrice Gottlieb or one of the other Communists in her classes, monstrously extended talks originating in the discussion of some political event but assuming, imperceptibly, a personal character. Alma talked little about Gene but she became fond of dwelling on her relationship to the movement. Beatrice, in particular, encouraged her, and although Alma knew she was being encouraged she did not mind because Beatrice had been an active Communist since childhood and her comments

were generally illuminating and bore an engaging resemblance to Gene's.

Beatrice, too, majored in English literature, but she had neglected her subject in favor of Marxist studies and she respected Alma's equally inadequate but somewhat more articulate literary knowledge. She considered Alma a real acquisition, and took pains to ease her entry into work among the students. Alma could never have been drawn straight into the type of work Gene was doing, but to give Beatrice a hand in the making of posters or in editing the little school bulletin seemed just a matter of course. Then, in the immediate resentment and enduring distress which followed Gene's departure, not his going, or leaving but his departure, Professor Egan's pallid and perfervid rhapsodies of Wordsworth became objects more of revulsion than annoyance. She cut classes regularly and wandered through the corridors and alcoves, and she stopped pleading busy when Beatrice accosted her with those odd jobs, which, no matter how unimportant in themselves, always held more interest than Egan's musty anecdotes concerning Shelley and Harriet or Byron and Mary Chaworth. "Everybody I know at school is preparing for the anti-war strike," she wrote to Gene, "and I've become involved. Not emotionally so much, the idea of war doesn't alarm me particularly. It's more of a gesture to defy authority in any shape, I fear. School as a whole has been getting into my hair more than usual."

In his reply, Gene went off on a characteristic excursion, a most clinical affair, very apt and not at all helpful. All wet, he wrote, about the business of authority in any shape. And he went into one of those

half serious mockeries of the old-fashioned Party terminology, so amusing to people who have had to sit through a score of political speeches each month. In the fifth year of the crisis, comrades, he wrote, it behooves us to analyze the class content of the concept of authority. This is not a vague concept suspended in a historical vacuum. It has its roots in the specific conditions of a very concrete and tangible epoch. We find Voltaire, the great ideologue of the approaching bourgeois revolution, ridiculing the abstract Authority with which the Jesuits of the Collège Louis-le-Grand tried to inculcate their students. Does that mean that the bourgeois order is eternally opposed to Authority? No, comrades. Hitler, at another stage of capitalism's development, a decaying but still a supreme stage, extols Authority. Does Comrade Darvas defy the authority in mathematics of an Einstein? No, I say. We must establish the sources of her newly found interest in the class composition of the specific influences in her own background. Write me longer letters, will you kid?

And among the less concrete and tangible but all the more powerful of these influences, she thought, are a whole series of subtle and poignant satisfactions derived from merely associating with premises and images that recall you, fraction meetings and the clatter of the trolley on Fourteenth Street and the window display of the bookshop.

By undertaking to introduce at the Literary Society a resolution in support of the anti-war strike Alma was signing away the last of her chances for an appointment in the public school system. Had she been a trifle less critical, she might have played this up before her-

self as a noteworthy sacrifice, but she knew, and the knowledge alarmed her, that the prospect of this job or any other job was so remote that to hazard it was no sacrifice at all. The preceding year only three per cent of the applicants gained posts, and although with some effort she could have vaulted into this tiny circle, it would have meant the trampling under of too many impulses for too extended a period. She had before her the spectacle of Harold, and of the oral examination in which one of her friends had been asked how many obsolete words there were in the English language, and of the girl who had been turned down because she was an inch under the required height of five feet. And Alma could not see herself explaining *Ivanhoe* for thirty years, and she could not agree with Beatrice in considering her acceptance of the assignment in the light of a sacrifice.

The unit meeting had dragged well past eleven, and at the adjournment most of the girls got up to go, but before they had a chance to refuse, Mrs. Darvas had a cup of coffee in their laps and large Hungarian napkins spread over their knees and cherry strudel on the center table. The new girls protested feebly and the old-timers ah-ed at the sight of the strudel and cleaned up several pieces each. Then Alma saw them downstairs and remembered she had not looked in the mailbox that afternoon. She opened it in the darkness and found a small thick envelope, obviously from Gene.

He had apparently written in the flush of the relief victory, full of details concerning the Hutchins family and the publicity release he hoped to sneak into the local paper, and about Sue Melinkovitch who was only

nineteen years old but had stayed awake most of the night helping to deliver a calf, reaching in elbow deep to facilitate its passage, then early in the morning had gone around collecting the greater part of the delegation. The shred of contentment Alma had derived from accepting her assignment disappeared as she read that. It made preoccupation with the problems of her still intermittent National Student League work seem most petty, just as petty as her inevitable and instant conjecture about the possibilities of a nineteen-year-old able-bodied girl in Gene's vicinity.

Gene was not prone to gush about people or events. At times he became intensely taken by persons, Buckeye notably, and Medwick, but in spite of his newspaper training he was less addicted to the feature writer's manner than anyone she knew. Among all his Party jobs, Gene had done his best work as fraction secretary because there he was constantly involved in or of necessity meddling with controversies, sometimes rather unsavory, and he had the faculty of remaining or appearing to remain calm in situations which exasperated Alma even while he was recounting their lighter and more amusing aspects. Although Gene admired Medwick, who was noted for impassioned and moving addresses, Alma could not recall his ever employing words like magnificent or thrilling, not even when he was so carried away by Agnes Smedley's reports of the Chinese Red Army or by the beauty and performance of a Russian screen actress, of whom he spoke for months under the pretext of an absurd claim that she resembled Alma.

In describing his own sordid childhood and days on the bum or in Hooverville, Gene had not been given

to elevated simplicities or to the tightlipped, spare and false restraints of the then flourishing American literary manner, and he had refused to impart a quality of nobleness to anything or anybody within the sphere of his own experience. In contrast to his former daily accounts of Party work, as well as to Alma's own now insignificant contribution, the story of the clean-cut relief victory and the totally unfamiliar character of its participants had virtually a ring of grandeur. And the more fearsomely at home Gene appeared to be in the midst of this alien locale and of concepts like "production credit" and "brooder stove," the farther removed from her he seemed, the more fantastic was the name Alma, squeezed into sentences as a concession perhaps.

The earlier letters, studded as they had been with characterizations of Mike and Anna, incidentals of the work, instructions to Buckeye, ornithological data and so on, concerned themselves mainly with the pain of their separation, mitigated somewhat by endless plans for the earliest possible reunion. In her state of mind Alma could scarcely be expected to allow for the fact that these plans were exhausted, nor could the subsequent letters give more than an inkling of the wretchedness and the thought that went into their elimination. Aside from his need of communicating with her, Gene had meant to indicate great friendship and love by the unusual length of his letters. Instead, in her uncertainty and anxiousness, Alma read the five pages devoted to the delegation and the three concerning their own problems and she was struck painfully by the notion that a corresponding ratio of their relative importance existed in Gene's mind.

Engaged in her second reading of the letter, Alma was several times surprised by tiny unmistakable tremors which shuddered down her body, and each time she glanced involuntarily at her naked legs and at the feet which touched the frayed and rough carpet. These shudders she had often experienced while waiting for Gene to join her in bed, but she had not felt them since their last night together and she had not thought they were possible without Gene's presence. Her carnal need of him was growing with the weeks, but until the reading of this letter there had been no distinct and distracting manifestation such as these tremors, which now became more intense and more frequent, until she merely skimmed over the last page and abandoned herself to them for the moment and to the images which redoubled them. The chair in which he used to undress stood by the bedside, and she pushed it with a violence that sent it halfway across the room. Once before she had thought partly to divest the room of its evocativeness by rearranging the furniture, but there was still the frayed carpet and the stain of black ink he had left on the unabridged dictionary, and it required only a night spent at Beatrice Gottlieb's to realize the obvious, painful fact that all the essential elements for a vivid and harrowing remembrance of him were contained within herself.

A jingle of silverware in the kitchen reminded her that while the strudel was being served she had determined to help Mother with the many dishes required for eight people; it was only after she had promised to do so that the girls would leave without giving a hand. And now, although Mother knew nothing about

the letter, she had apparently gone ahead with the kitchen work, leaving the arrangement of silverware to the last, as usual, for reasons of sentiment. Of the meager wedding presents which had started her off with Rudolf, only these spoons and forks remained, worn dull and malleable. They had been given to her by a girlhood sweetheart, a cousin who had learned of her marriage when she was already months gone with Harold. Alma's first impulse was to go out and explain about the letter and apologize for the neglect, but then she heard the forced jollity of her father's voice, quavering for affection and punctuated by the jingles. She knew exactly what he would say and she hesitated to risk the possibility of having to exercise forbearance. "Lo and behold our gentle and accomplished daughter," he would have cried, "condescending to appear after the dishes are out of sight. This then, my dear, is the butterfly for whom we caterpillars spin away our lives. How about it, Mother Worm, do we mind?" He would use the refined Hungarian word for butterfly, the diminutive of it to boot, and he would put an arm around Alma or her mother and sing a merry ditty of Hungarian nonsense words.

She turned back from the doorway and went to bed, lying naked as Gene had taught her. She began to read poetry, then turned to a novel and read many chapters before she discovered that they were too good to read without being able to lavish reflection upon them, and she went back to a stanza whose lines read "Nought loves another as itself, Nor venerates another so, Nor is it possible to Thought, A greater than itself to know."

A little later Mother opened the door and stood there

with the white braids gray against the long white nightgown, her cheeks and mouth composed but the eyes, which she could not control, restless and upset. She said, "I saw the light and thought I would come in for awhile if you don't mind. I'd like to sleep here, in fact, dear. Would it be all right with you?"

Alma sat up quickly and she was about to say "that son of a bitch" when she thought that after all, Father was no more a son of a bitch for trying to sleep with Mother than the latter was for not wanting to. The difference was that during all those years in Hungary when a reverse situation had prevailed, Mother could see no way of forcing the issue, as he was now trying to do by sheer insistence, a hopeless weapon but his last. Since Gene had left, Mother had taken to staying with Alma on nights when she lost control of Father and Alma would not have minded if the idea of the struggle that must have preceded such a visit had not angered her so. This night, however, she was inclined to more leniency with people who wanted to sleep with people. She made room for her mother under the blankets and revived the penitent sentence she had prepared about the dishes.

"They were so nice, those girls," Mother said. "I didn't understand everything they said, of course, but they seemed to be so honest and genuine, not at all like these college girls you see in the movies. I liked them."

"It was a dangerous precedent, serving the coffee and strudels, though. They'll meet here every week now."

"I wouldn't mind. Feeding them that way after the meeting made me feel like Gorky's *Mother*." She smiled faintly and in self-deprecation at the wild, fanciful and

bold idea that she should resemble someone in a book, and she glanced at Alma, hoping to make conversation which would justify their sleeping together. She thought she should not have told Alma about Rudolf in the first place, then there would not have been the likelihood of the girl's suspecting what went on every time she sought refuge here. Desperately trying to elicit some triviality that would lead to further casual talk, she said, "I saw a picture of Gorky in the paper the other day. He was sitting in a garden with some children and he had a baby on his lap, a round baldheaded Russian baby that was reaching for his moustaches."

Once Mrs. Darvas had read a story by Gorky about a smuggler who did not think work was worth while and did just as he pleased, paddled off with a boatload of stolen goods and had a good time while his money lasted. About forty years ago that was just what she wanted to do. She thought then that as she grew older and learned more things she would have to work less and less. It did not turn out that way because her father used to run a fruit stand in the market place and the older she grew, the bigger the packages she had to deliver. One morning before breakfast he handed her a watermelon that was so big she had to rest every hundred yards and she almost reached the customer's house when a boy came up from behind and took the melon and cut out a big slice.

She didn't know whether to return to her father's stand, or deliver the melon as it was, or just sit there and cry. She decided against crying because there was no one near enough to hear. So she delivered the melon and the housekeeper accepted it because there was no

time to deliver another. That housekeeper was a big woman and hit her for bringing an opened melon and paid only part of the money. She went back home the long way, walked with her face up so the sun could dry the tears as they came, then at the stand she tried to slip the money into her father's cash box but her father took it out and counted it and slapped her on the face which still hurt from the housekeeper's blow.

There never was a time in Mrs. Darvas' youth when she wanted to be an actress as most of the other girls did. She thought it would be so much finer to write the things actresses said. She thought she would write out what happened to her that morning, and a little girl actress would act it. Both her father and the housekeeper would then see how unjust they had been, and the boy who cut the melon would be sent to jail. Of course she did not go to the theater or read a book until about five years later and by that time she had forgotten all about the watermelon. And now about forty years later, reading *Chelkash* by Maxim Gorky, she envied the hero who did just as he wanted, and remembered how she never could.

She said to Alma, "It's been a wonder to me how you and Harold can remain so calm reading stories like that. Sometimes I think you have to go through all those things to really understand them. All the good books I have read since you started bringing them home from the library have made me cry just by reminding me of things in my own life. I used to think our family was different from others in a lot of ways but now I see the same things happening in books and why should we be

different? God knows how long Rudolf will be able to keep his miserable job, and Harold isn't crazy about the idea of supporting us. That's how young people are and there is no reason why Harold should be different. If Rudolf loses his job, I don't know what. I've even thought of suicide."

"In the daytime?"

"Yes. All this stuff, the reading, the things Gene taught me about Communism, it came too late. I used to think that fighting to keep my family together and making a future for my children was the biggest thing in the world. It was simple enough to think that when I spent all day in the shop and rushed home to cook and saw you three for only a few minutes at a time. But now I'm home for keeps, and instead of that bringing me closer to my family, I've found out how far apart we really are, how far ahead of your father I forged in the last few years, and how I'll never be able to catch up with you two. The other day I applied for a job."

"Not in a shop again?"

"Yes, but they turned me down. I thought of dyeing my hair but that would only make my wrinkles stand out the more. I couldn't pass for any younger than I am. It looks as though I'll never get another job."

Mrs. Darvas' face was surrounded by the pillow and tense with wretchedness. When her mother said that about trying to find a job, Alma turned clear around at the impact of the bitter self-reproach which possessed her; not since Gene had left had she thought more than vaguely of a job in connection with herself. Never had

she suffered acutely from the idea of imposing on her parents, and this self-reproach vied momentarily with anger at being confronted with her mother's more sensitive reaction. The anger passed away and she was left with a wretchedness whose outlines seemed to follow the lineaments of wretchedness on her mother's face.

THE DAYS WERE LIKE SEVEN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT molds into which unseen hands were pouring his life, Monday the departmental meeting and Saturday little white index cards on the library table. All the source books were lined along the desk now, there was no longer the annoyance and thrill of hunting them down. It would still be several months before the general design of his doctor's thesis would emerge from the slips and the index cards. It was simply a matter of collecting them now, labeling and filing them; and weekdays two trips on the subway, and the test papers, and the soft greasy sliding of the red Eversharp.

On Friday, the day of the great gray mold shaped by four medieval history periods, he saw little Dorothy Schultz across Second Avenue during lunch hour. Harold remembered both of the surprising things she had said after that consultation, the completely astounding one about the nice smile he had and the minor request about going easy on Frank Coletti, and also he recalled the decision to be friendlier with students. He was accustomed to eating in a small Armenian restaurant, Dr. Canfield's current fancy, but Dorothy Schultz walked past that, drawing her thin coat tighter about the round

and mobile little buttocks Harold had noticed in Room 312, and she ended in a coffee pot which he would have scorned in his least solvent days, a Coffee Pot advertising clam chowder for a dime, and she sat by the counter at that. He expected her to be surprised to see him there and she was, mildly.

"I generally eat with Dr. Canfield in the little Armenian place," he said, "but every once in a while I feel like breaking away from the formality. Wouldn't you prefer to sit in an alcove? That dishwashing basin isn't the most appetizing thing in the world."

"Why, yes, if you like, Mr. Darvas," she said. "I'll have the clam chowder at that table, Freddie."

"I see you're quite at home here," Harold said.

"Beggars can't be choosers."

Her chin was inclined to recede a bit so when she smiled only the upper row of the tiny even teeth showed, they were very even and glistened in a sunlight that made its way through the aerials of the roof opposite, the elevated structure, and the dusty window. Harold had an impulse to offer her lunch at his expense each day. Her tone had been piteous, without a trace of theatricality. It made him think of Alma who could not bear to utter a platitude except in mockery, not even if events or a situation infused that platitude with momentary meaning and aptness. "Beggars can't be choosers" meant a great deal to this girl and she said it simply, smiling what Harold thought was a brave smile. The impulse to offer a daily lunch made him feel good about himself. But instead of making the offer he said, "I like to get acquainted with my students." He said this pretentiously and awkwardly, he knew, and he was

glad when she retained the grateful smile and said, "I'm a bad student."

"Not at all," Harold said, surprising himself. She had been anything but bright in her last recitation, and there was the memory of her cheating on the Treaty of Utrecht question. And yet he had not said that out of politeness merely. In fact he repeated it with firmer emphasis. "I only wish all my students were like you."

They continued to talk of school matters, but more in the manner of two people having lunch than as teacher and student. Dorothy Schultz spoke haltingly but she was clearly the more polished table companion of the two, handling her thick, tarnished spoon with grace and applying her napkin daintily while Harold left his lying beside the bowl. At home he was accustomed to wiping his mouth with the dish towel. She is used to eating with men, he decided. In her manner of consulting with the waiter there was an ease tempered by the proper reserve, and while "Freddie" was removing the soup bowls she made way for him and ignored him with movements more suited to Longchamps, Harold thought, though he had never lunched there. And during one of the awkward pauses their attention was drawn to the other alcove, filled with some elevator operators in uniform, talking loudly and telling dirty stories.

Dorothy Schultz had considerable and apparent difficulty in suppressing a smile at some of the stories, and a flaming and exciting vision of her accessibility appeared before Harold. To distract attention from her illicit amusement she said, "That's a cute number, isn't it?" in reference to the radio which hadn't let up for a moment since they had entered. "Do you know the words? But

of course you wouldn't. You're not interested in those things. That stanza goes

*It's an old southern custom,
When you're walking down the street,
To bid ladies good morning,
Don't you think that's rather sweet?*

Something like that. I hardly ever learn the words to a song just exactly right because most of the time I'm too busy dancing. Do you like to dance, Mr. Darvas?"

"Perhaps I would," Harold said, smiling at the audacity of the question, Dorothy thought—"but I never learned how, alas."

"There's no harm in a little dancing."

"Oh no," Harold said, "are you an addict?" He had to repeat the question before he realized that she did not know the word's meaning. "Are you very fond of dancing?"

"It depends on the orchestra. Some of these cheap places you go to, you spend more time trying to keep in step or out of the way of other couples than you do dancing. Then it's just something to kill time with. I've been to the big places only once or twice because boys of my age are too young to have money and an older fellow will want too much out of a girl."

Harold realized that something in his face told her she had gone too far. She stopped suddenly and let her spoon jangle against the bowl. He smiled encouragingly, and she said, "You wouldn't be interested, Mr. Darvas. I wish I could talk about the kind of thing that would interest you."

"I'll tell you when I'm not interested, Miss," Harold said, imitating his own classroom manner, and he would have said more but that seemed to have melted her sufficiently.

"You know how it is," she said, "a girl can't be too careful with some fellows."

For the moment this disrupted the vision of her accessibility, but the effects of that vision had been and were still much too alluring to be entirely wiped out. As she chattered on about the attempts to entrap her made by the assistant buyer in her department store and by the real estate agent who came to collect rent, Harold's original impressions of this girl were confirmed and augmented. In talking about boy friends, dances, football games, jobs, Dorothy Schultz was sketching an alien existence, the life of a New York youngster to which Harold had always secretly and vainly aspired. Little doings she related with an ingenuous and, as he thought, girlish twist to details: So I told him to wait outside the ladies' room while I powdered my nose, and in front of that mirror I said to myself, Dot, it's either or, then I came back and told him straight out, George, if you really want to know, I'm dated up for Saturday, so take it or leave it.

Not too often she would repeat the apology about inflicting her private life on Mr. Darvas, but always he reassured her, striving at the same time to mitigate the superior air of his amused tolerance by sympathetic nods, and Dorothy would continue.

"The way I go on, you'd think I do nothing but run around with boys, you'd think I was boy crazy but I'd hate to have you think that. Tell me though, what can a

girl do evenings when she's got a home like mine, everybody out of a job, why it's the saddest place in the world, my home. A girl feels like she's got to get out of it or go nuts, crazy. Half the time I go with a boy just to get out of there and not for pleasure at all. It's no kick to sit around these fifteen-cent movies, specially when you can't see the ones you want to see. Take for instance, I always wanted to go to the Radio City Music Hall, not just so I can come to school the next day and show off about it, I mean I really want to see these places. Here's this new Fred Astaire picture playing there. You can't get appreciation out of swanky stuff like that when you sit in a fifteen-cent movie with some boy who hasn't washed his neck for a week trying to take hold of your hand. The whole atmosphere of a picture gets spoiled that way. I'm not blaming the boys for not taking me to the Music Hall, where are they going to get two dollars for a movie, but at least they ought to leave you alone so you could make believe you're somewhere else."

Harold experienced no trouble at all in feeling sorrier and sorrier for Dorothy Schultz, and he thought it would be common decency to offer her this visit to Radio City. "Why don't you come along with me tonight?" he said. "I always go Friday nights for relaxation." The question followed casually and in natural sequence after her remarks, but he was surprised at the glibness of the lie and hoped it sounded plausible. Dorothy looked as though she might refuse, and he added, smiling "Come along, I'll take you out."

"Oh swell," she said, "but you don't mean it, Mr. Darvas."

"Certainly I mean it. I think it's quite a notion, in fact."

During the afternoon he regretted the promise on two occasions, first when the assistant principal's menacing fisheyes hovered past his door and again through the last period when Frances Ward's beautiful head bent so much more exquisitely and intelligently over the test paper than Dorothy Schultz's ever would. Time and again Harold told himself it was out of pity that he had made the offer, look here's Ward, if he really wanted to make a pass at one of them, she'd be the one.

Then after the periods he had no time to think of Dorothy because the Current Events Club had called a special meeting to prepare for the one-hour anti-war strike which was not far off. The Young Communist League unit had completely adopted the Club as a base of operations and Harold had no way of wriggling out of his assignment as faculty advisor. "You see to it that they behave themselves," Dr. Canfield had said, "and bring me a list of the real loud-mouths." Also, Canfield had countered the Y.C.L.'s invasion of the Club by sending in a group of hand-picked Arista boys who were to spike all the proposals, and Harold's presence was expected to keep the debates on a parliamentary level. The Arista boys were honor students and they attended dutifully but with a dolorous lack of interest in the debates and no chance to spike anything. The Communists carried through their decision to have an outside speaker on the subject of war, and when one of the Arista kids demanded that they get an unbiased one, the committee said that goes without saying and invited a reporter from the *Daily Worker*.

Luckily Harold was not called upon to decide on the reporter's eligibility because Canfield himself stepped in

to forbid the lecture, so the Club held an unofficial outdoor meeting which featured the invited speaker and gathered a dozen times the crowd he would have drawn in a classroom. Since Canfield had personally handled the situation, the scandal could not affect Harold's standing. On the contrary, it vindicated the soundness of his advice to give the speaker a classroom and get the thing over with.

The one unpleasant consequence of the whole affair took place at home when Harold was talking about it to Alma and one of his remarks made her angry. People under twenty should not be Communists, he had said, and she took him up on that with an unexpected show of indignation. If you saw what Communism is doing to these kids in school you'd know what I mean, Harold said. They're given these pamphlets which shake their faith in everything you try to teach them, whether it's plane geometry or Latin. It's impossible to hazard a single theory but one of them sticks his hand up, and that goes for simple statements of fact. Now I'll admit most of our history teachers should be making themselves useful in some trade like upholstery or by grinding organs, and you know I'm not the one to squelch some youngster with an alert mind, really interested in the subject. But these kids simply assume a teacher is out to deceive them and they refuse to learn even the facts which would be fundamental to an understanding of their own theories. Then if you flunk them, it's discrimination. And if for one reason or another they decide to humor you by passing the exams, the same afternoon they go out and pull some absurd stunt that gets them suspended or expelled. Only half the number that can afford college ever get

there and when they do, it's the same thing over again. Then they're out of school, carrying on protest campaigns that peter out in a few weeks and then what? I've watched this happen year after year.

"But it never happened to you," Alma said.

"No, and I'm not sorry. What do you think has become of these courageous friends of mine? The few who were good organizers landed jobs in the movement eventually, earning enough to pay for carfare to the office, but the majority are scattered in cafeterias from Fourteenth Street to the Bronx, playing martyr and sponging off relatives. If that's courage, I'll take raspberry."

"If someone goes to the trouble of giving it to you, that is," Alma said. "You know I'm striking on anti-war day and may get suspended myself."

"I have no doubt you may," Harold said. "But I can tell you that it wouldn't be so easy to throw away your chance for a job if others in the family hadn't made the necessary compromises."

He said that in resentment at Alma's attitude, but he had not meant to hurt her and he hastened to slur over the personal nature of the remark by making the point that, after all, Marx himself would never have been able to carry through the work on *Capital* had it not been for the money Engels made as a partner in the textile firm of Ermen and Engels. Afraid that the comparison might be tainted with irony, Harold did not realize it was outside his power to hurt her in this regard, and he was relieved to see Alma lapse into indifference and amazed at her reluctance to pursue the topic.

After a while he thought the reference to Engels had floored her. Since Alma's knowledge of the revolutionary

movement was almost as incomplete as his own, and since he no longer had to cope with Gene, Harold had taken to airing his views again, and she would listen with an interest based on the fact that not so long ago she had shared them to an extent. However, the breathtaking implication that Harold's deserting the movement was a compromise similar to Engels' financing of Marx afforded her enough amusement to forgive his previous want of tact. In Harold the fear of having hurt her was supplanted by a feeling that she had taken over Gene's "unique contempt reserved for renegades." Now, as a backdrop to Gene's strictures on the subject, loomed a Communist activity that was not to be impeached on its own premises, but Alma had no recourse to any such crushing argument and so the contempt Harold ascribed to her annoyed him all the more.

"Just suppose," Harold said, "that I had gone and got myself expelled from college. I couldn't have fitted into the movement. I'm no organizer. I might have happened into a job, but more likely I'd be a cafeteria hound by now, moving in a circle of a few other misfits, blaming the general breakdown of capitalist economy, coming home after midnight because I was afraid to face the family. Well, I stayed off the campus when the dean's effigy was burned and I humored a couple of professors and I got this job with over a hundred kids going through my hands each term. Why do you think the Party switched from its policy of dual unionism if not to gain contact with larger groups of people? What could I have done, raving over a cafeteria table? You don't think I keep my mouth shut before those kids all the time, do you?"

"I'm afraid you do," Alma said.

"Wee, sleekit, cowrin', tim'rous beastie," Harold quoted, "Calm the panic in thy breastie. I do more good just being faculty advisor of the Current Events Club than I could in ten years of handing out leaflets to uninterested pedestrians."

"Are you going to encourage them to take part in the anti-war strike?"

"Would you advise a sergeant to get up before his regiment on parade grounds and instruct them to turn imperialist war into civil war?"

"I guess not," Alma said. "I guess you're right. Let's sit down and draft a letter to the Central Executive Committee, instructing them to disband all school units of the Young Communist League. Get the thesaurus."

Then, after this whole conversation had receded under pressure of newer controversies and misunderstandings, Dr. Canfield told Harold to be sure to attend the special meeting of the Club and to make note of all the arrangements for anti-war day, but at the same time to keep out of the proceedings and retain the young people's confidence. "No one can quell that bunch singlehanded," Dr. Canfield said. "We have other measures at our disposal." And he winked at Harold, who was a little slow in responding with a smile. It took that little time to reflect that even if one declined to hand over a description of the arrangements, the Arista boys were there to supply it. To expose oneself to the inevitable fall from grace would be an unnecessary and harmful gesture. Harmful to the cause of the kids even, because they would only be saddled with a really hostile faculty advisor. So on the afternoon of the day he had lunched with Dorothy Schultz, Harold went to the special meeting and admired

the efficiency with which the boys and girls went about their plans, a committee to arrange for the speaker, one to get leaflets, another to decide on strategic points of distribution, all very enthusiastic and strangely more mature than they seemed in class. In the light of this opportunity to do something in behalf of the radicals at school he recalled with satisfaction the things Alma had said and the answers he had made. The memorandum on arrangements had to be turned in, of course, but Dr. Canfield had not specifically asked for names. Harold's thoughts were a bit vague as to what "measures" the head of the department had referred to. Whatever they were, he knew that to be instrumental in bringing them to bear against individuals would be unforgivable. Accordingly, in taking his notes he neglected to include names, and he dismissed the idea that the Arista boys could provide these along with the rest of their report to Dr. Canfield. He felt more like an ally of Gene Marsay than he had for some time. Even the most militant members of the Current Events Club were beginning to see that in Harold they had a friend.

While still at the meeting, he had planned to acquaint Alma with these developments, which would be sure to interest her, but across the dinner table he was certain that she would not see his point in submitting to Dr. Canfield's instructions. He ate in silence therefore and found the food tasty and would undoubtedly have complimented Mother had his mind not been otherwise occupied.

In relation to the movement, he thought, Alma had become a nuisance as a result of her activity. In the old days she had at least tried genially to mediate the conflicts

with Gene but now she reproduced the boy friend's righteous red patter, interlarding it with the more telling quizzical little philippics of her own. She would surely fail to understand the circumstances surrounding the role he played in the Current Events Club, and perhaps go so far as to call him a stoolpigeon. He considered posing the problem in abstract fashion but Alma would no doubt see through a spirited defense of his position. He had reasons for wishing to maintain civil relations that evening.

At a moment of temporary uncertainty as to the justness of his course, Harold had decided to establish closer contact with the students and to probe into their specific attitudes toward the anti-war strike, also into their opinions of himself. In line with his decision he felt pleased in having made a friend of Dorothy Schultz, and he thought how interesting it would be to take her to a night club after the movie at Radio City, one of the big Broadway places with a lavish floor show, the like of which she had never seen and probably never would again, one that would make her so ineffably grateful she would open up and talk in all sincerity, and then he would really have a finger on the pulse of the student body, as any worthwhile teacher should.

