

1947

Three one-act plays

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HOWLEY

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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Thesis

THREE ONE-ACT PLAYS

by

John Walter Howley
(A.B. Norwich University, 1944)
submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1947

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APR 1947

to

Approved
by

First Reader..... *Winstow S. Loveland*

Professor of *English*

Second Reader..... *Gerald W. Brue*

Professor of *English*



THE ISLAND

The scene is the interior of a fisherman's "shack"; the country is the Cape or coast of Southern Massachusetts.

Barbara, a prim housewife in her late thirties sits in the only chair of the sparsely furnished room. Her features are gaunt and drawn; she gazes into the smoking fireplace.

It is March, the wind still drones and sings about the corners of the house. The door is suddenly thrown open and Sam Evans, a great hulking man bursts into the room. He moves swiftly across to the rocker and pats Barbara on the shoulder.

Barbara. Why, Sam Evans! My I'm surprised to see you.

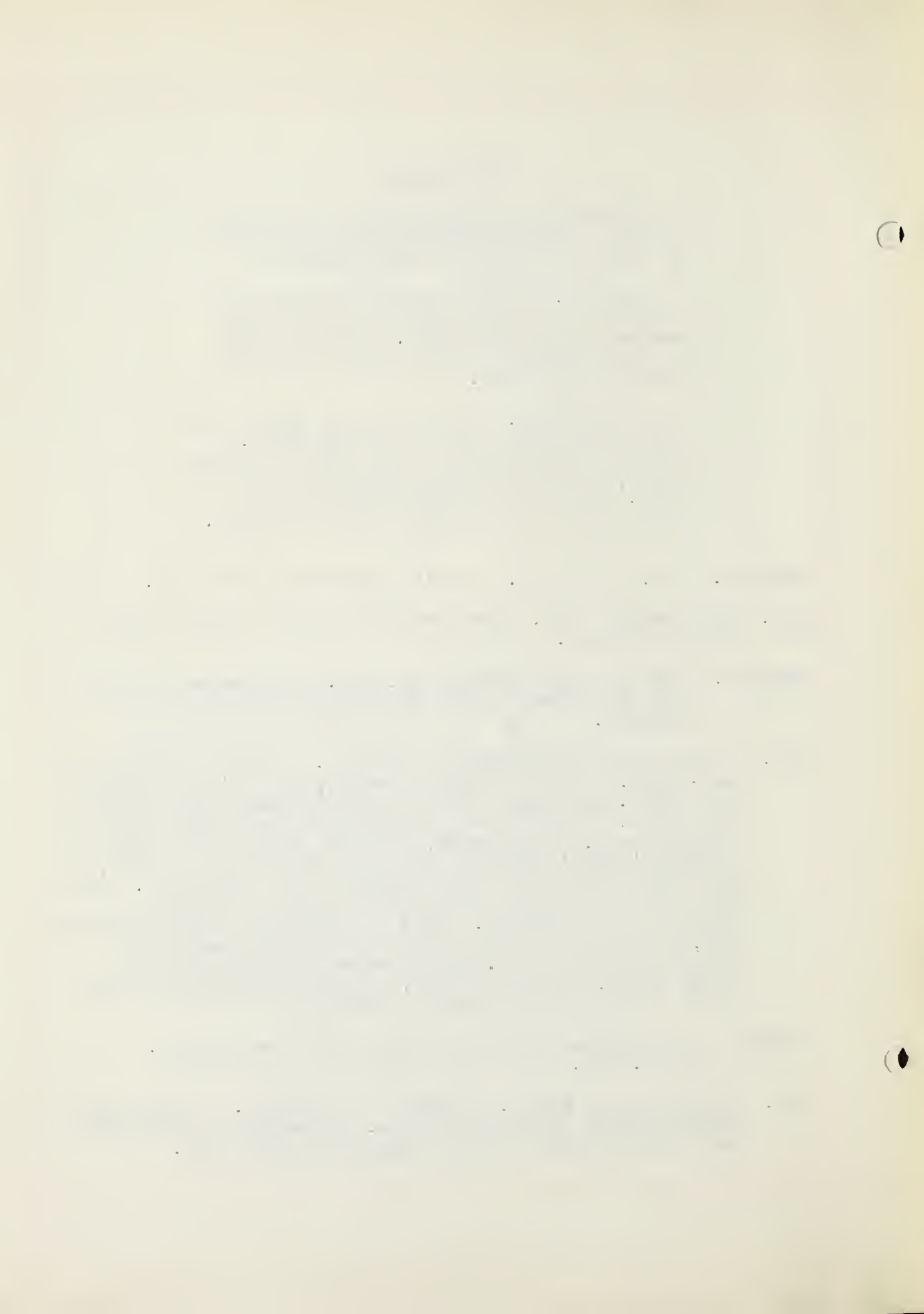
Sam. You shouldn't be. Been commin' on this island since first snowfall.

Barbara. That was four months ago, Sam. I remember you just sat over there by the fireplace and glared at my brother.

Sam. I don't like your brother, Barbara. I came over here to ask- Well, we ain't violent people, but we're stubborn and quick. My Uncle John on the mainland seen a girl he like once. He found out her name and he walked up to her and said, "Lena Pratt, will you marry me?" She said somethin' about never havin' laid eyes on him before, and after some more woman fandangerin' said, "No". Well, he took all his money out 'un the bank and went to Boston on a big spree. When he came back, lookin pretty bad, she ran up to him and told him she'd marry him right then and there. John looked at her and said: "Lena Pratt, you go to Hell." Bein' stubborn is a bad trait, so- Will you marry me Barbara?"

Barbara (clutches her heart and sinks into the rocker).
Oh Sam! Sam!

Sam. (Stroking her hair). Figured it would be. I know your brother don't think much of me. Me bein' a "hard-shell man", as he calls me: but I ain't marryin' him.



Barbara. Why, I don't know what to say.

Sam. With most women it would be "yes" or "no"; with you, its whether you'll come to Hingham or stay here and dry up the rest of your life.

Barbara. Hingham?

Sam. I had my eye on a wharf up there for three year. Got a telegram this mornin' sayin' the owner is goin' to sell. I got to go and grab it, and I ain't never comin' back.

Barbara. You're my only friend.

Sam (Misunderstanding). For three year I been breakin' my back diggin' up Quohogs. I had my eye on the place. When you came back in the fall it put me to thinkin'. I been workin' hard, Barbara, although I'm not one to complain. That's a good wharf up there. The Pollack and Tuna is commencin' to run on the North Shore. But I have to buy today; and I won't never be a shell-back no more.

Barbara. But this proposal, Sam. It's a surprise.

Sam. Ever since you cam back, I wanted to ask. I've been comin' over, but I felt ashamed 'cause I didn't have no real prospects. You don't think I come to see that pesky brother of yourn?

Barbara. Don't say unkind things about Robert.

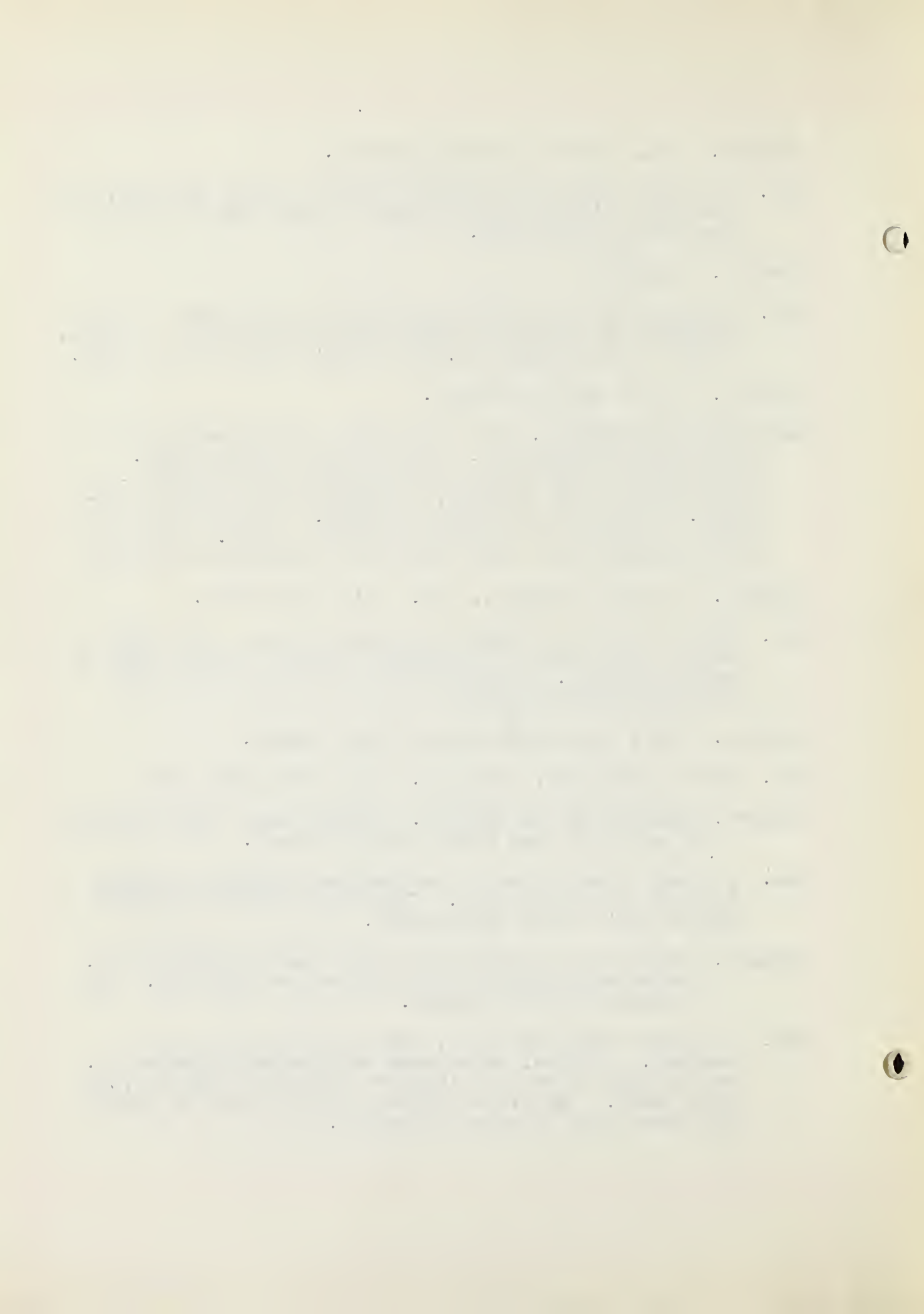
Sam. He's a worthless, lazy man. Well, will you come?

Barbara. (Walking to the window). But how can I leave Robert? He wouldn't know what to do all alone.

Sam. I always thought when a man reached eighteen he ought to ship out for himself. That there Robert is thirty and he ain't never shipped out.

Barbara. This is the first time I ever seen him happy, Sam. He's been bringin' in a lobster now and then. He's just waitin' for Spring.

Sam. "A lobster now and then". Why his dory ain't even caulked. A school of minnows could make a home in it. Bart Sprague's got his lobster pots sunk right on your front door. That's the biggest insult there is when a man sinks pots in your own harbor.



Barbara. He's just waitin' for Spring.

Sam. Comin' in I see three pieces of kindlin' on the block and I bet you did that!

Robert (Enters, he is a thin erratic man in his thirties, aged beyond his years with nameless worry. You feel that he acts out everything; there is little sincerity in his attempt at being impressive. He speaks to Sam from the doorway). You get out of here. I told you before to get out.

Barbara. Robert, please don't.

Sam (Moving toward him). Are you threatnin' violence, Robby boy?

Robert (Moving behind his sister). If'n she weren't here I'd throw you off'n this island.

Sam. Would you step into the bedroom so he can try, Barbara.

Barbara. Oh, why must you fight with anyone that speaks to me, Robert. (She gasps; Sam assists her to the rocker. Robert makes no motion to help her).

Sam. You feelin' under the weather?

Robert. You get out. It's her heart. You did this- I ought to-

Sam. Just lean your head back and take it easy, Barbara.

Robert. (Clenching his fists and trembling). Will you get out now?

Barbara (To Robert). Please go.

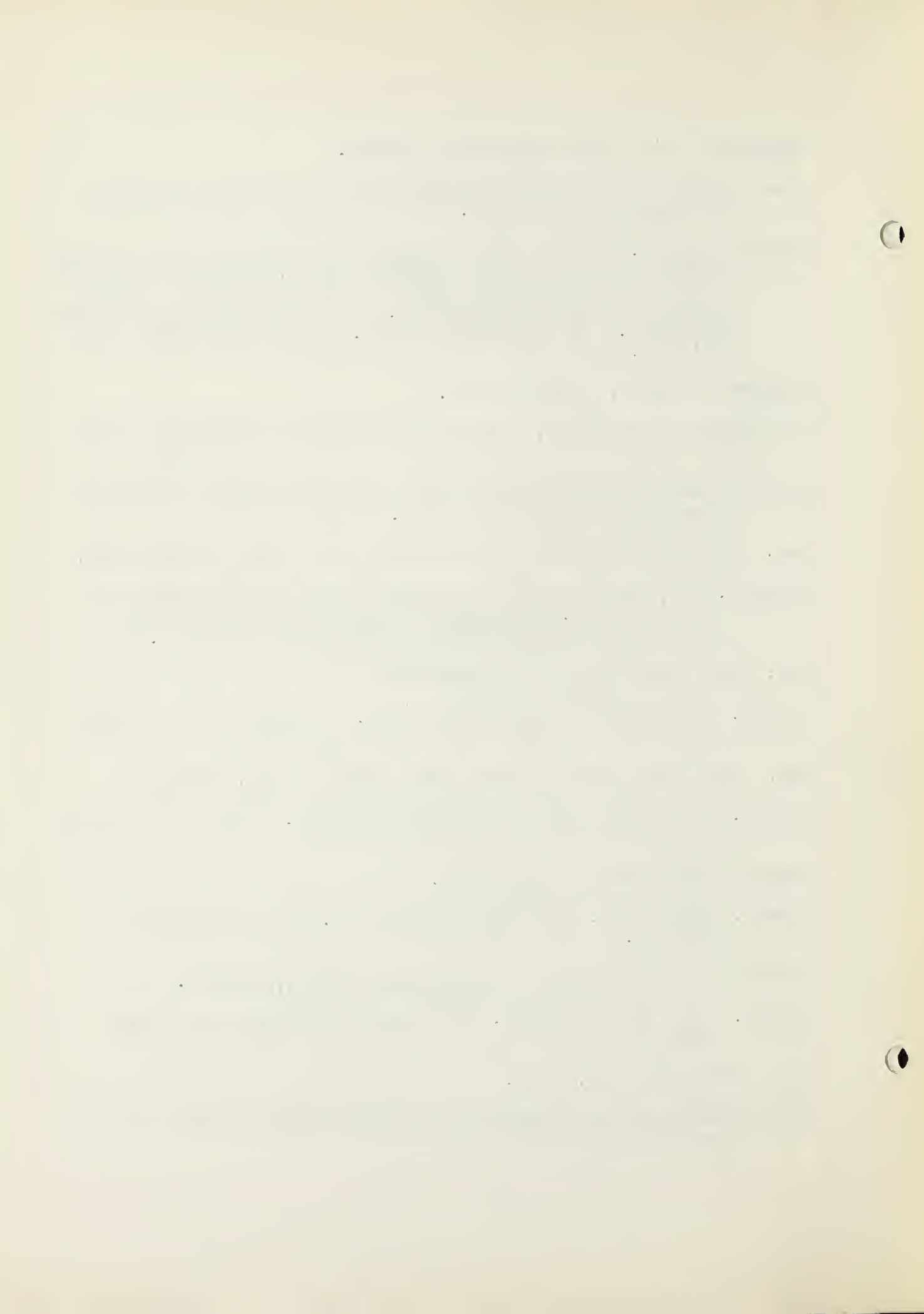
Robert. See! See! She wants you to go. She wants you to go too.

