

# A Night of Frost

by

Siegfried “Zig” Engelmann

# A NIGHT OF FROST

## PART ONE

### HENNA

Summer's my season. Course that don't mean I sit around all summer like a piece of lawn furniture, because I damned well don't. I'm the cook at Camp Timberline and more than likely I work harder during the summer than you work all year long. But I like the summer. It's nice to look out of my window in the camp's kitchen and see the blue lakes and the yellow meadows, instead of nothing but snow. People who don't know any better are always talking about the New England winter, but you can take it from someone who's lived up here all her life: The only good thing about a New England winter is that it only comes once a year.

Around here, you can always tell when summer is on its way by the way Jay McFarland dresses. When he sheds that old bearskin coat of his and gets out of his drag-ass overalls, you know it won't be long before the campers will be here.

Oh, that McFarland! The gossiping cornballs around here tell a lot of wild stories about him if you give them half a chance, but there's not a word of truth to most of them. One story even has it that McFarland used to be in the movies. That'll give you a rough idea of the kind of purebred gossip that goes through these woods.

Course McFarland is a bit *different*. He reads a lot and uses some fancy words. He don't act in a way that's exactly befitting the caretaker of a camp, either. But he's all right.

Don't get me wrong. I ain't sticking up for him. He's a typical male, which means he's far from perfect. Oh, he might be good looking enough—tall, a little gray, with rippling muscles like a young buck. He might even be a pretty fair carpenter, and lumberman, and even an interesting person to talk to from time to time. But like all men, he's as lazy as a sunburned grasshopper. Just to give you

an example, last August the blower over the ovens went of the fritz. McFarland said he'd get to it the next day. That was better'n nine months ago and the damned thing still ain't fixed. What's more (and I don't want you to think I'm gossiping because everybody knows this for a fact), McFarland's as sterile as a mule. Wouldn't surprise me a bit if that's why he has his moody spells.

He usually don't start getting them until the middle of the summer, when the forests are dry. But this year he's moody already and the camping season hasn't even begun yet. From my window I saw him this morning grinding up the hill in his old Chevy station wagon. He stopped by the Gymnasium, got out and walked to the knoll. That's what he always does when he's moody. Then he just stood there on that knoll, staring off at the spot where the town of Gallitan once stood. That was before the 1949 forest fire that ran though Gallitan like a cluberty horse, killing over a hundred people—some of them McFarland's cronies.

Off hand, it don't make a lot of sense for a man to always be brooding over anything that hurts so much, but I guess there's something about Gallitan that McFarland's never been able to settle with himself, something maybe to do with that Lorrie—that cute little girl that lived with him and Olive after Lorrie's folks were killed in the fire. But that's another story and I damned well ain't got neither the time nor the interest to go into it now.

Anyhow, after McFarland brooded on the knoll for a spell, putting a person in mind of a man looking at the grave of his best hound dog, he got back in his wagon and came grinding up to the kitchen. Out of the wagon he steps, whistling and acting extra jolly and corny. He always tries to cover up that way when he's feeling moody.

He swaggers into the kitchen so chipper it's enough to make you sick at your stomach. "How's my gal today?" he says.

"I'll give you my gal, right over the head with a skillet." Goddamn men always try to charm anyone that's fool enough to feed them. I raised five males, and I ought to know!

I had something to shut McFarland's water off with though. Nancy, she's the camp director, had just called up from Boston, not twenty minutes before. And when she calls it means work for everybody—even McFarland. She'd read off a list of things to do as long as your arm.

Without saying a word, I handed that list to McFarland. You should have seen his face drop.

## JAY

I looked up at Henna and shook my head. The number one item on the list read, “Pick up the circus tent from Barker’s Supply in Northport.”

“Henna,” I said, “what does Nancy mean: the circus tent?”

“I just write them down; I don’t worry about them. And *that’s* just the way she said it. ‘Pick up the circus tent from Barker’s Supply in Northport.’ ”

“It’s probably a small tent that looks like a circus tent. Nancy certainly wouldn’t buy a full-sized circus tent.”

“She wouldn’t, eh? I recall you once saying that she wouldn’t buy *live* seals for the Water Carnival, but you were singing a different tune when you had to drive all the way to New York to pick them up. And what about the time she had the snow party? She didn’t want *real* snow, you said, but ... ”

“All right, I surrender,” I said and began looking at the list again.

Henna said, “Who knows what’s rattling around in that woman’s head? Every time her nose twitches or her period comes a day early, her mind gets to going like a skunk in the thistle patch. But don’t ask me to ponder on the workings of her brain. I just take down what she says—nothing more!”

The list was fairly long—sixteen items in all.

Henna said, “And don’t forget to pick up those four new staff members at the depot. They’ll be in on the 11:15.”

“Yeah. I saw it on the list.”

“Well, I just thought I’d remind you. I know how you sometimes ‘see things on the list.’ ”

I started for the door. “I’m on my way,” I said.

“And when you get back, you damned well better take time to fix my blower! Unless you want to get bopped over the head with a skillet.”

I turned around and winked at her. “Anything I can pick up for you in Northport? Lingerie or anything?”

“I’ll give you lingerie,” she said, reaching for the meat cleaver.

Good old Henna.

I got in the wagon and started up the road, past the empty camp buildings. In four days, the camp would be alive with camp cheers, music, dirty jokes. It would smell of perfume, soap, comic books, fresh sheets, and Henna's cooking. But now, the camp was hibernating in musty silence.

I suppose I love Camp Timberline. You see, I've been caretaker here since it opened. In fact, I helped build it. And Camp Timberline isn't a handful of rough-hewn shacks for outdoorsmen. This camp was designed for girls who are used to the best of everything. They've got it here—32 buildings, in a triangle that spans about 180 acres. At the triangle's apex is the Mainhouse, built from \$22,000 worth of lumber. Down one leg of the triangle are the staff cabins and Nancy's cottage (next to the boat landing). Down the other leg are the campers' cabins—20 of them. Filling in the middle are the Artcraft Building, the Gymnasium (which has a regulation basketball court and a balcony capable of seating over 200 people), my barn, the garage, the stables, tennis courts, and finally the ballpark.

The camp—except for the ballpark—is in the middle of a first-growth, red pine forest with trees six feet through the trunk. And as you come out of the forest you'll see as breathtaking a sight as you can imagine. You'll find yourself on a ridge far above a panorama of ponds and forests—darkened in parts by the shadows of clouds. And on mornings like these, the mist clings to the mountains like a filmy apron. And off in the distance stands Mt. Washington, still wearing a snowcap.

Once the road dips over the ridge, it's downhill all the way to Northport, 60 miles away.

The morning chill had left the air by the time I pulled up in front of Barker's Supply, an army surplus store with hip boots, canteens, parkas, and footlockers on display in the window. I got out of the wagon and stretched. The sun felt good on my shoulders.

I hesitated a moment before going in. I felt embarrassed about asking for a circus tent. Usually, by the end of the summer, nothing bothers me, but I'd been out of practice for the whole winter.

I walked inside, pausing a second while my eyes adjusted to the darkness. A salesman with a pencil over each ear approached me. "What can I do you out of?" he asked.

"Miss Zimmerman's circus tent."

"You taking it with you?"

"I planned to."

"Well, pull your truck around the back and we'll load it there."

"Oh, no! My truck? Just how big is the tent?"

"About 35 feet to the side. Stands 8 feet high. And what a buy! A steal."

I'll bet it was. Knowing Nancy, she probably paid twice what it was worth. But even more disturbing: What did she plan to do with it? Possibly, she wanted to set it up near the swimming area over by the Gymnasium, but Nancy's too travel-minded for anything as sensible as that. I was almost sure she had a circus-tent trip in mind. I hoped I was wrong.

"How much does it weigh?" I asked.

"Four hundred pounds, and when you figure out how *little* it cost Miss Zimmerman per pound—and that's without any stakes or poles—why ..."

"Look," I said, "I'm not driving a truck. Why don't I come back for it tomorrow?"

"Sure. Fine. We'll take good care of you. I don't know why though. If I had any sense I'd never sell a piece of quality merchandise like that tent for the ridiculous price of ..."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow," I said. I half regretted cutting him off, because I was curious about the price and equally curious about the nature of the transaction. Did Nancy buy the tent over the long-distance telephone sight

unseen? But on the other hand, I don't like to hear about Nancy's deals because they grate against my Scottish nature.

"Toodle-loo," the salesman said.

I had to squint in the bright sunlight outside. It was a warm day for June. In fact, it had been an unusually warm spring—a lot like the spring of 1949, the year of the Gallitan blaze.

As I got into the wagon, my mind started down a well-worn groove, reviewing that summer and the events that led to the fire. I'd been over it so many times before that my thoughts were spontaneous, automatically falling into a mechanical sequence. I told myself that I could change nothing by thinking and regretting, but some kind of mental trigger had been pulled and there was no way to stop the process now.

When I arrived at the station, the wagon loaded with canned goods, books, and a few electrical fixtures, the clock on the Northport Courthouse was sounding half past the hour. I was late. Four people were standing on the red brick platform surrounded by their luggage. "Hello," I hollered as I got out of the wagon. "Camp Timberline?"

"Yes."

I ran over to them.

On the whole, they didn't look much like people you'd expect to see working at a girls' camp, but then, we get all kinds up here. A gaunt woman about 40 was standing next to a tall, acne-faced boy who didn't look much older than our Cabin 20 girls (16 years old). Standing next to them was a couple in their mid-twenties. The man had his face twisted in a tight squint. He was dark and slender. The woman was a knockout—as good looking a girl as we've ever had up here. In a way, she reminded me of my wife, Olive, when she was younger.

"I'm Jay McFarland," I said.

"Joey Jones," the acne-faced boy said and extended his hand. "I'm your assistant, or anyhow that's what this Zimmerman said in her letter."



The middle-aged woman stepped forward. "I'm Mary, Joey's mother, the camp nurse."

"Oh, yes," I said knowingly—even though I hadn't been briefed on the group. I never am.

"Ann Milton, swimming counselor." She was beautiful, really all-American, with light brown hair, a lovely figure, and the kind of smile that makes you melt a little.

"And this is my husband, Roy. He's also your assistant."

Roy nodded.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I said.

"No apologies, please, Mr. McFarland," Roy said somewhat sarcastically. "We're up here to relax, not to comply with a timetable."

I don't like to judge people hastily, but over the years I've become pretty good at spotting fellows who'll go stir crazy working for Nancy. I was afraid Roy had all the symptoms.

"You're not in for too much relaxation," I said. "Nancy usually has a pretty tight schedule worked out."

"Swell," Roy said.

Somehow we managed to find a place for everyone's luggage. Joey and his mother sat in the front seat with me while Roy and Ann crowded in back next to the applesauce.

On the way back to camp I told a few jokes. I like to make people laugh, because you're not simply making them laugh *now*. Twenty years from now, when they think back to Camp Timberline and remember some of the good times they had, they'll laugh again. That laugh will stay with them as long as they live, and it's about the only thing that will.

Shortly after we passed the halfway point, Joey said, "Say, Mr. McFarland ..."

"Jay," I said.

"Okay. Say, Jay, what kind of hammer do you use around the camp?"

“Oh, I’ve got ’em all—ball peens, three or four claws, even a couple of sledge hammers.”

“No, you don’t understand. I mean, what brand are they? You know, what make?”

“Well, let’s see. I’ve got two Craftsman and a ...”

“Do you have a Stanley?” Joey’s expression was intense.

“You bet your life I do,” I said, and Joey’s face lit up like Christmas.

“Probably the best hammer I’ve got, now that you mention it. Don’t tell me you’ve got a Stanley, too?”

“Yeah. I mean I’m not wearing it or anything, but I’ve got it with me. It’s in the old steamer trunk.”

In the rear view mirror I could see Roy, shaking his head disgustedly.

Joey’s mother said, “What is Nancy Zimmerman like? From her letters she sounds like a wonderful person.”

“She sure does,” Ann Milton said.

“Well, Nancy takes a little getting used to. One minute she can be as nice a person as you’d ever want to meet and the next minute, she’ll cuss you up one side and down the other.”

“Swell,” Roy said sarcastically.

“But Nancy’s a good Joe,” I said. “She has her moods, but the way I see it: Anyone who’s as dedicated to those girls as she is has to have a lot in common with them.”

Everyone laughed—except Roy.

We talked some more about Nancy, about the camp and the trips that were coming up. Almost before we knew it, we were at the Camp Timberline turnoff, a gravel road that joins Route 7 about four miles from the camp. We started up the grade, into the red pine forest. The wagon was straining and Joey was talking about their train ride up here. In the rearview mirror I could see Roy rolling down his window. At first it didn’t register, but suddenly I realized that he was going to flip a cigarette butt out—out into the red pine forest.

Before I could holler it was done. For an instant I froze at the wheel, my mind numb. Then I slammed on the brakes, pulled the emergency, and while the wagon was still skidding, spraying gravel across the road, I jumped out and ran into the brush.

Crawling between the trees, on a soft carpet of pine needles, I began to sweat. Then like the fading sounds of church bells on a crisp winter night, I heard Terry O'Rourke's voice. "Jay," he was saying. "Jay!" I was back in 1949.

We were on the Gallitan River, on a fireboat. Terry's voice was barely audible above the roar of the fire that towered over the north bank of the river. "Jay! Let's get out of here. We can't do any good here!"

I was so scared, all I could do was shake my head. The fireboat had five hoses, four trained on the fire and one on the boat to keep it from igniting like a Roman candle.

"Jay! The fire's going to jump the river! We've got to warn those people in Gallitan!" Gallitan was on the other side of the mountain.

"It won't jump," I said weakly.

"It will! Let's take a skiff down to the sawmill. We can take the back trail and warn them! Jay! Let's go."

"It won't jump."

A few minutes later (or was it an hour?) the fire jumped. I watched it with fixated horror. Without any warning, acres of trees burst into flames. The heat was unbearable. The heat!

I was sweating harder now. Then, I saw a curl of smoke—innocent blue smoke—rising from the ground. I scrambled forward and snatched the cigarette butt from the pine needles, where it had burned a small black ring.

After I stamped out all traces of fire, I carried the cigarette butt back to the road. My tension was turning into anger. I threw the butt on the road, ground it into the gravel with my heel and then turned to Roy, who was standing by the wagon with the others.

“Don’t ever do that again!” I took a couple of quick breaths. “Once a fire gets started around here, there’s no way—*no way*—to stop it.”

My anger faded almost as soon as the words were out, and I was ashamed of myself. In a much more civilized tone I said, “I know you did it out of habit, but it’s not like the city up here, Roy. It wasn’t your fault. I should have warned you about it before we left Northport. But please, don’t ever do it again.”

Roy looked down at his feet. “Don’t you think it’s a bit early in the season for forest fires?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to test it.”

“Well, tell me, Mr. McFarland, just what was I *supposed* to do? Field strip the cigarette and allow tobacco to blow all over the car?”

“No. You could have used the ashtray. Grind it out on the floor if you have to. But damn it, don’t throw it out the window.”

“Swell.”

Nobody said much the rest of the way to camp. I tried a couple of times, but it was forced, phony. When we got to camp, I assigned cabins to my passengers. Joey was to room with the tennis counselor. I gave Roy and Ann a cabin pretty far back in the woods so they’d have some privacy. Those campers can get pretty nosey. Joey’s mother was to have a room next to her office in the Mainhouse.

After we’d unloaded the baggage, I told Roy and Joey that I wanted to see them in the barn in an hour. Then I went to the kitchen for a drink of water. Actually, I was craving for something else—a quadruple shot of the strongest whiskey I could find. But I’m like an Indian; I can’t hold my liquor. That’s why I never drink anything stronger than beer—two beers.

I was still pretty shaken about the cigarette incident, so I went to the garage where I wouldn’t have to talk to anyone. I had some heavy thinking to do before Roy and Joey came down. I was worried about Roy.

## ROY

When I arrived at the barn an hour later, punctual McFarland was nowhere in sight; however, Joey was present—much to my complete delight. He was standing in awe, examining the various tools, which were hanging on the wall with military orderliness. He lightly fingered a carpenter’s square (as one might thrill to the touch of a mink coat) and said, “Did you bring any tools with you?”

I shook my head. Actually, I was tempted to say, “Oh, yes! I have the most divine hammer you’ve ever seen!”

“I did,” he said. “A Stanley hammer.”

“Swell.”

“It’s got nice balance. You know, you can really haul off with the son-of-a-bitch.”

“Swell.”

About that time, footsteps sounded outside the barn and in swaggered McFarland, the Arthur Godfrey of New England, carrying three pipe wrenches. He slid them across his workbench, lit his pipe, and looked at me sheepishly. “Roy,” he said, “I’m sorry I jumped on you about the cigarette. I’m afraid I’m irrational when it comes to forest fires.”

The understatement of the year.

“Where do you go to school, Roy?” he asked.

“University of Michigan—graduate school.”

“Oh, good school. What are you taking up?”

“Philosophy,” I said wearily. This conversation was something short of intense stimulation.

“Say, that’s all right.” Smilingly, he put his hand on my shoulder. “We haven’t had a philosopher up here in eight years,” he said. “Most of the boys never come back—one summer’s enough for them. But,” he took his hand from my shoulder and tamped the tobacco in his pipe, “it’s a nice arrangement—at least for me. I read a lot during the winter, and I always like to talk about things

with my new assistants. One summer it might be electronics, and the next—psychology maybe.”

“Swell,” I said.

“Say, who’s your favorite philosopher?”

“David Hume,” I said flatly, musing to myself over McFarland’s crude overtures of friendship.

“Oh, yes, Hume,” he said, “the man who tried to deduce a theory of epistemology from Newton’s laws of motion.” Then, to my complete amazement McFarland quoted the summary paragraphs of Hume’s Enquiry, concluding with those famous lines, “ ‘... Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.’ ”

I didn’t know quite how to react. Perhaps, I thought, I had misjudged our idyllic friend. However, before I had a chance to seriously consider this possibility, McFarland said, “We’ll have to get together and talk philosophy some evening. But right now, we’ve got work to do.” Without the slightest transition, McFarland had once more assumed his Foreman Role. “We’ll start by getting the swimming area in shape.”

Thus began Operation Frogman. After our briefing, we slipped into our swimming trunks and rode in an Army truck, down a rock-strewn road to the beach. Lake Timberline is one of those dark blue lakes fringed with tall pines. I’ll have to admit that when I saw it for the first time, I was mildly impressed. However, we had little time for aesthetics. There Was Work To Be Done.

On our first Mission (checking over the rafts and launching them) I strained my back, naturally. But The Work continued. As the rafts bobbed merrily in deep water, we assembled the pier, bolted on the diving board, and strung the buoys.

Now came what was perhaps the high point of the day’s activity. While Joey and I policed the beach with rakes, McFarland demonstrated his ability with an ax by chopping down two large, white-barked poplars growing along the edge

of the woods. Huge chips flew through the air and Joey looked on with open mouth.

I was completely exhausted by now, but the work continued for what seemed like hours. Finally, McFarland mopped his brow with his red handkerchief, surveyed the beach with apparent pride, and said, "Let's load up the tools and go for a dip." A good job well done.

I helped load the tools, but declined in the dip department. Instead, I sat in the cab of the truck, wincing as my sacroiliac throbbed, and dully watched that carefree duo of McFarland and Jones splash and giggle in the water.

I began to seriously wonder why I'd ever consented to a fiasco such as summer at Camp Timberline. Perhaps my doubts were premature, but from all indications, Camp Timberline had quite a bit in common with the Army. McFarland obviously had a case of top-sergeant fever; Joey strongly resembled a wide-eyed rookie; and even the camp itself conveyed an air of ancient Sparta.

I felt confident that I could cope with the situation, because, after all, I'd had two years of intensive training in Uncle Sam's Peacetime Signal Corps. Despite my splendid credentials, however, I felt that Camp Timberline represented a waste of time.

The whole thing had been Ann's idea. Through some kind of enigmatical, feminine logic, she had concluded that a summer in New England, close to Nature, would heal every wound from which our marriage suffered. Once she'd established this premise, she pressured and cajoled until I capitulated—unfortunately. Although I had intended to take several summer courses, I bowed to the Good of our Marriage.

Joey and Jay emerged from the lake with undaunted spirits. Like a pair of high school sophomores, they chased each other across the beach and frolicked around the truck. They finally got in. "Boy, am I hungry," Joey said out of breath, dripping water on me. "I mean, *really* hungry."

"Henna'll fix that up in a hurry," Jay said. "She'll have something good waiting for us."

With that the truck lunged forward—jolting my sacroiliac—and we pounded up the road.

Henna “fixed us up” with pork chops. Dinner was served in an ante dining room adjoining the main dining room. We of the Frogman Detail were joined by Ann, Joey’s mother, the stable boy (who looked uncomfortable in shoes), Henna, and Lulu (the camp’s personal secretary). During dinner, Henna bitched, Jay told terrible jokes, and Joey laughed.

Ann remained after dinner to coffee-klatch with the other women while I hobbled off to our cabin, a small but 100% rustic affair. I had just lain down on one of our *twin beds* when Joey and Jay started playing horseshoes not fifty feet from the cabin. Ringa-ring-a-ring-a-ring (that was Jay throwing). *Thud* (that was Joey).

When they were on their fifth or sixth game (all of which were won by Guess Who) the screen door opened with a twang, and there stood Ann, silhouetted in the doorway. “Have you come to watch the all-night horseshoe marathon?” I asked.

She didn’t answer.

I said, “Yes, this is the life.” I waved my arm weakly. “The Great Outdoors. You can’t imagine how glad I am that I consented to come up here. Where else could one find a person as talented as Mr. McFarland? He tells jokes; he swims like an aquanaut, swings an ax like Paul Bunyan, and he’s even read David Hume. Of course, he might be a little psychotic, but let’s not quibble about trivialities.”

“Roy, please lower your voice. They can hear us.”

“Swell.”

She sat down next to me and the bedsprings emitted a rebellious cry. I calculated that on a quiet night, activity of a more conjugal nature would be audible on the other side of Lake Timberline. Ann said, “Roy, I know this is an unsophisticated question, but what happened to us?” Her voice was more husky than usual. “I’ve tried, Roy, honestly I have. But I can’t take much more of your



sarcasm. Remember what you said when we were engaged—that you never wanted to become like your folks? You wanted tranquility and compatibility, remember?”

Yes, I remembered. However, somehow, things had changed.

She said, “It makes me sick to think that our marriage is a failure, but that’s what it is—a flop. We quarrel more than your folks do.”

“Not now, please. I’m tired. I’m trying to relax.”

“You’ve always got some excuse, but believe me, we won’t be talking about *this* or anything else, if things don’t change.”

“Swell.”

“I mean it. You’ve got to learn that people aren’t perfect. You’ve got to accept them for what they are. You can’t expect me to stay with you if you continue treating me like a—a stupid housemaid. And it’s not only me; you look down your nose at *everybody*.”

“I take exception to that statement. You’ve *never* heard me say anything caustic about those two delightful morons playing horseshoes outside our window.”

“That’s just what I’m talking about: your damned smugness! Why don’t you give people half a chance? Maybe you’d even learn to like them—if that’s *possible!*”

“Perhaps you’re right. Now that you mention it, I see where Joey and I have a lot in common.”

“Oh, stop it! You’re always ready to condemn, even you don’t know *what* you’re condemning. What do you know about Joey?”

“That he’s a (pardon the expression) moron. Excuse me: That he’s a jovial teenager with a Stanley hammer and a quaint, but underdeveloped intellect. In short, I know all I need to know.”

“Do you? Is he a moron or is he simply a normal, healthy boy who’s father died last fall? Is he jovial or is he simply trying to adjust to a frightening situation? Is he dull or is he searching for something that’s been taken from him?”

I had never heard Ann speak so eloquently.

She continued, “If you weren’t so busy judging people, you might have time to find out something about them.”

“A shrewd observation.”

She stared at me with glazed eyes, then got up from the bunk, fetched her diary (her only real confidant) from the dresser and marched outside. She scrupulously tries to keep her diary from me because I once read it and made a few frank observations.

Even before the screen door slammed behind her, I wanted to apologize for being so derisive. Strange as it may seem, I love Ann. However, I seem to tighten up and become defensive in her presence. Perhaps because she challenges something in my nature—backs me into a corner. Many times, I know she’s right, but I don’t care to hear her observations—if that makes any sense.

Even if I had tried to apologize to her, the words would most probably have stuck in my throat. But I was honestly sorry.

Confronted with this overwhelming evidence, Rational Man would conclude that I am a little neurotic myself; however, I don’t *feel* neurotic.

Nevertheless, I did feel something as I lay there (aside from my sacroiliac and my regrets). I felt a slight pang of sympathy for Joey and found myself pulling for him to throw at least *one* ringer.

## JOEY

Boy, that's the way to sleep nights—I mean, work up a sweat down at the beach, thrash around in that icy water until your joint turns blue, really bloat up the old gut with pork chops, and then top the day off by losing about 69 straight games of horseshoes. Boy, this was the life.

And the next thing I know, it's morning and here I am in my cabin, all doubled up like a rotten fetus under a dozen of these scratchy blankets, with somebody shaking the hell out of me. It's Jay. I didn't exactly respond to the shaking treatment, so he starts tickling me, and I broke up all over the place. That's living: have a good laugh while your mouth still tastes like a baboon took a dump in it and your eyes are all plastered shut with this goo.

So out of the covers I come and ZOUNDS, was that air cold. An icy blast hit me and almost froze me solid. I started putting on my clothes (which were about twice as cold as the air) but I was chattering and clanking around so much I could hardly button my goddamn pants. And my breath was steaming away so much I couldn't even see what I was doing. I'm not exaggerating; it was *really* cold.

Anyhow, I finally got dressed and we took off down the road to the Mainhouse, me with the good old Stanley hammer on my belt and Jay in these baggy overalls with the great huge pin stripe. I'll betcha anything that if you'd have seen us streaking down the road like that, you would have thought we'd lived up here all our lives—I mean *both* of us.

We had a mammoth breakfast, I mean all the ham and eggs and stuff you could eat. Then Roy and Jay and I went to Northport to pick up some circus tent. Boy, this Roy really kills me. I mean he might be a good guy and everything, but he doesn't exactly bend over backwards trying to be sociable. We took the red truck to Northport and Roy sat next to me, but I'll bet he didn't say nine words during the whole damn trip. Most of the time he slept. The rest of the time he was either yawning or fiddling around with the zipper on his jacket. Oh, he'd let out a

“swell,” once in a while and, if you played your cards right, he might even break down and say something like, “You don’t say,” or “How about that?”

And talk about somebody who’s all thumbs! Man, you should have seen him trying to help load this circus tent into the truck. In fact, you should have seen the circus tent. It was in the back of this store all rolled up in this real loose ball that would just sort of slosh around when you tried to move it. The damn thing smelled like last year’s leftovers. And was it *heavy*. I was going to be the big hero, so I got a good grip on it, gritted my teeth like mad, and pulled for everything I was worth. It didn’t even budge and all I had to show for my effort was a double herney and a mouthful of chipped teeth.

But Roy really took the cake. He didn’t even pretend to work. He sat on this bag of grass seed and watched. The store operator wasn’t much better. He didn’t help either, but he was always ready with suggestions. He was one of these say-fellows-why-don’t-you-try-this-or-that bastards. He and Roy really made a pair.

It was lunchtime when we finally got back to camp. With all the help Jay and I got, it’s a wonder we got back at all. We pulled up to the barn and left that maggoty tent in the truck while we headed for the training table. We were just outside the Mainhouse when all at once this blood-clotting voice comes booming from the dining room, just screaming to beat hell. I mean, what goddamn volume. You could actually see the windows vibrating.

Boy, I didn’t know what the hell to think. I followed Jay inside and right away I could see who’s making all the noise. I’d never seen her before. She was a real fat bitch—pretty young looking, except for her gray hair, but what a lard bucket. And could she yell.

Everyone else—Ann, Lulu, and the rest of them—are just sitting around the table like statues or something—I mean even Henna isn’t saying anything. You know, it looked like they had just started eating when in pops lardass, with her voice in overdrive.

Man, I just stood there with my mouth open. I mean, what an eerie experience. This fat bitch gives us the fast once over and inhales about 12 cubic yards of air. “Henna!” she screams. “How many times do I have to tell you to follow the menu? I paid a dietician a pretty sum to prepare it and I expect it to be followed!”

“I *do* follow it. Last night was different. The camp season hasn’t started yet and I didn’t see any harm....”

“I have nothing against pork chops, nothing at all. They’re on the menu sometime in August, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” Henna said.

“But they are *not* on the menu for June 26! Yesterday was a macaroni day!”

“You can’t serve the men macaroni. They work hard. They need meat and potatoes.”

That seemed to calm fatso down a little bit. She stood there munching on her lower lip for a while. Then all at once she wheels around and blasts off at Jay. “JAY,” she says and wets him down with about ten ounces of spit. “Why isn’t my cottage cleaned? The dust must be an inch thick! The shutters are still on the windows and—no electricity!” You should have heard her spray out the word “electricity.” Jay was drenched.

“It’ll be done,” Jay said. “I didn’t know you’d be up here today.”

“Well, obviously I am here! Greeted with a filthy cottage.”

I’d been so engrossed watching this human flit-gun at work that I’d sort of forgot about everything else. But now, when I looked around the room, I noticed that she and I were the only ones standing. Everyone else was sitting. Hell, Roy was half asleep by now. I felt conspicuous as—I don’t know what, but wouldn’t you know it? There were no more chairs. At first I didn’t know what to do, but then I remembered that there’s all kinds of chairs on this porch next to the dining room. So while there’s a lull in the tirade, I slipped out there and picked out a handsome red-spoked job. I was tiptoeing back with it—I mean I barely had my

foot back in the door—when this Nancy yanks the chair out of my hand and says, “Thank you! At least there’s *one* gentleman present!”

With that she sits down and here I am standing in the doorway trying to look like a goddamn gentleman. Was I embarrassed. My ears felt like a couple of heat lamps or something. I mean, I could have gone back for another chair, but if I did, it wouldn’t take any goddamn Einstein to figure out that I was no gentleman, and that I only brought the first chair out for my own blinkering comfort. So I just stood there, shifting and shuffling around like some kind of fink.

After Nancy settles herself down in *my* goddamn chair, she says, “Jay, how do you think it makes me feel to come all the way up here and then not even have a place to lie down?”

Get this. All the time she was talking to Jay, she was staring right at *me*, I mean really boring them in there, and I was starting to feel strange, you know, like my barn door was open. I’ve talked to cross-eyed people that you couldn’t tell if they were looking at you or something 90 degrees away, but this was different because Nancy was staring at me with *both* eyes. I tried to be casual about it, but something like that can get you after a while.

“Have you made poles and stakes for the circus tent yet?”

She was *still* looking at me. Wow, what kind of habit was this—look right square at one guy and talk to someone else? I mean, I *suppose* she was talking to Jay. I hope so, because I sure didn’t know anything about poles and stakes.

Jay said, “We’ll have it ready by the time the girls get here.”

Then without any goddamn warning or anything, Nancy stands up and shoots her hand out at me like a bolt. “I’m Nancy Zimmerman,” she says. Nancy was pointing her hand right at me, but for all I knew, she wanted to shake hands with some bastard in the other room.

“Pleased to meetcha,” I said and sort of gingerly shook hands.

“I just can’t get over it!” she said. “The condition of that cottage!! The lawn’s not even mown!”

“Nancy,” Jay said, “there are only so many hours in the day.”

Then without any warning, Nancy gets this glassy-eyed grimace on her face, busts out bawling and streaks outside with her lardass quivering and her handkerchief up to her face. And there goes Lulu, hot on her trail. What a sight—scrawny old Lulu chasing this mammoth bitch full tilt down the road. That would have made a nice photograph. You know, real human interest.

No sooner are they out of sight than Henna hits the fan and storms into the kitchen, cussing a blue streak.

Now there were empty chairs all over the goddamn place. I sat down next to Roy and he looked at me with his old deadpan and said, “Charming person, Miss Zimmerman.”

I almost broke out laughing. You know, this Roy is funny without knowing it. He thinks he’s pretty suave and all, but sometimes he’s a riot.

Jay said, “Nancy has moods once in a while, just like everybody else. You’ve got to remember, this camp means a lot to her and she puts her whole heart into it.”

“I agree,” Roy said. “Everyone should have a little ‘mood’ like that once in a while. I think we should adopt it on a national scale.”

Ann gave him a real—I mean real—simpering look. She had a point all right. I mean, right then, Nancy probably wouldn’t have pulled a half vote in a popularity contest, but why make matters worse?

“Nancy’s no angel,” Jay said. “But about ten minutes from now, she’ll come around apologizing to everyone. And she’ll be very sincere and humble about it. So let’s just forget about it and dig in before the food gets cold.”

I sure hoped Jay was right. Working for someone who acts like that *all* the time could turn you into a blithering idiot. I mean it would demoralize the living hell out of you.

Nancy didn’t apologize ten minutes later. Four hours would be more like it. Right after lunch we went to her cottage and all the time we were whipping it into shape, she was out on the lawn—sunbathing in this reclining chair but she wasn’t apologizing. She wasn’t doing much of anything except breathing. You should

have seen her, wearing this orange and white two-piece outfit that was so small she must have greased her legs to get the shorts on. Boy, did she look disgusting—big mammoth rolls of fat cascading all over the place and a double bolt of cotton wedged in each eye socket. And this Lulu, all over her like a leech, rubbing oil over every square yard of Nancy, and pouring great volumes of lemonade.

But anyhow, Nancy didn't apologize. So when we were finished in the cottage, we went back to the circus tent. We drove it up to the ballpark, rolled it off the truck and *cathud*—it made a crater in the ground about a foot deep. Was that damn thing heavy!

Then we unfolded it, and if you ever wanted to go on a puking spree you should have seen it. Man! In the first place, it looked like it had cancer or something, with these big splotches all over it, you know, sort of Guadalcanal green. And this cancer, or whatever it was, had weakened all the stitching so much that the first time a mile-an-hour breeze would come along, *whoopee*, no more tent, just great slabs of canvas laying all over a nine-acre field.

But that wasn't the worst of it. The blinking thing had an odor like three decades in Okefenokee swamp. I mean it was real bad, but I couldn't leave well enough alone, so I start picking at one of these green blotches and the first thing you know here comes this terrific stink wafting out and almost decomposing my T-shirt.

Jay rubbed his chin and said, "Well, the canvas is all right. We'll have to patch it in a couple of places; with some scraping and disinfectant we'll be able to get rid of the mold. But the big job is going to be restitching every seam."

I was still recuperating from that horrible smell.

Well, anyhow, we were talking the situation over, when Nancy comes up the road in her orange and white outfit. Maybe I shouldn't say we were talking the situation over, because Roy was just sitting there holding his nose. Nancy cruised over to this backstop deal next to the tennis courts. Then she whips out her tennis racket and tries to make everybody sick by banging the ball against



the backstop. She looked so ridiculous, I won't even comment about it. But it kinda reminded me of the biggest, fattest slob I ever saw in my life sloshing around trying to belt a ball with a tennis racket.

When she's all pooped and the old sweat was pouring off her—by the gallon—she clomps across the field toward us and stands there watching.

"Needs quite a bit of repair," Jay said, and pointed at the tent. "I don't think we'll have it ready for a couple of weeks. By the way, what are you going to do with it?"

"I'm not sure," Nancy said. "I hope to use it on our Mystery Trip."

"Where's it going to be this year?"

"Jay, I can't say, with any degree of certainty. I have a place in mind, but I'd like to discuss it with Dr. Bernstein before making my final decision."

"Maybe I can help," Jay said, sort of eagerly. "I know a lot of good safe places."

"Thank you, but I'd rather not discuss it yet. Fix the tent, and if we don't use it this year, we'll use it next."

She scratched her nose with the end of the tennis racket. Then she said, "I'm sorry I acted as I did in the Mainhouse. I didn't mean to offend anyone, and ..."

"Forget it, Nancy," Jay said. "We understand."

"Yeah," I said. "I mean, what the heck."

Nancy bored her eyes into me for a few hours and then turned to Roy. "What about you?" she said. "Do you understand, too?"

"Sure," he said. He wasn't convincing. "My paycheck's the same size regardless."

Nancy gave it everything she had and forced out this little puny smile. "We believe in freedom of expression up here. And the only way to set the proper example for the campers is to allow everybody to vent his emotions—speak his mind."

“Yes,” Jay said, “except I want you fellows to remember: No swearing around the campers. Right, Nancy?”

“That’s right. We must remember at all times that our only reason for being here is to serve the girls and insure that Camp Timberline is an Experience, not simply a place.”

“Swell,” Roy said.

Nancy apologized seven or eight more times and then left. As soon as she was gone, Jay said, “Nancy wasn’t kidding about making Camp Timberline an experience. It costs plenty to send a girl up here, and believe me, she gets her money’s worth. She goes on at least five trips—to Canada, to Mt. Washington, to Bar Harbor, down Fir Creek. The girls in cabin twenty—the sixteen-year-olds, also go on a mystery trip. It’s our job to see that everything is taken care of. We’re all in for a busy summer, so be prepared. Because the moment those girls hit camp, all hell is going to break loose, and it won’t stop until they go home.”

“Swell,” Roy said.

## JAY

A little after 6 a.m., we drove past the circus tent, which was still airing in the ballpark. We hadn't had a chance to work on it since that first day, and here it was time to pick up the girls in Northport. The day was cold and gray with a strong wind blowing from the north. I was leading the caravan in the red truck; behind me were Joey in the green truck, the camp wagons, and anything else we could find with wheels.

I was looking forward to seeing the campers again. Oh, I knew we were in for bickering, mischief, and tears. But we were also in for that special charm the campers have—the feeling that life is fun and love is natural. I'm no sentimental slob about childhood, and even if I were, this foul-talking bunch of hellers would cure me in a hurry. Just the same, I love them—especially the older girls. I've know them since they were snotty nine-year-olds, and I've seen them grow up and blossom into attractive young ladies. They might be spoiled brats, but I can't help myself. I'm crazy about them.

The 7:45 came into the Northport depot with heads and arms hanging out of the windows, with the Camp Timberline Fight Song sounding from hoarse (and sometimes off-key) voices. I felt sorry for the other passengers. The train wheezed to a halt and out the campers came, sweeping passengers and conductors out of their way. They swarmed around us in a huge circle and chanted,

*Traveling through the mountains,  
Traveling east and west  
We're traveling through the summer  
With the friends we love the best.  
Truck-em up; Truck-em up! Yeah, Jay!*

Most of the girls were decked out in their flashiest outfits—high heels, necklaces, rakish hats. As usual, some of the nine-year-olds hadn't heard about the tradition and wore the typical camping outfits—berets, shorts, and moccasins. One poor kid had a canteen strapped on her belt.

We divided the kids into groups, counted noses, loaded the luggage on the green truck, counted noses, packed everyone into the vehicles, counted noses, and then spent ten minutes searching for Ethel Liebstraum who was finally located in the women's room.

Now we were ready to leave. The campers sang "Summer's Ahead My Boys" (to the tune of "Anchors Aweigh"), and a handful of people on the station platform stared at us with dull curiosity.

Dot Cohen and Torry Menz, two of the cabin twenty girls, rode in the cab of the red truck with me. As we pulled out I turned to them and said, "Well, here we go."

Torry, who was sitting in the middle, said, "Oh, Jay, watch out for my crinoline! You're crumpling the hell out of it."

Dot said, "Jay, do you have a cigarette? I'm all out."

The summer had started.

On the way back to camp while the girls in back sang camp songs, my two sophisticated friends compared boyfriends and very intelligently discussed the merits of several cigarette brands, agreeing that Winston was best, Kent was safest, and if you wanted to smoke, and at the same time save the money you'll need for cancer treatment, Raleigh's premium plan was hard to beat. They started giggling over that one. Dot, with tears in her eyes, said, "I can just see that on TV. A man shriveled up with cancer, and these X-ray pictures all over the room. 'If we didn't smoke Raleighs ... ' Oh, that's too much!"

Nancy greeted us back at camp with a short speech, a prayer and the promise of double desserts for a week. Dot turned to Torry and said, "Big deal."

After lunch, the boys and I distributed luggage to the various cabins. We'd just unloaded the last of it, when Dilly Golden and her buddies in cabin eleven reported that their screen door had mysteriously fallen from its hinges. "We were just having a little fun, chasing each other in and out of the cabin," Dilly said, "when it happened. Must have been termites, I guess."

Termites in high heels. It turned out that the screen was ruptured and chunks of the doorframe were still clinging to the hinges. After we fixed the door, I told the termites to be a little more careful.

We then went back to the barn and were met by about a dozen girls who had lost their keys and couldn't get in their trunks. Naturally, Dot Cohen was among them. Some of the younger girls were crying, but Dot acted pretty indifferent. After we'd taken care of the other girls, I turned to Dot's trunk, which was built like a tank. "Can't you wait until your folks can send another key?" I asked. I was sure that Dot had another trunk because she was now wearing shorts and a white blouse—the standard Camp Timberline uniform.

"No. My swimming stuff's in there and I need it now."

Although the sun had come out, it was still a fairly chilly day. "Dot, you won't go swimming. And do you realize that the only way I can get that trunk open is saw the hinges off? I won't be able to pick that lock, like you saw me do with some of the others."

"Well, I don't care. I want to go swimming."

No use arguing, so I went to work with the hacksaw. I used five blades in all. After I cut through the last hinge, Dot bent over and I noticed a string around her neck. "What's that?" I asked.

She pulled the end of the string from beneath her blouse, stared at it and exclaimed, "My key!"

"So you want to go swimming," I said and picked her up. I slung her over my shoulder and carried her across to the men's shower room in the back of the garage. I turned on a shower and let the water run as cold as it would get. Then I put Dot in it.

She came out sputtering. "Jay, I *hate* you."

"How do you think your parents will feel when they find out what you've done? That trunk cost them a lot of money."

"Oh, who cares, anyhow! I've got half a mind to tell Nancy on you." I knew she would in either case, so I winked at her.

She said, “I hate you, Jay!” and ran toward cabin twenty.

Some of the other girls were peeking out from behind trees, tittering to themselves.

I went back inside the barn and began straightening up. Everything was peaceful now. In the distance I could hear the camp motorboat. The barn was a mess. I was sweeping the floor when a voice said, “Can you fix my locket?”

An older camper was standing in the doorway, the sun catching strands of her dark hair and turning them into gold. She was tall, and attractive, but there was something about her that vaguely disturbed me.

I stared at her, and as I did, a strange, surrealistic feeling took hold of me. I felt as if I were in a dream—a play I knew by heart. I could almost sense what would happen next, and it was frightening. Something too slippery to grasp was hiding just beneath my consciousness—something about that girl.

Suddenly, I knew what it was. That girl looked enough like my Lorrie to be her twin. Lorrie—older now, but still the same eyes and crooked little smile, the same dark hair. My Lorrie—who I hadn’t seen since they took her from me five years ago.

“She’s not your Lorrie, and stop thinking about it,” I told myself, but already some emotions that had been hibernating for five years began to awake and rumble.

“What’s your name?” I asked, avoiding her eyes. “I don’t remember seeing you around before.”

“Sue Fernbild, and I remember you.” She smiled. “You took me canoeing down by the dam. Don’t you remember? That was two years ago. I wasn’t here last year.”

“Oh yeah, I remember.” I didn’t though. I’d never seen her before—not if her name was Sue Fernbild. “What cabin are you in now?”

“Cabin twenty.” She handed me the locket. “It’s a picture of my boyfriend. He’s a jerk, but he’s stinking rich. He goes to Cornell. I don’t even know why I want his cheesy old locket fixed. He bores me.”

She reached for the locket. “Wait a minute,” I said. “I’ll have it fixed in a couple of minutes.”

“No, I changed my mind,” she said. “I don’t want it fixed. Give it back to me.”

I did, and she threw it into the scrap box. “What do I want with his cheap old locket anyhow?”

She smiled from the doorway and ran outside. I turned around slowly, pressing my palms against my temples. How much she reminded me of my Lorrie—the only daughter I’d ever have. Lorrie. I recalled the first time I brought her home, shortly after her parents were killed in the Gallitan fire. I introduced her to Olive and said, “You’re going to live with us now.”

She frowned sternly and said, “You can’t make me!”

But she stayed, and she was happy. Six years later, after she was a part of the family, a part of me, an aunt in Chicago took her away. We hadn’t adopted her, but everyone knew she was ours. We’d loved her and cared for her for six years. Our reward was a stinking lawsuit. God!

Almost mechanically, I fished her locket from the scrap box and opened it. Inside was a picture of a smiling young man with close-cropped hair. Facing it was a picture of Sue. I slipped it out and put it in my wallet. Then, still holding the locket, I went to the doorway. I looked out and saw Sue talking to Dot in front of cabin twenty. I try to be rational—try like hell—but right then I had a strong, frightening feeling about Sue. She was so much like Lorrie, I was having trouble maintaining proper perspective.

## DOT

I was sitting on the front steps of the cabin, drying my hair when Sue walked up. I wasn't in a talkative mood. My hair was an absolute mess and I was really mad at that Jay. I was going to tell Nancy on him.

"What happened to you?" Sue said, so I told her. She laughed.

"Jay's funny," she said. "I was just in the barn, and the way he was staring at me I thought he was going to rape me."

"Oh, Sue, you're not even funny."

She shrugged.

Torry came through the screen door right then, chewing gum, as usual. She loves to chew gum. "Jay's cute," she said.

"Oh, hardly," I said. "That new boy, Joey, he's sort of cute."

Torry pretended like she was gagging on something. Then she said, "You can have him. I'll take Jay."

Sue said, "I have no intention of entering this discussion, because I'm not particularly wild about *either* of them. But personally, I think Jay's a little strange."

"He's got problems," Torry said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Torry said, "This is really confidential, and I shouldn't be telling you. But I know for a fact that his wife is going to divorce him."

"No!"

"Yes! I heard her talking to Henna last year when she came to pick the laundry up. She told Henna that unless Jay moved to the big city with her, she was going to leave him."

"Stop making it up," I said. Torry can tell some whoppers sometimes.

"No, honest, that's the truth. She says she goes crazy up here every winter with nothing to do."

"Who wouldn't," Sue said. "Besides, Jay's not able to sex. I know that's the truth because I heard it from Nancy."



“You’ve got it all mixed up,” Torry said. “He can sex all he wants to. He just can’t have babies. He’s impotent.”

“Oh, I thought he couldn’t sex,” Sue said.

Torry stretched. “Well,” she said, “I’m going to the gym. Anyone want to come along?”

“Hardly,” Sue said. I didn’t want to go, either.

After Torry left, the gang started laughing it up in the cabin. Sue and I went in to see what the joke was.

Somebody had found a whole stack of letters in Torry’s trunk. They were from her boyfriend, who goes to some boarding school in Connecticut.

Everybody was reading them. “Listen to this one,” Redgy said. “It’s so sloppy it’ll give you goose pimples.” Then she started reading. It started out, “Having been so close, my beloved, it is pure torture away from you.” After that it got pretty raw. He didn’t sound like a very nice fellow. But everybody laughed.

We were making a lot of noise, I guess. We didn’t even hear Flick come in. (She’s our counselor—and she’s the best one in the whole camp.) “HEY, HEY! WHAT’S ALL THE YELLING ABOUT? YOU GUYS ARE SUPPOSED TO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE OTHER CAMPERS! NOW KNOCK IT OFF.” We did, too. We have a lot of respect for Flick. She’s been up here ever since I can remember, and I know for a fact that she’s *only* about the strongest woman in the world. And she’ll go to bat for you, too. She’s nowhere near as bad as she sounds. Everybody likes her. In fact, I know this sounds terribly infantile, but I used to have a crush on her when I was in cabin nine.

“I’M LEAVING. BUT I WANT YOU GUYS TO BE QUIET. YOU’LL ACT YOUR AGE OR THERE’S GOING TO BE SOME BUSTED HEADS IN THIS CABIN.”

After she left, Sue and I went into the john to have a cigarette. You can smoke in the camp if you’re fifteen and you bring a note from home. My parents are sort of old-fashioned and they wouldn’t give me one, so I had to smoke on

the sly. Sue had a note, but she forged it herself. I saw her do it on the train. I wish I had her nerve.

Well, we were smoking (Sue was French inhaling) when we heard Dug (the Artcraft counselor, who absolutely never shaves her legs) start talking to Flick, *right outside the john*. We couldn't actually see them because there's just one dinky window in the john, way up high. It's kind of a junky camp anyhow, I guess, but we could *hear* them as plain as day. The first thing Dug said was, "Hey, Flick, wait up. I've got something for you."

And Flick said, "Yeah? Well, whatever it is, I don't want it."

Dug laughed and said, "I made it just for you during the winter. It's silver, some pieces that were left over from last year. Here, let me put it on your wrist."

"You'll hell put it on my wrist. I don't want your goddamn bracelets or anything that goes with them."

I asked Sue what they were talking about and she whispered, "Sex, silly." I didn't believe her, but we listened some more.

Dug said, "I engraved an inscription on the back. 'To Flick with love.' It's yours. Here, let me put it on."

"Oh, no. I don't go for that crap."