Of course little Dorothy did not belong to the Current Events Club and she was less likely to have a clear-cut attitude toward the anti-war strike than any senior he could think of but it would be fun to sound her out from any number of angles. And the reason he had no wish to antagonize Alma this evening was that in her own high-school days she had been at several of these night clubs, had talked a great deal about them, in fact, and he wanted to familiarize himself with certain general

principles of conduct at such places as well as with sundry details of etiquette. He tried to hit on some way of introducing the subject without revealing total lack of experience, and finally he said, "This is a hell of a note. One of the instructors, good friend of mine, has a sister come to town for a few days from Loose Elbow, Utah, or some place, so he's asked me to trot her about the Stem. I don't know why it had to be me, this sort of thing isn't up my alley. Got to be done, though. She's goodlooking, that's the only redeeming feature. She wants to see Radio City and a night club. Which of the places do you suppose would impress a dame like that? Remember, Loose Elbow, Utah."

Alma asked how much he wanted to spend. Ten dollars, Harold said, so she suggested the Terrace, a flashy, noisy and covercharged place which would knock Loose Elbow over for a row of ashcans, and it wouldn't be necessary for him to dress. Strange, Harold said, I've never even heard of the place. He had wanted to ask whether the menu would carry prices, how much of a tip one was expected to leave, would one have to tip the headwaiter separately, and so on, but it would hardly have fitted in with the front he was presenting, and Dorothy Schultz wouldn't be likely to order champagne. He sighed and said Anything for a friend, and retired into the bathroom for an hour and twenty minutes, being routed out only by the protests of the assembled queue. He came out carrying hidden under his bathrobe the talcum he had had no time to apply. You're a vision, Alma said, and adorable, and don't forget the argyrol solution.

Harold liked the idea of her thinking he was going to sleep with a girl. On his way to the elevated he stopped

for a moment before the full-length mirror in the window of a dry-cleaning store and thought he had not looked so well since the night of the Phi Beta Kappa banquet. The belt of flesh whose undesirability he exaggerated was hidden under the heavy overcoat that made him look bigger than the ordinary football player, and he was thankful also for the little shaving accident which compelled him to attenuate his moustache on both sides, creating a new and dashing slant.

Side by side with Dorothy he felt particularly large, not in an awkward way, rather as the good uncle. She was in the same thin coat she had worn at lunch and he wondered whether the dress under it would be at all presentable at the Terrace. He offered his arm and said "Madam" in conformity with the playful-uncle relationship and she fell into the spirit of it with a scarcely niece-like verve. Dorothy hung on to the arm with a poise disconcerting to Harold who remembered how much more accustomed she was to getting around. In the lobby of the Music Hall she relinquished the hold and walked past the box office with that suddenly abstracted air some girls have while tickets are being bought. In the great ante-room she slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow again and gasped at the magnificence.

At first he scoffed at the anteroom's gaudier aspects and criticized the dull statuary much as one vocally deprecates the qualities of some expensive and rare gift one presents to an inferior, an attitude mutely precluding concurrence, however. Dorothy protested, said everything was lovely and cute, the statues had lovely figures and the tiny lights on the back of each seat were cute, and she flexed her arches on the lush carpet. And duly

enthralled as she was at the lighting effects and the stage production's mass ballet, she did not neglect to lean toward Harold's side of the chair and let a strand of hair brush past his face once, and to say Mr. Darvas, you're such a tease, several times. The first time she said it in response to Harold's remark that she resembled the movie's ingenue, but then she repeated it on slight or no provocation and made him feel virtually compelled to banter.

She took his night-club proposal very much in stride, but once installed in the chromium-plated, functional alcove, she behaved in a considerably more dazzled manner, and throughout the floor show, occasional interjections of delight were her only offerings. The few confidences she did vouchsafe were scarcely revealing; he could have filled them in from previous meetings. In the twenties Mr. Schultz had seen better days, but all bricklayers had, and these long months of unemployment had made him morose, which stood to reason. He had the habit of shouting at his wife and at Dorothy. He could be plenty rough. Dorothy was unhappy. Mr. Darvas shouldn't have shown her all these lovely places and things because the happiness of that evening would make the others seem all the worse. Still, she wouldn't have missed it for the world. But why talk about herself when it was Mr. Darvas who must have such an interesting life and know so many interesting people?

"My life," Harold said, "has been singularly dull. But now I'm determined to make it interesting and that is why I seized the opportunity to spend this evening with you."

Such a tease.

A marimba band appeared on the revolving stand, and some nudes in Hawaiian trimmings took the floor, swaying and performing contortions through the *leis*. Harold said he wanted to travel and would do so three months out of every year as soon as he got his doctor's degree. Perhaps he would brush up on his anthropology by taking some courses at Columbia, and get a year's leave of absence to do some field work in the South Sea Islands. Dorothy did not know what anthropology was, so Harold explained. Still, he said, history was his primary interest. He found himself indulging in more confidences than Dorothy would, but he did not mind because his own awareness of these plans had been vague and he was glad to formulate them before an attentive and uncritical audience. Alma would immediately have detected some connection between the Hawaiian nudes and his sudden preoccupation with anthropology. She would not have realized that the tropical trappings served merely to precipitate a latent and genuine interest in the subject, and he would have been constrained to dismiss her with some amusing remark. But with this kid one could release the ordinary controls and give rein to a fancy unhampered by overdoses of judgment. And because this kid took everything, Harold did not feel impelled to design his fancies and plans in accordance with any taste but his own.

Had Alma or Gene been present, he would unquestionably have woven the Communist movement into one or another of these plans. Even in solitary musings he would not have dared to ignore it completely. But no matter how remote the possibility of Dorothy's discussing him with some other member of the faculty, Harold

had conditioned himself to steer clear of anything connected with Communism or his own political views. In omitting his misgivings and pangs of conscience about the movement he felt liberated, good.

There was a sort of geographical frenzy about his elaboration of the three-month jaunts, a wistful and half-amused sprinkling of proper names—Madagascar, the Amazon, the Jungfrau. Afterward, all this subsided into a mood even more alluring to Harold. At a still youthful age he would cease wandering about and buy a small stone farmhouse hidden in the hills and within commuting distance of New York. Did Dorothy know there were illiterate mountaineers living not more than sixty miles from Times Square? And he would furnish the stone house according to his own taste and cultivate a garden like *Candide*, and in the meantime he would save enough money for an untrammelled and contemplative old age, retire at fifty instead of waiting for his pension. That was his idea of a complete life.

Naturally everyone had to work out his own problems; assuredly he would not attempt to impose these ideas on Dorothy or anyone else, her notions of the future were probably altogether different. Now he had a friend, a labor organizer, who would condemn these plans as a cowardly sort of escape perhaps. A long time ago Harold would have thought this friend presumptuous to do so, but now, it would not affect him in the least. If there is one quality engendered by a study of history, it's tolerance. If the logic of a man's life dictates that he be a labor organizer, all right. Should Dorothy ever meet this friend, she would see what a fine chap he was. A man could be a fine chap doing one thing and just as fine

doing the opposite. Character could be affected no more than slightly by political convictions. The character of Harold's friend was so compounded that he must express these convictions in action. That was all right. Harold could see why such a person would regard his course as the only just one. That was his privilege. All Harold wanted was to be left alone to run his own life in so far as it was possible for people to run their lives. On second thought, the idea of Borneo, Honolulu or the Andes didn't appeal to him nearly as much as the lonely life in the stone house upstate.

"Not too lonely," Dorothy said. "Don't you plan to get married, Mr. Darvas?"

"Not for some years. What do you think of my plans, anyway?"

Dorothy said she thought they were wonderful. Any plans were wonderful if you thought you had a chance of carrying them out. Take her, now. Nothing she dreamed about ever came through and nothing would. What was the use of planning? The shape he was in, her father would never work again. The most she could hope for was a steady job for herself in the department store. That would see them through for a while but why bother Mr. Darvas with her troubles? Would he dance with her, this waltz? He was kidding, why of course he knew how to dance. No? My God, there was nothing to it. No but he must be kidding. Well then, she would have to teach him some time. Well, Dorothy said, smiling with the even little teeth the color of whipped cream, there's something I'm a real expert at. But maybe it's a good thing you don't dance. This dress wouldn't go so good on that floor.

Foolish child. It's very becoming. Really.

By then Harold was convinced that his hesitation about finishing a third bacardi had been well founded. Quite suddenly the insides of his head started swaying and tugging like a dirigible at mast, and he thought he would be sick if he sat there any longer. He asked Dorothy to accompany him on a stroll along the balcony, but they were intercepted by an attendant who warned them of the rain. He saw her back to the table, excused himself and went to wait in the toilet to see if anything would happen but nothing did except that a Negro brushed his clothes and thanked him for the tip. He looked in the mirror to see if the outside of his head was swaying too, and he was glad to find it wasn't. He combed his hair and moustache and arranged his tie and thought so this is what it's like to be drunk. He had never been drunk before and he was not drunk now, but he thought he was and decided not to take any chances about Dorothy's finding out and spreading it around school perhaps. He was positive now that he should have called it a day after Radio City.

Returning through the corridor he met a red-haired girl he had noticed at the table of the three fighters who were there celebrating a victory. If only he had known where a person could pick up one like that he would have shipped the kid home that minute. He said to Dorothy, We'll be trotting along soon or your Dad'll be thinking things. Oh, I come in later than this, Dorothy said, but we'd better be going anyway, because I work tomorrow, Saturday, you know.

That penetrated only after he had tipped the doorman who carried the umbrella and closed the taxi door gin-

gerly. So she came in later than this, did she? With Frank Coletti, I suppose, that imbecile.

In the days when Alma still used to relate her adventures they generally started or wound up in a taxi. In a taxi men were supposed to kiss girls. Harold would have loved to kiss Dorothy Schultz, but he had already done enough damage, he thought, just by taking her to the Terrace. He thought of his virginity and how it's damn well got to be blasted to hell soon, and of Bernard Shaw who didn't get his until he was twenty-nine and had a red beard, and of the red-haired girl who probably wasn't getting any more from the boxer than he had spent on the kid sitting there so charming and plump. Damn and to hell with all the books he'd read about the technique of love, the matter-of-fact, the sanctimonious, the just dirty treatises on one hundred ways of kissing and how to give the old woman a break. He would have to learn how to dance. "Did you like the show?" he said.

Oh sure, Dorothy had liked it fine and she unloosed an avalanche of movie talk with the command of detail and fluency of a radio commentator, what stars were working on what new pictures, who had doubled for whom in the lion-taming scene, the births and divorces, all of it with the stupefying assumption that these were matters of common knowledge, and Harold felt a little superior but also a little out of the swim. It seemed as though he had never had a youth, and that at twenty-five it was too late to start, and he repeated the hell with it, he would pick up a broad after he delivered this kid, pick a hefty one and throw it into her, as he had heard a taxi driver say, only where did one find them? Madarász' Gulyás Grill?

He walked Dorothy up the slippery stoop on Rivington Street and shook her hand in the hallway. "I didn't think they had gas jets in hallways any more," he said, and after he had said that he could not take it back or make conversation which would efface the remark's apparent effect. He stood tall over Dorothy.

"We have them all right," Dorothy said. She had not released his hand, and now she bent down, kissed it, and said, "Thanks for all the wonderful places and—thanks." She turned to go, but this time Harold held on to her hand and she faced him again, holding her lips up. He kissed them several times, forgetting about the ninety-nine other ways, kissing her dryly with brief jerky pecks, but her lips were moist. He thought so this is what it's like to be drunk and to kiss a girl. He did not realize how sweet her mouth had been until he was well up the block. All thoughts of Madarász' Gulyás Grill were gone. He hoped Dorothy Schultz would not tell anyone, and assured himself that she wouldn't, and hated the guts of Frank Coletti, the imbecile, or any other son of a bitch who knew how to get girls. He did not think of the eleven dollars he had spent, not until he went to get change at the subway, and the last trace of the bacardi was gone. The express was no longer running, and as he passed the innumerable local stations the thought that most often recurred was that her lips had an actual, physical sweetness.

THE FACT THAT HIDE-BOUND JEFFERY Hutchins came to a meeting of the Willow Run local and sat through it sympathetically went a longer way toward impressing the members than the success of the relief delegation itself. They spent a long time treating each other to beers at Andy's bar below and came upstairs ready to approve anything Mike or Gene might suggest, and with several proposals of their own. There were rumors that Andy was running off steep card games in the back room, and that the two waitresses weren't waitresses merely. Mrs. Melinkovitch made a motion to have the Youth Branch, now calling itself the Angelo Herdon Club, move its meetings some place else. Mike said there was no reason why the Cayuna High School should object to a social and educational group of young people meeting in one of its classrooms. Gene added that they ought to be given access to gym facilities as well. Mrs. Melinkovitch said You betchum, this country supposed to have free education, my Sue she no can go to high school but I pay my school tax just the same everybody else. My Sue she get plenty exercise on the farm, she don't need a gym, but I don't want her running

around Andy's back room. Remember, I didn't say nothing against Andy personal.

The high-school principal turned out to be less impressionable than Squire Webb. He refused, and when Mike threatened to carry the matter to the school board he said, "Nobody is stopping you, they meet here in two months." Mike and Gene were getting ready to see some board members individually when a more important issue came up and they had to put in all available time on that. They were both on top of the big coop, smearing tar on outstretched gunny sacks to save the price of tar paper, when John Onda came running through the orchard and said his milk market had been cut off. He held up the health department's letter and it said that sanitary conditions on his farm had failed to comply with requirements, that there was a heap of manure directly outside his barn door, we regret to inform you and so on. An unprecedented letter, according to Mike and John, because they never cut you off for a minor infraction like that without several warnings, and there hadn't been any. Besides, John's farm was one of the cleanest in the valley. The heap had been there for three days. Then the inspector came, and the same afternoon John removed it. An open and shut case, Mike said, Midwest Dairy is cutting down on small farmers and this is the way they bust contracts, and you got to raise a fuss to make them back down. You can get a lot of non-members fighting on this.

They went on one ostensibly futile delegation to the health department and ran off a leaflet which later they decided not to distribute for fear it would be indefensible in a legal action. But then Jasper Finch and John and

Gene drove to the district and got up a little campaign of telephone calls by consumers. Every Party member and dozens of outsiders phoned, and joint committee of farmers and consumers and a grocer walked past the ringing switchboard into the manager's office and Jasper gave a strong talk. The manager said there must be some misunderstanding, the company has nothing to do with health department regulations, if the committee thought those regulations were too stringent why not appeal to the congressman in their district? All the same, the ruling on John Onda's dairy products was soon rescinded and the Willow Run local held its biggest meeting since the sheriffings two years before. Gene himself had not looked for such successful action.

After that meeting Mike and Gene drove home along the river road and Mike was jubilant, shouting and singing his Ukrainian songs, some of them with improvised English versions, so Gene might partake of his joy, absolutely rhymeless verses about the sweet banks of the Willow Run and the perfidy of the health department and would Gene take his goddamned foot off the emergency. The Hutchins dog barked at them and Mike barked back, he was that happy. They put the Dodge to bed and went to take a last look at the brooder stoves. Anna still had the light on, she couldn't turn in with Mike away. The bleary chicks scuttled awkwardly around the tin or blinked, transfixed in the flashlight's glare. Many of them were learning how to roost and swayed precariously on the shingles. Gene smelled skunk and made a round of the coops, checking on doors and on some of the wiring. On the way back to the house Mike said, "These Hutchins and Onda victories are what

builds locals, don't let anybody tell you different, boy. Don't let all this beefing in Pine Hill get under your hide. You're doing all right."

"I didn't know people in Pine Hill were beefing."

"Just a few soreheads."

"Complaints about my work, Mike?"

"You're crazy, what gives you that idea? Everybody likes you. You'll find people who want to do things their own way in any organization."

"Like whom, for instance?"

"I just got through saying everybody likes you. I got some cherry brandy in the cellar and tonight we'll see if it's improved any since last year. Hello, Anna, how about it, some of that cherry brandy?"

"What locals are beefing?" Gene said. Then, seeing Mike's reluctance, he walked upstairs and listened to Anna asking if anything was wrong and Mike berating himself for being a lummoX and starting something he couldn't finish. Anna said Gene would have to know sooner or later, Jasper should be learned a lesson once and for all, not that it would do any good, but he should learn to keep shut his mouth until he got to a Party meeting. He waited for them to say more, but Mike called up, saying the brandy was ready if Gene was. Gene filled two wine glasses, which terrified Anna and challenged Mike's manhood to the extent that he tossed one off and filled another and answered Gene's questions with speed and indignation. So far as Gene could gather, the soreheads' beefing consisted of complaints that he concentrated on Willow Run to the exclusion of weaker locals and that this was Mike's fault, for making him work around the farm. Had Jasper said that, Gene wanted to

know. Not exactly, according to Anna, but when Pine Hill people were talking, you could be sure it started with Jasper Finch.

So then it was Gene's turn to reassure Mike. Why of course, that was absurd. He couldn't be walking thirty miles across the ridge to Pine Hill every unit night. Either the comrades would call for him in a car or they would have to wait until the section had enough money to recondition John's old wreck. The district was not coming through with the promised weekly three dollars even, and Mike should not be expected to shoulder the entire burden of supporting him. The least Gene could do was to give a hand here and there around the place. The section would have to do something about finances anyway. Gene was manufacturing his own mimeograph ink, but you couldn't manufacture stencils and paper. Take it up next meeting. Blunt as Mike was, he still retained a reserve when it came to discussing the financial arrangements which surrounded Gene's stay on the farm. As a result, Gene did more to earn his keep than he ordinarily would have.

After decades of slopping around in all kinds of weather, kneeling on the damp earth at corn-husking time, Mike Ogrodnik, for all his size and strength, was not altogether healthy but it would have killed him to admit it; the rheumatic twinges had to be intolerable before he'd pull a stool up before the fireplace to warm a bad leg. It was well enough for Mike to polish mahogany and rock the spittoon at Andy's boasting that he hired help only around harvest time; he could not keep his rheumatism a secret from people who lived with him. Sometimes he would fold up momentarily, cursing

the weather, the leadership of the Second International, the chickery which sold him an inferior breed of white leghorn, and then Anna would fuss and hover about him. Gene would retire to the barn with his campaign plans, agrarian theory and postcard writing, and then the cold would drive him back to fixing flats, attaching tin aprons to hens, wiring egg crates and shipping them to the cooperative at Cayuna. Often Gene developed undue fascination for some novel method of work, char-pitting and the like, and he was vastly pleased when a farmer approved of his accomplishment or asked his opinion about where to put the borehole in blasting a stump. Naturally, Mike, who was the chief beneficiary of these experiments, saw no harm in them and advanced theories about their effect on Gene's standing among the farmers. Mike had been in the movement so long and had seen so few real advances made in farm organization that Gene won his heart by the Hutchins, Onda successes, and Mike was ready to fight for such methods of work against any odds.

Except for the succession of harvest hands and an occasional visit from relatives with whom he had little in common, Mike was not accustomed to having anyone live on his farm, and he knew just about everything that Anna had to say. Her complete catalogue of his frailties, which were being augmented with the years, annoyed him not a little. Mike professed to be fond of his home's comparative isolation but he was a great deal fonder of being appreciated and he reveled in having an audience at meals and during the long winter evenings. It amused him to ridicule Anna's many attentions to Gene until she began to indulge in them under cover

only. Anna changed Gene's bedclothes every week while she changed their own fortnightly, and no sooner did their boarder express preference for a certain dish than she would try to supply it. And with Gene in the house Anna was generally on her best behavior, moderating her tongue, going easy on Mike.

It thrilled Mike to hear Communist ideas embodied in American forms and American idiom by someone other than Jasper Finch whom he regarded as ignorant and presumptuous. Mike had experienced that sort of thrill, while attending mass meetings held by the district, but he had never been on such intimate terms with an American-born Communist who was truly a Communist, and when he heard Gene quoting Jefferson, Lincoln or William Lloyd Garrison at the editor of the *Cayuna News* or at Vern Saunders in the Grange Hall, he slapped Vern's shoulders as he had always longed to do, shouted for him to turn in his high-school diploma and spend a couple of hours scraping coops with Gene so he could really learn something. Mike had read plenty of mimeographed study courses prepared by the district agitprop committee, with instructions to "utilize the revolutionary traditions of the American proletariat and of the toiling agrarian masses" but those were words; his friend was actually "putting the buggers on the spot."

Aside from the happiness afforded Mike Ogradnik by these tangible victories of Marxism in Cayuna County and by the vicarious personal triumphs they entailed, he discovered that ultimately Gene preferred listening to talking, and since Mike was hardly to be satisfied with vicarious triumphs, no matter how triumphant, this secured their attachment. Most of the farmers in the valley

got their seed corn from Mike. He had no more need of being admired for farming ability. What he wanted was qualified recognition as a Communist, and Gene supplied it. Mike talked at fantastic length about underground work in Ekaterinoslav, the Palmer raids which almost affected him, the Party's decade of factionalism, when he didn't know whom to believe or what to do, and when a state-wide conference of farmers, called by the Party, had to be disbanded because only six attended.

Mike liked to dwell on what the movement did for him as a person, and once, in response to Gene's suggestion that he was being too hard on Jasper Finch, he said, "That's my way of doing things and he gets away with more than he deserves to, that small-town gossip. When I was a young man even before I knew anything about books or Communism I was tough, I was tougher than you'd think listening to me now. Anna was tougher too. Her folks chased her out of the house because she married a gentile. We went to live with her aunt. Anna asked me not to do anything for the first couple of weeks so she could get used to the idea, you know what I mean. Well, I didn't do it for a while but I didn't know her aunt looked at the bed sheet every morning to see if I had, that was the Jewish custom. So this aunt starts bawling me out one morning, hollers I was no good and why didn't I say so in the first place. I was a tough boy then. So I took this aunt and threw her down on the bed and I was going to show her I was plenty good when Anna come in and between us, so the aunt got away but if she hadn't she'd still be wearing her ass in a sling. Anyhow, that was the last day I let my Anna run around like a nun. Don't tell her I told you this, because she is

sore when she thinks of it. I ain't tough on Jasper though, but somebody's got to keep him in line and he don't like me anyway. You bring a guy into the movement or help him out of a tight spot and that's what you generally get before long. Nobody likes to put in years just being grateful."

At that, Mike was fond of Jasper Finch and treated him much as a recalcitrant younger brother. In addition to his long years as the only Communist in the county, the former had the tremendous fact of the functioning Willow Run local behind him, while Jasper with all his ability had failed to carry through a single action in Pine Hill. Mike could afford to be alternately mild and critical of his proselyte. But Jasper Finch thought of himself as a brighter and more useful Party worker than Mike, and potentially he was. He had never gone beyond grammar school, but he had a range and thoroughness of knowledge that continually astounded Gene.

On one of the few occasions when they obtained a car for a longer drive, Jasper and Gene drove to Weston where the town forum was featuring a widely advertised lecture by a professor from the state agricultural college, and an instructive presentation it was. The professor described a newly perfected and miraculous fertilizer that would transform the most barren soil into a rich pasture for fifteen years running, pasture sufficient for fifteen cows, and all that for an initial outlay of only twenty-five dollars. The forum had not planned on a discussion period, but Jasper asked for the floor and got it. He started with several questions about the fertilizer's chemical properties and the professor answered them satisfactorily enough, repeatedly complimenting him on the

intelligence of his objections and explaining how each had been painstakingly eliminated. Then Jasper wanted to know where a poor farmer was going to get twenty-five dollars when he didn't have enough money to buy a box of matches, and the professor smiled and said he would have to take that up with the sociology department.

"The sociology department wouldn't be able to tell you," Jasper said. "If they knew they'd be in the brain trust telling it to Roosevelt. But I can tell you."

And he gave the whole immediate program of the Cayuna Farmers League on governmental cash relief and production credit, talked as long as the professor almost, would not let the chairman stop him, asked the farmers there present to sign the petition Gene would have for them at the door. Then he read from a soiled card what Marx and Engels had said in 1846: "A petition has a purpose only when at the same time it takes the form of a threat in support of which stands a compact and organized mass." Even the lecturer signed that petition.

None of Jasper's neighbors or his hundreds of relatives all over the country knew where he had got his eloquence. The Finches were supposed to be a quiet, hard-drinking clan who kept out of cracker-barrel politics, married their cousins and did their talking in bedrooms. Jasper had a mind of his own, they conceded that when he married Emma Corey, his first wife, whom he had brought back from Weston where she'd been living in disgrace. Again, it was conceded that Jasper had a mind of his own, and more, when after a dispute with his brother-in-law, Tuss Corey, he shot a dozen red-tail

hawks, analyzed their stomachs, and proved his point that for every chicken or game bird they eat, they destroy ten pocket gophers and orchard rats, doing in this way more good than harm. Scarcely anyone around Pine Hill killed a red-tail hawk after that.

Jasper knew soil chemistry better than did the county agent, and there was not a thing about a combine he couldn't fix, given the right tools. He was not the biggest of the Finches or the toughest, or the best-looking or best-liked, but no one who remembered his farm before '30 denied that he was the best farmer any way you looked at it. He never had enough for a tractor but he had a team of Percherons which had not been worked by another hand since Jasper had come back from France, and they all but talked to him, same as the little hunting bitch that was one of the few live animals still left on the Finch place when Gene came to Cayuna County. Farming was what interested Jasper after the war, and hunting, and the study of Agriculture Department bulletins. But in spite of his much-discussed reclaiming and cropping stunts, he was forced to clamp on mortgage after mortgage, first, second, machinery, livestock.

Jasper didn't up and stop farming suddenly one spring, and he didn't find his tongue overnight. He knew why a combine broke down when it did, he didn't have to call a mechanic. Jasper had figured out why his first wife had gone to Weston before he married her, and why she sat lonely by herself in a pew on Sundays, and why she died of a disease Dr. Clarke couldn't locate, cure, or name. He was no Jeffery Hutchins, puffing at the corn-cob under the tobacco sign on his barn. He thought of

farming in terms of combine, mechanical milker and airplane spraying. For all the well-trained Percherons, and the cropping stunts, Jasper was not cut out for a seventy-acre patch, half of it rocky swamp. Jasper read more than farmers' bulletins. Privately, he had been an Ingersoll atheist before Mike ever went to work on him. Jasper was a Finch, but he had stepped into the rotting thigh of a German soldier, and he had nothing against foreigners. Mike had been a Ukrainian and the Ukrainians knew now what to do with combines when they had them, so this one claimed. Mike Ogrodnik wasn't a sore-head, he made more out of his farm than Jasper could hope to, listen to Mike, Jasper's mind was deep brown sod then full of acid phosphate and a catch crop of crimson clover turned under and corn seed waiting for rain, and the rain came, also a hurricane. In 1930 when Jasper dumped his grain in the Cayuna elevator, he got a check made out jointly to him and to the Second Union National which held his crop lien, a check that only Second Union National could cash. They took it and mailed him his balance, another stamped and signed check, this one for eighty-four cents.

The next week a tuberculosis test took the cows he had raised from the days of their births. The government gave him a small compensation check so he took the two checks over to Mike's little whitewashed rock house on the river road below Demster Pike, said look, see what I got, look Mike. Martha, his second wife, was seven months gone with the twins then. Eighty-four cents, second wife, seven months gone, enough numbers there to drive you crazy, Jasper said.

Before the war Jasper had been a harvest hand all over

the state and he knew how to take orders. In the army every shitcheeled son of a bitch had given him orders. After the war he ordered a couple of harvest hands around every year, and Emma, too, who virtually begged to be ordered around. At the Onda penny sale in '31, when Mike said, John you and a few of the boys take the lawyer, Jasper you and a few of the boys take the insurance man, Jasper knew those were orders and knew how to obey them. That was the way things were run. When after the sale, Mike Ogradnik said Jasper now you get up and tell some of these people how come we did this and tell us what Second Union National did with your grain check, Jasper stood on the haywagon and had his say. Jasper liked action and he could not conceive of action without people giving and taking orders, and when he joined the Party he was prepared to take them at first. Of course no one gave him orders but he did get assignments to probe into relief conditions around Pine Hill, to check on tax assessments which were rumored to be unfair, to solicit subs for the *Daily Worker*; and although later he admitted and upheld the necessity for such work, he was a little disappointed. It had been an important step for Jasper to join the Party. It meant branding himself among the Finches and renouncing the majority of them. And so after he did make the decision, action was what he wanted, and not so much action as deeds. Jasper thought of farming in terms of the combine, and of Party work in terms of the great mass meetings whose pictures he had seen in the *Daily*.

But Jasper was a farmer too, and a Finch, and he was small in a lot of ways. Just before Gene arrived all the

locals were to have run affairs of one sort or another in order to buy him the car so necessary for organization. The Pine Hill local had chosen a cabbage supper but it never was held because the local's two Party members, Jasper and his former brother-in-law, Tuss Corey, fell out over what kind of meat was to be served. Tuss proposed chicken and said he would let the women have the bulk of what they needed for the supper, but Jasper had an idea Tuss might try to palm off the dozen which went and died on him that same morning. "Corn beef is the thing for a real cabbage supper," Jasper said. "Will you pay for it?" Tuss said. Jasper couldn't just straight out refer to the dead hens, he had no way of proving that Tuss wanted to palm them off, but before the evening was over he had called Tuss a saboteur, a disruptive element and an enemy of the working class, all the choicest derisive terms he could think of after two years of reading *Daily Worker* editorials.

Mike bawled him out publicly for this and Jasper almost admitted he was wrong. Still, his feud with Tuss dragged out and literally shattered the local in time. When Second Union National bought up a couple of Tuss Corey's mortgages, the manager called Tuss in and said Now remember you can stay on that land as long as you like, we're a local bank, we know you have a good record, we want to see the farms around here going good, that is to our interest, but this organization you're secretary of, we don't like its ideas about property, we don't want to drive farmers off the land, stay as long as you like but you better resign that job of secretary in the local Cayuna Farmers League, they're a bunch of foreigners anyhow, that's why they need you to do their

writing for them, we like you and your way of doing business but that job isn't getting you any place, you better resign it, we want to keep your good will and we would not like you to force us to protect our mortgages.