Barbara. No, stay, Sam. Go out for a while, Robert.

Robert. Me? You mean him. Oh, Barbara, do you want some help?

Sam. She means you. Git!

Robert (Shocked and retreating, he stands unbelievably at the door and exits). Me?



Sam. Do you feel better now?

Barbara. It felt so good to have a strong arm around me.

Sam. It ain't like me to say nothin' again a man; but did you notice he didn't even make a move to help you?

Barbara. He meant to, Sam. Robert's a good boy.

Sam. A boy at thirty! He's a worthless man.

Barbara. He means well. Robert's a good boy.

Sam. I don't care nothin' about him. I'm goin' to marry you and he don't count.

Barbara. Don't say that, Sam. I've got to tell you somethin'.

Sam. I don't rightly care to hear nothin'. I see now I got to tell you to come with me.

Barbara. Haven't you ever wondered why we came back here, Sam?

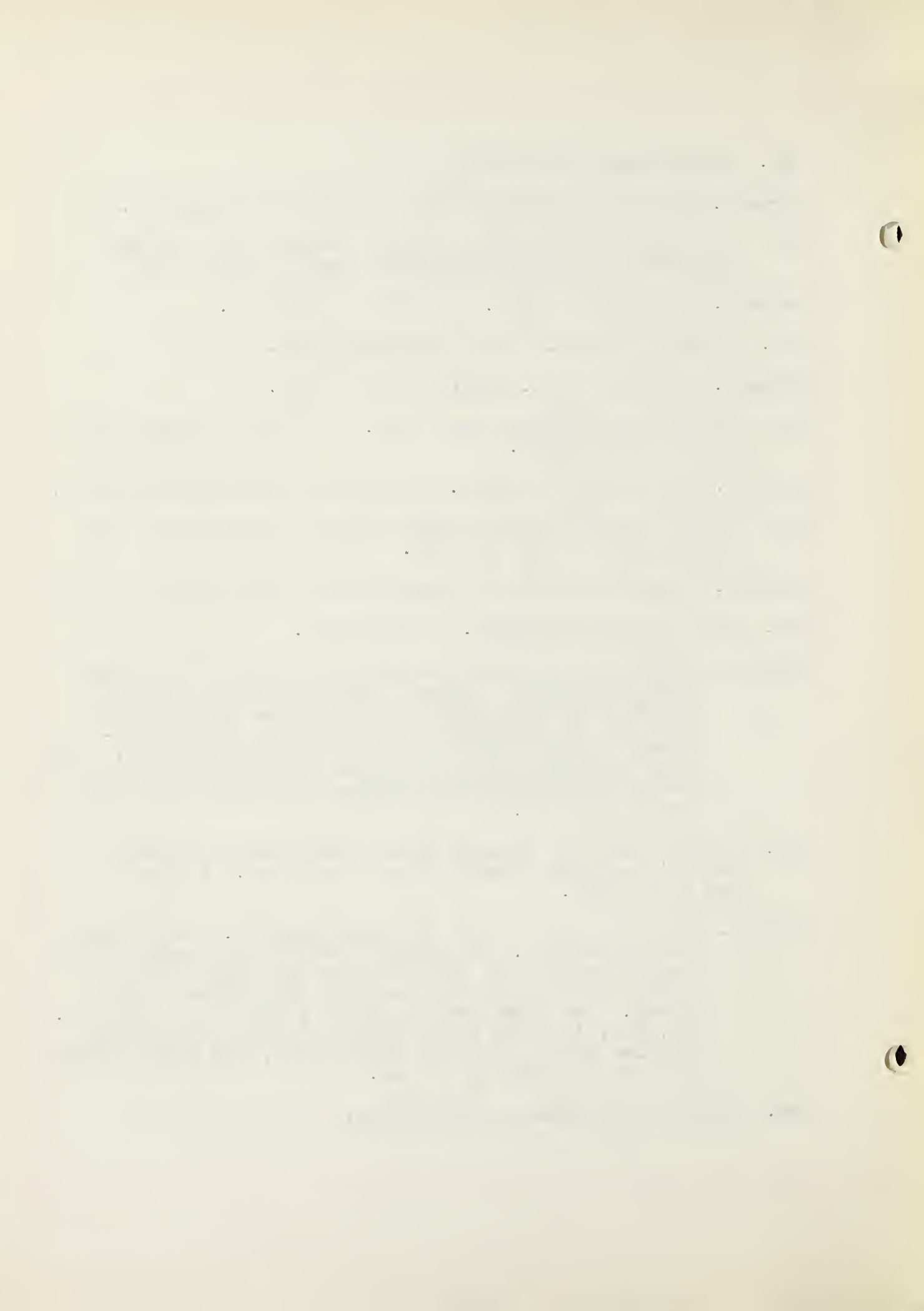
Sam. Lots of folks wondered. I never did.

Barbara. Seems as though ever since Ma died out here things have gone wrong. Robert said he couldn't stand it no more, and we moved to Barnstable. Sold what was left and raised enough for a store in Barnstable. Robert didn't seem to have no head for business. He said we ought to go to Boston - away from everything - He got that idea, and the store was lost to us. We went to Boston.

Sam. I recollect Bart Sprague said he seen you and Robert walkin' down some street there a year ago. I guess it was a year ago.

Barbara. We both went to work in a shoe factory. Poor Robert was so unhappy. He couldn't stand bein' indoors and away from the sun, and the boss was unkind to him. Robert said if he could only be outside he'd make money. The boss was so mean to Robert I quit my job. Oh, Sam, it seems every place we'd go people would dislike Robert, or he'd get an idea, and forget about what he was supposed to do.

Sam. I'll be he flopped at everything.



Barbara. It wasn't his fault though. He just has never been happy. We even hired ourselves out to a lumber camp in Maine. I was cook. Robert just couldn't stand the heavy work. Finally we had to come back. There wasn't no place we could go. Now I think Robert's got a start.

Sam. He ain't done a thing all winter. How come you left here? I remember you when I was a shaver jumpin' ice cakes in the Bay. Why did you ever leave?

Barbara (After a silence). Robert wanted to go.

Sam. It 'pears you don't want to tell me. It's all right though.

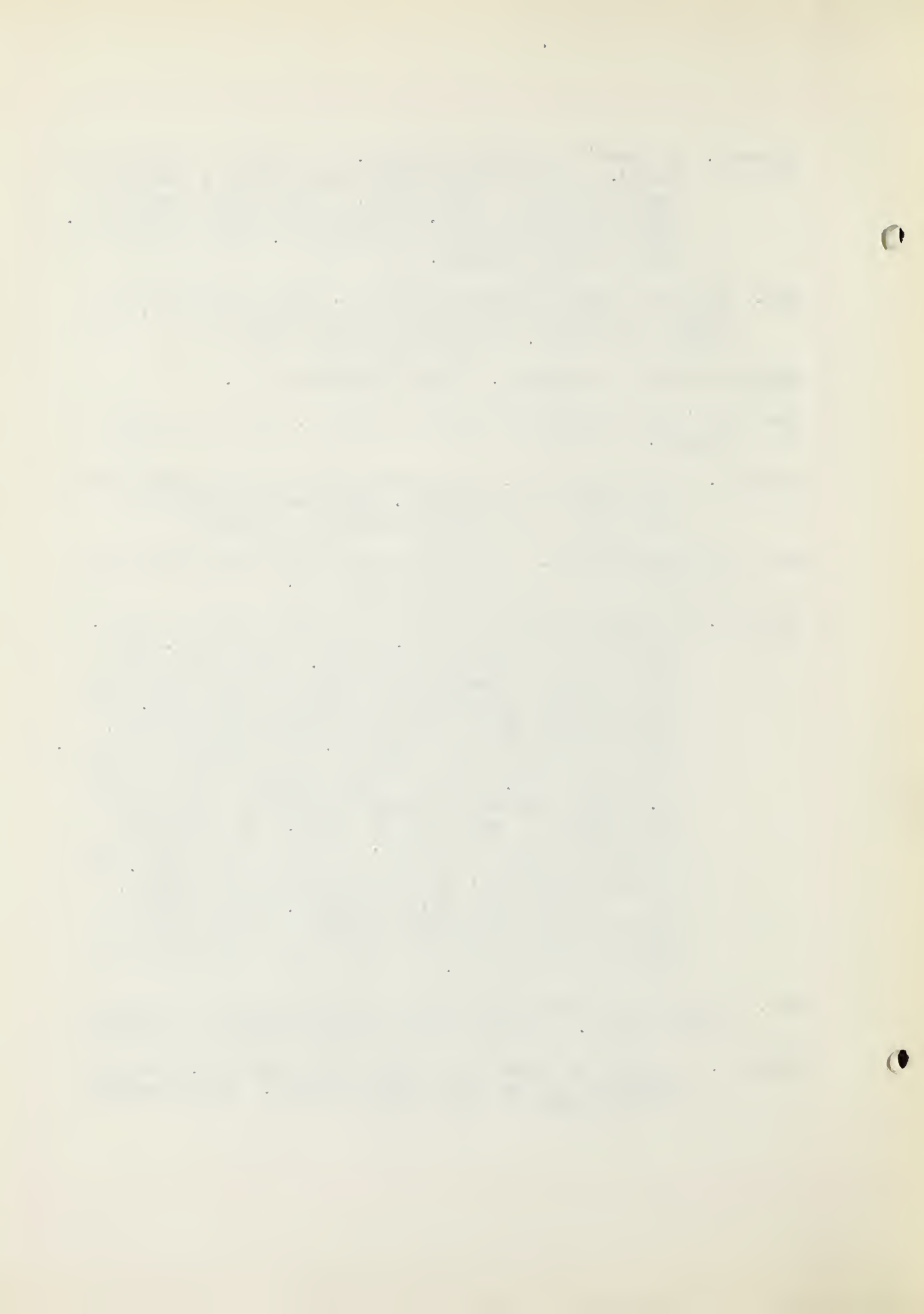
Barbara. Oh, I do, I do. It's been so long. My father had a big fleet of trawlers. They were really my mother's. Her folks was great fishermen.

Sam. I remember that. We used to dive off'n them when they unloaded their catch on the mainland.

Barbara. My mother began to do all the work after a while. We lost boat after boat. I never knew why. Pop would just sit there and dream. After the boats was all gone it seemed as though he took some hope and he'd take Robert out lobsterin' with him. Ma and me would watch them row around a little bit, then they'd just come back in, usually with nothin'. Then Pa emptied someone's traps by mistake- it was a mistake, Sam, and the whole mainland knew about it. Folks sneered so that we couldn't even go to town anymore. Pa left one night. We never did know what happened to him. Ma must have died from a broken heart- she was all choked up inside. But she seen somethin' of her own family in Robert. Ma's folks was all great workers. She seemed real pleased when Robert would tinker around with the nets; I think it was the only time I ever seen her smile after Pa left.

Sam. Folks are pretty cruel when they know there's a lobster thief around. But why did you ever stay with Robert?

Barbara. Ma made me promise to stay with him, Sam. She saw somethin' of her own family in him. All he needs is a start.



Sam. I remember some talk about your father. I didn't pay no attention to it even when I was young. So this bein' the only place you had you came back here.

Barbara. That's about it. Sam, Robert has some great plans for this Spring.

Sam. Don't you see that he's goin' to keep on plannin', and never get nowhere. No, Barbara, from the little I heard, I'd say he was like your father.

Barbara (With a sudden force). No! No! It isn't the boy's fault because people always give him a wrong turn.

Sam. I only had one run-in with Robert; but I can tell you that every plan he has that don't work out, that the other feller is always to blame.

Barbara. But more and more I see he's like Ma.

Sam. By the Lord Harry, he ain't done a thing all Winter.

Barbara. He's got big plans. Why he collected driftwood all Winter.