They were quiet for a second. Then Dug said, "Lovely day, isn't it? I'd love to go walking on the other side of the beach with someone like you. Here, let me put your bracelet on."

"Look, you're making me mad. I know you're sick. You can't help yourself. But don't bother *me*. Make a play for someone else or go see a doctor. I don't go for that crap."

"But, Flick, I made the ... "

"GODDAMN IT! I'M GETTING MAD! NOW GET OUT OF HERE!"

"I'm unattached—I'm through with Blinky. You're the only one ... "

"SO HELP ME, I'M GOING TO BUST YOU. IF THERE'S ANYTHING THAT BURNS ME OFF IT'S A QUEER. NOW, GET OUT OF HERE!"

"Well, I'll save the bracelet, just in case you change your mind."

“GET OUT OF HERE!”

We could hear Dug walking away. Then she stopped and said, “Well, so long, you big, strong hunk of woman.” She started running like crazy, and Flick said, “GODDAMN YOU! YOU BETTER RUN!”

At first I thought they were just fooling around, but now I didn’t know. Flick sounded pretty darn mad. I asked Sue if she thought they were serious.

“Natch,” she said. “All the counselors are that way. It’s from too much exercise. It makes you have hormones like men.”

“Where did you ever hear that?”

“I read it in a book. Disgusting, isn’t it?”

“It’s crazy! Look at Flick. She’s as manly as *anybody* and she’s not like that.”

“Maybe not with *Dug* she’s not. But she’s probably got her own lover someplace.”

“That’s a horrible thing to say.”

“Not any more horrible than when *you* had a crush on Flick. Remember the way you used to follow her around with mooney eyes all day long?” Sue pulled the bottoms of her eyes down and said, “Flick, Flick, where are you?” Then she laughed. “That’s you.”

Ha, ha. She thinks she’s so smart just because she went to Europe last summer. Big deal. She wasn’t fooling me a bit. I went to Europe once, and I know firsthand it’s a great big nothing—especially Florence with all those gooky old doors and beat-up statues. Europe! And besides, my crush on Flick was different. I wasn’t dirty about it.

I was just going to tell Sue off good when we heard a commotion outside. Somebody was yelling for help. We ran out of the john and could see a whole bunch of kids standing in a circle outside. We ran out and pushed through the crowd. And what do you suppose?

There on the ground, flat on her back, was one of the new counselors. I remember talking to her on the train. She was either dead or unconscious. Her

face was gray-white. Joey was standing next to her, jumping around like a jumping bean and yelling, “Holy Christ, what am I going to do?” Over and over. It was real scary.

## JOEY

I didn't know what the hell to do. I mean I *really* felt helpless. I mean—well, wait a minute. Maybe I better begin at the beginning.

I guess it all started in Northport when we were picking the girls up. I was driving the green truck, and Jay told me to take two passengers back to camp, so I look around at this mass of female humanity that's standing around and sort of casually announce that two lucky winners can ride with me. I know I'm no big deal or anything, but you'd expect at *least* a small stampede with all those girls around, I mean the odds are in your favor. But what do you think happened? Just about nothing, that's all. There's this mammoth lull that lasts about three quarters of an hour, and then this *nine-year-old* girl comes creeping out of the crowd. And was she ever ingoing. I mean about every three steps she took she had to glance all around to make sure a tiger wasn't going to careen her or anything.

I still can't get over that. All those goddamn girls standing around—some of them pretty sharp—and I had to draw a nine-year-old loser. Oh well. Anyhow, when I saw I wasn't getting what you'd call an overwhelming response, I said, "Still room for one more." Did I ever feel stupid.

So who should step out of the crowd but this dramatics counselor. I mean I didn't know she was a dramatics counselor at the time, but—oh, the hell with it. Right off, though, you could tell she was sort of funny. In fact, she looked funny. There was something screwy about her walk and she wore so much lipstick you could get smeared up pretty good just standing four feet away from her. To top it all off, her hair was like steel wool or something.

She was different, you can say that for her. And what a sense of humor. I mean, she was about as serious as a bad case of diarrhea, no josh. She took *everything* serious. Like when we were still on the outskirts of Northport, and had to stop for a red light, I said, "Boy, there must be twelve million lights in this town." You know, just trying to make a little conversation.

And she gets this big believing expression on her face and says, “That many?”

But the thing that really got me about her was that she had passion pants—I mean, she didn’t *look* the type but she was a real fooler. I don’t know how it got started but the first thing you know, we’re riding along playing kneesies. Wow, she really had me going! She was no goddamn Marilyn Monroe or anything, but let’s face it: I’m a roaring red virgin, and it’s not by choice, either. I mean, I’m game as hell, to be perfectly honest. Besides, she wasn’t *that* bad looking. In fact, the longer I was around her, the better she looked.

We couldn’t get too obvious with the Snake-Pit Kid sitting right there, chewing on her fingernails, but we were getting pretty cozy. This Carol—the dramatics counselor—was sitting in the middle of the seat, right over the old gear shifter. So after awhile, I gave her a little nudge when I’m shifting into high. And she just smiled at me, so—brother!—after that, I mean to tell you, I was shifting away like nothing you ever saw before. I shifted that truck into gears that didn’t even *exist*.

Well, the upshot of it is that when we got back to camp after 60 miles of this crap, I had to sit in the truck for nine hours waiting for my throbbing hard-on to die down.

And was it ever *fun* trying to walk around after that. I was in agony. I was in agony. And talk about being afraid to cough. Boy, I’d have dropped something for sure. Did I ever have a case!

But anyhow, before I hobbled off to help Jay unload the luggage, I made arrangements with this dramatics counselor to meet her later, and you know, take a little walk or something.

Now, here comes the strange part of the story. I mean, the climax. After we were through with the luggage, I started looking for her. I looked in cabin two (that’s where she said she’d be) but about the only thing I found there was a double gross of these little biddy girls, like the Snake-Pit Kid, and one of them was *completely* in the nude except for a pair of gym shoes. Big thrill.

So I started walking back toward the barn when I saw Carol, just standing there on the path. She was sort of swaying. I ran up and was just going to ask her if she was all right when she keels over—I mean right now. So there she was, out like a light, and I mean, I was panic-stricken from head to toe. I didn't know what the hell to do. She looked terrible, with her eyes rolling around. She was whiter than—I don't know what, but she sure was white. I didn't know what the hell to do.

I must have been going in about twelve directions at once, I swear. I was trying to keep all these campers from crowding too close, and I was trying to find Jay, and I—I don't know what all. But I finally got straightened out enough to streak over to the Mainhouse like a blue-balled bandit. I found Nancy on the recreation porch, and after stammering and stuttering around for a while, with my arms and legs flying all over the goddamn place, I finally got the story out.

Nancy called Mom and the three of us tore back to Carol like a son-of-a-bitch. She was still out cold. Mom worked over her for a hell of a long time—I mean it seemed like a century. And finally Carol mumbled something. It sounded like, "George, George," but I couldn't swear to it.

Then she sat up. She still looked pretty ghastly, especially with that real red lipstick against that *white* face. She almost passed out a couple more times, but we finally managed to get her to Mom's office.

About an hour later, when all the girls and everyone were in the assembly hall having a big beer blast, I was going around to the cabins with the truck, picking up all these tons of waste paper and crap the girls left belly-button deep all over the place. Well, I wade into cabin two, and here's old Carol sitting on one of the bunks, crying real soft. She looked kind of pathetic, all alone in this cluttered-up cabin. I felt sorry for her. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"I have to go back to New York," she said.

"How come?" I asked and she starts crying harder than ever.

"I—I'm sick. I can't stay here."

"What's—I mean, is it serious?"

“I’m just sick, that’s all. Please—leave—me—alone.”

There must have been something I could have said to make her feel better, but I’ll be damned if I know what it was. I stood around a while, but she didn’t even look up, so I left. I couldn’t seem to get her out of my mind, though, you know. It wasn’t just because I thought I could make out with her. I can’t exactly explain it. But you look at her crying on the bunk that way and you know there’s a big story behind it all—I mean something really important, but you’ll never know what. She’ll go back to New York. You’ll never see her again and for all you know, she might die of TB or something. I kind of liked her, and I even regretted—you know—playing kneesies with her. I guess Mom knew what her problem was, but she wouldn’t tell me.



## MARY

While the drama counselor waited in her cabin, we gathered in my office in the Mainhouse—Jay, Lulu, Nancy, and myself. They had been smoking throughout the discussion, and I can't stand smoke. The smoke hung in thick layers in the room. "We've got to think of the reputation of the camp," Nancy said.

"That's not right," Jay said. "We've got to think of the girl. She needs help."

Nancy's face tightened. "Jay," she said, "we are *not* the ones to give it to her. She brought this upon herself, and she'll have to work it out as best she can."

Nancy was wrong. In my earlier nursing days I'd seen a great number of unfortunate girls like the drama counselor—enough to know it's always the man's fault. He woos her with love and promises. He plays upon her weaknesses—her need to feel loved and to give love. But when she becomes pregnant, he's quick to forget his promises, so he leaves, foot-loose and fancy-free, while the poor girl has to struggle alone, carrying his baby. He crushes and then finds someone else to crush.

Jay said, "Nancy, some people would gladly give their life savings to have a baby. You can't just ... "

"That has absolutely nothing to do with it. You're not the only person in the world who's been unable to have children. I, too, am unable to give birth, but that's beside the point. The point is that the reputation of Camp Timberline is at stake. We cannot become involved in a scandal. In fact, we must make a concerted effort to insure that no one outside this room *ever* discovers what has happened. At all costs, we must protect the campers."

"No!" Jay said. "The point is: That girl needs help, and it's our moral duty to give it to her!"

"Really, Jay! It is *not* our moral duty. And I'll thank you to lower your voice!"

I wanted the discussion to end so I could be alone. I wanted to get out of the smoke-filled room and walk alone someplace in the fresh air. But the meeting dragged on. Nancy walked to the window and looked outside. Then she turned around and said, "We've been pretty lucky about our counselors, but something like this is bound to happen when one's only dealings with job applicants is through the mail." She looked squarely at Jay. "If anyone asks, we'll say that she was sick and had to go home." Then she looked away. "Naturally, we'll be inconvenienced, not having a drama counselor, but I think I can manage. The fine arts counselor, the music counselor, and the dance counselor will just have to absorb her duties!"

"Just a minute," Jay said. "Why can't we ... "

"No! It's settled. You take her to Northport and put her on a train—send her back to New York where they can care for her. And remember, the campers must never find out about this. Is that quite clear?"

Jay stood up and marched out of the room. Then the others left. After their footsteps had faded, I opened the windows as wide as they would go. The room still smelled of smoke, so I sat on a windowsill, breathing the fresh outdoor air.

When the room was fairly well aired and I felt better, I turned around and was startled to see myself in the mirror. I'd forgotten about the mirror and saw myself as a stranger, the way others must see me. I was out of place here. The others were athletic, healthy, and tanned, while I looked pale and fragile.

I powdered my face and put on new lipstick, but the effect was wrong. The powder was too white, the lipstick too red, highlighting every crease in my lips. I now looked like the poor drama counselor, only much older.

Below, in the dining room, the campers were laughing above the squalling of chairs and the clatter of dishes. I wasn't hungry. I kept recalling the look on Carol's face when I told her she was pregnant. I'd never before seen an expression with so much agony and bewilderment. Then she fainted again. Apparently, it came as a horrible surprise to her, and yet, I wondered how she

could help but know. Since she was at least four months gone, she must have noticed the missed periods.

They were singing, “Oh, Timberline! My Timberline!” in the dining room and something about their happiness made me even more depressed. For some reason it reminded me of Fred. I missed my husband. Every year at this time, we used to go with Joey on a vacation in North Carolina, to a lovely spot called Ovinal Lake. But there would be no more summers with Fred, ever. I knew all too well how the drama counselor felt.

I emptied the ashtrays and went down the back stairs. Outside the sun was almost touching the treetops across the lake and its reflection slid across the gentle surface of the water.

I walked along the shoreline until I came to a group of benches. There, I sat for a long time, watching the sunset. Then I noticed someone else walking along the beach—Ann Milton, one of the swimming counselors. She had already seen me or I would have tried to avoid her. Ann seemed nice enough, but I wanted to be alone.

She walked up and sat beside me, smiling. I tried to act pleasant. She commented on the sunset and I agreed. The mosquitoes were coming out.

Ann said, “Oh, what brats! I should have listened to Roy. He tried to tell me, but I refused to listen. Actually, he’s very brilliant about judging people, and I should have listened.”

I nodded.

“Really,” she said, “I used to be a counselor at a Y camp, and it was unusual if a girl couldn’t swim after her first year.” She looked toward the Mainhouse and shook her head. “But do you know how many girls in cabin twenty can swim?”

“No.”

“Seven—out of fifteen. And most of them have been coming up here for *six* years. What an untalented, ill-coordinated, indifferent bunch. But I wouldn’t listen to Roy.”

“That’s a shame,” I said.

“And these sophisticated brats won’t listen to a thing you try to tell them. All they want to do is sit on the pier and smoke.”

“Smoke?” I was horrified. Smoking is a filthy habit.

“Like chimneys. This is the craziest place I’ve ever seen in my life.”

“Are the campers crude?” I asked.

“Crude? They’re positively foul!”

My heart was audible in my ears. Poor Joey. This was no place for him, not around loose girls. If I had known, I never would have brought him here. Boys have very strong impulses—sexual impulses. That’s part of their makeup. They have no control over their emotions when a seductive girl takes advantage of them. No one could blame a poor boy for getting in trouble. The girl’s to blame, not the boy.

Ann said, “By the way, why did the drama counselor pass out before?”

“She’s pregnant and unmarried.” I had no sympathy for her anymore. My thoughts were with Joey. “Don’t mention that I told you. It’s supposed to be a secret, but it’s impossible to keep secrets in a place like this.”

“That’s terrible,” Ann said. “Was her fainting caused by her pregnancy?”

“In a sense. She’s anemic.”

“Oh, that poor kid. What’s she going to do now?”

“I wouldn’t know. Jay’s going to take her back to Northport and put her on the train.”

Ann asked more questions and I answered them. Then she looked at her watch and said, “We better hurry or we’ll be late for the staff meeting in Nancy’s cottage.” Her tone indicated that she didn’t want to go to the meeting. Neither did I.

Together we walked through the gathering dusk, up the lane, past the Mainhouse, which now had bright light flooding from the windows. Across the camp, counselors were funneling toward Nancy’s cottage.

As we neared Nancy's cottage, I noticed Jay loading a large trunk into a station wagon. Carol was standing off to one side, her head bowed. Nancy was right. Carol brought her trouble upon herself.

## JAY

I didn't know exactly what to say to Carol, so I just kept my mouth shut. I felt like taking her in my arms and telling her that everything would work out—that she'd give birth to a healthy baby and then her shame and despair would dissolve into love.

But I was afraid that if I said anything, she'd feel even worse. My heart ached for her, though. Pregnancy should be the pinnacle of a woman's life, the time when she holds her head the highest and knows that she is a magician—an artist with no peer. But poor Carol was bent over with shame.

After I loaded her luggage into the wagon, we drove slowly to Northport. I searched my mind for something to say, and became a little irritated when I couldn't find it. But every time I glanced over at her, I knew it was better to say nothing.

I thought that music might make her feel better so I turned on the radio. An orchestra played "April in Paris" and Carol began to sob.

That poor kid. In my mind, I pictured her dancing with the father of the baby while a band played that song, their song. He was handing her a line, and she was believing every word of it. I turned the radio off, feeling both helpless and angry at the son-of-a-bitch who did this to her.

"Does your family live in New York?" I asked.

"No," she answered in a weak voice.

"Well, do you have friends who can take care of you?"

"Yes, I have many friends." Her tone was too abstract to be convincing.

"Now, look, Carol, if you need money, I'd be glad to ... "

"No. My parents are very wealthy. Your offer is very kind, but I can't accept it."

"Carol, I hope you're not talking out of pride," I said and then realized how cruel it must have sounded. "What I mean is, I'd consider it an honor if you let me help you."

“No!” she blurted, and pressed her hand butts against her eyes. “No, I don’t need money. I didn’t take this job for money. I—I wanted to get away for a while. I have all the money—I’ll ever need.”

We were silent the rest of the way to Northport.

When we pulled up in front of the depot, the last tints of color were fading into darkness in the western sky. As I started to get out, Carol suddenly grabbed my arm and stared at me with wild eyes. “It’s possible your nurse is mistaken. Her diagnosis could be wrong, you know.” She must have been gripping me with all her might.

“No, Carol,” I said softly. “I’m afraid not.”

She released her grip and stared off in the distance, blinking. I squeezed her hand and slowly got out of the wagon. Somewhere in the back of my mind was a solution—a way to help her—but I couldn’t find it.

I led her into the station, and left her on a long, hard bench while I took care of her luggage and checked the train’s schedule. Her train wouldn’t leave for three hours. I slipped a few dollars to a red cap and told him to get her something to eat and to keep an eye on her.

“Sure will, boss,” he said, and smiled, flashing two gold teeth.

I sat down on the bench next to Carol and handed her two ten-dollar bills. “Your train fare.”

With a blank expression, she stared at me.

“It’s yours,” I said. “The camp is paying for it.” That wasn’t true.

I told her when her train would leave and then we sat for maybe a half hour. I hated to leave, but it was getting late, and obviously Carol wanted to be alone. So I put my arm around her shoulders and said, “Carol, I’ve got to be going. Will you be all right?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sure everything will work out for the best. Just be brave. And remember, if there’s ever anything I can do, call me.”

“You’re very kind,” she said.

I stood up and stared at her. She was still clutching the two tens.  
“Goodbye, Carol.”

“Goodbye.”

I felt rotten, leaving her that way, but I didn’t know what else to do. Just outside the station, I stopped and had a strong impulse to turn back. There she was, hunched over, alone on that long bench, with the glaring overhead lights beating down on her. But I didn’t turn back. Like a damn fool, I got in the wagon and drove away.

I drove down Fifth Street through the city, past the hotels, restaurants, the factories and warehouses, past the smell of the ocean and the panorama of lights. I drove until I could see Northport in the rearview mirror—a faint glow on the horizon. I picked up Route 7 and began to drive faster as the road shifted and swerved through the forest. I couldn’t seem to go fast enough.

Then, suddenly, about 20 miles from Northport, as I rounded a sharp curve with the tires biting out a staccato squeal, I *knew* what I should have said to Carol.

I should have said, “Young lady, you’re coming home with me.”

Of course. Olive and I live in a large old house in the country—plenty of room. We could have cared for Carol—and we would have had a baby in the house.

There was still time.

I pulled off the road, turned around, and headed back to Northport. Bit by bit, I pieced my future together. I pictured the three of us—Carol, Olive, and I—buying things for the baby: toys, clothes, liniments, and the like. I saw myself—Jay McFarland—walking the floor with a colicky baby. (God, I hoped he’d have colic.) Then the more tentative scenes: teaching him to hunt (if he were a boy). Teaching him everything I know—being like a father to him.

I hadn’t been this excited in years. I kept scanning the horizon for the glow that marked Northport.



It took a hell of a long time, but I finally was driving through the city again, past the factories and restaurants. There was the depot ahead.

I swerved into the parking lot, jumped out of the wagon, ran inside and stopped, staring at an empty bench.

Carol was nowhere in sight. “She’s probably in the ladies’ room,” I told myself, but I was afraid. When I asked the stationmaster about her, he said, “I don’t know. I think she left. Her baggage ain’t around.”

“Where’d she go?”

“Beats me.”

I had to find her. “Where’s that red cap that was here earlier? The one with the two gold teeth.”

“You must mean Harold. He ain’t around either. They change shifts at nine. You’ll probably find him in one of the bars over on Liberty Street.”

I stood there trying to think. A sickening thought kept running through my head: Carol was in a bad state—bad enough to do something foolish. Damn it, I had to find her.

“Say, wait a minute,” the stationmaster said, “maybe Jack knows where she went.”

Jack turned out to be a cab driver. I found him in a coffee shop across the street. He was fat and wore a Texas-style hat. When I asked him about Carol, he said, “Yeah, yeah. I remember her. She had a friggin’ green trunk.”

“That’s her.”

Jack said, “I remember because I tore the hell out of the back seat trying to get that friggin’ thing in.”

“Where did you take her?”

“Jeez, let me think. Tonight was a pretty busy night, I kid you not. I had more friggin’ fares than you could shake a stick at. Let’s see ... ”

While he thought, I closed my eyes and tried to be patient. Finally I said, “Jack, I’ve got to find that girl. It’s extremely important.”

Jack thought some more. Then he said, "I remember I took one broad to a rooming house over on Fourth, but I'm a son-of-a-bitch if I can remember which broad. I'm telling you, I toted more broads around tonight than you ... "

"Could you take me to that rooming house?"

"Sure thing."

On the way, I explained the situation to Jack. I don't know why, exactly. I simply had to talk.

The owner of the rooming house was an old man who said that no girls had checked in that evening. "Jeez, I'm sorry," Jack said. "I could have sworn this was the place. But like I said, I had so many friggin' fares tonight you could shake ... "

"Please. Try to think."

Jack thought. He thought he might have taken her to the Northport Arms, so we went there. But the desk clerk told us that no one answering Carol's description had come in that evening. Then Jack thought he might have taken her to one of the other hotels.

We tried them all with no luck.

We then got a phone book and called every rooming house and motel in town. No Carol. We tried the bars in the downtown district. Still no Carol, and I was becoming panicky.

We decided to try the airport and the bus terminal. We were about half way across town, when suddenly, Jack pulled over the curb and said, "Look, what are you worrying about? I might have taken her to a relative's house. Right?"

At this point I wasn't too sure Jack had taken her anywhere, but I agreed.

"Okay," he said. "I might have taken her to a hundred places. Right?"

I nodded.

"Look, here's the friggin' point. All you're doing is getting a bleeding ulcer and running a hack bill into the double figures. You got to remember, a girl that's going to commit suicide ain't going to take her trunk with her. Right?"

Maybe he had a point. Just the same, I had to check the airport and bus terminal before giving up.

A charming young lady at the airport went through the passenger lists for the two planes that had left since 8:30. Carol's name wasn't on either list. Then, I remembered Carol's trunk and asked the young lady to check passengers with overweight luggage. They were all men.

So the bus terminal was my last hope. The attendant there was a young, collegiate-looking boy who said, "Yes, I think I recall a young woman with a trunk such as you describe."

"Which bus did she take?"

"I hesitate to be too emphatic, but I *believe* she took the bus to Boston."

"Can't you check your passenger list?"

"Unfortunately, no. Unless she had a reservation, which seems *unlikely* under the circumstances."

"Isn't there any way I can check with Boston?"

"Ah," he thought, "no. We could call Boston, if you like. But, of course, she could have gotten off at any number of stops."

"Let's call Boston just the same," I said.

We did. The Boston attendant said he would page Carol when the bus arrived at 3:30.

So that was the end of the line. No Carol. I had my chance—had it handed to me—and I blew it. Jack drove me back to the depot and pulled up next to my wagon. I felt compelled to continue the search—continue until I found her, but I knew it was too late. "Look," Jack said, "I apologize for the friggin' fare, but it's \$11.20. Ah, hell, just give me eleven and we'll call it square."

I gave him twelve and thanked him. I watched him drive away and then got in the wagon. It was all over—another defeat. I was sick, thinking about my blunder. If only I'd acted sooner, things would have been different. We could have done so much for Carol, and she could have done a lot for us. But it was over. She was probably on her way to Boston.

Instead of driving directly home, I went to Highland—a small town twelve miles from camp consisting of a few stores, a couple of garages and a half-dozen bars. I went to Harry's Package Liquor Store and bought a fifth of cheap blended whiskey. I wanted to drink it down and get blind drunk—so I'd forget about Carol and about Jay McFarland walking the floor with a colicky baby. I wanted to forget what a cruel fool I was, handing Carol money—cheap money—instead of giving her the help she needed.

Somehow I managed to resist the impulse to drink. I knew I wouldn't be very fond of myself for the next few weeks, but I also knew that whiskey would make matters worse. So I tossed the bottle in the glove box and started home.

Strangely enough, I felt better with the whiskey close by; perhaps because it was a tangible enemy—something I could see and touch. Whiskey represents everything I hate, all the unbearable, irrational things in life. I try to make the unbearable bearable, the irrational rational. I try with all my might, but sometimes the prodding phantoms of guilt, anxiety, and pure hatred become overpowering. Sometimes there's no way to hide from them. But I was sure I could win the battle of the bottle—*if* things didn't get worse, *if* I could forget about Carol.

Out of habit I stopped off at camp on the way home. It was after 1 a.m. but the lights were still burning in Nancy's cottage, which meant that the staff meeting was still in progress. Nancy was probably lulling everyone to sleep with one of her long-winded orations.

## HENNA

I suppose I should tell you about the staff meeting, but likely as not it'll bore you to hell and back, so don't say I didn't warn you.

It's the same every year. We meet in Nancy's cottage. There's never enough chairs to go around but that don't upset the counselors none—'cause then they have a chance to lounge around on the floor and snuggle up to each other. The first thing Nancy always does is have the counselors stand up one at a time and tell about themselves—their name, where they're from, and what they're interested in. If you want to know what they're interested in, just ask yourself this question: Would someone come to counsel at a place like this five, six years unless she was having herself one *whale* of a good time?

Well, when it comes their turn, most of them stand up, talking in a big, thick man's voice, with their thumbs hitched in their belt loops. But not all of them. Take the new music counselor, a sickly, fidgety redhead that you'd hardly know she's around unless you happened to step on her. Her voice was so soft you could hardly hear her. "Charlotte Broadnick," she said. "From Chicago. I'm studying music at the Chicago Conservatory and I'm interested in—music."

Now, ain't that a rich life for you?

Oh, yes! I had to stand up and say my piece, too. I told them I was interested in retiring. And that's the truth. Everybody laughed, thinking it was such a funny joke, but if they knew what I had to go through day in and day out, they'd *cry*. Sitting up hen-partying until the wee hours and then having to stay up the rest of the night fixing chicken for the whole camp. That's not *my* kind of joke. But that's what I had to do.

Then, after everybody says their piece, it's Nancy's turn. "Welcome to Camp Timberline," she says in that hammy way of hers, and believe you me, those words always mark the beginning the longest, driest, most uninteresting speech you've ever heard in your life. First she tells about her name. "My maiden name is Zimmerman and that's the name I use around camp," she says.

“Actually, I’m married to Dr. Bernstein, but I choose to use my maiden name because I don’t want the campers to feel that they’re in competition with Ed, my husband, for my affections. Since I am their mother up here, I don’t want to complicate the emotional situation by introducing extraneous factors. That, of course, is simply good psychology. Therefore, you will always address me as either ‘Miss Zimmerman’ or ‘Nancy.’ Is that clear?”

Plenty clear. When you throw away the fancy words, all you’ve got is the bellyaching of a woman that’s ashamed to take on her old man’s name. My old man’s name is Rodetaffle, and when I married him, I knew damned well about the nickname some of his foul-mouthed cronies had been calling him. But you don’t see me going around using my maiden name—and it’s a good one, too—Boyd. Try to make a joke out of that one. Sure, who wouldn’t rather be called Boyd that Rodeapple? But it’s all part of the deal, and if you’re willing to settle down with the old man, you goddamn well better be ready to take all that goes with it, even it means having a nickname like Rodeapple.

Then Nancy goes on to give her life story, by way of telling how she built Camp Timberline. She starts out with her childhood. “Mine was anything but a happy childhood,” she says. “I grew up in a rather poor district in New York. Mother was too busy with the store to be ‘pals’ with me, so I was more or less left to my own devices.”

I know you ain’t interested in all the painful details but she goes on to tell how she went through college and came out with a degree in social work. Then she had a job with some kind of institution. Then the Depression came and she took a summer job in a girls’ camp. “Those were the happy years,” she says with that far-away look of hers. “I started out as swimming counselor. The next summer I was put in charge of the waterfront, and the following year I became a member of the General Staff.”

A dull life ain’t anything to be ashamed of. Fact is, most of the folks I know lead lives that are drier than a cotton cake. But it’s a plain pity when you find people who’ll stand up there and come right out and *brag* about their dull lives.

Well, during the years that followed, Nancy drifted away from camping. She went here and there and had one dull job after another.

Then after she inherited a pile of money, something happened that made her think of camping again. “I kept receiving letters in the mail which urged the support of boys’ camps. SEND A BOY TO THE COUNTRY. HELP FIGHT JUVENILE DELINQUENCY. KEEP BOYS OFF THE STREET. GIVE BOYS A PLACE TO PLAY AND CHANCE TO GROW. That aggravated me. All the letters were singularly alike in one respect. They contained not *one word* about *girls*. It was always this for boys and that for boys. ‘What about girls?’ I asked myself. Didn’t they have feelings? Were we supposed to ignore them completely—although they would bring the future generations into the world?

“I decided then to do something about it, and this is it!” She held her arms out and got an expression on her face like that picture of Jesus walking across the water to the disciples.

“Don’t misunderstand, I have nothing against boys. In fact, I have an adorable little boy of my own, Darrell. He’s seven now. We adopted him when he was only an infant. Would you care to see his picture?”

“Oh, yes!” everybody hollered. So Nancy got it from her bedroom and passed it around. “Oh, isn’t he *adorable!*” they all squealed. I kept my mouth shut because I don’t believe in being two-faced. Now, I’m not talking against Darrell, because he’s a nice little boy—ordinary but nice. Stutters something awful, though. That’s Nancy’s fault, packing him off to relatives all the time while she skitters around the country. I don’t have any degrees in socialized education, but I guess I know a thing or two about stuttering. Lots of folk’ll say that if you don’t breastfeed your babies they’ll likely as not come down with the stutters. But I won’t go for that. ‘Course, I breastfed my brood, and you’ll never hear them stutter. Might not say much if they don’t feel like talking—the big ornery galoots—but they goddamn well don’t stutter.

Here’s the way I see it: When your kids are young, you’ve got to be nice and gentle with them. When they get a little older, why then you can lay one on

their backside if they got it coming. But when they're little they need to know you're on their side, even if the old man's against them. One thing you *don't* want to do is skitter around the country and treat your boy like a houseguest. And I don't mean anything personal by that, either.

By now everybody was pretty drowsy and you could see heads nodding here and there—if you could manage to keep your own eyes open, that is. Nancy was going on about her philosophy. “We believe in treating each girl as an individual entity in God’s world,” she said. “This creed has paid off handsomely over the years—a fact to which many successful alumni testify. I am particularly reminded of a shy, retiring girl who ‘graduated’ from Camp Timberline a few years ago. She’s now playing the viola for the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, and by her own admission, she owes a great portion of her success to our camp. She was already an accomplished musician when she came here—*but*—her social education lagged severely. She was afraid of the dark, afraid of the water, afraid of snakes, and had a myriad of other phobias. However, by the time she graduated, she played tennis and volleyball with the rest of us; she had *almost* learned to swim; and she could sleep with the lights off!”

I ain't even going to comment on that one.

“We’ve also had the opposite kind,” Nancy said. “Mischievous imps—called by some, troublemakers. I’ll never forget the most impishest imp we’ve ever had, Karen Kartlinger—an electrified bundle of energy whose abysmal curiosity was unsatiable. At first, she presented many problems; however, we were patient and understanding. Our efforts paid off. She’s now vice-president of one of the largest real estate companies in New York.”

Nancy forgot to mention that Ku Klux Kartlinger was *so* bad they had to send her home two summers running. You’re quick to forget those things when she becomes a big vice-president, but if she turned out to be a bum, you’d remember them forever.

Well, right about there I must have dozed off, because Nancy don’t talk about Sunday services for a good half-hour after she finishes with Kartlinger. But



the next thing I knew, she was saying, “ ... and it’s compulsory to attend the services.”

Ha! Maybe for the counselors it is, but not for me! I go to a *real* church in Highland, and there ain’t nobody can make me waste a good Sunday morning sitting in the dining room listening to Nancy spiel off about “The Problems of Teenage Girls” or “The Meaning of Your Crush on Your Counselor.” No, sir! That ain’t my kind of sermon.

Nancy was leading up to her ballyhoo on being so goddamn liberal. “Since different people have different religious beliefs, our sermons concern themselves mostly with ethical and moral problems. Some of our girls normally attend temples while others go to churches. We’re primarily a liberal camp and therefore do not completely espouse the doctrines of any single specific religious group.”

Now, that’s just plain misleading. Why, there ain’t hardly a hermit from here to Moose Lake that don’t know the campers are Jews—down to the very last one. Not that I have anything against Jews, but it’s just not honest to stand up there and hint that half of the campers might be plain, everyday Baptists.

By now Winnie and Zip were curled up on the floor together something awful. Nancy saw them and started staring, the way she does. Then she said, “If we’ll all sit up straight now girls, we’ll finish much faster.”

So she talked about *WEEEEEE!* There really ain’t much rhyme or reason to her speech. It just flits around like a flea on a moose. It’s a plain wonder she remembers to say it the same way, year after year. “In accordance with our policy of self-expression, we put out an annual called *WEEEEEE!* for which each camper writes an original poem. I might add that the work is excellent.”

If the *counselors* are good poets, that is. Why, those campers even ask *me* to think up rhymes for them. There’s hardly a day goes by that one of them doesn’t bolt into my kitchen asking, “Henna, what rhymes with art?” I’ll give you rhyme with art.

And then there’s always a smart aleck like Torry. Last summer that clown had the whole camp in a buzz trying to think up a rhyme for orange. I even got to

thinking on it myself and I'll be damned in charcoal if it didn't keep me up the better part of one night. Well, after everybody gave up, Torry said that *nothing* rhymed with orange. She said she read it in a book.

"Our motto has always been, 'Happy counselors make a happy camp,' " Nancy said and went on to tell about the "fringe benefits" like the counselors' tent by the Mainhouse, where the counselors can "talk in private."

"Another pleasant innovation is breakfast in bed every Sunday," Nancy said. "Prepared and served by the campers." I take Sunday morning off but that's an outright insult, calling those breakfasts a pleasant innovation. Imagine, comparing my cooking to a canned-prune and dry-cereal breakfast, or maybe peanut butter and cold milk—no coffee or nothing. (That's what the campers make!) Pleasant innovation, my foot!

Nancy talked about crushes next—not that I was paying much attention after being insulted that way. "An adolescent girl feels that she has no one to turn to for her urgent needs. She's in a state of rebellion against her parents. At the same time she has a strong need to belong. As a result, most of our girls develop crushes—either on older campers or on their counselors. In this way, they are able to pour out feelings which can no longer find their way to the parents. The reaction is natural, and most girls grow out of it. Our older girls are already more interested in boy crushes than girl crushes. Of course, girls mature at different rates and we should not expect them all to redirect their libidos at the same age.

"We do *not* want to make them feel that their crushes are in any way harmful or unnatural. I make this point because it's your responsibility to act as parent-surrogates and accept and encourage crushes, treating them as something wholesome and natural. Every summer campers come to me, confessing their guilt and shame for feeling love, and every summer, I tell them: Your love is nothing of which to be ashamed. We must all keep this truth in mind."

Maybe I'm just old-fashioned, but it seems plain enough that getting moonstruck and starry-eyed over other females ain't going to help you get ready

to take on some buck and pamper him for the rest of his days. The last thing Nancy talks about is the summer schedule—the trips. This year she told about the circus tent and tittered around, hinting it might have something to do with the Mystery Trip. Then she went on and on about the other trips.

Finally, she dismissed the meeting. I was so stiff from sitting, I could hardly get out of the chair. But just about the time I did, Nancy said, “Oh, yes. I want the counselor lineup for the annual baseball game by tomorrow at ten. The game will be held tomorrow at 1:30. Zip is captain of your team so check with her. See you girls at the flag-raising ceremony—8 a.m. sharp.”

I went outside (and it was cold out by now), and who should be out there, standing by his old wagon, staring off in space but McFarland.

I walked over and said, “What the hell are you doing out this time of night?”

“Just got back from Northport,” he says.

“That’s right,” I said, remembering that sickly drama counselor. “Did she get off all right?”

“Yeah.” McFarland was in one of his moods again. I could tell by his tone.

“Well, you better get that tent out of the ballpark by tomorrow or Nancy’ll have your neck!”

He just nodded.

“And when are you going to fix that goddamn blower for me?”

“The first chance I get, Henna.”

## NANCY

Walking into Lulu's office the next morning, to embark upon another summer as captain of the Timberline ship, I was greeted with an unpleasantry that grayed the otherwise bright and brisk morning. Lulu handed me a piece of paper, saying, "From Dot Cohen."

I glanced at the note. In the carefree hand of a child who obviously knows the meaning of "happiness" was scrawled freely, "Dear Nancy, Jay threw me in the shower yesterday. I guess it was my fault, as I misplaced the key to my trunk, since it was around my neck and I forgot about it. Jay was at fault though, also. For he shouldn't discipline we girls. Dot."

An eddy of irritation darted across my serenity, and it began to tumble into mounting turbulence. Many times I've cautioned Jay about disciplining the campers—a function which should be entrusted to trained personnel, not to caretakers. Yet, by some emotional misinterpretation of facts, Jay had convinced himself that *he* is director of the camp. Obviously, he would have to be discharged if he persisted in his attitude; however, I tried to withhold judgment.

Sitting at Lulu's desk, I soothed the furrows of irritation from my mind by looking out of the window, at the towering pines, dark over the sun-drenched path that curled beneath them. Slowly the bands of tension relaxed.

Composed once more, I began discussing with Lulu the laborious details surrounding the week's camping activity. The first order of business was the lineup for the baseball game. However, I was unable to dismiss Jay from my mind, mentally noting that he had been steadily usurping authority over the years. I feared that a severe and unpleasant remedy was inevitable.

A knock sounded on the door. "Come in," I announced, and the door opened slowly.

Framed in the doorway was Dug, my artcraft counselor, a faint smile on her face and the corners of her mouth twitching the way they do when she

becomes excited. “I have something important to tell you,” she proclaimed, glancing uneasily at Lulu.

Since I cannot be everywhere at once, I rely on my veteran counselors like Dug to keep me informed. “What is it?” I queried.

“It’s all over camp,” she retorted hastily.

“What is?” I inquired.

“About the drama counselor,” she replied. “Everyone knows that she left because she’s going to have an illegitimate baby! And I know who’s spreading it.”

“WHO?” I demanded.

“Ann Milton’s husband, Roy!”

For an instant, I had difficulty assimilating the meaning of her words. When one’s expectations are destroyed, one is momentarily hurled into a dark abyss, reacting with the desire to lash out at that which is closest at hand.

I wanted to lash out at Dug—and Lulu, who was at my elbow, tackity, tickity, ticking on her typewriter as if nothing had happened. I saw Dug as an ugly, unlovable sneak with a hideous facial tic, and hairy unshaven legs. She might have known her announcement would upset me; however, her expression was one of unshamed pride.

“Thank you for your information,” I said curtly and she walked out of the office with her antelope stride.

Only after she left did I begin to realize the full meaning of her proclamation. Jay McFarland was to blame for this! He was the only person who could have told Roy about the drama counselor. He wanted to ruin me! My anger welled.

I pressed my palms against the varnished surface of the desk and stood up. I would fire him—immediately.

My shadow preceded me out of the room and then dissolved in the dim light of the hall. Beneath my feet, the stairs creaked gently, and the porch creaked and the grass bent down, tickling my ankles, and the dust foamed grayly from the ground.

Jay, standing in a shaft of light by his workbench, was threading a large, lethal-looking needle. "I want to talk to you!" I announced firmly.

As if to ward off an imaginary attack, he shielded himself with his hands. "Do I get to call my lawyer?" he jested.

My anger had partially abated, and I now felt reluctant about firing him. Perhaps a reprimand would suffice.

"What possessed you to tell Roy about the drama counselor, after I *insisted*, at length, that this was a highly confidential matter!"

"No, Nancy," he said, "start at the beginning. Just what's this all about?"

"You know very well what it's about, and don't try to deny it!" I shouted.

"Nancy, I haven't told anyone about the drama counselor," he said.

I searched his face, trying to read his expression. Was it actually sincere, or was it a mask of guilt? His face was haggard, as though he had not slept for days. I demanded, "If you didn't tell Roy, how did he find out?"

"You'll have to ask him, Nancy. I don't know."

"Frankly, I don't believe you," I blurted. "Who else could possibly tell him?"

"I know you're worked up," he said, "but I don't appreciate being called a liar."

Worked up? I was infuriated! "And that's not all!" I said in a flood of fury, "What business did you have throwing Dot Cohen into the shower yesterday?" Suddenly I remembered something else. Quickly, I blurted, "And don't ever urinate down by the purifying plant as you did last summer!"

With that I left. I was embarrassed about bringing up the matter of the purifying plant, but the words found expression in a moment of anger and after all, someone had to let him know that we do not condone such uncouth behavior. Already I felt cowardly for not firing him.

I went directly to my cottage and sat in the warm orange glow of the Maple Room. I felt strangely unclean. I missed my husband, Ed, and was grateful that he'd be here in a few hours. Mine is a lonely job.

## JAY

I watched Nancy go into her cottage and then I turned back to my work. I'd been working on the circus tent all morning, trying to forget about the drama counselor. I wanted to lose myself in work, but I was about ready to give up.

I was tired. Earlier that morning, I'd received a call from the Boston bus terminal. No Carol, no one answering her description. I wanted to believe that she was safe with a friend or relative, but I knew I'd turn to the obituaries in tonight's paper.

"Is it safe to come down now?" Roy said. He'd been up in the loft clearing a place for the tent. I wanted to work on it up there where it would become hot and I'd sweat until my system was clean.

"Come on down," I said, "she's gone."

I liked Roy (despite his cynical attitude), but I couldn't understand why he told about the drama counselor.

After he came down the ladder he said, "Sounds like Nancy's got me on her shit list."

I nodded. "Who told you about the drama counselor, anyhow?"

"Ann."

"*Ann?*" How'd *she* find out about it?"

"From Joey's mother."

I wasn't in a mood to puzzle out Mary's motives, but I was surprised. She was the last one I'd suspect. I said, "Well, you should know better than to tell everyone about it."

"Swell," he said and looked down at his shoes. "I told exactly one person—Dug—when I was picking up the garbage in the Artcraft building."

"You sure picked the right one," I said. "Don't tell anyone else. And it might be a good idea if you told Nancy that your source of information was the drama counselor herself. You'd take a lot of people off the hook that way."

Roy sighed and said, "Swell."

That irritated me, but I tried to ignore it. I had to get back to work. I had to get in a better frame of mind.

We'd have to use pulleys to hoist the tent into the loft. The pulleys were laid out on my workbench. I started stringing a hemp rope through one of them when the rope jammed. I forced it but it wouldn't go through.

I caught myself just in time. I was going to throw the pulley across the barn. I almost let a helpless, inanimate object get the best of me. This called for a time out.

I lit my pipe and leaned against the workbench. I imagined how this day would seem to me next winter, after time had worn off the rough edges. In a way it was funny—Nancy warning me about leaking down by the purifying shed. I can't help it. Every time I see all that water pumping, nature calls. No sales resistance.

I laughed out loud—a little forced at first, but then more naturally. "Roy," I said, "it looks like you've had your initiation in the community of women." He smiled. "The lesson to be derived is this: Never tell nobody nothing, especially the counselors. Sometimes after they come back from a trip you ought to see them lined up outside Lulu's office, waiting to tell on each other." I laughed again. I felt better, but I was still itching to work.

I said, "It's getting late. We'll just about have time to get the circus tent stored upstairs and straighten up the ballpark before the big game."



## JOEY

What a baseball game! The campers—this real clumsy group of beasts—were supposed to play the counselors a regulation nine-inning game. And the real sizzler was that this Nancy's husband, Ed, was supposed to play on the campers' side and, you know, even things up. He's some big-time oral surgeon from Boston, but what I joke—I mean, here he is, a turd no bigger than a breadbox, about four feet three inches tall with arms as big around as spaghetti noodles, and he was supposed to be the big equalizer.

Then you look over at the counselors and Holy Moly! What colossal brutes! There were only about three or four of them that even looked like women and they weren't even in the starting lineup. And the rest of them looked like hairy-assed cavemen or something. There was this one—Flick—and I'm telling you she had such big leg muscles that she looked like she was wearing these riding pants all the time, no josh! Jay told me that she can do five one-armed pushups and a one-armed chin-up with *either hand*. I can't even do that, and for Chrissake, I'm a *man*.

So anyhow, there we were, me and Jay and Roy lounging around on the sidelines taking it easy—I mean, this was a real celebration so we got the afternoon off to watch it. And the game starts off with what I mean, a royal bang. The first one up to bat is this horse counselor, Ted, and boy, is she ever a riot with that big slug foot walk of hers and that hairy ponytail that hangs down about three yards below her bung hole. When she stepped up to the plate, old Roy said, "The first person I've ever seen that identifies with a horse's ass." What a character! So old Ted really tees off on the first pitch and powders it back at the pitcher and knocks her cold. I mean, really kayos her. Well, the upshot of it all is that they drag her off the field and Massive Ed moves from short stop to pitcher and fans the next batter—some mousy-looking job name Mouse.

But who should be the next one up to bat but this moose—Flick. This I had to see. She stands there waving the bat around and Spaghetti Arms gets his sign, winds up, and burns the old apple in there. PATOW and I mean *PATOW!*

There's this big stone wall at least fourteen hundred yards out in left field and may lightning strike me dead on this spot if that ball wasn't still going *up* when it cleared that wall. When she laid into that thing, the concussion alone was enough to almost knock you out. What a smash! And, oh, boy! Was I ever glad I didn't sign up to play on the campers' side. I could have, you know, but was I ever glad I didn't. Not that I mind being on a losing team, but this was ridiculous, especially in front of all those girls.

And the attitude of this Ed was not what you'd call Davis Cup sportsmanship or anything. I could see where anyone would get a little burned off when the score is twenty-four to zero against your team in the seventh inning (no josh) but old Ed was starting to act like a maniac or something—you know, the field general routine: "What the hell are you playing over there for? Why don't you run after those grounders? Move your goddamn legs! Don't stand there holding the ball, throw it, goddamn it, throw it!" On and on.

Jay told me that Ed had managed to hit at least one homer every year for the past five years, but it looked like his streak was coming to a hair-burning halt. And he sure was being obnoxious about it. So in the eighth inning, the counselors make this great huge concession and let Champ, the tennis counselor, play on the campers' side, and he lucks out a homer by dribbling one past Mouse through the long grass in right field—I mean it never would have been a homer if Mouse hadn't spent eight days scouting around for it in the weeds. That made the score twenty-seven to one, and the crowd was really rustling, you know. They sensed a hairy rally coming on. So who should be next up but old Spaghetti Arms!

Lover, the pitcher for counselors (about the only one of them with a girl's name) burns in this fastball and SWISH, strike one called. Old Lulu was the umpire and I thought for a minute Ed was going to bend the old hardwood over

her skull. What a look he gave her! Now, I don't know if old Lover was a diplomat or what, but her next pitch was a real easy slow ball that even Lulu could have knocked out of the park. So Ed lays into it, and whoopee! The crowd is on its feet yelling like a madman. It looks like a home run—heading right for the left field wall, but wait a minute! There goes the left fielder after it and who do you suppose is playing left field? Flick, that's who! And what a stupendous goddamn race, the ball streaking through the air, and right underneath it, ye old Flick, bombing away full tilt. It looks like the ball is just going to clear the wall. Naturally, I'm surprised as anyone—you know, I didn't think old Spaghetti Arms had it in him.

Well, everyone is yelling like hell for Flick to watch where she's going—I mean, let's not be a hero and pulverize ourselves on this massive stone wall that must be about five feet high and two-thirds of a mile thick. But old Flick keeps bombing along, and just as the ball is dripping over the wall, she takes this tremendous dive—just like a gigantic bullfrog or something—right over she goes, and just as the ball is about seven millimeters off the ground, she makes this fantastic goddamn circus catch and plows up about four acres of turf sliding along on her navel. I mean, what a goddamn catch!

Well, that did it. By now, Ed has already rounded first and he just stops and stands there with his face turning every color of the goddamn rainbow. And he's not pulling any bones about it—he's just staring right at Flick with this expression like smoldering asphalt. I could maybe see it if this was the big play-off game for the Pinecone League or something, but let's be realistic. Why get shook up over a little game like this? Take me for instance. Since I'd been up here, Jay must have beaten me in about nine zillion straight games of horseshoes, but you never saw me trying to cut him in half with a double whammy or anything. I mean, it's all part of the game.

But I guess Ed didn't see it my way because he *really* started to get surly after that. He sat around sulking on the sidelines a while, and then he starts this

“Come on, goddamn it, don’t give up until the last man is out” bit, and he was really talking it up.

So this crap goes on for a while, and the first thing you know, here we are in the ninth inning with the score *thirty-one* to one, and the counselors are still batting. So as soon as it’s Flick’s turn to bat again, Ed has one of the other campers pitch and he goes out to left field right by the wall. Here comes the first pitch to field, and BOOM! Watch out for flying splinters! Old Ed is already over the wall and tear-assing through the long grass, but it doesn’t look like he stands a chance. But then the wind catches the ball and slows it down and it looks like it’s going to be a photo finish. Will he make it?