So when Tuss turned in his books at the next meeting, Jasper told how he too had been threatened in the same manner, but that he wasn't the kind to run from the groundhog's whistle.

"What do you mean?" Tuss said. "Talk straight out like a man."

"No man could make it straighter than that," Jasper said.

They brought it to the section committee meeting where Tuss preferred charges against Jasper for breaking up the local and Jasper against Tuss for resigning without the committee's permission. Jasper said the week never passed that he didn't receive some kind of threat from any number of quarters. He spoke bitterly and long, quoting Lenin on the duties of a professional revolutionist, let Tuss get away with this kind of yellow trick and you shake every member's faith in the strength of the organization, one season's seeding means seven years' weeding. So Gene had to quote Lenin too, about Communists having to work not with any fantastic human material created by their imaginations but with people produced by and living under capitalism. What good would Tuss Corey be to the League after he was driven out of Cayuna County? Certainly the Pine Hill unit wasn't strong enough to force the bank's hand. Let him resign as secretary, there are plenty of other things he can do in the local and the Party.

Gene carried the section committee's vote as he always did, and again there was a strained period between the Ogrodnik household and Jasper who never quite made up his mind in regard to the new organizer. For one thing, he could never get over the feeling that an outsider had been brought in over his head, installed at someone else's farm, removing the last of his chances to run a car again, a young fellow at that, who thought a Plymouth rock was something the Pilgrims stepped on. The way Gene talked sometimes, Jasper could not get over the feeling that no one but a rich young fellow could have had that much education, of course not everybody from New York was rich but how else if not in college could you learn to use words like that, and write letters like that, or talk so quietly, to say the sharpest things so quietly and calm like? Jasper could not wholeheartedly trust Gene except when the latter sought information from him instead of from Mike or Tuss Corey. At first he had liked Gene to play with his small children. These children had all been fat, cheerful babies but they deteriorated with the rest of the Finch place. Mike and Tuss Corey were in the habit of upbraiding Jasper for letting his machinery go rusty and a whole six-acre field of ragweed and foxtail go to seed, but it was on the children's account that Gene could hardly bear to hold a meeting on the place.

Jasper's four were like the Hutchins children and like all hungry and dirty children, great eyes and skin drawn over large foreheads and narrow pale lips over the teeth, yellow and chipped at the edges. But where the Hutchins children were abnormally and incredibly shy, even difficult to locate unless you knew their hideouts, Jas-

per's were aggressive and hunted in a pack. They thought nothing of killing a duck without their mother's permission and roasting it behind the barn, and they swirled around Gene when he came, begging for pennies and stealing his fountain pen. Jasper refused to strike a child because no kid could be as mean as Second Union National, he said, and I don't see any of you punching that manager. And he had certain ideas about child psychology although he confessed he could not put them into practice and he admired Gene for doing so. But Gene's methods worked only temporarily. Soon the children found that there was really nothing tangible to be got from the strange man and they stopped obeying him. One evening when they refused to go to bed and held up a meeting, Gene took them one by one and locked them into their room. Jasper didn't know how to take that, but finally he agreed with his wife that there could not have been any meeting without it.

Together with Martha Finch he worked out a theory that Gene was a well-intentioned and good-hearted boy imposed upon by Mike and shrewd Anna Ogradnik, and by the Party in New York and even the district perhaps. Jasper had no illusions about Moscow gold but he thought that a Party which could pack Madison Square Garden to the rafters must certainly have enough money to buy one of its farm organizers a second-hand automobile. For all one knew, there was graft going on and Gene Marsay was too polite or good-hearted to say anything about it or to notice it. Just think of the money that must come in from those big meetings, and subscriptions to the *Daily* and the advertising in it. Just think of the Paul Revere stunts he and Gene could pull

with a measly little Chevy to run around in. Jasper decided to bide his time, continue going to district committee meetings, get a real grasp on the workings of the Party and see exactly what one must do to get real help in local organization, then go ahead and do it.

In the meantime he tried to pep up the section by bringing back from one of his trips the District Agitprop, a rather feeble comrade, hardly more successful than the abbreviation of agitation-propaganda with which he was cursed. Agitprop had started as a regional poet and had gone to New York and to the revolution by marriage mostly. His wife had been a good worker until she died, and he got a Party job in New York as a sort of memorial to her. Then they got sick of seeing him around and sent him down the river, out to this district, half to get rid of him, half in hopes that it might do him good. At the special section committee meeting, called to polish up on methods of work, he spoke somewhat timidly at first but warmed into it after an hour, about one thing and another, "the necessity of penetrating basic strata of the non-urban masses, raising the ideological level of the Party membership, developing fresh cadres, utilizing the discontent rife among the population of the small towns, exposing the role of reformist leadership without antagonizing the rank and file, creating an opposition within the cooperatives, coordinating the work of the units on the basis of a solid collective leadership," all very definite like that.

Most of the unit organizers looked steadily at Gene and he looked down at the floor and kicked gently at the andirons. He made a brief talk after Agitprop's address, and the comrades were relieved to find they had been

carrying out most of these horrifying proposals all along, and spoke up to tell about it, and the comrade from the district often nodded approval. Jasper was so badly shaken that he drew Gene aside after the meeting and wanted to know whether men like Foster or Browder had ever worked with this fellow and how they could possibly think well of him. Gene said he didn't believe anybody thought well of that comrade, just comb him out of your hair and don't encourage him to come again.

Jasper's tacit apology for having brought the district representative confirmed what Mike had said about the former's general dissatisfaction with the way things were running. Gene knew the importance of retaining Jasper in leading positions and he took time from other jobs to spend evenings and nights at his farm. At first this meant unconscionable hours of sloshing over back country roads, but then he found that Sue Melinkovitch shipped eggs to the Weston cooperative twice a week, and Mike began to arrange his own shipping days so that Gene could have transportation both ways. Sue was the one-girl Party fraction in the Angelo Herndon Club, not nearly as active as her mother would have liked her to be, but always willing to do work that did not involve long meetings or talk.

Although Mrs. Melinkovitch could not speak English, she sometimes made Sue read aloud from the *Farmers' National Weekly* or some revolutionary novel, pretending to understand. Actually, it was for Sue's benefit that she forced her eyes to stay open. Most of her spare money went for subscriptions to Communist magazines and newspapers in the hope that Sue would become in-

terested in one of them and turn into another Ann Burlak, the young textile union leader whom they had heard in Weston. Sue didn't mind driving delegations to Cayuna or baking large chocolate cakes for the socials, but she could not run the Herndon Club singlehanded. She was elected president all right but she couldn't keep order at meetings, the boys hollered Hey Sue when do we have the next social. They were tough kids, farmhands all, and refused to sing the songs she tried to teach them and pinched her on the way out. Sue was a strapping big girl and she'd take hefty swings at them and of course that would spur them on and pretty soon Gene had to be at every meeting, always with something new to keep up their interest, a ball team, a boxing tournament, then an anti-war lecture about the CCC camps squeezed in between rounds sometime. A few of the young people from the paper mill at Cayuna straggled in to watch the boxing but they left after the anti-war lecture and never did return. And whenever Gene missed one of the Club meetings Sue would drive up to Mike's the next morning with harrowing reports of the boys' doings, either they were blowing the treasury on a gallon of moonshine for the social or they were voting down a proposal to enlarge the Club library.

During the first month of his stay in Cayuna County, Gene had formed extravagant notions of Sue's character as a result of several conversations and one rather spectacular occurrence. This happened at her own farm where Gene had walked one morning before dawn to get his weekly hitch to Jasper's. She had gone into an old corn crib for gasoline and she was carrying it in a bucket when the fumes hit an open lantern and it

seemed as though the whole crib had burst into fire at once. Actually, only the bucket and a thin stream along the sand were in flames, and when Gene ran up, Sue was well out of the crib, holding on to the blazing bucket although in her place someone else would have dropped it even at the risk of setting fire to the structure. But she placed it on the ground only at a safe distance and she had the presence of mind to rush to the well and to start pumping water. He knew that water would not have done much good, sand was the best thing, and he took a shovel and soon had the burning stream covered up so that the barrel was safe. But all the while Sue was pumping when any other girl Gene had known would surely have been overcome by the injuries. Sue's entire forearm was scorched, also a shoulder and one side of her forehead. But she would not be driven down to Cayuna for treatment until they had made sure that there were no embers of burnt cobs left around the crib.

In the car she kept talking about what might have become of the family if the chicken houses or the barn had gone up. The way she acted and the way she stood it when the doctor began peeling off skin impressed Gene more than had any individual performance in a very long time. He made a point of getting her to talk on a number of occasions, and Sue Melinkovitch said all sorts of unexpected things which went into the extravagant estimate he embodied in a letter to Alma.

Sue didn't like the fellows from Cayuna or any of the Herndon Club members. She hung out with them mostly for the sake of the movement, she said. What she wanted to do was go to New York or at least to Cincinnati where she had a man cousin who drove a moving van

and a woman cousin who worked in a high-class real estate office. But she said she would never consider taking an important step like that without talking it over with her father. He had been killed in a lightning storm eight years before.

Comrade Gene might consider this a funny way of thinking for a girl that's never been to church, but on a real clear night she could see a certain cluster of stars that was as like to a drawing of her father's face as one acorn to another and if she looked at it long enough it would move around and talk. Comrade Gene mustn't for a moment think she was superstitious, she knew all this business about bats getting into cow's ears was nothing but chaff, she didn't mean her father was really talking words, it was more like a voice just inside her ears. A while ago she had called that cluster of stars to her mother's attention and Mrs. Melinkovitch had said for her not to act like a priest-crazy old woman but Sue knew there was something to it, and some day she would figure it out.

Mr. Melinkovitch had been a union organizer in the coal mines and the men loved him so much that when he died a few of them traveled all the way to Cayuna to attend his funeral. They wore red carnations, all of them, and in the cemetery they took these flowers and threw them into the grave. Sue knew well enough why her mother was making her read those books aloud, and sometimes she said Ma, you don't understand them no-how, but Mrs. Melinkovitch would say that maybe after she heard the sound of those words a lot of times over and over, it would all come to her one day.

Sue did a man's work on the farm, and although her

hands were not quite as yellow and gnarled as Martha Finch's, they too made Gene realize the impossibility of bringing Alma out to live at Mike's, and of expecting her to do farm work when she hadn't even held down a city job. In her last letter that was what Alma had begged him to arrange but he couldn't see it at all, not after turning from the backward-slanting closely packed script, and sound, irreproachable sentence structure to the wash-tub full of chicken droppings at his feet. Alma's letters were just as long as his own now, and he thought they had more substance and sparkle in them. She had a wry, humorous manner uniformly applied to the most insignificant and the most deeply felt sentiments, and although this was extremely striking when employed in conversation where meanings could be clarified by qualities of tone and gesture, in writing it had an ambiguous and misleading effect on Gene. Too often these lightly told anecdotes of her trials in school or her listless attendance at a dull party would leave the impression that she was really having an enjoyable time, had plenty of congenial companionship, and was begging him to find a place for her around Cayuna in full knowledge of the proposal's impracticability.

Much of Gene's time went into trying to polish up on Marxist writings "concerning the agrarian question," and he had not read a line of fiction or of bright magazine articles since leaving New York. Alma's writing seemed so vivid and unique in the midst of the pamphlets and theses and the now familiar lifeless outlines of the Willow Run and the ridge road, that her letter became the axis of some of the week's most poignant intellectual activity. In the darkroom of his solitude, where Gene

developed the negatives he had of her character, these letters were but one chemical process precipitating his image of her, constantly changing under the effects of still other elements, breaking up under the prisms of memory and of jealousy.

Alma had more than the ordinary girl's passion for talking about herself, and under the guise of an attractive self-disparagement she had sometimes dwelt on her callousness in keeping three, four boys on string during the years before Gene. It was one of his firm convictions that people's fundamental traits were scarcely ever subject to drastic changes, and although this conviction could not itself be classed as fundamental he had not observed enough conflicting evidence to make him discard it. No mere series of letters, however detailed and loving, could counteract what he thought was his knowledge of Alma's notions of loyalty and faithfulness, and of her sensual nature which he had cultivated and refined. Just as in his Hooverville days Gene had pictured Eileen Weiland doing all the things she enjoyed best, he now visualized Alma betraying him in the midst of scenes she might never have known but for him, past those barriers which he had laboriously, patiently worn away with all the restraint and skill at his command. He had retained the faculty of conjuring bedroom images with the fervor and excitement of an adolescent. And even after he had removed their purely carnal motivations by sleeping with Sue Melinkovitch, these images recurred with unabated frequency, spurred by the additional factor contained in the simple theory that if he could be unfaithful, loving Alma as much as he did, what was there to stand in her way?

Gene augmented these fancied scenes by imagining discussions with Alma on the subject of her infidelity, and he composed speeches not unlike those he had automatically made in similar situations to girls who had meant nothing to him, insincere speeches with forgiveness implicit in their gracious fatalism, and rational with an intelligence that wounded the victims whose new sweethearts were less gifted as a rule. Never certain as to how intensely she suffered by being temporarily deprived of him, Gene had impulses to wound Alma as her absence was wounding him, but his own way of writing was so similar to hers that it was easy enough for Alma to interpret his jealousy as perfunctory and harmless mockery.

He wrote once a week, devoting Sunday nights to the letter until he began taking Sue out in her mother's car, then he switched to Mondays. He put everything he had into those letters, and his best organizational plans originated from such thinking between the lines to Alma. Sue was often attractive simply because she reminded him of Alma by having similar reactions in a very few cases or by having diametrically opposing ones in others. A good-for-nothing little girl from Cayuna, one of the disruptive members of the Angelo Herndon Club, had brown hair arranged like Alma's and a quick white smile like Alma's, so Gene went easy on her, and took undue pains to neutralize her, much to Sue's chagrin. He had not realized that any mistress could mean as little to him emotionally as Sue Melinkovitch who had lost all mystery, and he attributed this to Alma whose image was assuming vast proportions. He made love to Sue when opportunity arose, and he did it with such a minimum

of embellishments that he wondered why she was so grateful, then he would walk home to Mike's.

On the first warm April night when he made this three-mile journey, partly through the fields, then along the Willow Run, he was more than halfway home before the name or the body of the girl he had just been with occurred to him, and she seemed most unreal, unexpected and astonishing as the silent passage of a swan. His senses were dull and weary from lovemaking, and the shapes of trees and gusts of blue mist from the Willow Run slipped past him. On the bridge he felt the boards shivering as though a great fish had just made its way below, and he looked down and the water rippled black and indigo, smelling moist and mingling with the moonlight. The ripples were like the ripples in Central Park lake before they had installed the shore lights, and a sensation of the weight of those uneasy nights fluttered through Gene, the nightsticks of the park patrol. There was no place to rest between the bridge and home so he sat on the railing awhile, tasting his weariness. Men liked to sit by a fire and by water, and some interesting ideas might be developed around these profound yearnings, he thought, ideas maybe about atavism, but his mind too was weary. When he felt the moisture penetrating to his skin, he started for home. The Hutchins dog barked above the croaking of the frogs and Gene hoped Mike's new pup would not raise too much hell. When he got in, the pup only crept closer to the embers still blinking in the fireplace.

He covered the embers with a few cobs and settled into the armchair, waiting for the blaze. He uncovered the basket near the andirons and picked up the bleary,

gored chick which Anna Ogrodnik was nursing back to health. One of the cats sprang into his lap too and watched the downy chick with the round, baleful, half-tamed eyes of Goya's three cats in Don Manuel Osorio. Not even when the flame went up would the cat take her eyes off the chick, which didn't know enough to be scared yet and swayed peacefully on Gene's knee.

In the warmth of the armchair and the fireplace he began to think again in a less disjointed sequence, particularly about the possible consequences of the Sue affair. He had not the slightest scruple of moral principle in the affair, but he knew it might turn out to be an exceedingly bad business from the Communist angle. He had seen months of organizational work ruined by a scandal around the person of the organizer. The fact that some of the leading people he knew in the Party had at one time or another jeopardized their work by such relations was not an extenuating circumstance at all. Of course there were others whose conduct in this regard was above reproach, but chances were they would have lived that way even if they had not become Communists. He enumerated the many sacrifices he had been called on to make in the past year, rather the acts and inconveniences which he would have classified as sacrifices not so long ago, and he wondered if he would ever be enough of a Communist to regulate his sexual behavior exclusively or primarily with the interests of the Party at heart, wondered if anyone ever had.

He threw new corncobs into the fire, lazily aiming at the center of the flame. The cat stared wildly at the yellow chick, stared with great, dewy motionless eyes whose chiaroscuro shifted and blazed with the flame, her

body crouched into a nervous ball leashed by Gene's presence to which she paid tribute by occasional purrs. Alma is sleeping, curled into a ball too, her body storing up its grace and sweet savors.

Any sort of hint concerning him and Sue would travel around among the farmers like news of a barn fire. The old people would be sore on principle and on Sue's account and because they were old; the young fellows would be sore for having been discriminated against in favor of a city guy, and the girls would be sore, envying Sue and wondering what he saw in her. Mike would be sore as all lavender hell.

The work was going good, better than anyone had expected. The success of the delegations had made itself felt in locals which heard of them only through Gene, and doubled their attendance when the postcards announced that he would speak again. Two League members had their farms reassessed under threat of another delegation. A Scottsboro defense dance netted twelve dollars, and the automobile fund was nearing completion. Most of these things found their way into the copy-hungry *Cayuna News* whose editor regarded Gene as a former *Times* man amusing himself in the backwoods. Vern Saunders, the saloonkeeper, had twice plied Mike with drinks to find out exactly what the League's racket was. The organization was being talked about to such an extent that the local Daughter of the American Revolution to whom Gene had been introduced by the tactless young editor, cut him and Mike Ogrodnik dead before Lindeman's hardware store. Gene wanted to stay with the work, and decided to call a halt

to the Sue business, and knew he would violate his decision.

The big cat could not bear to look at the chick within paw's reach. She jumped off Gene's knee and paced up and down before the fireplace, swinging her tail and growling intermittently. Mike was crazy about Gene and Mike was wonderful company when he wanted to talk as he always did, and Anna was kind, a Jewish mother who never had any children. They loved the shock brigaders in the Soviet Union and hated William Randolph Hearst. They were Gene's people and told him he was a goddamn fool and fed him. Sue Melinkovitch was dear and admirable. She had carried the blazing bucket to a safe place and burned her arm rather than risk the uninsured chicken coops. They were his people, and yet they would not be complete until he had discussed them with Alma, analyzed them, laughed at them and loved them with her. An entire large part of him lay fallow in her absence, the part that had grown in an adolescence, youth and Party life in New York, during the section dances in Harlem, in the long dinners of talk at Madarász', yes even during the parties of certain sophisticated Communists who ripped each other apart just as meanly and venomously as any set of French aristocrats, London literary people, or Montana farmers.

Gene could not turn to Mike or Anna and make this point: that there was some kind of human similarity in the voice of a chorus girl criticizing another's legs, in a ship stoker's scoff at the way his buddy swung the shovel, in the tones of one Party leader's acid comment on the political decisions of another, a fundamental similarity

in the venom whose similar sources are so easy to trace.

He could not turn to Mike and make this very minor point, but Alma would have responded by augmenting and remolding it, smiling or very serious. Gene and Alma were designed and constructed differently but they were very nearly of the same displacement and favored the same waters. It was a curious metaphor to think of, and he carried it to even more absurd lengths. He wanted Alma. That was the general idea, he thought. He replaced the chick under its basket, scattered the fire and went upstairs to bed.

The next morning he had to write some eighty post-cards, and since it was a nice day he moved out into the woodshed, taking Mike's primeval shotgun in case the outlaw dog they had been laying for showed up. Mike had lost four chickens in less than a week to that black chow-shepherd, all four leaving traces of feathers or blood. Possibly a few more had been lugged into the woods and eaten there. Gene took a potshot at a cloud of crows over the corn, hitting a small one that floated awhile before dropping. He left it there in the hope that some big scavenger would come around, a big red-tail hawk from Demster where they had them, and he would bring it down in spite of Jasper's ornithology and give it to Anna for mounting.

He was beginning to write the cards when he saw John Onda and Mrs. Melinkovitch pull up in her car, blow the horn, and hurry to the kitchen door. Anna shuffled out and called Mike up from the cellar, and they all appeared to be excited, arguing with each other and throwing their hands around. Certainly it was about Sue, Gene thought, and he wondered how her mother had

found out, and floundered for possible explanations. Mike called out his name and he walked slowly from the woodshed, carrying the gun which he realized must look stupid, thinking they mistook that for a threat because they waited for him in silence, except once Mike said hurry up in a tone Gene could not place with any accuracy at first but decided in his anxiety to interpret as ominous.

"Hurry," Mike said. All four looked tense, and Gene asked what was up, and Mike said, "You'll need more than that shotgun now. The county is foreclosing on four thousand farmers at a clip."

He handed Gene the *Cayuna News* which carried the story under a modest two-column head, and the lead said four thousand farmers and small home-owners in the county were given three weeks to pay up their back taxes of three and four years ago or else at ten o'clock on a Saturday in the Cayuna courthouse they would lose title to their properties. The delinquencies ranged from four to sixty dollars.

"That means all the stump jumpers off Pine Hill," Mike said.

"It means me," John Onda said.

"If they tried to sell them out one by one and came to do it on the property itself, we could stop them," Mike said. "This way I don't know what we could do outside of raising a yell."

"It's maybe just bluff," Anna said.

"I don't think so," Gene said. "If they could foreclose on forty thousand at a clip in Mississippi they could certainly take a chance on four thousand here. John, can you round up Jasper and Tuss and any other Party

members you run into? Mike and I will draw up an order of business and I'll get off a couple of letters to the district and a lawyer."

Mrs. Melinkovitch took the *Cayuna News* and threw it to the floor and spat on it, said Sonomabitch bastard.

ALMA NEVER FOUND OUT WHY HER NAME had been included among the six indefinite suspensions handed out by the dean's office two days after the national anti-war strike. More than half the school had struck to attend the outdoor meeting at which the other five girls spoke from the platform. Her own suspension might have been a belated reprisal for her insolence to the dean or it might have been due to the fact that she introduced the resolution in support of the strike at the influential Literary Society. At any rate, the charge was insubordination. When she got her notice she started looking for one of the other five students and located some of them downtown at the National Student League office.

The place was full of high-school kids who had also run up against the authorities in the course of the strike, and everybody was telling his story or wanting to use the typewriters and the mimeograph, or asking for Beatrice Gottlieb and the other leaders. Most of them had gone through one or more suspensions, some of them had been the center of local *causes célèbres*, and Alma had looked on them as rather heroic, at least courageous, youngsters. She herself did not feel courageous at all. She had known

what deans under pressure were like before she ever got out of high school herself, so there was no horrified indignation involved. But it was exasperating to have this thing happen just two months before graduation. The thing to do was to fight it out, make an issue of it in the press, gain reinstatement at the point of a sword, and not crawl back on the administration's terms. All the same, the suspension had not awakened any latent lust for battle in Alma. Again she considered chucking college right there, and raising enough money for the bus fare to Cayuna. Father could raise it on the rings in the family.

Beatrice called her into the inner office where a group was mapping out the campaign and Alma was loaded up with an assignment to obtain signatures from leading liberals and a few clergymen.

She knew that the affair might drag out for several tiresome weeks of interviewing, handing out leaflets, talking on the campus, and arrests in all likelihood. Beatrice was in her element, as Gene would have been, making "concrete proposals," getting up committees to the American Civil Liberties Union, the Board of Higher Education, the Mayor. Without initiating any of the plans, Alma undertook to do as much as the rest, but most of the afternoon was gone. She made her appointments and got ready to go. She fixed a typewriter ribbon for a curly-haired boy who was composing a leaflet, and tried to correct some of his sentences. He was one of the seven suspended from Harold's school, and she asked whether any of the teachers had protested against the disciplinary action, knowing that Harold wouldn't, but thinking maybe maybe.

"No," the boy said, "but a couple of them promised to take it up at the faculty meeting."

"Mr. Darvas?"

"Like hell. He was one of the group standing at the main entrance trying to keep us in."

"You sure?"

"Sure. I know him."

"Did you ever have him in class?"

"Once. I used to think he was okay."

For a while Alma thought she would be ashamed, but she wasn't that, only very angry. All the way home she wondered if there would be any point in bringing it up before Harold. She knew the answers he would give, most of them anyway. The curly kid had been very young, badly dressed and sweet, his leaflet very earnest and terribly written, and these things made Harold seem the more contemptible. That kid might have a real interest in electricity and might turn into a good engineer if he weren't expelled, as he surely would be if his leaflet went through. Knowing the things he did, Harold had no right to stop these kids at the door and take their names if they insisted on going through. On the outskirts of Beatrice Gottlieb's energetic labors Alma had felt comparatively apathetic and rather out of it, but confronted with Harold's action her own part in the strike gained importance and luster.

She knew what domestic clashes did to her mother, so at the supper table she spoke only about the food which was coming to be more splendidly and elaborately prepared each week. Mrs. Darvas had bought a Hungarian cook book of established reputation, supplementing its recipes with piquant but sound notions of the moment,

and the unfailing success of these experiments was attracting the patronage of more or less welcome relatives. But that day only Harold and Alma sat at the table. Mrs. Darvas had the habit of curbing her own hunger until Rudolf arrived after work at eight or nine.

The entire family shared a faculty of divining one another's moods, and Mrs. Darvas knew something had happened to Alma and worried about it to the extent that she forgot to be hurt at Harold's reading of a teachers' periodical during his meal.

"Anything wrong?" she said.

Alma said she'd been suspended, nothing very important though, she'd be back in her classes soon. Mrs. Darvas asked if she knew how soon, and Alma said she didn't, the whole thing wasn't very important. The anti-war strike had been a great success. Five or six years ago you couldn't have pulled out more than three, four thousand students at the very best. Now returns were still coming in and already the count was running over a hundred thousand nationally. Harold placed the periodical outside the range of grease spots and asked intently for the particulars of her suspension. She gave an extremely brief account, hoping he would not comment. The case of the curly kid had made her very angry, but now Harold seemed the same as ever, no new light had been thrown on his character. He had sat through supper a little heavily, indifferently, harmlessly, and she hoped to avoid a fight not because she knew it would not do any good, but mostly on account of their mother. She hoped to avoid a discussion which would inevitably lead to that fight.

Harold said, "There was trouble in my place too."

"I know," she said, "I spoke to one of the boys." She knew saying that was a mistake, but she resented the reference to suspensions as "trouble."

"Those kids acted very foolishly," he said. "They insisted on walking out in a body through the main entrance when they could have left individually through the side doors and accomplished their purpose just as well. The assistant principal had placed most of the men teachers at the main lobby, but there was no stopping that bunch. They just had to break through that cordon of instructors, just had to have their names taken and check in as certified, registered martyrs. They're brought up on the *Daily Worker*, some of these East Side kids, and they get really hysterical, they simply court trouble."

"The boy I talked to, Frank Daniels, didn't seem hysterical."

"No, he isn't," Harold said. "Frank Daniels is okay."

"He used to think you were okay too."

"I don't know the story he told you, but if he criticized my conduct in the affair he doesn't know his friends from his enemies."

"It seems to me his distinctions were extremely well made. The strike's entire value as a collective action would have been lost if they had sneaked out one by one."

"While as it is they succeeded in getting their most articulate members suspended, with the possibility of expulsion."

"They're very young," Alma said, "and no doubt they had counted on the younger instructors' refusal to scab."

"In view of that well-rehearsed bit of red flag waving,

weren't the preliminaries somewhat superfluous? First you tell me individual action is stupid in a case like that, then you call me a scab for not indulging in it. You don't suppose I wanted to see those kids suspended?"

"No, I don't suppose so. But what have you done to have them reinstated?"

"Nothing yet, because my first chance to do anything useful will come next week when their case comes up before the disciplinary committee where I can influence at least three members."

"You let your first chance slip the day before yesterday when you helped to turn in those names. And before we drift too far away from the subject of collective action in place of individual gestures which aren't even gestures, either you join the teachers' union or you stop shooting your mouth off about any kind of action at all."

Harold had stopped eating, but Alma kept on, although she was excited too. Mrs. Darvas looked from one to the other, understanding little and hesitating to interfere. Whatever they were disputing about, she felt Alma was having the better of it, and this inclined her to take Harold's side. She tried to joke about their neglecting the meal, and it scared her when they paid no attention.

"What is the matter?" she said in Hungarian. "Alma, have you been thrown out for good, tell me?"

"Not yet," Harold said, "but she's doing the best she can. For all her chances of a school appointment in New York after this, they might as well have branded her on the forehead with a hammer and a sickle. The red badge of courage."

"It's not the worst color one could choose," Alma

said. "You've apparently adopted one rather more nauseating."

It did not immediately occur to Harold what color that could be, and he glanced at her, slightly puzzled. Then he said, "My subtle but explicit sister. At least one of us had to turn yellow to pay for that succulent chop you've just finished."

"Not so subtle after all," she said. "I couldn't in a million years have anticipated the delivery of that choice sentiment."

"You asked for it." He got up and left the kitchen.

Mrs. Darvas opened her mouth to ask again what had happened, but then Harold came back to pick up the magazine, and she just followed him out again with her eyes.

Alma said, "Mother, can you raise about thirty dollars on one of the rings?"

"What happened?"

"I'm going to Cayuna to be with Gene for awhile."

"What did Harold just say?"

"Nothing important. I just want to be with Gene."

"And school?"

"I'll finish it some other time. Now I want to be with Gene. Would Father be willing to pawn one of the rings?"

"You know he would. Have you thought about this thing?"

"Have I," she said.

The flesh around the dimple in Mrs. Darvas' chin began to contract and quiver slightly, and she turned toward the stove. When she thought she had regained sufficient control over her voice to appear collected and

reasonable, she prepared to say all the things about the importance of training for a profession, the particular importance of an independent livelihood for a woman, all the things she knew Alma had figured out for herself long ago. She knew also that to repeat them could only irritate Alma in her present mood. "Maybe it's only that you're sore at Harold now," she said. "Think it over tomorrow when you're not so sore."