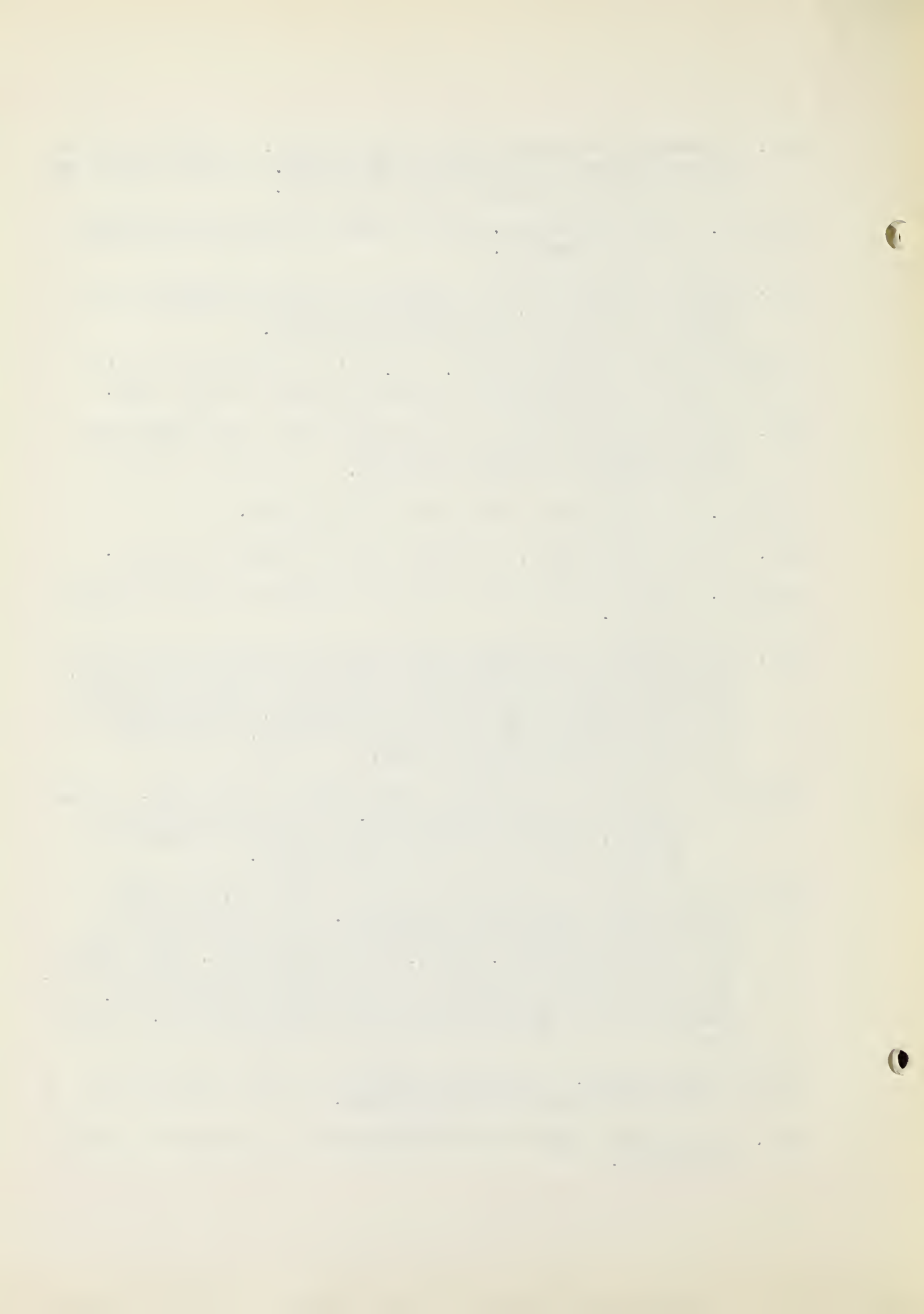
Sam. Why Barbara, them high tides swept it up; he ain't never brought none up here has he? You don't have to answer. Why, I'll bet he ain't even scraped up any of them Quo-hogs been washed in by the Nor'Easters. (Robert enters the door with two lobsters in his hands. He stands glaring contemptuously at Sam.)

Barbara. No; but he's becomin' more like Ma every day. I can see that light in his eyes. He's just waitin' for Spring. He has brought some lobsters in already and the snow ain't off'n the ground.

Sam. He's as much on his feet as he'll ever be. Men like him always sponge off'n somebody. I'll bet its you that's done all the work since your Ma died; just like she did for your Pa. Well, that's over now. You marry me and leave him to make a man of himself on this island. He never will as long as he can blame somebody else. When he can't blame somebody he'll start on you. You'll see.

Robert (Screaming). I come back here to be nice and I find you tryin' to break up our home.

Sam. I think you ought to be horsewhipped for keepin' a girl like this.



Barbara. Why, Robert, where did you get the lobsters? My, they're big. See how big they are, Sam?

Robert. You be careful of her heart.

Sam. There ain't nothin' wrong with her heart 'ceptin maybe its too big to be cooped up in this place. She's alone too much. Women are like that.

Barbara. Sam!

Sam. Course its true. You need some children and a husband to give all your love to. You need to give your heart out. Its too big and gentle to live in this rock and sand. She's comin' with me, Robert.

Robert. Is this true? After I worked and slaved for a home. Look, I been slowly building pots and I got a real start. I've been workin' -

Sam. Course it's true. I bet you ain't never worked a good day in your life.

Robert. You tell him, Barbara. You tell him how hard I've worked. Barbara I've got a real business started. 'Course it ain't much, even though it is only "shell backs"; but I've sold a few, and when Spring comes we'll be rich. And she don't need no one to lean on- she's got me!

Sam. Why, you ignorant sculpin-head. Why do you suppose she stayed with you? Do you think she liked to hear tell how unkindly people was toward you? 'Cause she always liked to hear you tell how you was always goin' to do somethin'?

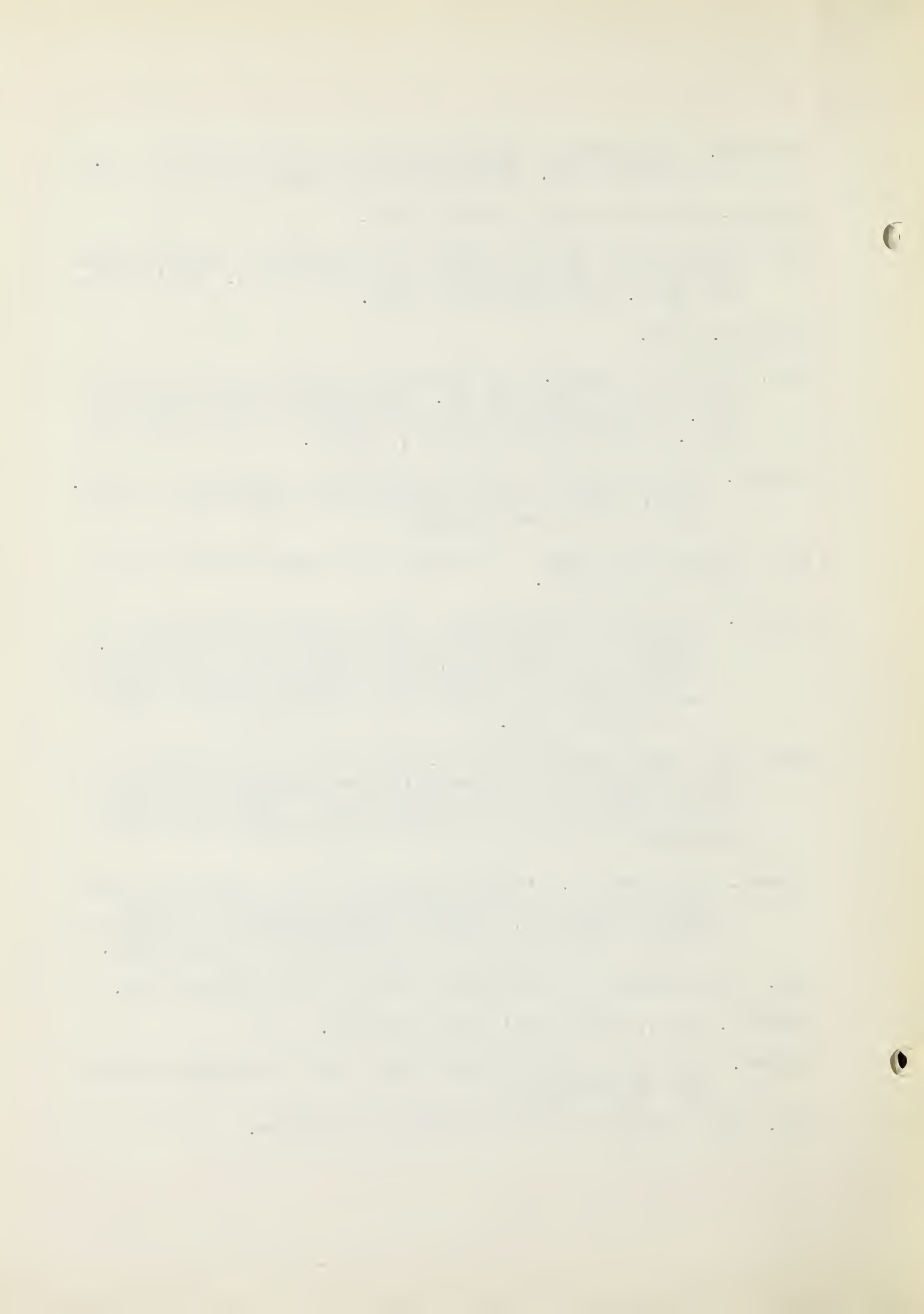
Robert. (With pride). 'Cause she know'd some day I'd be real rich; and I've already started, and it ain't even begun to warm up. Barbara needs somebody to watch out for her and it ain't no clam-stinkin' man like you.

Sam. Disregardin' the insults, Robert, I'll tell you why.

Barbara. Sam, please don't say anything.

Robert. Just what have you told him? Ain't I always worked and supported you?

Sam. It's 'cause your mother made her promise.



Robert. That ain't true. It's because she knew I'd be able to help Barbara out.

Sam. Your mother made Barbara promise to keep you until you got a start. Your mother could see you was your father all the way through. I never seen your old man, but I can tell you're the spittin' image of him, inside and out.

Robert. My father never worked- well, I do! I got a start too.

Sam. (To Barbara). There shouldn't be no problem now, Barbara. He says himself he's got a start, and I'm so happy I won't argue with him.

Barbara. Do you really have a start? (She is interrupted by the entrance of Bart Sprague, a hardy lobsterman who opens the door without knocking. Robert drops his lobsters and rushes into the bedroom door).

Sam. Hello, Bart. What are you doin' on the island? This here's Bart Sprague. He's the one that seen you and Robert in Boston.

Barbara. I remember Bart when I was a little girl. Why didn't you stop us in Boston, Bart?

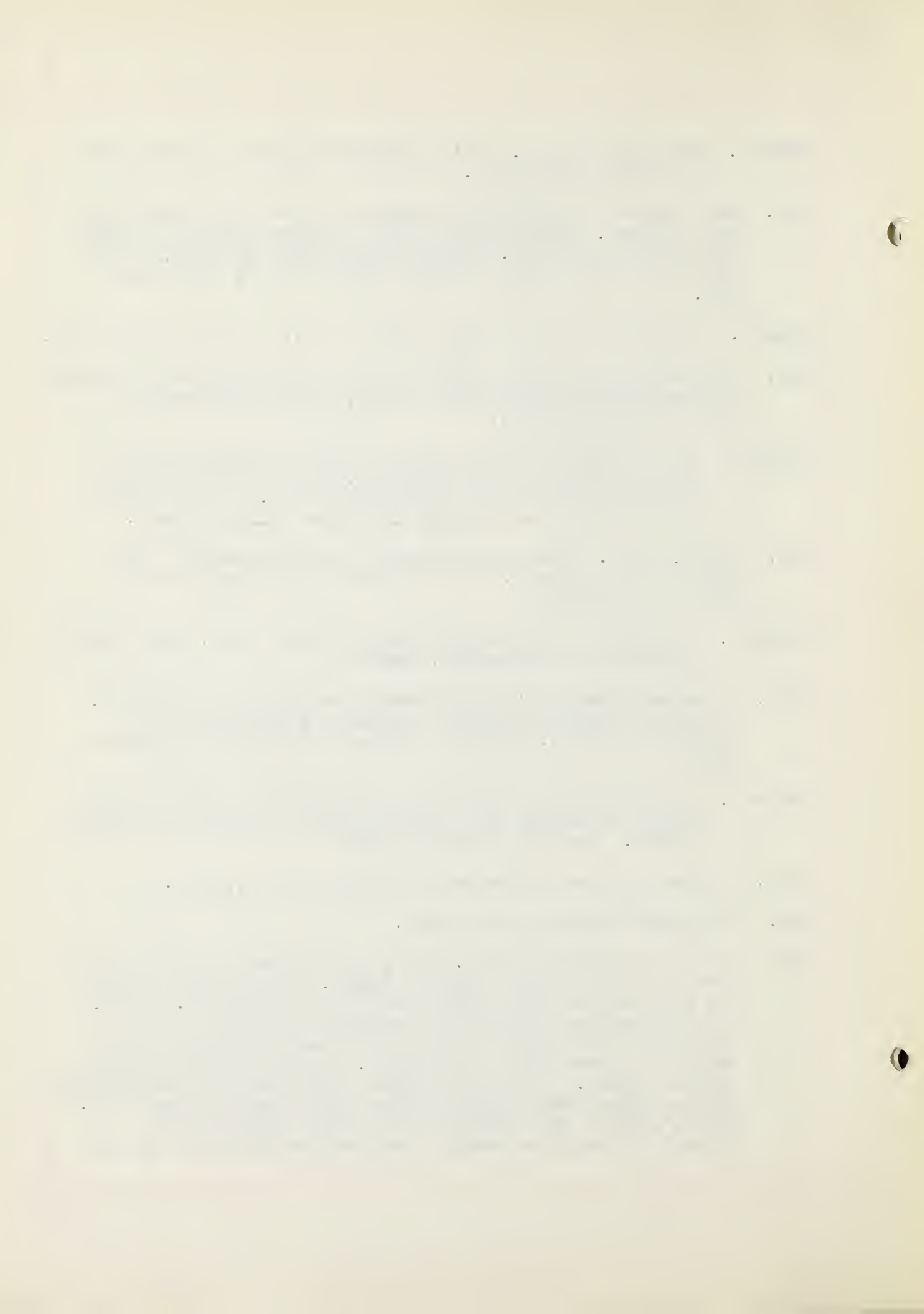
Bart. I never thought I'd have reason to speak to you, Mam. (Barbara sits down again, thinking perhaps of the other townfolk). Is your brother still in the house, Mam?

Barbara. Yes, he just stepped into the bedroom. Why? (Bart makes no answer but simply glares toward the bedroom door). What has Robert done?

Bart. I guess you're concerned as much as he is, Mam.

Sam. I'll drag him out here, Bart.

Bart. T'ain't necessary, Sam. Mam, as you know, or maybe you don't, I got yeller lobster buoys. Them's pretty easy to spot cause I got a big red "S" on them too. Well, since your brother ain't trappin the waters right in front of your door, I been usin' them ledges and been getting a good haul all winter. Lately I ain't been gittin' much. I thought maybe them lobsters had shifted their ground now that the seas ain't runnin's so high. Well, Mam, I was commin' in to check today- just hoverin' the shore when I see your brother run out of



Bart (Cont'd). the house and start to fish up catch. I didn't recollect of no one havin' buoys out 'ceptin me. It was your brother Mam- stealin'!