He was almost out of sight when he made his play so I can’t *swear* to what happened, but it looked like he made a terrific leap and fielded the ball with this screwy-looking backhand catch. But then he lands with this belly flop in the thistles, and the ball squirts out of his hand. That *really* did it! Talk about yelling and screaming and swearing and throwing a goddamn fit, you should have seen him! I mean, he lit into everyone for about 83 miles around. And what goddamn language!

But the thing I really remembered about the ninth inning was this sexy-looking camper who was the new substitute at third base. Was she ever sharp! She was good looking all over, but what a body! Land sakes! If that was all her, she really had it. She wasn’t much of a ballplayer, I mean, she just stood around out there, smiling and drawing stuff in the dirt with her tootsies, but so what? Who wants a woman to be a ballplayer anyhow?

I was sitting there gazing at her, trying to figure out what it would be like doing it with her and all, when all at once, Roy leans over and says, “She’s really begging for it, isn’t she?”

“Yeah. Who is she?”

“Her name is Sue Fernbild. I hear she’s bored with her boyfriend. This is your big chance. You could step in and take over.”

“Maybe I will.” Who the hell was I trying to kid? You know, there are certain things you’re supposed to say when you’re talking about women. It’s sort of an unwritten law or something, but I knew she wouldn’t have anything to do with a guy like me, not her.

Roy said, “You do that. She can be made. Take her up behind the gym some night.” What the hell was with him, anyhow? Boy, if there’s one thing that makes me want to puke in my fedora, it’s these vicarious bastards—you know, these guys who are always going on about women and telling you who to make and how to make them and all. Like I said before, I’m still a roaring red virgin, but that doesn’t mean that I have to get advice about it or get my gun off listening to some guy like Roy go on and on. I figured I’d know what to do when the time comes, but let’s face it, that doesn’t mean you should be filthy about it.

When the campers *finally* came up to bat, this Sue and some pig were practicing cheers behind the backstop, you know, throw your arms all over the place, jump up and down, and yell, “Ricky-ticky-too,” to beat hell. They weren’t camp cheers or anything, and I guess old Spaghetti Arms didn’t appreciate it very much, because he finally jumped all over them and told them to knock that goddamn stuff off. But just before Sue sat down, she looked right over at me and gave me this *Esquire* wink. Holy cow! I almost keeled over. I mean, what a goddamn wink! Boy, that did it! I decided right then that I’d find some way to get to know her better before the summer was over.

## ED

My knee was beginning to stiffen. I'd hurt it when I'd bobbed Flick's last home-run ball. Now, I was limping away from the ballpark with Jay, Roy, and Joey. "Guess I'm getting too old for this kind of thing," I said. I wanted them to say I was wrong, but they didn't. Roy looked at me and shrugged. Jay acted as though he hadn't heard my comment. Joey apparently was absorbed in watching Sue and another camper who were walking in front of us.

Their attitude angered me. True, nobody likes a loser, and admittedly, I was disgusted with my performance, but at least I had guts enough to participate, instead of watching from the sidelines. Those smug armchair strategists, hiding in their facetious shells of rumination would never know the feeling of exhilaration that comes from tackling a job head on.

The more intensely my leg throbbed, the madder I became. I wanted to *make* them participate and see how things look from the other side of the fence. Finally, I could take it no more. I clapped my hands together and said, "It's a perfect day for waterskiing. How about it?"

Roy said, "I pass."

"Have you ever skied before?"

"In a word, no."

"I'll teach you. If you follow my instructions, you'll be skiing like an expert within an hour." Actually, it would take much longer than that to achieve any degree of proficiency, but I wanted Roy to know how the loser felt.

Roy said, "Swell, but I'll have to decline. I'm not a water enthusiast."

Typical of the do-nothings, who never succeed in the world of competition. They never learn how to work or play—learn how to devote ten hours each day to go-get-'em work and how to leave the office, the patients, books, and business ready to play. Play, like work, must be actively pursued with zeal.

“I’m going skiing,” I said, “even if you’re not!” I was angry. “If you change your mind, come down to the boat dock.” I knew they wouldn’t have a change of mind, but I’d show them how to play—those damn do-nothings!

Their eyes followed me as I trotted—painfully—to the cottage. To hell with them. I bounded up the cottage steps two at a time and went inside. I trotted through the living room. Nancy and Lulu were seated at the table, working on the trip schedule.

“Oh, Ed,” Nancy said, “I’m glad you’re here. There are several things I must discuss with you immediately.”

“Not now,” I said without breaking my stride. “Going waterskiing.” My mind was made up.

“Ed, please!” she said and followed me.

I ran into the bedroom and rummaged through my bureau for my trunks. The water in Lake Timberline would probably be near freezing. I hate cold water, but my mind was made up. I found my trunks and began undressing. Nancy stood by the bed watching. “I’ve got to talk to you, Pumps. Please don’t go swimming now.”

“Waterskiing.”

“All right, waterskiing. In either case, I must talk to you.”

“It’ll have to wait.” When my mind’s made up, it’s made up.

“Unfortunately, it can’t. I’ve got to talk to you about Jay. Also, I need your advice on the Mystery Trip.”

“Have to wait.” I needed a towel, and started toward the bathroom, stark naked.

“Why are you limping?”

“I hurt my knee playing baseball.”

“Come over here. Let me look at it.”

“Oh, hell!” I said. “It’s nothing.”

“Come over here.”

As I walked toward her, I suddenly lost some interest in skiing. I had the impulse to kiss her—passionately.

She examined my knee, and I caught the scent of her perfume. It aroused me so I began stroking her back.

“Not now, Pumps, please,” she said. “I’d better have Mary look at this knee. It’s definitely swollen.”

“The hell with Mary,” I said. I was aroused.

“You’re not going waterskiing in this condition,” she said.

“Like hell I’m not.”

She sat down on the bed and pulled my arms, forcing me to sit next to her. “Ed, don’t spoil everything,” she said. “I had a wonderful surprise planned for you. I’d arranged with Don Rogers to fly us to the place I had in mind for the Mystery Trip. He’ll be here in a half hour. Don’t spoil it. Besides, you shouldn’t waterski with a painful knee. You might injure it more seriously.”

“I’ve told you a thousand times, Nancy, I don’t care to become involved in the administration of this camp. When I come up here, I want to have some *fun*. And frankly, I don’t care where you send the girls on the Mystery Trip.”

“But this is special, Pumps.”

“Special schmecial,” I said and stood up. I winced as I tried to straighten my leg. Nancy was probably correct about water skiing in my condition, but I was reluctant to admit it to myself. I wanted to teach Roy a lesson.

“Oh, the hell with him,” I said out loud.

“Who?”

“Nobody. Now, what was it you wanted to say about Jay?” I wouldn’t go skiing. I wasn’t in the mood anymore.

She related the story of the drama counselor and how Jay had prostituted Mary’s confidence. “He’s vehemently denied telling anyone about it,” she said, “but I frankly don’t believe him.”

“Fire him!”

“What if he’s telling the truth?”



“Fire him! Remember what I said when he went on that drunk spree a few years back? He’s emotionally disturbed and it’s just a question of time before his condition becomes more serious.”

“But he loves this camp. And he *is* competent.”

“Competent schmocompetent,” I said. “Why in hell do you seek my advice if you have no intention of following it?”

“Oh, let’s not argue,” she said and covered her face with her hands. “This has been a very trying experience.”

I turned away. I love Nancy because she is strong and positive. I hate to see her when she’s weak. I limped across the room and looked out the window at the lake. A perfect day for waterskiing.

“What place did you have in mind for the Mystery Trip?” I asked.

“You’ll see. It’s a surprise.” She stood up and began unbuttoning her blouse. She was strong now, suntanned and healthy.

“What are you doing?” I asked hopefully. I was still aroused somewhat.

“I thought I’d take a shower before Don got here.”

I watched her shed her clothes with the same intense excitement I experienced the first time I’d watched her undress. “Pumpsy,” she said teasingly, “get that glint out of your eyes.”

Lovemaking should be undertaken with as much zeal and determination as work or play. That’s why I love Nancy. She’s strong, beautiful, and she makes you fight for it.

I lit a cigarette and smiled at her. I was almost bursting from the pressure. “I’m going to rape you,” I said.

She was naked now, a classical nude statue, a full-bodied, timeless beauty, with an undiluted sexual appeal. “Not now,” she said. “Don will be here shortly.”

“The hell with Don,” I said, walking toward her. I tried to throw my arms around her, but she pushed me away.

Then she smiled. “You mustn’t want it very badly or you’d go after it.”

The green light! I wrestled her onto the bed and said, "All right! You asked for it."

"Shhh," she said, "Lulu's in the other room."

"The hell with Lulu!"

"Stop it!" she said, smiling. She was teasing, which made it all the more enjoyable. I grabbed her by the hair and tried to kiss her. "Pumpsy! Leave me alone, or I'll get mad!"

She pushed me onto the floor. Damn her!

Then she leaned over the bed and began stroking my hair. "Why, Pumps," she said. "You certainly do give up easily. Here, let me hold you."

I sprang onto the bed and again tried to kiss her. "Stop it!" she said. I lunged at her and fought with all my might. She was excitingly strong, but I was becoming so frustrated and worked up I was nearly out of control. I stormed into the bathroom. "The hell with it," I said again. I hoped Lulu heard me. I wouldn't have intercourse with Nancy if she were the last person in the world.

As I was rinsing my face with cold water, Nancy came into the bathroom and grabbed me from behind. She slipped one arm around my waist while the other hand grasped my penis. Her warm breasts pressed against my back.

"Oh, Pumps, I was only teasing," she said. "I thought you wanted to fight for it. I missed you very much."

I could stand it no longer. I led her back to the bedroom. "Lie down!" I demanded and pointed her to the bed.

"Yes, Pumps," she said teasingly.

I lunged at her and grabbed her breasts, and squeezed them until she winced. Then, I squeezed harder. She emitted a moan of ecstasy.

I thrust my pelvis against her with all my might. Soon, it was over. I finished first. Although Nancy's pretty fast for a woman, I beat her about nine out of ten times (hence, my nickname, Pumpsy).

We lay together for a few minutes. Then Nancy rose and went to the bathroom. "Better get dressed," she said, "Don will be here shortly."

The hell with Don. I didn't like him. He, like Jay, drinks too much—proof that he's emotionally disturbed.

## NANCY

Before Don arrived, I had just enough time for a brisk shower, the rhythmic, warm tattooing from the water jets cleansing and relaxing me. Stepping from the shower stall, I dried myself with a fluffy white towel which stimulated every pore. Through the window, I watched the silver splinters of sunshine dancing on the water. Life, at that moment, seemed perfectly wonderful. Even the green bottle fly buzzing and thumping against the screen was a shining, lacquered violin—nature’s violin (an analogy I would have to use in the Timberline annual).

Ed was still lying on the bed when I stepped from the bathroom, dressed in a counselor’s T-shirt and blue slacks with towel around my shoulders and cool drops of water still falling from my hair. The breeze blew softly against the back of my neck.

“Pumps, Honey,” I said smilingly, “Don will be here shortly. You’d better dress.”

“Why don’t you just send your brood to Crushed Orchard beach like you did last year?”

“Oh, Ed! It wouldn’t be a mystery,” I retorted. “The cabin twenty girls deserve something special. This, after all, is their last year.”

“Something special? You give them *everything* special—treats, trips. What about the Canadian trip?”

“Half the camp goes on that one,” I said a little too petulantly. “Please, don’t spoil it.”

“Spoil schmoil,” Ed said, rubbing his eyes. “It’s your camp and I have no intention of telling you how to operate it, but I personally feel that you mollycoddle your brood too much.”

“Ed, just wait until you see the place I’ve selected. This won’t be a ‘mollycoddle’ trip, believe me!”

Ed sat up and lit a cigarette, saying, “Well, where is it?”

“Mussle Lake,” I replied reluctantly. I’d wanted to surprise Ed.

“When were you there?” he inquired.

“Never,” I admitted bluntly. “However, Mr. Heinike assures me that the spot is among the most dramatic and beautiful in New England.”

“The hell with Mr. Heinike,” Ed said defiantly. “By the way, who *is* Mr. Heinike?”

“He’s one of the largest realtors in Northport.”

“And he wants to sell you a plot on Mussle Lake,” Ed replied sarcastically.

I said, “Ed, darling, he wants us to *look* at a site—not a plot—on Mussle Lake. We are in no way obligated. Mr. Heinike assured me that if the site doesn’t measure up to our fondest expectations, he will gladly refund the down payment.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you’ve put money down on a plot you’ve never seen?”

“Ed, I had to,” I explained. “Someone else would most certainly have taken it.”

Saying nothing, Ed stared caustically at me.

I said, “Please get dressed.”

He crushed his cigarette against the bottom of the ashtray and struggled out of bed.

When Don’s plane came into view, Ed and I were standing on the raft surrounded by excited campers. Intensely they watched the plane—a silver bird—gently kiss the water and skim toward us, followed by a veil of white mist. Instantly, I knew that the camp should own a seaplane. The idea fascinated me, but realizing that Ed was not in the proper frame of mind, I decided to mention nothing about it at this time.

The plane moved slowly toward the raft, the engines coughing and a slurred wake sloshing from the plane’s prow. A door opened and Don, wearing a straw hat, leaned out saying, “I’ve got the booze if you’ve got the habit.” The campers laughed amusedly.

Don’s red face and glassy eyes indicated that he’d been drinking.

In little more than a whisper, Ed said, “Are we supposed to entrust our lives to *this*?”

“Fear not,” Don shouted from the plane, which was now alongside the raft, “the pilot is almost sober.” Beneath his glassy eyes an insipid grin appeared.

We climbed in the plane and situated ourselves, Ed in back, myself in front next to Don. Suddenly the engines emitted a full-throated roar, and we plunged forward across the lake. Behind, the girls on the raft and along the beach waved their handkerchiefs. I watched them shrink until they shrank to tiny dots on a blue doily.

After circling Lake Timberline once, we flew north.

“Now, let’s see if I can find Mussle Lake,” Don said, reaching for an aerial map. “Say, how’s that caretaker or yours, McFarland?”

“He might not be ours very long,” Ed proclaimed above the engines’ roar.

“Ed!” I scolded, “That’s nothing to discuss in front of ... ”

“Strangers,” Don added and laughed. I felt horribly embarrassed. Don continued, “Well, if you don’t want him, just send him around. I’ll give him a job. I think the guy’s got a lot on the ball.”

“What would you do with him?” Ed inquired.

“Put him in one of my plants. Hell, I don’t know. I’d find something, though. He’s a sharp cookie.”

Don obviously wanted to start an argument and as always, he used the only line of attack he knows—flaunting his wealth about like a cheap mink. I certainly wouldn’t encourage him.

“Yessir,” he exclaimed in mock wonderment. “That McFarland sure is sharp.”

“The hell with McFarland,” Ed said.

“Spoken like a true sportsman,” Don said, banking the plane sharply. “That must be Mussle Lake down there.” He pointed.

The countless lakes below melted like blue stones on a soft green fabric, glistened happily in the sunlight. “Which one?” I asked.

“Up ahead. The one that looks like an hourglass next to Mt. Silverfoot.”

Now I could see it, the darkest, largest lake in view, growing even larger and darker as we approached.

After circling above it twice, Don said, “Got to watch out on a lake like this. The winds coming off the mountain can be murder. They blow every way but Sunday.”

We descended. The engines quieted and we slid downward, approaching the lake lengthwise. Down, down, down. Below the mountains, the water speeding under us. When we were almost touching the water, the plane gave a terrible lurch, the world seemingly turning on end. Seized with panic, I grabbed the door handle. The plane lurched the other way, shuddering, and the left wing almost touched the water. Another lurch to the left, and I was sure he’d turn over. I was afraid.

The plane righted itself, and an instant later, we slammed down against the surface of the water—spray covering the windshield. A terrible force struck the side of the plane, forcing it into a sideward skid. Finally, the plane slowed and slogged along easily.

“Whew!” Don said. “If I’d known the winds would be like this, I would have stayed home and hung one on.” His knuckles were white against the steering wheel.

“Is it always this bad?” I managed to ask.

“Don’t know; I’ve never landed here before. It’s a danger area according to the chart. Large mountains on either side. They give you some pretty screwy air currents.”

“I hate to fly,” Ed said flatly. His face was pale.

Don laughed, then inquired, “Now where’s this property of yours?”

“Mr. Heinike said that he’d have it staked out with white flags,” I replied. “It’s somewhere along the east shore.”

Don brought a pair of binoculars from a compartment under the seat. After searching through them a few moments, he said, "Let's cruise down the shore and see if we can spot it."

The engines barked loudly and we began moving faster, plowing through the dark green waves. As we approached the shore, I began to understand why Mr. Heinike had recommended Mussle Lake so highly. It was breathtaking. The mountain tumbled toward the lake in irregular, angular movements, ending abruptly in towering, sheer, stark cliffs which plunged into the angry water. The timber was exquisite. Above the barking engines, the timeless whine of the wind sounded as if it raced through the forest. "Isn't this beautiful!" I exclaimed admiringly.

Another gust of wind struck the plane, almost bobbing the right wing into the water. "And treacherous," Don retorted.

"Let's get out of here," Ed said. "This place belongs in one of Edgar Allen Poe's stories."

"No!" I said emphatically. "We're not leaving until we see the property."

"The hell with the property," Ed said.

"Please, Ed! Do you have to spoil everything?"

"Your flags are right over there," Don said, pointing.

Following the path indicated by Don's outstretched arms, my eyes found the site and became fixed with fascination and awe. On one of the highest cliffs, a small clearing spread out beneath the great-grandfather pines which formed a sky-high cloak around it. The sunlight filtered through the trees in slender, hazy shafts. It was magnificent.

"Oh!" I said. "This simply defies description!"

"Very scenic," Don said. "But what do you plan to do with it?"

"This will be the site of our Mystery Trip. Our cabin twenty girls will spend four whole days here, swimming and camping out—living like pioneers in our circus tent. It's perfect!"



The waves, like maddened creatures, lunged against the plane with fearful impact. Soberly, Don inquired, “You mean you’re going to let a bunch of sixteen-year-old girls stay out *here*? And go swimming in *this* lake? You must be nuts! Look at the way the waves are crashing into that cliff.”

The worst gust yet struck the plane and turned it around, almost blowing it into the cliff. With the sound of the engines echoing loudly against the cliff, and a sudden acceleration, we sped away from the towering cliffs. Idling the plane again, Don said, “What do you think, Ed?”

“Frankly, I don’t care. As far as I’m concerned, Nancy spoils these girls too much. This is just what they might need. Now, let’s get the hell out of here.”

Don shook his head. “I think you’re both nuts!”

“Oh, Don,” I scolded, “We can build a ladder up the cliff, set buoys around the swimming area. We’ll send along our four most competent counselors, and I’m sure the girls will love every minute of it.”

“Except their first mistake might be their last. Nancy, I wouldn’t send anyone out here unless he had one hell of a lot of experience. This place is dynamite.”

I glanced anxiously at Ed, hoping that Don’s rhetoric had not swayed him. Ed’s face was still pale. He clutched the safety strap as another gust shuddered against the plane. “Let’s get out of here before we capsize,” he said. “We can talk about it back at camp.”

I agreed. The plane, fighting winds and cracking waves, finally became airborne. When we were once more vaulting through space above the many lakes, I began planning the Mystery Trip. I was excited. However, realizing that precautionary measures were necessary, I decided to arrange extra daily swimming lessons for the cabin twenty girls, starting immediately.

Soon Lake Timberline appeared below, flat and bleak and drab among the other ponds. I envied the cabin twenty girls and wished I could go with them. Only when I thought about Jay’s reaction to the trip did my excitement darken. He’s so completely neurotic about forest fires.

We glided downward toward Lake Timberline. I wouldn't tell Jay about the Mystery Tour until after he'd taken the girls to Fir Creek. I didn't want a hassle at this time.

## ROY

Nancy, motivated by her quaint compulsion to leave no Blanks in her schedule, and by her apparent Love of Confusion, kept us quite busy during the week following the Ball Game. Now, seven fun-filled fays later, Jay and I were preparing for the Fir Creek Fiasco. (Obviously I hadn't volunteered for Fir Creek Service; however, Joey had proven to be so adept at Resewing the Circus Tent that Jay had requested him to devote his Full Energies to this project.)

Jay and I rose while the frost was still on an occasional pumpkin. We hurried to the boat docks and loaded 16 Indian Type Aluminum canoes on the boat trailer, attached the boat trailer to the red truck, and heaped the truck high with an array of equipment which would protect the campers against all but the most severe atomic attack—paddles, packs, sleeping bags, Coleman lanterns, flares, life jackets, snake-bite kits, and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

But alas, one small chore remained before we could depart for Fir Creek. Today was laundry day, which meant that we had the honor of going from cabin to cabin in the green truck, picking up the bundles, a Much-Sought-After assignment. When we were finished, the truck was piled high with laundry and my back was ailing.

We drove to the Mainhouse, where we were met by two women wearing full-length checkered coats (apparently the Latest Vogue in the Great Northeast). Jay sprang from the cab and greeted them. "Well, you're right on time. Roy, come here. I'd like you to meet my wife, Olive, and Abby Morse. They're going to do the laundry."

Abby smiled, displaying her missing front tooth. I assumed an appropriate pose on the running board and said, "It's a pleasure."

Olive said, "I've heard a lot about you. Joey, too."

I nodded.

Abby said, "I'll be back in a minute. I got something to tell Henna." With that, she stuffed her hands in her coat pockets and Made Haste to the Mainhouse. Olive remained behind.

"Roy, let's give these laundry tags a last check," Jay said, climbing into the truck bed. Reluctantly, I joined him. As we rummaged through the bundles, I found myself staring at Olive. She wasn't at all the person I'd visualized. Although her hair was tied up on back and her figure was obscured by a quaint coat, she was strangely attractive in a way that's hard to define. Her face was haunting, and seemed to look different every time I glanced at her. And for some reason, I found myself vicariously imagining what she'd look like in an evening gown.

Moments after we had checked the last tag, Lulu's voice peeled thinly from her window in the Mainhouse, "Jay, Nancy wants to see you."

"Okay," Jay said. With Cat-Like agility, he vaulted over the side of the truck, landed silently, and trotted off. I suppose that, in my own inimitable way, I liked Jay—despite his obvious shortcomings.

Although I was tempted to follow suit and try an Athletic Leap from the truck, I wisely decided in favor of a slower, and less graceful means of descent. When I finally reached *terra firma*, Jay was out of sight. Olive said, "Where's Joey?"

"In the loft. Do you want me to call him?"

"No, don't bother him. I'd heard so much about him ... I ..."

A lull in the Conversation followed, during which I leaned against the truck and lit a cigarette. "Care for one?" I asked, holding out the pack.

"No, I don't smoke," she said and seemed to blush.

She faced the truck and ran her fingers through the dust on the door. She drew a series of waves then quickly scribbled over them. Looking at her handiwork, she said, "Who's going with Jay to Fir Creek?" She sounded too casual.

"I am," I said. "Joey's going to work on the circus tent."

"Would you ...?" She pushed her hair back. Her expression was pained.

I waited. With her index finger she drew another wave on the truck. Suddenly she faced me, her eyes intense. "Please take care of Jay," she said softly.

I tried to look at her eyes, but it was difficult. They were on fire. "Sure," I said. I wanted to ask her why—why she wanted me to take care of Mr. Self Sufficiency himself. But her plea seemed too imperative to question.

"Thank you," she said.

"That's okay."

What was the scoop? Olive's concern seemed unfounded; however, it was obviously real enough.

Soon Jay returned from the Mainhouse—a picture of rustic happiness, whistling the "Colonel Bogey March" and carrying an ancient table radio under his arm. I wondered if Olive and I were looking at the same person.

"What's the radio for?" I asked when he was closer.

"Lulu was going to throw it out. I thought I'd fix it up for Joey."

I said, "Why? So he can practice on it with his Stanley hammer?"

Jay laughed raucously and grabbed me by the nape of my neck. "What did I tell you, Olive? The most sarcastic so-and-so in New England."

Olive smiled politely. Jay said, "Come on, now. Let's get this laundry out of here." He clapped his hands together. "Where's Abby?" he asked and looked around.

"She's still in the kitchen, I believe," Olive said.

"Well, you kids can take it from here," he said. "Roy and I are off to Fir Creek."

Then Jay McFarland, the subject of a great deal of concern, picked Olive up, swung her around, kissed her and said, "It'll probably be near midnight before we get back."

"Be careful," she said. Her eyes still had a trace of fire in them.

Late that night, after we had dropped off the 50 exuberant Fir Creek candidates at the Enchanted Stream, Jay and I were on our way back to camp,

driving along a desolate road which wound through the forest. The night was extremely dark, and riding in a truck, breathing raw gasoline was quite reminiscent of the Army. The only element missing was the eternal truck in front, belching exhaust smoke.

I lit a cigarette but its famous Hint of Mint was masked by the taste of raw gasoline, so I ground it out on the floorboard. Jay said, "How would you like to stop for a hamburger?" His voice resonated above the engine's hum.

"There's a hamburger stand on *this* road?"

"Come on, Roy. This is one of our better state routes. Look up ahead."

Amazingly enough, there it was as we came around a bend—red neon sign and all. CLOVER CAFÉ. Jay swung the truck alongside the café and we went in. My legs were stiff. We each ordered a hamburger and a beer.

On our second beer the conversation turned to philosophy. I mentioned that I had little interest in the mystics like Whitehead or Bergson. With a surprising knowledge, Jay came to their defense, pointing out the relative value of some of their theories. I countered with pragmatic Tough-Minded Logic. Our beers were almost empty.

Jay said, "All the 'mystics' as you call them seemed to have one thing in common. They were all concerned with balancing the human soul with the world. Hegel had his thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; Whitehead had his balanced complexity. The mystics dealt with this balance as a fact of maturity, a striving which has no total realization.

"I think there's a great deal of truth in what they say. From the time he's born, a man tries to adjust. If he fixates on a simple adjustment, he'll never mature. His world will be distorted by his stereotyped perceptions. To mature, you must strive for balance.

"Take an idealist like Joey and a cynic like you. You're both part of the same process. No one would be cynical unless he had to protect himself against his idealism. The only difference between you and Joey is that you've been

burned a few more times than he has. I'd almost bet that within a few years Joey will be as cynical as you are."

Jay gulped the last of his beer. "But is cynicism the end of the line? I don't think so, because a cynic is out of balance. He's missing too much of life while he's hiding behind his protective wall. It's easy to be a cynic, but it's also very costly.

"I think this is what the mystics were trying to say. You've got to build an attitude that is neither cynical nor idealistic—one that allows you to look at the world as it is—and love it."

"Like you do?" I asked flatly.

"Like I try to do. I'm afraid I have a long way to go."

I said, "Let's have another beer." I was tired of being profound (although I had found Jay's discussion somewhat interesting).

"No. Two beers is my limit."

"Come on. I'll buy."

"No, thanks," Jay said.

I reached in my pocket for the money. "One for the road."

"No!" he yelled, causing the waitress to turn around and stare at him.

"Roy, I'm sorry," he said. He was perspiring. "I didn't mean to use that tone. I can't drink more than two beers or I'll—stay awake all night. I get insomnia."

"Swell," I said and stood up. Insomnia from beer!

Jay picked up the checks and walked to the cash register. Then something strange occurred. As he pulled his wallet from his pocket, a small snapshot fell out and drifted to the floor. There, smiling on the hardwood was that would-be call girl, Sue Fernbild.

I didn't know quite what to think, but a number of interesting possibilities presented themselves. After Jay received his change, I picked up the snapshot and handed it to him. He glanced at me uneasily. Then he smiled, saying, "My sweetheart. Pretty good picture, huh?"

"Swell."

I'm not what might be termed the inquisitive type, but frankly my curiosity was aroused. Perhaps Olive's admonishment had something to do with McFarland's propensity for Statutory Rape. There was one way to find out. Time for Sherlock Milton to Whip into Action—using his knack for fabricating stories.

When we were once again in the truck I said, "That Sue's a pretty sharp number."

"Yeah. Cute kid."

"Lucky Joey."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you know? He's making time with her. He'll probably be getting in her regularly by the time the summer is over."

Silence. Jay's expression was sour.

I said, "She's ripe for romance. Joey apparently lucked into it, didn't he?"

Silence. I didn't push the issue. Jay remained silent until we'd unhitched the trailer back at camp. Then, as we walked back to the truck, he said, "I suppose you're wondering why I'm carrying Sue's picture in my wallet. Well, I don't want you to think I go around seducing sixteen-year-old girls, so ..."

"Oh, hell, Jay. Don't be ridiculous."

Jay said, "Well, just to keep the record straight, I keep an album at home—a visual diary of the years you might say, and I must have forgotten that I still had Sue's picture in my wallet."

"You don't need to explain anything to me. I never gave it a thought."

Jay said, "And you better tell Joey to watch his step with her." His voice sounded strained. "I don't think this is the place for it. Too many spies around." His voice trailed off.

"Swell."



## OLIVE

I was awful tuckered out by the time Jay got back from Fir Creek, but my day had been glorious, more glorious than words could say. It all started that morning when Abby and me picked up the laundry from the camp. By the time we got back, the other girls had already started to arrive. There was Elise, who I hadn't seen since the fall before, and Flora Erickson coming all the way in from Highland, and Marguerite with all the latest news from Bleaker, and Sylvia Sutton who was always keeping everyone in stitches with her carryings on.

We got everything set up in the basement—the tubs lined up along the wall, the ironing equipment over on the other side, the clothes sorted out and given to each one in an equal pile so that no one would feel that she had to do more than the others. Then we started to wash, talking all the time—nice newsy talk, like about why Dr. Saulson over in Highland *really* retired, about the new annex on the Methodist church in Bleaker, and how much money that fellow in Northport made from writing that silly song about the squirrels. We talked about more personal things, too. We talked all morning, never letting up for a second. Then we had lunch—a little something I'd prepared the night before, celery soup, potato salad, and smoked sausages, and coffee. By then most of the clothes were washed and hanging out. Fourteen rolls of clothesline we had stretched out in the yard.

Then after lunch, it seemed like we were all talked out, so we sang. We couldn't seem to get together on anything popular, and Marguerite couldn't carry a tune in a basket, so we finally sang church songs, and the rest of us sang loud enough so that you couldn't even hear Marguerite anymore. "I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy deep down in my heart," we sang, until we were hoarse and the water pipe vibrated. It was wonderful. We sang every church song we knew and then we started over, and I can't never remember hearing church songs sung with so much feeling before in my life. 'Course I don't get to church too often—especially during the winter—but I can't never recall hearing a choir sing with any more

feeling. It wasn't work, doing the laundry. It was a holiday, a picnic, and how I pined for such times during the winter.

We had a pot of stew for supper and then we went back to ironing. I hated to see it end, but around nine o'clock Elise ironed the last piece, a camper's blouse, and when she was finished we all clapped. I looked around, hoping to maybe find something we'd overlooked, but that blouse was the last of it. We bundled the clothes according to the cabin they were supposed to go to, and that was the end of it.

I thought maybe they'd want to stay for a while and have some more coffee, but it was late and they had to go. And when they left a part of me went with them and I was left feeling a little hollow, waving to them from the doorstep.

It must have been after midnight when I heard Jay pull up outside. I was feeling very let down, and I didn't get up to greet him. The dishes were still on the table, and what was left of the stew was on the counter, but it didn't seem to matter.

He came in carrying a radio under his arm. "Hi," he said. "For Joey—after I fix it." He put the radio down and picked up the Northport paper, and turned to the death notices. He's been doing that every night for the past week.

I'd begged Jay for years to move to a town where there's life, people. But Jay was as afraid of cities as I was of staying here. I was afraid of staying here because Jay was building up to something. I seen it happen before. He talked in his sleep and wouldn't let on that something's eating him. But I could tell.

After he put the paper aside, he sat quiet in his chair for a spell, staring at the radio he brought home. His face was hard. Then, all at once, he got up and handed me a snapshot. "Who does that look like?" he said.

I looked at the girl in the picture and searched my mind. I'd never seen her before. "I don't know, Jay," I finally said.

"Olive, don't be that way! Look at that girl—that face, those eyes, the same mouth. Who does she remind you of? Look!"

Jay hadn't talked to me that way in years. I was hurt, but I wanted to say the right thing. I looked at the girl again, but nothing registered. "I don't know, Jay. I suppose she's a camper, but I can't place her."

"Damn it, Olive, look at her!"

"Jay, I am looking. What am I supposed to see?"

"A girl that looks enough like Lorrie to be her twin!" Can't you see it? That's Lorrie!"

My heart jumped in my throat. The picture wasn't anything like Lorrie. But what was happening to Jay that he'd think such a thing?

"Jay, you're wrong. Lorrie's got a cleft in her chin, and a mole down here on her neck." I know Lorrie's face like a poem that you memorize.

"I saw her with my own eyes. I saw her. Don't you think I know when someone looks like my own daughter?"

"Now you stop that. Lorrie is not your own daughter, and you stop talking like that. Lorrie belongs to someone else, and this girl is *not* Lorrie!"

He took the snapshot from me and said very quietly, "This picture doesn't do her justice. I saw her face to face."

I felt for Jay with all my might, but I was afraid for him too. He was quiet for a while. Then he said, "Do we still have that bottle of hooch?" Oh, God. That's what I feared most of all.

"Jay, please, I beg you, don't."

"I've got a sore throat. I just want to gargle."

"Don't drink, Jay. I beg you. Not after all these years."

"What do you mean, after all these years? I can have a beer whenever I feel like it. I know when to stop."

"Yes, but not with whiskey. Please, Jay."

"Why don't you just go to bed?"

I followed him to the kitchen. He poured a drinking glass half full of whiskey. He picked it up and then he looked over at me. I thought back on those bad years and asked God to spare me this.

For an instant everything stood still. Jay seemed to be frozen—holding the glass. My heart even seemed to stop and the silence of the room had a noise of its own. Then Jay’s face slowly softened and he tipped the glass and poured the whiskey into the sink. He put the glass down gently and said, “Olive, I’m sorry. I—I can’t tell you how sorry I am. Please forgive me.”

I hugged him, and held on with all my might. I was so relieved. I couldn’t speak, but I nodded my head up and down on his shoulder so he’d know that everything was all right. Thank you, dear Lord, thank you, thank you.

After we both calmed down, Jay went to bed and read his astronomy book. I sat on the living room couch. I knew he had to be alone for a spell, but I wasn’t afraid anymore. I knew he’d be all right. I heard him turning the pages for a long time before he fell asleep.

Everything was quiet then—even the crickets in the basement. I looked at the radio and recalled that we used to have one much like it, back when we were first married, long before I knew I’d never be able to give him a son he could do things for, like repair old radios.

## JOEY

I suppose you're wondering how Mom and me came about getting involved with Timberline in the first place. Well, it's sort of a long story—not any big deal secret or anything, but you have to go all the way back and start out with this “Fido was a pup” and all. You see, my old man died last fall and that's how it all started—I mean, that's the whole thing right there. I suppose now that he's dead I shouldn't call him my old man, but he was kind of a screwy guy and just because he kicked off I can't see making a saint out of him, like this preacher did at the funeral. I'm telling you, I almost doubled up with the bends. Listening to him talk, I would have thought that some real heroic missionary just kicked off or something, if I didn't know who was in the casket. I hope the old man had a sure ticket to the Pearly Gates, like that preacher said, because in a lot of ways he was a good guy, and I really miss him, but you'd never have known him, hearing that preacher go on.

The whole deal didn't break me up near as much as Mom. Oh, I bawled. At first I suppose I bawled because everyone else was bawling. And it all happened so *fast*. You know, I just came home from school and I was upstairs changing my clothes when all at once I hear this great hairy commotion downstairs. When I get down there, Mom is sprawled out on the couch and this guy, this Ted Bush who works with my old man, is standing there crying. Boy, when he told me my old man got killed in a crack-up, I almost keeled over. Boy, just like that. Here you are, you come home from school feeling pretty good. You put on your coveralls and get all ready to help Hank and Rudy put new rings in Hank's goddamn old Ford, when all at once some character tells you that your old man is dead. I mean, what a blast.

I bawled, there's no kidding about that, and it just wasn't a stray tear here and there, either; I mean I turned on the waterworks. I don't know if I felt as bad as all that, but crying is sort of contagious. Ted Bush was crying, Mom was crying, the old man was dead, so I just let go—kinda relaxed and I mean get out

the bucket, here come the tears. But I don't think it really hit me until a few days later—just after the funeral. It was the real corny little things that got me, like the day after the funeral I was moping around down in the basement—you know, smoking a couple of weeds and scratching my ass and all that—when all at once I look up and see this crummy punching bag my old man put up for me when I was just a kid. It was one of these jobs where you have to assemble the frame yourself. You open up the box and all you see is a deflated Junior Miss punching bag and about forty-two thousand pieces of iron, and you have to figure out how to put it together.

You see, my old man was anything but an Einstein with his hands. He was so damned unhandy that it would take him about half an hour to open a new loaf of bread, and here he was trying to put this punching bag up. I got the bag for Christmas and I'll bet it was almost next Easter before he finally finished with it. And when he finally did, I didn't even want to use it anymore. I mean, all the kick was out of it. I waited and waited—you know, every day I thought well, maybe tomorrow he'll be finished with the goddamn thing, and then hearing him bitch and moan about having to put it up. "Goddamn manufacturers, goddamn this, goddamn that," and hell, the first thing you know all the kick is out of it. I mean, all I wanted was a punching bag. I didn't ask anyone to break their ass slaving away over it for months so that every time I look at it I feel guilty.

So after the funeral I was down in the basement and I look up and saw that goddamn bag with about nine-tenths of the air out of it so that it looked like an old goat's tit or something, and I think that was the first time that it really hit me that my old man was gone—I mean, that I'd never see him or anything ever again. That was real strange. Boy, I stood there bawling like a baby.

So then after these lawyers get through with us, we had to sell the house and move into some real cruddy apartment. My old man never believed in insurance; Mom wouldn't let me quit school and get a job, so she had to. She was a nurse before she got married so she gets a job in an old folks' home—you know, putting the old drain bag on these geezers that can't help it when they leak

anymore. Boy, what a dandy job, huh? And she wasn't even making enough money so that we could pay the rent on our lovely goddamn apartment. We finally ended up moving into this hairy little shack next to the old folks' home. I'm telling you, that place is really the end of the road. Talk about scraping bottom. I don't know who in the hell lived there before us—probably Genghis Khan—but you should have seen some of the furniture in that place. I mean, all ragged and dissolving all over the place—a great old lump couch here and a horsehair armchair there that would stab you in the ass every time you sat down, and talk about stink. Somebody must have died in that goddamn chair and they didn't find him for about nineteen years. Oh, we really stepped into a setup, all right.

The Cornell Home for the Aged. Don't get the idea that it was some big fenced-in institution or anything. Not this place. It was just one of these old beat-up three-story frame houses—you know, one of those old-fashioned jobs with the floors sloping so much that you can't even have coasters on the furniture or everything would roll to the middle of the room. Big hairy dirt basement with this ancient furnace that must have come across with Columbus. And who do you think drew the job of stoking up that big old clinker can three times a day? Lucky Joey. But that wasn't the worst of it.

When it got good and cold out, everything—you know, all the pipes and everything—would freeze up. And not just the pipes in the basement, either—I mean every pipe in that goddamn place. Now that's no kidding. Up on the *third floor* there's this thing in the bathroom—I guess it's supposed to be a foot washer or something, I don't know—that's about all you could use it for, unless you wanted to wash a cat in it or maybe take a long-range leak—and don't think some of those old nearsighted geezers didn't take a shot at it from time to time. Of course, they never hit it. I mean, it's only about ankle high and no bigger than a breadbox—but you've got to give them credit for trying. Well, anyhow, this foot washer has a water faucet on it that leaks all the time. You can hear the damn thing all over the house, drip, drip, drip, but the first time it gets a little cold out

that son-of-a-bitch is just frozen solid with this big icicle hanging down there like an oyster.

So here we are, the pipes frozen, the old furnace straining its ass off, ready to blow its cork and not a drop of water in the whole house, and all at once every codger in the place gets this terrific thirst. I'm telling you, those old duffers can be just like little kids sometimes. Just after a snowfall you could walk around outside and tell which rooms the men lived in. Just look for the big yellow stains in the snow and that's where some old duffer took a leak out of the window the night before. Of course, they don't all do it. Some of them just wet the bed and let it go at that. I can't blame them, though—I mean, there's no bathroom on the second floor and some of those guys are locked in their rooms every night so that they don't go sleepwalking around and break their ass, so what are they going to do when they wake up in the middle of the night with a goddamn swollen kidney?

That's how we spent our winter. Of course Mom didn't like it any better than I did, but she said it had been so long since she'd nursed that she'd have to—you know, get back in the swing of things, get in a little practice with the old drain bag before she could get something better.

But about the middle of March, Mom really got into it with the owner of the place—this Mr. Wilky, some iddy-biddy little bastard that was about the size of a rattlesnake fart. I mean to tell you, what a first-rate jerk—him and that wife of his. What a money-grubber. Well, you can imagine what kind of guy he must be, operating that kind of old folks' home. How did the bastard sleep nights? Well, anyhow, he came around to give his weekly pep talk—you know, get in there and hang the old drain bag and all that crap, and boy, Mom lit into him like a chocolate-covered buzz saw. I didn't know she had it in her. You know she was always kind of quiet. She'd get mad—oh, could she get mad, but only with the family. Never to any strangers. But that old Wilky had it coming, I'll say that, and did Mom ever give it to him.



So the upshot of it all is that we were fired. You'll have to excuse me for using this word upshot. It's something I picked up from my last history teacher. I swear, that must be the only word that jerk knows. Everything that happens, like Aaron Burr gets athlete's feet, and the upshot of it all is that they throw him in the clink. I had a pretty good history teacher at the school I used to go to, but I had to transfer when we moved to Cornell Stench Haven.

So here we were packing our bags getting ready to move again—I mean, they have very strict rules that you can't stay in Genghis Khan's *chateau* unless you're working for the company. I don't know who in hell would want to, but anyhow that's the rule. Old Man Wilky gave us one week to get out. He said he had a very nice couple moving in to take our jobs. Nice couple! Boy, he'd have to go pretty far down Skid Row to find a couple of suckers who'd live in that place. I mean, let's be reasonable.

We moved across town and stayed with my Aunt Alma for a while. Was I ever glad to get out of that old folks' home, I mean, you don't know how nice it is to get up and not have to worry about stoking up a furnace or watching your mom working her ass to the bone. I know this sounds a lot like that "Eat your food and think of the starving Armenians" bit and all, but I never really knew how nice we had it when my old man was still around.

And poor Mom. God, did she ever look old all at once. I mean, by the time we left the old folks' home you hardly would have known her. I always thought she was a hell of a lot better looking than Aunt Alma, but boy, when we got there, Mom looked like she was fifteen years older than Aunt Alma. You know, when we were at the old folks' home, I never noticed it with all these *real* old bastards running around, but now I could see that she was really shriveling up in the face. That's awful, you know it. Sometimes I hope I'll never have to grow old.

Well, anyhow, Mom got a job jockeying around taking care of these rich old bags who had to stay in bed, but she didn't work every day, and she wasn't dragging down what you'd call a huge paycheck. Like after about two months we were into Aunt Alma for a couple of hundred bucks.

I don't really think Aunt Alma minded because she's the kind who's always going out of her mind to get one up on you in favors—you know the type. The Christmas present she buys always costs about five times as much as yours, she always loads your plate up with so much of this real heavy food you can't possibly finish it all, and her favorite bit is to squeeze a dollar bill into your hand while your mom isn't looking. Like I say, she didn't mind, but I don't really think Uncle Norman had much of an orgasm about all of us living in that dinky little flat.

You see, the walls were about as thick as eggshells. When someone blew a fart in there you could hear it all the way down the block. I remember one night old Uncle Normal was in the john and you'd swear he must've been eating red cabbage, chili, baked beans, and radishes from the report he let loose with—just like a car backfiring in the Holland Tunnel or something. I really felt sorry for that guy when he came out. If Mom and Aunt Alma hadn't been sitting there pretending like they never heard anything, I might have even congratulated him, but what the hell can a guy do?

And while I'm still going on about those thin walls, let me tell about the funniest thing I ever heard in my life. I mean, it actually wasn't funny in itself but if you ever saw Aunt Alma and Uncle Norman you'd fall out of your chair laughing when I tell you this. One night I heard the bedsprings going to beat hell in their bedroom. Boy, that kills me. I mean I really would have liked to see that—you know, not that I'd get a big thrill out of it or anything, but just for the sake of seeing them in the act. I suppose it's not very nice for me to talk that way, because what the hell, beautiful people aren't the only ones who have a license to have some fun out of life, fall in love, and all that. And I appreciate what they did for us, but there's something about them bouncing away in that bed that just strikes my funny bone. Did you ever do that—look at people and try to imagine what they act like when they're going at it full blast? I do sometimes.

So anyhow, we were staying with Aunt Alma and Uncle Norman, and everything was going along all right, everything was fine, and then around the middle of April, Mom and Aunt Alma got together with some of Aunt Alma's

buddies and the upshot of it all was that one of them knew about an opening for a nurse at Camp Timberline, and so they talked Mom into writing to the director of the camp. Well, the first thing you know I was sitting in Aunt Alma's living room when here comes Mom smiling like hell—the first time I saw her really smile since the old man died.

She hands me this letter. It says: “Dear Mrs. Jones, I was very favorably impressed with your letter and we have decided that you are the one to fill our nursing position. Yes, we can work something out for Joseph, too. With two hundred active girls in camp we can always use another handyman. Joseph will be working for our caretaker, Jay McFarland, who helped build the camp. He used to be a lumberjack in Canada, and I'm sure Joseph will enjoy working for him. We are prepared to pay you nine hundred dollars for the summer, and Joseph one hundred. Are those terms suitable? Sincerely, Nancy Zimmerman.”

How about that, huh? It just goes to show you how much handymen are in demand nowadays. Where else could you go out and slave your ass off for twelve goddamn weeks and drag down a whole one hundred dollars?

I mean, I wasn't too keen on this Camp Timberline deal or anything. I was all for going out and working in the steel mills, but when somebody gets all fired up on something the way Mom was on this camp—you know, wholesome atmosphere, outdoor living, beautiful country—why you just better go along with the gag.

And there were still a couple of things I liked about the setup, two hundred girls for instance. I'm not what you'd call a lady-killer or anything, but with those kind of odds a guy's bound to do some good. I also liked the idea of working with a lumberjack.

When the old man was still alive, I used to go out camping overnight with Hank Ramsey sometimes, and I liked that rugged life—you know, sleeping out there in the old man's sleeping bag that he bought about ten years before and never used once. For a while I was such an outdoor fiend I even subscribed to this hunting and fishing magazine and conned the old man into buying this thing

called the Brushman's Buddy. Funny thing about that goddamn gadget—I mean, it was supposed to do all kinds of things, act like a machete, a pruning hook, a saw, a fish cleaner, a knife sharpener, a toenail clipper, and I don't remember what all, but you know? It didn't do a goddamn thing right. You couldn't machete your way through a goddamn rubber toothpick with it, and I mean if you really—and I mean really—want to get your knuckles chewed up into one huge bloody pulp, just try using that son-of-a-bitch as a saw. Here you are trying to work with a stroke about four inches long, and the first time you overshoot a little bit, get out the tourniquet, I mean, here comes the goddamn blood. So after I used the thing four or five times maybe, I can see that this jazz has to come to a screeching halt or I'll be one huge bandage from head to toe, so I salt the old Brushman's Buddy away in the attic with all the other junk and there it stays.

You know, that's kind of funny—I mean, I must really be a lot like my old man although I don't feel like I am, if you know what I mean. I mean, that's just like something he'd pull, going crazy to get some gadget and then never using it but maybe once or twice. It must run in the family.

But anyhow, I liked the idea of working with a lumberjack. I was kind of worried about him being a caretaker and all, because you know how caretakers are—real crotchety old farts with big massive canes that they're always belting cats and dogs and everything with. But I figured that maybe this guy was different—being a lumberjack and all.

So during the next month, I must have asked eighteen hundred people what a caretaker's handyman was supposed to do. I mean, I was curious. What the hell was there to do around a girls' camp anyway? Maybe teach them woodcraft or something. Boy, that would be the deal, wouldn't it? Go on an overnight woodcraft trip with about three or four of them.

Well, finally I meet this guy who gives me the lowdown. He's a carpenter working on remodeling a store a couple of blocks away from Aunt Alma's place. On the way home from school one day, I step in there and strike up a conversation with the workers. You know, not with all of them. With some of

those bastards you couldn't strike up gas pains, especially the plasterers. I'm telling you, I don't know what's with them but there must be something about slinging that crap on the walls all day long that does something to a guy—you know, makes him as sour as a green grape.

But this one guy, Pete, used to be a caretaker at a camp up in Vermont and I mean, he's sociable—laugh, joke around. Damn good carpenter, too—about four hundred times as good as those goddamn plasterers. And Pete really gave me the scoop on camp life, too. He told me there's always something to do. He said a handyman has to be good at everything, fixing leaks in the roof, overhauling the trucks, fixing the pipes, repairing the boats. He didn't mention anything about overnight woodcraft classes, but it still sounded like a pretty good deal.