"I've been making my mind up for a long time," Alma said. She wanted to go into her room and be alone, not to think it over but to think about details of the trip. Then her father came home from work and she remembered that a few days ago he had complained that his children deliberately shunned his company, so she could not leave the kitchen and stayed at the table, leaning back in the chair and balancing herself precariously.

By the time her husband had washed up, Mrs. Darvas had served soup. She took care to put the pepper in while he wasn't looking, because when he saw her adding spices he grumbled about stomach burn but he could not eat soup without pepper. He ate fast and eagerly with the hunger of twelve hours' manual labor. He praised the food and asked Alma how she was. Alma said all right, then he began to complain of the new line of miscellaneous articles which Shahbenderian was introducing, a totally unfamiliar line the handling of which confused the help. Shahbenderian cheapened his fruit and vegetable store by dealing in loose macaroni and vinegar like a Second Avenue wop. Sooner or later Shahbenderian would break his neck with these experiments. It was no cinch trying to hang on to a class trade on the wrong side of Lexington Avenue and had it not been

for Mr. Darvas the store would have folded up years ago. What an idea, to sell brooms and toilet tissue in a fruit and vegetable place. Took America to think that up. Toilet tissue in six colors and three scents, if that wasn't the limit. A woman comes in out of a Packard, orders a dozen orchid scented rolls, nickel apiece, and a dozen ordinary Waldorf tissues, three for ten, and then she explains that the Waldorf rolls are to be used by the servants. That's America for you. In Hungary, barons and high government officials were damn well satisfied with newspapers.

"Rudolf," Mrs. Darvas said.

Alma's father returned to his soup with the satisfaction of having at least mildly shocked his wife and perhaps mildly amused his daughter. His head, bent over the plate, made Alma think about the theory that children resembled parents of the opposite sex. Harold's head always bent over the table at that same angle, and the configurations of his skull and jaw moved in the same relation to his high shoulders. Only, her father had been whipped by the white terror in Budapest, by his good wife and American bosses, collectors of rent, cranky customers and terrible loneliness. Ordinarily, Alma would have been able to think of Harold too as having been whipped and undermined in an altogether different fashion, but that day she read something voluntary, perverse and base into his treachery.

Had Harold come to her miserable and guilty, she would have defended him from anyone, Gene even, but she refused to recognize in his attack on her the logical expression of misery and guilt. She needed the indignation aroused by this attack to complete her case for leav-

ing home, and she could not apply the same yardstick to her contempt for both the Darvas men. Harold had been more successful in hiding his loneliness before Alma than he had been before Gene Marsay. Alma hated him that day and she would have hated her father for resembling him, but her father looked crestfallen at having been re-proved for vulgarity. And he was an old man, and she would be leaving him in a few days, robbing him of the joy he would feel at seeing her bachelor's degree framed over the dresser in his bedroom. She remained at the table, attentive to his talk and uncomfortable in her mother's silence.

Immediately after supper he went to bed and called Mrs. Darvas in to massage him between the shoulder blades. She knew the varying degrees of pressure which pleased him most and she labored over him mechanically. Mrs. Darvas thought it would be best not to talk things over with Alma until she could find out exactly what had happened to her in school and just how bad the quarrel with Harold had been. She thought of talking it over with Rudolf, but that would have meant agitation and wakefulness for both of them, and he needed the sleep.

Never while she still worked at her trade had such a feeling of complete ineffectuality come over Mrs. Darvas. Then at least she had had to concentrate on her work during the day, and in the evening, when domestic troubles loomed large, she could meet them with the knowledge that she was doing her part toward their solution. Now she imagined herself relegated to a subordinate position where she became a factor only in swinging the balance of power between contenders. And although

she had a singular aptitude for this role, at the same time she despised it because playing one side against another made her feel like a double-faced scheming creature, despicable regardless of the good that her schemes were meant to accomplish.

For the first time, at the age of fifty, she came up against the dulness and the futility of a purely domestic existence, all the duller and more futile in the light of the magnificent, luminous books Alma was bringing her each week. It seemed as if the strength she had been storing up to face the inevitable departure of both her children had been entirely illusory, and the idea that it was out of weakness that she clung to Alma appalled her.

"What if the children leave us?" she said aloud, but mostly to herself.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," Rudolf said. He was reading a Hungarian daily, bundles of which arrived with the trans-Atlantic steamers, badly dated but more alive and fascinating for him than any American paper could have been.

She herself reached for *Gulliver's Travels*. That was the first non-fiction book she had tried, and although Alma had taken pains to explain just how satire worked, it still seemed no more than a juvenile adventure story at first. Then, as Alma started pointing out how the chapter on Laputa applied to the Royal Society and Sir Isaac Newton, and so on, Mrs. Darvas began to like it. She looked at the pages now, but she could only think about what might happen if Alma really went off, how dearly she valued her daughter, and how dearly she would love Harold if only he would let himself be loved. Rudolf fell

asleep with the papers strewn over his blanket. She listened to his breathing. When it was certain that he would not awaken she went over and swept the papers to the floor, put the light out, and lay down by his side.

IT WAS AT CONSIDERABLE RISK TO HIS standing that Harold tried to predispose three members of the disciplinary committee in favor of the suspended students. He felt very bitter about Alma's censure of his behavior during the strike and her way of dramatizing it. Their remarks at her departure were of the most perfunctory sort. He kept the information that the kids had been reinstated to the last half-hour, and then all he said was, "Give my best to Gene and tell him to drop us a line occasionally."

Harold went to some pains in regaining the friendship of the strike leaders. That proved easy enough because they had been subjected to pressure from all directions, including home, and they were young and greatly relieved at the reinstatement. As conscientious Communists unwilling to destroy any literature that might be of use, they continued to leave the morning's *Daily Workers* scattered around the building, and sometimes Harold stuck one in his great-coat pocket and read it on the way home. The Party's shift from its dual unionism policy gave him a feeling of great triumph and he wished it had come to his attention before Gene and then Alma left. It had been some time since he had lost even academic

interest in trade-union tactics, but he knew that only a year ago Gene would have defended the old policy fervently and he would have liked to confront his brother-in-law with the new shift and watch him squirm and equivocate. The *Daily Worker* explained that the situation had changed, the American Federation of Labor had doubled its membership under the Roosevelt regime, conditions for revolutionary work inside the big unions had improved; but this seemed like a feeble and belated apology to Harold, who definitely knew that all such drastic changes of policy came from Moscow and that American Communists had no say in the matter, take it or lump it.

It was Alma who would have done the real squirming though. Gene might have done well enough, what with all his specific information to draw on, but all Alma could have done would have been to impugn Harold's motives in broaching the subject or perhaps to demand why this sudden preoccupation with political problems anyway. Harold was glad he had lost all fundamental interest in politics and kept up with events only in so far as it was necessary for the course he was taking in contemporary European history. Amateur politicians made him angry, and that's what every Communist was, from rank-and-filer to the best informed of district organizers. Lenin now, he'd been no amateur, but where was the like of him in this country?

How pained and shocked little Frank Daniels was when Harold told him that *Left Communism* had been virtually unobtainable in Party bookshops during the entire period when dual unionism was the sacred doctrine. Frank was a high-school boy and he could be excused for

being a dabbler in politics, but when grown men stood up on street corners and stated with a maddening air of incontrovertibility that in three months there would be another world war, only then could Harold fully thank his stars that he himself was no dabbler, but seriously preparing to be a student of history, not politics.

There was something so much more solid about his researches in Negro revolts preceding the Civil War than there ever could be about politics, at least so far as he was concerned. And if he did a good enough job on it, some publishing house might even undertake to handle the Ph.D. thesis as a book, or they might sign him up for a series of high-school texts. Then he would retire long before the age at which New York teachers became eligible for a pension. During the years in college Harold had grown accustomed to the idea of work as a necessary evil, and although then as now he did the work thoroughly, the final purpose of a tranquil and cultivate-my-garden-and-mind sort of retirement never left an important recess of his consciousness. Various stages of the progress toward his present secure position had succeeded each other with such controlled swiftness and regularity that now his horizon of the future expanded with each word of praise from superiors. The tranquil, cultured middle age in the well-stocked stone house upstate swung into view and he nourished the prospect until its mirage-like qualities, so delusive during that first formulation at the night club, vanished from time to time. The amenities and delights of this upstate existence, with its library, blazing logs and rural smells, became, in Harold's more sanguine moods, attainable—barring illness, early mar-

riage, involvement with the Communist movement or bad luck. And of these he dreaded marriage the most.

It was only because marriage with Dorothy was inconceivable that he continued to see her outside of school, took her to lunches during the week and to the movies on Friday. With her Harold felt he was not running the chance of being tied down to anything like a permanent arrangement, and as the date of her graduation was only a couple of months off he could dismiss the danger of a scandal around his job. Little Dorothy was too grateful, too anxious to please and apparently too happy to disregard his many warnings about the need of discretion, *little* Dorothy. Even in their most unguarded moments, the hallway sessions, he maintained the little-Dorothy attitude. It wasn't objectionable condescension, rather an unspoken but ubiquitous pretense that he was merely diverting himself with her refreshing and innocent young company. The first few times that she passed her tongue between his lips, he became profoundly excited, and managed with great effort to assume his classroom manner long enough to say Here, here. Dorothy only smiled as if she had been kissing that way for decades, and her smile and ease in adopting Harold's pretense that this was mere play, these things set him to wondering what she could be like in earnest.

That Friday, he asked to see her the following night and Dorothy said, "Suppose we make it Sunday, tomorrow I'm going to a dance." She would not say with whom, and he could not carry the classroom manner too far by demanding to know. He told himself he ought not to be surprised that she should be going out with some-

one else. At the same time, it astonished him that she should not have hastened to break the previous appointment. "Make it Sunday," she said, "if you're not too busy, I mean." But Harold said he would be, and didn't see her until Tuesday, when she got 78 on a quiz, somewhat higher than her average mark.

At lunch Harold said, "Did you have a good time Saturday?"

"What was Saturday? Oh, the dance. We went to the Roseland."

"Did you have a good time, Dorothy?"

"Not so good. Like any other dance."

"Do you go to lots of them?"

"No, not many."

"And your mysterious companion, did he enjoy himself?"

"Oh, he wasn't mysterious, just a boy I know." She was apparently delighted by the notion that Harold Darvas should think of a boy she knew as a "mysterious companion," and she was determined not to betray who it had been, because she knew what Harold thought of Frank Coletti, the ball player, and she also determined not to go out with Frank again, because if Harold thought he was dumb it must be so. Dorothy, at seventeen, had gone out with enough men to realize that when they started asking questions about each other, they were very much interested. And although ordinarily she might have been taken aback or confused by his next question, this assurance of his interest composed her and filled her with pleasure.

"Did you kiss him?" he said.

She smiled and shook her head slowly. "You mustn't think just because I kiss you, I kiss everybody I go out with."

After that they both ate in silence. It was the first time either of them had made reference to the hallway passages. The total effect was not too embarrassing; in fact it relieved Harold to an extent by removing some of the constraint which had enveloped the subject, and, between soup and entrée, he pursued it with the self-consciousness of inexperience.

"Have you kissed lots of them, though?"

"Quite some, but not really, you know."

"Do you kiss me really?"

"I'll give you one guess."

"And do you like it?"

"Uhhuh."

"As much as you liked the others?"

"More."

"Why do you like my kisses more?"

"Say, I can't answer all those questions."

"Why not?"

"Oh," she said familiarly, "you."

Because Dorothy was afraid she might not understand the exact shadings of Harold's talk she hung on his words with a mixture of attentiveness, admiration and anxiety, but he was so absorbed in the novelty and strangeness of intimacy with a girl and so anxious himself to please her and impress her on terms other than superior knowledge that he consciously elaborated on subjects of her own choosing or on those introduced by him in the hope that they might prove congenial to her temperament and education. He went so far as to jeer at people intensely given

to intellectual pursuits, and he attacked many of his colleagues, though not by name, deploring their softness and tearing into their erudition with the ferocity and completeness of a Turgenev nihilist. He told her the story of a departmental meeting at which, after one of Canfield's quotation-studded orations, he, Harold Darvas, had taken the floor and mildly ventured to hazard the suggestions that Savonarola did *not* refuse to absolve Lorenzo de Medici and Galileo did *not* mutter *E pur si muove* before the inquisition of Pope Urban VIII. Of these names Dorothy was acquainted with Dr. Canfield's only, but that did not matter since the story was told merely to deflate false erudition, and to minimize its importance in order to vindicate her own naïveté. The fact that the story was untrue merely enhanced the creditableness of the effort involved in its telling. Dorothy's smile continued to be full of admiration and anxiety to please, and of the tiny, even, ivory teeth.

Harold was thinking what a marvelous little mistress she would make. In the hallway on Rivington Street Dorothy went limp in his arms, and for the first time he knew the meaning of that phrase, and the tips of the ivory teeth gleamed moistly, and most of the time her eyes were closed, but when they opened partly, their strips of white gleamed moistly too. She let him reach inside her coat but not inside her dress, and most certainly not inside her brassière. They kissed moistly, lingeringly, longingly, furiously, miserably, and when they heard the door rattle they leaped apart. Once a tall shadow, even taller than Harold, but leaner and stooped, passed under the gas jet and heavily up the staircase. They listened to the lock open and the door close, then the lock close, and

then Dorothy whispered, "That was my old man." Your father? Harold said. Yes, that was my father all right. You know, a funny thing, my mother still calls him Schultz.

Tuesday, lunching in the cafeteria, Harold said, "I hate these big open places."

"You're not ashamed to be seen with me, are you, Mr. Darvas?"

"Don't be foolish. But we're never truly alone for any length of time."

"Why should you want to be alone with me?" she said with a disingenuousness which even he remarked.

"Because."

"Whenever I answer like that you bawl me out."

"Wouldn't you like to be alone with me sometimes?"

"Sure I would."

"Why don't you have spumoni ice cream besides the regular dessert?" Harold said. "I know you like it."

"Thanks, I will."

"I shouldn't want to invite you to my house, we couldn't be alone there, but I'm getting a room downtown, some quiet place where I can study evenings without too much family life. Drop in on me sometime?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"I just couldn't."

"You don't trust me?" He smiled pleasantly so as to remove the melodramatic implications, then he let one side of the smile droop slightly for affectionate irony. Absurd, lovable child, he smiled.

"I trust you," she said almost solemnly.

Harold did not regard the gaining of Dorothy's con-

fidence as one of his obstacles. Once he rented a suitable room, he was sure she could be habituated to visiting there, but to find the room was a problem. He did not want to sleep there more than a couple of nights each week, and he had no idea how rooming-house proprietors took to girls who visited their clients. He set five dollars a week as a limit, but a sordid room would not have served his purpose. After having walked around two Saturday afternoons, trying to decide on a house, wondering how to explain Dorothy's probable visits, constructing a pseudonym for himself, he decided on a building in Bedford Street, mainly because the greenery on its ground-floor windows gave it a friendly appearance. It was on the West Side, and out of the way. Also it was in Greenwich Village, where proprietors were more lenient in their views, or wasn't that so? Gene and Alma knew people who lived around this section, but they were both out of town now, and their friends not likely to recognize Harold. And what if they did?

At the time Alma was frequenting restaurants and speaks in this section Harold had professed great contempt for the people who loafed their best years away doing the things she described, and since she was his only living contact with the legend of the Village, he could hardly have repudiated any part of that repeatedly expressed contempt by asking to be taken there. Besides, to make the contempt at all authoritative, it had been necessary to pretend some familiarity with the premises. Now, Harold told himself, he had arrived at a stage where it was not only legitimate but strongly advisable to take a breathing spell, and Greenwich Village seemed to be the logical place to take it.

During the two weeks when he occupied himself with the problem of obtaining a room, his work on the Ph.D. thesis fell off badly. He dismissed this by use of the breathing-spell theory and by dwelling on a largely unformulated resentment at Dr. Canfield's cavalier assumption that the thesis would be submitted for use in his book. There was no particular hurry about this investiture with the final degree, and a few weeks' rest would give him better perspective on the material already in hand. A thorough job on Negro revolts preceding the Civil War would be referred to and remembered long after the movement had forgotten Alma's existence and maybe Gene's. Dorothy was such a splendid-looking little girl, so full of life.

Harold went into the friendly house and asked the landlady to show him some of the vacant rooms. She was a quick, fat, hard woman who sized him up with a frank and comprehensive glance and said, "How much would you like to spend? I have them all sizes, single and double." She took him through some back rooms, showed him two without windows, another without running water, and they were all pretty dismal. He asked to see one that had a window on the street, and she said that the only vacancy there was a double room which would cost him seven dollars. When he saw it, Harold said that was just the kind of place he wanted, light and cheerful; that on the few nights when he stayed in town he wanted a decent place to rest in, and that his wife, who might visit sometimes, would not be able to bear one of those dark holes. Since it was only a matter of making the bed and sweeping the room a few times, couldn't he have it for five dollars? The most the woman could do was to

refuse him. Her face had been completely motionless as she listened, but when he finished talking she began an animated discourse on business conditions in general and the unreliability of tenants, then she said that Harold looked like a trustworthy young man, in short, six dollars was rock bottom. He said he would take it, move in some of his books soon, and gave his name as Douglas Wilson.

Getting Dorothy to visit him turned out to be a more difficult job than he had anticipated. She exhibited qualms of every description, a nice girl couldn't go to a man's room, he would only think the less of her. Harold spent several lunch hours and after-movie periods in reasoning away these compunctions, and on the logical end of it he was effective enough. Of course she would love to be alone with him, she said, but he didn't know what these lodging houses were like, how she had lived in some with her mother when Pop had the job in Buffalo, and those landladies kept snooping. She would feel just awful in going past one of those open doors downstairs. Tell the truth, now, wasn't the landlady's door always open? What if it was, Harold said. They weren't going to do anything wrong. Besides, he had told her his sister would come up occasionally.

Harold himself was extremely jittery the first time they went past the open door. A man who could not have been anyone but the landlady's husband followed them with his eyes above the rustling comic sheets of Saturday's *Journal*. Upstairs Dorothy sat in the only chair without removing her coat, and Harold sat on the bed. He tried to put her at ease by assuming various semi-recumbent postures suggesting hominess, and by talk-

ing what he thought she would regard as amusing nonsense. Every time they heard steps in the hall or on the staircase he imagined it would be the hard fat woman come to say she was running an orderly house and wanted no sluts around. He would stand on his dignity and walk out without asking for the rent he had paid in advance, and he would take Dorothy to the Terrace to make her forget, or home to his own house to show he respected her and to salve her feelings. Mother would think she was awfully young.

After a while he abandoned the amusing trivialities and tried to conduct the conversation on a plane of intimacy which would justify the room's existence, but he learned nothing new about Dorothy and revealed more than he had meant to about himself. She was there for more than two hours and said nothing beyond an awed reference to the "hard" book he was reading and several remarks about the possibility of the landlady's objections. For the most part she answered him by facial expressions, nods and monosyllables. He alternated between boredom, impatience and exasperation, but after they parted he was glad he had kissed her only two or three times, because it had ostensibly increased her confidence. He forgot that it had been out of fear and awkwardness that he had not gone farther, and a warming thought came to mind, the idea that his affair was progressing along planned lines. Of this he was never quite certain, but the fact that by now he could predict and cope with many of Dorothy's reactions helped to maintain the illusion.

Even the literal, physical progress of his endearments showed an ordered advance that regulated itself, although

afterward it was possible to imagine he was in control of a plotted and thrilling seduction. First Dorothy sat on his lap in the armchair. During the next few meetings they kissed while seated on the bed. It was weeks before they would tilt over to lie side by side. Another stage saw them make their way toward comfort on the pillow; after a sexy and particularly outspoken Broadway show he reached into her blouse.

Within these limits Harold employed the knowledge gained by extensive reading on the subject. Dorothy attained the ultimate tension many times before he undertook to remove her skirt, and on the day he did she offered no resistance whatever at first. But suddenly she sat up and adjusted the skirt, and fell back on the pillow in a virtual collapse of sustained and convulsive sobbing.

Harold had known no such terror since adolescence. He stroked the small forearms which covered her face and said, "Here, what's wrong?" And after this brief stroke of terror, the spectacle of a bitterly sobbing girl in his arms filled him with an unknown, speechless fascination that served the same end as would have the silence of a man sufficiently experienced to let such a first spasm run its course. When she subsided somewhat he began plying her for an explanation, and when she would not answer he assumed that it was fear of pregnancy, and told her he had not meant to do it that night anyway. She began crying anew and again, and he was becoming exasperated and worried, thinking perhaps she might not be altogether normal. During this second prolonged, worried silence of his, Dorothy too quieted down. They lay side by side without touching. Her voice was almost

composed when she said she didn't believe a fellow and a girl ought to lie on a bed together unless they were married or in love, and the use of the "or" instead of "and" heartened Harold. He made a mistake in saying that love was a silly word, that no such thing existed, because Dorothy moved further away and seemed to be on the point of breaking out again. She said, "You don't love me, do you?"

The word had no meaning, he said, it had lost its significance by having been used too often and indiscriminately, but if by her question she wanted to find out whether he preferred being with her to being with any other person, whether the thought of her flooded him with tenderness and emotion, why then of course he loved her. Harold had never made such a speech to a girl. Its eloquence intoxicated him. Its cadences and obvious effect swept him onward to unknown, rarified altitudes. He felt the dim and now strange eyes playing on his face, half visible in the light of the street lamp, and he told her things further and further removed from his ordinary consciousness, ideas that grew involuntarily out of one another, a secret and bitter flow of words like barrenness, loneliness, frustration, and among these her name glowed as he recurred to it in the unknown, taut undertone.

It was her turn to be fascinated then. Of the words barrenness, loneliness and frustration she understood only one, but it was her turn to be thrilled at the emotion her presence and actions had aroused, at the sound, caressing and new, of her name on the lips of Harold, the former Mr. Darvas. Incomprehensible as the substance of this cascade of words was, she had encountered this tone before, and it sounded most genuine. Her fear of him and

what he might do that night vanished in the triumph. Not long after he had finished talking she said she was hungry and could certainly stand a cup of coffee and a ham on white toast.

ON ALMA'S ARRIVAL SUE MELINKOVITCH bowed out of the picture rather more gracefully than Gene had feared. She evaded him in town, and for this he was grateful. On the night of the Herndon Club meeting she played sick, not knowing he was busy elsewhere, and in her absence the club nearly split. Once they unavoidably ran into each other on the Demster Pike, where her car had stalled, and he got out of the Dodge to give a hand. In the few remarks beyond which she would not venture, her attitude was almost apologetic. Gene was fussing over the ignition while she spoke, and he knew that if he turned to face her, she would stop short. As it was, she said it had been her fault, he'd told her he was married all right; she had it coming sooner or later. When he did turn around she managed a smile and switched to the Herndon Club. Primarily his feeling was one of relief, and he never quite realized the magnitude of her effort. Briefly it even wounded his vanity to be renounced with such a lack of histrionics, but there were much too many other things on his mind to consider this angle at length.

Mike naturally took to Alma with great and violent demonstrations of comradeship and love. Trying not to

interfere with Gene's work, she followed Mike around the coops and she asked all the silly questions about how come the hens lay eggs without a rooster in the house, and why some chickens squat before your feet and spread their wings. She followed him behind the cultivator like a blackbird, and when he told her to pull the morning glory from around the young corn she did it until her back hurt. She cut the horse's wind by feeding it too much oats at the wrong time, and she leaned over breathlessly while Mike showed her nests in the bushes and groundhog diggings under the quickset hedge. She picked an armful of pussywillows, then she did not know what to do with them. Mike loved her and kidded her at every meal. "Wait till summer comes," he shouted, "I'll make you pitch hay till your hand's got callouses the size of a hickory nut and harder." Her position in the household was not nearly as difficult as Gene had imagined it would be. With the Ogrodniks it never became a matter of having to skimp on food, and the twenty dollars she brought would take care of the few extra expenses for a while. She was a great help to Anna in running up and down the cellar for provisions, doing the dishes and, in time, milking the goat. Neither Mike nor Anna had met an educated American girl who was also a comrade, and they were fascinated by her complete ignorance of farming, by the English or Hungarian words she knew to all Mike's Russian revolutionary songs, her very small and white hands, her three sweaters, the references to well-known Communists whom she had met at parties or heard at meetings, and her boisterous flirting with Mike, which actually displeased Anna, as Gene later found.

The other thing Anna resented was what seemed to her an unending and unnecessary succession of Gene's attentions to a girl who was young and small and pretty, but still a worker's kid who ought not to require such delicate handling. When Gene bent down to fasten Alma's galoshes and Alma rested her hand on his head meanwhile, Anna would try to register censure of the tableau by busying herself at some strenuous task with a particular display of vigor. Mike too at first noted these strange attentions and ridiculed them, but when he saw that Gene did these things as a matter of course, he began to admire and imitate them when he thought Anna was not looking. Mike and Alma could spend entire days together, laughing loudly every five minutes.

The general line of a campaign to fight the foreclosure on the county's four thousand tax delinquents had been worked out by the section committee, and it involved some fourteen hours of work each day on the part of Gene. For Mike it was one of the year's busiest seasons. The farm kept him going all day around, and he got to see people only at the egg cooperative and in the A. & P. where he did his trading. He was very sore about not being able to take a more active part in the campaign, and he fumed about it too, every chance he got. The way he took it out on Anna was by insisting that Gene be allowed to run the Dodge as much as the campaign required, and that was most of the time. The automobile fund hoarded by the Party section and the Cayuna Farmers League went for gas and repairs.

Gene spent the first day after the section committee meeting in running off four thousand copies of the call to "delinquents" on the primitive mimeograph, but after

that he spent scarcely any time on the farm. In the evenings he spoke at township or Grange meetings, wherever he could get the floor, and usually he went with Jasper Finch and one or two others. In the daytime when Gene was not composing letters of protest to the county commissioners, congressmen, state legislators or the governor, he went around doing farm-to-farm canvassing on Pine Hill and along the upper river road which seemed to be one of the most widely affected areas. Many of the farmers he interviewed were too stunned to say much more than that times were bad, and the county shouldna done that. They took his leaflets and said they would try to be there in front of the courthouse when the mass meeting came off. Some said they'd be there if they could get the car running, or if they had the gas, or if someone would call for them. Others were distrustful and simply fingered the leaflet and said they were going to be out of the county that day, peddling flowers in town or something.

Jeffery Hutchins said he'd be there wearing his uniform from the Spanish-American war and carrying the stars and stripes. Claude Earnshaw, who had the prettiest field of early wheat on the upper river road, said, "Sure, I'm one of the four thousand. What of it?"

"Have you seen one of our leaflets yet?" Gene said.

"Sure, I seen one. What of it?"

"Can we count on you to be at the courthouse next Monday?"

"You can not," Claude Earnshaw said, "I'll tend to my own troubles."

"The county will just sell you out if you don't stand together with the others. This is the kind of trouble that

won't be settled by any amount of tending you can do alone. You may have been voting the Democratic ticket for twenty years, but that won't help you with the county commission. You owe back taxes and they'll collect or foreclose."

"They won't throw me off the place," Claude Earnshaw said. "I'll just lose title and a couple of mortgages, so instead of me the county will be paying interest. Any time for two years I can pay off the back tax, the costs and the interest, and the title is mine again."

"But don't you see that's how the county commission works for the bankers. They make those poor farmers who can still afford to pay taxes pay also the interest on the mortgages of the fellows who can pay neither interest nor tax. And rather than be evicted two years from now, many of you will raise enough to buy back your title, even if it means your family's going without shoes or food. That's the way they figure."

"All that ain't no news to me. I know how county commissions work. I used to be on the township school board myself. A governing body got to look out for the interest of the people as a whole and not for us four thousand stump jumping buggers. We don't pay our taxes, so why should they look out for us?"

"They're not looking out for the interest of the people as a whole. You four thousand paid your taxes as long as you could, and you have a good chance to make them work for you whether they want to or not. The only way you can do it is by sticking together, and the only way you can stick together is by coming to this meeting in Cayuna and electing a delegation to voice your demands."

"Let me give you a tip, young fellow," Claude Earnshaw said. "I don't know what part of the country you come from, but in this state there ain't never been a county commission that give a hoot in hell about the farmer who don't put in a showing at that administration building in three, four years. Not after the elections are over anyway. Trying to make a county commission work for you and the banker both is like harnessing a team of a mule and a rabbit. No amount of meetings in Cayuna will do it. You can't make a county commission do nothing they don't want to do. Did you ever know a place where it's been done?"

"Last year in North Dakota——"

"This ain't North Dakota. Just look at the license plates on the cars along the river road and you'll know this ain't North Dakota."

"That's still no reason for letting the county commission walk all over you. There is enough money in any two mansions on Elm Street in Cayuna to take care of all four thousand delinquencies. They won't give up any more of it than they have to, but there are ways of making the commission shift some of the burden on them, here as well as in North Dakota. Jeff Hutchins was positive he couldn't get relief when our delegation went and forced the authorities to shell out."

Claude Earnshaw said, "That was federal money, but these commissioners was put in office by local business and they ain't going to throw away their bread and butter by crossing up their own outfit. If they said four thousand poor bastards is gonna be sold out, they don't mean three thousand nine hundred ninety-nine. And there's nothing you can do about it."

"Will you for one be willing to get off your land at the end of two years?"

"Earnshaws have lived around the valley since this state was a territory and they ain't one of them been driven off his land yet. Outside of my son who's with the army in Hawaii I'm the only man left in this family and I'm not fixing to join any city breadlines. They might take my title away, but this is Earnshaw land and the county commission knows it."

"They might know it but they sure don't give a hoot in hell," Gene said. "Those are your own words."

"You're wasting good breath, young fellow. I'll tend to my own troubles."

"Well, see you in two years."

"That's telling."

Up on Pine Hill and along the weedy back roads off Demster Pike the farmers and sometimes their wives listened to Gene silently, waiting for him to spring whatever article he was trying to sell, and when they found he was not a salesman they were still wary, wondering what his racket was. Some already knew he was the fellow off Mike Ogradnik's place, and they would offer a chair, or a bucket of water for the steaming Dodge. One sandy-haired farmer offered him a glass of milk, and when he turned it over to a little girl who should still have been in swaddling clothes he thought, she asked her father's permission to drink it. Gene saw the man nod consent, but by the time his eyes returned to the child, the milk was gone and the glass on its way to be washed.