Barbara. I don't believe it.

Sam. Why, he's right in here. (Sam opens the bedroom door and drags Robert into the room).

Robert. I don't like to see so many people here, Barbara.

Barbara. This man says you've been stealing from his -

Robert (interrupting). Course it's not true. Whenever people come they always cause trouble. It's not true. What would I have to steal lobsters for with the Ocean full of them?

Bart. Don't recollect I mentioned lobsters.

Barbara. You said lobsters, Mr. Sprague. It's not true though. Tell him Robert.

Sam. Now don't lie for him, You didn't hear Bart say a word, Robby. You don't even know why he came out here do you? (He shakes Robert).

Bart. Mam, if you'll look in his boat you'll find he was in such a rush that he didn't even drop the trap back over the side. I seen him with my own eyes. I don't care none about them lobsters; but I remember a like time with your father. I don't care, but I sure feel sorry for you. I feel awful sorry. Folks was about all dead that remembered your father. And now- (Bart leaves).

Sam. And you call yourself a man!

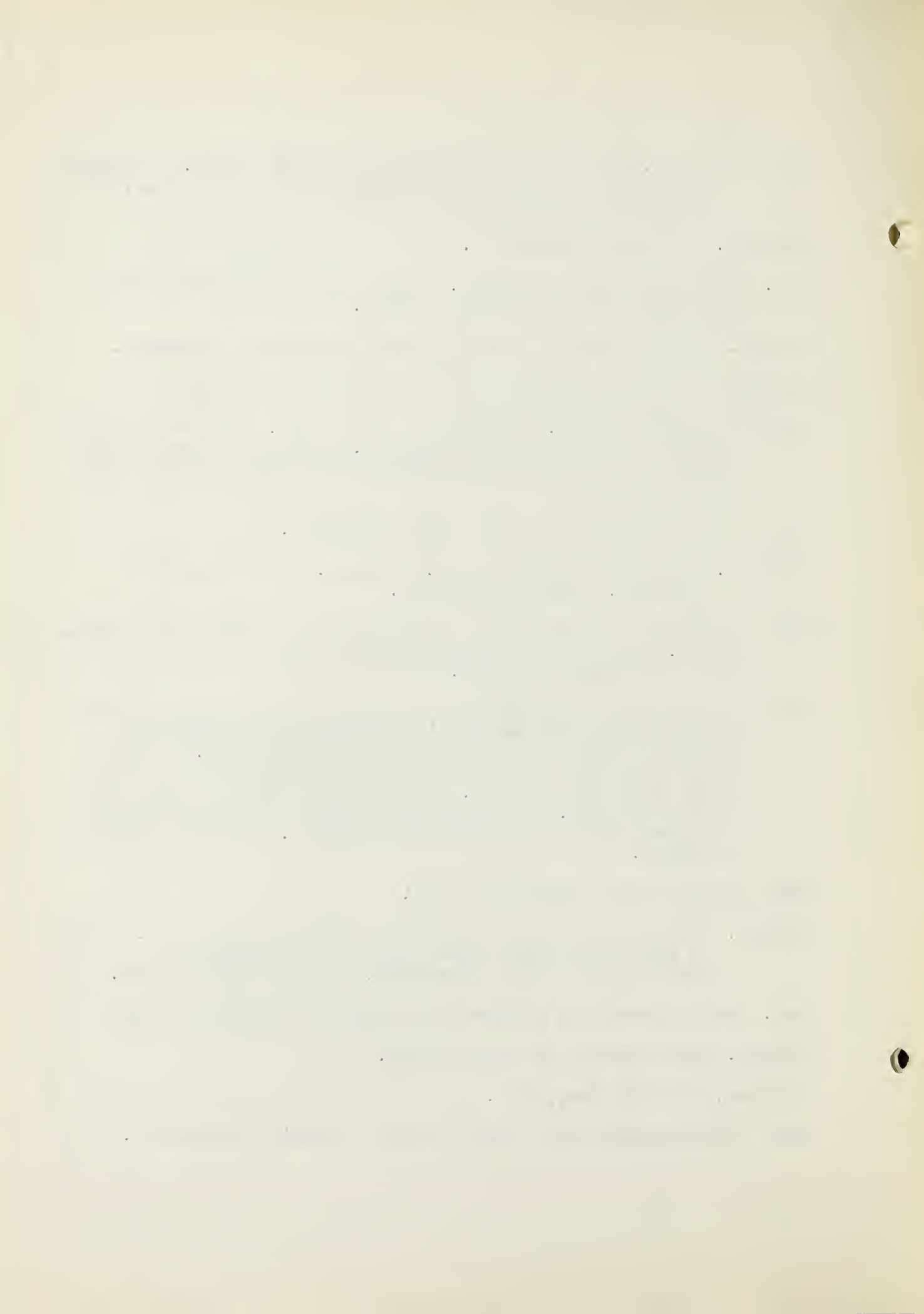
Robert. I'm not - I'm not - I'm what you want me to be. When I knew you might leave I had to do somethin'. I never stole before, Barbara. I never did - once.

Sam. Well, where did you get the lobsters the other times?

Robert. There wern't no other times.

Barbara. That's true, Sam.

Sam. You mean you been lyin' to me? I don't believe it. I



Sam (Cont'd). think he's brought shell fish from Bart's pots all Winter. Don't lie for him.

Robert. I just had to bring somethin' in. But you'll see. Why, there's a mess of driftwood on the beach, and I can make traps and buoys myself, all by myself. I'll cover the whole coast with buoys, blue ones. I'm goin' right out now. You just listen to me work. Where's the hammer? It don't matter, you just listen to me work - you'll see.

Sam. Well, Barbara, in ten minutes Bart'll be back on the mainland, and in another ten the whole town will know; and in a day the whole Cape will know that there's a lobster thief on this island. You'll never see no one again. No one will ever speak to you - you might as well be dead.

Barbara. (As in a trance). Just like his father.

Sam. And you'll be just like your mother, Barbara. You'll have to come with me.

Barbara. It wasn't my father's leaving that killed Ma so much; it was the talk. Folks seemed to think she had somethin' to do with it. She didn't, Sam. She didn't. (From outside there can be heard an aimless banging that continues throughout the play.

Sam. You best come with me now, Barbara. We can be away from all this.

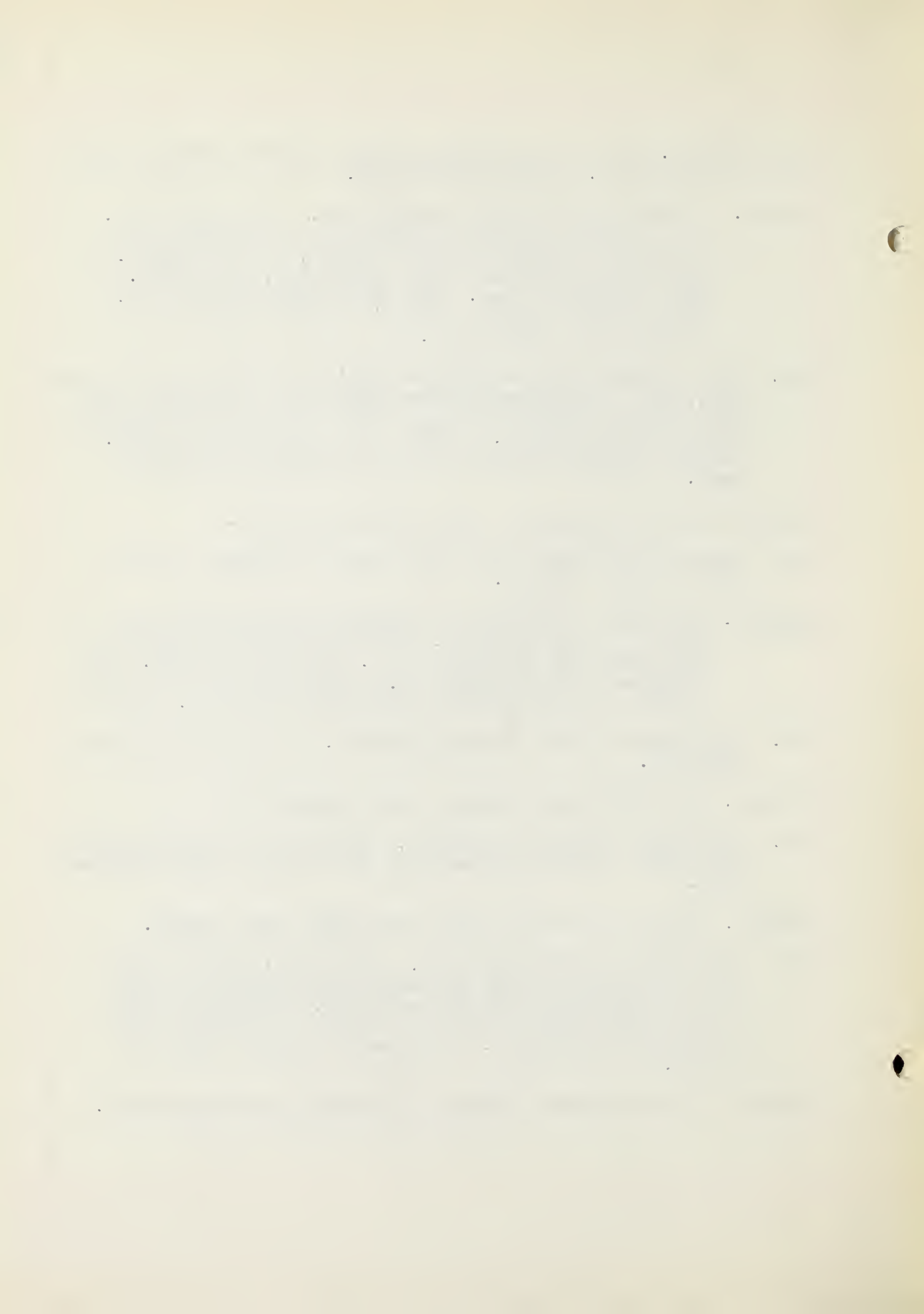
Barbara. But what would he do? What wouldhe do?

Sam. (Motioning toward the noise). How long do you think that will last? Maybe till he sees me go, or he gets another idea.

Barbara. That's no way to talk, You watch your tongue.

Sam. Now don't get huffy with me. I'll bet somethin' like this has always turned up; maybe not exactly like his father every time; but close to him. Somethin' made you go from place to place. I'll bet he always found an excuse for failin'. I'll bet he always found an excuse.

Barbara. (Clutching her breast and sinking into the chair).



Sam. Your heart is just squeezed up tight on this island, Barbara. It just needs a great kind space to beat in. This place will become smaller and smaller, till it finally -

Barbara. That's what Ma said: "This island's crushin' me into pieces". You know that, Sam. She said it got smaller every day until she knew she just couldn't breathe no more - and it finally killed her. Oh, Sam, I don't want that to happen to me. I don't. I don't.

Sam. Honey, you just come to Hingham with me. You have a great heart; all you have to do is give it a chance to love.

Barbara. But what would Robert do? The poor boy would be so lonely - and he couldn't go away.

Sam. Why a man could ship on a trawler any day from New Bedford. It'd make a man of him.

Barbara. Why couldn't Robert come with us, Sam? We could all work together. He can repair nets, I seen him do it. He can paint.

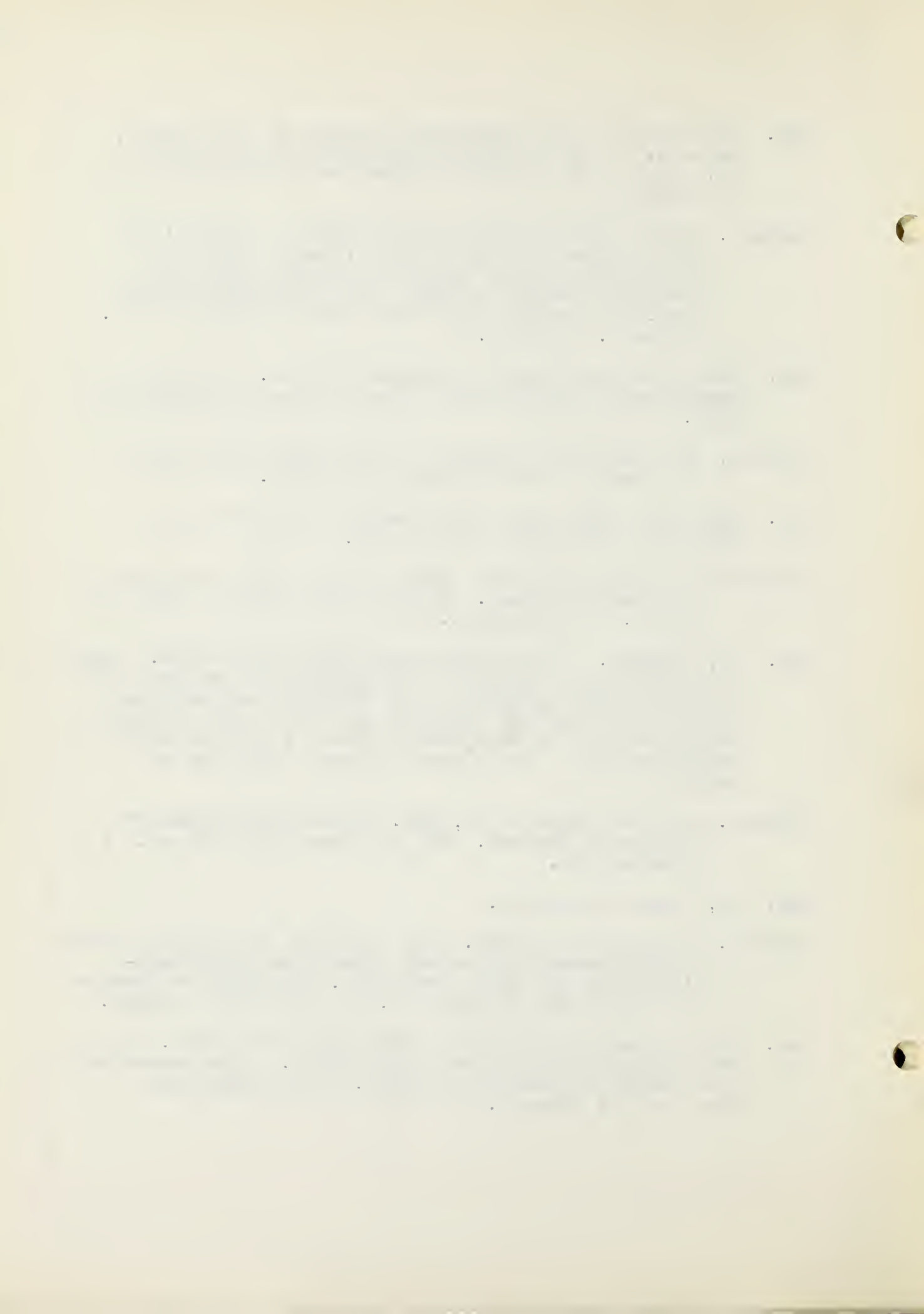
Sam. No, Barbara. I ain't ever been much around here. Where I'm goin' have a chance to be big and grow bigger. I didn't dig for Quohogs in that November mud so Robert could come along and maybe do just one little thing to destroy what I've been workin' for. I seen you and I worked for you. I'm blunt, I guess - It's you or nothin'.