I asked him if I was supposed to bring any tools with me, but he said that the camp supplied them. That didn't seem right. I mean, I wouldn't go for it if I had to bring a goddamn power lathe with me or something like that, but you'd think that a handyman would have to bring something of his own, maybe just a pipe wrench or an ax, but anyhow something that's his own. I mean, if you're standing there and see some so-called handyman get off the train without even his own screwdriver, you're going to know right off the bat that he's not a very cool handyman.

Old Pete agreed with me. I didn't have any tools, but I had about eight bucks, so Pete and I decided that there's no sense bringing a whole goddamn tool box along but a guy can never go wrong with a *good* hammer—not just any old nail-bender, but a first-class hammer. Pete uses a Stanley hammer and boy, you ought to see him sink those nails, I mean just three whacks and that nail is down there. So the upshot of it all was that I bought a Stanley hammer—nice one, good balance. I practiced up a little bit, too. You know—sink the old finishing nail and all that crap.

I wanted to keep my hammer with me on the train when we came up here, you know, wear it on the old belt and all, but Mom wasn't very keen on that idea,

so into the old steamer-trunk it went. That kind of shook me up. I mean, you're standing there and this handyman gets off the train without his hammer, and for all you know he doesn't even own one. I mean, you have no way of knowing his old lady made him salt it away in a goddamn steamer-trunk. What the hell's the sense of even owning a hammer if you can't wear the son-of-a-bitch once in a while?

And that's the whole story in a nutshell—I mean, how we got mixed up with Camp Timberline.

## PART TWO

### NANCY

The trees were already rustling a deep green song of autumn and I had trouble accounting for the elusive days and weeks which had been swallowed by the past. The waves on the lake—gray against the bleached sandy shores—had a frozen quality about them and there was a harsh cold undertone in the air. The summer was half over. Today was Parents' Day. In less than a week the cabin twenty girls would go on the Mystery Trip.

I sat in my cottage—the dawn's first shadows shuffling restlessly outside—attempting to decide how I should tell Jay about the trip. I dreaded a hassle and hated to think of firing him. My mind wandered. I scribbled a few notes for my Parents' Day speech; I glanced through last year's edition of *WHEEEEE!*; and then, in close rapport with the infinite, I found myself thinking about death. I saw a procession of girls and women, stretching for miles, on their way to the cemetery where they would pay their last tribute to one of their dearest friends—their Nancy. I heard a speech by a camper who had later won acclaim in the literary world, and I saw tears—tears of love.

I was moved.

Perhaps I think about my funeral so often because it most clearly illustrates my reason for being. How amorphous and nebulous, and yet how real. Once I had tried to explain my feelings to Ed (although they actually transcend verbal expression), but his reaction had been one of disgust. "Nancy, that's sick!" he had said, and I've never since discussed the subject with him.

I glanced at my watch, and forced myself to think about Jay. I would tell him about the Mystery Trip now—before breakfast. As I picked up the phone, however, my determination faded. "Yes, Nancy," Lulu's voice came through the receiver metallically.

I bit my lip. "Nancy, are you there? ... Nancy?"

“Ring Jay in the b—,” I hesitated. “No.” I said emphatically. “No. Cancel the call.” I hung up slowly, knowing that I should tell him in person. I’d have to select the most appropriate time. Sometime tomorrow perhaps, after we’d put the strain of Parents’ Day behind us.

I put on my tan jacket and trotted in the still-stiff, frosty air to the Mainhouse. The wonderful smells of biscuits baking, heavy grease, butter and eggs drew me to the kitchen. Henna, working by the ovens, was perspiring into the bread pans. I was growing weary of reminding her to wear the forehead sweatband I’d bought her. Nobody relishes eating perspiration-soaked biscuits. However, I managed to quell the words of reproach rolling up my throat. On Parents’ Day, I need all the help I can get—Henna’s help—and I couldn’t afford to anger her. I’d have to ignore the nauseating drip, drip, drip into the bread pans. Since over four hundred people would be on hand today, and since Henna would quit with the slightest provocation, I’d have to cajole and propitiate—turn my back and smile.

“When are you going to get that goddamn blower fixed!” Henna barked, pushing her hair back. “I’m getting damn well sick and tired of the smoke and heat in here.”

“Henna,” I soothed, “this has been a trying summer for all of us. We’ve all had our share of inconveniences. I’ll have Jay look at it the first thing tomorrow morning.”

“Jay, ha! He was supposed to fix it last *summer*. You’ll never get any work out of him!”

“What prompts you to say that?” I inquired.

“Nothing.”

Henna is a New England clam—in appearance as well as actions—and on Parents’ Day I couldn’t afford to pry open her shell. If she had secret information about Jay, I’d find out about it—sooner or later.

I left the smells of the kitchen and started up the back stairs, glancing at my watch again. With a twinge of anxiety, I realized that there would be a horrible



time-gap before breakfast—unless I could find some way to fill it. I stepped into Lulu’s office which smelled of damp lumber. A blanket of sunlight fell on me. Lulu, sitting at her desk, was punching numbers on the adding machine which clicked and clacked mechanically. She smiled.

I needed company, but I would not find it in Lulu’s web or introversion. I looked out the window at the camp below, searching for life. I found it. On the path, two campers and a counselor (Jug) walked briskly, their arms around each other affectionately. I handed the Parents’ Day schedule to Lulu and rushed downstairs. The campers and Jug were on the recreation porch, starting a fire. “Good morning, Miss Zimmerman,” they chorused respectfully when I entered.

“Good morning, good morning,” I replied cheerfully. “Did you sleep well? We’re going to have a busy day.”

## ROY

By the end of Parents' Day, I was suffering from a case of All-Out Fatigue. The day had been one sustained, near-orgasmic fit of ecstasy, starting immediately after breakfast and continuing through the Mother-Daughter Hat Contest, the cabin sixteen's truncated version of *South Pacific*, the Water Exhibitions (and I mean Exhibition), the Lobster Boil, the Mid-afternoon Watermelon Fiesta (sliced expertly by the men of McFarland's Volunteers), the Chicken-in-the-Basket-Eat-Out, the Sunset Fireworks Display, and the Family Sing. Sandwiched between this wide spectrum of events were light Public Relations conversation with the 400-odd parents of our illustrious campers and, of course, the garbage detail—time-consuming, but rewarding.

And now, as we performed our last duty, directing the Homeward-Bound traffic from the parking lot (which fairly bristled with chrome and lacquer) I had difficulty holding up my flashlight. Finally the last car (a Cadillac) hummed past the campers, who were lined along the road, waving tear-soaked handkerchiefs, and Jay, who was standing next to me, summed up the situation nicely, saying, "Well, Parents' Day is over."

"Swell," I said, and shuffled determinedly into the sunset toward our humble cabin. I needed a short nap to fortify me for the Second Half of the summer. Somehow I managed to find the cabin. However, I had just settled down and closed my eyes, when Ann entered. She made a Bee-Line to the dresser. Moments later, she was thoughtfully composing her Daily Message in her Diary. That irritated me. I suppose that if one were to classify my feelings about Ann's diary writing, he'd have to place them somewhere in the Jealousy Philum. The whole idea struck me as being painfully Un-American.

"What are you confessing today?" I asked. "Nothing incriminating, I hope."

Without answering, she closed her diary, locked it, and put it in her beach bag (or whatever it's called). Then she stood up and began unbuttoning her blouse. In a moment of revelation I realized that I wasn't so fatigued after all.

She took off her blouse and unhooked her brassiere. Her nipples began to pucker when they were exposed to the cool air. She looked extremely inviting with her hair curling gently around her neck and her suntan marking an imaginary bathing suit. Perhaps Ann's hips were too wide; perhaps her lower abdomen is on the flaccid side; perhaps even she has a shade too much body hair. However, at that moment I was quite willing to overlook her defects—all of them.

She reached for her red bathing suit, which hung on a nail near the dresser, and I Made My Move. Stealthily, I slipped out of my bunk and approached her. She saw me and modestly clutched her bathing suit to her breast. "No, Roy," she said. "Not now."

"Come on," I said and put my hands on her shoulder.

"No. I've got to go to the beach."

"Really?" I put my arms around her.

"Yes, really. I've got to give the cabin twenty girls their nightly swimming lesson."

"On Parents' Day?"

"Every day."

"Let them wait for a few minutes."

"No, Roy. I don't care to do anything in a few minutes. I don't like that."

I tried to grab her butt, but she resisted, so I shrugged and walked across the room. "Pardon me," I said. "I almost forgot about the Recommended Procedure. It won't happen again. After this, I'll remember to kiss you until my lips are chapped. I'll make like Rudolph Valentino and profess my undying love—yea by the hour. Then perhaps you'll reward me with a little intimacy. Pant, pant."

"It's not that, Roy. I just can't enjoy doing it on the run."

"Aha. Sometimes I think you can't enjoy it, period."

"I do when you give me a chance. But you can't expect me to respond every time you get an urge."

"Swell."

“Would you please stop saying that?”

“Swell.”

“*That’s* one of the reasons I can’t get worked up,” she said. “Your damned sarcasm. You have absolutely no respect for me. You’ll insult me one moment and then turn right around and expect me to make love with you. I can’t do that. I’m your wife, not a prostitute.”

“Swell.”

She glared at me and began putting on her bathing suit. I ambled over to the screen door and dented the silence by twanging the spring a few times.

Music Soothes the Wild Beast.

When Ann was ready to leave, she said, “I’m sorry, Roy. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I hardly see you from day to day, and when we meet ... And this *camp!* The people up here are *mad!* They’re psychos, just like you said.”

I Broke It To Her Gently. “Ann,” I said, “I don’t recall making such a generalized statement.”

She radiated bewilderment. “Are you serious? That’s all you talked about the first week we were up here. ‘Jay’s a psycho; Joey’s psycho; Nancy’s psycho.’”

“Please, no melodramatics. I said that they had certain traits which irritated me. I didn’t say they were (as you put it) psychos.”

She stared at me. “Oh, I see,” she said. “You’ve changed your mind. Now you like them. Is that what you’re trying to say?”

“Hardly. I don’t ‘like’ Nancy nor do I ‘like’ most of the others. On the other hand, I don’t exactly ‘dislike’ them, either.”

She forced a laugh. “You’ve changed your tune just like that,” she said and snapped her fingers.

“Have it your way,” I said. “Just like that.” I snapped my fingers.

“I don’t think I’ll ever understand you,” she said solemnly and went outside.

The Fairer Sex.



## ANN

Roy didn't know how hard I tried seeing things his way. He had no idea of the mental gymnastics I went through to convince myself that he was right about the people up here—Jay and the others. Then he rewarded me, damn him, by doing a complete flip and leaving me holding onto his discarded notions.

As I walked down the path, I no longer felt angry—just embalmed with a sense of hopelessness. I remembered how Roy was when we were engaged—when we used to read together in the library, walk hand-in-hand around campus, and sit for hours over a cup of cold coffee, talking about trivialities that seemed more meaningful than anything in the world. I remembered Roy's comment when we received the results of our college placement exam, "You've got a remarkable mind, Ann." I felt proud for days—I glowed.

Now, he treats me like an ignorant slob, and I feel like one with his obsolete opinions rattling around in my head. No woman wants to admit that she's a failure in the single area which should be most natural for her, but everything pointed to it: I was a flop as a wife.

When I neared the swimming area, I saw Shirley Zurbahn—one of the cabin twenty girls—sitting in her dress uniform on a stump next to the path. I addressed her curtly, "You'd better hurry and change, Shirley."

"All right," she said, standing up.

She started to walk with me, dragging her feet and looking down at the ground. She looked sad. "What's the matter?" I said. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"I'm mad," she said. "My folks didn't come up today. And they said they would. They didn't write or anything. They just didn't come. I waited in the parking lot almost all afternoon."

She looked up at me—her big dark eyes and her homely face—and suddenly I wanted to take her in my arms and hug her. Her parents must have been animals like Roy. "Maybe their car broke down," I said. (I almost said,

“Maybe something happened to them on the road,” and fortunately, I caught myself.) I put my arm around her. “I’ll tell you what. After we go swimming, you and I can do something special. How would that be?”

“All right, I guess,” she said absently. “All the other kids were walking around with their folks and about the only other one whose folks didn’t come was that obnoxious Fiegler snot in cabin sixteen. She was the only other one. Just me and her.” She stopped and looked at me again with her pleading eyes. “Ann, do I have to go swimming? I don’t want to go down there. I don’t even want to sleep in the cabin tonight. I feel like such a fool after I told all the other girls that my folks would be here. I never thought Daddy would do anything like this to me. Do I have to go swimming?”

“No, I guess not. Would you like to do something special after I come back, just you and me?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Where will I find you?”

“I don’t know. I’ll be around. I just can’t understand Daddy doing anything like this to me.”

Gee, I felt sorry for Shirley. I left her standing next to the path. When I looked back at her, she had her fist up to her mouth, as if she were sucking her thumb.

The rest of the cabin twenty girls were lounging on the pier, and Sue Fernbild, who was wearing her dress uniform, was saying, “And I know why her folks didn’t come up here.”

“Why?”

“I shouldn’t say because Shirley and I are very dear friends and I wouldn’t talk behind her back for the world.”

“Oh, come on. Why?”

“Well, I happen to know that her daddy drives a Ford—an old Ford—and he’s no chain-store executive, either. He owns a dinky grocery store—and they don’t live in Shaker Heights like Shirley always says. They live in *Cleveland*.

“No!”

“Sue!” I said. “Go change into your swimming suit.”

“I can’t go swimming,” she said haughtily.

“Why?”

“I’ve got the curse.”

The other girls laughed and Sue seemed very pleased with herself.

“You’ve had the curse for the last three weeks now,” I said.

She shrugged and said, “You look very nice in that bathing suit, Ann. I guess you’re the prettiest counselor up here, did you know that?”

“Thank you,” I said. She was trying to make a fool out of me. I said, “You look very nice in a bathing suit, too. You ought to wear yours more often.”

The girls laughed.

Striking an affected pose, Sue said, “I know.” She strutted toward me down the pier, scratching her head. “How come you don’t take special pills like the other counselors?”

“What in the world are you talking about?”

“Didn’t you know that most of the other counselors take special pills?”

“Are you serious?”

“Sure. Everybody knows that. They don’t want their breasts to get in their way, so they take special pills. Everybody knows that.”

“Sue, that’s a terrible thing to say.”

“The truth never hurt anyone.”

“Well, it’s not true. Now if you’re not going swimming, get off the pier.”

“All right. I hate the water anyhow. I think I’ll go up and flirt with somebody. There are a couple of men around here who seem like a lot of fun, if you know what I mean.”

She wriggled her rump as she sauntered away. The girls were hysterical with laughter, and I could hardly quell the impulse to throw Sue off the pier and drown her. If Roy ever as much as looked at that animal cross-eyed, I’d divorce him in a minute!





## SUE

Ann was pretty sore at me—not that I particularly cared. I wanted to make the gang laugh, and I did. Ann gets on my nerves anyhow, always trying to make me swim. I hate swimming. I hate anything I can't do well. I'm probably the only one in the cabin that can't swim one stroke—not even an inch. But I don't admit it. I act like swimming bores me—and that's not exactly lying, either, because it *does* bore me. And besides, I could probably swim if I had to. And—oh, the heck with it.

I watched the gang from the hill for a while. They were practicing kicking. What a waste of time. It bothered me a little though, because they looked like they were having fun. They didn't even miss me.

I'd find something exciting to do. Then I'd tell them about it, and make them wish they'd gone with me instead of wasting their time on that silly kicking. I started up the path and I yawned a couple of times. I was bored silly. It seems like I'm bored most of the time. But whenever I yawn at home, Daddy becomes so upset, he threatens to send me to my room or some other crazy thing. "Young healthy girl like you," he says. "Must be something wrong with you. I never knew what it meant to be bored until I was thirty." That's the kind of stuff I have to listen to. You see, he just doesn't understand people. How could he say something as stupid as that?

He doesn't think I have feelings, but I do—plenty of them. I walked past the barn. Nobody was around. It didn't matter. It wouldn't be fun flirting with the men now, not when the gang wasn't around to watch. That's ninety percent of the fun.

I saw Shirley Zurbahn sulking around in front of the cabin. I didn't want to talk to her. She's sort of a creep. I went the other way—toward the ballpark instead.

If I had a beautiful evening gown hidden away, a pure white one, covered with sequins—I'd have put it on and gone back to the beach. The gang—and

Ann—would just stand there staring with their mouths open. They'd gather around me and "oh" and "ah." I like that idea. Sometimes, when I can't sleep at night, I think about things like that.

When I rounded the bend in the road, past the gym, I heard some banging over by the tennis courts. It was Joey in one of the practice courts. He looked positively ridiculous in his old sweaty jeans and tennis shoes. I've sort of flirted with him before—not that I particularly like him. I haven't liked anyone too much lately and that bothers me. Everything's a lot nicer when you have a crush on someone, but I didn't feel very crushy. I hoped it was nothing permanent.

No, the only reason I ever gave Joey a tumble in the first place is because some of the gang—Dot and Peg especially—think he's really something. Actually, he is not much, but I thought I'd flirt with him. It would give me something to talk about, anyhow.

I kept walking toward his practice court, and I knew he saw me, but he pretended like he was interested in nothing but his silly tennis. I guess he was trying to act like a pro, because he had a mean look on his face and he was pounding the ball with all of his might. He was jumping around like a crazy jumping bean, too.

I'd fix that. Boys are spineless things. As soon as they think you're going to give them something, they'll drop whatever they're doing and follow you around the world. That's very disillusioning, but true.

I pulled my shoulders back and put an extra wiggle in my walk. Joey was still acting like a pro, but I knew how to make him forget about his silly tennis in a hurry.

## JOEY

The old roommate—Champ—gave me a few basic tennis lessons—you know, shake hands with the racket and all that crap—and I was up in the practice court banging some of the dust off from his catgut. I was really laying into that old ball. When I first started out, I used to hit home runs—you know, right over the backstop and into the underbrush, but I settled down after I lost a few cases of balls and I was really getting the feel of the game. So there I was moving around on the balls of my goddamn feet like a cat, peppering the old ball against the backstop, when all at once I looked up and who should be standing there but this creamy-looking Sue—I mean, not twenty feet away. Well I mean to tell you, I really—and I mean really—put on an exhibition of practice court tennis for her. Forehand, backhand, forehand, here I go. Jump back, get set, wind up, whammo. Oh man, was I in rare form.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see that she's cruising over toward me, so I decide I'll give her a sample of my patented cannonball return before I casually take a break. Here comes the ball. I'm set—I mean, I'm really waiting for it. I wind up and *splatto*.

A goddamn home run. What a hero I turned out to be.

I tried to act casual, you know, shrug it off like it's all part of the game, but when someone belts one over the backstop like that, it doesn't take any nuclear physicist to figure out he's not the world's greatest tennis player. I mean, did I ever feel like a blooming idiot or something.

Sue was smiling at me, so I gave her a big Hollywood smile—you know, really turn on the hairy old charm. Boy, can I be a phony bastard sometimes. But that's the kind of thing women go for.

"That doesn't look like much fun," she said.

I laughed and sort of got my finger stuck in the tennis racket. How the hell did I do it, I'll never know but I got it wedged right in there. Boy, whenever I'm around girls, I always feel like I've got about three thousand too many parts—my

hands feel like they're as big as a breadbox and my feet are all over the place and my tongue swells up like a goddamn inner tube. Let's face it: It's really a bitch to try to act like a lover when your awkward ass is sprawled out over the eastern third of the United States.

Well, I managed to pull the old finger out of the racket and say, "Just trying to stay in shape."

"Why?" she said in his real sexy tone and sort of cocked herself up on one hip. What a build, I mean *what a build*.

"Oh, you know, a guy's got to stay in shape," I said. (What a brilliant statement.) Then I laughed like a mammy-jamming banshee or something. Nothing was funny but, you know, I just doubled up all over the place. Oh, I'm telling you, I'm really cool around women.

She walks over to me and takes the racket out of my hand. Then after she looks at it a while, she says, "I used to go with a *boy* who played tennis. He goes to Harvard. He bores me. They say he's a pretty good tennis player, though. I wouldn't know. I never saw him play."

"I'm not very good," I said—as if she didn't know. But I didn't want her to get the idea that I was conceited.

"I don't like tennis," she said. "I don't like any sport. What a waste of time."

"What do you like?"

"Dancing."

Wouldn't you know it. If there was one thing I'm *really* a flop at, it is dancing. I mean if you ever want to get the dry heaves sometimes, you ought to see me stumbling around on some dance floor. I even make myself sick—and I have to *live* with myself.

"Do you dance?" she said.

"A little bit, but I'm no ace at it." Boy, I'll say I'm no ace at it.

She tossed Champ's racket on the ground and said, "Let's dance."

I didn't know what the hell to say. I sort of laughed and everything—all the time trying to think of a good excuse. Then I said, "No music."

“All right,” she said and started to walk away. “If you prefer tennis to me, I’ll leave.”

I tried to pick Champ’s racket up on a dead run but all I did was drive about eight pounds of Syncoat under my fingernails. “Where are you going?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, giving me this massively seductive look.

“Mind if I walk with you?”

She shrugged and sort of looked me up and down like I was some kind of prize stud bull—maybe this was it—the big moment: Boy Loses Cherry, and all that crap.

## JAY

I'd been relaxing on the knoll by the Gymnasium for maybe an hour when I heard voices coming up the path. I recognized Joey's right away, but I couldn't place the girl's until she laughed. I'd recognize that laugh anyplace. Sue. She and Joey were going up the path to the parking lot.

I hate filth, and I fight against it as best I can, but now all those sickening statements Roy had made driving from Fir Creek, all those cracks about Joey and Sue, began running through my mind and the complexion of the evening suddenly became saturated with ugliness. That was ironic. I'd come up to the knoll in the first place searching for beauty. The pine needles on the ground were dry; Carol was still on my conscience; and Parents' Day left me feeling drained and irritable. So I'd come to the knoll to relax in the beauty of the evening, where I could be alone with my thoughts, and watch the light fade and the lights pop on in Highland.

Beauty!

Sue laughed again and I could hardly bear it. Rationally, I knew that she was just another camper—nothing to me, nothing at all. I'd gone over it hundreds of times and each time, when I was numb from thinking and reasoning, I'd be left with the same conclusion. But just the same, I couldn't hold back the clammy panic that came over me when their voices began to trail off. She was just a kid, a sixteen-year-old kid, going off to do God only knows what. I wanted to stop her—call out, but I didn't. I never act when it counts—not on the Gallitan River, not when Carol needed me. No, some people act; I merely seethe with regrets.

Their voices faded into nothing, and after a few minutes of silence, my imagination was active—creating scenes I could hardly bear.

I tried every trick I knew to throw the situation into a different perspective, but I was up against something so basic and brittle that I couldn't bend it. I had dug down to the bedrock of my personality—that solid core that defies the rubber shovel of reason—and now there was nothing left to do but bow to irrationality. I

couldn't laugh at myself or intellectualize my way out of it. There was only one trick left.

The wagon was on the road, next to the knoll. In it—inside the glove box—was my last trick. I wanted to run to the wagon and get it over with. I felt no regrets now, just pain—pain so severe I had to dull it. I couldn't stand this filthy goddamn world another second and I wanted to change it into fascinating, drunken confusion. I wanted to become disassociated from all the things I hate—including myself. The hate was dripping from my pores. I hated Joey—and Nancy—and that goddamn judge who took Lorrie from me.

The front door on the wagon opened with a squeak. I reached inside and fumbled for the latch on the glove box. I found it, pressed it, and reached inside. I pulled the bottle out and stared at it. It was covered with dust. "All right, you son-of-a-bitch, you win," I said to myself and walked back to the knoll.

I stood there hefting the bottle in my hand and staring at the base of Gallitan mountain, when all at once, everything seemed to calm down inside me, and I thought maybe I wouldn't have to drink after all.

But then I began to think of all the people I murdered—all those souls that had lived in Gallitan. And Carol. Maybe I murdered her, too. "*I was a murderer!*" With each pulsing of my heart these words pressed harder against my brain. The bare, unrefined truth—with no rationalizations or circumstances to shroud it.

"Jay!" Terry O'Rourke was saying. "Jay, to hell with this fireboat." I was back in 1949. I could hear the din of the fire—feel it smart against my eyes and grate against my throat.

"Stop it," I said half aloud, but I was caught in the eternity of those few minutes. I was a prisoner for life.

"That fire's going to jump the river. Jay! Do you hear me!"

As inevitable as the behavior of falling bodies, my mind continued in tortuous detail. I uncorked the bottle.

"Let's go!" Terry was saying, "Before it's too late!"

I stared at the fire and shook my head numbly. "It won't jump," I said.



I closed my eyes and held the bottle to my lips. Then I tipped the bottle up and felt the slug gurgle into my mouth and burn a hot trail all the way down to my belly button. But I was still sober. I could still hear Terry's voice and I still remembered Carol.

I took another slug. Terry's voice faded.

Olive had once said to me, "Jay, you're always breaking your back trying to prove yourself, trying to make yourself something you're not. Why don't you prove yourself in something important and stop drinking?"

I had an answer for her, but I didn't know how to put it in words. I try to live by my standards, but I don't even come close. Whoever said, "Maturity is that quality which each person sees in some others and can only wish for himself," sure knew what he was talking about. For me, maturity means temperance, not abstinence, but the temperate sympathy necessary for one to be a part of the world without becoming either passionate or hateful. But look at me.

I took another slug, a big one. A few more and I'd be able to spit on Gallitan mountain.

Here's some more irony. Olive and I were going to have a lot of kids. And we were going to raise them right, neither spoil nor deprive them. I knew what it was like to be deprived. My father was a Bangor bum. He left my mother when I was about eight, that son-of-a-bitch. But Olive and I were going to do things right. We had big plans.

I recall one night, on our honeymoon, we talked about this in bed. Old Dundee Boyer let us use his cabin on Lake Tolouse. It was autumn and the nights were cold. Olive was eighteen and I was twenty-one—the best tree topper in camp. She wanted six kids, I thought four would be enough if we raised them right. That was before I discovered that I was a sham—a spermless male.

I took another slug.

Jay McFarland sterile? Impossible. That's what I thought when Olive first had difficulty conceiving. Olive was obviously at fault and that presented a problem, trying to decide whether or not I should leave her. I actually considered

leaving her. When we found out who was at fault, she didn't leave me—didn't even talk about it. God.

I was going to take another slug when I realized that someone was approaching me from the road. Automatically I had the bottle behind my back. As the intruder moved closer through the heavy blue twilight, I realized it was Ann. She looked beautiful. She was wearing a white T-shirt and shorts and one look at her told me there *was* beauty left in the world—living, human beauty. One look at her, and all the filth and ugliness that had been clinging to me began to melt. Perhaps it was a natural reaction to the alcohol and emotional strain I was under. I don't know. I only knew I suddenly felt saved.

She spotted me and stopped short. "Is that you, Jay?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, you gave me a start," she said with her hand against her chest. "I didn't know anyone was here."

I wanted to possess her. My feeling for her, as immature as everything else about me, screamed with lust. I wanted to kiss her and feel the youthful glow of her body next to mine. I wanted to undress her, caress her, explore her.

I was little more than a middle-aged, pasty-eyed chorus-girl-chaser. "Beautiful view, isn't it?" she said, looking toward the lights of Highland. "I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

"No, I was just sitting here feeling sorry for myself and trying to get drunk." I sounded like a teenage kid fishing for sympathy. And that's just about how I felt.

"Trying to get drunk?" she said. "Why?"

"Oh, I guess I'm a psychological case."

"Shame on you," she said. "You're not either." She smiled and I wanted to know what it would be like holding her in my arms.

I held up the bottle and said, "Do you want some?"

"No, thanks," she glanced at me apprehensively.

"Don't worry. I'm not drunk."

"Well, Jay, why are you drinking here alone?"

I laughed. “That’s a loaded question. Why am I drinking? Because I’m weak and full of hate. Why am I drinking alone? Because I suppose I’m a lone wolf at heart. Why am I drinking here? Because from this spot I can view my entire life.” Over-dramatically, I pointed east. “I was born over there—in the slums of Bangor.” I pointed north. “Then I went north, to Canada. That’s where I was married.” I pointed west to the purple form of Gallitan mountain. “That’s where I died.” I stamped my foot on the ground. “And here’s where I am buried.”

“You really *are* feeling sorry for yourself, aren’t you?” she said.

“Not really—not with you around.”

“Nice soft shoulders,” she said smiling.

“Very nice. Extremely nice.” I smiled back. “And yet, I don’t think you know it. A person’s self-picture is little more than the product of the way others treat him, and I believe that you’re beginning to think your shoulders are ordinary. But they’re not. In fact nothing about you is. You’re beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I wish Roy agreed with you.”

“He does, Ann. It’s just difficult for him to express himself.”

“Well, frankly, I wish he’d learn how. I’m getting ...” Suddenly her voice was intense. “You don’t know how I ache to be important—to have him really *care* about me....”

“Be patient. Roy will come around.”

“God, I hope so. I feel like such a failure. If only he’d say nice things once in ...” She started crying.

I tossed the bottle over the hill. Then, I put my arms around her and she moved in close. She was wonderful in my arms, soft and pliable—a real woman. “Ann,” I said. “I hope you won’t think I’m a girl-chasing old goat for saying this, but—I don’t think you know how desirable you really are.” I took a deep breath. “I love you—and not out of sex. I love you as you are—because you’re you.” My words sounded flat compared to the feeling they were supposed to reflect, but I didn’t know how else to say it.

She stiffened in my arms. “But—what about Olive? You’ve got Olive and she’s a ...”

“She’s my wife and I love her, too. Ann, I’m not trying to make a play for you. I just want you to know that I love you.”

“I—I don’t know what to say. Thank you. I—I’m flattered.”

“It’s not flattery. It’s the truth. You’re a special creature—the most beautiful form a living being can hope to be, and for that I love you.”

With my thumb under her chin, I tilted her face up and looked into her beautiful, tear-filled eyes. Our faces were almost touching. Then it happened. I kissed her. I was a kid again, hungry with passion, ready to take on the world.

In a soft, throaty voice, she said, “I’d better go.” I held her close and kissed her again, this time with all the passion that was in me.

She responded, pushing her body against mine.

“Jay, this is wrong,” she said weakly.

“I love you,” I said and kissed her again.

Then I sat down on the ground and pulled her close to me. I ran my hand over her back. I hugged her and kissed her until I was almost out of my mind. She kissed back.

I ran my hand under her T-shirt and felt her warm, firm breasts. She was breathing hard. I kissed her again. Then, I unzipped her shorts. “No, Jay. Please,” she said. “This is wrong.”

My id was screaming, “No, this is right!” but I managed to listen to Ann. I reminded myself that if I actually loved her, I’d do what was best for her, not for me and my biological urges. I zipped up her shorts again.

We sat silently on the ground together for some time. Finally, I said, “Ann, I hope you won’t feel guilty about this.”

“Of course I will. But I wanted it. Maybe more than you did. I needed it.” Her voice was abstract, far away. “I didn’t want to stop any more than you did.”

“Thank you,” I said. “Now I’m flattered.”

“I’d better go,” she said. We stood up together. She squeezed my hand and said, “I like you very much.”

“Good. And if you ever want to talk anything over, I’ll be around—any time you need me. I’ve got pretty good shoulders, too. But everything’s going to work out for you and Roy, you’ll see.”

Without answering, she turned around and disappeared into the dark. I was about two feet off the ground. My love had been put to the test and it won out over lust. Maybe I wasn’t so immature after all.

## ROY

Ann glided into our cabin sometime after ten o'clock, wearing a quaint expression. Her lipstick was smeared. I was in my bunk reading—rather attempting to read—a musty book I'd found in the camp library behind a book of mush by Walt Whitman, *The Education of Karl Witte*.

"It's late," I said. "Where have you been?"

"Out."

"Swell. Any place in particular? Or just out?" Her shirt was crumpled.

"I'll tell you about it some other time," she said and sat down on her bunk. "I went for a walk with Shirley Zurbahn."

Her back was covered with pine needles. Although I'm not what might be termed the jealous type, I experienced a definite twinge of suspicion at this point. So I closed Karl White and, maintaining my usual tractable disposition, said, "My dear, I frankly don't think you're telling me the entire story."

"Roy, I'm tired."

"The sooner you tell me, the sooner you'll be able to rest. It's as simple as all that."

"Please," she said and sighed. "No third degrees. I'll tell you about it tomorrow. I'd rather not talk about it now."

"Perhaps I'm helplessly obstinate, but I'd rather talk about it *now*, not tomorrow. However, I'm willing to compromise. You tell me how your lipstick got smeared, *now*, and you can save the rest of it for tomorrow."

She stared at me with set jaw. Finally she said, "I don't care to discuss it now."

Her tone and expression indicated that my suspicions were well founded. I suddenly felt anxious. I had assumed that she'd have a reasonable explanation for her appearance, but now I was afraid that there was only one explanation. I said, "You'd better tell me about it right now."

"You wouldn't understand."

“I might,” I said.

She struggled out of her shirt and held it in her hand. “I’m sorry, Roy. I don’t want to talk about it now. I’m not hiding anything. You can quiz me all you want tomorrow.”

“No! I’m quizzing you *now*.”

“All *right!* Jay and I kissed!”

I looked at her, blinked, wondered if my ears were deceiving me, and said, “Would you mind repeating that? You and *who* did *what?*”

“Jay and I kissed,” she said looking down. People rarely surprise me because I’m always prepared for the worst—or “the typically human” if you prefer. But Ann had just transcended the boundaries of my expectations, and I was quite frankly shocked. “Jay *McFarland?*” I asked.

“Yes.”

I wasn’t angry or particularly jealous—simply abashed. “You and Jay *McFarland* kissed?” I asked. She nodded. “Would you mind providing the salient details, or is that asking too much?”

“Yes, I’ll provide them. I know you won’t rest until you’ve completely humiliated me. You can do it, too, Just keep it up.”

I said, “The details please.”

“It just happened. We were by the Gymnasium and he was very nice to me, so I kissed him and ...”

“*You* kissed *him?*”

“Yes—I don’t know. We kissed! I don’t remember the details.”

“Swell. What happened after you kissed?”

“We kissed again!”

“And again?” I asked.

“And again! And *again!* Damn it.” She began crying. “Goddamn you, Roy. I hate you!”

Ann was upset because she obviously thought that I had, through my interrogation, stripped away the last fibers of her cherished diary-writing Individuality—which is untrue. I had a right to know.

I felt sick.

I remained silent for some time. Then I said, “I suppose you enjoyed kissing that four-flusher?”

“Roy, I don’t mean this maliciously, but in many respects you could take lessons from that four-flusher.”

That hurt. “Swell,” I said. “What else did you do?”

“We didn’t have intercourse if that’s what you mean?”

“How close did you come?”

She bit her lip. “Close. And that’s all I’m going to tell you. I’m not going to give you a blow-by-blow description. I refuse!”

I smiled and said, “Now Ann, if you want to go to bed with Jolly Jay don’t let me stand in your way. After all, I’m only your *husband*—a mere formality.”

She glared at me again. Without looking away, she unhooked her brassiere and began taking off her shorts. I wondered how far they’d gone. I felt sick. I’d lost her.

Perhaps I have a good reason for remaining aloof with Ann. Perhaps I have to maintain a certain amount of emotional distance simply because I’m afraid—scared silly—of becoming too closely attached, too dependent. Perhaps I’m afraid I’ll lose her some day. Perhaps I know how unbearable that day will be unless I insulate myself somehow.

Ann was naked now, fumbling with the sweatshirt she wore for a nightgown. I loved her, and the thought of losing her was charged with panic.

She put on her “nightgown” and turned out the light. Her bed groaned as she got in. Then silence. Outside the crickets chirped, and a car came up the road casting light in our cabin.

I thought she knew I loved her. If she didn’t, I wouldn’t correct and try to improve her. I’d assumed that she’d thank me for it someday.



The minutes seemed to drag. I wanted her to apologize, but I knew she wouldn't. After lying silently for some time, listening to the crickets and clutching *The Education of Karl Witte*, I knew I couldn't stand to lose her. My ego was ruptured. I was prepared to swallow my pride and make the concessions necessary to keep her. I had no choice.

"Ann," I said. My voice was tense.

"Yes."

"I just want you to know that I love you, no matter what happens."

Amazingly enough the words came out easily. On many occasions I try to evoke them, but something always holds them back.

"You do?" she said. "You *really* love me?"

"Of course. I always have—and always will."

There was a slight pause. Then she said, "I didn't know. You never tell me." Another pause. "Roy, I love you, too. And I'm sorry about what I did with Jay. I'll never do it again, I swear. He flattered me and made me feel so good that I ..."

"You don't need to explain. I understand."

"I don't think you do. He made me feel like I was really somebody—like I was important."

"You *are* important, at least to me. You're the most important person in the world."

"Do you *mean* that?"

"Of course."

"I didn't know. You never tell me."

With a rustling of sheets she got out of her bunk. She came over and sat down on mine. She put her arms around me and said, "Roy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. You're the only one I could ever love."

I couldn't agree with her fatalism, but I was glad to hear her say it just the same. I put one arm around her waist and kissed her. She was a beautiful woman, and I was lucky to have her. I kissed her—on the mouth, the neck. It was

wonderful. Objectively, kissing the mouth that just kissed Jay McFarland isn't a very pleasing prospect, but I suppose I wasn't objective, because I liked it. It was good to have her back. "Honey, I love you," I said, and I meant it.

## MARY

It was a lonely night. All the counselors must have been worn out from the Parents' Day gathering, and the only two to be seen were Zip and Flick playing ping-pong on the recreation porch; the men weren't in the barn; and even the kitchen help, who are usually finishing up with the pots and pans, were nowhere around.

I first went to Joey's cabin. Champ, Joey's roommate, was reading a book. He said he hadn't seen Joey all evening. That boy gives me some moments.

I went up the path to the place where the men play horseshoes, which was bright in the light from the Miltons' cabin. No one was playing, but inside the cabin Ann was standing bare-chested. I idly watched her, wondering how long she'd displayed herself. The shame of it. You'd think she'd at least have the decency to pull down the shades. I was still thinking ill of Ann when she moved from my line of vision and suddenly the lights went off. I shivered involuntarily. Did darkness and death follow me like a shadow?

I hadn't meant to be so harsh with her in my thoughts. She'd been nice to me, and I supposed I just envied her more than anything else. Her life was still ahead of her, but in a few more years, after Joey left me, mine would be over.

I switched on my flashlight and guided the flat, bleak circle of light down the path. Suddenly a pair of lights and the sound of a loud engine came toward me from the direction of the Mainhouse. It was Jay's old car. It stopped near me and Jay leaned out. "I'm going to Highland to pick up some ice cream. Want to come along? Lovely night for a drive."

"Thank you, no."

"Is anything the matter, Mary?"

"No, I'm just out enjoying the evening."

"Good for you. Hell of a nice night. Wish I could join you, but I've got to hurry to Highland before the stores close."

With that he started the car again and disappeared around the bend in the road. I could hear the car rattling in the distance for an amazingly long time. When the last sounds were fading, I thought I heard someone laughing. The voice wasn't coming from the Miltons' cabin. I held my breath and listened. I heard it again—a girl's laugh.

I followed it up the path to the parking lot, where the gasoline barrels huddled on their rack and three or four cars stood like dark animals on a trampled field. I switched off the flashlight and listened. The parking lot was a desolate site in the moonlight. I shivered.

Suddenly a deeper voice laughed. I moved closer. The pine needles snapped under my feet, they were so dry, but I managed to edge to a clump of shrubs on the far side of the parking lot. Whoever was out here was on the other side of the shrubs.

The deeper voice said, "I mean, after I come back here a couple of years, I'll really have the experience. You know, I'll pick up a lot working with Jay."

It was *Joey!*

My first impulse was to march over there and find out what my boy was doing with a girl at this time of night. But I held back and listened.

The girl said, "I'd better get back. I'll be in trouble if they catch me—not that I particularly care. But I don't want to miss going to Gardner's Landing next week. That's the best trip of all."

I peeked over the shrubs and could see that they were lying down. My grip tightened on the flashlight. Somehow I was to blame for this.

"Do you have to go?" Joey said.

"Not if I don't want to, but I want to."

"Can I kiss you goodnight?"

"I don't kiss strange men."

"But this wouldn't exactly be a kiss. I mean, I just thought ... "

I could stand no more. I marched through the shrubs and said, "Joseph Jones!"

“Holy Muldoon,” he said and scrambled to his feet. I tried to grab the girl but she escaped into the forest. Joey said, “Did you ever give me a scare. I didn’t know what the heck was coming off.”

“Shame on you,” I said.

“What do you mean, shame on me? I wasn’t doing anything.”

“Who was that girl?”

“She wasn’t doing—hey, what is this, a Federal Investigation or something?”

I said, “You should be ashamed of yourself talking to your mother that way. Now cut out the smart-aleck talk and tell me who that girl was.”

“Look, Mom, I’ll tell you, but I don’t want to get her in trouble.”

I grabbed him by the shoulders and when I talked my voice was still with emotion. “Joey, you know the difference between right and wrong. Please, I can’t be your watchdog or treat you like a little boy anymore, but please don’t do anything you’ll regret. If you have something troubling you, come and discuss it with me. Don’t do anything you’ll live to regret.”

“Look, I mean, I don’t know what you’re so upset about. I didn’t even kiss her, for crying-out-loud. She wouldn’t let me.”

I said, “Just the same, I’m not very proud of you. Now get to your cabin.”

As we walked down the road, Joey started whistling that marching song Jay always whistles. That boy was trying to do everything like Jay. I resented that—especially since Joey took so little interest in me anymore.

When we were in front of his cabin, I faced Joey and said, “Just remember, I’m your friend as well as your mother. And if you have anything you want to talk over—anything at all—I want you to come to me. Since we’ve been up here, I’m afraid we haven’t been as close as we used to, and I don’t want you to get the idea that you need someone else for the comfort and love a boy your age should receive from his mother.”

“Ah, don’t worry about me, Mom. I’m all right.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Joey. But I miss talking to you. Why don’t you come up and visit me tomorrow?”

“Sure. I mean, if I can. Old Nancy keeps us pretty busy with her running around.”

After we talked a while longer, Joey offered to walk me back to the Mainhouse, but he needed his sleep, so I told him to get to bed. I kissed him goodnight and left him standing there on the road. His mind was a million miles from me.

## **PART THREE**

### **JAY**

I felt great the next morning, although I didn't get much sleep the night before, because Olive and I stayed up pretty late eating ice cream and talking. We had a nice discussion—the kind we hadn't had in some time. At breakfast I had Olive almost rolling on the floor with my imitation of Charley Rebus trying to work as a cement finisher. It was good to hear her laugh in the morning again.

When I went outside, I noticed a raven standing on the roof of the old wagon. "Go home, you beggar," I yelled. "That car might be getting along in years, but it's not dead yet." The raven took off and croaked a warning to his buddies who were all over the yard.

Olive was standing on the porch with my raincoat over her shoulders. "Jay, won't you ever grow up?"

"My dear," I said, "growing up is for old people. I'm just a kid yet."

The old wagon started off just like that. I turned on the window wipers to get the dew, honked the horn, waved to Olive, and said, "Don't eat all the ice cream before I get home, honey." I laughed. It was funny—damn funny. You see, I'd bought a whole gallon of ice cream the night before, so she couldn't possibly finish it off by herself. Well, anyhow, it seem funny to me at the time.

As I drove to camp, I did some thinking about Ann. I hadn't told Olive about what happened because it would have just upset her, and she wouldn't have understood. But I wasn't ashamed; I was very grateful to Ann. It's not easy to explain because when you're talking about a person's basic self, it's hard to translate the emotional eruptions and clouds of wordless meaning. But I was sure that Ann had made the world beautiful again. I loved her. There was no more hate left in me now—just compassion, pity, and love. Thanks to Ann, everything had been supplied with a new dimension, and I didn't have to *try* to love the world. I couldn't help myself.

Almost before I knew it, I was pulling up in front of the barn. As soon as I stepped out of the wagon, Lulu called me from her window. “Nancy wants to see you, Jay,” she said, “right away. She’s in the kitchen.”

“Yes, ma’am! I’m on my way.” Lulu’s window slammed and I trotted to the kitchen, but when I opened the door and saw Henna in street clothes instead of her cook’s outfit, I stopped cold.

Nancy pointed at me and said, “Here’s Jay, and he’ll take care of it right this minute, won’t you, Jay?”

“Yes, here he is,” Henna said. “But he’s a day late.”

Nancy said, “Jay, how long will it take you to fix Hanna’s blower?”

“Well ... ”

“No!” Henna said. “I been telling that fathead for days that either he fixes my blower or I quit. And it ain’t fixed!”

“Stop acting like a child!” Nancy said. “Jay has had other things to attend to and you know it as well as I do.”

“Oh, yeah, he was busy all right. All I can say is you should know just how busy. Ain’t that right, McFarland? Especially last night.”

Nancy glared at me and said, “Well, don’t stand there gawking. Get that blower fixed.”

“Nope,” Henna said. “I quit, and that’s final. It ain’t as though I didn’t give fair warning of my intentions.”

Nancy said, “All right, quit. But just remember, you’re leaving us in a very awkward position, so when you walk out of that door don’t ever expect to come back.”

“If I’d had any sense,” Henna said, “I’d walked out of that door years ago. Cook, and work all day long—and it ain’t as if I need the money; anyone around here can tell you I don’t—but go on year after year. Two of the ovens ain’t no good, run in and out of the locker until I catch pneumonia, get treated like common dirt. No sir, I should’ve walked out of that door years ago.”



“We’ll *send* you your check,” Nancy said. “Jay, I’ll see you in Lulu’s office *immediately*.”

After Nancy left, I said, “Henna, I’m sorry about the blower. I could have fixed it last night, but I plumb forgot about it.”

“Plumb forgot about it, did you? Well, see what your forgetting’s done now? Maybe your memory will be a little better with the new cook.”

“Henna, I hate to see you go—not that I can’t get along without your bitching. But, well, after all these years, you’ve kind of grown on me—like a wart you might say—and—I do hate to see you go.”

Her stern expression buckled for an instant and I was sure she would cry. But she didn’t. She said, “Ah, the likes of you is enough to drive anyone away, Jay McFarland.” She took her coat from the hook and slung it over her shoulder. “So, I’m a wart, am I?” Well, you just remember that the next time you get to craving for some of my potato pancakes. And if you come around my place with any of your fancy talk, trying to fool me into fixing you something to eat, I’ll take the old man’s shotgun and blow your hind end off.”

I walked her to the door with my arm around her shoulder. Then I said, “Henna, I’m going to miss you. You sure you want to go?”

“Listen to him, would you? You know where I live, McFarland, and you know how to get there. You might be no good as a man, but at least you’ve got a man’s appetite. ‘Course we might make you sing for your supper, but ... ” her voice suddenly softened—“come see us.”

She went down the road, half running, half walking, her head down and her coat slung over her shoulder.

“Never thought I’d see the day,” I said to myself and watched her get into her car and disappear around the barn. She did it. She actually quit.

I walked upstairs. I couldn’t decide whether I envied Henna or felt sorry for her. Camp Timberline can be one nerve-wracking headache after another but ... but I guess I pitied her after all.

Mary Jones, all prim and white in her nurse's outfit, was straightening up in her office and as I went by, she came to the doorway and said, "Oh, Jay, have you seen Joey this morning?"

"No, I haven't. Anything you want me to tell him?"

"No, nothing important. I'll catch him at breakfast."

"Swell," I said, and then realized how much I sounded like Roy. Oh well, if you're not affected by the people you come in contact with every day, you might as well be dead. Good old Roy and his goddamn sarcasm.

When I walked into Lulu's office, she was just finishing a phone call. She hung up and said, without taking her eyes from the phone, "Well, I got a new one. A new cook. She works at Lindy's in Bleaker. I don't know how good she is but she can't be any worse than Henna. It's just like her to do something like this to Nancy—without proper notice even. I never did like her."

"Oh, come on now, Lulu. Henna's not as bad as all that. Her pride was at stake. She was more or less forced into it."

"Her pride? I like that. As if she's the only one around here with feelings. There are some people who work in this camp that have every bit as much feelings as she does, but they're mature enough to control themselves without throwing tantrums and quitting in the middle of the summer."

"I quite agree," Nancy said from the doorway. "Did you find a cook?"

"Yes," Lulu said.

Nancy walked over and sat on the edge of Lulu's desk. She said, "I haven't forgotten the incident that just took place in the kitchen, Jay, but for the moment I don't care to discuss it with you. We've got too much to do.

"Three days from today, Thursday, I'm going to send the cabin twenty girls on a special trip, and *everything* will have to be ready for them. I bought a strip of property on the east shore of Mussle Lake, and there we're going to set up the circus tent. The girls will spend four days there in the true pioneer tradition—a four-day camp-out and cook-out, away from civilization on the most beautiful lake

in these parts. They'll canoe across from the foot of Mt. Silverfoot at dawn, and everything *must* be ready for them."