The sandy-haired farmer said, "I hear tell of a family about halfway down the hill, a family of French people

that's supposed to be eating frogs' legs for a meal. What do you make of that?"

"Lots of people like frogs' legs. There's nothing wrong with them."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure."

"My pond is aleaping with frogs and I don't mind telling you I'm ready to eat them if you or anybody else will tell me how they are cooked or fried."

"I don't know," Gene said, "but I can find out for you between now and Monday and you can meet me behind the courthouse after the meeting. You know some other farmers around here that might be interested in this meeting?"

"You try Roger Shotton, about half-mile across the pond. He's great for all kinds of meetings. I want to thank you for that information in advance, because we don't often see meat on this farm, other than a cotton-tail or a miserable floating chipmunk. If you can get Roger to go to this meeting he will bring a heap of other folk because he's a Klansman and they stick to each other like sand burrs. Roger won't let on about his place being sold out for back taxes but I know good and well it is. That's why I'm advising you to get him joined up with your meeting."

All Gene knew about the local Klan was that once they had threatened to run Mike out of the county for selling *Daily Workers* on Main Street in Cayuna. They could not have been very strong because none of the hangers-on in Vern Saunders' saloon professed to have any respect for them, and they had never burned a cross

in the vicinity. He said, "May I tell him you sent me?" "Better not," the sandy-haired farmer said.

Gene got into the car and followed directions until he came to Roger Shotton's mail-box, but there the road stopped. The footpath was obscured by a heavy growth of Russian thistle, and he did not think that could be the entrance to anybody's farm. He caught sight of the top of an unpainted silo and he tried to make a bee line for it through the undergrowth. He hit swamp land and turned back and tried along the old footpath, which led away from the silo at first, but then he saw that was only to get around the swamp. Next to the silo was a sturdy rock barn with the narrow rifle slits that showed it must have been built in Indian days. The house was not nearly as solid, its roof sagged, with most of the shingles awry, and its sides bulged toward the bottom as if the upper part were too heavy. There did not seem to be any live-stock around, and the only thing that moved was an old drooling hound which sidled toward Gene without barking. The yard was covered with buffalo grass, the first he had seen around the section, very tall and rich buffalo grass, strange for swamp country.

That buffalo grass had not been grazed or cut for a long time and it reached up around the legs of the man who sat smoking a pipe and rocking himself on the open porch. As Gene got closer he could tell from the smell of the pipe that the man was smoking dust tobacco, the kind they use in chicken mash. He was a handsome, strong-looking man dressed in worn clothes the color of his buildings' unpainted wood, and the first thing Gene thought was what a good guy he would be to have on

one's side in a scrap. The old bitch hound whined feebly.

"Good morning," Gene said.

"How do." The man shifted his broad shoulders to face him but left the pipe between his teeth.

"Are you among the farmers whom the county is threatening to sell out next month?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"I'm from the Cayuna Farmers League. We're getting up a mass meeting Monday to protest against the sales. We're going to have one every Monday and we are organizing delegations to call on the commission, and the governor if necessary. This is the leaflet we put out. If—"

"Haul ass," the man said without moving.

"Why don't you read the leaflet first?" Gene said. "Maybe you'd change your mind."

The man got up and went in the house and came out with a shotgun. He said, "Haul ass or they'll be picking buckshot outa your skull."

"Why don't you put the gun away and talk to me? I'm here to help you."

"Haul ass," the man said.

He stepped forward and jabbed the muzzle into Gene's ribs with almost enough force to knock him off his feet. Gene thought the man would shoot in another minute. He turned around and went back through the buffalo grass. The hound had apparently lost her power to bite or bark. Twice she hurled herself against him with toothless jaws open, then lay down panting.

Back in the Dodge, running along open road again, he tried to account for the man's animosity. He hoped per-

haps the man had threatened to shoot thinking he'd been sent by the county, but that was probably not the case. Many of the farmers affected by the sale imagined it was their own fault and that they had it coming. A man with a place as run down as that was most likely to take the blame and brood about it. For all one knew, this particular farmer had notions about international Jew bankers and Communists being responsible, and there was no longer any secret about Jasper's or Gene's own affiliations. People didn't threaten to send a load of buckshot into somebody's skull unless they were cracked or had a definite reason, and that man didn't look cracked. The way his features were set, cheeks immobile and eyes dancing, certainly gave the impression that he was ready to fire. At that, Gene might have taken a chance had it not been for the jab which was violent and painful even through the thick leather lumberjack. He decided to sign off canvassing for the day and to go back home, but not to say anything about his experience with Roger Shotton to Alma who had no control over her dread of any kind of physical injury.

He found Jasper Finch and Mike arguing in the kitchen. Being tied down to the farm had Mike raging intermittently ever since the day the foreclosures were announced. He felt the campaign had started off on the wrong foot and that his own participation would have changed its entire complexion. At meeting after meeting he pleaded for more canvassing on the part of those comrades who didn't have farms to run or had sons and helpers to leave in charge. He accused Gene of taking too much of the burden on himself and so retarding the development of the less experienced Party members who

could learn and grow only by doing the work themselves. What if Gene were transferred or became sick, as well he might, tramping around the swamp areas all day?

Then everybody, including Gene, would nod and agree with Comrade Ogrodnik. But this campaign was something extraordinary and mistakes were apt to be too costly. There were too many things which only Comrade Marsay could do. Now Jasper had taken it upon himself to go into the district for an International Labor Defense attorney and had stayed away five days. This, Mike maintained, was a criminal waste of forces when the important thing was to get the farmers to this first big meeting.

Jasper said, "Mike, you might know the feelings of the people in the Willow Run local, but I know what goes with these native farmers on Pine Hill. They'll listen to me and Gene and they'll go home thinking we're mighty smart fellows, but lawyers is what gets them. If we could have got an I.L.D. lawyer to shove one of those big books in their face and say here, there's fourteen laws says your farms belong to the bankers and there ain't a blessed thing you can do about it—legally. What you need is mass action and the only way to get mass action is by rallying around the Cayuna Farmers League. That's what these birds need, a lawyer."

"Did you get one?" Gene said.

"I would have if the district hadn't interfered. They insist he's got to stay home in case the rubber strikers get pulled in from the big picketline they're planning."

"That probably is more important. After all, we don't expect any arrests."

"Maybe so. But it's purely funny every time it's the

district's turn to do something for us they're busy doing something else more important. Every time that happens."

"That don't mean you have to stay there five days," Mike said. "We could have found out about the lawyer by just writing. Don't worry, if the first meeting is big enough, the district will send us a couple of speakers to the second. If it's mass action that will stop the sales, you won't get it hanging around town waiting for a lawyer. It's farmers you need, and you'll only get them by canvassing."

"You tell me not to worry about the district. Well let me tell you not to worry about the farmers. They'll be there. If I know the way they feel around Pine Hill they'll come with Winchesters."

Gene thought that might be the time for him to tell about Roger Shotton and possible interference on the part of the Klan, but he knew that neither Mike nor Jasper would be able to keep from talking about it to others whose wives would get panicky and make them stay away. Or a few might actually come with Winchesters, and that would be disastrous. He limited himself to an inquiry about Shotton, and Jasper said he was just a sore-head, no good for the League. Alma came in with a basketful of strawberries that were so large they called for a change of topic. After supper the Party members of the Willow Run unit came and ate what was left of the strawberries and made final arrangements for Monday's mass meeting. Sue reported the distribution of three hundred more leaflets at the Demster carnival, and her mother and John Onda spoke at length on the temper of their neighbors. Gene submitted outlines of his own

speech and Jasper's and they were approved and amplified somewhat. Everyone hoped for big things.

Monday morning the Party members were first to arrive and they were just as enthusiastic but considerably less hopeful. John Onda, for instance, was to have picked up four neighbors in his big Hupmobile, but two of them backed out the last minute, saying they had work to do. A state trooper from the sub-station on the river road came up the courthouse steps and asked for Gene by name. All he wanted to see was their permit to hold the meeting. When Jasper showed it to him, he said, "Watch out and see there's no violence."

"We're farmers," Mike said. "You're the trooper. You watch out."

"What's your name, fresh guy?" the trooper said.

"His name is the Cayuna Farmers League," Gene said. "That's my name too. Is there anything else we can do for you?"

"One thing you can do is don't holler too loud when you make your speeches. Judge Eldon is going to be in session and he don't like unnecessary noise," the trooper said, looking at Mike. He joined the town dick who had been studying the group from the window of Cy Leslie's Tonsorial Parlor ever since the first car pulled up.

"Why, Mike, you don't want to get on the wrong side of these troopers," Jasper said. "They're useful. They're useful like horseflies."

Half an hour before the meeting was scheduled to start, there could not have been more than sixty farmers around the steps, and most of them were old standbys from the Willow Run local. There were a few small groups loitering in front of the various stores, and their

eyes were on the courthouse steps, but there was no telling whether they had come to attend the meeting or simply to do their trading. Gene, Mike and Jasper were in a huddle to decide if it would be advisable for a delegation to call on Judge Eldon as well as on the county commissioners. Alma came through the closely bunched outer group and wanted to speak with Gene alone.

She said, "The paper-mill superintendent came past the A. & P. in a car and said the packing room was taking on half a dozen girls. He hired Sue and me on the spot and told us to bring our girl friends. First he thought I'd be too small, but then he said all right. Eleven dollars a week. Isn't that a break?"

"What kind of a job is it?"

"It can't be a skilled operation because he said for us to report in half-an-hour if possible, and they'll start us right in."

Gene knew the amount of work one had to do in a paper mill for eleven dollars, and he did not want her to be with Sue, either. "The work will be too hard for you," he said.

"Don't be silly. They're handing us a factory Party unit on a platter. It'd be good if you could come for me at the whistle, but I'll walk if you can't. Make a good speech, darling."

She was gone before he had a chance to say much more. He knew they needed the money, and he was ashamed not to have thought of the beautiful opening to gain a foothold at last in the paper mill. He told Mike about Alma's being hired, and Mike shook his head, said she wouldn't be able to handle that kind of a job, they made them sweat there.

Then a carload of small home-owners from Demster drove up in a car with only a single fender, unemployed porcelain workers mostly, whose box houses were being put on the block for unpaid taxes of as little as four and six dollars. Gene went to greet them. They said many more would have responded to the leaflet but there were no cars to be had. That was encouraging because he had just about made up his mind that the leaflet was a total failure.

Even with the new arrivals there were not more than a hundred gathered on the steps and the lawn. The late spring mud was dry on their brogans and caked the colorless denim of their pants. Their hair grew thick and low on their necks; many no longer had the ambition to take even a bowl haircut. Neither the newcomers nor the town folk who had the leisure to stop by knew exactly what the purpose of the meeting was. Gene heard Mike laughing, telling a farmer no, the county had not issued the leaflet.

An old man came with a family of kids in a wagon drawn by a team of Percherons. Apparently the children were not used to leaving the farm. One of them watered the horses at the town pump, and joined the rest as quickly as he could. Seated atop the pump was an enormous blond youth wearing probably the largest size overalls made. Mike said he must have come from a distance because he had watched all the Cayuna young grow up, but there wasn't none of them grew that size. It comes from sleeping twelve hours groundhog day on a yellow bantam corn-shuck mattress, he said, smiling to show Gene he thought superstitions were stupid. Unexpectedly, Mike refrained from taunting Jasper with the mea-

gerness of the gathering. Gene was prepared for some outbreak of animosity between the two, brought on by disappointment, and he made a point of keeping one or the other by his side. Once when he suggested that the meeting start and Jasper said, "Let's wait awhile, they'll show up," Mike did mutter "With Winchesters, eh?" But by then Jasper had walked off to bone up on his speech. "Lay off," Gene said.

The town dick remained behind the barber-shop window. The trooper took to circling the courthouse like a woodpecker. His motorcycle was parked against the town pump. Each time the trooper would be on the other side of the courthouse, the enormous blond youth would rest his feet on the machine's comfortable leather seat. The stenographers in the county administration building and the clerks of the courthouse took turn in examining the farmers. From their faces Gene could almost tell just which of them were charged to report on the group and which were looking on from simple curiosity. When he opened the meeting by asking people to mover closer, even those most important channels of town information, the A. & P. clerks, appeared in their doorway. The proprietor-editor-staff of the *Cayuna News*, who had gone back on his promise to run a notice of the meeting, slapped Mike's back and asked how the old flock was laying. Jasper stood at the head of the stairs, his thin face flushed and nervous. "They'll show up," he said again. Then he looked up Main Street, where there was not a car to be seen from the bridge to the post office.

He knew and Eugene knew there would not be much of a crowd. They knew this would be the League's first trial of strength and that its failure would mean failure

in the entire campaign. With just a few hundred farmers there Eugene would have known almost exactly what to do but the small attendance disrupted all blueprints. Suppose the trooper called reinforcements from the substation and they tried to arrest him, what then, should he resist and precipitate a battle or should he go peacefully and let the meeting continue? Would the troopers allow it to continue? Suppose they took him to the substation and worked him out there, how would he stand up under it? What if they simply let the meeting continue and disintegrate under its own numerical weakness, of what use then the delegation to Judge Eldon? Of what use then the threat of mass pressure without the mass? All right, so the committee will go in to Eldon and Eldon will listen and call the bluff and they'll be standing there like damn fools, and afterward they'll turn to their organizer, the man who put them up to it, the one who should have known better but didn't. Should there be any delegation at all or should they wait until next week for a better turnout? Next week would be too late.

A hell of a note for a Communist organizer to wonder how he would stand up under a beating, Eugene thought. A hell of a note to be stumped by the strategy of a simple mass meeting. Or wasn't it so simple? If only it *were* a mass meeting. What in the hell kind of work had they been doing if out of four thousand delinquents they could not attract more than a hundred? What in the hell kind of Communist was he to pass up a unit in the paper mill simply to spare his wife? Four thousand families on the point of losing their homes

and he's wondering if his wife would have to work as hard as everybody else.

All right, skip Alma. Look at the farmers. They hadn't come. Either there was something wrong with the Party's broader policy of approaching them, or the Cayuna Farmers League didn't work right. If the Party was to blame, why hadn't he blamed it at the proper time and place? Why had he patiently listened to the fatuous District representative and let it go at that? Right then he should have exploded and fought it out. Or if the fault lay with himself, why didn't somebody else say so? Why didn't a couple of other comrades call on Roger Shotton and see if they could do any better? Was there anyone who could convince a stubborn bastard like that?

Eugene got off the top stair and he said, "Mike, you start the meeting."

"Why, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Why don't you start?"

"I don't know. You start and I'll talk after you."

For all that, the meeting went off well. Of the farmers who took the stairs briefly to describe their situation, Jeffery Hutchins made the best impression. He had kept his word about coming in the Spanish-American war uniform. He jingled with a large number of medals and sharpshooting badges, and he told what the relief delegation had done for his family. One of the boys from the Herndon Club was prevailed on to say a few words, and Gene explained why the Cayuna Farmers League was taking up the fight and how those present could help to spread it. Jasper went into detail about the way the bank-

ers and the county were working this particular swindle and he shouted for someone to come out from behind the iron grated windows of the Second Union National Bank and challenge his statement. He pointed to Charlie, the town drunk, who was sometimes allowed to sleep on benches in the Grange Hall, and he asked the farmers if they wanted their children to grow up homeless and sleep on the park benches of some city. When Jasper spoke he generated unnatural lung-power and an emotion that left him wound up long after he finished. This time the audience cheered for him to go on. They would have stayed all morning listening to Jasper, but when he asked for volunteers to go on the delegations to Judge Eldon and the county commission, only Party members raised their hands, and Jeffery Hutchins.

"How about you?" Gene said to the blond youth who hadn't stirred off the town pump.

"Hell, what could I tell Judge Eldon?"

"Jasper Finch and I will do the talking," Gene said, "and you will surely want to hear what the Judge and the commission have to say about these sales. It might help you make up your mind whom to vote for next year."

"I don't vote till the year after, but I'll go in with you."

Some of the farmers laughed for the first time since the meeting had begun, and the youth became embarrassed. He took out a whetstone and pretended to be absorbed in wiping it clean against his overalls. But apparently he had broken the ice, and enough farmers volunteered to make up a delegation of some twenty. When Gene took their names, only one hesitated to give it, and

later Mike said that the man was deaf-dumb and could not write. Two delegates were so obviously stool-pigeons that when one of them fumbled for a pseudonym, Gene smiled and said, "Are you sure you don't spell that with two *d*'s?" The man was a political hanger-on from Demster, down to the *Intelligencer* in his pocket, and he was too busy trying to interpret the queer smile to protest against the verbal slur. Gene warned those he knew against trusting these two, but he did not warn Jasper, who would certainly have insisted on giving them their lumps then and there. At last Jasper was convinced that there would be no more farmers coming to take part in the demonstration and he glowered in the effort of formulating his address to Judge Eldon. He led the delegation into the courtroom, swinging the door wide open with a sullen gesture. Judge Eldon was in his chambers, resting.

Judge Eldon had been a client-hungry rural lawyer too long when the machine picked him up, and he had not been allowed sufficient time to set in a judge mold. He had called for recess to prepare for the delegation. That was obvious. He had the three required law volumes all ready on his blotter, pages marked with strips of leather. He listened to Jasper's description of conditions on Pine Hill with appropriate nods and intense, varied clicking of the tongue. In token of deep and sympathetic concern he leaned forward, elbows on desk, chin on interlocked hands, facial play active and accurate.

When the speaker paused, Judge Eldon said that the interests of the affected farmers were close to his heart, had he not handled cases for the many poor people on Pine Hill, often without hope of remuneration? Ever since the county commission had been forced to take this dras-

tic step he had given himself to the study of this problem. Speaking as a private citizen, he winked, with a fair working knowledge of the law, his advice was for the delinquents to exhaust every means at their disposal to pay off these back taxes, because the county commission had waited as long as it reasonably could. It had the right to foreclose after only two years, and it had waited three and in some cases four. Naturally, he was speaking as a private citizen with a fair working knowledge of the law, and if Mr. Finch or any of the other ladies and gentlemen cared to look at the provisions relating to their case, in these three volumes. . . .

“Will you as a private citizen go on record as opposing these sales?” Jasper said.

“Whether as a private citizen or judge, I am bound to obey and carry out the law of my land. If those sales are legal, and I have just advised you they are, they will and should be carried through independent of my pleasure. As a private citizen I might consider them regrettable, and I am sure the members of the county commission feel no differently.”

“We intend to call on them later in the day,” Gene said. “But we have come to you primarily because you have been elected Judge by the people of this county, and these same people want to know if you are prepared to sign an order throwing them off their land two years from now.”

“These people have elected me to carry out their county’s laws, and if those laws call for the signing of such an order I am ready and prepared to do my sworn duty.”

"There are higher and more important duties," Jasper began.

"That's a matter of opinion," Judge Eldon said. "We have our different opinions."

"It's a matter of sitting in the chamber here, reading magazines," Jasper pointed to a copy of *Collier's*, "or sitting in a barn on Pine Hill, afraid to go in the house and watch your family starving to death. Opinions ain't got a thing to do with it. Your job is to sell us out and our job is protect our families."

"What are you trying to insinuate?"

"Not a thing. I ain't insinuating a thing I can't prove. This morning I spent a long time trying to prove something to these people, but mostly I wasted a lot of wind. I was trying to tell them who their enemies were and what they could expect from the law, but we should have come here in the first place."

Judge Eldon stood up, looking final, but he said, "Are you advising these citizens to take the law into their hands?"

"We're advising them to change the law," Gene said. "Failing that, we're advising them to protect their homes from the legalized gangsters of the Second Union National Bank."

"And their political tools," Jasper said.

Gene thought it was unnecessary to have added that, because there were several other things he had wanted to bring out before the delegation, and Jasper's remark cut the interview short by infuriating Judge Eldon. The deep-set blue eyes of Judge Eldon went large and gleaming with fury. He rang for the courtroom attendant, shouted that he wasn't going to stand and be insulted

in his own chambers, that the people of Cayuna County had no more to do with Eugene Marsay and his sort than they had with Russia and Stalin, and that if the members of this delegation knew what was good for them they'd run the agitator right back to the people who sent him. Marsay needn't think he had anybody fooled by giving himself out as a resident of Willow Run township.

So Jasper's remark had helped to confirm the knowledge that county officials were following the League's activities, but Gene censured provocative tactics and warned against them before they called on the Commission. Jasper, who had to be dragged out of the Judge's chambers, accepted the criticism but said he knew half the crooks on the Commission personally, and would never be able to control himself, so let Mike do the talking. They agreed to have Jasper make the initial demand and leave Gene and Mike to do the parrying, and that is how it went off. There was not much parrying to do, because the Commission point blank refused to revoke its decision, with the chairman observing that the county had bills to pay. The Road Commissioner said he respected the motives of those present but that many farmers who could have paid their taxes with ease were holding out until some such measure was resorted to. This time Gene lost his temper, and several of the farmers shuffled around and had their say too. But these three were experienced politicians, accustomed and impervious to abuse, smiled even. Gene was last to leave, and he left with the threat that a week later they'd be back with a delegation representing not a hundred but a thousand demonstrators. The chairman said his Commission

was always ready to see people and discuss with them matters of import to the community, and he was sorry the ladies and gentlemen could not see his position. "They're wise sons of bitches," Mike said, "but they would have changed their tune if we'd had a thousand out there this morning instead of next week."

At first many of the newly created delegates had been aghast at the spokesmen's tones, the emphasis on demands rather than requests. But watching the buck pass from hand to hand under their own eyes, and given the chance to have their say without being singled out for reprisal, they put in several timid protests and seconded Jasper and Gene with eagerness.

"Hot damn," the blond youth said, "that was telling 'em."

The thing then should have been a meeting of Party members to decide on immediate steps, but Jasper's condition made Gene postpone anything that might precipitate an explosion. Disappointment in the small meeting and in the largely intangible results of the delegation left Jasper staring out of livid features, reflexes inert or twitching with unpredictable jerks. He circulated among the delegates, talking continuously and indiscriminately of Party matters that should not have been aired. When Mike rebuked him he submitted with a strange and disquieting alacrity and confined the stream of low-pitched, querulous apostrophizing to his brother-in-law, Tuss. He sat in the parked car with Tuss, sat high with his head bobbing like a cushat's, frail shoulders hunched; and as Gene listened to the tirade from Mike's car, all that harping on the need for a lawyer, he almost feared for Jasper's sanity. A consultation on the wording of the

next leaflet or assignments for canvassing was out of the question that day. Mike drove home bursting to tell Anna of the morning's events, and Gene sat in the front seat, his nerves grazing on the now familiar river-road landscape. The hills were lush-green and uniform under the cumuli.

All of Gene's afternoon went into composing and running off the new leaflet. He worked in the woodshed whose open side faced west, and in the bright spring sun and the broad valley under the ridge road and its distant white railing, and in the composite of bird song and chicken noise, the thin metal clatter of the mimeograph was fragile and ineffectual.

Long and exhausting as had been his part in the campaign for the morning's demonstration, he felt his will and devotion dwarfed in the glare of Jasper's bitterness. The depth and great contours of the valley lay in apathy or contempt around the thin metal metropolitan little sound. The convulsive passion of Jasper's disappointment grew out of identity with the struggle against the sales, while Gene's own too-reasoned control of the situation's strategy could never be more than an identification.

He knew that this strategy and the coolness it required was necessary, indispensable, if there was to be any planned struggle at all. But after the maneuver met with failure on the courthouse steps, a momentary loss of temper and immediate restoration of calm and detached judgment within his limits: this seemed hardly the behavior of a strong and delicate revolutionary instrument. It was not only a matter of having a personal economic stake in this particular fight, such as Jasper had. The pas-

sions of at least a dozen Communists Gene had worked with had no such immediate motivation, yet they were as intense as Jasper's without precluding a more complete command of tactics than Gene could hope to have. Gene was consumed neither with envy nor the desire to emulate them, and the lack of this desire troubled him. Without scope of knowledge or ability, his vaunted detachment might have been nothing but plodding, unimaginative indifference. Faithfully and resourcefully as he had worked during these first few weeks of the campaign, the pang of disappointment at the size of the crowd had not been nearly as keen as the pang of fear on learning that Alma would be working with Sue and might find out about his affair. He found joy, however, in reflecting that although his personal pang was keener, it passed away quickly and would recur only with diminished force, while the mainsprings of his life were set into the life of the Party, so firmly and permanently that even at the cost of a longer separation from Alma than the Sue discovery would entail, he did leave New York and did stick to his assignment.

At the same time the clash between personal and Party interests appeared too often and prominently to afford full faith in his own revolutionary integrity. Partly he laid this to the original mistake of training to be an organizer instead of a worker in ideas. Gene had never thought of himself as a man of action. In his latter teens every three dollars saved had meant a day of reading or loafing, and he had held on to tough jobs only for the sake of these days. Even as a reporter he had enjoyed writing a story more than going after it, and talking about it had been an attraction superior even to writing.

He loved people and the society of people too well ever to be absorbed primarily in sedentary work such as writing or research. Organizing was the only other full-time occupation the movement had to offer, and he felt he would never again be able to work for a boss or even the most impersonally vast corporation. He had been incapacitated for holding any ordinary job successively by his year on the bum, the five months in jail, and then by the highest form of independence he had known, the independence of Party work which liberated him from the shackles of his own whims.

In New York his work had been largely cut out for him by precedent, by accumulated international Party experience in urban areas, by the various specific pressures from district, section, individual comrades; and the initiating element was often as not subordinated to routine. But here the Party was poor in farm-work experience, and Gene even poorer. In Cayuna nothing on a county or township-wide scale was initiated without his first drawing up the plan, and only rarely was there time to consult with the district or with the Farmers' National Committee for Action. Here the responsibility of making decisions rested so much more heavily on him, especially since Mike and Jasper never treated him as a novice, and to the others his was irrevocably the final word.

Now he was more or less at a loss as to what decisions had been to blame for the rather feeble report of the current campaign's opening gun. It might have been the failure of comrades to carry out decisions; but this meant that they were bad decisions, for they should have been made with a clear estimate of the available forces. Gene

felt that he should have known that Jasper and Tuss would not canvass, and that Mrs. Melinkovitch could not be expected to do more than distribute leaflets, and he felt he had not reckoned with these factors. Not that the results would have been any more satisfactory if he had. Very few of the farmers who were about to be sold out had ever attended an open-air mass meeting other than those held by patent-medicine men at fairs. The idea of collective protest was altogether too novel and many were reluctant thus to make public declaration of their poverty. Also there was a widespread conviction that the county was simply making a threat in order to scare delinquents into coming through, and the wise boys in Vern Saunders' back room made moral bets as to how long before the Commission would back down.

In addition there was the unfortunate but immediately unavoidable deterrent of the meeting's being held under the auspices of the Cayuna Farmers League. For thirty years Mike had been known in the community as a Communist, and before Jasper and Gene he had been forced by default to assume sole leadership in the League. Patently the farmers were not ready to fight under Communist leadership. Three months before Dimitroff's keynote speech for the united front, the Communists in Cayuna County realized that their campaign against the sales should have been initiated within the influential Farmers' Union, whose local leaders could have been pushed to do far more than the hesitant, moderate letter to the commissioners.

Gene's second leaflet considered more of these factors than the first one had. In the middle of running it off, he thought of getting Jeffery Hutchins' opinion, which

would have been more representative than Mike's; but Hutchins was away, and so far as Mrs. Hutchins was concerned, Gene could make no mistakes. Her relief was coming regularly and she looked on him as her sole guaranty that it would continue. She marveled at the idea that such beautiful printing could be done by a machine on the Ogrodnik place, and assured him that everyone who read it would be most positively sure to come next Monday, and she served a glass of buttermilk.

Mrs. Hutchins wanted to know how much truth there was in the story that the paper mill was hiring. When Gene said Alma had gone to work there that morning, her expression said the same thing Mike and Anna had told him, sure made you sweat in that mill. By then he was considerably alarmed, because all these people were used to spine-breaking work. Possibly, though, they just had the wrong idea about Alma's capacities. Gene himself had no notion of how she would take to it. In his anxiety to find out he left the Hutchins farm without waiting for Jeffery, and walked home the short way through the fields. Near the top of the tangled growth which set off Mike's watermelon patch from the orchard he found a catbird nest and marked the place so he could show it to Alma who shared his delight in all forms of wild life.

In the orchard Mike was destroying tent caterpillars with a burning kerosened corncob stuck on to a rake. Across a distance of thirty yards Gene could hear him swearing at the pocket gophers who had girdled a couple of apricot trees. Mike had his own names for many things, rose-breasted grosbeaks were potato birds, the killdeer was a holler bird, and pocket gophers he called

chippies, from chipmunk probably. Mike was advising Gene not to wait for Alma directly in front of the mill when the postman's blue Essex pulled up, and besides the regular *Daily Worker* they got also a telegram addressed to Gene as secretary of the League.

"The district," Mike said, but it turned out to be from Governor Keith to whom they had sent a protest letter without the remotest hope of being answered. Apparently Keith was not going to abandon any part of his reputation for liberality. The telegram was sent from the streamline express en route from California, where he had spent a vacation, and it read, "Have wired state attorney prepare advice on sale four thousand farms stop will receive delegation in effort save peoples homes Elroy Sunday, twenty-seventh, four-thirty P.M." It was a Keith gesture to leave the impression that he had cut short a vacation for the sake of the farmers and it was a Keith gesture to receive them at his estate instead of during office hours. Still, he must have had an extremely disproportionate impression of the League's influence. Mike snorted but admitted that the telegram was a god-send and a great opening wedge into the columns of the *Cayuna News*.

When Gene arrived with the telegram the proprietor-editor-staff of the *Cayuna News* was putting his paper to bed and he had arranged to play the delegation story in a box on the eleventh of his twelve pages. Gene asked how come he had not relegated it to the personals column, after all, there were not more than four thousand homes at stake. The editor turned to a full-page ad of Second Union National and said it was his first decent break since two months before, when he had got hold

of his last full-page ad from Robbins General and Department Store. Robbins was the Road Commissioner, one of the officials interviewed by the delegation. The most the editor could do for his friend, Mr. Marsay, was to refrain from condemning the conduct of the delegation which had been subjected to much sharply critical comment in local circles. Judge Eldon had sworn he would make it the topic of his address at the Kiwanis banquet. Mr. Marsay had better be prepared to read the full text of it in the *Cayuna News*, since the editor, who had seen more independent days on the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, was now forced to make his livelihood in this town and it would be suicidal for the paper to antagonize substantial business men.