Barbara. But the three of us, Sam. No one would know of Robert in Hingham. Oh, Sam, take him with us. I promised Ma.

Sam. No, I won't take him.

Barbara. I promised Ma, Sam. She lay there so sick she could hardly speak; she raised herself on her elbows - them were her last words, Sam. She made me promise to see Robert on his feet. To give him a chance.

Sam. You promised your Ma you'd help him to his feet. You both thought he had some of her blood. This proves he's your father through and through. You helped him. Your work is through.



Barbara. Oh Sam, take us out of here. I couldn't stand it knowin' the way Ma went. All choked up. Here
(She sobs).

Sam. No, I won't take him.

Barbara. What would he do? What could he do? Must you leave today? Listen, he's makin' pots now. He could help you.

Sam. Look here, Barbara. I think you got it in the back of your head that you're goin' to stay if I don't take him- or better still you ain't made up your mind. Do you want to end up like your mother? Like a dead woman, or one that might as well be dead because she's livin' in the past? I know them folks- you do too. They'll twist you and Robert together with their tongues and they'll remember this day, and two lobsters are already dead. When you're old and choked up they'll still talk as though the stealin' just happened and you or him hadn't grown a day older. You know'd what your Ma's last days was like. And I know you ain't got no money to speak of, what with his tinkerin' around from one place to the other.

Barbara. I still see Ma in him. I don't know how, but her eyes are there.

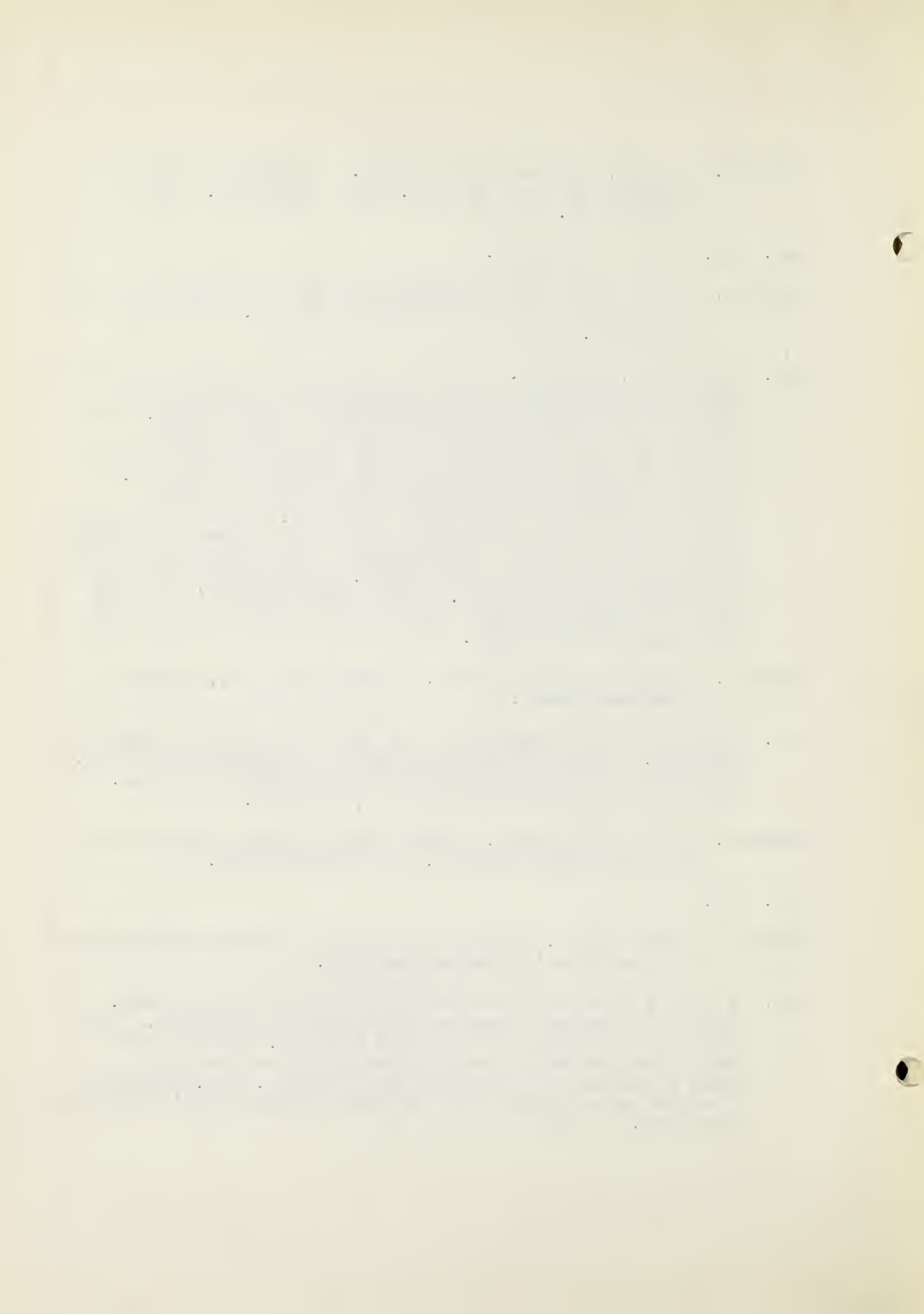
Sam. Maybe when you was little you had to believe in somethin', Barbara. But what you're tryin' to believe isn't true. I ain't much that's sure; but you can believe in me. You make up your mind right now, Barbara.

Barbara. Wait a week, Sam. Seven days. Robert will be set up, and then I can go. Just seven days.

Sam. No.

Barbara. Just a week. Listen to him. He's real industrious- in a week he'll be on his feet.

Sam. I told you about my Uncle John over on the mainland. I told you because I want you to know I'm stubborn. I'm proud of the fact; but I can't help it. That's why I dug clams instead of sailin' on the great sea; so when I did sail it would be my own boat. No, Barbara, I ain't takin Robert; and if you're comin' you'll have to come now.



Barbara. But I'll know better in a week. I -

Sam. Right now Bart's on the mainland spreadin' the news, and right now I want your answer - this minute. Either you're comin' with me or you're goin' to be a dried up old woman like your mother. By the Lord Harry, woman, be careful.

Barbara (Wanders about the room). Then that's the way it's got to be!

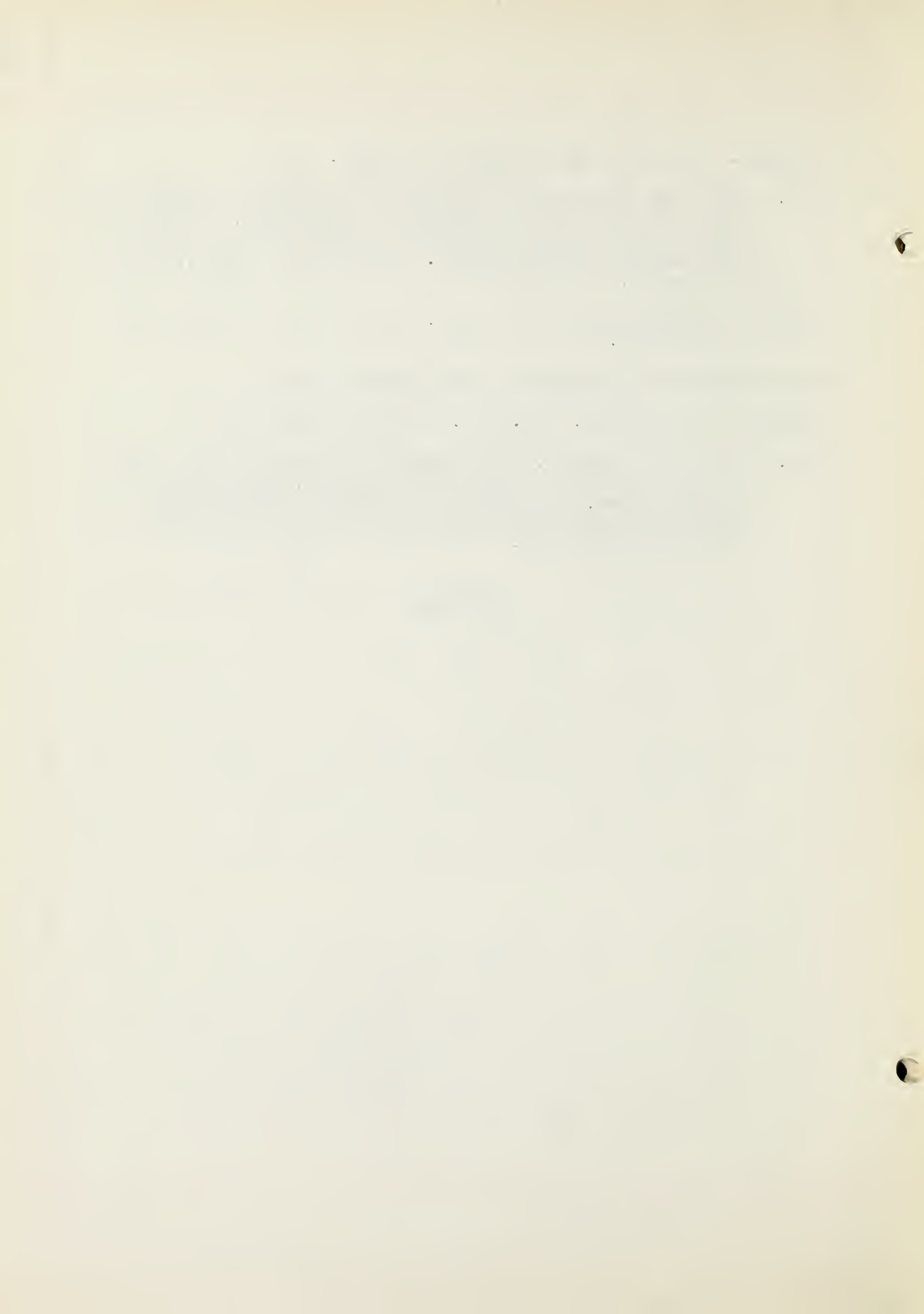
Sam (Stepping toward her). Then you're comin'?

Barbara (Facing him). No, Sam. Oh, don't you see -

Sam. Goodby (He leaves. The hammering continues for a few seconds and then comes to a dead stop. Barbara rushes to the window, and then with a little choking sob clutches at her breast and sinks back to the rocker as the curtain falls.).

Curtain

* * *



In the opening dialogue between Sam and Barbara I have given an orientation of time and purpose; and Sam's story of his Uncle John develops the character of stubbornness, so necessary in the final decision; Barbara's heart clutching (harking back to the good old melodramatic days) is supposed to excite sympathy in the mind of the audience, and Sam stresses the necessity for an immediate decision.

The situation developed, the "cloud on the horizon" of Barbara's not wishing to leave her brother is inserted. The conversation is then directed to Robert preparatory to his entrance. His entrance develops conflict between Sam and him, and attention is again drawn to Barbara's heart, in this case purely symbolical; Robert's dismissal develops speculation in the mind of the reader that this is a prophetic action.

The exposition having seized the interest, the drama gets under way as Barbara makes preparatory explanations for her concern with her brother, and the promise to remain with him develops a more definite motivation. There follows a strengthening process in this motivation by Barbara telling of Robert's long list of failures and a minor preparation for complication in the telling of the father's crime; and the various lights exposing Robert's failures; and the belief of both mother and daughter that the son has good blood in him. The dialogue continues building up in the mind of the reader that Robert certainly has little of the mother's "light in his



eyes", and Sam's insistence that Robert is a failure; and in his sketching Barbara's future life with him.

A more direct note is added as preparation for the complication when Robert appears with the lobsters, as proof, in his own mind at least, that these should prove his strength in retaining his sister, and dissuading her from any plans of marriage.

Minor action is developed in Sam's telling Robert of the true state of affairs and Robert's defensive measures in announcing his change for the best. This minor action is accentuated by Barbara's too ready acceptance of Robert's story, and suddenly the complication arrives in the form of the angry fisherman and his accusations concerning Robert. This is followed by the action of Robert denying the charge; his sister half-heartedly siding with him; and the fisherman's remembrance of the father, and how the crime, almost dead and forgotten will be revived. Suspense follows the scene in Barbara's admission that Robert is "just like his father", and the following change in Barbara as she still attempts to explain Robert's earlier plunders.

Preparation for the crises develops as Sam sketches briefly how the story will be spread from one end of the Cape to the other, thereby building up Barbara's decision in his favor; and Robert makes his plea to be given another chance and busies himself by hammering off the stage. The hammering



is used to keep Robert's appeal on the one hand; and Sam is allowed full sway upon the stage; thereby creating suspense as to Barbara's final decision.

Suspense is intensified by Barbara's flash-backs of her mother suffering because of her father's crimes and the oppressiveness of the lonely life on the island.

Preparation for the resolution develops as Sam continues the picture of the desolate life; and Barbara begins to feel the crushing weight upon her heart; and Robert's hammering continues sporadically. The preparation actually places its major emphasis upon Barbara's heart, and the road to freedom is pointed out. This continues as Barbara makes plans for Robert, all of which are promptly rejected by Sam. Sam then repaints Barbara's life and foretells her tragic end if she remains, demanding her decision immediately; as he once again tells of his stubbornness and makes another appeal against the tragic end.

The ground for the resolution depleted, Barbara makes her decision as Sam remains stubborn and leaves; for a brief moment the hammering, her last hope, continues and stops, as Sam had prophesied. The clutching at the heart assumes the major emphasis as we realize that hope is gone and that she will meet the same end as her mother.