I could hardly believe my ears. "Canoe across Mussle Lake? Camp on Mussle Lake? Are you out of your mind? Nancy, listen to me, that lake is over six hundred feet deep and it's got such a vicious undercurrent that in parts it's lethal. Back in '45 they were trolling for Mackinaws and brought up a body that must have been underwater for ten years, but it was in perfect condition. You should remember that. And the winds! Holy Jesus H. Christ! Nancy, you're not serious about this."

"I *am* and I wish you wouldn't scream so they can hear you all over camp. If you don't want to help us out, Lulu can get on the phone again and ... "

"Knock that off, Nancy. I mean it. You've done some pretty nutty things over the years and I've never opened my mouth, but this time you're playing with the lives of eighteen girls and I'm not going to sit back and let you make a serious mistake. Do you know what the weather forecast is for this week? Well, I'll tell you. Clear and warmer. No rain. No *rain*. Doesn't that mean anything to you? No rain, and you're going to send a bunch of *kids*—inexperienced little kids—to a place like Mussle Lake, where it's not at all unusual for the winds to reach forty and fifty miles an hour. Can you picture what the hell would happen if one spark, one cigarette, ever got started? That whole goddamn forest would go up before the kids could even yell for help. Why didn't you consult me before? I know a lot of nice lakes around here—just as much in the wilds as Mussle Lake but a lot safer."

Nancy said, "Lulu, would you mind leaving the room? There's something I'd like to discuss with Jay in private."

After Lulu left, Nancy said, "Jay, we've always been able to work together, but if you keep interfering in this way, I'm afraid I'll have to let you go. I get four or five calls a year from caretakers who want your job, but I've never considered hiring anyone else. I know I'm overpaying you. I'm not a *complete* fool. And frankly, this summer your work—and your attitude—have been anything but

satisfactory. You've taken it upon yourself to discipline the campers. Your manner of joking around is often in bad taste—like trying to get Mrs. Jones to go to Highland with you last night. Jay, that's vulgar. And Henna might still be with us if you hadn't been too busy getting drunk last night. Oh, I know about that. The whole camp does—here's the proof." She reached in the wastebasket and pulled out an empty bottle—my bottle. "Dug brought this to me early this morning. She was curious about the commotion up there last night. I'm curious too. She said that she was sure she heard a girl with you. In any case, I think all this brings out the point I'm trying to make, don't you?"

Right then, I knew how an attorney must feel when the opposition crumbles his case. Nancy had me out-maneuvered, and I could see she was prepared to press her advantage.

She said, "So the way matters stand now, you can stay here as long as you want, but you'll have to watch your step, because the first time you put on another display, or try to interfere with the way I'm running this camp, I'll have to let you go. I'm sorry, but that's the way things are. If you *still* want to protest the girls' going to Mussle Lake, I'll have Lulu make out your check and we'll see what we can do about finding a more cooperative caretaker."

I smiled and said, "You don't leave me much choice. But I still think you're making ..."

"Nonsense. Ed and I went over the whole thing before making our decision. We'll set buoys up around the swimming area. We'll string a rope along the edge of the cliff, so that no one accidentally falls off. We'll dig a big safe fire pit and send our four best counselors with the girls. She dropped her school-marm tone and said, "I know how you feel about forest fires, Jay, but do you really think for a moment I'd send those girls out there if I thought there was even the remotest chance of anything happening?"

Maybe I was being too cautious. After all, there's a risk involved in stepping out of bed in the morning. Besides, she had me over a barrel. Oh, I

probably should have quit on the spot, but I couldn't see how that would help anyone.

“Okay, Nancy,” I said, “I won't mention anything more about it, but I still think you're making a mistake.”

“Well, keep your thoughts to yourself.”

Nancy then went over the schedule for that week. It wasn't going to be easy, getting things ready on Mussle Lake by Thursday morning. Joey and I would be away Wednesday, taking the older girls to Gardner's Landing for an informal dance with the boys from Five Star Camp. That left only two days for us to prepare. And before doing anything else, I'd have to scout the area to see just what had to be done.

I didn't have much of an appetite when I left Nancy's office, but I went down to breakfast just the same. It was going to be a long, hot day.

## JOEY

Did you ever go someplace where there's about a million people and then find out your pants are unzipped, or try to ease out a fart at some big-time social function when all at once everyone stops talking and there you are, playing a solo? Or did you ever tell some guy about this girl who's the local punchboard and then find out you're talking to her brother? Well, then you have a rough idea of how I felt that morning. I'm referring to the way Mom made like Carrie Nation the night before. I mean, how embarrassed can you get? Here I am, almost eighteen years old, trying to score a few points with this chick, when who should come roaring out of the goddamn night—scaring the crap out of everything in sight—but my own mother. Boy, that's one way to nip the old romance right in the butt. And the worst part is, I wasn't doing a goddamn thing, but the first thing I know, Sue is sprinting lickity-split into the underbrush, and here's my own goddamn mother sailing after her with a diving tackle. Let's face it: That was no time for introductions. "Mother, I'd like you to met Sue Fernbild," as they roar off into the forest.

Really makes a guy feel great to know that he's old enough to take care of himself.

But it wouldn't be so embarrassing if it happened anyplace else but here. The way gossip spreads through this place, I wouldn't be surprised to read about the whole thing in the Society Section of the Northport Gazette. "Whose mother broke up the game of After Dinner Crumpet Rolling played by what camper and what handyman?"

And I'd have to live with this thing for the rest of the summer; I mean knowing that every camper from A to Z probably knew about the whole deal and was getting a big healthy laugh out of it. Boy.

The next morning, I wasn't exactly eager to go down to the Mainhouse and become the subject of a gigantic whispering campaign, but I couldn't stay in

the cabin and starve to death, so I stiffened the hell out of my upper lip and went out to face the music.

When I was near Roy's *chateau*, he and Ann came out, and they were really mushing it up, too—grinning and walking with their arms around each other—you know, just like a couple that went to the Prom and then stayed out all night on the dunes Watching the Sun Come Up! I almost heaved all over my coveralls.

I pretended like I didn't see them, but Ann waved and said, "Hello, Joey."

I sort of skidded to a halt and waited for them. Don't ask me why because if there's one thing I can't stand, it's being around a couple that's mushing it up. They were walking so close together they looked like a pair of Siamese twins. Then they stopped and had a contest to see who could be the most sickening. Ann said, "Honey, I've got a waterfront meeting with Clancy." Clancy's a swimming counselor—a girl, sort of. "Don't forget the thermos jug. And I'll see you at four o'clock."

"Okay, hon."

"I'll miss you."

They kissed. Then Roy said, "I'll miss you, too."

They kissed again. By now what little appetite I had was shot in the ass; I mean good grief.

Ann cut out toward the beach. All at once she stopped, whirled around and said, "Four o'clock, don't forget."

"I won't."

Roy and I started walking. He was still gazing at Ann.

"What's with this four o'clock business?" I asked.

"We're going someplace," he said and flexed the hell out of his forehead.

"Oh." That killed *that* subject in a hurry. I said, "Boy, did I ever have a scare last night." Then I went on to tell him about the deal with Mom catching Sue and me in the thistles. I figured I might as well tell him before he hears about it from someone else. I thought I told it pretty good, but about the only reaction

Roy gave out with was to sort of bend his arm and rub his eye—no crap, I mean that was it. One lousy eye rub. I probably didn't tell it as good as the last person he heard it from.

"What's the matter?" I said. "Something bothering you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact—'something' called Jay McFarland."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not at liberty to divulge the details, Joey, but I should venture to say that before the summer's over, Mr. McFarland will give you a personal demonstration of his quaint Pearl Harbor tactics. Then you'll know what's the matter."

"You mean Jay stabbed you in the back?"

"In a word: yes. Of course he's obviously deranged and can't help himself. He's a sycophant."

"What's that?"

"You've seen dogs that have no loyalty to their masters and seem to prefer strangers."

"Yeah. I know what you mean: the old tail waggin' and tongue lappin' routine."

"Well, that is a sycophant."

I said, "How's Jay like that?"

"You'll probably find out in due time."

"I don't believe it."

"Swell."

I was getting a little burned off. I don't mind people making up stories and spicing up their lives with a little gossip once in a while, but you can carry a good thing too far. I can shrug it off when they make up fantastic yarns about the drama counselor being pregnant, or about Henna carrying on with this guy who picks up the garbage, or even about me and Sue last night (even though this one's true), but when they start calling Jay a sycophant, that's going too far.



I didn't say anything to Roy, but boy, I was really thinking it. I was feeling pretty grouchy by the time we reached the kitchen, but I was a regular smiling Sam compared to everybody else. June, Henna's helper, was staggering around like she's in a blooming daze—you know her eyes puffed up the size of a breadbox and her knuckles dragging on the ground. And Jay was just about as bad. He just sat there with this sulky look on his face and when you'd say something to him, he'd just pull a Roy and show you how many wrinkles he could pack into his forehead. What a bunch of grouches.

And then after we sit around for two-thirds of the morning, in this dead silence, listening to our whiskers grow waiting for breakfast to be served, June finally comes shuffling in with this tray full of bread and jam sandwiches. That was our goddamn breakfast—raw bread and jam. I couldn't believe my eyes, I mean no eggs or nothing. "Hey, what's the scoop?" I said, and boy, that did it.

She blubbers something about Henna quitting and then busts up all over the place and runs into the kitchen leaving this wake of tears behind.

After that, I just sort of gave up, I mean I tried not to think about anything. You can just take so much, and that's it. Besides, if Henna wants to run off with the garbage man, that's her business.

Anyhow, after we all had our fill of bread and jam sandwiches and our lower tracts were in a state of complete revolt, we sat there glowering at each other for a while. Then the millennium came. Jay broke down and said something. It wasn't much, but it was a hell of a lot better than this huge void we'd been having.

"We've got a lot to do today," he said. His voice sounded a little rusty from lack of use. "Nancy's sending the cabin twenty girls to a place called Mussle Lake in four days. Joey and I will survey the campsite this morning. Roy, I want you to stay in camp."

Roy just glared at Jay. He didn't say "swell" or anything. I thought I might be able to lumber up everybody's foul goddamn sense of humor, so I said, "Swell."

I started laughing like a maniac, but it went over about as big as a bastard at the family reunion. Roy and Jay looked at me like I was a goddamn sliver on a toilet seat. Did I ever make a smash.

I decided to give up.

“Let’s get going,” Jay said. “The only way we’ll get to the campsite is by boat.”

So Jay and I went to the boat docks and for the next half hour we were churning around in the shallow water, trying to load the motorboat on the trailer. And all the time we were huffing and grunting away developing double hernias, Jay didn’t crack a smile or make one joke. I got the impression that he wasn’t exactly wild about my company. Maybe Roy was right about him. I’ll bet if some camper or some total goddamn stranger happened to pass by, old Jay would have started scoring points all over the place—goddamn sycophant.

But I really began to wonder about him after we hitched the trailer to the green truck and went to Highland to borrow this guy’s jeep. I guess an ordinary truck can’t make it up the Mussle Lake Road. We didn’t exactly go to Highland itself but to some real dilapidated goddamn shack nestled in this grove of underbrush about a mile from Highland. On the way over Jay didn’t say more than three and a half words (with a couple of stomach grumbles thrown in to spice up the conversation) but did he ever start sycophanting all over the place when we pulled up in front of this shack. The guy who lives there—this Charley Rebus—is some bosom buddy of Jay’s and what a stupid bastard—I mean he is almost *unbelievable*. One thing for sure: If that’s the kind of friends Jay wants, he *must* be some kind of sycophant or something. It was disgusting. Before we could even get out of the truck or anything here comes Charley, streaking out of the outhouse with his drawers dangling around his ankles, laughing and yukking it up like a maniac. He’s wearing the stupidest grin you’ve ever seen in your life, and right away he’s all over Jay like a goddamn octopus—fingernails and kneecaps flying all of the place—you know, slapping Jay on the back and jabbering away. And you’re not going to believe this but that son-of-a-bitch didn’t

even make any sense. What a bosom buddy. He just kept repeating the same old crap over and over. Well, you know, the guy was out of it, let's face it. All he could say was, "You got guns? You got guns? Charley got dogs. Just take Charley a minute." The guy must have thought he was Tonto or something. "You got guns?" Oh boy.

Naturally Jay's so glad to see his buddy, he's one big toothy grin from head to toe. But then he tells Charley that we didn't drop in for a social call. We wanted to use his jeep for a few days and leave him with the camp truck. Well, Charley wasn't exactly what you'd call wild about that. "Just take Charley a minute to get dogs," he kept saying. He couldn't understand a simple sentence, and that's the truth. Jay must have told him forty-five times why we were there, and when it finally sank in Charley starts grumbling and cussing a blue streak in that pig Latin of his.

Then, as sort of a grand finale, or whatever you call it, Charley has to help us hitch the trailer onto his jeep, and wouldn't you know it? You know this big sharp thing sticking out of the bottom of the trailer hitch? Well, Charley cut his arm on it so bad I almost got sick. I mean, it was horrible, this huge gash running almost all the way up to his elbow. But I'm telling you, it didn't faze that dumb bastard one bit. "Little blood, little blood," he says. "Charley scratch himself. Just take Charley a minute to get dogs." I've never seen anybody before with such a one-track mind.

Naturally, Charley has to have his arm stitched up, but the dumb guy doesn't even believe in *doctors*, so Jay has to get his first-aid kit from the truck and do the job himself—no painkiller or nothing. And while Jay is sewing away, this Charley doesn't as much as flick an eyelid. What a stoic bastard. Was I ever glad when we got the hell out of there. That guy gives me the creeps—all the time, "Just take a minute to get dogs." Holy Moly.

But the jeep wasn't much better than Charley. It was such a filthy affair it made me feel sort of uncomfortable, with about a ton and a quarter of old rags in the back that looked like Good Old Charley had been wiping his ass on them

since the turn of the century, the seats all torn up and stuffing hanging all over the place, and a statue of the Virgin Mary on the dashboard. Some bosom buddy this Charley was.

So we drive to Mussle Lake and about an hour later here we are creeping around the side of this hairy mountain in four-wheel drive—you know, revving and whining like hell and going about two-thirds of a mile an hour. And finally we come out by this stupendous goddamn lake. What a sight—tremendous mountains on all sides, and this lake, so big you can hardly see across it. Man, I wish you could have been there—I mean, just to see it.

So we unload the boat into this fantastically cold water and start streaking across the lake. The place we took off from didn't have any waves at all, but when we got out there a ways, we started to zip across these little ripples—you know, no bigger than a breadbox—and pretty soon the ripples got bigger and bigger until they're monstrous goddamn things. We were going in the same direction they were, and we'd slow down when we went up one, then we'd zoom ahead and CASWAFF, we'd plow into the next one and send the blinking spray flying all over the goddamn place. Great sport.

Well, we were buzzing along like this, and I was having a ball, sitting up front on the old poop deck having my kidneys pounded silly, when all at once I see this majestic goddamn police dog standing on one of the cliffs by the shore, just standing there, sort of crouchy like, with his tail down.

I thought maybe he was lost or something so I yelled, "Hey, Jay, look at the dog."

He looked over there and then he started to laugh like an old sea captain, with the spray dripping all over his face and his pipe turned upside down. "That's no dog," he yelled. "That's a timber wolf."

A timber wolf—a real live timber wolf, and I saw him with my own eyes, so help me God. A timber wolf. Boy!

"Hey, Jay, what's he doing up there?"

“He’s probably an old-timer. A young strong wolf probably kicked him out of the pack. He’ll have to live by himself and hunt alone for the rest of his life. He’s a leader with no one to lead.”

“Kinda sad,” I said.

“Yeah, sure is.”

You know, I couldn’t get that timber wolf out of my mind. Boy, I mean, the ways of nature can be pretty cruel sometimes. I kept wondering what would happen when he got so old he couldn’t get around anymore. Would a moose ram him to a bloody pulp with his horns, or would he just die up on some mountain some place with the vultures circling around him? I kind of wished there was something I could do to help the old boy out, but I knew there wasn’t.

When we got near the campsite, the waves were regular mountains, and the wind was blowing like a blue-nosed streak. I didn’t see how in hell we were going to park the boat without having it pulverized against this massive cliff, but Jay told me to get in the back of the boat with him, and then he heads straight for this great forked tree growing out of the water. With me in the back, the front end of the boat was way in hell up in the air, and just as slick as a fish we go right between the forks of the tree, come to a grinding halt, high and dry in ye old crotch. Even if Jay was a goddamn sycophant, he was still pretty sharp. He ties the boat up good, with the front end down so the back end is out of the water, and then he slips a rope around his waist and goes up one of the forks like an old ring-tailed monkey. He jumps across to the cliff and tells me to tie the other end of the rope around my waist. I do, and here I go right up the face of the cliff, with Jay pulling on the other end of the rope. When I was almost to the top, I looked down and I got a sensation in my stomach like I just swallowed a cannonball. Great huge rocks all over the place, and these gigantic waves smashing themselves silly against the cliff and making so much roaring noise, you couldn’t hear anything if you had to.

After I caught my breath we surveyed the place—I mean, Jay did most of the surveying while I just sort of looked around. Man, there were a lot of dead

trees around there—laying down, standing up, and leaning at any angle you could imagine. There were so many trees around that I didn't even see a spot big enough to put the tent up. It was a terrific campsite all right, except for the goddamn wind. "We're going to have to do a lot of clearing," Jay said. The understatement of the year.

So after all the old surveying was finished, we took a break. Jay bummed one of my fags and we sat there puffing away in the pine needles. I felt pretty good, and I was almost tempted to ask Jay if maybe someday he and I couldn't come out here and spend a couple of days. But let's face facts, for me it would have been a big deal, but he would have been bored numb. I mean, after all the camping out he's done it would be about as exciting as brushing your teeth in the morning.

Then I remembered Jay's bosom buddy—this Charley Rebus character. I mean he was really food for thought. I said, "Do you mind if I ask you sort of a personal question?"

"No, go ahead."

"Well, what's with this Charley Rebus? I mean what is he, some kind of nut or something?"

Jay laughed. "You might say that," he said. "Charley's the victim of childhood encephalitis." Boy, my vocabulary was growing by leaps and bounds today. First "sycophant," and now "encephalitis." Jay explained how this encephalitis works, you know, how you get this huge fever and it burns out all the wires in your brain.

I said, "Well, how does the guy get along? I mean, what does he do for a living?"

"Odd jobs. He traps in the winter and works some in the timber. And like many retarded people, he has several highly-specialized talents. He can track animals better than any other man I've ever seen."

"No kidding."

"Yeah. He's a pretty good old boy."

“Well, I mean, does the guy live out there all alone all year long?”

“That’s right. Charley doesn’t like people.”

“Oh, he sounds like a real nice guy.”

“Joey, he’s not a good guy or a bad guy. He’s Charley Rebus. Don’t judge him on the basis of one trait.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” I said, even though I wasn’t sure what the hell I was agreeing with.

We sat around a while longer, and then Jay said, “We better start heading back to camp. It’s getting late.” He stared at me a second, you know, with one of those penetrating looks. “Say, there’s one thing I’d like to know, Joey.”

“Shoot.”

“Roy told me something about you and Sue Fernbild. I want to know if it’s true. Have you been carrying on with her?”

What did I tell you? *Everybody* knew about it. You probably thought I was exaggerating like hell when I made that comment about it appearing in the Northport Gazette, but I’m telling you, nothing would surprise me. Boy, what a grapevine.

I said, “I didn’t even kiss her for Chrissake! Carrying on with her? I mean, the party broke up before I could even put my arm around her goddamn waist.”

Jay smiled and said, “That’s all I wanted to know.” Boy, I wouldn’t even be surprised if these old geezers at the old Cornell Stench Haven were yukking it up about what happened with me and Sue. This was embarrassing.

Jay said, “By the way, I want you to go to Gardner’s Landing with me Wednesday.”

How about that? The best trip of the summer—at least that’s what Sue said—and I was going on it. Old Jay was okay, no question about that. Roy was all wet about this sycophant business.

Just the same, though, I couldn’t help wondering what went on between him and Jay. I mean the guy wouldn’t just turn against someone for no goddamn reason at all.

## ANN

I met Roy in front of the Mainhouse promptly at four o'clock. We were to go on a picnic together—just the two of us. The whole thing was his idea. I suppose it was a good sign, because at least it indicated that he was trying, only (I'm ashamed to admit this) I don't like picnics—not the bugs nor the fuss nor anything about them.

Roy looked as if he were dressed for a safari. He had blankets, a thermos jug, camera, and a knapsack. "Hi," he said as I walked up. "Ready to venture into the hills?" he smiled.

"Sure," I said. He *was* trying. That was more important than anything. We'd have a good time. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"Just beyond the camp property there's a pleasant grove, red clover and all that rot."

"You make it sound delightful."

"Swell," he said. "Leave us be off before the good Matron finds something for us to do." I picked up one of the blankets and started walking. Suddenly Roy stopped. "Say, Hon, you *do* want to go a picnic don't you?" If you'd rather, we could go to Northport for dinner."

"No. I'd much rather go on a picnic." I knew God would forgive me for that one.

We walked up the road, through the blobs of sunlight that filtered through the trees. Then we came out of the forest and the air seemed heavy with the warm smells of the meadow. It was like walking into a different world, a bright world of flowers and yellow grass—of hope.

Finally we came to the spot Roy had selected, a small flat-topped hill, with squat, sprawling trees on either side like bookends.

Roy unfolded one of the blankets and we sat down. A yellow-and-black bird in one of the trees chirped happily. I desperately wanted to talk to Roy and settle some things while he was in a good mood, but I didn't know quite how to



start. After studying his face (which was unshaven), I finally said, “Roy, do you really love me?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well—I know I’m as much to blame as you are—but the incident last night never would have taken place if I’d *known* you love me—I actually thought you disliked me.”

“You should know better than that.”

“But Roy, that’s the point. I can’t know unless you show me and tell me. You didn’t.”

“Honey,” he said patiently, “I married you, didn’t I? I’m obviously concerned about your welfare, aren’t I?”

“Most of the time I don’t know. Most of the time I’m just plain afraid of you—scared stiff.”

“Ann—” he scratched his head. “What are you trying to do, nominate me for Cad of the Year?”

“No, Roy. I know you’re hurt, and believe me, I’m sorry. But that’s why we have to talk about it. I don’t like hurting you, but I can only take so much—I need affection. Really, I’ve got to have it. I want to *know* that you love me. And—and I want to be able to love you.”

“Pardon me. ‘*Want* to be able to love me? I thought you already were in love with me.”

“I am and I want to continue. But our marriage is pretty ragged and needs quite a few patches. Last night you said you loved me—for the first time in months—but you can’t expect ‘I love you’ to change everything like magic. It takes much more than that.”

“Perhaps this will sound hackneyed to you,” he said in his familiar sarcastic way, “but I am what I am. Your new ‘talent’ obviously gives a great deal of bargaining power, but I’m afraid not as much as you’d like.”

My stomach went flat and I turned away, waiting for him to turn the knife. He didn't, however. He put his arms around me and said, "I'm sorry, Ann. I didn't mean to say that."

"Roy, I wasn't trying to pressure you. I just wanted to hear you say that you'll keep on being nice to me—that's all. I want to be sure you love me. I *don't* want to be afraid of you and cringe when I'm in your presence, waiting for you to attack me. If our marriage could be as it is now, I'd be the happiest woman in the world."

"I'll try, Hon, I promise."

I believed him. We kissed.

Later that evening, after we'd finished eating and were preparing to go back, Roy said, "Would you mind talking about last night?" The mosquitoes were coming out.

"No." A lie.

"I believe it would clear the air, don't you? After all, we're both what's nominally referred to as adults."

"We can talk about it," I said.

"Naturally, I'm curious—not so much out of jealousy, but—I think we can talk about your experience in much the same manner we'd examine any other human emotion—because, after all, that's what it is, basically. It's a new experience, and I believe we can view it objectively."

I nodded.

"Well, tell me. Did you become sexually excited?"

"Yes." My heart was pounding.

"How excited? Moderately, or ... ?"

"I don't know how to gauge it. I was excited."

"What I mean is: Did you have control of your senses?"

"Yes."

"But you were excited." He lit a cigarette. "Exactly what excited you? The naughtiness, or did you have a desire for McFarland?"

"I don't know, Roy."

"You should. I imagine I'd know if I had an experience like that."

"But I'm not you, Roy. I wasn't analyzing my feelings."

"You did want to have intercourse with him, though?"

"I didn't say that."

"Well, did you?" His interrogation was becoming more intense and I was becoming suffocated with a feeling of helplessness again. "Yes."

He said, "But you didn't do it."

"No."

"Ann, you can tell me. I'll understand. I'll admit it hurts my ego but I'll understand."

"We didn't have intercourse."

"Is that the truth?"

"Roy, I swear to God."

"But he did play with you."

"Roy, please, I'd rather not talk about it anymore."

"I thought we were going to be objective and discuss this thing as we would any other human emotion."

"I'm sorry," I said. "But I can't. You're making me feel filthy."

"*Filthy?* Swell. In my masculine ignorance, I thought I was being very understanding."

"Maybe you are, but please, let's not talk about it."

"Swell."

It was no use. Roy and I were from different universes. We couldn't communicate.

## JAY

The next morning before breakfast, Roy came in the barn just as I was finishing building the ladder for the campsite. “Hi,” I said, through the nails in my mouth. “Everything’s in order. All we have to do is load it and take off to Mussle Lake.”

He didn’t answer.

I took the nails out of my mouth. “We’ve got shovels for digging the fire pit. Axes, rope, rakes, shovels, first-aid kit. Quite an array of equipment.” I gestured at the orderly pile surrounding the tent in the center of the floor.

Roy turned away and looked outside. I said, “We’ve only got two days to get the campsite ready. We’re going to have to get most of it done today.

He didn’t answer.

I lit my pipe. “Roy,” I said, “in a sense I’m sorry about what happened the other night. I’d be a liar if I said I was entirely sorry. But I regret hurting your feelings and destroying your confidence in me. And I just want you to know that I mean nothing malicious. Neither did Ann for that matter. I hope that despite what happened, you and I can continue being friends.”

He turned around and sneered. Then he went outside.

His pride was ruptured; I didn’t blame him for giving me the cold shoulder. But it did tend to make conversations a little one-sided. I felt sure that he’d forgive me before the summer was over, and more important, I was confident that both he and Ann would benefit. Jealousy, the great aphrodisiac.

A short time after Roy left, Nancy came into the barn. “Jay,” she said, “we’ve got to have the campsite ready on time. It’s imperative.”

“We’ll do our best,” I said.

“I appreciate the fact that this is a major project, but Jay, everything must be ready on schedule, is that clear?”

“I’ll say.”

“I’ve assigned three of the cabin twenty girls to go with you today—Dot, Torry, and Pat. With their assistance, I’m sure the work will go much faster. I’ve told them that they’ll be expected to *work*. And they’ve assured me that they’ll put forth their very best effort.”

I said, “Nancy, be reasonable. They’ll hinder more than they’ll help. We’ll get the campsite done on time—one way or another, but why don’t you let me handle it? I don’t want those girls along. It’s too dangerous.”

“Nonsense. You have a tendency to underestimate the capabilities of women, Jay. I assure you they’ll make the work go much faster.”

Maybe Henna had the right idea after all. “You’re the boss,” I said and shook my head.

We left for Mussle Lake right after breakfast. Not everyone could squeeze into Charley’s jeep, so Joey rode behind in the motorboat with Dot and Torry, while Pat, Roy, the tent, and I bounced around in the jeep. On the Mussle Lake Road, the dust plumed up like powder in clouds that almost obscured the boat. Then we hit the worst stretch of road, angling across the tail of Mt. Silverfoot. The jeep bounced and pounded violently and our passengers wailed. I nudged Roy and said, “What a hell of a way to get deflowered.”

He didn’t answer.

By the time we reached the lake, we were coated with dust. Every crease in our faces, every fold of clothing became a dust-pocket.

I was relieved to see that the lake was calm. Every lake has a personality, but not many of them are as temperamental as Mussle Lake. Today, she was posing as a calm, lazy lake, yawning in the morning sun. Even the meadowlarks and locusts added their voices to her masquerade. Looking at her slick, almost-dusty surface, I was so taken by the act that I could hardly imagine the sounds that marked her anger—the hiss of the stalk grass in the wind, the whoosh of the pines, and the thunder of the waves.

I got out of the jeep and began brushing off some of the dust. Dot Cohen came up and said, “Jay, can I go swimming before we start across? I’m just icky with dust.”

“Go ahead,” I said. She changed in a clump of trees, and the rest of us loaded the gear into the boat. We couldn’t transport everything across in one trip—not all the equipment and six passengers as well. So I thought Joey and I would take the equipment across and then come back for Roy and the girls.

We were loading the tent when Dot emerged from the bushes in a gold bathing suit. She ran into the shallow water and then began screaming. “Yowww! This water’s COLD!” Immediately, the other girls ran over and began splashing her. I’m glad my life didn’t depend on their assistance at the campsite. But it was good to hear them laugh and have fun. I guess I was glad they came along after all.

At the campsite the girls tackled the job of clearing brush with much enthusiasm. For the first ten minutes, Dot swung her ax with Calvinistic zeal—at almost any target. Then she came up with a blister on her palm that put her on the disabled list. Next, Pat scratched herself hauling brush. Torry—not the kind to be outdone—turned her ankle in a gopher hole. The cycle repeated itself all morning. By noon, we were running low on first-aid supplies.

The lunch Mrs. Bowie (the new cook) had prepared for us consisted of peanut butter sandwiches and Kool-Aid. Roy and I sat near the brush pile, but since he wasn’t talking, I couldn’t help but overhear Joey and the girls on the other side of the clearing.

They complained about the lunch for a while. Then Pat laughed and said, “I’ve got a good one for you. What’s the difference between a girl in the bathtub and a girl in church?”

“I know,” Torry said. “A girl in church has hope in her soul.”

They laughed. Dot said, “Do you know what the height of indifference is?”

“Sure,” Torry said. “A man who does it in his pants and doesn’t care which leg it runs down.” Torry apparently knew all the answers.

Then Joey got into the act. He said, “Do you know why Santa Claus can’t have any children?”

Not even Torry knew that one, but I suspected that within twenty-four hours, every girl in camp would.

“Because,” Joey said, “Santa comes but once a year and when he does, he drops his load down the chimney.”

The girls thought that was a riot. As a matter of fact, I got a kick out of it myself, but at the same time I was disappointed in Joey.

After lunch, I called him aside and said, “I couldn’t help but hear the joke you told the girls. You know better than that. Nancy’ll get wind of it before tomorrow morning and I’m afraid it’ll mean trouble.”

“What do you mean? I didn’t start it. They were telling jokes by the gross and I just threw that one in. I mean, what the heck, I didn’t start it.”

“I know, Joey. But I warned you about talking dirty in front of the campers. That’s something Nancy won’t tolerate.”

“Well, good grief, they talk dirtier than anybody I ever heard before.”

“True. But they’re Nancy’s problem—not mine. You and Roy *are* my problems, and I’ve warned you about this before, now haven’t I?”

“But maybe she won’t find out about it? I mean, who knows about it except you and Roy and the girls, and me of course.”

“That’s way too many, Joey. Now come on, let’s get back to work.”

We dug a safe fire pit—as safe as possible (almost three feet deep and lined with sand and large stones). We cleared the ground of pine needles for ten feet on all sides. The ground was dry—too dry.

We were ready to erect the tent now. A wind had blown up. It was coming from the north, pulling a line of low stratus clouds across the sky. The lake was dotted with whitecaps. I wanted rain—a long steady rain from low stratus clouds—and I could almost smell it in the wind, but I didn’t want to get my hopes up. After all, the forecast was for sunny and warmer, and you can’t rely on the winds around Mussle Lake.

Just the same, I found myself looking at the sky from time to time as I cut down a young hemlock which would become the center post for the tent. I hate to cut a living tree, but in this case, I had to. By the time we'd trimmed it and hauled it back to the clearing, the sky was solid with cascading shades of gray. Let it rain for a week. Let that dry wood soak up water by the gallon.

We laid the center post flat on the ground and spread the tent out over it. Then Joey and I crawled underneath and tried to stand the center post up, while on the outside Roy and the girls pulled on the ropes. Although it probably sounds simple enough, the whole process must have taken us the better part of an hour. Joey and I, working underneath the tent that way, were soaked with sweat.

When the center post was erect, with the tent draped over it, I went outside to secure the buttress ropes. As soon as I stepped outside I felt cold dots landing on my shoulders. I stopped. It was *raining*. Yahoo. It was actually *raining*.

Rain! And the smell of wet pine needles—the most wonderful smell in the world. I looked up and let the rain splatter against my face and run down my chin, bounce off my nose. Hot dog. I felt like turning cartwheels. Through the pines in the distance I would see a hazy veil of drifting rain—hard, steady rain. A thunder clap broke overhead—mellowed into a deep roll that echoed off the mountains, and the rain came down harder. The sounds and smells were intoxicating.

“I’m getting all wet!” Dot said.

Who but the very young could complain about a blessing?

“Get under the tent,” I said.

“We didn’t bring our raincoats or anything,” Torry said. “We’ll get soaked if it doesn’t stop.” I didn’t want it to stop for a month.

I laughed and danced a jig. “Little rain never hurt anyone,” I said. “Makes you grrrow.”

I secured the buttress ropes and watched the rain come down for almost an hour. I watched the brush drink up the water and change from a dull, dirty brown to shiny black. Since the rain didn’t show any signs of letting up, I



suggested we head back to camp before the Mussle Lake Road washed out. The girls groaned. “We’ll get soaked!”

The lake was choppy and pocked with countless raindrops. A couple of inches of water sloshed around in the bottom of the boat. When we started out my passengers were hunched over, shivering.

I fixed that, though. I swerved the boat sharply to one side and started singing, “Oh, I come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee.” Pretty soon Dot joined in, harmonizing no less. I sang louder and swerved again. Torry started singing, then Joey and Pat. The ravens looked at us quizzically from the trees along the shore.

After we’d run “Oh, Susanna” into the ground, Dot said, “New song,” and began singing, “Can she bake a cherry pie, Billy boy, Billy boy.” We zigged and zagged and sang as loud as we could. And I’m a son-of-a-gun if Roy wasn’t singing, too—even smiling a little bit. Good old Roy.

An hour later when we pulled up in front of the Mainhouse, we were all as hoarse as foghorns, and about as soaked as you can get, but we were still singing. “I’ve got sixpence, jolly, jolly sixpence.” A wonderful experience.

## OLIVE

It was nearly dark in the house when Jay came home. The rain drummed on the roof. The house was cold—damp. I had a terrible headache. I watched Jay get out of the wagon and come up the walk, whistling. It made me shiver. The rain was beating against the window, changing everything outside into a dreary mass of splattered runny colors. I don't like rain. Being lonely is bad enough, but it's almost too much when it rains.

Jay was soaking wet. He came in and smiled. The water flowed onto the floor in rivers. "Look at it rain!" he said. His voice was hoarse and almost gone, but he kept talking until I thought my head would burst. He told about the campsite. "This is just what we needed," he said.

I wanted to stand up and say, "WHY? WHY DO YOU NEED IT? SO WE CAN WAIT ANOTHER YEAR FOR YOUR FOREST FIRE!" Jay was just like an old maid that's always peeking under her bed for men. Jay *wanted* a fire. Maybe he was scared, too, but he still wanted one.

He turned the end-table light on and I felt the pain shoot clear back inside my head. I turned around and pressed my face against the back of the couch. It smelled musty. My whole life was musty. I was sick inside, living in this lonely place. I couldn't understand why God planted me on this earth.

Jay said, "What's the matter, Olive? Don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right," I said. "You better get out of those wet clothes."

The phone rang then with a hollow sound that seemed to pierce the musty air.

Jay answered it and left puddles of water behind him. "Hello," he said. "Oh, hi, Nancy ... What? ... Yeah, just got in.... That's right.... Well, yes, as a matter of fact he did. But Nancy, it wasn't his fault. The girls baited him into it. And the joke he told wasn't really very raunchy.... Yeah ... Yeah, comes once a year and drops his load down the chimney.... No ... No, Nancy, that was the only joke he told—at least the only one I heard. And I'm sure he didn't tell any more

because I told him not to.... No! Just the part about coming once a year. He didn't say anything about Santa having popcorn balls and a candy cane.... Well, I don't care who said he did, I'm telling you he didn't.... No. Let's not credit Joey with every foul joke told in New England, he only told *one* ...”

“ ... Well, Lulu has my note. I thought I'd take Joey with me.... Now, look ... Now, look, Nancy. He's looking forward to the Gardner Landing trip. I don't think you're being fair.... You're the boss, but it doesn't seem fair to let those three campers go if you're going to make Joey stay behind. The jokes they told were as dirty as his.... Nancy, he promised he wouldn't do it again. You can hold me personally responsible for him, if you want.... Okay, you do that. I'm not going to say anything now, because I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to stop once I got started. But in a couple of days, you and I are going to talk a few things over, without any childish temper tantrums or threats. And we're going to reach some kind of understanding one way or another. I'm through telling my boys one thing and then having to eat my promise!”

He slammed the receiver down and stood quite for a minute. He called them “my boys.”

## JOEY

Son-of-a-bitch, I mean, what a rotten deal. I was all set to go to Gardner's Landing the next morning, you know, here I am in Champ's silk tie with ye old Windsor knot, my hair slicked back with axle grease and all that crap. Boy, and then I strut down to the barn feeling real—I don't know what. Good, I guess, you know, how you get dressed up sometimes and it makes you feel like a real dashing bastard.

But I didn't feel dashing very goddamn long. I walked in the barn and there's Jay in his Matt Dillon dress suit and a great profound expression on his face. "Joey, I'm sorry," he says, but I can't take you with me to Gardner's Landing."

"Why?"

"Because Nancy wants you and Roy to work on the campsite. Champ's going in your place.

"Champ?" What a Pearl Harbor maneuver. Let a guy go right on until the last minute before telling him. Let him put toilet water behind his ears, pluck the hair out of his nose, scar his face all up rooting out blackheads, spend about six hours putting a mirror-like finish on his goddamn shoes, and then, the very last minute, slip him the purple shaft. Brother. I said, "I thought you said / was going."

"Joey," he says and takes one of those misty-eyed drags on his lousy pipe. "Joey, I'm not boss around here. If Nancy wants to send Champ, there's nothing I can do about it. She doesn't want you to go because of the joke you told yesterday. She heard three or four versions of it."

"From who? I mean who in the heck would tell on me?"

"I don't know, Joey. She asked me if the story was true and I told her it was."

"Gee, thanks."

"Should I have lied about it?"

Oh, hell, no. Not Honest John McFarland. Maybe if my name was Charley Rebus and I owned some beat-up jeep he could borrow whenever he wanted—well, then maybe he might stick up for me and tell old Lard Ass that it wasn't my fault. But let's face it: Why lie for Joey? Why do anything for Joey?"

He said, "Joey, I feel as bad about this as you do. I tried to tell her the girls led you into it, but she wouldn't buy it. I'm sorry."

I'm telling you, I must be an infant and a half, I swear. When Jay started on this sympathy routine, and put his hand on my shoulder, I felt like I was going to bust out bawling, so I streaked out of the barn and tooled up the road. Man, was I ever feeling sorry for myself.

I had the old emotions pretty well in hand by the time I got to the cabin, but when I gave Champ his hairy tie back and told him what happened, he says, "Oh gosh, Joey, that's too bad," and here I go again, the old throat starts getting muscle-bound and the eyes start blinking away ninety miles an hour. If that isn't embarrassing, to stand around fanning the tears out of your eyes. Only I couldn't help it. I felt so goddamn bad—I just couldn't help it. I know that sounds pretty corny, coming from a man and all, but it's the truth. I mean, if you're a big-time athlete, it's all right to cry if you win a game, or lose one, or what the hell have you. But let's face it: I'm no goddamn athlete, so I've got no excuse. I must just be a bawl-baby that's all.

So I put on my soaking wet coveralls and went back to Mussle Lake with Roy—big deal. That goddamn Mussle Lake Road was about as solid as bread dough and the wheels on the jeep got so coated with that gunk they looked like something you see in these old war newsreels—you know, the Yanks forge ahead into Brussels and all that crap.

Anyhow, we get in the boat and when we're about halfway across the goddamn lake it started to rain again—great goddamn drops the size of softballs. The boat was filling up with water like a madman, but we didn't bail or anything, because, let's face it: We didn't give a damn if it sunk. I mean, this was really the

berries—coming back to this campsite with nothing but four trillion trees and rain and that monstrous goddamn tent. Pardon me while I heave all over my sandals.

We worked all day and it rained most of the time. Needless to say neither one of us was in what you'd call good spirits. I'll bet we didn't say twenty-four words all day between us. But we got the work done—hip, hip, hurray. Of course, it was almost dark out by the time we finished and we both had blisters on everything but our navels, but we got the goddamn work done.

We were just gathering up the tools that the rain hadn't washed away when Roy said, "I thought you were going to Gardner's Landing today."

He's quick to notice things, isn't he? "I was," I said and then gave the whole gory story.

"Ah, yes," he said. "You found McFarland's Achilles' heel."

"How's that?"

"Your Santa Claus joke. As you undoubtedly know, Jolly Jay is sterile; therefore, he feels he has to prove his prowess by being ultra-masculine in everything he does."

"So?"

"So your joke had to do with sterility. I doubt if McFarland found it very amusing."

All of a sudden, it hit me. "Wait a minute," I said. "You think *he* told on me?"

"Wouldn't that seem to be a logical conclusion?"

"Yeah. Sure, I remember now, as soon as I told the joke, he streaks over and pulls me aside and gives me this big lecture about being foul in front of the campers."

"He had to demonstrate that he was the superior masculine figure," Roy said.

"And he was *positive* that Nancy would find out about it! I remember, I thought it was kind of screwy that he could be so goddamn sure about it."

Roy sort of chuckled and gave me one of his patented slimy sneers. “He’s sick.”

“Boy, he must be,” I said. “You should see some of his *friends*.” I told him all about Good Old Charley Rebus. By the time I finished we were both ready to shove off.

Roy said, “Jay’s friend is probably no sicker than he is.”

That was hard to believe—but I mean, everything pointed to it. I said, “Jay pulled some kind of dirty deal on you, too, huh?”

“I’ll say.”

“He must be some kind of professional prick, you know it? I mean, buttering people up and then the first thing you know, whammo, right up the old chute.”

“Check.”

It was still raining like hell, which didn’t help matters. The more I thought about that goddamn sycophant Jay the madder I got. I mean here we were slaving our gooners off, while he’s living it up at Gardner’s Landing. Maybe he wasn’t such a bad guy sometimes, but he gave me a pain. I said, “You’re not talking to him are you?”

“Correct.”

“Well, I’m not going to, either. The hell with him.”

## JAY

It rained all the way back to camp—a hard, steady rain that filtered through the headlight beams and hammered against the cab of the truck. It gave me a cozy feeling. Pat and Doris rode up front with me. Champ was behind with the other campers. It had been a good day—would have been perfect if Joey had been along.

Pat and Doris swooned about the Gardner’s Landing dance all the way back to camp.

“And did you dance with so and so? Oh, what muscles. I almost *died!* And what a *dreamy* dancer. Sigh.”

“What about so and so? He looks at *least* twenty-four, and he’s in *love* with me! He actually is. You see, he and I were out on the terrace *alone* and—I’ll tell you about it when we get back to the cabin. I don’t want Old Nosy to hear. But anyway, he’s coming to Scarsdale for Christmas. He actually is. And we’re going out every night for *two weeks!* Sigh.”

“Did he kiss you?”

“Well, natch, silly. I’ll tell you about it when we get to the cabin.”

“Sigh.”

When we pulled into camp, the girls strolled into the Mainhouse with stars in their eyes. I headed for the barn and dodged the puddles which were everywhere and shimmered with the light reflected from the Mainhouse.

Roy and Joey weren’t in the barn, but their muddy clothes were—in a heap near the work bench. Clean clothes and towels were laid out on the saw table. I figured the boys must have been taking a swim. They probably had a pretty rough day.

Pretty soon, I heard them coming up the path. I couldn’t make out what they were saying, but Joey was talking in his usual animated way. As soon as they saw me standing in the doorway, they clammed up and walked silently to their towels.



“How’d it go today?” I asked.

No answer.

I said, “Joey, how did it go today?”

He shrugged and began drying his hair.

No, not Joey, too. “Did you dig the latrine?”

Joey nodded yes.

“Finish the tent?”

He nodded.

“The buoys and the rail?”

He nodded.

“I imagine you’re pretty tired.”

He stared at me a moment and continued drying.

I wanted to fight back, but I knew he had a legitimate gripe. Just the same it hurt. I liked Joey—very much—and I was hurt because he didn’t have more faith in me. He should have known that if I had anything to say about it, he would have gone to Gardner’s Landing.

I said, “Well, I’ll see you boys in the morning.” I paused by the doorway and went outside. Maybe in the morning, Joey would be over his anger. I sure hoped so. The cold shoulder from *one* assistant is bad enough.

## NANCY

We took the girls to Mussle Lake the next morning. However, it was ruined—destroyed—the whole beautiful venture. I had it so clearly visualized—the girls moving away from the high bluffs in the early morning calm, the shadows of the mountains dark on the water, broken only by seven graceful canoes moving majestically into the distance. But everything turned out wrong. In the first place, Jay couldn't use the big canoe trailer so he had to make *four* trips with the smaller one. By the time the boats and the girls were assembled, it was almost *eleven* o'clock in the morning; the spot from which the girls disembarked wasn't a high noble bluff at all, but a flat grassy little slough that sank spinelessly into the water; and instead of standing around in reverent silence, as the girls in my image did, our campers chattered and talked about the boys they'd met at Gardner's Landing the day before. It was horrible. This trip was supposed to be a reliving of the wonderful pioneer days of this country, however, it had degenerated into a complete sham. The sun, almost directly overhead, was hot on my shoulders. The mysteriously intriguing shadows of early morning had shrunk and twisted into drab little spots. And the campers, after waiting on the shore for several hours, were becoming restless and cross.

Even my counselors, the watchdogs, the scouts of this venture back into time were acting like anything but strong alert guides. Flick and Ann, sprawled out on their camping gear, were sleeping in the yellow grass. Dug read a cheap detective story and Red chatted with Torry Steinblum and that awful Roy Milton. Everything was wrong, everything. I had come out here myself, over the ruts and bumps, in the jeep, because I wanted to remember the sight of them gliding across the lake, seven arrows of courage moving into the wilderness. I wanted to breathe in the blues and grays of early morning, watching the canoes fade into the distance. But now I only wanted to weep and go home.

The sounds of the jeep—the whine, the growl of the engine—were still harsh in my ears, and the nauseating smells of exhaust smoke and raw gasoline bit mercilessly at my nostrils.

More time elapsed loading gear, launching canoes, settling seating arrangements. Three campers were supposed to go in each canoe. However, they argued petulantly about who was supposed to paddle. Unable to take it any longer, I settled all arguments, issuing the paddle assignments myself.

At last, they were ready to leave. They started out, all seven canoes moving gracefully in echelon, just as they did in my image. Suddenly, however, a commotion arose in the fourth canoe. Alice Blauknopf yelled incessantly, “My portable! I left it on the shore.” The other canoes waited while the fourth canoe returned and Alice ran lackadaisically back up the slough retrieving her abominable portable radio. The fourth canoe finally caught up and all seven continued across the lake, the campers singing with Alice’s radio, BEATNIK BLUES! That was the last straw. One might have thought that they’d have had the decency to sing one of the traditional Timberline songs. Turning to Jay who was smugly smoking his pipe, I said, “Well, let’s get out of here.”

First it was the drama counselor, then Jay and his drinking, then Roy, then Henna, then Joey telling the girls filthy stories, and finally this. Fully aware that this was by far the most humiliating summer in the history of Camp Timberline, *I*, the director, could now return to camp and spend the remainder of the afternoon helping Lulu and that inept Mrs. Bowie prepare dinner!

## HENNA

I'd almost forgot what it was like, being away from this kind of life so long. Oh, when I was at Timberline I used to think how nice it would be sitting on the porch of the farmhouse fanning myself with a newspaper, just loafing around, instead of stooping and bending and working until my back was ready to give out. But I had no idea how it can unnerve a person if that's all she has to do day in, day out—just sit and loaf. Here it was Thursday already and I hadn't done one stitch of work since I quit. Tuesday and Wednesday I sat inside watching the rain come down, and now I was on the porch fanning away—for all the good it did. It was so goddamn hot out that even the heat flies took cover. And all that water going back into the air made it seem even hotter yet. Must have been over a hundred degrees anyhow. I wondered how the girls were doing—going to Mussle Lake. Wouldn't have surprised me if the new cook hadn't given them enough supplies to last them two days.

It was time to fix lunch for that thankless bunch of mine, but if you think I was going to jump up like I was a cheap hired hand, you're crazy. Jackasses are too damned lazy to eat anyhow. Starve them up for a couple of days and then maybe they'll be a little more mannerly.