Of course the Governor's telegram put a different complexion on the story. He was going to give it a flash head, but remembered he had an old cut of Keith, so he remade most of the front page, giving the story a two-column, ten-point lead and for a moment even considered Gene's suggestion of a streamer. Gene hung around the shop longer than necessary because from its back window he could see the paper-mill entrance. He sat there watching until the whistle. To his relief Alma came without Sue, looked about for the Dodge, then started for Main Street, apparently with the intention of walking home.

He took a last look at the story, which now ran to almost a full column, and went downstairs. Alma looked a little worn under the hurriedly applied make-up, but not weary or exhausted as he had expected her to be. He kissed her as soon as they got into the car, and said "Work very hard?"

"Kind of."

He searched her face to find more definite clues and asked what her operation was. Alma said that most of the day she had stood before a table and applied long strips of gum tape to seal the ready wrapped rolls which came out of a chute. She had to be on tap for that single operation, but when no packages rolled out of the chute she had to do odd jobs around the packing department, see that the paste pots didn't go dry, be ready for errands. This part of it was easy, but applying the gum tape was not as simple as it sounded. Often rolls came askew from the chute and had to be straightened before they could be fitted under the ribbon, and they were so heavy it took a big man to load them on handtrucks. Gene would have to stop at the drug store and buy rubber gloves, because the tape had sharp edges and cut into the fingers.

"Did you cut your finger?"

"No." She asked about the delegations and he told her. Then he showed her the telegram. He asked if she wanted to walk with him to the drug store, since it would be difficult to park there. Alma said she'd rather rest in the car, and then he knew that she was very tired.

He said, "You can't handle this kind of a job. Don't go in tomorrow. Stay home awhile and keep helping Anna out, and maybe later something more suitable will turn up in the vicinity, some office job." He knew there would never be any such opening, and that if ever there should be, one of a dozen county officials' daughters would snap it up. He felt as though he had just sent a young daughter to work in the beet fields or exposed her to some unsafe machine in a canning factory, and

he knew that not only would Alma's pride keep her working, but also their need of removing some of Mike's burden. Just after he had suggested the walk to the drug store he had felt in his pocket for money and remembered that all he had was about a dime's worth of pennies. "Quit it," he said, "quit the goddamned job."

Alma shook her head and turned on the ignition for him. They drove quietly until the turn in the Pike, and there she placed her face against his shoulder and said that he mustn't be silly, she would have to get used to working some time or other. He thought he would have Sue check on exactly how tough Alma's job was, and insist on her quitting, once he definitely knew. He had not remembered Sue's new job except in connection with Alma, but the idea of the latter's possible suffering obviated the most perfunctory pang of conscience in regard to Sue. He jammed on the brakes viciously as they pulled into the garage, and Anna came toddling out of the kitchen to greet the Dodge, Gene and his wife. Mike was already at the table, munching impatiently on a gigantic white radish.

After the dishes were done Alma lay in the porch hammock and Gene brought a chair to fold leaflets on. It was still light enough for him to see the white bars across the nighthawks' wings, but he had also learned to spot them by the intersecting circles of their erratic flight.

"I love you," he said.

She let her hand drop from the hammock and slid it around his neck as far down his back as the collar would allow. They both used the expression rather more often than advisable, and its meaning had become dependent

to a more than usual extent on tonality and on their respective moods. Now, with her face turned east toward the gibbous moon misty through the vapors of the Willow Run, his voice was invested with a simple and final solemnity, as though he had said I love you, on a bed in a submarine chamber about to be flooded. She felt sad and very tired. Her hand stopped exploring but she let it lie along his warm hard back until he drew it out and made her palm cup around his mouth.

"You did cut your fingers," he said. "What happened?"

She had not counted those as cuts really; they were just the rough places where the gum tape had penetrated under the epidermis but not far enough to draw blood. She struggled between the two very feeble forms of vanity, one impulse to hide these little flaws, the other to display them. She drew her fingers along his mouth and he took one between his lips, released it, and said, "Quit the goddamned job."

"All I need is a pair of gloves," she said. "Remind me to get them before work tomorrow."

Gene had intended this to be an evening and night similar in quality to last week's Sunday, but Alma's being tired from work made it all different. That Sunday he had taken her walking across the river road to one of the luxuriant half-swampy peninsulas formed by two inlets of the Willow Run. They had sat against the foot of a tasseled white oak, the ground thick with rushes, crow-foot and giant huckleberry growth. They sat facing south, away from the Cayuna lights, the flickering lights of farmhouses obscure in the hills under the stars whose light set off the dark hills and the dark sky which tinted

the winding Run. The owls were hooting back and forth from their hollows with their sounds unbearably like human moans groaned in torture at the unbearable loveliness of the night. They sat until the stars and the frog music and the unaccountable gusts of warm spring air no longer impinged on their consciousness and they were aware of each other only. They had not spoken for at least an hour when the small white sail of a canoe passed. They stood up together and walked home, still silent. Had the sudden glare of a headlight or even one of Mike's shouts interrupted, their mood might have been changed for the entire night. As it was, Gene broke the silence only after Alma had fallen into the profound sleep that comes only to children and drunkards of one sort or another and to tired lovers. When he saw that she would not answer he arranged his pillow high against the wall and watched her face until he fell asleep too.

Before, at the office of the *Cayuna News*, he had been so absorbed in seeing the telegram get proper space that thoughts of Alma and her job had been relegated, and it was partly to atone for this unfaithfulness that he had planned another such night. Now Alma was too weary for a lengthy walk, and he himself was too disturbed with thoughts of what having to hold a job like that might do to her, and to them, over a considerable period. Alma had never been subjected to pressure of the sort that a paper mill would inevitably be, and he was certain she would go to pieces under it. He stopped folding leaflets and rocked her hammock gently. Inside the house Mike had tuned in on a deadly coloratura.

THE FIRST FEW TIMES THAT HAROLD SPENT entire nights in the room downtown Mrs. Darvas hesitated to ask where he had been, and voluntarily he had not got around to telling her. His father did ask him, saying, "Your mother worries," and Harold answered curtly that he'd stayed with a friend and they should get used to the idea. Neither of his parents ventured to inquire what sort of friend it was. Once Mrs. Darvas tried to pump him by asking how he took to his friend's wife's cooking—hadn't Harold mentioned that his friend was married? Pretty good, he said, and the subject never came up again.

Invariably when Harold stayed out Mrs. Darvas would wake up even earlier and she would go to his room to see if he had come in during the night. Now that Alma was gone she felt herself deserted and lonely. She had looked upon a fuller home life as the only redeeming feature of her unemployment, but she had time only to rearrange and redecorate the apartment before Alma was gone and Harold beginning to stay out. She tried to make herself useful in the house by doing much of the washing, to save linen from the laundry's strong acids, and she racked her brain to devise more new dishes that

the men would like. Harold ate everything absentmindedly and only Rudolf gave fatuous, if warming, praise.

One morning she came to Harold with the suggestion that they move to a smaller apartment while Alma was gone, and although he was usually receptive to money-saving proposals, this time he grunted, "She'll be back soon enough."

Mrs. Darvas flared up and asked if he had anything against that, and Harold said, "Not a thing, Mom, keep your shirt on."

She knew Harold and Alma had not parted friendly, she had watched them drifting away from each other; but she would not allow herself to believe that this obvious estrangement was serious or permanent. Even when convinced that one or the other was right in any minor altercation she had assumed that their conflict was on a level beyond her and she avoided taking sides. She did not press the point, but Harold explained all he meant was that Alma would not be able to stick it out there. Immediately Mrs. Darvas wanted to know if Alma had written anything besides the official letter to the family, anything about the hardships in Cayuna. Harold said, "Not a thing, Mom, keep your shirt on."

Whenever Harold saw the difficulty of her position and whenever he noticed her despondency, he made up his mind to do things for her, even if they were only little attentions which would surely produce tremendous effects. He knew how much the Hungarian books which Alma used to draw from the public library meant to his mother. With Alma away, Mrs. Darvas had been forced to choose the books herself, and she had no familiarity with authors' names and no way of telling what books

were good until she had read a couple of chapters. At the same time she had a marvelous sense about literature, and cheap novels distressed her. She was not sufficiently sure of her ground to condemn them outright, and she would not stop reading for fear she might miss something worth while later in the book. She read on in distress at the tinsel emptiness of the pages, longing for Alma's guidance and despairing of her son's help. Each time Harold made up his mind to bring her a book, it came on a day when he had papers to mark or a class at Columbia. Each time he decided to buy her some little gift he ran short of money.

When it came down to dollars and cents, little Dorothy was assuming the proportions of a luxury. He took her to lunch every day, often to dinner, made it his business to buy her the little things, and the room cost six dollars a week. Her family had been having such a wretched time of it for so many years and she was so appreciative of even the slightest convenience that gratitude almost shamed her into the final seduction. That did not come off exactly as Harold had planned, but, success or no, liberation from the stigma of his own virginity overshadowed the misery of the weeks. And it was easy enough to lay the fiasco of that first night to Dorothy's squeamishness and inexperience, and thus establish an additional claim on her gratitude. Little Dorothy had bled for hours. In those hours he made two trips to the drug store, perhaps a dozen to the hall bathroom, washed the sheet and soaked the towels, and even so they had had to move to another rooming house. Only after the consummation did Harold realize how little he

knew about the conduct of an affair. Dorothy did not behave at all as he had expected.

Up to a certain point she could always be relied on to retain the poise he had admired in the first place, but beyond that her actions became totally unpredictable. It did not seem as though they could go through a single session without upheavals of one sort or another. She who had been so passionate and clinging in her caresses became passive with dread between the sheets; her stream of fascinating intimate small talk about the movies, home, the department store, stopped abruptly. As delicately as possible Harold tried to trace the source of her tense silence to a possible sexual dissatisfaction, but under his questioning, which of necessity became progressively more insistent, she would suffer, equivocate, and burst into crying finally.

From her talk during lunch hours he gathered that she was worried about pregnancy, marriage, the fear of being discovered and so on, and he made the mistake of trying to dispel these terrors in bed where their very mention was enough to throw her into trembling. When he assured her that in three months, the required period, they would get a foolproof contraceptive, to Dorothy this meant only that the kind they were using then was unreliable. When he argued that if anything should happen to separate them her future husband would never have to know she was not a virgin, for Dorothy this not only emphasized her loss but admitted the horrible possibility of such a separation. Only when he dropped a casual, unguarded reference to a future together would she revive temporarily, and he in turn would rack his brains to guess the cause of her good spirits. In his own

mind he dismissed the idea of marriage and he did his best to dismiss it from hers.

To this end Harold marshaled all of his resources. Repeatedly he dwelt on his responsibilities to the parents who had supported him until now, the plans for an early retirement which would be frustrated by marriage, the stone house up-state which seemed now to embody all his ambitions. Under the glare of her silent reproach these ambitions which had appeared lofty shriveled into such feebleness that eventually he was forced to construct less tainted motives. After extracting a solemn promise of secrecy he confessed that he had plans to write a historical work whose execution might be a matter of decades. He did not say outright that it would be revolutionary, but hinted that it would be a thankless job, one he himself would have to finance. No man with such grim prospects had the right to inflict them on a wife.

Then Dorothy would say all the Hollywood things about not wanting to interfere with his career and she would wait for his renunciation of her sacrifice and fall to weeping when it failed to come through. After her repeated attempts to obtain this renunciation, Harold hit on the device of making the sacrifice a joint one; he too gave up their personal happiness, not for anything as Hollywood as a career, but for important work which had to be done, work that he was fitted for and in duty bound to perform.

This was reasoning beyond her depth. She did not have Mrs. Darvas' respect for intellectual matters, but she did fear them. She mistrusted and resented them too, and not long after Harold began straying into their pro-

tective altitudes she would snatch him back by observing, "See, I scarcely know what you're talking about. We weren't really meant for each other." There was only one answer to this, and she could not have enough of letting it pour into her ears. Reassurance was cheap and Harold never grudged it. When Dorothy found that the easiest way to secure reassurance was by describing her home life, she played that instinctively and to the limit.

Material was not wanting. Mr. Schultz was a violent man, he often struck his wife, and had recently threatened to beat Dorothy as well. The last couple of times she had been out he had questioned her in detail about where she'd been, what she'd done, and with whom. Dorothy could not guarantee to stand up under many more of these ordeals. If her father ever thought— Oh, Harold had no idea how just sitting around the house having nothing to do could make a man mean and small. If it wasn't that she was handing over every last cent she made in the store to her mother, Heaven knew what that man'd be capable of doing. He wouldn't stop at making a scandal at the school, he'd find some awful revenge. Dorothy shuddered to think, and Harold could feel her shuddering against his chest. They would have to be very careful. Dorothy wasn't religious or anything, but she prayed to God for strength to be careful and not give herself away. But what if anything happened?

Nothing will happen.

Something might, you never know.

Why then Harold was always there.

That was so wonderful to know, but she simply couldn't help being afraid. If she could only describe

how it felt to be questioned like that. Her father looked right through a person as if he knew she was lying all the time, just waiting for her to slip up so he could prove it by her own words. If ever he found out, Dorothy would kill herself. She hoped she would have the strength to kill herself.

No need for anything like that. Harold was always there.

That was so wonderful to know. But what if she became pregnant, what could he do?

She wouldn't become pregnant. He knew what he was doing.

Let's hope so.

And in spite of all precaution most of their evenings would come to be prefaced by this sort of conversation and it poisoned their pleasure almost fatally. Harold found himself clumsy as a lover, unable to apply most of his book knowledge, blundering in his anxiety. Once he stepped into a glass of water standing by the bed and wounded his foot. At least twice they had to cut things short on account of an inadequate supply of contraceptives. Always his timing failed to click. At the slightest sign of what he interpreted as impatience or disappointment on the part of Dorothy he would be thrown off stride for hours. It was too early for him to recognize these things as the inevitable trial and error of inexperience; his worrying naturally complicated matters. As a rule he enjoyed himself mostly on the trips back from her home in the middle of the night.

He did not always return to their room, but sometimes took a bus back to his own home, and in the solitude of the clean night air it was possible to heal indignities

and plot new modes of attack. It was possible to reflect that, after all, he had gone along quite a way in the business of growing up, and without any major calamities. He had a job and he had a mistress. She was a charming little mistress and might in time become something more than just charming. Temporarily there was a falling off in his research work, but the delay would cause no permanent damage. At school his superiors respected him and his students rated well at examination time. He had a room to himself and a room in which to entertain Dorothy, and he had clean shirts, clean beds and good health. He had only to remember to buy those little gifts for the folks next week and he would have a contented family. That wasn't bad at twenty-five.

Could Gene or Alma show more? Perhaps. Gene had been around more and he had done the things he wanted to do while Harold had been painfully laying the basis of his future. Gene had traveled and had had girls and gone through the more picturesque hardships, and now he was struggling along on three dollars a week, dragging Alma with him. At the end of the year he would have fifty or a hundred farmers organized, and then the Party might recall him to New York and he would be a rootless, homeless person at the beck and call of a political machine.

Bull. It was Gene who had the roots. Anywhere he went he would have friends. More than that, comrades. All right, he didn't have the clean sheets. Alma was clean. All right, he was at the beck and call of the Party. But that wasn't the way they worked. Gene wanted to do the things they wanted him to do. They wouldn't ask

him to do anything outside his capacities. Harold was at Canfield's beck and call. What a difference.

No, stop there and start all over again. Alma went and got herself kicked out of school. So now she could never be a teacher. And she'd never be a real Communist either, that was certain. What did that make Harold? Comparison stupid.

Dorothy's qualms forced Harold to recur to his secret revolutionary project so often, and the attitude of grim resignation seemed so attractive, that he was beginning to embrace it even in moments of solitude. The reservations in respect to Marxism were still necessary to make rational his complete abstention from Communist activity, but with Gene and Alma away, these reservations remained mental and they lost in prominence. If it had not been for his assignment to the Current Events Club, he might have fully persuaded himself that by voicing certain materialist interpretations in class he was doing extremely valuable revolutionary work. In spite of the fact that the Club, together with its radicals, was undergoing a period of quiescence after the suspensions, Harold felt uneasy about this assignment. In a critical situation he would again be forced to report, and this time Canfield might note his tendency to exonerate the students or at least minimize their breaches of discipline. He could not ask Canfield for a release on the grounds that research kept him busy, because Canfield was following the work and Harold had little to show. There was nothing to do but regain the confidence of those students and violate it as little as possible. Another faculty advisor would have been far more treacherous, so here again Harold felt he was doing some good. Even

Lenin, and Trotsky, whom Harold considered the greater man, had to compromise at Brest-Litovsk.

Actually, these matters occupied less and less of his time. Trying to work Dorothy into the routine of his life and trying to set her mind at rest, these were the big problems and they did not appear to be insurmountable. In the knowledge that he finally had a mistress who confessed she loved him Harold experienced a new and confident serenity. It gave him the kind of poise he had never been able to muster in the presence of his prettiest students. At first when he recognized Dorothy's flirtatious glances in their eyes he grew terrified, thinking perhaps she might have talked. Then he realized these young girls had been trying their strength on him all along and he simply had not known what they were doing. He took to smoking cigars in the rest room with George Hawley, the young gym teacher whose name was always on the blackboards in connection with one or another of the school's beauties.

Some months before, George had invited Harold to a party given by a fast sorority on Riverside Drive. He claimed to have full run of the house there. He thought he was letting Harold in on the ground floor of a good thing, but made the mistake of saying so. Harold couldn't leave him with the impression that he had no good things of his own, and contented himself with an indulgent smile. This had the effect of increasing George Hawley's respect, but also of precluding further overtures along that line. Harold thought the gym teacher was stupid and a fop, and he disliked the fellow for not repeating the invitation. But now, as one ladies' man to another, they exchanged cigars and comment in the rest room

and even had a drink together in a well-hidden alcove not far from school.

One Friday evening George Hawley got hold of some ringside seats at a small club, and Harold for the first time in his life saw an evening of boxing. He was dazed by the thick smoke and the brutal faces and cruel knock-outs. When one of the preliminary boys was dumped cold on the canvas not more than four yards away from him he tried to turn the other way, but couldn't. In the moments before the last count and the ministrations of a greasy, tobacco-chewing second, Harold watched the slow trickle of blood from the kid's split eye and wanted to leave right then but couldn't. The next bout was a dull six-rounder and he tried in vain to concentrate on it, all he could think of was the trickle of blood and the swollen, glazed eyes. He thought he might vomit, and went to the men's room, but nothing came. After the main event George Hawley wanted to have a beer. Harold said he had to get up at four the next day, the family was moving. That was the best excuse he could think of in a hurry. Too bad, George Hawley said.

By Monday Harold remembered almost nothing of the sick feeling and felt rakish and man-of-the-worldish as all hell, what with his new spring raglan and the black moustache and Dorothy and the tough fight club which he was determined to frequent.

"Got any more passes?" he said to George Hawley in the rest room. George shook his head and Harold was afraid the question smacked of mendicancy, so he added, "Next time we go it's on me."

George blew some dandruff out of a pocket comb,

his breath whistling one of the popular tunes. "Pretty good fight, the semi-final."

"I like these small clubs," Harold said. "Even if the fighters aren't of championship caliber, they at least fight, they're not like those mazurka partners in the Garden. There was more real fighting in that semi-final than they had on a whole Garden all-star card of so-called middleweight contenders. Neat left on that rangy boy. I thought he should have been given the decision." These things Harold had heard from the man who sat next to him.

"No kick in that left though," George Hawley said. "The little guy had all the better on in-fighting. You could tell those short blows did their work because every time the tall fellow's back was turned on us I could see him give ground. The little guy had no reach and the big fellow's got to fill out before he can travel eight rounds, but that's what made a fight of it. I agree with you about the Garden. Give me these small clubs every time."

"Yeah," Harold said.

"I like it when the teeth are flying around so fast you have to duck if you sit at the ringside. I like it when their knees buckle so they pitch forward on their faces. That's when they're cold. The only time a completely knocked out guy will fall backwards is when an uppercut does it, and that's rare. Friday there wasn't anybody knocked real cold, but the blond one in the curtain raiser would have been if the referee hadn't stopped it. I guess the girl who came up to talk to him after the fight was his wife."

"She must have been checking up to see where he was spending the evening."

"I wouldn't be surprised," George Hawley said. "Women certainly are funny."

"Not any funnier than men," Harold said, trying to blow smoke rings.

"Yes, they are. Take it from me, they're funnier. A guy won't stick around as long as a woman after he finds out he isn't wanted. When I was a kid I used to worry about getting girls, but now the problem is how to get rid of them. Believe me, it takes more to get rid of one girl smoothly than to make half a dozen in a week."

"Depends on the girl."

"I mean starting from scratch with the weights even," George Hawley said.

A group of English instructors walked in, arguing about whether or not *Hamlet* was suited to a high-school curriculum. Young Hirsch maintained that it was too mature for young people, and, far from understanding the basic motivations, they would only misinterpret them in a manner harmful to subsequent readings of the play. No matter how bright a boy was, he would not at that age have the experience necessary for savoring such a play to its full; and, by the way, that was one of the drawbacks to precocity, you think you read a book when you were sixteen, whereas all you did was go over the words and get the general drift of the story.

On the other hand, Mr. Ellis thought it was useful for a boy to have even a superficial acquaintance with Shakespeare. If he had anything to him, later in life he would return to the plays for a deeper understanding,

while if he had no intellectual interests, a smattering of such knowledge would at any rate be a social asset. We're not out to make poets of them all. There are certain practical considerations involved.

Harold had no respect for young Hirsch, every one of whose ideas could be traced to chapter and verse in some pedagogy text. And he despised the old hack, Ellis. He exchanged an amused and derisive glance with George Hawley, who, within his limitations, was at least a man and had seen life. After the deep and rending experience of the smoke-filled, cruel masculine arena, these faded emotional starvelings shriveled into meagerness. Careerists. Hairsplitters. His bell rang and he threw the cigar away and went out alone.

The corridor was full of noisy young people, but as he walked, with him moved an island of relative quietness and deferential behavior. It gave him pleasure to think that this had been achieved without resorting to disciplinary measures, through simple force of character. Personality. He distributed more than the usual quota of smiles to the familiar faces, and the boys responded like the amiable roughnecks they were at heart, and the girls flirted, always flirted. Passing the letter boxes, he found two envelopes, one a routine departmental notice, the other a letter from Dorothy. He did not like her to correspond in that way because someone might open the note, if only by error, and she insisted on appending dangerous endearments. This time she merely asked him to be sure to meet her at lunch, she had something important to talk about. At the "something important" a profound pang of terror shot through Harold. He was almost positive that she had failed to become unwell dur-

ing the week-end, although he had no idea if or when she was due. Both of them had somehow steered clear of that particular. But they had been intimate for at least three weeks at the last stretch.

As his class drew near Harold's panic became more intense. He was impatient with the group which clustered about him, and when the bell rang he told them to prepare for an exam. After they were well at work he leaned back in the swivel chair and pretended to read.

If Dorothy were pregnant she would have to have an abortion, and he did not know any doctors. He would have to write to Alma, saying it was for a friend. Would Dorothy be willing to go through with one? And if she did go through, how would she be able to conceal it? Alma was far cleverer, and yet within a week it became an open secret. The tall, stooped shadow which once passed them in the hallway was Dorothy's father, who thought nothing of striking his wife.

At least a hundred dollars. She must have the best he could afford, because if anything went wrong, she would never be able to pass it off as a tumor in the womb, as Alma had. Good God, was that the only reason he wanted her to have the best, when the girl's entire health was at stake?

One sure thing, he couldn't marry her, not without first giving himself a chance to live and find out what he wanted. The tall, stooped shadow which once passed them in the hallway was Dorothy's father, who thought nothing of striking his wife. Used to be a bricklayer. Settling down with a wife now, one and a half families to support, maybe two, that would be disaster, get into a rut, the old hack Ellis.

Dorothy wasn't pregnant. Cross that bridge when he came to it. Only they would have to be more careful until she could get the reliable contraceptive. Why did one have to wait until three months after loss of virginity anyway? Patiently and calmly he would have to explain why she should not write notes like that, patiently, without mentioning pregnancy. That would throw her into a panic.

"Try to fix your pen so it won't scratch so loudly," he said to one of the boys.

"It's broke," the kid said. "I gotta write with the back of it."

He found Dorothy seated in their alcove. There was nothing to be remarked in her expression, and he patted her small hand and settled into the opposite corner. Harold smiled affectionately and casually. He said, "So what's all the shooting about?"

Dorothy said she was four days overdue, never happened before, Christ Almighty she would kill herself.

"Girls go longer than that," Harold said, "especially after they pass through a crisis, as you have. It's always best to see a doctor though, even if only to put your mind at rest. Don't worry, dear. We'll wait another couple of days, then if you don't come through we'll see a doctor. You'll be all right. Just don't let worry get you down."

"What if I am going to have a baby? Is there anything I could take?"

"No, there isn't anything you could take," Harold said. "Aside from that, you're not going to have a baby."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I just am. Isn't that enough?"

"No, Harold, it's been four days now, and that never happened."

"Whatever it is, I'm still here, aren't I?"

"Oh, then you're not sure? I can't have an abortion, I tell you. I'd kill myself before I had one. I wish I was dead."

"You'll come through in the next couple of days," Harold said, "but worrying won't help. You've got to get a grip on yourself."

TWO WEEKS OF THE MILL LEFT ALMA stunned and all but crushed. About four o'clock each afternoon the brown paper rolls stopped coming from the chute, and in the breathing spell of the errands which occupied her from then until the whistle she would go through the ridiculous little formula of plotting an escape. In reality, she had exhausted the formula's possibilities on the very first day, but, without the sustenance of believing in them, Alma could not think of facing either Gene or the future he represented. Sometimes sheer weariness of muscle blurred these chimeras and in despair she would skirt the subject of returning to New York and Gene would fight shy of it. He implored her to quit the job and stay at the farm, said after the campaign against foreclosures he would find a job for himself, do organization work in the evening. He repeated this over and over again and she began to resent the proposal as disingenuous; every penny she made was so badly needed. The district had increased its allowance to five dollars only at the most urgent prodding, and Mike's extra cash was used up in running the Dodge.

Fortunately Gene was never at home when she re-

turned from work, and by nine or ten she would be comparatively rested and self-controlled. Once he found her in bed at nine and he came up anxiously asking if anything were wrong.

"Just tired," she said.

"Where do you feel it most?"

"No special place. All over."

"How long do you suppose I'm going to let this go on?"

"It's not a question of 'let,' " she said. "What the hell else can I do?"

"You must stay home, darling. This isn't your kind of work."

"What is my kind of work?"

"We don't know yet. But certainly this isn't. Stay home tomorrow and I'll go in, pick up your part-time pay."

"That'll last us for several days," Alma said. "Then what?"

"We won't starve with that acre of truck out there. The district's five dollars pays for our share of whatever Anna has to spend on meat and bread. We've been washing our own linen for the most part. Mike and Anna aren't the kind of people to worry about rent. They know we're not here on a vacation."

"They know you're not here on a vacation. I wasn't sent by the district. As a matter of fact, Walker advised against my coming, if you'll remember. So far as people here are concerned, I'm your wife, a kind of necessary evil. It isn't the pleasantest little notion."

"No, but it's one of the silliest. Mike's crazy about you. Everybody likes you," Gene said.

"Maybe. It wouldn't last long though, not if I kept hanging around the house when there was a chance for me to work at the mill. I couldn't earn my board on the farm here; that's one of your pipe dreams. If you went and took a relief job after the campaign, you couldn't do one-half the Party work you're doing now, and that's when I'd really be regarded as a leech."

"You would not. They're all family men out here. They realize what it means to have a family."

"I'm no family," Alma said. "Better go down and have supper now. Anna's hollering for you."

"Here's a plan I figured out driving to Weston this morning. After the campaign you and I will get up a list of everybody we know in New York and write each a personal letter describing conditions and asking for pledges of so much a month to be used in Party work here. This is an old method and the people we know are being pretty well drained dry as it is, but we know so many, and by pledging sums as small as fifty cents they could round out the district's five bucks to a respectable total. I'm not going to watch you ruin your health. Quit tomorrow?"

"Quit tomorrow and then what? Being assistant housewife to Anna here doesn't solve my problem. Now don't tell me I shouldn't have come to Cayuna in the first place."

Gene looked shocked and said, "I wasn't going to tell you anything of the sort. Do you think you made a mistake in coming?"

"No, and even if I had, I wouldn't be sorry. I knew there was no place for me here but I wanted to be with

you. I still want to be with you and I still realize there is no place for me here."

"But there is a place for you."

"If you mean the place of the wife beside her husband, sure. The mill's no place for me, but until something easier turns up I have to stay there. Anna's calling you."

"I don't feel like eating."

Then Mike came up and bullied him into going down for at least a bite. She heard them talking through the thin wooden floor of the farmhouse. Mike asked if there was anything wrong with her. Gene said no, and she didn't like that. He might at least have said she was all in from the day's work. Instead, he began talking to Mike about the extraordinary number of feebleminded people and downright idiots he came across in this last week of canvassing along the dirt roads up the hill. A great many of them failed to grasp the significance of the county's foreclosure order, while some had scarcely bothered to read it. He wondered how much of this was congenital, how much of it was due to intermarriage or undernourishment. Deep in one of the gulches he had found a well-kept, lonely and beautifully designed home owned by a retired civil engineer, and this engineer had circulated a petition to raise the required school age from six to nine. Apparently the man had conducted personal researches and found that the children were under-developed and steadily losing in capacity to absorb the most elementary kind of teaching. He found about 70 per cent of them being left back each term, and in the graduating class, 90 per cent. The teacher

had shown him a letter on county schoolboard stationery requesting her to graduate only two students that term, because that was the entrance quota assigned to the township by the Cayuna high school. In one term this weatherboard school of twenty-eight students had expelled three girls for pregnancy and none of them were over fourteen now.