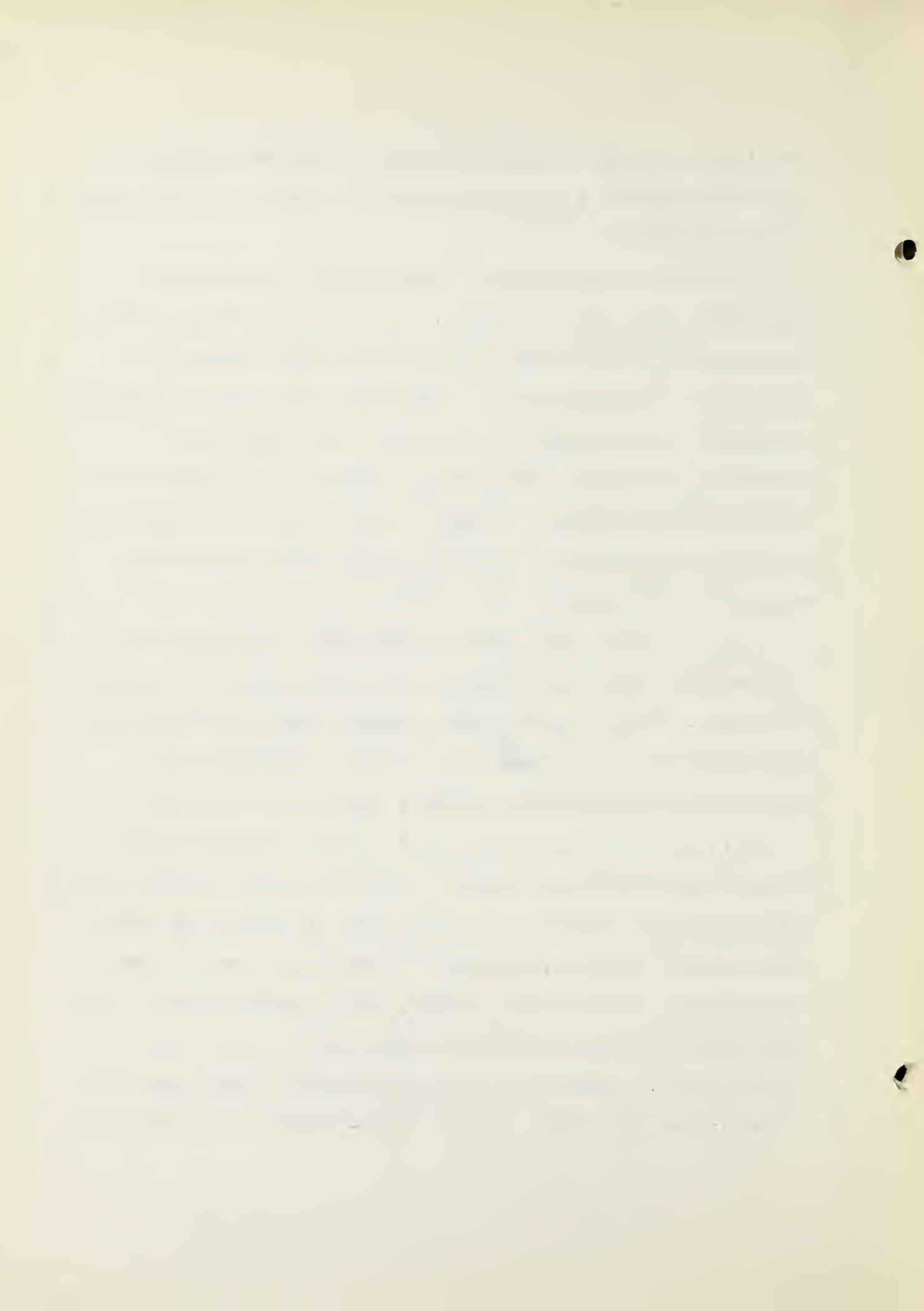
This play was written as a technical exercise after floundering unsuccessfully with plot and economy for many



weeks; and finally deciding to write a drama emphasizing all the technicalities - with the result that there is little real blooded character.

The theme is based upon a family which lived on an island off the coast of Hingham. When we were young we were always warned not "to play" with the children because the father was a "lobster thief". This struck my sense of justice; but being a little snob I watched the three grey-faced youngsters awkwardly sucking their thumbs as we played under their noses and refused to speak to them. Thus the theme of segregation because of a parent's crime always stayed with me; and to the definition of a "crime" on the South Shore.

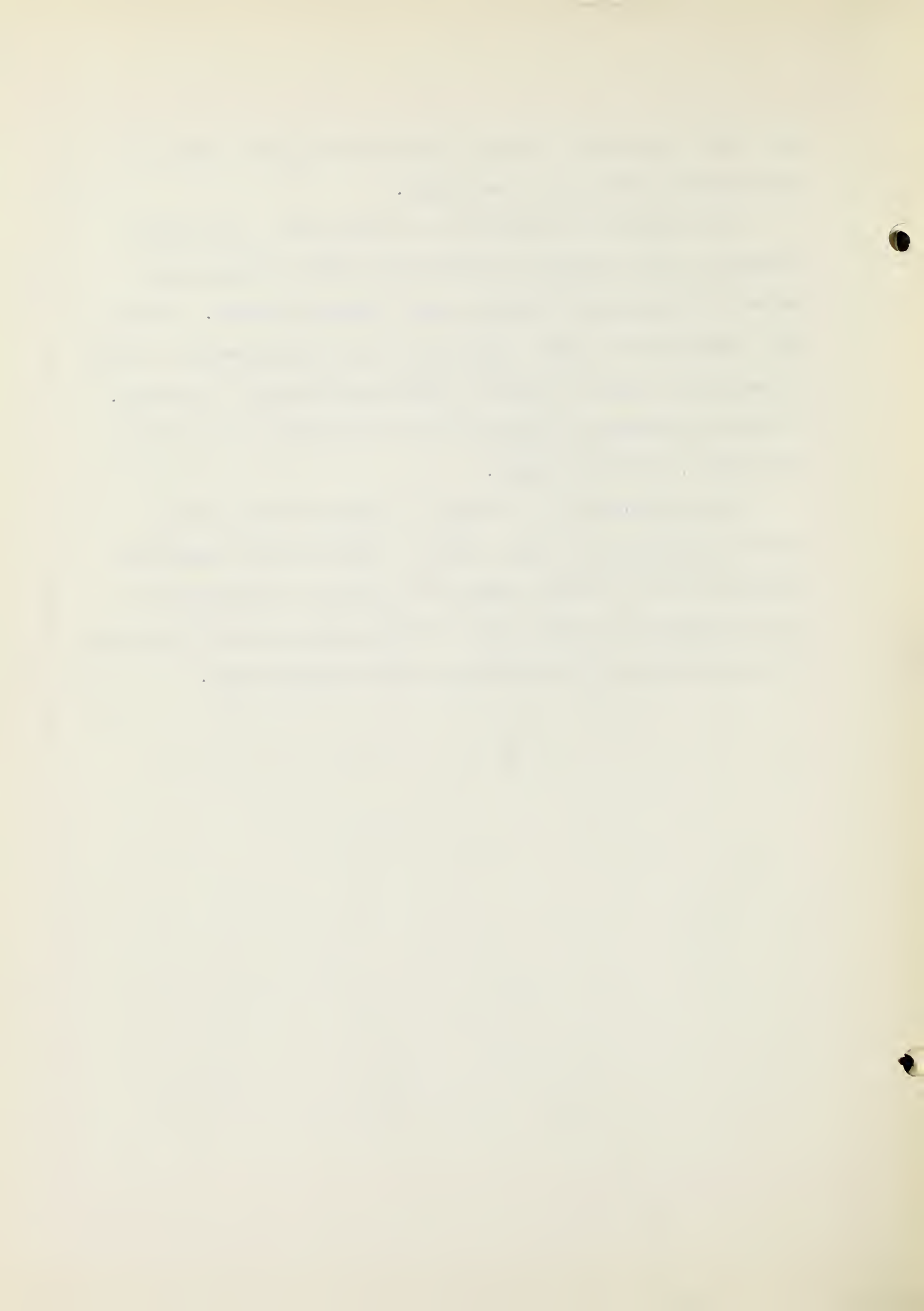
The characters came from a hodge-podge selection in my "little Black Book": the Barbara and Robert story I picked up in Vermont. Robert was slightly younger than his sister but never seemed to find himself; and always had great ideas, which Barbara would always condone, and attempt to carry out for him. She had many suitors, but all were repulsed until she was "sure Robert was happy". After the war I visited them and Robert was planning on raising money to revive the ferry-boat on Lake Champlain, although the rain was coming through the roof into the fireless kitchen, and two days before, the only cow had fallen through the rotten floor of the barn and killed itself. Barbara was helping to draw up the plans for the boat; Sam Evans was a patient clam-digger who would work



like fury while the tide was out; and then fish when the flats were covered with sea water.

The town folk nicknamed him "Silent Sam" and always laughed at his industry, particularly Bart Sprague, who owned a dilapidated fish-pier and leaking trawlor. "Silent Sam" continued to work; rumor had it our housekeeper refused to marry him, and he finally bought up Sprague's business. I simply attempted to transfer the character, as I had him in my mind, into the drama.

The dialogue is an attempt to improve the cracker-barrel technique of "Great land o' goshen twarn't nawthin" business into a clipped speech with only a springling of colloquialisms to catch some of the language that is akin to the fast running tides beating on our rugged coast.



THE KID FROM THE NEW WORLD

The time is just after the collapse of Germany after the second World War. Germany is dead; but bits of foreign life struggle to free themselves from the carcass.

The play concerns itself with four men who have been liberated from the many prison camps and seek to find their way home. These men are still herd-bound. They argue among themselves but have forgotten individualism after years behind barbed wire. They are mere shadows of men.

They have reached a crossroads marked by a sign whose great white arms display "DRESDEN 30 Ks"; "POTSDAM 20 Ks"; "MAGDABURG 50 Ks".

Sam. For three days we've marched, marched. Which way now? (Pointing to the sign). Dresden, thirty; Potsdam, twenty-three; Magdaburg, fifty. They say the Americans - my boys - are at Magdaburg. (Throwing himself down). United we'll march.

Sidney. The British are at Potsdam. What say, lads, there's a bit of food there.

Jole. There is no food - we have no food. I cannot walk. A man without food is without a soul; without a soul I cannot march! (He gazes at the sky).

Valeo. Bread! Bread! I cry for bread. I can run to Italia with bread; but there is none. If only I had music.

Sam. Damn it! Damn the bread! In three days we could be in Magdaburg. Drive! Drive! Drive all the way to the soft nurses and the white sheets.

Sidney. Potsdam in a day, you know - British there.

Sam. If I said London you'd say Odessa. Well, boys, I say Magdaburg.

Sidney. Potsdam!

Jole. Potsdam! Magdaburg! A Man without a soul cannot walk.

Valeo. Mother of mine, it is hopeless. Three days we have been liberated - From what? For what? I wish I was in the Stallag.

Jole. I cannot move, I am as one dead.

Sidney. I'm damn well tired of this. You chaps need someone to lead. Up you swine - up to Potsdam. (The men roar with laughter).

Sam. I'd bust your teeth, if you had teeth and I had strength.

Jole. Let us sit here and die. I would rather sit than march to death.

Sam. Now look you guys, I found a carrot. I'll split it with you. (He removes the carrot from a pocket). With food in your gullet we can march to Magdaburg. (They look eagerly for a moment and then turn their backs to him in disgust. Valeo suddenly rises to his feet and plunges a few feet off the road).

Valeo. Hayi! Hayi! A violin. Music! I can play a largo. My own.

Sam. Hey look, a bundle. (As he steps toward the spot, Jole ducks under his arm and rises, waving a revolver in his hand). You crook! You dirty French crook! (Sidney stoops and quickly places something under his coat, and then moves away from them).

Jole. (Waving the revolver). Now can I stop hunger - and you - from that foolish march. You are no longer free. I am the power.

Sam. (After searching the grass). Aw look - a lousy slug. (He holds a cartridge in his fingers)

Valeo. (Playing dully). Englishman, what do you have?

Sam. Yeah! You look like the cat that ate the goldfish.

Sidney. You, You and You. Rise - get up! We are marching to Potsdam.

Jole. Sit there. I have the power. I command you to stay here.

Valeo. I am about to compose a fitting largo. The death of we nationals. I will not march.

Sidney. I have bread! Bread! A loaf of bread! (He holds it above his head).

Sam. The great God, bread. (Falling to his knees). Power of machines; strength of dynamos; might of armies; giver of life; road to Magdaburg; I salute you.

Jole. (Mocking Sam's position). Bread! Bread! Seed of eternal glory; dough of equality; crust of fraternity; loaf of liberty. I may grow fat for a moment, and then die - it is inevitable. Ah, but an exquisite instant - death with a full mouth. (He draws his sleeve across his mouth).

Valeo. Mother; Father; capriccio, toccato, concerto, allegro. All kneaded into one symphony. I shall call my largo "Bread". Can you hold it by yourself, Englishman, or do you need aid?

All. Give us the bread! The bread!

Sidney. Cut the dramatics, chaps. This will get us to Potsdam and the British. There's more there, you know.

Sam. No, Magdsburg and the Americans!

Valeo. Ah well, I will follow my own song: Italia! You hold the road to Calabria in your hands, Englishman. Give me my share.

Jole. Bah! What good would this be, this power cut into four neat slices; four neat pieces of power, eh? I am realist, naturalist, Frenchman; I say one should have the bread.

Sam. There's enough there to help us all fifty kilometers.

Valeo. Enough to help me to play to Reggio; a slice would help me play; but the entire grand loaf. I could walk and play - that is appealing.

Sidney. As yet I haven't performed my salaams to the great God; but I am an Englishman - holder of the bread. Worship me, lads. I am the power and the glory and the way to Potsdam.

Sam. Divide and share alike.



Jole. You are going to keep the bread and make us follow you, eh?

Sidney. Precisely! A morsel when I think you need it. There is enough here for a day, and then Potsdam. However, I won't give you any, as long as you stay there on the ground.

Sam. We all found that bundle together, didn't we?

Sidney. That, all for one business, is great for children's books. You follow me and you'll get a share; but only as I make the dole.

Jole. Power would dwindle down into four stomachs. Ah, the loaf for one man - one man could do as he pleases.

Sam. We can all go to Magdaburg and the Americans.

Valeo. To Calabria, the warm sea and the olives - the music. That is - I could go with the loaf.

Jole. (Waving the revolver at Sidney). Stand, Englishman. Stand. Here is power, the power of death. I say this is a stronger. I can kill you - I have always hated you - always. Give me the bread. I command it!