At least when I was at Camp Timberline, I was an important person—probably *the* most important! And I don't expect to get any argument out of you on that point. If there ain't no cook, nobody eats. If nobody eats, they all die. So there ain't nobody more important than the cook, and that's a *fact*. I didn't have to do dishes, either. All I did was prepare the meals and I did it *my* way. Oh, I know I was supposed to follow that dietician's chart, but I guess I know a little more about good healthy food than she does. Cheese soufflé! Why I'm a goddamn steer in rutting season; you serve the men something like that and they'll have your scalp.

No sir. I had the *most* important position in that camp. Just look at all the people I had working for me. June, the two waitresses, and Sparky the

dishwasher. Now, you can say what you want, but even McFarland, who thinks he's an important rooster around there, ain't got that many people working for him. Like I always say, you take a person who's got four people working for her, and there's a damned important person. Ha, and then I come home, and sit around with nothing to do but listen to my bunch cry all day long. The orneryist, stubbornist, laziest pack of males in these United States. Growed men they are, too. I must have been plumb out of my head when I left camp.

Let's see. Today the camp was having potato salad and ham for lunch and they were eating right now. I'd be getting ready to sit down with the men myself. Now those men—even that big-mouthed McFarland—know how to treat a woman with some respect. At least *they* know how important a cook is, and they don't want to get on her bad side *no* how.

Then, after I ate, I'd go sit on the recreation porch and have a cigarette, and maybe talk to Mary Jones, while the waitresses were clearing the tables and Sparky was doing the dishes. And you wouldn't have to fan the flies away with no newspaper either because they have screens on their porch. Then maybe about two, three o'clock I'd get back to the kitchen and start fixing dinner, but I was never alone. There was always June around to help me out. June and I used to have some nice chats, too—real nice.

After dinner all I'd have to do is get everything set up for breakfast and then I was off—my day was through. And when I left you'd hear the waitresses, Sparky, June, and whoever else might be around saying, "Goodnight, Henna," like I really mattered—which I goddamn well did. The work ain't easy by a long shot, and I doubt if you'd last there a week, but I guess I was used to it so it didn't bother me the way it would a newcomer.

My two youngest boys, Vince and Norm, were on the porch playing checkers. The railroad in Northport went on strike back in June, so they'd been sitting around on their tailbones ever since. They try to fool me saying that they don't want to look for any other job because the strike might be over any day

now, but they ain't fooling *me*. Them boys is just plain goddamn lazy—the old man's side of the family coming out in them.

Yesterday's dishes were still in the sink and that's just where they were going to stay until one of them bums decided to wash them. And you better believe it. I was used to being treated like a lady—at least during the summer months—and I aimed to keep it that way. Nobody was going to make me into a dishwasher.

Poor June was probably having a miserable time with the new cook—at least I hoped she was. I'd sort of growed used to thinking of June as *my* assistant, and it made me sour to think she might enjoy working for somebody else. That went for Sparky too, and the waitresses. I wondered to myself if Jay ever fixed the blower.

Those two bums of mine were starting in on another game of checkers. Isn't that the way, though? Bring up five boys, three good ones and two bums. The good ones go off and get good jobs—move so far away that you don't get to see them but maybe once every couple of years. But the bums? You can count on them to sponge off from you and play checkers on your porch until their beards are gray. “Why don't you give your behinds a rest and go help the old man in the fields?”

“Now, Maw, you know damned well he ain't doing no work out there. Just plucking a thistle here and there.” That was my oldest bum, Vince.

“Yeah. If you don't believe it, you can take a walk out there and see for yourself.” And that was Norm.

“I'll give you walk out in the fields! Right over the skull with a big black skillet.” And goddamn it I would, too.

But them ill-mannered bums just went right on playing, like I wasn't even around. “Your move, Vince.”

I must have had brain fever to leave camp the way I did. Why, if June ever opened her yap to me that way, I'd paddle her little virgin red ass for her. But what are you going to do against a couple of big strong bums that'd just as soon

hit their old lady as drink corn liquor? Oh, I wasn't afraid to bash them one, except that I might injure them permanent by knocking the sawdust out of their heads, and then I'd have to take care of them for the rest of their lives.

"If you bums want to eat." I said, "you'll have to wash all the dishes in the sink."

"Naw, we're going into town after a bit. Your move, Norm."

Get backaches and morning sickness carrying them, then get all tore to pieces inside when the monsters finally come out, raise 'em, sacrifice for them, try to be a good mother and teach them to shift for themselves, and then when they're growed men you can still pamper them for another twenty years. Not this old gal! No sir. I spent twenty years of my life being a wet nurse—right through the Depression and all, and they never once hurt for anything to eat—but them days is behind. I've earned the right to have a life of my own, and goddamn it all to hell, I was going to have it. I'd go into Highland and find me a job—and I was leaving right now!!

I could see the old man in the field. As usual, he weren't doing nothing but sitting on the ground staring at his beans.

"Hey, Maw," Vince said, "where the hell you going? We want to use the car."

"Well, that's too goddamn bad about you. It's *my* car and I'm damned well going to use it myself, you bum!"

Paid \$750 for that Chevy and just let anyone try to tell me who's going to use it. Not that I couldn't have bought a new car if I'd wanted to. We're not hurting for money, as anyone around here can tell you if you just ask them, but I just plain didn't like the looks of the new cars. Besides, my Chevy has four-wheel drive and you never see me get stuck in the wintertime no matter how deep the snow is.

I got into the car and drove down the road a spell, when all at once I noticed a very funny thing. Camp Timberline is right on the way to Highland. I wasn't actually *thinking* of stopping in, but it was sort of a coincidence. When I

was a few steps from the camp road I started to get curious about how the new cook was doing. Thought maybe I could give her a pointer here and there to help her get situated—since it was right on my way to Highland. I know Nancy told me not to come back, but it weren't as if I was coming after my old job or anything. I'd just be doing her a favor, you might say.

It felt funny going up that same old road again and not going to work. New cook was probably one of these home economic highbinders—couldn't cook a good meat-and-potato meal if her life depended on it. Well, just wait until she starts serving the men cheese soufflé and macaroni. See how long she'll last then. Oh, she was in for some real suffering all right, poor soul.

When I pulled up by the garage all the campers stared at me, and I almost turned around and went on my way, I was so embarrassed. But it wasn't as if I was coming back for my job, was it? No! I was doing a favor, so I got out and all the campers said, "Hello, Henna," just as pretty as you pleased. It was plain to see they were all a little thinner.

I went into the kitchen, and there she was—the most pitiful, sloppy, fretful, nervous thing you ever saw in your born days. She was *twice* as skinny as Lulu, which just proved that she couldn't even eat her own cooking. She was all over the kitchen at once like a lovesick katydid, leaving a mess wherever she lit. She had enough cooking utensils out to cook a banquet for both sides of the Civil War. And she even had Lulu working for her!

And this is the interesting part: Ever since the camp opened, I don't know how many years ago, I'd fixed Lulu a good hearty breakfast every morning and that skinny little sliver never once ate it, to say nothing about the outright snippy way she talked to me. But when she saw me standing there in the kitchen, she smiled and said, "Hello, Henna. You're looking very well. Is that a new dress?"

I'll give you a new dress! That old gunny sack I was wearing was *five* years old, and she must have seen it a thousand times, but that'll just give you some idea of how glad she was to see me.



And when June saw me her face lit up like Fourth of July in Northport. But when the new cook took a gander at me, you could see it in her eyes. Just like a dog before he goes out of his head with hydrophobia. She was a bad one all right. I personally wouldn't trust her to cook for a bunch of criminals. You'd never know when she was going to fly off her block and poison the food or what have you. Oh, that look in her eyes!

She said, "You're the old cook, aren't you?" You could hear it in her voice, too.

"Yes, that's right."

"Why have you come back here? Does this mean that I'm not doing well? What does it mean?"

"Oh, no, honey, I just come back to maybe help you out and give you a few pointers."

"Well, thank you. But we're getting along all right now." She laughed—very suspicious laugh. "Little different system. Takes a couple of days to catch on."

"No, honey, I just thought I'd give you a few pointers to help you get situated. For instance, that great big kettle you're fixing to fix beef pot pie in. Why, honey, you use that and it'll take over eight hours to cook, and then the dumplings'll be burnt to a crisp on the outside. Now, I'm not saying that I know more about it than you do, but if I was you, I'd brown the beef real good first and then throw the works in those three shallow pots hanging up there."

"Oh. Well, that's what I was going to do anyhow."

"Well, how come you're using that big pot then?"

She laughed, casual-like. "Well, that's just the way I do things."

"Makes it sort of hard on the help, don't it? Now, mind you, I don't want to butt in, but you're making those dumplings too runny. Why, they'll spread out and burn blacker than coal. You've got to make them goopy, so they slop down into the pie. Everybody knows that."

You should have seen the way she stared at me—blood-soaked daggers she was wishing on me.

“Well, I’m the cook now,” she said in that snarly voice of hers. “And I’ve fixed a dumpling or two in my day.”

“Oh, I’ll bet you have, honey, and good ones, too.” I was trying my damndest to be polite. “But it’s a lot different cooking on a range like this, instead of the dinky stove you’re probably used to.”

“I’ll have you know that I cooked at the Northport Hillguard Hotel, and their range is every bit as big as this.”

“You’re right. It’s probably a lot *newer* too. That’s what makes this one so tricky.”

She said, “Well, thanks for stopping in. But we’re doing just fine.”

Nancy walked in then, wearing an apron and I frankly didn’t know what to say. We stared at each other and I could see a warm look in her eyes, underneath the frown. Without saying hello or anything, she said, “Henna, do you want your job back, yes or no?”

“Yes, I do, Nancy.” I thought I would cry, everyone was so sweet to me.

“Good,” Nancy said. “Lulu, give Mrs. Bowie two weeks’ pay.”

“I never ...” Mrs. Bowie said and ran upstairs. Poor darling. Nancy did the right thing, though—couldn’t trust that woman around girls for a second.

“I’m glad you’re back, Henna,” Nancy said. “We missed you very much.”

“We sure did,” Lulu said, and she *smiled*—as strange a sight as you could hope to see. About the only one I know who ever made her smile before was McFarland, and that monkey could make a bullfrog giggle.

After they left, I was putting my apron on, when June walked by and winked at me. “June,” I said, “the number seven pots and make it snappy!” Oh, I guess I taught them a lesson they won’t forget for a long time to come. I told you the cook is the most important person.

But it sure felt good to be back in the harness. I’d serve them up a batch of beef pot pie like they never tasted before, and this time I wouldn’t even pretend to follow that stupid dietician’s recipe.

## ROY

After those unusual dishes prepared by The Knife—Mrs. Bowie—Henna's pot pie was a refreshing change. On that point, I think we were all in accord. However, I felt that the Welcoming Home Committee might have been overplaying its role.

After dinner, I sat around listening to the Testimonials, until it became apparent that they might run on into the wee hours of the morning. Henna, who had bloated perceptibly with each accolade, now sat at the head of Nancy's table, poised like a true Monarch. I politely excused myself and went outside, where I was greeted with a different kind of unpleasantness—heat.

Although the sun was Sinking Low in the Heavens, the temperature was struggling for a Record High and the Discomfort Index was further dramatized by the high humidity.

Either out of habit or boredom, I went to the cabin. Needless to say, it was even more uncomfortable in there. For a while, I sat on my bunk, watching the drops of perspiration trickle off the end of my nose and land silently on the floor. Then I tried to lose myself in *The Education of Karl Witte*. However, I found neither of these activities very rewarding. I missed Ann. I was still jealous and perhaps bothered with slight pangs of guilt. That morning, when Ann had left for the Campsite, I'd wanted to kiss her, but I couldn't bring myself to do it, not on the shores of Mussle Lake, with Nancy and the campers Looking On. Ann had seemed disappointed, but she knows how I feel about Public Displays.

Furthermore, I was concerned about her safety. When she's in camp I at least know she's relatively safe—although I rarely see her before Timberline Taps, because she's busy providing swimming lessons or attending seminars at Nancy's cottage. At Nancy's Forgotten Half Acre, on the other hand, almost anything might happen. I was concerned. And puzzled. I had difficulty understanding why Ann had been sent out there. One would imagine that Nancy would have selected only her most loyal and experienced Amazons.

I sat there and mulled the problem over and over, a process which only accentuated my apprehension and my feeling of (pardon the expression) loneliness. So, I decided to search for other forms of Enjoyment.

I went to the barn. It was cooler there—hardly chilly, but somewhat cooler. Joey was sitting on the workbench examining the stirrup on a water ski. “How goes the night?” I said.

“Putrefying. I mean, boy is it ever dead. Can’t even play horseshoes with all the water laying around up there.”

“Swell.”

We had just fallen into silence when the not-too-melodious strains of the *Nutcracker Suite* wafted into the barn, followed by the Music Maker himself—Whistling Jay McFarland. He came through the door, laughed, and said, “It sure is good to have Henna back, isn’t it? I’ve told her right along that when she finally quit it would be because she’s too senile to move around anymore. Good old Henna.”

Strangely enough, I was no longer angry with Jay. I realize I *should* have been, considering the gravity of The Incident, but I couldn’t seem to manage it—not when Jay kept talking and joking in his pathetically charming manner. In fact, if Joey hadn’t been present at the time, I probably would have talked to Jay.

Jay said, “Well, Joey, how do you like this hot weather? Did you know we broke a record today—101 degrees? How about that?”

Joey shrugged and Jay’s face hardened.

## JAY

They caught me off guard. I'd completely forgotten that they were snubbing me, but Joey jogged my memory—and how. My first impulse was to say something about it. I wanted to tell them that they were making damn fools out of themselves. But actually, they weren't. They were trying to punish me and they were doing a pretty good job. My next impulse was to make an ardent preachy speech about—about anything that would win them over. I wanted to be dramatic. But that was out, too. So was bribery.

I lit my pipe and walked to the loft ladder. Suddenly, I remembered the pair of driftwood lamps I'd built a few winters back. Funny, I hadn't thought of them before. They were just gathering dust in the loft, and I'd probably never use them myself because Olive didn't want them in the house. Don't misunderstand. They were beautiful lamps—perfectly matched—only Olive doesn't think they're right for our house.

I'd give one lamp to Roy and the other to Joey. That wouldn't be bribery either because no one was using the lamps, and besides ... Well maybe it *would* be bribery. So what?

## JOEY

Boy, this whole silent treatment business was about as childish as eating boogers. I mean with old stone-face Roy sitting there watching me, I couldn't back out. Things like that just aren't done, unless of course, you want everybody to think you don't have any goddamn will power. But just the same, I couldn't see much point in it anymore. I mean, it's as hard as hell to always keep on guard and remember not to talk to somebody, and besides, there's no iron-clad rule that says you've got to deprive a guy of your beautiful voice just because you might be a little hacked with him. But I got myself into this thing and now I was stuck.

So there we were sitting around getting brain hemorrhages trying to think up all kinds of things *not* to say, when all at once Jay starts acting sort of frisky. He frolics around the place for a while, you know, whistling real goddamn shrill and swaggering around. And then all at once, zip, up the ladder he goes to the loft and clank, bang, crash, you can hear him rummaging around to beat hell. For chrissake it sounded like he was assembling a Junior Miss bulldozer or something with all the blinking racket he was making—trudging back and forth and clankety-banging around until the boards in the ceiling were starting to jar loose.

I'd just be lying if I said I wasn't curious, because I *was*. I mean, you can just take something like that so long and then boy, the old inquiring mind starts going to work and the first thing you know, you're one pulsating mass of curiosity whether you like it or not. So I pulsated away for a few minutes and then here comes Jay down the ladder carrying this mammoth goddamn monstrosity—I mean a *huge* goddamn thing. At first I thought it was seven cords of rotten redwood or something, but then, when he's waltzing across the floor with it, I can see that it's a *lamp!* Honest a God, a lamp, and no josh, you're not going to believe this, but it was a *table* lamp. I mean it was about as big around as Nancy's waistline, but it was way too short to stand on the floor, and talk about

being grizzly and snarled up with stumpy branches jutting out all over the place. Man, you never saw anything like it. All I can say is you'd have to have an awful goddamn strong table to hold that thing and even a stronger stomach.

It didn't have any shade or anything, just this brass fixture, and when Jay set it down on the saw table, I started thinking about how funny it would look with an ordinary-sized lampshade on it. I almost broke up all over the place. I mean any shade smaller than a washtub would look like a thimble sitting up there.

What a lamp.

It was made out of driftwood and, you know, some of these driftwood lamps are pretty classy-looking, the ones that are nice and swirly and graceful, but *this* lamp was about as graceful as a basket case. It had busted off branches all over it and they weren't the kind that had a nice curve to them, either. No, these were more like—well, do you know how kindergarten kids draw pictures of people? You know, with the arms sticking out to the side? Well, that's *exactly* the way those branches looked. I mean, a house is hardly a home without a lamp like this.

So Jay dusted the damn thing off and it was all I could do to hold myself together. There's this guy back where I used to live whose old man is a real fiend on taxidermy and he made this one lamp that would give a boil-sucker the dry heaves—you know, about four squirrels chasing each other and playing grab-ass all around the base—but next to Jay's lamp it was *nothing*. Well anyhow, when Jay is finished dusting, he tears up the ladder again and as soon as he's out of sight I look over at Roy and say, "That's really some lamp, isn't it?"

And Roy gets that real flat look on his face and says, "Oh, it's really a Jim Dandy."

I couldn't get over it. What a lamp! I couldn't take my eyes off the goddamn thing, I mean it was *so* ugly it was *fascinating*. I didn't even hear Jay come down the ladder or anything, and when I looked up and saw him carrying *another* one, I almost keeled over. No crap! Another one. And so help me God, you couldn't tell them apart except one was all dusted off. I know it sounds

fantastic, but that's the gospel truth. They were *twins!* I'm telling you, my jaw was almost dragging on the ground. You know, at first I thought I was seeing things.

Well, Jay dusts the second one off and then says, "What do you think of these lamps?"

We didn't answer.

"I had to do a little work to make them identical," he says and then he explains how he had to chisel away a little on one here and graft a few of those attractive branches on the other one there, and on and on until you couldn't tell them apart. Oh boy, can you imagine the jolt you'd get walking into a living room and seeing those babies on either side of the couch? That would be one way to keep people out of your living room. Oh man.

"It's really a shame to break up the set," he said, "but," and then he picks one of them up (and don't ask me *which* one for chrissake) and hands it to Roy and says in this phony casual voice, "With my compliments."

Well, that did it. You know the kind of dead pan Roy is. Well, you should have seen him sagging under the weight of that lamp. His face lit up like a goddamn taillight and his mouth was so far open you could hold a family reunion in it. "I—I don't know what to say," he said, and boy, there was no question about it; he was speaking the truth. "Thanks."

"You're quite welcome," Jay said and picks up this other lamp. And just like that, when he started walking toward me, the whole thing didn't seem very funny anymore. I suppose I knew all along that he thought these lamps were pretty hot stuff. You could tell by the way he dusted them off and set them on the table. But now I could see what he was trying to do and the whole thing was sort of sad. I don't know if I can explain it, but he put a lot of work in those lamps, chiseling and all that stuff, and the *workmanship* was good. I mean you could look them over all you wanted and you couldn't tell which branches were grafted. He even carved those rings where the branch joins the rest of the lamp. And I'm not saying they weren't ugly, because they were—no question about that—but those lamps *meant* something to him.



And then the look on his face when he hands it to me—I mean you could sense that he was pretty shook up and he was trying to say something. He was trying to say, “I’m sorry.” He isn’t the kind of guy to get real humble and apologize all over the place, so this was his way.

Then he looks at me with this real I-don’t-know-what look—sincere I guess—and he says, “And this one’s for you, Joey.”

Maybe I was reading a lot in. I don’t know, but I really felt for him right then. And it didn’t matter so much that the lamp was ugly. A lot of things are, but that doesn’t mean they can’t have sentimental value. And besides, that lamp didn’t look so bad anyhow, once you got used to it. The important thing was what it meant. I was really touched. “Thanks Jay,” I said, “I ...” And then I didn’t know what the hell to add. I wanted to say, “I’ll treasure it forever,” but *women* are the only ones who say things like that. So I didn’t say anything more. I wanted to, though. I was really touched.

## ANN

While there was still a little light, I got my diary from my pack. “Thursday,” I wrote.

*Today was the hottest day I can remember in a long time. The sun is setting and we’re waiting for the tent to cool off so we can go inside. This morning everybody was excited and boisterous going to the campsite, but now we’re all grouchy. Our dinner was awful. Dug ruined the meat and then she and Flick got in an argument over it and they’ve been at it ever since.*

*I didn’t do much today. I helped with the meals and went canoeing. The campers wanted to go swimming this afternoon, but no one had nerve enough to jump into that cold water. All day long I kept thinking about our apartment in Ann Arbor. When we lived there I thought it was so awful with its cockroaches and noise, but now I wish I could turn the clock back and start over. I don’t belong out here in the wilds with a bunch of spoiled kids. I’d love to be home and mop the floors and clean the pantry. I miss that feeling of pride I used to get when the housework was finished and I knew I’d done something that was important. I’d like to rearrange furniture again and fix my own dinner for a change in my own kitchen. I even miss watering the philodendrons and ironing Roy’s shirts. I never thought I’d see the day. I might not have been a queen in a castle, but I miss it so much I could cry. The smell of the oil stove when it was on the fritz, our books, Roy’s and mine, side by side in that funny bookcase he built—everything. I miss Roy, too, but I’m almost afraid to go back to camp because I’m afraid our marriage will never make it. I hope I’m wrong.*

## MARY

Thursday was hot but Friday was worse. I should have started writing to hospitals about a winter job weeks before, but I dreaded it so that I used any excuse to get out of it. Friday I had a lot of spare time, though, with so many girls out of camp, and everybody else not doing much except trying to keep cool, so I couldn't put it off any longer. I sat at my desk for an hour—one whole hour—staring at my hands and trying to think of the right thing to say. But it's not easy when they want young nurses and you've been away from it for so long. The right words never came, and I finally gave up. It wasn't as if I didn't try. I did, but it wasn't in me. I'd probably end up in another nursing home. The only other way out would be for me to get married, but I was hardly counting on that, not at my age. Maybe I wasn't being fair to Joey even thinking about marrying again, but the future looked awfully dismal.

In the afternoon I took a walk with Lulu down to the orchard. We picked flowers, but it certainly felt good to get back among the big trees again where it was cooler. You have no idea how hot it was on that road. The flowers were so wilted by the time we got back we had to throw them out. And the road was so dusty—just like it never rained at all. I took a shower afterwards and a little nap. I felt worse when I woke up because I was wringing wet with sweat.

It stayed hot like that all day and right into the evening. But then after supper, when we were on the recreation porch watching the Friday night movie, a cool breeze suddenly came up, and you could breathe again. It was such a relief. The breeze blew cold around my neck and down my back, under my arms and across my face. It was wonderful. Everybody sighed with relief.

Then the movie was over and they turned the lights back on. Everything seemed washed out and cluttered. There was too much noise, and too many faces—girls' faces, moving around frantically, constantly changing expressions. I'd been sitting next to Ed who had come up for the weekend.

Now we were moving toward the door with the crowd, and Ed was saying, “Yes, the secret in making good time on the highway is learning how to pass. It’s an art that some drivers never master—judging the speed of the oncoming car precisely, thereby enabling one to pass in such a way that he doesn’t have to severely alter his speed.”

I tried to act interested but I was growing weary of listening to him brag about the way he drives up from Boston. When we were near the door he excused himself to play ping-pong with one of the counselors. I was glad to be rid of him.

Joey was sitting in the back row with the men, his feet propped up and his eyes on the girls. Just then I regretted all the love I’d ever given him—all the love I’d wasted on him that I could have given to Dick when he was around. Dick and I could have had times together. We could have gone dancing and hired babysitters like other folks do. But instead I ignored poor Dick and poured everything onto Joey so that he could grow up and treat *me*—his own mother—like a stranger.

The current of the crowd funneled me through the door and now I was on the outside, idly watching the others clamor out. Campers, campers. Then Roy and Jay came out, laughing. They went down the stairs and disappeared around the Mainhouse. I waited for Joey.

Pretty soon he squirmed through the crowd, yelling, “Hey, wait for me!”

“Joey, Joey,” I called and tried to catch up to him. “Joey!”

He stopped and waited for me, shifting around impatiently. “Joey,” I said, “where are you going in such a rush? I thought we might take a walk down to the beach together.”

“Aw, Mom, I don’t want to. I mean, I’m supposed to play horseshoes with Jay and Roy. They’re waiting for me.”

So it was everything for Jay and Roy and nothing for his mother. I could feel my shoulders sag some and an ache swell up in the back of my throat. It would be miserable trying to read in my room again, with the campers laughing

and singing downstairs, but there was nothing else for me, so I turned away from Joey and started around the Mainhouse.

“Hey, wait a minute,” Joey said. “I’ve got a great idea. Why don’t you play horseshoes with us? You’d love it, you know, once you caught on to it. It’s a great game. Come on, Mom.”

For a moment, something jumped inside me and, I was eager, but then I realized that I’d be out of place. I’d never played horseshoes before in my life, and I’d just ruin the game for everyone. “No, Joey. I—I don’t want to.”

“What are you talking about? How do you know? You’ve never played before, so how do you know? I didn’t think I’d like it, *either*, but it’s a great game. Come on, you’ll have a lot of fun. Live it up.”

“No, Joey. The men won’t want me around.”

“Well, who cares about the men? *I* want you around. And if they don’t like it, they can lump it. But I know they’ll like it. I mean, what the heck, it’ll be a lot of fun for them.”

My shoulders raised up—I could feel them. And in my mind I could still hear Joey say, “*I* want you around.” You’ll never know what those words did for me. I squeezed his hand and said, “All right, Joey.”

He smiled at me. “Well, what are we waiting for?” he said.

We’d gone a little ways up the path when we heard someone screaming. I couldn’t make out what she was saying so we stopped and listened. It sounded like Henna, and she was yelling, “FIRE! FIRE! OVER BY MUSSLE LAKE!”

The words didn’t have any meaning. Joey and I stared at each other. Then I looked up and saw Henna running toward the barn. “JAY! JAY! FIRE OVER BY MUSSLE LAKE!”

Fire over by Mussle Lake? I couldn’t believe it. The campers were starting to scream now. The meaning of it was beginning to sink in—those girls out there and a fire. A bolt of panic suddenly shot through me. I had to get hold of myself. Joey ran over to the rise and looked north, shielding his eyes. Girls were running by me now screaming hysterically. “Fire! Fire!” It was a nightmare.

Joey dashed past me—his face white. “Oh for chrissake,” he said and ran up the path to the horseshoe area.

A young camper ran blindly at me, screaming. I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. “Now get hold of yourself,” I said. “Everything will be all right.” I prayed to God that everything would be all right. I could see a bright patch of orange in the sky to the north. I couldn’t see the flames themselves, but sometimes not seeing is worse than the seeing itself. The camper squirmed out of my grip and ran screaming into the Mainhouse.

## JAY

Roy and I were approaching the horseshoe pits when the commotion started down at the Mainhouse. We were too far away to make out what all the shrieking was about. “What do you suppose happened?” I asked. “One of Nancy’s brassiere straps broke and everyone had to run for cover?”

“Sounds to me like . . . ”

“JAY! Jay!” Joey was running desperately up the path. “JAY! FIRE! FIRE, OVER BY MUSSLE LAKE!”

It couldn’t be—not after all the rain we had.

“JAY, YOU CAN SEE IT IN THE SKY!”

It couldn’t be. But it was. I didn’t have to look at the sky; I could see it in Joey’s face—that taut look of panic.

Roy said, “Goddamn it, if this is a joke, I’ll kill you!”

“No. NO! Honest to Christ! You can see it in the sky.”

For an instant everything stopped—the sweat on Joey’s forehead seemed to freeze and the shrieking faded. “Honest to Christ,” Joey said, “You can see it in the sky!”

Maybe the fire wasn’t by Mussle Lake at all. Maybe Joey was mistaken. I had to see. I ran to the knoll by the gym. The boys followed. My legs were spongy. I used to wonder what I’d be doing when I found out about my next forest fire. It comes when you least expect it. In 1949—on a nice September day—I was in the basement with Olive, putting up preserves. Then the phone rang and the whole world changed. “All volunteers go to the fire gap on the west bank of the Gallitan River.”

I needed a drink, but there wasn’t time.

We stopped at the crest of the ridge. My gaze momentarily paused at the Gallitan mountain. I shivered involuntarily. “See,” Joey said out of breath. “You can see it in the sky.” He was right. Orange-bellied clouds hung in lazy puffs over

Mussle Lake, and I could almost hear the roar of the fire, feel it smart against my eyes.

For the first time, the full realization came down on me, and I thought I would vomit. All the cabin twenty girls were out there—with Ann. Joey was talking but I couldn't seem to concentrate on his voice. My senses were rebelling. I felt as if I'd been doped up with drugs and my gaze wandered. I watched a spider trying to swing an anchor line to a nearby tree. My eyes were like telescopes. Although I was some distance away, I could clearly make out every marking on the spider's back.

Then I distinctly recalled how Lorrie acted after she caught on that her parents would never come back. "My parents are dead, aren't they?" she'd asked, almost proudly. I suppose she thought that if she heard the answer often enough it would make sense.

Snap out of it. We need action. Meditate later.

I pulled myself back, but it wasn't easy. Roy was standing next to me, looking toward the fire. "Is it really by Mussle Lake?" he asked.

"Yeah. Come on, let's go. Joey, get Nancy to call the Ranger. Roy, you help me load the tools into the truck."

Roy stared at me, and then his eyes began to roll back. His legs buckled but I caught him before he hit the ground. He was unconscious. We left him there on the ground and ran to the shop.

We were met by a wild crowd of hysterical campers. They pounced on us like starved wolves. They pulled, clawed, screamed. I had to fight my way through them. They were like blind animals and I knew then what it must have been like during that last day at Pompeii. They followed us into the shop, still clawing and screaming.

"KEEP AWAY FROM ME!" I yelled and pushed them back outside.

I was drenched with sweat. Automatically I got the tools I needed—axes, climbing spikes. When I was coming down from the loft with a case of dynamite, Joey ran into the barn and said, "Can't get a hold of the ranger. Nancy's trying to



get some friend of hers to fly them over, but she can't get through. The lines are busy."

Why didn't I think of that?

I had to slow down and think. Couldn't afford to make a mistake.

There was a jeep trail to the east shore of Mussle Lake that Charley Rebus and I used sometimes when we'd go hunting. It probably went within a mile of the campsite. But it didn't go near the water, which meant we would gain nothing by taking the motorboat down that trail. Joey would have to take the motorboat and jeep to the usual place on the west shore and I'd have to figure out some way to get down that east path with a canoe. But how? The green truck would make it, but Charley Rebus had it. A regular car wouldn't stand a chance, and the big truck was too big.

Then I remembered Henna's car. "Joey, get Henna's car over here quick." It was possible that the old four-wheel-drive Chevy might just make it. I stuffed my goggles into my pocket and watched Joey run up the path.

Maybe the girls were all right. All they needed to do was climb down the ladder and get into the canoes.

## ANN

The ladder was on fire. So was the forked tree next to it. Everything was on fire and we were trapped. The roar of the flames was the loudest thing I'd ever heard in my life, and the heat was unbearable. We were all huddled together on the ground next to the cliff, too scared to move. Flick was down below lying in one of the canoes. She was hurt pretty badly, perhaps dead. She'd dived off the cliff, but must have hit a rock. She'd managed to climb into the canoe, but now she was just lying there not moving. Everything was crazy and so impossible. The wind was blowing towards us across the lake, but the flames in the other direction were blowing towards us, too. Everything was burning. The tent was a curtain of flames.

And the noise. I couldn't stand it anymore. I was so scared I couldn't talk. All the trees on the edge of the clearing had been transformed into swaying monstrous torches ready to topple over on us. I had to get away. There was still a space to the north along the cliffs that wasn't on fire yet—my very last chance. The gap was closing. I didn't want to die. "Dug! Dug!" I hollered and shook her. Her eyes were glazed and I could see the fire reflected in them. "We've got to get out of here! One of these trees is going to fall on us!" A large tree across the clearing swayed to one side and then toppled, spraying a plume of sparks and burning fragments into the air. You couldn't hear the crash above the roar of the fire. "We've got to get out of here!"

"No!" Dug said. "We're safe here. Someone will come for us!"

"No! We'll get killed here."

"I'm staying. You can go if you want to! I'm staying."

I went around and shook the girls. Most of them were lying face down on the ground. "Who wants to go with me?" The wind was blowing fiercely and the whitecaps in the water were highlighted with orange. "We might find a path to the water."

"I can't swim! I can't swim!" Sue Fernbild cried. "I can't swim."

I said, "Who's coming with me?"

"I'll go," Red said, and I could have sworn she was smiling.

"Don't go!" Sue said. "Don't leave me alone."

Dot Cohen looked at me and nodded yes. She would go.

Pat, Shirley, and Torry would go too, but the others were too scared to move. I didn't want to leave them behind, but we couldn't wait. The gap between the fire and the edge of the cliff was closing rapidly. We couldn't wait.

I took the lead while Red brought up the rear. We started, running single file. Sue was still screaming—lying on the ground and screaming. Her voice was soon drowned in the din of the fire. It felt better to be running, to be doing something. But the heat! The flames were brighter than day, and the smoke wasn't too bad, but the unbearable heat. In one place we had to run within just a stone's throw of a patch of burning trees and I thought I would suffocate. We ran along the shore, over rocks and roots, through the gap, and then we were in the smoke. We coughed and gagged, but we kept on going.

This whole business was so impossible, so fantastic, it wasn't actually happening. I would wake up any minute and Flick would be there, sound and uninjured, and there would be no fire, no nightmare. It had to be a nightmare. It was so crazy and unreal, right from the beginning.

It had started when we were in the tent getting ready to turn in. We'd made sure the fire in the pit was out—at least, so we thought, but when Torry went out to look for her cigarette lighter, she started hollering that the *ground* was on fire. It was. Somehow—perhaps because of the wind—a spark jumped from the fire pit. It wasn't much of a fire, just a harmless little ring of flames crawling along the pine needles. I thought we could stamp it out with no trouble at all. But *we couldn't*. I guess the campers felt it was a pretty funny and exciting game—something to brag about when they got back to camp—so I'm not sure they didn't help the fire along. Peg, Dot, and Shirley were supposed to stamp out a section that was heading for the brush pile. They didn't even try. And when the fire

reached the brush, it was no longer a joke. With the smell of burning Christmas trees, the brush pile went *swoosh* into flames and the next thing we knew, everything was on fire—the forest, the tent, the trees on all sides. We panicked at first, but when the fire got worse, we got so scared that we lay down on the ground next to the cliff and prayed. I'd never been so scared in my life.

We ran along the cliffs until we couldn't see the fire anymore, just the glow. The wind was whipping off the lake now, and some of the gusts were enough to knock you down. We ran until we were exhausted. "We ... can't follow the cliff any longer," Red said, out of breath. "Look!"

I could see it ahead of us in the oriental light. The cliffs were climbing and turning into a snarled mountain of jagged rocks—orange and pock-marked with sinister, chiseled faces sneering out of the black shadows. It was a scary sight. We couldn't follow the cliffs anymore but we couldn't stay where we were, either. "Let's go this way," I said and pointed inland. There seemed to be a trail or something through the forest, and it headed away from the fire, which is where we wanted to go.

It was dark now underneath the trees, and quiet—unbelievably quiet. We couldn't see the sky, just the dim outline of trees, side by side, with small branches like whips that would lash you in the face as you went along. Soon the forest became more dense and we had to crawl; the pressing, almost-loud silence was only broken by snapping twigs and the sound of our breathing. No one talked. In the quiet, I could think for the first time, and I began to wonder why I was leading this expedition. I didn't know where I was going. It was crazy.

Sometimes it was so dark that I couldn't even see the row of white shirts behind or the path in front. The path wasn't made by humans, I don't think, because there were places we had to slither through on our stomachs and once I'm sure I heard an animal start in back of us and ploppety-plop away. I'm not even sure we were on a path most of the time, but we kept moving, and finally when I was almost ready to drop, we came to a clearing. There was something

strange about it, but exactly what I couldn't say. Maybe it was too bright, I don't know, but it felt good to have a cool wind blowing in our faces. We were all soaked with perspiration.

We'd just sat down to rest when three animals bolted across the clearing and almost ran into us. One of them was a rabbit—a big rabbit with funny legs, but the other animals were bigger—like pigs—and black. One ran so close to me I could have reached out and touched him. They ran into the forest we'd just come out of, right down the very same path. What crazy animals, I thought, running toward the fire. There was something wrong, something confusing about all this.

Just then Shirley let out such a shriek that I almost jumped out of my skin. She screamed and pounded her hands against her face. I couldn't imagine what scared her so, but whatever it was it scared me, too. Then I looked up and saw it. I couldn't believe my eyes. But there it was, rolling over the tops of the trees across the clearing. The Fire! We must have gone in a circle. The ugly orange monster was coming right at us. We were trapped!

## ROY

I awoke in a bumble of confusion. I looked at the trees, the sky, the building; however, I couldn't seem to recognize anything or orient myself. Then, as I almost abstractedly listened to the screaming in the distance, everything came into critical focus and then zoomed into my mind with a kind of hyper-awareness. The campers were screaming down by the Mainhouse and Ann, my poor dumb little Ann, was out there on Mussle Lake. I felt sickeningly helpless.

I got to my feet and ran down the road. I couldn't seem to move fast enough. When I neared the shop, Henna's car came screaming up the road at me with a canoe strapped to the roof. Jay was inside.

I stood in the middle of the road waving my arms. The car skidded to a stop. I started to get in but Jay said, "Go help Joey hitch the motorboat onto the jeep."

"No! I'm going with you!"

"All right. Get in."

As I did, and we lunged forward, we gained speed and skidded around the bend so fast I thought we would overturn. Ann had to be all right. She had to be. "What do you think their chances are?" I asked in a voice that belied my anxiety.

"Pretty good. They can climb down the ladder and take the canoes out on the lake. It's pretty rough out there tonight, but I think they'll be all right."

"I hope so," I said.

We drove for what seemed like an eternity—closer and closer to the full, billowing clouds, and all the while I was tortured with blatant fear and the caustic awareness that I hadn't even kissed Ann goodbye.

Finally we reached the Mussle Lake Road. We bounced and swerved over the ruts—through the patches of smoke that hung close to the ground like early morning fog. They had a harsh odor. From time to time, I could see flames merging into thick smoke, far above the trees.

I was nearly out of my mind. "They will be all right!" I aid. "Won't they?"

“Sure, Roy. Sure they will.”

“They have to be! Ann’s never had a chance to live. She *can’t* die! Don’t you understand, she cant!”

“She’ll be all right, Roy. Now, get hold of yourself. Hang on! Here we go.”

The car suddenly swerved, hopped sideways over the ruts, and veered from the road. At first I thought we were out of control—impossibly, ironically out of control—but then I realized that we were pounding a trail, strewn with boulders. The car jarred and lurched from side to side.

“Where are we going?”

“Shortcut—if we can beat the fire. Something’s just been down this road—a truck it looks like.”

I couldn’t see the signs but I didn’t care. I couldn’t think of anything but Ann. I wanted her. Ann Milton—my wife—was out there somewhere.

Jay said, “The fire can’t go too far if it keeps going in the direction it’s heading. There’s a fire gap about a quarter mile up the road. You’ll see it in a bit.”

The car lights bounced up and down, jerked from side to side. We were airborne most of the time—suddenly we went up over a mound and slammed down against something so viciously that I bit my tongue. There was a harsh grating of rock against metal, but we went on.

“Son-of-a-bitch!” Jay said. “There goes our oil pressure. That rock must have gone through the pan.” His face was tense. Feeling completely helpless, I watched the oil needle drop to zero.

“Come on, Bessy,” Jay said, “hold out for another quarter of a mile.” We were just passing the fire gap. The engine was freezing up, straining. A quarter of a mile! I was sure we wouldn’t make it. Jay’s foot was flat against the floorboards with the gearshift in low but we were slowing down. I listened to every sound in the engine—the squeak of metal turning on bare metal, the deep-throated strain, the chatter of the valves. We wouldn’t make it—I knew it. We slowed to fifteen miles an hour. Now to ten—eight—seven. I was almost shattered with anxiety. But we kept laboring along, slower and slower, until I could see a clearing up

ahead. There was a truck parked in it—the camp’s truck, the green one. “That’s Charley Rebus,” Jay said, smiling. “That son-of-a-bitch beat us here. I’ll never hear the end of this.”

We were going to make it after all. I wanted to shout and cheer. I could see the fire plainly across the clearing. We were almost to the truck. Then, as though Jay had slammed the brakes to the floor, the car stopped, throwing us forward.

Charley ran awkwardly toward us. “Jay! Jay! he yelled. “Tracks—girl tracks. Lookee.” Jay and Charley ran to the middle of the clearing where they stooped down. I followed. Charley was saying, “See? Stop here and sit down. Six of them. Then get up and run back the way they came.”

“These tracks aren’t ten minutes old,” Jay said.

“Boar tracks, too. See? Lookee here.”

“The hell with the boar tracks,” Jay said and turned to me. “Six campers are out here, Roy. They went back down this game trail. Go with Charley and find them. Make them stay by the water. I’ll go after the others. But for God’s sake watch out. If you block a boar’s way on that path he’ll go nuts and gore you to pieces. If one wants to get by, just step out of his way and he won’t bother you. I don’t know where this path goes, but you’ll be safe with Charley, just *listen* to him. He knows what he’s doing.”

“Charley find them, Jay,” Charley said and charged into the forest. I followed.



## JAY

I was alone. My first impulse was to move fast—meet the fire and get it over with. I had a bad case of stage fright. I knew I'd feel better once I was doing something, but I had to hold myself back and move carefully. I couldn't afford to make a mistake.

I put on my climbing spikes, took off my belt, and selected a giant hemlock on the edge of the grove. I wanted to see where the fire was before making my move. I climbed the hemlock until I was above the forest. The wind was fierce and whipped the tree around violently. I hung on for all I was worth. Below, I could see most of the fire stretched out, moving on two fronts, one heading northeast and the other coming due east—right at me. In a matter of minutes, the path to the lake would be blocked. It was still open but the fire was rolling toward it pretty fast.

I hadn't tried a Frenchman's slide in probably twenty years but I didn't know a faster way to get down the tree, so I turned my heels out, leaned against the tree, and let the belt go. It's a tricky business, because your spikes have to gouge in enough to slow you down, but not so much that they dig in. If one of them does, you're a goner. I made it, though—with only a few bark burns to show for it. I felt better. This was my kind of work—physical, automatic, something I could do without weighing moral implications or tiptoeing through social innuendoes. In this kind of work there was only one way—the right way.

I gathered my equipment together, put on my goggles, stuffed nine or ten sticks of dynamite into my pocket, shouldered the canoe, and trotted down the path. After I'd gone maybe fifty yards the roar of the fire sounded more fierce—more familiar. A dry heat beat against my right side. Then I came to the worst spot, where the heat was so intense I thought my clothes would ignite. Remembering the dynamite in my pockets, I used the canoe like a shield and moved as fast as I could. The prow of the goddamn canoe kept snagging on branches, but I kept going.

Then the heat faded, the roar subsided and the forest became dark. I was past the worst part. Funny, the fire wasn't as bad as I'd recalled—nowhere near as bad. And strangely enough, I felt elated. That's about the only way I can describe it. I'd been scared—petrified—on the Gallitan River, but this time I was eager to meet the fire halfway. I suppose I'd been waiting a long time for this day. My stage fright was over and now I knew that I was going to lick the goddamn fire for once and for all. Tomorrow night, I'd either sleep like a baby, knowing I did a good job, or I'd be a dead piece of charcoal—one or the other. The fire itself wasn't so bad. It was the waiting and the aftermath. But there would be no more waiting. This was my chance to make it up to all my friends who were killed in Gallitan, and I wasn't going to let them down. I was either going to win or lose. There could be no stalemate.

I was pretty winded by the time I reached the cliff. The waves below were wild—jumping and squirming like huge fish. I lowered the canoe over the cliff, bottom side up so that the bow was propped against a boulder below and the stern was resting against the cliff. I was just tying a rope around my waist getting ready to slide down when I heard an explosion above the fire. Actually, I felt it more than I heard it. It shook the ground. At first I was puzzled. Then I remembered Henna's car sitting back there with over half a case of dynamite in it. The fire must have jumped the clearing already. I hoped Henna had the old bus insured.

I slid down the cliff and floundered around in the surf setting the canoe up in the water. It wasn't easy, not with those waves. I got in and paddled against the wind for all I was worth.

As soon as I rounded the point, everything was bright as day and I could see the campsite ahead. The canoes were still moored to the cliff and the ladder was nothing more than fragments of embers. I squinted and strained my eyes, but I couldn't see any movement in the canoes. A deep dull nausea came over me. All along I'd assumed that I would find the campers in the canoes, but now I

was scared. I paddled faster. I wasn't making much headway against that fierce wind.

Maybe the campers panicked and ran into the fire. Maybe they were trapped in what remained of the tent. Maybe a thousand things. If anything happened to them—to any one of them, not just Ann or Sue—I'd never be able to live with myself. I'd be to blame for not standing up to Nancy. As I drew closer to the other canoes, the top of the cliff disappeared behind a rolling wall of smoke. I put my climbing spikes back on, grabbed an ax and a coil of rope, and jumped overboard. I felt sick and weak. I cut one of the twenty-foot canoes loose and stood it up against the cliff. I noticed that someone was lying in one of the other canoes but I didn't have time to investigate. I started up the cliff but before I reached the top, I was in smoke so thick I couldn't see a thing in front of me. I coughed and couldn't seem to breathe. I tried holding my breath, but it was no good, I was too winded.

I'm not sure how I did it, but I somehow clawed my way to the top of the cliff. My eyes smarted and my lungs were on fire. I put my handkerchief over my face and crawled along the ground on all fours. I coughed; I needed air. I thought I was going to have to turn back. But I kept on moving. I put my face to the ground and tried to breathe. No sign of the campers. I groped along the edge of the cliff moving toward the ladder. I tried calling, but my voice broke into a gagging cough. No sign of the campers. I turned around and crawled back along the cliff. I knew that I would pass out if I didn't get out of the smoke pretty quick. I leaned as far as I could over edge of the cliff and drank in some fresh air. Then I crawled on. Still no sign of the campers.

Then I heard a muffled sound—a cough. Someone was coughing, not five feet in front of me. I scrambled forward. My hand touched something—a leg—now another leg—more forms lying in a heap on the ground. I'd found the campers. They were very still. Then one of them coughed again. I crawled over them until I found her. I shook her. It was Dug. "Are you conscious?" I managed to say.

She turned her head and said, “Ahhh ... ” and then began coughing. She was all right. Now the others. I went around and shook them. They all seemed to be alive. Thank God.

I took off one of my climbing spikes. I found a tree stump and hammered the spike into it. Then I tied the rope to the spike. The smoke was getting me again. I crawled back to Dug and pointed to the rope. “Slide down the cliff! Understand?” She nodded.

I handed her my jackknife and said, “When you get down there—hold the rope taut—over the canoe and ...” I started coughing ... “and cut the others loose as I send them down.”

I watched her slide down and disappear in the smoke. Then I leaned over and took in a few gulps of air before going back. Now the smoke seemed to be letting up. Four campers were conscious, five were in such a daze that I doubted they even recognized me, and the rest were out cold. I instructed the conscious ones to slide down the rope the way Dud did. Then I took the others, one at a time, and laid them face down under the rope with their feet facing the cliff. I tied their wrists to the rope and then slid them over the cliff. The smoke was clearing and I could breathe again. I kept count of the campers as they went down. I wasn't paying attention to them as individuals, just as numbers. Six were out in the woods, which meant that when I finished here there had to be fifteen down below in the canoes.

“How many are down there?” I yelled to Dug when there were only two campers left above. I must have lost count. At least I hoped I did.

“How many?” I yelled.

“Thirteen!” What a relief.

I slid number fourteen over the canoe and then went back for the last one. She seemed unconscious but when I tried to pick her up she vomited and opened her eyes. It was Sue. She began coughing. Then she said, “What are you doing?”

“Going to slide you over the cliff.”

“NO! NO! I can’t swim!” she screamed and her eyes looked like those of a trapped animal. She thrashed around in my arms. She seemed to have the strength of a bull. She squirmed out of my grip and ran toward the fire. She almost got away in the apron of smoke but I caught up and tackled her. We landed on some hot coals. I pulled her up and started back toward the cliff. She was relaxed now—muttering something about the dark. I’d never be able to slide down the rope carrying her. It would put too much weight on the climbing spike.

A belching cloud of smoke suddenly cloaked everything. I had to get out of here. I couldn’t take much more. “I’ll get you out of here,” I said. “We won’t go near the water.” She stared at me and then went limp. I ran toward the cliff as fast as I could. I had to get fresh air.

I didn’t see the edge of the cliff until we were almost on it. I jumped as far as I could and for an instant we seemed to pause—suspended in air. Then we began falling. We dropped through the layer of smoke into clean bright air. We were going to land right on the stern of one of the canoes. I tried to lean forward as much as I could, but it wasn’t enough. It seemed as if we were falling in slow motion. I watched the canoe draw closer. My legs must have hit the stern—and we went head first into the water. What a shock that cold water was. Sue became hysterical again. “I can’t swim!” she screamed. She clawed at my face and tore my shirt.