Mike said, take it easy boy, you'll be running into things like that all the time, I stopped trying to get those people into the organization years ago, it's a waste of time, take it easy boy and have a bite.

In the horror of these things Alma felt her own problems withering into unimportance, but she knew that once the initial horror subsided, the problems would reassert themselves. Her fascination in the countryside had balanced the loss of comforts at first. Now her days were spent in the shipping room, her evenings on the porch or in Anna's kitchen. Gene seemed to find so much meaning and passion in his work that by comparison her own part in the anti-war strike and even the expulsion appeared to be little more than a way of liberating herself from the deadly undergraduate curriculum.

Alma had taken out her Party book here and she was able to relieve Gene of much clerical work, but it was work that Sue or any of the young people could have done, and she had no heart in it. She had tried to talk intimately and without big words to many of the farmers, and she played the piano for them at socials only to find on the way home that she'd played it too well, the Yankees had wished for a fiddle, the Polacks for an accordion. She dressed as they did and sat among

the women instead of with Gene and she smiled and made small talk, but for reasons which neither she nor Gene could fathom, they would not warm to her. The men liked her and respected her to the extent that they would buy raffle tickets only when she offered them, but if they were in trouble and came to the house they asked for Gene or Mike or Anna before they would open up and talk. Gene talked their language and she couldn't. Only when Gene spoke of the farmers' lives would they become comprehensible to her; when he was away they ceased to interest her. She got on with Mike well, but even their mutual kidding which had been so amusing in the early weeks crystallized into settled and rather dull forms. Anna had been first affectionate, later cool, and now, since the mill job, civil. Alma missed her mother, her room at home, the college library, restaurants with Hungarian music, the theater, the department stores, cigarettes during the day, an occasional dance in Harlem, an occasional drunk with Gene who had to be on his good behavior here, obviously motivated flattery on the part of successive aspirants for final favors, museums and galleries, concerts, in a word, New York. She had no acute need for any single one of these things, but in sudden contrast with the bareness of the shipping room they combined to evoke a nostalgia altogether disproportionate to the role they had played in her most intimate life. When it came to a categorical choice between Gene and all these New York amenities she had chosen him and would do so again. But confronted with the actual day-to-day sacrifices, she was bound to lose sight of the fundamental motives which drove her wherever he was.

She was on the point of falling into complete sleep when the sound of his boots brought her back into that state saturated with alternate waves of drowsiness and of a certain lucidity. He removed the boots softly and sat in the old rocking chair facing the window. He stretched his bare feet out into the warm night air, and horizontally the legs seemed even longer than they were. When lean, long-legged men took to drink they could carry it better than the fleshy ones. Sometimes Alma wished he had more flesh on him, a Rubens belly, say, and arms you could bite without the resistance of muscle underneath. She glanced at him through her eyelids. Gene looked calmer and more composed than she wanted him to look. For all she knew, he had explained her lack of adjustment and irritability on the basis of temporary feminine indisposition. Momentarily, this idea enraged her. Without the ordinary controls of full consciousness, she blurted out a question she had been careful not to ask before Mike took him downstairs.

She said, "How long after the campaign do you intend for us to stay here?"

"I don't know," he said slowly and without turning around.

Alma waited for him to expand on the subject, but he remained silent. He looked at his bare feet on the window sill, the breeches tight around his calves. Gas-station attendants wore breeches like that, and the truck-drivers who stalked through the shipping room and said Hello, girlie.

"About how long?" she said.

"I don't know. It'd be six months wasted if a new man came in now. I'd feel like a heel, running out on

them. District wouldn't release me anyhow. They'll know it's not my fault if the campaign falls through."

"You sound very placid about it." She didn't know why she said that.

"Smug, you mean? I don't feel smug or placid. That job is making you lose all perspective. I don't want to get on your nerves, but please quit now. You liked it here before that job."

"It isn't the job," she lied. "It was before I began to think of Cayuna County as a permanent residence."

"No need for you to think that."

"What else am I to think? If it were up to you, the subject would never come up."

"That's true. Until we've at least got Party units responsible for work in each of the League locals, I think it's pointless to talk about my release. They wouldn't give it and I wouldn't want it. I can't tell you how long it will be before we get to that stage. Certainly not before the fall, maybe the end of the year. When the foreclosures are pushed through and now there's no doubt they will be, we'll lose membership and I can't pull stakes in a period like that. These are the busiest months of the year for Mike."

"Couldn't Jasper be trained to take your place?"

"Not for a while," Gene said. He took his feet from the window sill and turned around with the chair. She could not see any part of him except the outline of his head and the elbows sticking out. He said, "Alma, do you want to go back to New York?" His voice was too deliberate.

"Not without you."

“What is it you want?” It was the same voice, coming through the teeth.

“I don’t know. I want to sleep.” She knew that soon their problem would not allow itself to be tabled at that point, but now her shoulders and arms ached with fatigue and she had to have the sleep. Gene remained sitting in the old wicker chair. If she was to get up at half-past six and be on the job at eight, she had to have the sleep.

THAT HAD BEEN FRIDAY. SATURDAY NIGHT the scene duplicated itself, now it was Sunday and Mike's lawn was filled with delegates elected to see Governor Keith. They had four cars, but one of these was unfit for a trip to Elroy, so again the Dodge was pressed into service. Earlier in the morning Alma had said she wouldn't go, and Gene tried to prevail on her for awhile. When the cars arrived, the job of painlessly weeding out two suspected provocateurs fell to him. The League could not afford a scandal in the open committee but neither could it afford to carry disrupters into the Keith estate. Gene got rid of them on a trumped-up ruling that only those whose farms or homes were affected could attend. This took all of an hour and some of the delegates were beginning to sound their horns. Alma really wanted to go and it was on a flagellant's impulse that she had said no in the first place. Gene knew this and stopped trying to convince her by reasoning. When the first automobile of the caravan rolled out of the lane she was still on the porch, standing next to Anna and holding back the tears. Gene ran into the house, ostensibly for a rag to wipe the windshield, and on his way out he said, "It would be a tre-

mendous favor if you could come along. We have no one to take notes on the promises he'll surely make, but the two of us could remember everything he says almost word for word."

She got into the front seat of the Dodge between him and Mike. Jasper and his wife and Tuss Corey were in the back. The delegation was not nearly as broad as it should have been. Half the committee were Party members and most of the others were old actives from the Willow Run local. Of course Keith had no way of telling that, so far as he was concerned they represented all four thousand delinquents. They did represent the interests of all four thousand, Gene thought, even if the rest had been too ignorant or apathetic to take action. If they accomplished nothing else, they would at least put the case into newspapers other than the *Cayuna News*. He wondered if there would be reporters present, and tried to visualize Keith from various pictures he'd seen. There was a great deal of Sunday traffic along the Willow Run, then the highway wound into the hills. Driving around the curves, he caught glimpses of Alma's face in the mirror. Manipulating the gears, he saw her thighs close together and small against Mike's.

Alma had put on weight during the first month of her stay in Cayuna, but now she weighed five pounds less than on the day she had come. That made her a hundred, a pound more or less. She was the smallest girl Gene had ever had. A hundred pounds did not seem like the weight of a grown-up person. He made up his mind to get her fired from the paper mill in some way that would not disgrace her in the eyes of the comrades or the community at large. Cayuna was the first place

where Gene had to consider things like the eyes of a community. He felt happy to have hit on this notion of getting her fired. She might feel badly about it at first, but in the long run adjustment at the farm would be easier to make. The Ogrodniks would not let her do hard work, and if he got her the proper books and made her feel she was not stagnating, in time Alma might become reconciled to a longer stretch in Cayuna. Gene did not want a release or a transfer.

Again he thought that no Communist organizer should get married unless he was prepared to stay in one place or his wife had a steady income wherever they went. Trying as Alma had been in recent weeks, Gene could not think of parting from her now. She sat huddled into a small package in Mike's shadow, and she was more important than the delegation which might have such decisive bearing on the fate of four thousand families. Why think of it in terms like that? Why should the two be mutually exclusive? Because her determination to get him away from this work made it so. If he could only impress her with the importance of this work and the importance of his share in it, if he could only involve her emotionally in the lives of these people, the whole problem would begin to be solved. Perhaps the only way to do this would be to leave her at the paper mill, living the life of a worker. She'd crack under it, or wouldn't she?

And if she didn't crack, would she remain the same Alma? Without responsibilities she had been a book-made creature, but days in the mill were chipping off the literature, leaving raw and painful spots. The ano-

dynes he had to offer were temporary, ineffectual and sometimes they proved to be irritants. Either the new protective covering would develop and harden out of her own resources or they would have to seek a remedy in new conditions elsewhere. He could not think of leaving her again and he refused to think of throwing up his job.

During the entire long trip to Elroy she said almost nothing, not even when Mike appealed to her in the course of his stormy debates with Jasper. Passing through towns, Gene would point out notable spots and make brief sociological remarks. She nodded but did not encourage him. He explained the significance of hex signs on barns and she said, interesting. In Elroy they asked a man which way the Keith estate was, and the man said you had to have permission to go in there. Gene said they had an appointment. The man looked at the Dodge and Mike, spat, and pointed with his thumb. The estate was surrounded by woods and approached by a mile of well-kept gravel road. At first the woods were mostly fir and birch, but toward the mansion they thinned out into clearings and widely spaced chestnut and oak. The Chevvy from Demster was already parked in front of the garage and its passengers clustered anxiously in the lane, waiting for the Dodge. There were also several limousines and roadsters. Keith must have been entertaining. His mansion was an imitation French château. Its front door was wide open and Gene could see into the paneled reception room.

With all those cars overflowing the garage no one

had noticed the Chevy from Demster, but as the Dodge and the other two arrived the committee gained in confidence and some of the men ventured toward the lawn. Except for Jasper and the giant blond boy who had volunteered in Cayuna, they wore Sunday clothes, some with high stiff collars and short lapels. The denim overalls were probably all the boy had. Scorning authority, Jasper had come in shirtsleeves. Of the men, Gene wore about the best suit, but it was crumpled from lying in a trunk. A butler came out and looked at them and hurried around one of the wings.

"He must think we're a demonstration," Mike said.

"That's what we are," Jasper said.

Halfway across the lawn they came within sight of a pool and a group of young people in beach costumes under an ivied trellis. That was appropriate, Gene thought, because in Hollywood whenever they wanted to suggest wealth they shot one of these pool scenes, the diving board, the sparkling water, tall green drinks and the people gloriously young. Keith was not among them.

The committee's spirits wilted again, and only Gene and Jasper continued walking. Gene heard Martha Finch say, "Look at him jump in the water."

One of the young men threw a scarf and robe around himself and came to meet them on the lawn. He picked his way gingerly along the grass in bare feet, and again Gene heard Martha's voice, "He's good-looking."

When he came close he was even better looking but not so young. By then the scarf was fashionably adjusted and the robe drawn tight. He smiled and said, "I trust you'll pardon me. We didn't expect you till

four. My name's Guthrie. I'm the Governor's secretary and he's working now, but if you and the ladies will follow me we'll find some seats in the house."

"The house," Mike said in an undertone.

The handsome, barefooted person led the way, but most of the committee members could not take their eyes off the pool and the people under the ivied trellis. They straggled slowly after Gene, still turning to look. Before they reached the reception room, the butler returned from around the wing, and in his wake, Governor Keith, tall, spare, white hair, white moustache. "Nothing but a ward-heeler," Jasper had said, but even he took a position behind Gene in that ambassadorial presence. Keith had no broad ward-heeler's smile. He felt for the underdog. His anxiety to accommodate the delegation, his radio speeches, and innumerable passages in his published book, *The Navajo: His Religion*, attested to that.

"Governor Keith," Mr. Guthrie said, "these ladies and gentlemen are the Cayuna County delegation. This is Mr. Marsay."

"I'm glad to know you, sir," Governor Keith said. "Now Mr. Guthrie, don't you think it would be pleasanter to chat with these ladies and gentlemen on the west lawn? If you'll see that some extra chairs are brought out we will all sit around the old millstone and talk away to our heart's content. Is that agreeable to you, Mr. Marsay?"

"Oh yes," Gene said.

The butler and Mr. Guthrie brought canvas beach chairs by twos and threes. Governor Keith assisted in opening them, and between consignments he asked to

become individually acquainted with the committee. He shook hands with them all, and to the first few he said how do you do and once or twice even asked that the name be repeated. He bowed to the women and smiled at Alma. He was last to remain standing. When he sat down Gene looked at Jasper and nodded.

Jasper had gone through his description of what foreclosures would do to the tax delinquents so often that he could repeat paragraphs in their entirety. But now the pool, the mansion, the west lawn which sloped into a golf course, the butler and the unexpected reception befuddled him. Jasper had thought of Keith in terms of Judge Eldon and the county commissioners. The amenities simply brought down his guard. He'd started across the lawn hating the mansion, the pool, the butler, Mr. Guthrie. Confronted with the smiling Keith, he was stopped dead. Keith didn't have to smile, he didn't even have to receive them. If he was approached in the same aggressive manner that had brought results with local relief administrators, he might refuse to do even as much as he would otherwise have done. And the white-moustached, gracious authority took Jasper down a peg. He was completely overwhelmed, and motioned for Gene to do the talking.

Gene spoke for some twenty minutes and Keith listened appreciatively. When Gene said that some of the farmers on Pine Hill and small home-owners in Demster were being put on the block for delinquencies amounting in many cases to less than ten dollars, the Governor said "No" with a horror-stricken incredulous clasping of the hands. Mr. Guthrie's emotions were manifested with greater discretion, but mostly they patterned them-

selves after those of the Governor. The butler had no reactions at all because he had resumed his attendance at the pool. Governor Keith paused for some time after Gene finished.

Then he said, "Mr. Marsay, you have outlined a desperate situation indeed. All the more desperate since it is by no means confined to Cayuna County, but is state-wide and national in scope. The public official who does not strain every resource to alleviate such suffering is unworthy of his office and a violator of his oath. That American citizens should be deprived of the roof over their heads as well as of their sole means of livelihood for such paltry sums is something that I, for one, am not prepared to face with hands folded. Unfortunately it's outside my official province to rescind the commissioners' ruling, but I'm in whole-hearted sympathy with your cause and I assure you I will use all possible influence to see that you and the farmers you represent get a square deal."

There were no reporters present, Gene had noticed. "Definitely," he said, "what do you intend to do?"

Mr. Guthrie's face disapproved of that attitude, but the Governor remained serious, earnest and obliging. He said, "I'm certain your commissioners have been forced to do this out of desperation on their own part. I'm certain the county must be in financial straits for its officials to resort to such a measure. They are not doing it out of meanness. Your committee must recognize that. I contend, however, that under no circumstances, no matter how desperate, must American citizens be deprived of a roof over their head or land under their feet. Everything in the power of the gov-

ernor's office will be done to help the people of Cayuna County."

"More definitely?" Gene said. "The sale is scheduled for Saturday."

"Definitely, I will send a personal telegram to the commissioners, asking them to be as lenient as humanly possible. That represents the full extent of my powers in this case."

"Will you declare yourself in opposition to these sales, and should all attempts to forestall them fail, will you support the farmers of Cayuna in resisting them?"

"Are you asking the governor of a state to obstruct a legal process?"

"We're asking you to help save the homes and bread of four thousand families who are being sacrificed so that a group of unscrupulous politicians may save their faces by balancing the county budget."

"You speak very well," Governor Keith said. "I cannot obstruct a legal process."

Before Gene could say anything, the Governor turned to one of the farmers and said, "Now let me get this straight. They are not foreclosing on the total sum of your back taxes but only for the sum you owe from three or four years ago. Have you paid your taxes of four years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much do you owe of the following year's taxes?"

"Twenty-one dollars and eighty cents."

"And you cannot pay that," he said, half asking.

"Not unless I sell my horse."

"Hm," Governor Keith said. "And you, sir, how much do you owe?"

"I don't owe a cent," Mike said.

"What is your complaint?"

"The same as this other fellow's," Mike said. "We're here together, representing the Cayuna Farmers League. We don't believe the poor farmer ought to be taxed at all, but those of us who can still pay have been paying through the nose. I pay all right, even if I know what my money's being used for. You can't squeeze rum out of a corncob and you can't make these four thousand pay. They ain't got it."

Governor Keith had an adequate background of tension relieving, and he relieved this particular tension by saying, "What makes you think I want to squeeze rum out of a corncob?" All the committee's newspaper-reading members remembered what a famous prohibitionist he had been and they smiled and Mr. Guthrie smiled, and had the butler been there he would undoubtedly have allowed himself a smile.

Jasper had been looking for a chance to rehabilitate himself after his failure to make the initial speech. He saw that Gene was putting the Governor on the spot in the same way they had made the ward-healers squirm, and with the tension relieved and all the people smiling, he said just as gruffly as Mike had spoken, "Why don't you call martial law and make them stop these sales? You got the right to command the National Guard."

"In the years of my administration," Governor Keith said, "I have never had to call out the Guard, and I thank God for that. The National Guard is to be used solely in case of violence."

"There'll be plenty of violence if they try and go through with those sales," Jasper said.

That was an open threat. The Governor stood up, and with as open a tone of finality said, "I earnestly and strongly advise against violence, sir."

"We're not asking for the National Guard," Gene said. "We don't want them. We're asking for effective help. A telegram advising lenience will not be sufficient."

"The citizens of Cayuna County have my whole-hearted sympathy and co-operation and also my advice that violence will only hinder their cause. Violence has never helped anyone."

"Not the Navajo Indians perhaps, but it did the American colonists a great deal of good," Gene said.

There was not much to be said after that. Keith again assured them of his whole-hearted sympathy and he bowed to the women and shook hands with several of the farmers, not all of them this time. Mr. Guthrie seemed much angrier and grasped one of the canvas chairs so that he would not have to shake hands. They retired together into the *château* and the committee filed back to the cars. When the butler thought they were out of sight he emerged from one of the wings, and with him was an armed state trooper.

"Look at the trooper," Martha said. "Who do they think we are?"

"You'll see more troopers on Saturday," Mike said, "and we won't have no kick coming because Jasper here asked for them. What the hell did you mean by asking for martial law, Jasper?"

"Just calling his bluff," Jasper said. "Just seeing how far his whole-hearted sympathy went."

"We'll be queered if they send a company of National Guard to the courthouse Saturday. We ain't got much of a chance as it is. You had to go and ask for martial law."

"Just putting him on the spot. He won't send troopers on my say-so," Jasper said.

"It was a mistake to bring up martial law in the first place," Gene said. "We don't want troopers unless they're sent by a workers' and farmers' government."

Mike said, "Jasper, we was lucky you didn't make the speech. How come Gene did the talking?"

"That's how we had it arranged," Gene said.

"You didn't make that arrangement at the section meeting," Mike said stubbornly.

"All right, Mike," Gene said. He took the wheel and made room for Alma. All the way home she refused to enter into the conversation. She was just as sullen as she had been on the way to the estate. He would try to draw her in and each time she answered with a strained civility, briefly, and he knew she would retain the same tone in bed that night. Now, when the Governor refused to intervene and the campaign was sure to fail, now at the moment when he should have been devoting every effort and thought to the next step, she had to act like this. They got out for a cup of coffee at a roadhouse, and she took one bite out of her sandwich, then laid it aside.

"Did you see that girl on the diving board?" Tuss Corey said. "It looked like she didn't have a stitch of clothing on."

THEY CAME FROM THE DOCTOR'S NOT knowing what to say or where to go. Dorothy kept repeating "Now what will we do?" and Harold kept forcing a smile and telling her not to worry. He would have preferred to turn into Central Park with her and talk it out there, but she gave every sign of going to pieces and that wouldn't do in public. After some aimless walking along Fifth Avenue they took a bus downtown to the furnished room, something he had not meant to do. He couldn't have Dorothy go to pieces in public, but neither did he want to be alone with her.

During the night before and in the doctor's waiting room Harold had thought of the most fantastic plans, a few of them almost feasible. One involved a kidnaping plot which would account for a month of her disappearance. That's assuming she consented to the abortion. Even so, she would never stand up under the questioning. And previously when the word abortion had occurred in conversation she shuddered at its mention and begged him to change the topic. She maintained that this was not out of prudery, it was just that she dreaded the word. How easy it had been to accommodate her then. Now he would have to be as

circumspect as possible in approaching the subject, perhaps it might be well to leave it for another day. Simply try to soothe her now.

Neither of them wanted to go to the furnished room, but there was no other place. Passing Bonwit Teller she looked into a window and said, "Isn't that a pretty linen suit? Five more months and I won't be able to get into it."

"You'll be all right," he said.

At Thirty-fourth Street she looked west and saw an electric sign and said, "Let's go to the movies."

"All right," he said.

"Let's not."

They stayed on until the last stop and walked to the room on Charles Street. On the stoop Harold said Well, here's our home. In the hall they saw the landlady and Harold sent Dorothy ahead so he could pay the weekly rent. This was the first time the woman had got a good look at Dorothy, because they had never come in before dark.

"I feel so guilty taking your money," the woman said. "You haven't been here all week. If this was one of these cheap boarding houses you get around here I'd be renting your room out to transients without you knowing it. But you been treating me right and I'm going to treat you the same, Mr. Wilson. She's so pretty, your young lady."

"My wife," Harold would have said under any other circumstances, but now he dreaded the words as much as Dorothy dreaded the word abortion. "Six dollars, right?"

"Right you are, Mr. Wilson."

Upstairs Dorothy sat in their only chair, looking at the bed. She had not removed her hat or her thin coat. It took endless attentions to appear well-dressed in those cheap clothes, on her they scarcely ever looked cheap. Only now she was off guard, hat tilted back against the chair and coat crushed under her. The worry which usually adds years to girls' faces subtracted a few from Dorothy's adult pose, and she looked not more than fourteen there, with the round little face and Renoir tints.

"I can feel it inside of me," she said quietly.

"Nonsense," Harold said, "dear."

"When do you start feeling it?"

"You won't ever," Harold wanted to say. "Not for a long time," he said.

"When does it start to show?"

"Not for a long, long time. Don't worry about it."

"You said you were going to watch out."

"I can't imagine how it could have happened."

"I know when. I felt it when I got home."

"Nonsense," he said. "You don't feel that."

"Didn't I though. I told you the very next day and you said nothing had happened. But I knew it had. I could feel it inside of me."

"That's all imagination."

"Well, it's in me now and there's nothing we can do."

"But there is something," he wanted to say. "Don't you worry," he said.

"You won't go away from me, will you?"

"Of course not. How can you say such a thing?"

"I didn't mean to hurt you," she said.

"You didn't hurt me, dear. You're just scared. Take it easy now."

"You're not going to send me away, are you, Harold? I want to stay with you."

"Take your hat and coat off, kid. Here, I'll put them away." He hung them in the empty closet. He turned around and saw her fluffing the blonde locks instinctively, but not combing them as she always had. "Here's a comb; make yourself pretty," he said, smiling.

She took the comb and held it in her lap. "I said you're not going to send me away, are you, Harold?"

"No, of course not."

He took her in his lap and began combing the lovely hair, gently.

"I'm so glad you're not scared," she said. "You're good to me."

"Who can help being good to you?"

"More people than you'd suppose. Besides being my husband, you're the only friend I have in the world."

They had taken to calling each other husband and wife in bed some weeks before.

"Don't you like your mother?"

"I do in a way, but there's something wrong with her. The other day I got to thinking she likes my father to kick her around the way he does. It looks almost like she wants him to do it and that's all he asks for. He's a mean guy, my father. I shouldn't be the one to say it, but he's mean all right."

"Maybe she's a masochist."

"What's that?"

"Never mind."

"Anyhow, I'm sorry for her but I don't really like her. You're the only friend I got."

Harold stopped combing her hair and Dorothy drew up in his lap. She rested her whole weight on him. It was not much of a weight and they remained sitting there for a long time. "I'm all mixed up," Dorothy said once, but he didn't answer and they continued sitting. He felt her becoming composed. Her breasts rose and fell regularly under his hand and he thought of taking her to bed, might as well now, made no difference, see what it's like when one didn't have to watch out. Apparently not even pregnancy had shaken Dorothy's confidence in him. She sat there curled up, younger than ever. He took her to bed and felt she was placing herself completely in his hands. For the moment he did not mind, but after he had her the sensation of the trap became stronger than in the doctor's office even. At first he had felt the recent virgin's jealousy of the doctor who had touched his girl, but after he had her he did not care so much. "Did the fellow hurt you any?" he said.

"Don't talk about it."

He assumed that the doctor had hurt Dorothy, and he found it easier to pity her for this immediate pain than for the larger situation where self-pity was predominant. In the aftermath of their embrace there was that species of love which is almost exclusively gratitude for pleasure bestowed. He said, "Tell me, my dear, did he hurt you?"

"Not so much. But you know, there was one thing. I had my mind made up that no one except you would ever touch me. I guess I had forgotten about a doctor."

It was inspired of Dorothy to have told this lie. Once, under Harold's cross-examination, she had confessed to a number of heavy necking parties with boys from around her block. She remembered how eagerly he had pressed her for particulars, how she had stopped short in fear of blurting out too much. She knew he liked the idea of being the first one.

The delicacy did impress Harold. A girl who spent her entire life in the slums, and with a father like that! Such a straightforward, simple little girl, so fundamentally good, a real proletarian. Look at Gene, with all the revolutionary pretensions, most of his girls had been well-to-do or at least well-educated.

"How good you are," he said. "How little and young. You're too young to have a baby."

"I thought of that. Does it hurt more when you're young?"

"Does what hurt more?"

"You know. Having a baby."

"You won't have a baby," he said, "darling."

"Oh, then there *is* something we can do?"

"Sure," Harold said. "You mustn't worry."

"Some kind of a pill?"

"Pills don't do any good. Nor horseback riding either. Abortion's the only thing that'll help. We'll have it done by the most reliable doctor there is. You mustn't worry," he said, "darling."

"No," Dorothy said. She removed her hand from his and said "No" again.

"With a good, skilled doctor it won't be more serious than having a tonsil removed."

"No." Her voice was small, as though it had strug-

gled through a constricted passage, and she moved away from him slightly on the bed.

"It won't be more serious than having a tooth pulled," he said. "They've got it down to a method which is as safe and painless as having a couple of stitches taken on a small cut. Most of the girls walk away from the office in an hour or so. My sister had one about a year ago and in two days she was attending classes. We'll have it done by the same doctor."

"No," she said.

"Don't keep saying that, my dear. I'm talking sense. Just as soon as you find out what it's like, you'll agree with me. There isn't anything else we can do."

"I thought you said you knew all about it when we started. You said there couldn't be an accident."

"This sort of thing just happens, Dorothy. It doesn't make any difference what I said. The fact remains, we have to do something and there is only one thing we can do. I'll see that you come out of it all right."

"No," she said. She moved as far away as she could, began whimpering, then crying and sobbing. Mattress and pillow shook with the convulsions and he did not dare touch her. Each time he started to reason with her, or even opened his mouth, the spasms redoubled almost mechanically.

At first Dorothy cried the way Alma had cried in Hungary when some bigger girl hit her. It seemed as though Dorothy would stop any minute, and he waited. He gave up trying to talk sense and began talking endearments. Then he gave up trying to do anything at all, and sat against the wall feeling the same sort of terrified fascination he had experienced on the day he

had first called forth such hysterics by removing her skirt. After a while what faith he had in his ability to placate her was entirely shattered, and his own relative composure began to give way. The choked rattle which capped off each of the receding sobs increased his horror to the point where he shouted, "Stop it, you fool."

Dorothy said, "I can't stop it. I'm trying, but I can't."

He dressed and made her drink a glass of water. For lack of anything else to do he brought her a second glass. That one spilled over the bed, so she had to get up too. Sitting in the chair helped a little and the choking rattle disappeared. The sobs too petered out from simple exhaustion. They went over the same ground again, and as soon as she had gathered some strength, the hysterical crying reappeared with only slightly diminished force.

That week there was a series of these afternoons. They would begin tranquilly and affectionately enough. Then Harold would skirt the subject of an abortion and Dorothy would fall apart beyond the possibility of being reassembled that day. Just before leaving him she would pull herself together sufficiently to make wild, childish declarations of love which he returned dutifully in passionate low tones. Over and over she begged his forgiveness for being so cowardly. And Harold said that it was all right, any kid would be scared in her place, she'd come around once she realized how safe and harmless that kind of an operation had got to be. Well-known movie actresses had them done over the week-end and went to work Monday morning, fresh and ready for the camera. He named

half a dozen of her favorites, the youngest and dewiest buds he could think of.

When he convinced himself that the scenes were losing in intensity Harold wrote to Alma and asked her for the doctor's address. For a friend, naturally. He also asked her how Gene was, and what progress their campaign had made since her last letter. Why doesn't Gene sit down and type out a few words, he wrote.

This was on a Saturday at the New York Public Library, and Harold meant to do a little research on his thesis. After he had sealed the envelope he tore it open and read it again and made a few minor corrections. He didn't have another envelope, and the sight of the open letter distracted him. He went out and mailed it and dropped into a bookshop to see if they had anything in the way of a volume on abortions. Back in the library he looked up Abortion in the catalogue, but you had to have special permission to read up on specific data. He postponed work on the thesis for another week and went to a movie, just as he knew Alma would have done. It was a good movie and helped some. The heroine was very dark and did not resemble Dorothy in the least. Coming out of the movie, he thought that after this Dorothy thing blew over it would prove to have been perhaps the first major experience of his life. He went home in time for supper.

The apartment door was wide open, something very unusual. Harold was prepared to remark on his mother's carelessness and to warn her against petty thieves who stole clothing. Surprisingly, the kitchen was dark and no supper in evidence. In his own room he found Dorothy talking to his mother, the remains of coffee

and cakes on the desk in front of them. Dorothy had never been to the house before, and, so far as Harold knew, had never met his mother. He was very angry and did not know what to make of it. His mother made him sit on the bed, and from her voice, kindly and serious, he realized that she knew about Dorothy's condition. He was outraged at the girl's stupidity and sat on the bed without saying anything. Dorothy began to explain and wound up in sobs again. His mother quieted her without the slightest evident effort and said, "You mustn't look angry, Harold. She couldn't help herself."