Sam. Not so fast, "Froggy".

Valeo. You simple child of the new world, you do not understand this.

Sidney. You have never had anything from me that I did not want you to have. Stand? Ha, ha. Be damned to you.

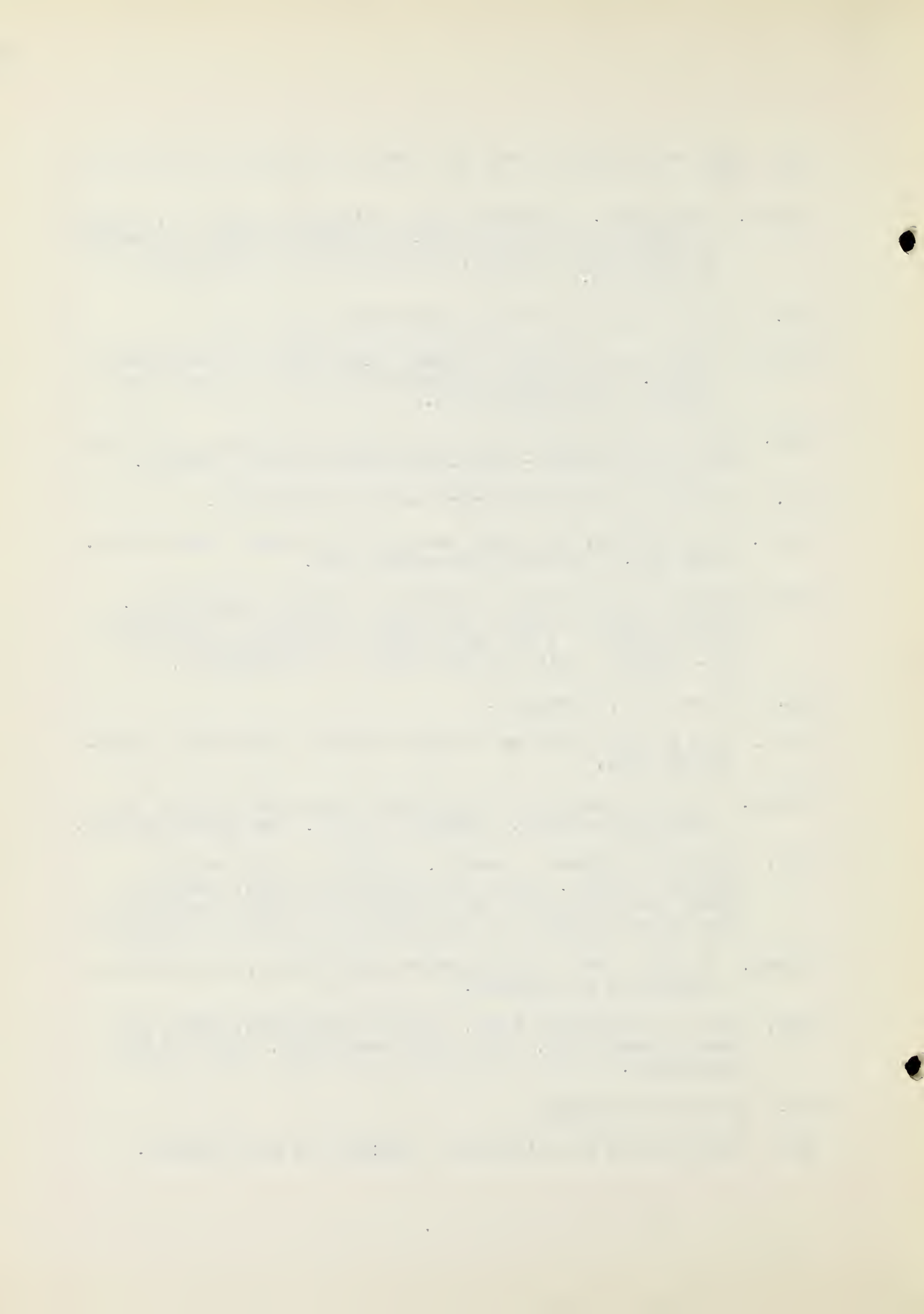
Jole. Brother of blood - goodbye! (This is followed by several clicks. Jole has closed his eyes, and now opens them warily). Ah, unfaithful German mechanics. (He throws himself on the ground in a fit of passion.)

Sidney. Ho, Ho! Now that the power, your power, has failed, follow me to Potsdam!

Jole. (To the wondering Sam). Child of the new world, you have a cartridge. You and I are power. Give me the cartridge.

Sam. Give me the pistol.

Jole. Together we are strength. Divided we are nothing.



Sam. Give me the pistol. I will load it and we shall have the bread.

Jole. It is nothing who loads it. I will hold it and I will give the bread.

Sam. You just said only one should have it.

Valeo. You do not understand, child of the new world. This is a different situation now.

Sam. No, I don't think so. Like you, I want that bread; but I'd give it to you all; you'd keep it and stuff yourself. If you had that slug you'd be the big cheese. No siree.

Jole. My friend, My friend. We are worthless as we are. The two of us could share.

Sam. I wouldn't want the two of us. Me - I'm a democrat. Well, you guys squabble. I'll split the carrot with you. (He breaks the carrot into four pieces and throws a bit to each one.)

Sidney. Filthy food for swine! (He hurls the morsel from him. Jole creeps over and stuffs it into his mouth.)

Valeo (To Sam). Your piece, child, is much larger and yellower than mine.

Sam. Do you want to swap?

Valeo. Let me hold it to compare.

Sam. Compare it from here.

Valeo. If I had the strength I would crawl to you and compare.

Sam. (Popping the bit into his mouth). Oh, I'll bet you would. Is everyone satisfied?

Jole. I salute you! A noble gesture; but of no avail. If the Englishman did not have the loaf I should be happy; but no - the loaf is with the Englishman.

Sidney. Now you know that I'm the power; in command. That was such a morsel; but enough to make you hungry - your mouths are dry. Come; we march.

- Valeo. Very well. I am on your side, Englishman. I am so weary; my music does not help me. I will march but I crave nourishment.
- Sidney. We will march ten kilometers before I give you anything.
- Valeo. I will give my priceless violin for a slice.
- Sidney. Get up and start for Potsdam.
- Jole. The violin has great value.
- Sidney. Probably a beastly taste. I will give you a slice for your pistol.
- Jole. Ah no, no friend.
- Sidney. A slice for the cartridge.
- Sam. No, I'll keep my hand in.
- Jole. I will give you my pistol for a slice - to meet the inevitable here.
- Sidney. No, the cartridge would have value.
- Jole. You cause this, child of the new world. Very well. Italia we were civilization when this child ran about eating raw fish and the other painted his body blue and wandered in fog. We do not want to march with these fools to either world. We shall outwit them, we old ones. (Jole sits close by the side of Valeo).
- Sidney. I find this highly amusing, but boring. I will hold this bread until we are within sight of Potsdam now. Whether you are old or new children, you are hungry children and you will follow this life, regardless of what you think you are. Now drag yourself up and follow me to Potsdam.
- Sam. You win - I thought that carrot might have taught you somethin'.
- Jole. (To Valeo). If we must, old man, we must. Imagine having to walk to death instead of waiting? Are you ready Dante?

Valeo. Ah yes. Goodby Italia - we shall never meet again.
(As they drag themselves after Sidney, Jole and Valeo fall upon Sam. Jole suddenly emerges with the cartridge and jams it home into the chamber.)

Jole. (The heroic). Now I am the power. I am lord of death. Give me the bread of life or you shall never see that knob of chalk in the Atlantic.

Sidney (With great calm). Very well - that hoped for sight has kept me going through six years of prisons. It's yours.

Valeo. (Strumming wildly). Old man, old man, we are victors.

Sam. Now maybe you'll divide that damned loaf and I can go to the Americans.

Jole. Ah now! You can go without the bread. You have the drive to return to a land that hasn't seen war. No. I will keep it all. I have no incentive to return to my torn land. I shall eat and die.

Valeo. Friend, old friend, we are victors. Italia has won; but I want to feel the warm sea, taste the olives and hear my music in peace - Give me my share.

Jole. You are incurable Italia; positively incurable.

Valeo. My piece! My morsel of life! I demand it! I demand my road to Reggio.

Jole. Play a tune on your violin and amuse me Verdi.

Sam. Don't you want to move? You don't want to stay here.

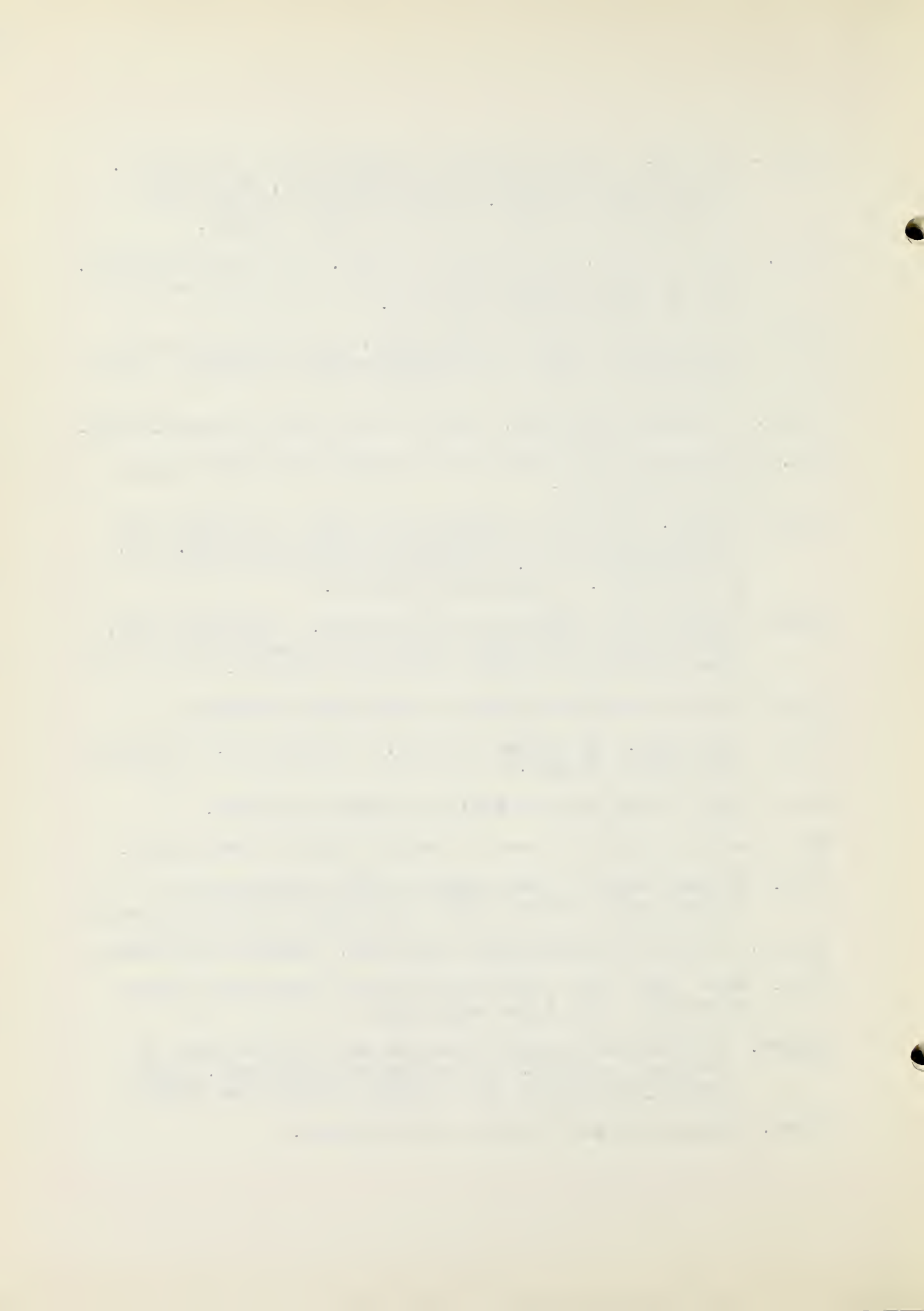
Jole. My dear child, I have power - don't creep to me -
(As Sam moves toward him) why should I move from here?

Sidney. Filthy, untrustworthy Frenchman. Keeping the bread.

Jole. Why? Why? Did I not say ages ago that power cannot be shared? Did I not say that?

Sidney. I would have shared after we were within sight of Potsdam; but you! We are too weak to move. What would you have us do, Oh giver of life and death?

Valeo. Italia was more cultured than France.



Jole. Oh play me something. (To Sidney) Do. Do. Go to Potsdam and fill your English belly.

Sam. I gave you an equal share of my carrot. What about that?

Jole. I thank you. I thank you again. If you wish to sit here I shall thank you whenever you wish. The bread is mine.

Valeo. Give me my share. You promised equality; and I will go back to my old world.

Jole. If you play I might toss you a crumb, Garibaldi.

Sidney. We're starving. You know none of us can move, very far in any case. Cut the dramatics, old boy.

Jole. You said a short while ago that you had power. You were the "power and the glory". I have all the essentials; death in one hand and life in the other. That's power; but I will give you freedom - A word you loved for six years. Go! Go!

Sam. You know we can't move without somethin' to eat.

Jole. Then freedom is empty. Ha, Ha. You are afraid of your little lives to attack because of this cartridge.

Valeo. Look over there - a great goose. (The two look to the left as Jole laughs to himself and clutches the bread). Sidney and Sam look puzzled and squint as the rapturous yell is repeated) Look a beautiful goose!

Sidney. I say a fat bird.