Then, it all came to me, and I almost laughed out loud. Lorrie could swim like a fish. In fact, Sue didn’t even look like Lorrie. There we were splashing around in the water, and all at once everything was clear. Sue was a good kid, a sweet-looking girl, but she wasn’t anything like Lorrie. Rationally, I’d been trying to tell myself this for some time, but now I knew it where it counted—in my heart.

As soon as I put Sue into one of the canoes, she calmed down. I said, “Girl your age should know how to swim.”

The cold water was just what some of the other girls needed to wake them up. A couple of them were still unconscious, but most of them were either

sobbing or heaving. They'd be all right. Tomorrow at this time, they'd be bragging around camp like veterans of the Boer Wars.

Then something happened that gave me a chill. Mussle Lake showed her fangs. The wind changed from the southwest to the northwest in an instant. The two long noses of the fire would now become wide fronts which would sweep south down along the east shore. "Dug!" I yelled above the roar of the fire and crashing breakers. "Dug!" Who all's out there?"

With each name—Ann, Torry, Dot—I felt a stab. The fire would rush through that pine grove they were in faster than a man could run—twice as fast—and it would.... No, I couldn't think about it. Charley and Roy were out there, too. If anyone had to go, let it be Charley, not Ann and those young girls who'd never even had a taste of life. But even the thought of losing Charley was too much. No, I couldn't let them die.

"Joey will be here with the motorboat in a few minutes!" I said, untying one of the canoes. "Wait for him. Tell him I went to find Ann and her girls."

When I tried to stand up on the gunnels of the canoe, I realized that my leg wasn't right. It wasn't broken, but it sure was stiff and bleeding from landing on that canoe. It didn't exactly hurt, though—not anything like the suffering we'd all have to live through if anything happened to those girls.

## CHARLEY

Charley like to track. Fun. Most fun with fresh tracks. Hands and knees most of the time in brush. Other fellow can't keep up with Charley. Have to wait for him all the time. City fellow. Too bad Charley isn't tracking boar. Too bad Jay isn't along. Too bad it's so smoky. Make Charley cough.

Now wind change. Charley stop and listen. Bad. New wind make fire chase Charley. Charley chase tracks and fire chase Charley. Have to move faster.

Now Charley find little jacket on trail. Little jacket with pretty smell, like inside movie show in Northport. Charley show jacket to other fellow. Other fellow yell at Charley. Don't like him. Pine needles nice and soft though, nice for tracking.

Smoke pretty bad, getting worse. Fire catching up. Should have dogs along. Always feel better with dogs. Wag tail and pant, "Ahahahahahahah." Nice. Better than city fellow along.

Trail going in circle. Crazy trail. But nice new boar tracks.

No girls yet, but fire catching up. Too much smoke. City fellow yell again, but Charley doesn't listen. Keeps on trail like Jay says. "Find girls," Jay say, and Charley find girls.

Trail forks and Charley worries. Can't see through smoke to see where girls go. Can't see tracks. "Why stop? Why stop?" other fellow say but Charley keep looking for tracks. Eyes full of tears. Fire catching up. Charley look and look at ground but can't see through smoke. Dogs sniff around and tell, but Charley has to look. Charley feel funny inside. Charley want to run from fire, but Jay says find girls and Charley has to find girls. Funny feeling.

Now smoke go away and Charley sees tracks. "Move fast," Charley say to city fellow. Charley moves fast, faster than fire, but city fellow get way behind. Charley faster than anyone, even Jay. Stronger, too. "Move fast," Charley say.

Wait. Stop and look through smoke.

Charley see girls. Good tracker. Go fast and catch up. All girls from Jay's camp. Pretty girls with dirty faces and dirty clothes. Look scared. Charley look at women and doesn't care about fire anymore.

City fellow run up and kiss one girl. They cry. Kiss again and cry. She say, "Oh, Roy, so scared."

And he say, "My darling, all right, all right, so glad." They cry. They say more but Charley can't remember. Everyone cry but Charley. Charley never feel like crying—except sometimes.

"Come on," city fellow say. "To cliff."

"No," Charley say. "Wind change."

"Jay say 'to cliff!'" city fellow say.

"Charley say 'wrong.' Jay say, 'Listen to Charley.' This way." Charley point.

"No trail."

"Charley show way. Go to fire gap this way."

"Fire catch up this way," say pretty girl who cries and kisses with city fellow.

"Charley fool fire."

Charley know secret. Smarter than fire. Charley smile inside. He know how fire move before wind change. Charley knows just where fire is. Fire cutting back, but Charley sneak right in front of it and fool fire. Has to move fast, though. "Move fast," Charley say.

Hands and knees again. Through the brush. Too thick. Too many twigs. Too much smoke. Path no good. Girls move too slow. Maybe Charley not to fool fire after all. "Move fast," Charley say.

Wait. Stop. Listen. "Roararoom." Sound of fire close by. Now Charley look. See fire through trees. Bright and big—big as sky. Fire fooling Charley and Charley scared. Fire moving faster than women. "Roararooooom."

Now women scream.



Charley scared.

Fire getting closer. "Roararooooom." No place to go.

## NANCY

We circled above the holocaust in Don's plane—above the swirling yellows, reds, and oranges, which floated on heat waves. Sitting next to Ed, I stared numbly out of the window, my forehead pressed against the cold Plexiglas. Patches of color flared, blurred, and turned into smoke as they plumed upward, bending and arching in the wind like mysterious snakes. Filled with empty anxiety, dull with resignation, I stared at the inferno. Closing my eyes would do no good now. The image was burned on my soul—the miles of hungry Hellfire.

The ranger's trucks and volunteers' cars—dwarfed against the towering flames—were spaced along the fire gap to the east. And the volunteers, the men who were to stop this sea of death, huddled in little groups, mere specks of algae against the flood.

I ached inside. I wanted to weep, but my soul was dry and empty. I wanted to feel more for my campers, but all compassion, all love—save for a dark ache—had left me. I had accepted the idea that my campers were dead, all of them; therefore, I could feel nothing.

Ed was staring straight ahead—his jaw muscles flinching in the mustard light. He blamed me for this. He as much as said so. However, it wasn't my fault. I'd done everything humanly possible to make the campsite safe. But it didn't matter. Occasionally I would catch a glimpse of the future, and I'd grow taut with panic, but then I would slump back into resignation, staring dully at the fire. I couldn't look ahead, to tomorrow or the day after—to the day when they'd bring the charred bodies out of the forest. I couldn't.

The plane engine began to roar loudly and we banked, the world apparently tipping up on its side. "Hey, look!" Don said. "There are your campers—in their canoes down there."

My emotions began to thaw in this ray of hope. Yes! I could see them now; they were safe. I sobbed softly to myself. "Thank God," I murmured.

Then, as though all my strength had been siphoned away, I became narcotically weary, a persistent magnetism pulling against my eyelids. Thank God they were safe.

“How many girls were out there?” Don asked, his voice harsh and metallic.

“Twenty-one,” I said wearily.

“No,” Don said. “There’s no twenty-one girls down there. Twelve—fourteen maybe.”

What? The words bit at me like electricity. Don must have miscounted. The plane was jarring too much for an accurate count. Also we were too high. “Go lower,” I ordered.

“Can’t. Those wind currents would tear the plane to shreds. The fire is creating a terrific low-pressure area and the winds are blowing in to try to equalize it.”

“You mean you can’t land?” I demanded.

“It would be suicide.”

“But ...”

“Shut up!” Ed said.

“But where are the others?” I asked. “Where could they have gone?”

“Shut up!” Ed said.

I didn’t want to go on living. I leaned against the window, my face down, and let the tears run down my cheeks. Where were the others? I dreaded the answer.

“Hey, what’s that down there?” inquired Don, banking the plane sharply. “Looks like somebody running along that high ridge. Yeah, that’s what it is.”

I strained my eyes, but I could see nothing.

Don circled around and around, staring into his binoculars. “Yeah, looks like your man McFarland and apparently he doesn’t intend to go back the way he came, either. His canoe is being torn to pieces down there below the highest cliff. The crazy bastard must have climbed that cliff and now he’s running right into the fire.” Don handed the binoculars to me. “See him?” He’s about halfway along that

rock ridge—the one with no trees on it. What the hell do you suppose he's up to?"

## JAY

I was so winded I was starting to see spots in front of my eyes. I was on the highest ground for miles around, but the trees down below were so thick that I wasn't able to see as much as I'd hoped I would. Ann and the campers had to be in the grove to my left but the way the fire was moving it wouldn't be long before the whole thing was ablaze. I'd have to work fast.

My leg was beginning to stiffen and my lungs felt like they were being torn apart, but I forced myself on. As I jumped across a crevice, I stumbled on a loose rock, fell forward, and landed belly first on something that knocked the air out of me. I tried to stand up, but I couldn't catch my breath. The pain was almost blinding. But I had to get them out of that grove. If I could get them to the ridge we could make it to the fire gap—I was sure of it, but there wasn't much time. My breath was coming back now, and I stood up and started running again.

I ran until I came to a place where the ridge forked—one fork sloping into the grove to my left. I ran down it until I was about on a level with the trees below and then I yelled, "CHARLEY, ROY! OVER HERE! THIS WAY! CHARLEY! ROY! OVER HERE!" I called until I was hoarse.

It was no use, though. The fire was only a few hundred yards ahead and my voice wasn't carrying twenty feet.

But I had to think of some way to let them know where I was. And I had to think of it now, not tomorrow or even a second too late. Think! Think!

Then I remembered Henna's car exploding and how I'd heard it all the way down by the cliffs. *Dynamite*. That was it. That had to be it.

I dug the sticks out of my pockets and laid them out on a rock—nine of them. They were soaking wet. They had to work. I took my knife and cut all the wicks off so they were about a half-inch long. I dug my waterproof matches out of my tobacco case and I was ready. I would light a stick, throw it in the air like a firecracker and hope it would go off over the trees. The fire was about fifteen yards closer already.

I held a lighted match. My hand shook and the wind was hammering at my back. The wick smoldered and glowed and smoked but it wouldn't catch—it wouldn't fizz. Maybe it was too wet. The roar of the fire was getting louder, but I didn't look up. The match burned down to my fingers and I threw it away. But just as I was reaching for another one, the wick began to fizz and spit sparks. Automatically, I reared back and threw that stick as far as I could. Then I flattened myself against the rocks and waited. It seemed like a hell of a long time, but she went off, loud and clear—damn loud—and when I looked up I noticed that the puff of smoke was hanging right over the trees. Perfect timing. I reached for the second stick. I just hoped they heard the first one.

## ROY

We were crawling single-file through the smoke when I heard a muffled little *boof*, like a mortar going off. Charley must have heard it too. He stopped and said, “We go this way!” Perhaps there was hope, and we’d get out of here alive. However, Charley wasn’t heading toward the sound. He was going too far to the right.

What difference did it make as long as we were moving? A few moments before, when it had seemed as if we might never leave the forest alive, I’d thought of the irony of it—Roy Milton dying in a smuggy, smoky fire. But now my thoughts were connected only with living. I wanted to live.

Watching Ann through the smoke as she crawled along, I began to realize how much I wanted to live. I wanted to breathe fresh air again, see things, do things, even the most prosaic things. Anything. I didn’t want to die. I was afraid—for Ann, too.

The smoke was getting worse. *Boof*. Another explosion, this time to the left—or at least so I thought. Oh, I couldn’t tell. Perhaps Charley was leading us in the right direction. Jay said that he was competent. I had to have faith in something, and Charley seemed like the most logical prospect right then.

Just get us out of here, Charley, and I’ll kiss you in the square at Northport.

Suddenly I felt silly. Weak and silly. The flames were close now—adding melodramatic colors to the forest. The temperature was rising steadily. It was all idiotically insane and I felt like quitting—just lying down right then and saying, “I quit.”

But then I became frightened again. This was for keeps. I couldn’t quit. We had to get out of here, and when we did, I’d be a new person. I’d never yell at Ann or be sarcastic as long as I lived—just give me a chance. I’d be good to her. I’d be the kind of husband that she’d be proud of.

Life seemed sweeter than I’d ever imagined. We had to make it.

*Booof.* Another explosion, this time louder. We were close. However, the flames were also close. From time to time I caught glimpses of them high above the trees—an awesome sight. If I lived, I'd be an asset to society. Ann and I would bring children into the world and make sure they grew up to be good citizens.

Suddenly Charley stopped and I saw that we had come to an impasse—a hedge, a briar, a thicket, or whatever, as thick as a tangle of hair, bristling with thorns. We were trapped. The fire was roaring down on us from two sides, and the hedge was in front of us—ten, fifteen feet high and so tightly woven it didn't seem possible that a field mouse could squirm through it. We were pinned. The smoke had cleared but the air was so hot I thought I would go mad. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't—there was no place to go.

Ann's face was almost expressionless, streaked with mud, staring at the fire. "Ann, we'll be all right," I said and put my arm on her shoulder.

She was breathing heavily. Still looking at the fire, she said, "It doesn't matter."

She must have been exhausted and suffering from shock. It did matter.

BOOF. I saw it. I saw the explosion, right over the trees, right in front of us. "HERE WE ARE! HERE WE ARE!" I could hardly hear my own voice. "Come on," I said. "Let's all yell together, on the count of three! One! Two! Three!" We yelled, we screamed. I didn't know what good it would do—what good it could do—but as we yelled, we whistled, we shrieked. I was the last one to give up. By then the others were lying on the ground, trying to get away from the heat. It was useless. I lay down next to Ann.

Perhaps everyone—myself included—assumed that they're immortal—indestructible; however, as I lay there in the heat and smoke, with my heart pounding in my ears and the roar of the flames—like a thousand rockets—becoming louder and louder, I saw myself as a mere human being whose flesh was the consistency of gelatin and who would probably smell much



like a broiled steak and change to ordinary carbon. The flames rolled over me. I was rigid with fear—honest to God fear.

“THIS WAY! THIS WAY!” Charley yelled. He’d found a pass, a way out. We all scrambled over to him. “Follow Charley,” he said and disappeared into a small opening underneath the tangled brush. Ann went next. I was going to follow her, but for some reason I became noble at the last moment and let the others go ahead of me. One by one they crawled into the hole—so slowly I wanted to kick each one of them in the behind. Finally Red went in and then it was my turn.

It was dark again. On my belly I fought my way through the thorns and branches. Red kept kicking me in the face. The thorns tore at me, and I had to dig my fingernails into the ground to pull myself along. The way the twigs cracked and broke indicated that when the flames hit the patch we’d all be trapped with nothing to do but die. We inched along, fantastically slow. I expected to hear the roar overhead any minute and look up to see the fire. How much longer would it be? Ahead I could see nothing but the dim outline of Red’s behind, nothing more. No daylight, no relief from our dark coffin. Perhaps Ann would make it, anyhow.

Our progress was getting worse. Red stopped. I tried shoving her along, but it did no good. Then we started moving again, tediously. I looked behind me and saw a bright yellow glow down the tunnel. “Red! The fire’s catching up! Look!”

She looked and then gasped. “THE FIRE! THE FIRE!” she screamed and tried to scramble forward, kicking me in the face. I shoved her along, but we didn’t seem to be moving any faster. I shoved her harder. Why didn’t this brush patch end? Did it go on forever? Was I in a fantastic, surrealistic dream? Perhaps I hadn’t seen the explosion. Perhaps it had been a hallucination. Perhaps the brush continued for miles and miles. I pushed and shoved against Red’s behind. Why didn’t she move faster?

I could see the fire plainly now. It had a different sound in the brush, a mild crackling sound, almost like the sound of a mellow fireplace fire—it even smelled like a fireplace fire—sweet pine smells—perhaps the last smell I’d ever

experience. I was almost paralyzed with fear. In one last frantic effort, I shoved Red with all my might. She moved forward. I shoved again.

She stood up! At first I couldn't believe it. I stared unbelievably at her legs. We'd made it. We were going to live. We were safe. I scrambled forward. Hands grabbed me and pulled me to my feet. I looked at the faces. Charley, and—for a second I didn't recognize Jay. His face was covered with blood and his expression was gaunt and wild. I was suddenly weak, and I thought I was going to faint again. Everything was turning around, and Jay's voice sounded far off. He was saying, "Come on, we've got to make it to the fire gap."

## DON

I believe it would have been easier to have been down there with Jay than to watch from up above—holding our breath every time he tossed another stick of dynamite into the air, and counting each camper come out of the brush—waiting—watching the fire bear down. It was a grueling experience for me and—frankly—I didn't know I had that much empathy in me. I'm not a praying man, but I prayed for them. I prayed with all my might. And, I can't tell you how relieved I was when they were *all* safe on the ridge.

But they weren't out of trouble yet. All the time they'd been coming out of the brush, the fire up ahead had crossed over the ridge cutting them off. Apparently they didn't know it, because they climbed the ridge and started toward the fire gap. They were heading for a trap. "They'll never make it that way," I said. "They *might* if they went to the next ridge south. We've got to let them know."

Nancy stared at me with wide eyes, goddamn her. "What do you plan to do?" she said. If she'd had a grain of common sense this tragedy could have been averted.

"We're going to buzz them," I said patiently. "And we're going to drop a series of flares to mark the way to the south ridge."

I got the emergency box from under the seat and dumped it in Ed's lap. He looked up from it and said, "You mean you're going to go down lower?"

"*That's* right!"

Ed hadn't spoken ten words since we'd taken off, but now he was becoming loquacious. His face looked like curdled milk. He said, "But you said that the wind would tear the plane apart."

"That's a chance we'll have to take."

"No!" Nancy said. "Can't we drop them from up here?"

I could hardly believe my ears. "In a word, no," I said. "We wouldn't know where the wind would carry them. We're going to drop them from treetop level. That's the least we can do."

“Nancy’s right,” Ed said. “We can drop the flares from up here. There’s no sense in all of us losing our lives.”

That did it! “Why you filthy scum!” I said. “You mean you wouldn’t take that chance after you sat up here and watched your *handyman* risk his life running practically into the fire and throwing dynamite into the air? What kind of people are you, anyhow? There are *nine* lives down there—*NINE*—and you mean you wouldn’t even take a chance to save them? You people STINK!” I retarded the throttle and turned down the landing flaps.

I maneuvered so we were heading into the wind and then down we went. It was pretty smooth until we hit 900 feet or so. There the air currents started slapping us around—harder and harder, as we descended. Our air speed was 80 miles an hour, but against the wind we were probably going only 30 or so.

We went over a section of the fire and the plane rose up on the hot air. Then we were in the smoke. “Take a flare out of the box!” I said. “And light it!”

Navigation was getting touchy now in the choppy air. We were at three hundred feet. Through holes in the smoke I could see the ridge swirling up ahead. Goddamn, it wasn’t going to be easy. We were going to have to drop the first flare, then bank to the left and head for the south ridge. We’d have to get lower.

The throttle was cut down to an idle but terrific gusts of wind kept lifting us up. We were in danger of stalling all the time.

Two hundred feet.

In an almost juvenile way I was glad to be an active part of this rescue. I’d always scoffed at the Hemingway theme: Live by getting close to death; but now I knew what he was talking about. I don’t know about being reckless for recklessness’ sake, but in this case, I did feel as though I was living—for the first time in ages. There was no reservation or qualification. I was doing something that required all my energy and to that degree I was alive.

A vicious gust swatted the plane to one side and then whipped it back the other way. We flew into a billowy mass of dense smoke. I could see nothing. “NO! NO!” Nancy wailed. “NO! WE’RE ALL GOING TO DIE!! OH, GOD!”

One hundred and fifty feet. We came out of the dense smoke. I shoved my window back. We were almost above the ridge. “Hand me that flare,” I said, “and light two more!” The plane began to lift again, so I eased the wheel forward.

One hundred and twenty-five feet. Nancy was still wailing and Ed was somber—almost frozen—holding the two lighted flares.

We were over them now and I could see their faces as they looked up at us. I threw the first flare out but I didn’t have time to see where it landed. I’d roughly calculated how much the wind would take it and now I had to worry about the second flare.

But as I started to bank, the plane shuddered. It jarred as the wind hammered against it. The wings flapped and the plane floundered—out of control. The wind kept pushing us up. I eased the wheel forward but no response. The plane was flapping around like a sheet on a clothesline. I had the wheel almost all the way forward, but still no response.

Then it happened. The left wing rose way up and the wind stopped! We dropped into a dive. Down we went. It all happened in a second. The treetops raced wildly at us. I pulled the wheel back, kicked the throttle wide open and cranked the flaps up, but it looked as if we’d crash. The engines were revving all the way, but we were going too slow with no wind to float us.

We were picking up speed, but I couldn’t bring the nose up. The treetops were whizzing underneath us, and any second I expected to hear them sting against the wings. Now the nose lifted some and we were almost leveled off about twenty feet above the forest. But there was a large tree ahead, speeding at us—swirling through the smoke. This was it. In a few seconds it would be over.

The tree seemed to be floating in the heat waves—bearing down on us like an ethereal phantom. We were less than one hundred feet from death. Then—miraculously—the wind caught us. The nose lifted and we soared up over

the tree, like we were on a magic carpet. We were safe. I sighed a long, long sigh and took another flare from Ed's petrified hand. Nancy was unconscious. I threw the flare out the window.

## ANN

We stopped and watched the plane. I was sure it was going to crash, but it didn't. It swooped up high again, then came back down and dropped another flare. Someone asked Jay what it meant and he said, "Don't know for sure. They took a heck of a chance dropping those flares. Probably trying to mark a trail—to that ridge over here. Better follow it. They can see a lot more up there than we can. Let's go."

Where was I getting the strength? I was exhausted. I didn't feel as if I had the strength to break a match, and yet something kept me moving along—something more powerful than I. I was being guided.

We were going down the other side of the ridge now, and Dot fell. She somersaulted down the slope and slid into a pile of rocks. She was hurt. She couldn't get up so Jay carried her piggyback. Jay seemed on the verge of collapse himself.

We descended until we were in the forest again. It was quiet now, and dark. Suddenly everything seemed so soft and peaceful that I couldn't believe that a fire was close by or that anything so horrible could exist. No, it was just a lovely cool summer night, like the nights in Ann Arbor—with crickets and street lights and couples strolling hand-in-hand. But there were no streetlights or couples, and it was cold now. I began shivering. I was soaked with perspiration, and the cool breeze seemed to freeze on me.

Torry was walking next to me, talking to herself. "I can't go any further," she said. "I can't take another step." I put my arm around her shoulder. "If we were going to lie down and quit," I said, trying to catch my breath, "we should have done it a long time ago. We've come this far, we might as well see it through." I sounded like someone else, like the kind of brave person I wanted to be.

Torry said, "But I—I'm all in. I can't go on." She sagged against me.

“Sure you can. Time us on your watch. We’ll be out of here in fifteen minutes—fifteen minutes—no longer than a news broadcast. Now you can go on that long, can’t you?”

“I don’t know. I’ll try.”

I went back down the line and checked with the other girls—I tried to pep them up. The words must have come from my mouth, but I felt separated from them. It was all very confusing.

Roy stumbled over to me and said, “You all right?”

“I’m fine.”

We passed the first flare. It was making a fire of its own. Somehow, I managed to pick my feet up and put them down. I felt as if I’d been plodding along that way for years, and I’d almost forgotten about the rest of the world, relaxing in the evening with the lights out and the radio playing soft music, or sleeping late on Saturday morning with the birds chirping outside the window.

We climbed up again—up the next ridge. Up and down, back and forth. Strange, but at the beginning, when the fire started, I thought it was so unreal and fantastic, but now the rest of the world was fantastic and the fire was the only truly real thing.

We were emerging from the forest. It was bright again— and rocky and steep. I could see the second flare ahead of us. I slowed down and waited for Torry. “How are we doing?”

“Ten minutes to go,” she said.

We were climbing almost straight up. Charley and Jay were helping us. Dot was on the ground, propped up behind a boulder, moaning.

We finally made it to the top of the ridge. I was so exhausted I couldn’t move.

“Let’s rest for thirty seconds,” Jay said. I fell onto the ground and pressed my forehead against the small stones. I ached and throbbed from head to toe. Roy was sitting next to me stroking my back. We didn’t talk.



Then, after what seemed like a very few seconds, we had to get up and start walking again. The girls were crying. Red was limping. Roy looked forty years old. I felt ninety. We stumbled and fell, but we kept moving along the ridge.

## NANCY

Don said, "They're going to make it! Look at that! They're going to make it! I'm telling you, they're going to make it!"

Thank God. What a terrible weight had been lifted from my shoulders. They would make it. I said, "But why did they give us such a fright by stopping on the top of the ridge?"

Don stared at me and shook his head. He was being anything but mannerly tonight. He said, "I don't know. Maybe they were trying to figure out a five-horse parlay." That was entirely uncalled for. I was still trembling from the close call we'd had trying to drop the flares. Don was probably upset, too, but that was no excuse for his being abusive. After all, we were *all* upset.

A rescue party was moving down the ridge toward our campers. The space between the two groups closed and my throat began to knot up. We circled above them until the two groups met on the ridge. It was a sight I'll never forget. They were safe. I wept. I covered my face and wept. They were safe.

"We'd better go home," Don said. "We're just about out of gas." When he banked the plane I could see his face plainly in the light from the fire. His expression was hard and set, but tears were running down his face.

## JAY

With Dot on my back I was staggering, but when I saw Gumpy and Terry O'Rourke and the others running down the ridge toward us, I managed to straighten up and walk right, stiff leg and all. I was a proud man and I didn't want anyone to make any mistakes about it, especially anyone I hadn't seen in almost three years. No sir, I'd walk up to them with the pride of a man who's taking a stroll around his million-dollar estate. I'd beaten the goddamn fire for once and for all!

Terry ran up to me wearing an anxious expression. "Are you okay? Here, let me take her."

"Her? Why, she doesn't weigh as much as a good bag of flour."

Judging from the way Terry stared at me, I must have been quite a sight. He said, "Come on, McFarland, she must be getting pretty heavy."

I couldn't resist it. "She's not heavy," I said. "She's my brother."

I started laughing and wheezing in the smoke and I don't know what held me up.

"The same old Baloney McFarland," Terry said smiling. "Goddamn it, you ain't changed a bit."

"Ah, be off with ye, Terry me boy. Go check the others. They've had a pretty rough outing."

Terry left and I started walking again. We had only about an eighth of a mile to go to the fire gap. I was so pooped though, I wasn't sure I'd make it. "Hang on, Dot," I said. "We're almost there."

She squeezed my neck and dropped a warm tear on my ear. Poor kid probably had a broken ankle.

I'd just started counting my steps, when Gumpy caught up to me. He was carrying Torry, who was bawling up a storm. "We saw that plane drop the flares. Who was that?"

"Don Rogers."

“You mean that industrialist or whatever he is? Sure looked like he was going to crash.”

“Sure did.”

We walked.

Terry caught up with us carrying Shirley, and pretty soon Slim Something-Or-Other joined us carrying Pat. Terry said, “We got a doctor up ahead. He’ll be able to patch these girls up.”

“I think they’re okay except for Dot here,” I said and tossed my head back. “They’re young. In a couple of hours they’ll be themselves again—the little vandals.”

We walked, and we walked. Finally we came to the fire gap where the trucks were lined up. While the others were getting coffee or sprawling out on the ground, I took Dot to the emergency truck. The doc looked her over. He felt around her ankle, and Dot writhed with pain. “Broke?” I asked.

“Yep, ’fraid so.” Then he gave her a shot. I held her hand until she passed out.

When I tried to stand up, my leg felt like starch. “Hey,” the doc said. “Better let me take care of that.”

“Time for that tomorrow. I’m going to help the boys with the fire.”

I hobbled down from the emergency truck and was heading for the coffee concession when Roy called me. He was sitting on the ground, holding Ann, who was sobbing in his arms. “Jay,” he said, “Ann wants to know about the others back at the campsite. Are they all right?”

“Oh, yeah. A little smoke in their lungs and that’s about all. By now, Joey probably has them halfway back to camp.”

## JOEY

Holy jaloney, what a lousy rescue man I turned out to be. I was in such a hurry to get to the campsite that I blazed down roads that probably didn't even exist. I tried to stay near the fire, but it wouldn't have surprised me if I'd ended up in Canada or some goddamn place. I mean, I was so goddamn shook up I didn't know which way was straight up. Mom and Henna were with me in the jeep and they didn't help any, giving directions left and right like the goddamn traffic bureau—I kid you not.

We heard a great massive explosion about half an hour before and then a bunch of little ones. And all this time I was zigging and zagging and going down dead-end trails and then having the goddamn trailer jackknife on me all over the place when I try to back up.

So finally we hit this road that seems sort of familiar and we follow it around the mountain and sure enough, it's the right one.

But as soon as I looked across the lake at the fire I did something so goddamn infantile that you wouldn't even believe me if I told you. I couldn't help it. You know, I saw a little bit of fire from the road but I didn't know how big those goddamn flames are, and when I got a good look at them, I got so scared I couldn't control the old valves. Man, those goddamn flames were a couple of hundred feet high. No josh. And the spot where the campsite was supposed to be, I mean, it's just one huge goddamn ball of fire going way the hell up into the sky.

It was the most horrible thing I'd ever seen in my life. I mean, just ghastly. Those poor goddamn girls. We launched the old motorboat and streaked across the waves full blast. You'd never believe it if you didn't see it for yourself—these mammoth goddamn trees—huge things about three hundred feet tall—toppling over like I don't know what—just falling—falling. It was horrible. We were all just staring with these glassy-eyed looks. I just hoped we weren't too late—I mean, what a thing to have to live with—get lost halfway around Mt. Silverfoot and all

those girls lose their lives on account of it. My heart was pounding so hard I could feel it all the way down to my toes.

And when we got close to the campsite was I ever glad to see those heads bobbing around in the canoes. What a relief. “They’re all right,” Henna said.

“Yeah,” I said. I must have been grinning like a red-assed baboon. But that fire! I couldn’t get over it. I mean, there are fires and there are fires, but even in a big bonfire you don’t see any flames bigger than ten feet or so. But in some of them goddamn trees I could see flames start out by the ground—a single flame, mind you—and go all the way up the tree and then go another forty feet in the air before breaking off. It was fantastic. You could feel the goddamn heat too—you know, way out there on the lake.

We went from canoe to canoe and Mom checked the girls over. When I saw Flick I almost heaved into the kelp, I mean I really got sick. She was laying on her back with her head bashed to a pulp. There was a big black puddle of blood under her head and her hair was all plastered with it. I had to look away. The other girls weren’t exactly in what you’d call U.S. Government choice condition, either. They all had this look in their eyes like they’d just come from the snake pit and a couple of them were still out like lights.

We were going to string the canoes behind the motorboat and try to tow them across that way, but just when we were getting ready to shove off this big goddamn government launch comes streaking across the lake and pulls up alongside of us. Some guy in a cop’s uniform starts bleating at us through this megaphone. “Load the girls in here. We’ll take them back.”

Boy, those girls really acted strange. They didn’t act like they were glad to go home or anything. They just walked around like zombies or something. I guess they must have been pretty scared. I don’t blame them, either.

After we got them all transferred, Henna says, “All the girls aren’t here! Dot’s not here. Neither is Ann Milton. Where are they?”

“Ann took them that way,” Dug said. “Jay went after them.”

That way? What in the holy hell was she talking about? There was nothing “that way” but a goddamn ocean of flames! They *couldn't* have gone that way. “That way?” I asked. My voice was awful goddamn high.

“Yes,” Dug said and looked down. “And, Red and four campers.”

Did this mean—No! It couldn't. Nobody would stand a chance going that way. Ann? Dot? Jay, too? Oh, my Christ! I looked at the spot again, hoping that maybe it wasn't *all* flames, but I couldn't see how a heat-treated turtle could make it through there.

One of these cops in the government boat was looking through his binoculars. He said, “Looks like the remains of a canoe washing against the cliff down there.”

“Jay took a canoe,” Dug said in this real flat voice. “He climbed up that highest cliff over there, the one with the big ledge on the top. We saw him.”

The cop put down his binoculars. “Was that Jay McFarland?”

“Yes,” Dug said.

Mom put her arm around me and I thought I would start bawling. The cop shook his head and looked away. “Jay McFarland,” he said as if he couldn't believe it, either.

“Be brave, Joey,” Mom said. Yeah, big deal. Be brave, for what? Big deal. Sure, she could stand there without one goddamn tear in her eyes. She was a goddamn nurse. She was used to having people die all over the place, but I wasn't. I never would be.

Henna was standing in the front of the launch bawling and I couldn't hold it back anymore. I wanted to get far away from this goddamn place.

One of the cops stuck his head out of the cabin and said, “Hey, Saul. Message for you.”

I got back in the motorboat. “You ride with the girls, Mom,” I blubbered. I shoved off and started the motor.

I was mean to Jay, too. I treated him like he was a son-of-a-bitch and now he was gone, just like Dad. Boy, you get attached to someone and the first thing

you know, whammo, he's dead. This business of living was a pretty rotten deal, I'll say that.

"Hey," the cop said over the megaphone. "Got some good news for you. McFarland's got nine lives. I just got the message. He and the girls are all safe at the fire gap."

Wow! I mean WOW. I was never, and I mean NEVER so glad to hear anything in my rich old life. That was the greatest news since Marconi flew over the South Pole.



## MARY

The ranger took us in his truck to the fire gap where Jay and the other girls were. Joey followed in the jeep. We stayed there just long enough to drop Flick off with the doctor and organize a convoy to get the girls back to camp. The doctor said that he'd take Flick and Dot to the hospital in Northport. I rode back to camp with Cindy, Regie, and a supply salesman from Highland—I can't recall his name. The girls didn't talk. They were still stunned.

When we got them back to camp we hurried them into the Mainhouse and kept the rest of the campers out. I made the announcement that the girls were safe and sound. Lulu had called in a doctor from Bleaker and he had everything ready in the dining room—bunks, tables lined up with sheets on them, and bright lights. Henna did what she could to help the doctor and me. Cuts, bruises, particles in the eyes, and several minor burns—nothing really serious. No, their troubles were mostly mental—mostly shock.

And then a wonderful thing happened. Red went out on the recreation porch and started playing the piano and you could almost feel the tension in the room begin to melt. I don't know the name of the piece she played, but it was the kind of easy music that makes you think of a large elegant restaurant in the late afternoon with a veranda overlooking the ocean. It was beautiful. And there the campers were, at first scared and silent and then they talked some and after a while you could even hear them laughing a little. I felt it myself, but I still had a lot of work to do.

I wanted to check Roy over before he and Ann went to their cabin, but he said that outside of a headache he never felt better. He asked Henna if he could borrow her radio from the kitchen. Then he and Ann left with their arms around each other's waist.

After I'd finished taking care of the campers, Lulu told me that Nancy wanted to see me in her cabin. On the way down, I could hear the girls talking in their cabins with the lights out. As soon as I walked in Nancy's cabin she said,

“How are the girls?” She was sitting upright on the couch, shuddering. I told her and she became hysterical. “I have to know the truth! Don’t spare me! Tell me the truth!”

Ed, who was standing by the window, held a glass of whiskey. His hand was shaking. “Shut up!” he said.

They were in a frightful state—worse than the campers. I gave them both a sedative.

After they settled down I went back to the Mainhouse to make a final check. The doctor was packing his things up, getting ready to leave, and the girls were exchanging experiences. “Oh! And JUST when we sat down, I looked up and saw flames. Oh! I thought I would DIE!”

“That’s nothing! We were ... ”

The doctor left, and the girls insisted on sleeping right there in the dining room—with the lights on. They chanted in chorus and pleaded with cow eyes. “Please, Mrs. Jones. Can’t we, just this once?”

“All right,” I said. “But you’d better be quiet. I don’t want you waking the rest of the camp up.”

They cheered and sang that I was a jolly good fellow, but when I was leaving, their tone changed. One of them was saying, “Gee, I sure hope Flick is all right.”

Yes. And I did, too.

It was a different world outside—quiet and dreamy—with only a red glow in the north to remind me of the fire. I couldn’t believe that I’d watched a movie only a few hours before. I couldn’t even recall what it was about. A few hours, and yet in that time, everything had changed. For the first time since Dick’s death, I could feel something for people other than Joey. I suspect the fire did it. I don’t know how to explain it, but before the fire I always felt that if I let myself go and felt for someone, I’d mark them with the cross of death. I tried to shut my feelings off because I was afraid of going through another nightmare like I had with Dick.

We Christians don't mourn for the person who passed on. We mourn for ourselves, because through our love we make our family and our friends a part of ourselves, and when they go it's worse than trying to find your way around with no eyes. No, we cry for ourselves. After Dick I didn't want to cry anymore.

But the campers had escaped death. I know it's crazy but I felt that they were immune—that it was safe for me to love them now. Nothing could harm them—nothing. Not even my love.

And I wasn't afraid of tomorrow. In fact, I looked forward to it.

I'd kept my nerves in a neat bundle during the rescue, and now I couldn't let go. I'd have to walk it out of my system. I walked by Joey's cabin and I could see him inside, talking to Champ. His face was dirty.

I didn't want to disturb him so I started back down the path. The rest of the camp was quiet now, except for the usual noises, the insects and the wind in the trees. Then I heard another sound and thought my mind was playing tricks on me. I heard music—an orchestra and a woman's voice singing.

*"April in Paris. Who should I turn to?"*

It was coming from the Miltons' cabin. The lights were on and I could see them dancing—not really dancing, but holding each other tightly and swaying back and forth in one spot. "What have you done to my heart?"

I suppose I was being snoopy, standing there watching them, but I couldn't seem to look away. I felt a sad pang of nostalgia mixed with a warm feeling. In the middle of the song, the lights went out, but the music kept playing. The music played and played. I could hear it all the way back to the Mainhouse.

## PART FOUR

### JOEY

The story about the fire was in all the papers. We didn't get them until the second day, but when we got them I mean to tell you we got them. I guess Nancy ordered a double gross of every paper that carried the story and on that second day there was so much paper floating around camp that you couldn't even light a match or the whole blooming woods would go up in flames all over again. Man, every room you walk into, what do you see but newspapers, newspapers—stacks of them, *reams* of them.

And the reporters! By the second day most of them left—all but two guys from the Northport papers, another joker from one of the wire services, and this colossal jerk who called himself a freelance reporter—but you should have been around on that first day if you wanted to get ulcers. It was just like the movies—burnt-out flash bulbs knee deep on the ground; guys with cameras streaking around and blazing away at anything that moved; and these other clowns with notebooks ganging up on you and shooting questions left and right. “This your first forest fire, Joey? Were you scared?”

Me scared? Hell no. I always do it in my pants before I turn in at night. (I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I didn't mention *anything* about that to the reporters. I was just joking around when I said what I did. I mean why tell them? What good would it do? And how the hell do you think that would look in print? JOE DENNIS JONES DROPS LOAD IN BRITCHES. What kind of headline would that be?)

I mean, I've got a lousy enough name as it is without putting anything like that after it. Joe Jones. I don't know. Why would anyone named *Jones* name their kid *Joe*, anyhow? *Jones* is about as common as germs in the throat, but *Joe!* Let's face it: Every goddamn Tom, Dick, and Harry in the world is named Joe.

But anyhow, it was really something. And poor Jay. Boy, I felt sorry for that guy. Here he was up all night with his bad leg helping fight the fire, and so what does he have to do the next day but sit around and answer all these questions. I mean, those reporters wouldn't let him alone. Always another question. "Mr. McFarland, do you like living up here in the winter?" Oh boy, what a question. If the guy didn't want to live up here in the winter, he'd move away, you dumb jerk. Some of those reporters are really frauds, you know it?

So this crap goes on until almost midnight—questions and answers, flashbulbs blinding you, and some of these artistic cameramen always wanting you to get in some crazy pose. One joker even had me get in the motorboat with Mom and Henna. I mean, the boat was just tied up to the dock down there, but we had to make like we were streaking across Mussle Lake. Boy did I feel like a fraud.

And then, bright and early the next morning, here comes this massive truck pulling into camp—just loaded to the gills with newspapers. And then the fun *really* began. The whole camp got Newspaper Fever. In the dining room it looked like a goddamn white Christmas with this solid wall of paper standing up at every table with a few hands sticking out here and there. The sound of the goddamn things crinkling and crunching was enough to make you deaf for life, but brother it was nothing compared to the campers. "Oh, bla, bla, bla, and la-di-dah! Lookie, lookie! Here's my name!" Oh big deal. Pardon me while I pull a Roy and faint dead away.

In all fairness, though, I'll have to admit that I wasn't much better than the campers. Oh, I didn't froth at the breakfast table or anything like that, but as soon as breakfast was over, I sort of casually gathered up a gross of papers and faded away to my cabin. I mean, let's face it: This was a big deal for me. The only other time I ever got my name in the paper was when the old man died, and now here I was, big feature story with picture and all. It was no big-deal portrait of me in horn-rimmed glasses dragging away on a Sherlock Holmes pipe or anything. If you're real goddamn brave you might say it's a group picture, with everyone

huddled together—Roy, Jay, everyone—and there I am, sandwiched between Nancy and this goddamn Charley Rebus. And if you ever want to get sandwiched, you should stand between those two sometime. A few sweaty tons of solid lard on one side and this real jittery bastard on the other whose breath smells like he’s just been munching on bear droppings. What a way to go—this Charley Rebus prancing and jumping around so much he’s practically sanding the skin off my entire right side, while Nancy is trying to make like an amoeba and engulf me in her flab. So the upshot of it is that in the picture I’ve got this real scroungy expression on my face and what’s left of my shoulders flattened up against my ear lobes. Oh boy, did I look cool—just like some forty-pound weakling with a big pimple right in the middle of his forehead. This picture’s so goddamn fuzzy you couldn’t even hardly make out who’s who, but there it is, right in the middle of my forehead, a great hairy pimple—just as plain if not plainer than the nose on my face.

And this picture appeared in—I’d say forty percent of the papers. The other papers either carried the picture of the campers or this one of Jay being kissed by Torry and Sue. But get this: Some real eight-ball papers like the Ann Arbor *Globe* didn’t carry *any* picture. No kidding, I don’t know how that paper stays in business. Warp the facts? You never saw anything like it. Big headline: LOCAL COUPLE IN RESCUE. Local couple! What about the rest of us? What were we supposed to be doing all this time? Eating raisins and expelling gas?

And the article itself? Oh boy! Talk about being sick. I mean the damn thing took up about half of the paper and all it is, is one huge buildup for Roy and Ann. It has everything in there but Roy’s favorite color, I swear. His rank in the Army, what he’s doing in school, Ann’s measurements—and that’s all! Nothing about anyone else. Oh, maybe if you get out a magnifying glass and develop writer’s cramp of the eyes you might be able to make out a few other names, but I’m telling you, that was the sickest article I ever read.

No, I take that back. This Northport *Gazette* takes the cake. Their whole aim in life is to try to make Charley Rebus into a National Figure. They carried

three big articles—one about everything to do with the rescue, another on telling about Jay and Olive, and finally this real putrid one on Guess Who. A whole article—a whole goddamn article—on nothing but Charley Rebus. What’s there to say about the guy? He lives in a shack by Highland. He owns a beat-up jeep. You could cut his arm off and he wouldn’t feel it. And he’s so dumb he’s—ah, I don’t know what. He’s just dumb, that’s all. But, boy, this Northport *Gazette* tried to make him sound like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Einstein all rolled into one. Imagine trying to pawn that kind of crap off on the public. I won’t quote you any of their outlandish B.S. because I don’t want you to get sick, but take my word for it, that article was the worst thing I ever read in my life.

Most of the papers made me sound like quite the dashing young blade, you know, streaking “across the windswept lake to save the campers.” But let’s face it: Jay was the big hero. I mean, what’s putting around in a motorboat compared to “inching along the path a few yards from the inferno with a canoe on his back and nine sticks of dynamite in his pockets?” That takes guts. But Nancy *really* surprised me. I never thought she had guts enough to spit out of a tall building, but here, let me read you this. This is from the AP story. “When asked if she knew about the danger involved in buzzing to treetop level and dropping the flares, Miss Zimmerman, who is known as Mrs. Burnstein in Boston, blushed apologetically and said, ‘We knew the danger, but those were my girls down there and we had to save them at all costs.’ ”

Now that *really* took guts! I don’t know if I would have been so blooming noble if I was in her position. I mean, you could get killed so easy it would make your head spin. It just goes to show: You think you know people and you don’t hardly know them at all. She’s not the only one, either. Take Jay. From reading those articles, I learned more about that guy than I did from knowing him all summer. That’s right. A total stranger could pick up a stack of papers and in a half hour know more about Jay than I did. I didn’t know he took in a little girl after the Gallitan fire. I didn’t even know that he was born in Bangor, Maine, or that his

old man left his mother when Jay was only six years old. In short, I didn't know hardly anything.

But don't get me wrong: I'm not trying to knock the newspapers—not really. You see, if it hadn't been for them, Mom probably wouldn't have got all those job offers. I guess all in all she got seven of them—everything from being a personal nurse of some broken down old invalid, to working on the second floor of this mammoth hospital in Ohio. (They even sent a picture of it along.) But the job she was really interested in was this one at the Cannon Rubber Company—you know, working as the old industrial nurse.

Boy, I don't know though. They make all kinds of things out of rubber, but I guess their big sellers are enemas, douche bags, the old drip bags, and crap like that. I guess there wouldn't be much for Mom to do unless they field-tested each enema before they sent it out so that every now and then one of the testers got an overdose of water in the old system.

And you should have caught the act of this Mrs. Beemer who wrote the letter. Boy, she really broke me up. She said that the Cannon Company boasts a blooming host of eligible middle-aged bachelors. Oh boy, that really kills me. Can you imagine writing a letter like that to my mother? Let's face it: Mom's about eight decades too old to get worked up over that boy meets girl routine—after all, she's no goddamn teenager anymore. Eligible middle-aged bachelors! That's disgusting, you know it?

I mean, if she *wanted* to get married again or something, I wouldn't care, I mean, it's her life, but I know her better than that. But anyhow, she was really tickled with all the job offers. She came to my room just after breakfast, and she was a one-man Good Will show—laughing and clowning around. It made me feel real good to see her like that.

So all day long, everybody is reading papers like a madman. No work or nothing. Oh, we had to take care of the garbage but that's about all. Then after supper who should come back from the Northport hospital with her leg in a cast but Dot Cohen. Flick didn't come back with her. She had a brain concussion and



Dot said she'd have to stay in the hospital another few days. She was okay, though. I mean, she'd get better and all. But everyone really raised hell when Dot came back. They all whipped out their Eversharps and started signing the hell out of her cast.

After that it sort of quieted down and there wasn't much to do anymore. I went to the barn. These four reporters were in there and I stood around a while, but they were talking politics. So I plodded up to the old horseshoe pits. You know, I thought maybe I'd heave a few ringers, but when I got up there I wasn't in the mood. I mean, that seemed sort of boring after being a big celebrity. I didn't know what else to do, so I stepped over and knocked on Roy's cabin. I guess I could have gone down and let the campers drool all over me, but I didn't want anyone to think that I was overdoing the hero bit. Besides, I was kind of teed off with those cabin twenty girls. You know, all day long they're ultra-friendly with me and Jay and anyone like that, but boy, you should have seen how they treated the other campers. Gee, with this real highbrow air. "Stand back, peons, I'm coming through."

So anyhow, Roy answers the door and wouldn't you know it, he's holding a copy of this outrageous goddamn paper—the Ann Arbor *Globe*. And there's Ann on the bed, and I'll give you four guesses what she's reading. There's about four hundred copies stacked all the way up to the window sills. Not *one* good paper in the whole place, just this massive heap of the crappy Ann Arbor *Globe*.

"Well," Roy said, "if it isn't a member of the valiant Camp Timberline rescue team. Come in, come in."

"Ah, cut that out," I said.

"Hi, Joey," Ann said.

Roy said, "Well, who shall we save tonight?"

I shrugged. He was just joking around, but it wasn't very funny, let's face it. "I thought maybe we could play a game of horseshoes," I said.

“Gee, I’m sorry. Ann and I were going to get away from it all tonight. We’ve got permission to use one of the wagons, so we’re going to drive to Highland and have a soda. Want to come along?”

“Nah.” Couldn’t you just see me, sitting there in the booth with these lovebirds billing and cooing away? How embarrassing can you get?

“Come along if you want to,” Ann said. “We’d love to have you.”

“Nah. I ... uh ...” I uh what? “I ... uh ... / don’t know. I just ...” Now that’s what you call a brilliant bit of conversation. I don’t know what the hell happens to me sometimes. My mind gets in one of these dry spells and about all I can do then is make like Charley Rebus.

So while I’m stammering and hee-hawing all over the goddamn cabin, Roy and Ann start in on this “but we insist” routine and the first thing you know, there we are in one of the station wagons tooling across the countryside. I didn’t really *want* to go with them, but when you can’t dream up any way to get out of it, you’re stuck. I’ll have to admit, though, that it was sort of nice of them to ask me.