What happened was that the preceding night Dorothy had gone home especially late and her mother had waited up. Both of them had been crying, Dorothy with Harold, and Mrs. Schultz on account of a scene with her husband. They were both wrought up, and before she knew it Dorothy had said what she should not have said. After that there was nothing to do except assure her mother that everything would be fixed up, Harold would do the right thing. Outside of a long lecture, her mother took it all right, being that Harold wasn't just one of these bums. But that morning when Dorothy came home from a half-day's work in the store she heard her father cursing and shouting. She heard him way out in the hall and never even went in. Her mother had promised not to tell, but she must have. Mr. Schultz was hollering there and swearing he'd go to school the first thing Monday. He said he would kill Harold if that was the last thing he did. So without letting them know she had heard him Dorothy ran away and came straight here to tell Harold, and Harold

was in the library. She was so upset that Mrs. Darvas had to give her a couple of aspirins and make her lie down. She felt as though nothing made any difference, and she wanted somebody to do something about her father, so she told Mrs. Darvas the whole story. Then they had a cup of coffee and some cakes.

As his mother was telling this story, Harold could see why Dorothy had confided in her so readily and so completely. At first that was what had puzzled him most, how Dorothy could have opened up to a stranger. But as his mother went on, calmly and in command of the situation, even he was reassured by her presence and the decades of similar crises represented by her poise. From the moment Schultz's name entered the narrative, his anger at what he had considered uncalled for interference on his mother's part vanished, and very suddenly he felt much closer to her than to Dorothy. His shame at having to do with so immature a girl also vanished, and the thing that remained was an image of Schultz, storming into the principal's office.

"Why did you tell your mother?" he said.

"I didn't think she'd tell my father," Dorothy said.

"That's no reason for telling her. I want to know why you had to tell her in the first place?"

Dorothy looked ready to cry again, and looked at Mrs. Darvas for help. Mrs. Darvas said, "What's the difference why she told her? You can't blame the girl for talking to her own mother. Maybe if she had done that a few months ago this would not have happened. Why wonder about that now? Now the thing to do is to see what we can do before Monday. You can't

let her father go to school. Would you two rather talk about it alone?"

"No, stay here, Mrs. Darvas," Dorothy said.

"I've been talking to Dorothy most of the afternoon," Harold's mother said. "From what she says I'm sure Mr. Schultz will make a scandal unless you marry her now. You know what a scandal would mean in school."

"My job, that's all," Harold said. He felt all young and dependent, and his mother's gentle firmness helped some. Most mothers were like Dorothy's. He wanted to pity Dorothy but he couldn't.

"Marriage wasn't exactly included in my plans, as you both know," he said.

"Neither were a lot of other things, Harold," Mrs. Darvas said. "I'm not reproaching you or your little girl, but you'll have to upset a lot of plans between now and Monday, I'm afraid."

"I don't want to marry Harold if he doesn't want to marry me," Dorothy said. "I couldn't look him in the eye if I did that."

Harold said nothing.

Mrs. Darvas stood up said, "You would prefer to talk about this alone, wouldn't you? I'll be back when you call me."

"Please stay, Mom," Harold said. "You are a help."

"Honest, I'd hate to be married this way," Dorothy said.

"Are you sure your father would go to the school?" Harold said.

"We discussed that," Mrs. Darvas said. "No, she's not sure, but I don't think you can take the chance."

"My father'll do worse than go to the school. I don't guess you ever met the kind of man he is, Harold. I'd rather jump in the river than go home tonight."

"It won't come to that," Mrs. Darvas said. "You're not the first young couple in this fix."

"Your mother's been awfully nice to me," Dorothy said. "If only my folks were like that."

"I'll be goddamned if I know what to do," Harold said.

Mrs. Darvas said, "Wouldn't the best thing be for both of you to go downtown and talk to the little girl's parents?"

"I don't want to go down there," Harold said.

"Me neither," Dorothy said. "I'd rather jump in the river than face my father."

"Would it make it easier if I went first and explained?"

"You shouldn't do that, Mom."

"One of us has to do something."

"It wouldn't do any good for you to see my father. He'd only throw you out."

"What if we all went and told him you would get married next week?" Mrs. Darvas said.

"I don't know what the hell to do," Harold said.

ALMA WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO NOTICE the announcement on the courthouse bulletin board, and it excited her so much that she could not wait for Gene to drive into town. She ran across the bridge and almost reached home before the Dodge became visible around the Demster road. It seemed like a great victory to gain an extra six months for the thousand three-year delinquents, even if the majority were to lose title. She was inordinately proud of Gene and ashamed of having wanted to cut short his work. In her eyes all credit for gaining the postponement belonged to him. The rest were raw, drafted battalions to be marshaled into one danger spot or another. They were good comrades, many of them, but without Gene they would have been just as helpless now as they had been last winter when Tuss Corey's milk market was cut off. Without Gene, Mike and Jasper would still be bickering about which local should pay for a leaflet or gas. Gene went out and canvassed and got stories into the *Cayuna News*, wrote letters, made farmers stand up and speak at meetings, and he held the locals together. Now look. No doubt many of the three-year delinquents would pay up during their breathing spell. Say half

of them would. That means Gene's leadership had saved the homes of five hundred families. From the single, immediate, humanitarian angle, Gene's presence and activity here had meant saving the homes of five hundred families. Figure three thousand people, making twenty for every day he spent in Cayuna County. Beyond that, the victory would have a great agitational effect and probably some organizational influence. Add this to the total effect of the relief delegations, the personal contacts, the training of several unit organizers and so on; figure he was just getting under way, and you could see that his work was at least as valuable as the job he had left in New York.

Only the preceding night she had argued that he'd been more useful in his own town, and Gene had been inclined to agree with her. She had pressed the point and meant to follow up her advantage. By shunting the entire subject of New York to intimate moments, Alma had hit on a splendid tactic, time-honored but still splendid. He would commit himself to promises and observations which furthered her campaign even in their subsequently modified forms. Repellent and housewifely as this mode of attack was, Alma resorted to it consciously and systematically only after exhausting many other means. Partly it consisted of snipes at Anna's unsanitary cooking, variations on the Communist Manifesto's phrase about "the idiocy of rural life," snatches of nostalgia for their first sweet months together, local color from the Sunday *New York Times*, which was one of Mike's luxuries—tiny, effective blows like that. Generally they hit the mark. When Gene complained of some unit's inactivity, or lack of co-operation on

part of the district, Alma, under pretext of distracting him, would counter unobtrusively and fancifully with one of New York's minor attractions or else she would become charming in the ways he liked best. It was easy enough to bring Gene's guard down. His recuperative powers offered more of a problem. His stability of character was Alma's despair at times. It brought her own fluctuations into bolder relief.

Here for weeks she had been campaigning toward Gene's release from the Cayuna job, bringing every major and petty device to bear, and now at the first sign of victory on his part she was relinquishing all conquered territory. Even during major engagements of the campaign she knew her cause to be unprincipled when measured by her very own standards, but after the retrenchment she felt this all the more keenly. At the same time, there was the unaltered condition which had compelled Alma to fight with the only weapons at her disposal. Surely she was not any less weary, and the accumulated gall of the mill job would burst forth again. It was impossible to transcend the fact of that job or view it as temporary maladjustment. With Gene life would be a succession of such jobs and of miserable periods when she would have to search for them. Once inured to them she might take more of a share in his work, but inured though she might become, Alma knew she would never be fundamentally reconciled. Twenty-one years of comfort and leisure would never be simply shaken off. Yet not only an important aspect of her relationship to Gene, but to the revolutionary movement as well, hinged on this struggle to become inured and hardened and ready to work at dull, exhausting

jobs. In the comfort and comparative leisure of undergraduate existence she had been a Communist in spurts and lapses. In a comfortable job of the sort she had a remote chance of obtaining in New York she would only retain this characteristic; there was no doubt in her mind about that. In Cayuna the mill job left Alma without either the energy or the desire to exert herself in Party work.

Under the heartening influence of the courthouse bulletin she felt ashamed not only of having impeded Gene's activity but of not having made her own contribution. In Alma's case self-reproach was scarcely ever of an extended or profound kind. As a rule she cut it short by a series of resolutions equally short-lived and contented herself with them while they lasted. Now, on the way home along the Willow Run, she decided to let up on the New York campaign, struggle with the mill job for a while at least, and give Gene a hand in the work. Just how long these resolutions would remain in effect she did not know. The problems they involved, however, she knew to be the central ones in her life. The decisions that Gene had made at the price of hunger, jail and loneliness she would have to make at a price equally high if they were to hold as well. At the moment her decisions fitted bravely into his, but she knew it would not always be so. Next Tuesday the paper rolls would start coming rapidly and inexorably again and by noon her arms would hang heavy in their sockets and her finger joints would ache and be hot and trembling. Among those Tuesdays and the peaceful hammock evenings and Gene's long kisses in bed and tiresome unit meetings and great victories like

the bulletin announcement and a thousand unexpected events, perhaps blindness or an automobile accident, among these things the great decisions would have to be fused and welded. At the moment, decisions seemed easy to make, stay at the job, stay with Gene, help him. And although Alma knew she would soon falter and want him back on the early, careless, affectionate, sensual terms, she also knew this would no longer be possible. These months seemed to be her belated, painful economic adolescence, and she could no more return to her parents' home than she could make her chest flat and hard again.

The willows were still a very tender green at that time of the year. At some points they nearly touched above the narrow Run. Their hanging, luscious foliage inclined northward in the breeze, and the breeze swirled back and forth between the shore and Pine Hill. Alma's skirt clung to her thighs. Webster Hutchins greeted her from atop a large cherry tree and said he could see the Dodge across the Demster Pike. He threw her a cluster of large ones and she stood under the tree, wiping dust off the cherries and looking for the car. Gene pulled up and made the turn before he let her get in. "How did you happen to walk?" he said.

When Alma told about the bulletin he didn't take it at all in the way she had expected. He drove into town and took a look at it himself, then he said it was a shrewd move and would do more harm than good. Back at the farm, Mike agreed with him. For one thing, the bulletin might create the illusion that everything possible was being done by the county. For another, it would undoubtedly split the ranks of whatever new

farmers the campaign might have attracted. Many of those affected by the extension would stay away from the courthouse the next day when the showdown came. Some of the others would be discouraged.

After supper, Gene ran off a leaflet which warned against these things besides pointing out how the extension had been forced by the publicity attendant on various meetings and delegations. Alma helped him at the mimeograph, but she was considerably let down by his attitude and Mike's. Neither of them looked for much of a demonstration at the courthouse next day, and all evening Mike was yelling blue murder at the outlying units whom he held responsible. Briefly, his point was that if the bastards Jasper and Tuss had taken the lead out of their asses three weeks ago, the courtroom and the whole square could be packed so the sonofabitch commissioners wouldn't dare go through with it. The bastard Jasper deserved his foreclosure. Maybe not that, but why was he such a lazy bastard anyhow?

"Do you think they'll have state troopers?" Alma said.

"They wouldn't have the nerve," Mike said.

Then Webster Hutchins came over with a brown bag full of cherries. He stood in the doorway just as he always did and gave the bag to Anna, who coaxed him to come in.

IN THE MORNING MIKE PULLED UP AT THE bridge and let Alma out. She had asked him to let her off there because the mill was shut on Saturdays now and some of the foremen or the super might be around town, and it would not do to have them see her in Gene's company. She started walking across. Midway on the bridge the Dodge passed her and Gene waved and smiled. He did not know what to make of her kindness and wonderful soft talk of the night before. He hoped it was not simply an armed truce.

"You sure crazy about her," Mike said.

"Yes."

"I used to be crazy about Anna like that before she went and got so jealous."

"She's only kidding three-quarters of the time."

"That's what you think. She had a sister used to live with us for about fifteen years, a poor girl, we were all she had. I used to have a go at her sometimes when Anna was in the fields. Then after fifteen years we got caught and Anna was sore as a bull and she been jealous ever since. I wouldn't be telling this to anybody else. Keep it a secret, will you?"

"I've been waiting to get some kind of scandal on you," Gene said. "I'll rake it up one of these days."

"No you won't. Members of the Communist Party here in Cayuna can keep a secret better than anybody I know. We kept this courthouse demonstration such a good secret that there won't be a hundred farmers here. I don't see no more cars parked than there would be any old Saturday morning. What I said last night goes. I don't look for more than a handful of folks."

"That's Tuss Corey's bus in front of the barber shop. You can tell by the mud."

They saw two other familiar cars. Mike parked his Dodge in the alley behind Vern Saunders' saloon. He asked Vern if any Pine Hill people had been around.

"I wouldn't know," Vern said. "I just opened up. But if they do come you better tell them to behave right and proper. They'll listen to you, Mike. Pine Hill people wouldn't get to first base against that outfit I seen moving into the courthouse a little after sunrise. Those fellows must have been about the biggest state troopers going. They had everything an outfit would need to handle a Pine Hill bunch."

"How many?" Gene asked.

"Seven carloads. You know, them big touring cars. They take about eight apiece. You start trouble with those guys and they'll thin you out some. They're all about the size of Mike here. It'd take six Pine Hill rummies to put a dent in one of them. Go and see for yourself. They ain't bashful. You can go right up and talk to one of them. Just man for man, I would string along with one of these boys before I'd put money on three Pine Hill stump-jumpers. With all those lead sticks and

gas guns they'll take on six easy. This just a bluff, these handbills, what do you say?"

"Come around the courtroom at ten, take a look for yourself," Gene said. He took the new leaflets from the car and left some with Mike at the saloon entrance. He began distributing the rest in stores along Main Street, giving them mostly to farmers in town for their Saturday trading. At the A. & P. he ran into Sue and Mrs. Melinkovitch.

Mrs. Melinkovitch said, "You see the cops yet? Jasper is by the pump, looking at them."

Sue took the leaflets and Gene went to the town pump. John Onda and a few others from the Willow Run local were there, and Tuss, but not Jasper. The state troopers' cars and a couple of motorcycles were lined up between the pump and the courthouse, with only one trooper in charge. He was not as big as Mike but he did have everything Vern had talked about, nightstick, blackjack, revolver. Gene looked into the cars for gas guns. The trooper glanced at him lazily, keeping his sharper glances for the men in overalls. The giant blond boy was there. He'd been on all delegations since the one to Judge Eldon. He followed Gene around like a shaggy, great Newfoundland, running ahead, turning back for a look. The rest too began to cluster in a group, and then the trooper did not take his eyes off them until he went into the jury room and brought a sergeant back.

"Is that where they're staying?" Gene said.

"Mostly," Tuss Corey said, "but there's some in the judge's chambers and a few in the sheriff's office. What're we going to do?"

"Let's see how much of a crowd we get. Where's Jasper?"

"He's gone for a walk," Tuss said very loudly. He drew Gene aside and walked with him behind the Civil War monument. The blond boy followed at a distance. "Jasper's raving fit to tie," Tuss Corey said. "He took one gander at that handsome troop, drove home to get his gun. My one hope is he runs out of gas back on the hill. There's only about two gallons in her and Jasper ain't got a cent. Boy, I've been Jasper's neighbor for forty-odd years and I used to be his brother-in-law. I can tell you that man don't fool around, not once he gets his Irish up. He'll take a stand on that roof and make these bastards think they're in the Indian War way back yonder. He'll mow them down like a covey of ducks before ever they'll get to him. When Jasper Finch gets blood in his eye he don't give a hoot in hell for Communist Party or Jesus Christ. Good shot, too."

"You and John take the Dodge and keep him away from town," Gene said.

"How we going to know which road he took? Man alive. That's not my idea of an easy job, giving me Jasper Finch to handle. Why don't you send Mike?"

"Mike would only make him angrier. You and John wait for him at the head of the bridge and take his gun away if you can't do anything else. Make him turn the car into a ditch if you can't stop him any other way."

"I can't afford to wreck my car. Jasper's driving my car."

"I'll see that you get paid for repairs," Gene said. "You gotta do this, Tuss. After the auction I'll handle him, but now I have to stay with the crowd. You can

see that. It's bad enough having Jasper away. Mike and I have to stay with the farmers and we have to sit right in front of the courtroom and do any talking there is to be done."

"I'll meet him and take his gun away if John will help me, but I ain't turning my own car into a ditch. Where would you get the money to pay for it?"

"Just take his gun away. Mike and I will handle him after he gets to the courtroom."

"What are you going to do inside?"

"Depends on the size of the crowd."

The crowd would not grow. All the old faces collected and the same old cars lined up in Vern Saunders' alley. Not more than three or four of the small homeowners from Demster came. The Willow Run local had about fifty, Pine Hill, less than twenty, all told there were perhaps a hundred. The rest were curious shoppers, paper-mill workers, and town hangers-on. At ten o'clock court opened and the crowd took seats. Some of the troopers were lined around the back, but the majority remained in the jury room and the judge's chambers. They were heavy young men and heavily armed and they were confident and almost genial. From where Gene and Mike sat in the front row they could see the captain, looking over the courtroom through a widely opened door. An arrest could have been made with no difficulty at all. The farmers who did come were too discouraged at their own small numbers to make any effective protest. They watched Gene and Mike and the large number of county officials in front of the bar. None of the farmers said anything. The acoustics carried even the officials' whispered tones

around the room. A janitor talked to the trooper stationed behind the middle aisle and they both laughed softly. Everybody turned to them. The janitor walked out but the trooper continued smiling.

No one among the farmers knew exactly how the proceedings would be conducted. They assumed that Judge Eldon would come, and looked for him at the door. Mike said, "Do we stand up when he comes in?"

"Suit yourself," Gene said. "Makes no difference. All you can do is watch the steam roller now."

The county treasurer came to the bar and began reading a legal notice. Appended to it were a few hastily prepared sentences which warned the citizens of Cayuna County against being taken in by misrepresentations.

"Those delinquents who wish for a last chance to pay up this morning may indicate so as their names are read," said the county treasurer. "Mr. Oberle will read the names."

Mr. Oberle began reading the names. He looked up after each one. There was no one paying up, so he began to read faster and faster. The county treasurer asked Mr. Oberle please to read a little more slowly because it took time to apply the rubber stamp just right. The farmers stayed on and commented about some of the names. Gene counted twenty foreclosures per minute. The reading would last into the afternoon.

He said, "Mike, go out and see that Jasper doesn't get in here. Tie him up and take him to your place if necessary."

Mike went out and Gene sat alone for awhile. With just a few hundred farmers something could have been done, but all he could do now was to watch the steam

roller. He had been through a number of setbacks in the revolutionary movement and a few victories. He knew that this particular setback would not affect his outlook to any great extent. Only, he had worked very hard all along and he had expected more than a hundred farmers. It wasn't so bad with Mike sitting next to him, but now he was alone in the entire first row.

He looked back to see how the rest were sitting. They were scattered around, but mostly their eyes were on him. Sue Melinkovitch came down the aisle and slipped a note into his hand. He wondered how she was getting on at the mill. Mr. Oberle asked for a glass of water.

The note said, "Darling, I'm standing in the lobby, listening to a couple of the troopers and Vern's old bartender. The sergeant said if there's any trouble they would go to work on you first. He described you very accurately. He sounded as though he wanted you to start something. Please don't. Please be very careful. Alma."

Gene sat there for another hour, taking down many of the names for contacts. Then Tuss Corey came in and said he and John Onda had taken Jasper's rifle away at the bridge and Jasper had walked into town to borrow one from Vern or anybody else who would lend it. Mike found them arguing in front of Vern's and said he would lend Jasper his own shotgun. Jasper must really have been out of his head because he consented and they drove to Mike's in John's Chevy and now Mike was holding him there. Tuss Corey said, "If you let me have the Dodge, I'll go over and help Mike. That's a two-man job there."

"Where's Jasper's rifle?"

"Under the back seat of the Dodge."

"You should not have put it there. Stay here and tell the unit organizers to meet me at Mike's tonight. Best thing I can do is to put Jasper back into shape if I can."

He went out, followed by all the eyes. He told Alma to meet him across the bridge, and took John Onda in the car. John showed him the bullets removed from Jasper's gun.

"You suppose Mike tied him up the way you told him to?" Alma said.

"I'm afraid so."

"Did they read his name off while you were still there?"

"Yes."

"You can't hardly blame Jasper," John Onda said. "Still and all, he been in the Party long enough to know better."

They came into the house together but there was no one around. Gene found Anna in the storehouse, grappling with a bag of mash feed.

She dropped it and said, "Go right away into the summer kitchen and see what they're doing. Mike ran in the house and says he's taking that Jasper Finch into the summer kitchen and they're gonna stay there awhile and I shouldn't come near the place. I don't like this funny business. Hurry, run, see what they're doing."

"Were they fighting?"

"They was not. They was just walking very fast together to the summer kitchen and they looked so

funny, I want you should run and see what they're doing."

Gene ran to the summer kitchen. The door was locked and he asked Mike to open it. Inside, Jasper sat looking south down the valley, and without turning around he said, "Are you in on this?"

"Yes," Gene said. "I'm sorry we had to do it. How do you feel about it now?"

"F— yourself," Jasper said. "You didn't lose your farm. F— yourself. Was that your bright idea about tying me up?"

"It was my idea," Gene said. "I see you're not tied up now."

"Tell him to get the hell out of here, Mike. If this guy don't get out of here our arrangement is off."

Mike and Gene went out together. John Onda and Alma were coming around the silo, but Mike motioned them to stay away. He said, "I told him my gun was in the summer kitchen. In there I tried to explain why we made this trick and he came at me with the chair. I had to tie him up. He hollered so much I had to stuff something in his mouth too, but when he promised to shut up I took it out. We had a big argument. First he said we were all yellow. Afterwards he realized that was no leg to stand on and he tried to prove it would have been good tactics for one guy to show fight. He thinks all these Pine Hill people need is a spark like a couple troopers being shot down. Go argue with a bugger like that."

"After awhile."

"You think so? He's half batty. I asked him if he wanted to quit the Party and he says no. I says, Jasper, they'll kick you out the day this gets around to the dis-

trict. Then he started blaming you for the whole works. Said he'd bring you up on charges of sabotage. I figured there was no use arguing so I says Will you promise to stay in this summer kitchen until the sales are over and not to shoot anybody until you bring Gene up before the district committee? He says all right. That's the arrangement he was talking about when he told you to get the hell out. He made me promise we'd all drive in tomorrow or Monday. That means you got to help me all day tomorrow so I can get the pullets in from the field coops and put them in the laying houses. Anna found about a dozen peewees under the hedge and she's chewing at my ear to get those pullets in and this time I can't put it off."

"Is Jasper coming to the meeting tonight?"

"Said he wouldn't," Mike said. "Maybe he'll change his mind. We can do without him. Monday we'll drive in and the district will expel him if they take my advice."

"I'm not so sure they'll have to expel him. Maybe we can talk him out of that trip."

"Yeh, maybe. Look out he don't shoot you."

"I'll have Anna bring you two something to eat," Gene said. "Try talking to him some more."

He met the women on the back porch. John Onda had left. As briefly as he could, Gene explained why Jasper Finch and Mike were out in the summer kitchen and why Anna would have to take their meals there in some pots and pans. Anna swore and chattered in Jewish at Jasper and set some dishes on the table. Alma thought it might be best to leave Gene alone then, let him go off into the barn or around the quickset hedge. But she

wanted very badly to stay with him and went along as he wandered toward the woods. He had found some freak tree there, an elm that had a large branch growing straight out a foot above ground. He could sit on it, leaning against the trunk, resting both feet on the branch. He threw her his lumberjack and she spread it over the mat of dead leaves.

"John is a good man," Gene said.

It was one of those statements she was not expected to answer. Alma sat on the lumberjack and picked at some mushrooms.

In a little while he said, "Mike Ogrodnik is a good man. Jasper's a good man. Hand me a butt."

Through the sparse woods, Mike's pullets were lively white dots in the clover. Around six o'clock they would stop moving and peck wherever they stood. Then they would look like enormous daisies in the distance.

Alma said, "I got a letter from Harold. He wants the address of an abortionist. You think it's for his own girl?"

"I don't know."

"Have you that doctor's address? Somewhere on Lexington Avenue, I think."

Gene fumbled around in his pockets and found the note she had sent him with Sue, and an envelope from the district, and the list of contacts he had jotted down in the courtroom.

"We have to divide these names up at the meeting tonight. Mike and I will have to look up as many of them as we can. We should have known better than to rely on Jasper to do any canvassing. Today he did just

the kind of thing I might have done a couple of years ago."

He said this knowing that Alma had suffered from the let-down of the defeat as much as any of the others. He did not know how she was going to take it. She might begin to mention New York again and he would have to explain how important it was for somebody to gather up the organizational strings at this moment and how impossible to transfer his duties. She might remind him of his promise to stabilize their finances and point out that the likelihood was more remote than ever. Then he would have to generalize about the characteristics of Party work in the present period, the inevitability of a hand-to-mouth existence for any organizer in the field. And before Alma as well as before the others he would have to conceal the let-down he himself felt and make an effort to talk mainly in committee terms: these are the mistakes we made, these are the things we have to do next, will the treasurer please make his report.

He read the note she had sent him in the courtroom. He looked past her to the road where the Hutchins twins were coming home from school, walking side by side in the dresses made from relief-station calico. The last time he had seen those dresses the colors were badly faded and the material was coming apart. Still, it was the delegations that had got even those dresses and the relief for a score of families on Pine Hill and the Willow Run. He searched for a way of telling this to Alma, this and about the great chance the League had won for itself through having the sales postponed for a thousand three-year delinquents. On the basis of today's sales, money for a real campaign could be raised all over the

state. They could recondition John Onda's old Chevy and they had six months in which to make Paul Revere look like an amateur. He searched for some way of making these things clear to Alma.

"We ought to write letters to all these farmers who were sold out today," she said. "A good, strong letter now while the thing is still an issue. I'll write it this afternoon and you can look it over before the others come."

"Would you?" he said. "Would you, darling?"

"Why, does the offer surprise you?"

"No, really it doesn't."

"I'm certain it does."

"You're very nice," Gene said. "I'm very grateful. Much more grateful than you'd think."

AT HER SUNDAY DINNER, MRS. DARVAS HAD now the same seating arrangement that had obtained before Gene moved in, only Dorothy sat in Alma's old place. The marriage had taken place so swiftly that Mrs. Darvas had no opportunity to form a real estimate of her daughter-in-law, and all week she had been trying to like the girl. All week too she had been trying to help the child in adjusting herself. She had refused to allow her to wash dishes or to make her bed, saying, "This is a honeymoon, just do your school homework and forget about the rest." Of course Dorothy insisted on at least wiping the dishes and cleaning her own room. By Sunday Mrs. Darvas realized that these small chores were a godsend to the girl; they gave her something to do in a strange household. No matter how young and simple, Dorothy must have felt very strongly about the circumstances of her marriage, and so far as Mrs. Darvas could see, Harold did little to alleviate matters.

Dorothy was not a wife for Harold. His mother could see that an hour after she had gained her confidence. Had the girl been a little older, a little more intelligent, it would have been easy to assume that she had tricked Harold, and to treat her accordingly. Actually, in Mrs.

Darvas' mind, it was Harold who had wronged Dorothy, and without reflection she took it on herself to expiate the crime. Mr. Schultz too had been cruel to his daughter, and Dorothy seemed to be hungry for affection. Most important of all, she was a very poor girl, astonished at the comforts of Harold's home and embarrassingly grateful. At first she was afraid of Mr. Darvas, who had been mistrustful and gruff for the good reason that he had not been fully informed about the ceremony's puzzling urgency. But on Sunday, gorged with the elaborate dinner, he unbent and teased her about not being able to cook, and said the way to a man's heart, a Hungarian's particularly, was through his stomach, no kidding. Dorothy said she would never be able to cook like Mrs. Darvas, but that she would try to learn.

After dinner Harold and his mother were left alone in the kitchen for a moment. She said, "You haven't talked to your father all week. He's hurt. Why don't you go in and say a few words?"

"I haven't anything to say."

"Sure you have," Mrs. Darvas said. "Ask him about his job. Tell him a little about yours. Talk about politics or the weather. You'll see how much he appreciates it."

"All right."

Dorothy had gone into Alma's room and turned on the radio. Harold blew a great smoke ring.

He said to his mother, "How do you like little Dorothy's taste in music? How do you like little Dorothy as a whole?"

"What do you mean? She's very nice."

"You don't have to humor me. Save that for the old man." He went into the parlor, where Mr. Darvas was

turning the pages of a rotogravure section. "How's the job, Pop?" he asked. "Legs holding up?"

"The work would be easy enough," Mr. Darvas said, "if it wasn't for the hours. It's the hours which are killing my legs. Even boxers and ballplayers will tell you the legs go first. I'm not as young as I used to be."

"We none of us are," Harold said.

"My bones are getting to be a regular barometer. They start the fireworks just a day before it rains. I could bet on it every time."

"How about you and me starting a weather bureau?"

"I will consider it," Mr. Darvas said, happy in Harold's affability. "Right now I think I'll drag this job out a little longer. Change isn't so easy at my age. I might be a grandfather before long."

"Without a doubt," Harold said. "The prattle of young voices again. Not to mention the pitter-patter of tiny feet."

He went into his own room and took a batch of test papers out of his brief case. That made it almost like any other Sunday. Across the street, on the roof, the corner delicatessen man was flying pigeons, and on the next roof some boys were shooting crap. In the alley there was a group of small boys in a card game, and on the street still another group playing stickball. They wore their Sunday suits. Some of them would soon be in his classes at school. Dorothy too was still in his senior class, because, on his mother's advice, she had decided to go on and get her diploma. In the first weeks of pregnancy she had completely neglected school work, but now she was studying very hard to catch up. In history she was really coming along. Harold never did find out definitely if

she had cheated on that Treaty of Utrecht question. Frank Daniels, the suspended kid who had not returned, pulled a hundred on that one.

The test papers made this almost like any other Sunday. Only a little different, he thought, because this Sunday he had the perspective of supporting two families, and maybe a third, for decades to come. He would support people he did not want to support, and this by teaching history that was not history. The Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713. Harold marked papers for most of the afternoon. In the evening he and Dorothy went to the Rivoli Theatre. Besides the feature presentation there was a newsreel, a travelogue and a comedy short.