## NANCY

I hated to see it end. Only four reporters were left, but they would be rewarded with a wonderful human-interest story, a climax to the rescue. Tonight I would present Henna with a brand new Chevrolet! The Chevrolet dealer in Highland would deliver the car today at 8 p.m. Then with the cabin twenty girls and the staff gathered around me, I would make the presentation. There would be pictures, questions, more publicity. I had a marvelous idea for a picture. Jay and Henna would stand next to the new car, Jay holding a stick of dynamite, and Henna shaking her scolding finger at him. I would be between them, smiling, holding the keys.

After I called Highland to confirm the arrangements, I turned to Lulu who was behind her desk reading a paper. "Won't Henna be surprised? A brand new station wagon. Did you tell the reporters to be at the garage at eight?"

"Uh hmm," she replied, her nose still stuck in the paper. An eddy of irritation ruffled my composure.

"Well, I hope you didn't give the secret away. What did you tell them?"

"Just what you told me."

"What's that?" I felt the urge to snatch the paper away from her and tear it up.

Without looking up, she mumbled, "That if they wanted to get a good human-interest story they should be down by the garage at eight."

"Now we have to get the others," I added quickly. "Won't Henna be surprised?"

"Oh, phooey!" Lulu said.

"What did you say?"

"Phooey! I think it's just a cheap publicity stunt. Oh, I don't mind you buying Henna a car, but you didn't have to buy her a brand *new* one."

Staring intently at her face, I tried to find clues to this sudden change in attitude. Her eyes, wide in the hollows of her skull, stared back unfalteringly and I

instantly recognized that I was looking at a Lulu I had never seen before. I was frightened. Trying to conceal my emotions I walked to her desk and picked up a handful of letters of application from all over the country. “Perhaps it *is* a publicity stunt, Lulu, but I certainly wouldn’t call it a cheap one. How many letters have we received from parents who want to enroll their daughters here next summer?”

“Too many.”

I pursed my lips and turned around to leave. Lulu said, “What did *she* ever do for you, anyhow? *Nothing*. She doesn’t even like you. I’ve heard her talk myself. And you buy *her* a new car! She doesn’t even ... ”

The door slammed behind me, pushing a cool pulse of air against my legs. The stairs creaked under my feet.

In the kitchen, I tried to act composed. I was close to a state of buzzing nothingness, a confused unreality, a clashing of conflicting brain impulses. I could hardly restrain an insuppressible pleading scream that was forming in my throat. Henna was just coming out of the food locker. “Where are Roy and Ann?” I asked stiffly.

“They just left. Didn’t you see them?”

“Left? Where?”

“For Highland.”

“Highland?” What did Highland have to do with anything? I couldn’t seem to grasp the meaning of her words.

“You told them they could take the wagon. Nancy, do you feel all right?”

“The pictures! They can’t go to Highland.”

“They already left. Are you all right?”

The tip of the wing—orange against the blackness of the forest—was almost touching the treetops.

“Are you all right?” Henna inquired.

“Yes, I’m fine.”

Who lied to the reporters? Certainly not I! Why, if Ed and I had so desired we could have overpowered Don and prevented him from diving. After all there

were two of us, and Ed is very strong. I would have done *anything* within my power—even if it meant sacrificing myself—to save those girls. I love them.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes.” Everything was becoming clear again. Lulu was jealous because she played no part in the rescue. Well, she’d soon find out how far that kind of attitude would get her.

“Where’s Jay?” I queried.

“Last I saw him he was in the shop.”

Through the door and down the steps, the last column of sunlight slithering warmly across my back and then falling into a motionless rectangle on the ground.

The shop was smoky with the reporters loitering around. “Where’s Jay?” I asked, somewhat more authoritatively than I had intended to.

A skinny reporter, his hat pushed back on his head, tossed his thumb in the direction of the door. “He went to the hospital in Northport.”

“Where?”

“Yeah, Northport. He said he was going to visit Flick.”

I wanted to laugh. It was grotesquely funny. I’d wanted so badly for the presentation to be a surprise—a true surprise—that I had told no one about it except Lulu—not even Jay. And now he was gone! Gone! My idea for the picture was gone, too. Ruined. It was so funny I wanted to weep.

“Has anyone seen Joey?” I asked.

“Yeah,” the skinny reported answered. “He left in the wagon with Roy and Ann.”

Joey gone, too. No! I couldn’t believe it. I clenched my fists, strangely enjoying the bite of my fingernails as they dug into my palms. I wanted to hide and jump up and down on something until it broke. I wanted to scream!

To the cottage—away from the filthy shop. Over the hill, a green branch tickling my arm, and into the cottage. Ed, sitting by the window in his tennis shorts, looked at me a moment and then turned his attention out the window

again. It was just as well, I was in no mood to talk—or sex. No, I had to be alone. The new car would arrive any moment, but I couldn't go through with it now. Lulu could make the presentation. Then no one could accuse me of trying to stage a cheap publicity stunt.

I went to the bedroom and sat down. In the quiet, I could feel the tendons of loneliness closing upon me, strangling my mind, weighting my body. I would have to take a nap and let my unconscious resolve the problems. They were too elusive and nebulous to handle consciously. Stretching out on the bed, I pressed my thumbs against my closed eyes and waited for the fascinating designs to capture my attention. Slowly a swirling mass of color began to form and then ...

I sat bolt upright in bed, my eyes wide open. The image was still there. Instead of spectacular sparkling geometry that usually accompanies the pressure I saw flames and sparks, heat waves and tiny people running, running, trying to escape. I held my eyes open, afraid to blink. Nevertheless I could still see the image—the Mandarin designs cast by fire. I shook my head and bit my knuckles, but the satanic images were still there. The fire—the horrible fire. It would never leave me.

Rinnnnng.

The phone. Ed answered it and called, “Nancy, it's Lulu. She says the car is here.”

“Tell her,” my voice sounded peculiar, “tell her to make the presentation herself. I'm not feeling well.”

Ed mumbled on the phone. Then he hung up and came into the bedroom, his eyes cold beneath the furrows in his forehead. “Are you sick?” he questioned—a question more like a demand.

“I'll be all right in a few minutes. I simply have to relax.”

I hadn't noticed it before, but Ed was holding a large glass that rattled of ice and looked the color of whiskey. “When are you going to tell the reporters to go home?” he demanded.

I knew I'd have to be strong and stand up to Ed, but I felt weak and unwanted—especially since he was also against me. He likes me to be strong, and I have to act even when I'm weak.

I tried not answering him, but he said, "Well? When are you going to send them home? Don't you think this farce has gone just about far enough? I can't even go swimming without them tagging along."

I caught a glimpse of myself—alone with everyone blaming me, pointing at me, staring with wide, reproofing eyes. I couldn't bear it. "The publicity has been very good for the camp," I blurted, looking away from Ed.

He all but emptied his glass in one vicious swallow. "Oh, very good, is it? Well, it obviously never dawned on you that two girls wouldn't be injured and a million dollars' worth of trees reduced to rubble if you hadn't been so pig-headed."

"You can't blame me for that! You can't! You said that Mussle Lake would be just what the campers needed."

"I did *not!* I said that you shouldn't mollycoddle them. I didn't say you should arrange to have them burn down the forest."

"But you ... "

"Don't interrupt me. You could have seen to it that you precious girls learned to play tennis or learned how to swim. Thanks to your 'wonderful publicity' everyone in the U.S. knows that you have two girls who have been coming up here for seven years and still are unable to swim twenty feet!"

"This is not primarily an athletic camp, Ed. We're interested in building character."

"Stop it! Save that blurb for gullible parents. You know as well as I do there's no better character builder in the world than competitive sports! Getting out there and learning to fight, fight, fight! All your drama and artcraft and dancing are just so much window dressing!"

“That’s not true,” I objected. My voice was beginning to crack. “You don’t know what it’s like to be a young girl. These things are very important. You’ve got to feel that you’re a member of a group. You’ve got to ... ”

Ed slammed his empty glass down on the counter and smiled. “Oh.” He walked to the window, laughing. “Sometimes you puzzle me, Nancy. I try never to interfere with the way you operate the camp because it’s your hobby, your little toy, your chance to play God. But don’t deceive yourself about it. Your interest isn’t in building characters but in playing God. Actually you don’t give two hoots about those girls!”

That was a heart-stabbing cruel lie. “That’s not true! You know it isn’t.”

“Oh do I? Wasn’t I in the plane when you tried to persuade Don to drop the flares from above? If I cared as much about the girls as you supposedly do ... ”

“You don’t know what you’re saying. You’re drunk—nasty drunk. I was in that plane, too, remember? And I heard *you*.”

“Naturally! But why should I risk *my* life for those girls? They mean nothing to me. I never maintained that they did.”

I said, “You’re ashamed of *yourself* and you’re just trying to blame me. You’re ashamed of yourself because you showed Don what a coward you really are.”

“Don’t say that, Nancy. I’m in no mood for that kind of talk. I am not ashamed. I have nothing to be ashamed about.”

“You certainly do. You were so scared you couldn’t talk. You’re ashamed of yourself. You’re jealous of Jay.” The words were coming out by themselves.

“Stop that! If you’re trying to be obnoxious, you’re succeeding.”

“I’m obnoxious?” I screamed. “What about you? What about *you*? Ashamed of yourself, so ashamed of yourself you have to start drinking!”

“Shut up, you fat bitch!”

Something broke within me and everything suddenly stopped. Then it started again, but this time in a different mood. All along I’d known he hated me,



but now that he admitted it, I was free, free to let myself go, free to laugh and cry, free to scream, “Look at you! Look! Short, skinny, homely *RUNT!*” The pent-up words, feelingless but freeing, were pouring out. I was laughing. “You hate me! But I don’t care. I don’t! You’re a despicable little *worm*, did you hear me? WORM. Let everyone hear me! WORM! You’re a ... ”

There was a momentary shocking pain and then a dull numbness. It took me a moment to realize that Ed had struck me across the face. The taste of blood was warm and salty in my mouth. He was saying, “ ... to shut up and I mean it. Next time perhaps you’ll pay attention.” He stalked out of the bedroom and a moment later the front door slammed. I fell forward onto the bed. Sleep, oh, how I needed to sleep.

While I lulled in a thick cloud of drowsiness, the fingers of my mind dug into corners, searched the dark cracks. I knew then that the marriage was a deception. Ed and I weren’t in love with each other. We loved ghosts, apparitions, creatures who existed only in our imaginations. I wasn’t strong and aggressive, as he wanted me to be. And now I knew that he actually *was* a worm—an unfeeling worm. He wasn’t brilliant. He had absolutely no understanding of people. He was a bigot, a wormy little bigot.

I would leave him. I would stay with Lulu. No, she hated me. There was Henna, but I didn’t like her. Where would I go? Everyone I cared about was against me—Jay and the rest of the staff, and the campers. The campers, still possessing the perspicacity of children, subconsciously knew the truth about the fire and hated me for it. I was alone—horribly alone.

The warm drapes of sleep closed on me.

A hand was on my back when I awoke. I felt dry and empty. The room was dark. It was Ed’s hand. He was sitting next to me. “Honey,” he said, “I’m sorry. I don’t know what got into me, but I’m sorry.”

“Oh, my darling,” I said and threw my arms around his neck. “Oh. Please forgive me.”

I *did* love him. He was all I had—my husband, my whole life—and I had to love him.

“No, it was my fault,” he said. “I don’t know what happened to me. The reporters all day long and ...”

“Oh, Pumpsy, I didn’t mean a word of what I said. You’re the most wonderful husband in the world. I just felt I had to hurt you back and ...”

“No, it was my fault. I love you, Nancy.”

We kissed and he squeezed my breast. I pushed him away, saying, “Why, Pumpsy, I believe you’re getting fresh. Shame on you.” I smiled through my tears.

“Yeah, I’m getting fresh. What are you going to do about it?”

“I’m not going to do anything. I’m not in the mood. And if you want to do something, you can go into the bathroom and do it by yourself.”

He lunged at me and I bit his ear lobe. I was so relieved, but in the back of my mind, I still had the ominous premonition that things would never be the same again. Something had changed in both of us.

## ANN

Although we didn't do much in Highland, we had a wonderful time. First, we drank thick milkshakes in a drugstore that oddly combined the past and the present. The embossed decorations on the ceiling and the old-fashioned furniture behind the pharmaceutical counter conflicted harshly with the dazzling Formica soda fountain and the large neon window signs.

I could easily picture what the drugstore must have been like around the turn of the century, horses clattering down the street and bearded men in bright, checkered jackets conversing inside. I sensed the human dramas the old building must have witnessed over the years—the births, deaths, heartbreaks, and joys. I felt warm. It was a beautiful place.

After we'd finished our shakes, Joey and Roy looked over the magazines while I strolled through the store. A sign in the window proclaimed that last year's hunting licenses were now available. Next to the sign stood a leg, clad in a heavy elastic stocking. A sign, in the shadow of the leg, said, "Learn good writing habits ... Save your experiences ... Make the most out of *each* day ... WITH A REYNOLDS DIARY."

Next to the sign was a dusty, morocco diary. I'd lost my diary in the fire, and my first impulse was to buy a new one and write in capitals on the first page, "LIFE IS WONDERFUL, AND ROY LOVES ME." But when I looked at my idea a second time, it was tarnished. I suddenly realized that I didn't need a diary anymore. I had a husband again—I didn't need to pour my soul out through a pen.

I looked over at Roy, who was thumbing through a copy of *True Magazine*, and I felt very proud. Imagine Roy reading *True Magazine*. He'd changed—thank God. Instead of sitting back in his smug superiority, he now took part in things. No longer did I shrink up in his presence, waiting for him to pounce on me. I didn't have to. Every time he looked at me now, his eyes said that I was important.

“Hey,” Joey said, “Why don’t we take a walk around town.”

“How about it, Ann?” Roy said.

“Sure. Let me buy a tube of lipstick first.” I took a last look at the Reynolds diary. “Learn good writing habits, my eye,” I thought.

The town was quiet. Moths buzzed around the streetlights and people sat out on their porches. Their cigarettes glowed in the dark. We walked all the way across town. We stopped to look in store windows and drank in the smells of a small town, the raw smells of the filling station, the smells of the restaurants and the lumberyard.

By the time we returned to the wagon, the town was already going to bed. Roy drove slowly up the mountain. The stars were bright and the cool green light from the speedometer tinted our faces. Roy and Joey talked. I was satisfied to listen. When we reached the top of the mountain, Roy stopped and we looked back at Highland, now an irregular rectangle of lights, which seemed to hang in the darkness below.

Roy started the car again and said, “Joey, it’s a very funny thing. I’ve heard people say that their lives pass in front of them when they’re close to death. That didn’t happen in my case. However, I did experience what might be called a flash of insight. I realized that the ‘cornball’ things, like going to Highland for instance, are the most important things in life, because, after all, they are the elements that make up life, minute to minute, hour to hour. Admittedly, this observation probably sounds a great deal like the Power of Positive Thinking, and all that jazz, but I’m convinced it’s true. When we were trapped in that Freudian birth canal of underbrush, perhaps the thing that gave me the most anguish was knowing that I’d never again rake leaves on a fall day or ... ” He sounded embarrassed. “Or any number of cornball things.”

I wanted to hug him. He was still the man I married. He still had ideals and he wasn’t afraid of love. Before the fire it had appeared that I’d have to spend the rest of life going to bed with different men to keep Roy jealous. The fire changed that, thank God. Our marriage had been saved.

## ROY

Proverb for the day: Time, the great healer of all wounds, is a two-edged sword. For about a week after we'd gone to Highland I'd been so thirsty to live that the world had seemed like a proverbial Fairyland. I had become drunk over every crinkle and had almost immorally relished every fetish.

But alas, I quickly discovered that the Rose-Colored tint on my retinas was not permanent. With the passing of time, the Fairyland dissolved into a world of platitudes, injustice, and ignorance. Now, weeks later with the summer over, I had all but forgotten how to think positively.

Red was on the recreation porch playing the "September Song" and the dear campers were blubbing tear-filled farewells. Tonight—the night of the Going-Away banquet—would be our last night in the great North Country. Tomorrow at this time, Ann and I would be in Ann Arbor, busy cleaning up the inevitable mess left in the apartment by our subleasees.

After supper I wandered around camp. I was met on every front by sentimentality, so I ventured to the cabin, where Ann, in the Spirit of the Day, was lavishly applying cosmetics. She was wearing her Full-Dress Camp Timberline Uniform.

"You'd better hurry and get dressed," she said. "The banquet will start in less than twenty minutes."

"Swell," I said and sat on my bunk, reaching for the trusty copy of *The Education of Karl Witte*.

"Roy, you're going to be late."

"Fear not," I said. "We men folk stage our own exclusive banquet in the kitchen, and I understand it's a more casual affair than the one held for the campers. Shirts and ties, of course, but no tuxedos."

"Roy, you can at least wash your face."

"Thank you. I'll keep that in mind."

Ann slammed her lipstick tube down against the rustic, unfinished dresser. “I hate to sound like a broken record,” she said. “But what in the hell is the matter with you now? These past few days you’ve been as nasty as you ever had. What’s the matter, Roy?”

A good question. I only regretted that I didn’t have a correspondingly good answer. I suppose I could have answered her with the “habit” argument, which was a least partially true. I had, more or less created my own world, and now the *creator* was a slave. Without spurious props, such as infidelity and forest fires, I was a victim of my own compulsions. I was something like the ambitious mason who was so busy laying each brick that he didn’t realize he was sealing himself in a tomb. How morbid.

I couldn’t answer Ann. I wanted to. I wanted things to be as they had when we went to Highland, but ...

Oh, I wasn’t beaten yet, not Roy Milton the Tiger. At least I now saw the problem in a truer perspective. I was beginning to realize what Jay’s battle with the Windmills was all about. And I knew that if I wanted to change (which I did) I’d have to crusade—wage a grueling battle. Every day I’d encounter a myriad of barriers which I’d have to stumble over. I’d have to try to hold my sarcasm in check, think about Ann, and even recall how precious life seemed during the fire, if such drastic means seemed warranted.

Ann sat down next to me and took *Karl Witte* from my hand. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to nag you.”

I nodded.

“Roy, what’s the matter?”

I smiled. “Oh, I suppose I’m a little sad about leaving.” The words hurt like hell. An unpretentious person is also an unprotected person.

“I am, too,” she said. “Funny. You don’t even realize how much people mean to you until you have to say goodbye.”

“That’s right.”

“I love you, Roy,” she said and I noticed tears in her eyes.

I put my arm around her somewhat gingerly. I'd have to comfort her now, something at which I'm not very good. Actually, I'm clumsy and— inadequate—if you have to know.

I held her close and said, "It's all right, honey. Everything's going to be all right." I sounded like something out of a woman's magazine. "Come on, dry your eyes. I'll wash my face and change into my tux and we'll go down to the banquet. Our last free blast."

## JAY

Another summer was over. We sat in the kitchen drinking beer while the campers held their after-the-banquet ceremonials in the dining room. From time to time they applauded. Then they sang every song in the Timberline book—“Oh, Timberline, My Timberline,” “Three Little Campers and a Mamma Nancy Too.” Finally they sang, “Aloha, Timberline” to the tune of “Pomp and Circumstance.”

There is something about that tune that makes everything final, and I think Roy and Joey felt it, too. “Hey,” Joey said, when they were on the fourth stanza, “why don’t we get together this winter? You know, live it up.”

“Takes money,” Roy said. “I live in Michigan, remember?”

“Yeah, that’s right. Well, we’ll probably get together sometimes, you know, by accident or something.”

“I doubt it,” Roy said. “When we shake hands tomorrow, that’s it. Finis. Chances are we’ll never see each other again as long as we live.”

There was a pause, during which I could hear Nancy delivering her farewell speech.

I said, “I don’t know, Roy. We might meet sometime.” Roy was probably right but I didn’t want to dampen Joey’s spirits.

“Yeah,” Joey said, “you can’t tell about these things. I might even be in Michigan sometime, walking down the street, and ... You just never know about these things.”

I went to the locker for more beer. Coming back, I said, “What do you suppose we’ll all be doing next year at this time?”

“I’ll probably be in school,” Roy said.

“Me too,” Joey said. “You know, college. If we have the money, that is.”

“That’s a problem,” I said, “but if you get a chance to go, take it.”

“Yeah.”

Flick came in from the dining room then with a babushka around her head.

“Hey! You guys listening to the game?” she asked.



“No.”

“Well, turn it on! Come on! I’ve got five bucks on the Yankees—stupid intern at the hospital gave me two-to-one odds.”

Roy turned the radio on. It wheezed and crackled. Flick took over the controls trying to find the station. I lit my pipe and stepped out on the porch.

The night was cool and exceptionally dark. I’d just leaned back against the porch rail when I noticed someone coming up the path with a flashlight. “Hello,” I said. “Friend or foe?”

“None of your goddamn business!” It was Ed and he was staggering pretty badly. He made it over to the porch. Then he shined his flashlight in my eyes and said, “What business do you have interrogating me?”

“Come off it, Ed,” I said. “And take that damn flashlight out of my eyes.”

He threw the flashlight down and slumped over on the stairs. “McFarland? You know what I’m going to do? I’m going inside to that fiasco and make a speech. I’ll make a speech they’ll never forget.”

“Sure thing,” I said. “But why don’t you just sit here and relax a while first?”

“I’m drunk. Did you know that? I’m completely inebriated and disinhibited. Did you know that?”

“Well, I’ll have to admit I could tell you’ve had a drink or two.”

“McFarland, you’re a goddamn drunkard yourself. Tell me this: What are you like when you’re drunk? Are you a mean bastard?”

I thought for a second. “No, I guess I’m sullen.”

“I’m a mean bastard.” He sat upright and almost lost his balance. “Here, let me tell you a story. I’ve never told this to anybody—not anybody. Did you know that? Back when I was in college, I used to get good grades. I was in a fraternity, and you’ve got troubles in a fraternity if you get good grades and you’re three years younger than everybody else. I was sixteen.

“But everybody got a kick out of me when I got drunk. I was a laugher. I didn’t feel like it. Actually, I felt like the meanest bastard in the world, but I used to

sit there and laugh, sometimes for hours. I was the center of attraction at all the social affairs.

“One of the goddamn brothers used to take me around town like a trained animal, feeding me drinks so I’d laugh. Billy was his name—Billy Collier. All the time I was laughing I felt like taking a busted beer bottle and mashing it into Billy’s face. But I just sat there and giggled—until the muscles around my mouth were so sore I couldn’t stand it. I hated that goddamn Billy.

“And do you know what happened? I’ll tell you what happened. Saw Billy in Boston last year. We had lunch together and he started reminiscing about the good old days. Billy is a third-rate salesman for a shoe manufacturer. And do you know what I told him? We were having lunch and I looked him in the eye and said, ‘Billy, all the time I was laughing—all those hours—I was simply trying to be one of the boys. I really felt like ramming a busted beer bottle down your goddamn throat!’ That’s what I told him, and you should have seen the expression on his face. I used to get so drunk—and the drunker I became, the meaner I felt. But I had to sit there and giggle because of that goddamn Billy. That bastard.”

Ed was talking pretty loud. “Say,” I said, “why don’t we take a walk to your cottage?”

“Bullshit. Stop trying to order me around. I’ll have a contest with you in anything you name. I’m a better man and I’ll prove it. Go ahead, name anything—anything at all. Except horseshoes. You son-of-a-bitch, that’s one thing I’ll concede.”

“I don’t feel like any contests. But don’t talk so loud, Ed. They can hear you inside.”

“Good! I’m going in there right now. And do you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to make a speech they’ll never forget.”

“No you’re not.”

He blinked a couple of times and stared at me. “Are you going to try to stop me?”

“I’m not going to try, Ed. I *will*.”

“You bastard, you mean it, don’t you?”

I nodded.

“You wouldn’t get away with that if I were a little drunker. Because the more I drink, the meaner I get.”

I couldn’t help smiling. “Well, I’m glad you’re not any drunker.”

“Me too. I’m dizzy, did you know that? I’m so dizzy I feel sick. I think I’ll puke.”

“Why don’t we take a walk back to your cottage.”

“I don’t give a damn,” he said and floundered to his feet, using the rail for support. “I think I’ll puke.”

I held him up and guided him toward the cottage. He said, “Do you like Nancy?”

I nodded.

“I don’t. She gives me a pain. She reminds me of Billy—always trying to lead me around by the nose. I’d like to take a busted beer bottle and ram it up her ass.” He started wheezing with laughter. “I’d fix her virtuous little red wagon, wouldn’t I? Ram it right up her ass.”

“That’s no way to talk.”

“What difference does it make? Everybody knows I’m a mean bastard when I’m drunk. I do and say mean things and never remember them later. You think I’m nuts.”

“Not at all.” Ed tripped and almost fell. I held him up. “Say, when are you and Nancy going back to Boston?”

“Tonight, right after the goddamn banquet. It’s traditional, don’t you know that by now!”

“Tonight?”

“You’re goddamn right tonight. And I’m going to drive all the way back.”

“Ed, I don’t think that’s a very good idea. After all, you’re not in the best condition.”

“Do you want to have a driving contest?”

“No, thanks.”

“I’ll have you a driving contest. You just name the road and I’ll show you a thing or two about driving.”

“Not tonight, Ed.”

“Chicken shit!”

When we were at the cottage stairs, Ed balked. He grabbed the rail and said, “I don’t want to go in there. I don’t like this goddamn place.”

“Sure you do,” I said. “Come on, let’s go inside and have a cup of coffee.”

“I don’t give a damn. I’m not going to stand here and argue with you. It’s too goddamn cold out here.”

We went inside. I fixed the coffee while Ed sat on the living room couch. When I returned from the kitchen, he was sound asleep. I left his coffee on the end table, and drank mine. Then I went back to the Mainhouse.

Joey met me on the porch. “Hey, what was all that hairy commotion about?”

“Ed wasn’t feeling well.”

“Boy, nobody’s feeling well. All this Farewell Sweet Timberline crap. That really gets me, you know it. I mean, big deal. Everybody boohooing over a ninety-acre field. That really kills me.”

“Well, they’re girls, Joey. You’ll have to excuse them.”

“Yeah. They really play it for all it’s worth, though. You’d think they’d be glad to go home. / am. I mean I had a good time up here and everything, but let’s face it: A little bit of this place goes a long way. I’m really looking forward to the old city life again—you know, live it up with the boys, go back to school, score a few points with some *older* goddamn girls.”

“That sounds like a lot of fun.” I was still thinking about Ed. I hoped he’d changed his mind about driving to Boston.

“YEA! YEA! YEA!” the campers shrieked, followed by a stampede—chairs grating and feet pounding.

“Hey, what’s all that about?” Joey asked.

“They’re probably passing out *WHEEEEEEE!*, the annual. We’d better get inside. The girls will want to immortalize their copies with our signatures.”

Just as we stepped into the kitchen, the dining room doors burst open, and about a dozen campers bolted in. Most of them were cabin twenty girls.

All the campers get pretty upset about leaving, but the cabin twenty girls take it the hardest because for them it’s final. It marks the end of a phase in their lives, and they know it. But sometimes the most fundamental truth in life is the most difficult to accept. That is: A person can’t mark time; he has to grow up.

They tore through the kitchen like a tornado, yelling and laughing with flushed faces. But their joy was brittle, almost hysterical. Shirley was the first to reach me. She pushed her annual and pen at me, then turned around and stuck her tongue out at the girls behind her.

I always try to write something special for the cabin twenty girls—something that may have meaning for them later on. But this year there was too much to say, and I didn’t know how to put it in words. “Hurry up,” Torry said from the end of the line.

I thought for another moment, smiled at Shirley and shrugged. Then I wrote, “With kindest regards and best wishes, Jay.”

The verse was pretty bad, but really it didn’t matter much. There are no magic pills or words that make growing up any easier. It takes time, and shortcuts usually lose more ground than they gain. I handed Shirley’s book back to her. Sue was next. I took her book and stared at her, trying to figure out what to say.

“Hey gang,” Dot said, “listen to what Joey wrote in my book. ‘I hope you sit on the tack of success and rise quickly.’”

Pat said, “That’s the same thing he wrote in *my* book!”

The girls laughed. But Joey, who was standing next to me, blushed violently. He was holding another book, in which he’d written, “I hope you sit ... ” He crossed it out and started over.

I turned my attention back to Sue's book. "Hurry up," Torry said.

I wrote, "Best wishes. Love, Jay. P.S. You'd better learn to swim."

We signed annuals for over an hour. When we were finished, Henna served ice cream and cookies. I was just about to dig in when Nancy came into the kitchen, wearing a shocking pink dress with about a dozen strands of beads around her neck. "I'm leaving now, Jay," she said. "I'll be in touch with you the first of the week."

"Don't worry. I'll take care of everything on this end."

"Goodbye, all," she said.

The campers started singing, "Goodbye Dear Friend." Nancy stood stiffly by the door. Then she went outside, quickly. I followed and caught up to her by the barn. "Before you go, I'd like to tell you something," I said. "I left Ed in your cottage. He's not feeling well."

"You mean he's drunk don't you?"

"Yes. I just thought it might be a good idea to wait until tomorrow before you go back to Boston."

"Jay, what am I going to do? I can't seem to understand Ed anymore. He rarely touched alcohol, and now, he's drunk almost constantly."

"I wish I had the answer, but I don't."

"When I left him this evening, he seemed—perfectly natural. Why did he start drinking?"

"I don't know."

"I used to be proud of him—and now ... " She rubbed her eyes. "What am I going to do?"

"Try to help him. He needs it."

She turned away quickly and started toward the cabin.

"He was asleep when I left him," I said.

Poor Nancy was going through hell, the same kind of hell I'd once put Olive through.

## OLIVE

“If you were going to stay up this late, you should have gone to the banquet. You’d have had a swell time.” Those were Jay’s first words when he came home, and they made me see red. It was late, almost midnight, and I was curled up on the couch, listening to the radio—music from the Northport Hillguard Hotel.

I’d have had a terrible time at the banquet but Jay thinks he knows my mind better than I do. To me, the banquet means that another summer is over, and soon I’ll be alone—snowbound—with snow outside up to your neck and no one to talk to save the mailman and Jay when he’s not cutting timber or shoveling snow off the roofs of the camp buildings.

Jay sat down next to me, patted me on the back like I was a hound dog, and picked up the paper. He said, “Would you like to go to Northport with us tomorrow when we send the campers off? You could do some shopping?”

“No.”

“Anything you want me to pick up for you?”

“No.” There *was* something, but nothing like he had in mind—no potato peeler or snow shovel. I wanted to get away. I wanted to go to a city—New York maybe—where there are people and life.

I watched him thumb through the paper, and all at once, I said, “The Erickson place in Highland is for sale.” Yes, HIGHLAND. I’d settle for Highland or even a trailer park with three trailers in it.

Jay smiled and shook his head. “Highland?” he said. “Why would we want to move to Highland?”

“Because I can’t stand another winter out here alone.”

“Olive, we’ve been through this before. We’ve got everything we need right here—as nice a house as you’d find anyplace. Much better than the Erickson place.”

“No we don’t have everything we need. You have everything *you* need! Jay, I’m no good out here, not to myself or anyone else. I’ve got to get away.”

“I really don’t see ... ”

“No, you don’t. Sometimes you’re blind. You can’t see that the only reason you’re afraid to move is because you own this house and you won’t part with anything you ‘own.’”

“Olive, that’s not true.”

“It *is*. You think you own everything around you. Your camp, your wife, your house, your boys that work for you, even your Lorrie.”

“You’re hitting below the belt,” he said softly.

“No, I’m hitting where I’ve been hit for years.”

“I don’t try to own people, Olive. You have things pretty much as you want them, in everything but this.”

“Yes, and *this* just happens to be my whole life!”

We fell quiet for a while. Then I said, “I think I’ve earned the right to move away from this tomb. I knew you had to settle things with yourself, so I waited, ever since the Gallitan fire. Every summer, I watched it come over you—your forest-fire fever. Two summers I watched you almost drink yourself into the grave. I saw it happen every summer, having nightmares, pacing the floor at night, getting edgy like a caged tiger. But I didn’t say anything. God knows I worried about you, but I let you alone. Jay, believe me, every summer has been as hard on me as it was on you.

“Then there was the fire this summer, and I thought it would be finished—all your fever and worry. But I can see now it isn’t. It’ll never be over. You’ll go to your grave thinking that you own people. You’ll still think that Lorrie belongs to you, and I belong to you, and the camp belongs to you. Let me tell you something, Jay. Nobody belongs to you. Even if Lorrie had been born to us, you’d have had to let her go someday.”

“Olive, I don’t think I own people. I ... ”



“Maybe I have no right to ask anything of you. I’m not like Henna. I didn’t give the world five sons, so maybe I should be satisfied to leave so I can steal crumbs. But I *am* asking. I’m pleading! Please, take me away from this God forsaken place. Please!”

“You don’t understand.”

“Please! Do you want me to get down on my belly and crawl to you like a whipped dog? I’ll do it!”

“No, please, Olive.” I started to get down on the floor but Jay grabbed me and straightened me up. We were standing now, facing each other.

“I didn’t know you felt that strong about it,” Jay said.

“Why? Haven’t I told you enough times? Don’t you think I know my own mind?”

“It’s not that. I just thought—well, I didn’t know you felt so strong about it.”

“But I do. What can I do to convince you? I want to move away from this place. Please!” I pressed my face against his chest. Then his arms were around me, strong and gentle at the same time. He meant well.

“Olive, when I finally moved away from Bangor, I vowed I’d never live in a city again. That’s why ... ”

“But Highland isn’t Bangor. Highland is *Highland!*”

“I know. I just wanted to tell you why I was so reluctant about moving.”

“That’s no the reason, Jay. You’re reluctant because you own this house and you’re afraid to part with anything you own.”

“That’s not true.”

“It *is*.”

He held me tighter. “All right,” he said. “I’ll see how much they want for the Erickson place.”

“Ten thousand. When will you talk to them? When?”

“Tomorrow.”

I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him. “Thank you! Thank you, Jay. I love you.”

I was so happy, I have no words to describe it.

Just imagine. We were going to live around other people. We were going  
to *live!*

## JAY

All along, I'd seen myself as a kind of philosopher-teacher, who helped others. I used to think that I came pretty close to the "good life." But now I knew that I pursued my goals at Olive's expense. You might say I'd been putting a fancy roof on a house that wasn't built yet. Olive's hell hadn't ended when I stopped drinking. It continued—simply because I was selfish.

That wasn't an easy admission to make, and I stayed awake most of the night trying to deny it. I tried to blame everything on my sterility, but I couldn't make it stick.

By the morning, I was pretty depressed. I wasn't looking forward to moving. Don't ask me why. Maybe because I associate towns and cities with Bangor, maybe because I hate to part with anything I own.

At breakfast, I tried to eat and act cheerful, but I think Olive saw through it. When I was ready to leave, she put her arms around me and said, "You've made me so happy, Jay. Thank you."

That made me feel better. I patted her on the back and kissed her. Then I drove to camp.

Sending the campers home is a sad business at best, but it was worse than ever today. The first batch—the younger campers and their counselors—left on the 11:45 and it was a pretty rough experience, but not nearly as rough as the one that afternoon with Joey, Roy, Ann, Sue, and the rest of the cabin twenty girls leaving.

Shortly before we were ready to leave camp that afternoon, I went to the Miltons' cabin to see if they needed any help with their luggage. But I didn't go inside. They were arguing. Ann was saying, "I just asked if you thought this dress was the right thing to wear. I didn't know a question like that would send you into a blind rage."

"Swell. Conservatively speaking, I've told you at least a dozen times what I think of that Pansy Yokum outfit; however, you're obviously going to keep after

me until I say what you want to hear, so I surrender. Ann, I think it's absolutely divine—probably the most stunning outfit I've seen in years. There.”

“I should have known better than to ask. I ... ”

I didn't want to hear any more, so I started back to the truck. It had all been drawn out for Roy in simple diagrams, but he didn't see it. He was still going down a one-way street. Poor Ann.

Finally everything was loaded and we were ready to leave. Regie and Torry rode in the cab of the big truck with me. They wailed all the way to Northport, sputtering about a camp reunion, and grieving for their wonderful times together. I couldn't help thinking that years from now, when they can't get worked up over a movie idol, when they can say goodbye without soaking their handkerchiefs, and their lives take on the inevitable ordered bleakness that goes with “maturity,” they'll look back on today and think, “How utterly juvenile I was,” never knowing the truth.

At the depot, we unloaded the baggage and waited. We stood in the afternoon sun on the red brick platform. We didn't talk much. The train was late. Finally, I saw it in the distance and heard its thin whistle. The summer was over. Tomorrow, the camp would be musty and dead, inhabited by the wind and the ravens. I dreaded tomorrow.

As the train drew closer, I closed my eyes. I heard it pull into the station, hissing steam and rumbling slowly over the ties. I heard a door open and the stairs clank into position. A voice over the loudspeaker was naming the stops. The summer was over.

I opened my eyes and said, “Let's go.” One by one, they climbed into the green coaches. I stood at the foot of the stairs where I shook hands with them and said goodbye. The cabin twenty girls were at the end of the line. When their turn came, I swallowed hard and forced a smile. One by one they went by me—Dot, still on crutches, Shirley, Cindy. They all had something nice to say. I'd miss them.

The last of the campers was Sue, and when I reached out to shake hands with her, I almost choked up. I wanted to tell her that she was a wonderful girl, but I didn't trust my voice. So I smiled. So much was left unsettled and unsaid, but all I could do was smile.

She stared at me. Then her eyes crumpled and she threw her arms around me. "You're the kindest person I know," she said in a hoarse whisper. I kissed her on the cheek and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to let go. But I did. I pushed her away and managed to say, "Here, here. What are you trying to do, soak my good shirt?"

She tried to smile. Then she ran up the stairs, turned around, and whispered, "Goodbye."

Oh God.

It wasn't over yet. There were still Roy and the others. Mrs. Jones was first. She smiled and held out her hand. "I feel that you've done a lot for Joey. Thank you."

"Pleasure was mine," I said quickly. "Only wish I had a son like him."

Ann was next. She wore a pretty blue dress. I took a deep breath. I'd probably never see her again. "Jay," she said, "I ... I don't know what to say." She wiped her eyes with a jerky movement. "I've never even thanked you for saving our lives. I ..." She looked down. "You've ... we ... oh, I don't know. If you're ever in Ann Arbor—and you don't stop in—I'll never speak to you again." She kissed me quickly on the cheek and ran up the stairs.

I wanted it to end. Roy shook hands with me. "Well, Dad," he said, "I guess we said goodbye before, but ..." He shrugged and smiled. "Well, anyhow, thanks for everything."

Then, the last one—Joey. Joey. He dug his finger into his ear and said, "Hey, Jay, are you sure you won't need me to stick around a couple of days, you know, help with the pier and all?"

"No, thanks. Charley and I can manage."

“Oh *him*. Well, what about the wagons? I mean, what are you going to do, just let them sit here at the station? How are you going to get them back to camp?”

“Don’t worry, Joey. We’ll take care of that tomorrow.”

There was a pause, and we stared at each other. Then he said in a high voice, “Jay? I don’t want to leave, no kidding.”

“Joey, I wish you could stay, too, but who needs you more? Me or your mother?”

He looked down. “I guess she does. Look, I don’t want you to think that I’m anything like those stupid girls or anything, but I feel bad, I mean, I really feel awful. What a blast. You know?”

“I feel as sad as you do, Joey. But I’m glad, too. Because I think we’re both a little better for having known each other. I know I’m better for it.”

“You mean that?”

“Of course. You helped me remember a lot I’d forgotten, and more important, you’re the kind of son I wish I had.” Surprisingly enough my voice was clear, without any tremor. “Yes, Joey. I’m a lot richer for having known you.”

“Coming from you that’s something.” The train whistle sounded and Joey jumped. “Hey, Jay? You know my Stanley hammer? Well, I mean, I won’t be using it much anymore. Going to college and all. So I ... well I ... left it on your workbench. I want you to have it—you know—sort of a gift.”

“That’s one of the nicest gifts anyone has ever given to me.” I had no gift for him. I’d never finished repairing the old radio. “I’ll think of you every time I use it—and use it I will.”

“ALL ABOARD!”

Joey looked frightened. He said, “Goodbye, Jay,” and ran up the stairs.

The train whistle sounded again and the train started moving—handkerchiefs and familiar faces in every window. I stood there waving and trying to smile. There went Sue and Dot. There went Roy and Ann. There went Joey and his mother.

I stood there a long time. After the train was out of sight, after you couldn't even hear the clacking sound of ties anymore, I stuffed my hands in my pockets and started back across the brick of the platform. I walked back to the truck and leaned against the tailgate. A few short minutes ago, that truck had been alive and squirming. Now it was empty except for a lipstick tube one of the campers must have dropped.

I wasn't ready to go back to camp yet. I didn't want to face it today, so I started walking—across the parking lot—away from the depot. I kept picturing the way the camp would look tomorrow—eerie, silent, with the buildings, my buildings, empty. There wouldn't be a sound, except the noise of the pumps, the hum of the generator, and the eternal wind. I'd pick up the trash the campers left—empty Kotex boxes, drawings, letters, clothes, newspapers. The camp would even smell abandoned—smell like a bunch of dead buildings in the middle of the forest.

I tried to look at the positive side of it, but I couldn't shake the past. I tried to think of the nice peaceful autumn days that were coming, but it was no good.

I found myself walking across the street and into a coffee shop. I was alone. My life was wrapped up in the lives of other people who were now gone, leaving me alone with nothing but stale memories of the things we'd shared together—not the living part of life, but the faded after-image. Funny, I used to be contented with the memories, but now, I didn't even want to kindle them and try to keep them alive.

I sat down at the counter and rubbed my eyes. I wanted to forget that Joey had given me his hammer—his symbol of manhood. I wanted to forget that I'd probably never see him again. I wanted to forget that I was alone.

“Yes?” the waitress said.

“Coffee—black,” I said. As soon as I looked at her, I knew she was familiar. But I couldn't place her for a second, not until she cocked her head and stared at me. “Carol. The drama counselor.” I could scarcely believe it—I'd found her.

“Hello,” she said flatly. She looked very pregnant now, and gaunt.

“I thought you went back to New York,” I said. “I came back that night and looked all over town for you. Where did you go?”

She blushed and shrugged. “I didn’t leave town. I got a room down the street.”

“I was very worried about you.”

“You’ll get your money back, don’t worry.”

“Carol, I wasn’t referring to that. You shouldn’t be working here. You should be at home resting.”

“I’m sorry, but I *do* have my obligations. Excuse me.” She plopped a couple of doughnuts on a plate and took them to the other end of the counter.

When she returned with my coffee, I said, “Why didn’t you go back to New York? Wouldn’t you have been taken care of better there?”

“Not much to go back to.”

“Well, are you staying with friends here?”

She gave me a haughty little smile, and said, “No, I’m *not* staying with friends.” Her tone was defiant.

“But ... ”

“Excuse me.” She went back to the other end of the counter. I only wanted to help her, but she was trying to avoid me. The poor kid seemed suspicious of everyone. Finally, she took a lunch tray to an empty booth and sat down. I walked over and asked if I could join her. “Sure, sit down.”

“Carol, I’m not trying to embarrass you. I ... ”

“I’m beyond embarrassment. See?” She held up her left hand. On it was a cheap wedding band. “It keeps nosy people from asking too many questions. I tell them my husband is in the army—over in Europe.” She smiled, bitterly.

“When is the baby due?”

“Couple of months. Oh, by the way, I read about your exploits in the paper. Your wife must be very proud of you.”

“Carol, should you be working—in your condition?”



Her face softened. “I don’t know. I get tired.” Her tone was no longer defiant, just anxious.

“What are your plans, Carol? Are you going to put the baby up for adoption?”

“No.” She pushed her hair back and ran her cheek over the collar of her uniform. “I’m a martyr.”

I was proud of her. “Well, who’s going to help you take care of him?”

“Me.”

“Do you have enough money?”

“Is ninety-five dollars enough?”

“You know it isn’t.”

“Then I don’t have enough, do I? Pardon me. My Salisbury steak is getting cold.”

She ate slowly. My first impulse was to say, “Come on, young lady, you’re coming home with me.” But that wouldn’t be fair to Olive. I wanted to help Carol so much I could taste it, but my first obligation was to Olive.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” I said and walked to the phone booth. When I dug in my pockets for change, I noticed that my palms were sweating. How I wanted Olive to say “yes.”

I dialed and waited while the phone rang. It rang four times. Then Olive answered, in a muffled voice. “Hello.”

“Olive, it’s me, Jay. I’m in Northport. Say, do you remember me talking about the drama counselor who had to leave camp because she was pregnant?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve found her. She’s working in a coffee shop in Northport. The baby’s due in a month or two. Olive, the poor kid doesn’t have a soul in the world, no relatives or friends—no family. She’s scared stiff, but she’s putting up a front. She needs help, Olive.”

I waited. Olive didn't answer. "Olive," I said, "I want to take her home with me. The poor kid must be going out of her mind. I want to help her. But I don't want to do anything without your approval."

"I—I don't even know her, Jay."

"Well, I don't either, but the poor kid needs help."

"Is this the only way we can help her?"

"I don't know. But ..." I wiped my forehead. "I don't know how to put it. She should be proud to be pregnant. This should be the pinnacle of her life and she should hold her head high. Instead, she's ashamed, defensive and just plain scared silly. I think we should change that if we can. We'd have given almost anything to have what she's got. We'll never get it, but ... but, we can at least help her realize what it's worth. I don't know how to put it, Olive. But do you see what I'm trying to say?"

"I think so."

"Well? How about it?"

"Jay, I'm afraid."

"Of what? She seems like a nice kid. I don't think we'll have ..."

"I'm not afraid of her, Jay. I'm afraid of you."

"Me?"

"Yes. I'm afraid you won't be able to let go. You won't own them, you know. The child will belong to the mother, and the mother will belong to herself. When they want to leave, they should leave."

"Olive, I don't think I own people. I want to help them. When they want to leave, I'll give them my blessings, and it will be finished."

"I only wish I believed that."

"I promise, Olive! Honest."

We were both silent and I could hear my heart pounding. Finally, she said, "All right, Jay. Bring her home, but *please* remember, they're not yours."

"I'll remember, don't worry."

I hung up and went back to the booth. Carol didn't look up when I sat down. "My wife and I would like you to come and live with us." She looked up and stopped chewing. "We're moving into a big house on the outskirts of Highland. You won't have to pay a cent for rent, and you can leave whenever you want to. If you want to work after you have the baby, we'll be glad to take care of him for you. If you don't want to work, that's all right, too."

"You ... you want *me* to live with you?" Her voice was sharp. "No."

"Please. You'd be doing us a great service by letting us help you. We were never able to have children of our own. Please. We won't interfere. You can leave whenever you want, but we'd love to have you for as long as you want to stay."

"You're joking, aren't you? You want me to say I'd love to stay with you, so you can tell me it's a joke. Isn't that what you want? Isn't it?"

"No, Carol, I'm serious. We want you to live with us, believe me, we do."

She stared at me and then closed her eyes. "Please don't joke," she said, almost crying. "Aren't things bad enough? Don't you think I'm frightened enough? My hand trembles so much I can hardly hold anything. Go away. Don't joke with me."

"But I'm *not* joking. We want you ... and your baby ... to live with us."

"You mean you *actually* want *me* to live in your house? I don't believe you. You can't. Nobody wants me, and I don't blame them."

"We do, Carol. Honestly, we do."

"I don't have a friend in the world. No one. I was even thinking of killing myself. I didn't know—I just wanted to die and get it over with."

"No, Carol. We want you to live with us. We do."

"Why? What's your motive? What's the catch?"

"No catch, Carol. Will you?"

"You're not joking!" I was getting through to her.

"I'm not joking."

"You really ... you really *want* me?"

“We really want you. Will you?”

“Y ... yes, yes. If you’re serious. I was going to kill myself. I just wanted to die and get it over with.”

She started crying, the poor kid.

I reached across the table and clenched her hand. “You’re coming home with me right now!” I went to the counter and told her boss that she was quitting. Then I got Carol’s coat, slung it over her shoulders, and with my arm around her we walked out of the restaurant and across the square.

And not until we approached the depot did I begin to realize fully that we were going to have a baby in the house. Hot dog. Oh, sure, they’d leave some day, but it would be worth it for the time we’d have them—maybe only a year, maybe ten.

Everyone comes and goes, but that’s as it should be—that’s life. And life seems like a pretty wonderful thing to me right now. We’re approaching the truck and the station wagons, lined up next to the depot. Carol is still shuddering with sobs. But she’ll feel better at home, where she belongs. Home. We’re not walking fast. We’ve plenty of time, a whole lifetime. Olive will be waiting for us when we get home. And tomorrow, after Charley and I finish taking down the pier, we’ll all drive to Northport and buy things for the baby.

Autumn is coming, the beautiful twilight season with its summer sun and winter breeze. Then comes winter—cold and sharp—the best winter ever.

## END

Let us be reckless of our words and worlds,  
And spend them freely as the tree his leaves;  
And give them where the giving is most blest.  
What should we save them for,—a night of frost? ...  
All lost for nothing, and ourselves a ghost.

“One star fell and another” LVII  
Conrad Aiken