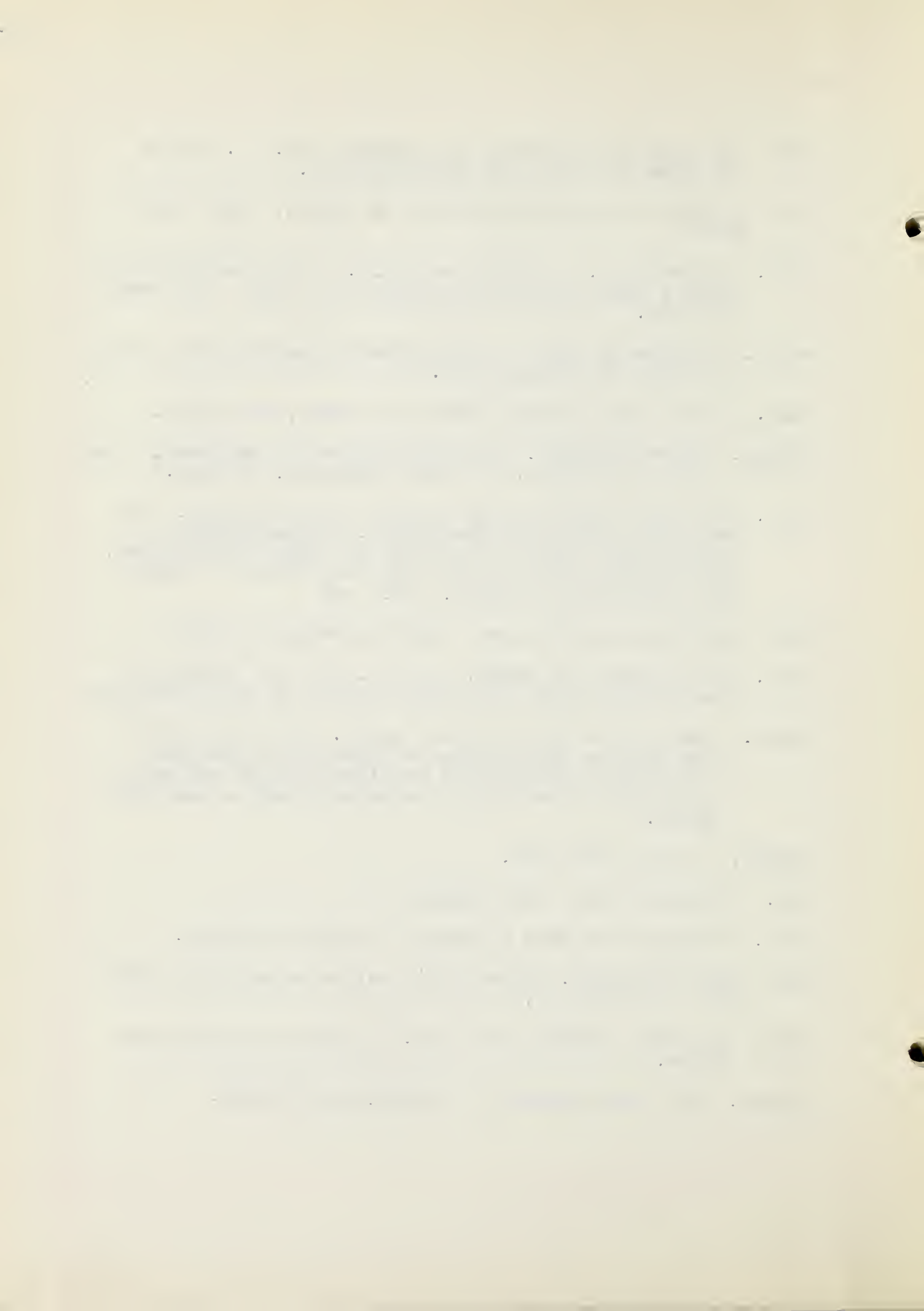
Sam. It looks like a real turkey.

Jole. (Turning his back to them). I have the bread.

Sam. And the bullet. Shoot him! Let me shoot him I could knock his head off.

Jole. And very probably mine too. I turn my back on the goose.

Sidney. If I had strength, I would throw a stone.



Valeo. Oh, such a beautiful bird!

Sam. Look, he's so fat his feathers look as though they were lyin' on a swellin' sea. Oh, if we could only kill him.

Jole. I refuse to look!

Sidney. Shoot him. There's more than enough for all.

Jole. I am a realist, Frenchman I -

Sam. Not so loud!

Jole (whispering). I have enough for myself right here. You say he's big?

Valeo. A great fat bird.

Sidney. A great fat - rolling in fat, bird.

Valeo. I shall play something to attract him.

Sam. You'll scare him. I'll break that fiddle over your head.

Valeo. Why, he cannot shoot it.

Jole. I cannot shoot, you say?

Valeo. Frenchmen have notoriously bad eyesight.

Sam. I didn't know that.

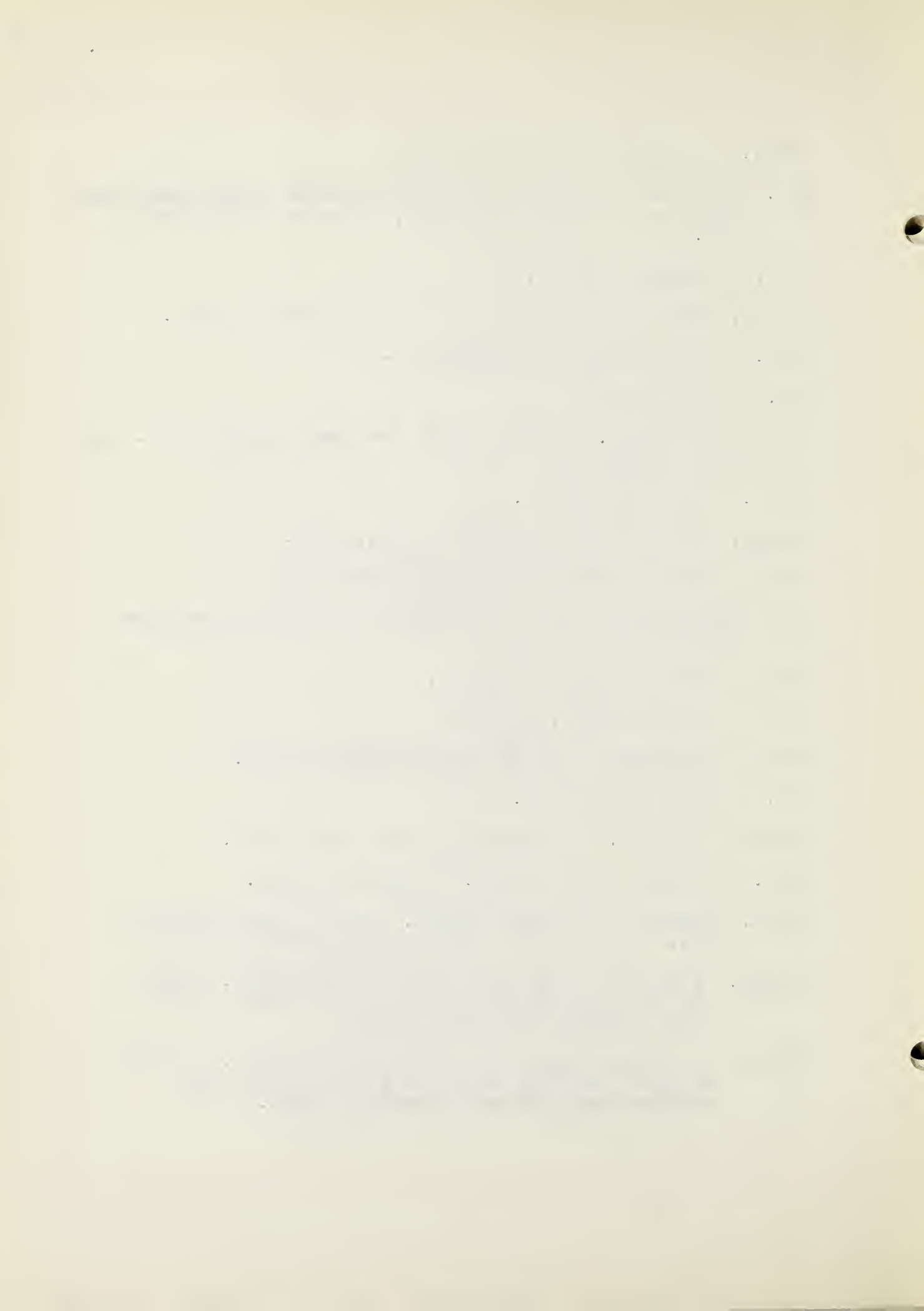
Sidney. Ah, yes. He cannot see the bloody bird.

Jole. I do not care to look. I have my bread.

Valeo. Imagine if it were cooked. Such a great dripping bird. Imagine your teeth sinking into its flesh.

Sidney. I say it would taste greater than bread. Bread is life, but what is life without flavor, Poo! Let him keep his rotten bread.

Valeo. The French cannot see; they cannot taste. They do not have the fine taste of the Italian. No, cabbage soup and bread for the French.



Jole. Liar! Liar!

Valeo. Let him yell. It does not matter, he cannot shoot the bird. He would not appreciate the taste of the dark savory leg. Do you not think the leg as large as a young apple tree?

Jole. (rising). Where is the bird?

Valeo. Baca! Baca! You cannot see it?

Jole (looking). Where? Where?

Sam. Right there at the foot of that tree.

Jole (questioningly). That resembles a bush.

Valeo. Mother of mine! A bush! A bush! These dogs have no eyes.

Jole. We French have eyes. (He points the revolver, closes his eyes) For the glory of the French eye and tongue. (He fires, there is a mad rush for the bread. Sam emerges with the loaf clutched in his hands).

Jole (opening his eyes). I shot the bird, yes?

Sidney. Excellent old man. Excellent. You shot two blackberries from its tail.

Jole Blackberries?

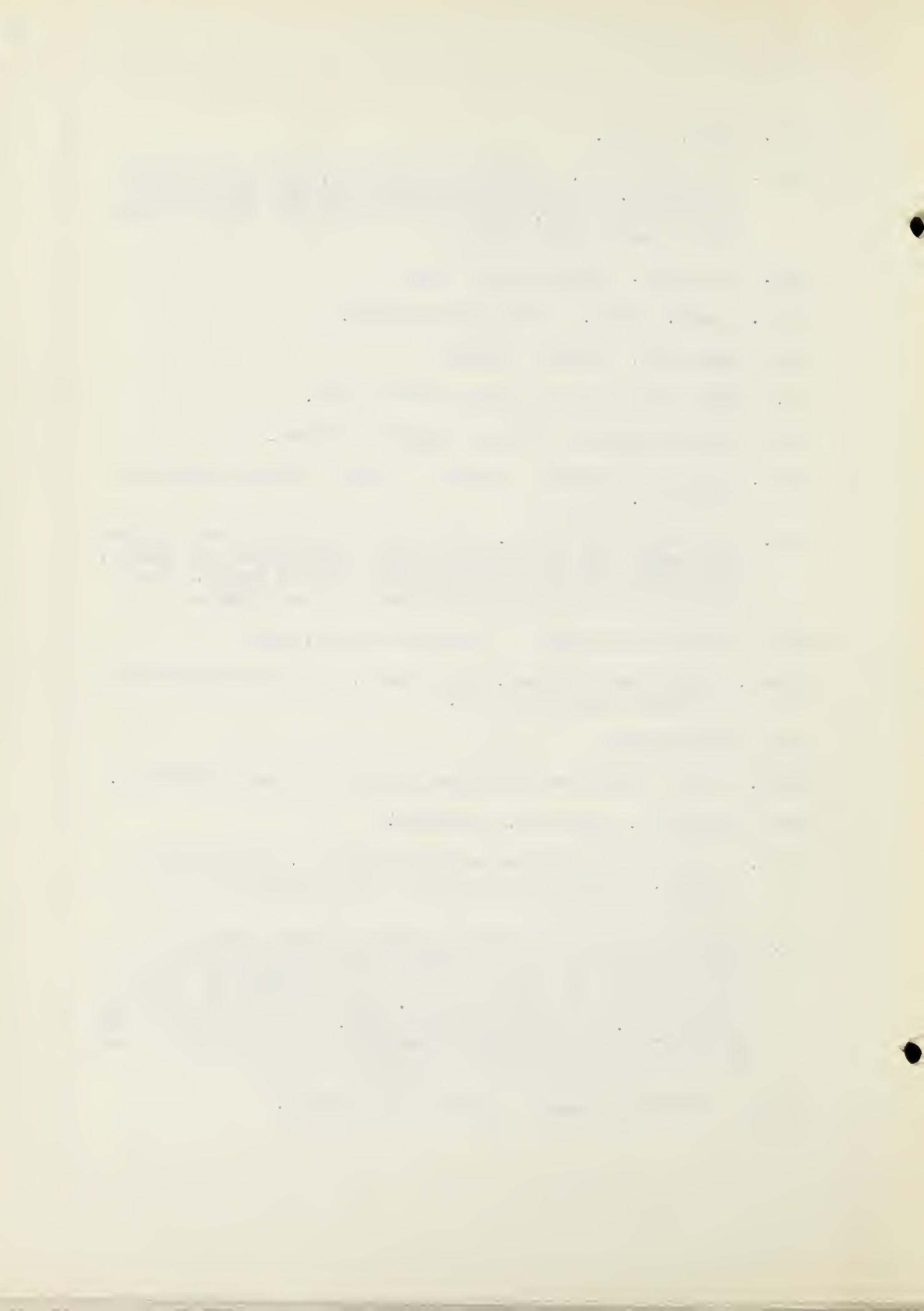
Valeo. Yes. They grow on bushes stupid old man of France.

Jole (weeping). Traitor! Traitor!

Valeo. Now I shall compose a largo for you. You without power. You who throw away power because you are greedy; you who -

Sam. Shut up all of you. This bread is still power; but we've been using it to further our own ends, see! And there wasn't no freedom. We've all learned a lesson - everyone gets an equal piece. There ain't no weapons around now. Everybody's the same. I'm the kid of the new world and I'm givin' everybody an equal share; and you can go any place you want.

Sidney. Sporting idea. I'm off for Potsdam.



Valeo. Reggio, we shall meet again.

Sam. I just found out why I came over here. It's taken me three years - and one of 'em in a German prison camp. It's to see that everybody gets the same share - then there won't be no squabblin' - and to see that the guy passin' out the bread don't have no other motive.

Jole. (Always the Frenchman). An excellent dinner speech. I believe now we should divide the bread.

Sam. Anyone got a knife?

All. No.

Sam. Then I'll break it. (Followed by a chorus of no's).

Valeo. Some of the pieces would be larger than others.

Jole. We shall have to find a knife.

Sidney. I say a cheer for "the kid of the New World". What say, lads? (Sam blushes as there follows "Pip, Pip" and Valeo and Jole, the old men, cheer "hurrah".)

Sam. Wait a minute, you guys, I hear someone comin'.

(A great hulk of a man comes through the buses at the rear. He is fastening his belt and has a pleased expression on his oval face. He slides up to the group showing great power and confidence).

Sam. Do you have a knife? A shive? How do you say it? You see, sir, we want to divide this bread equally. (He holds the loaf and traces cross-lines with his fingers).

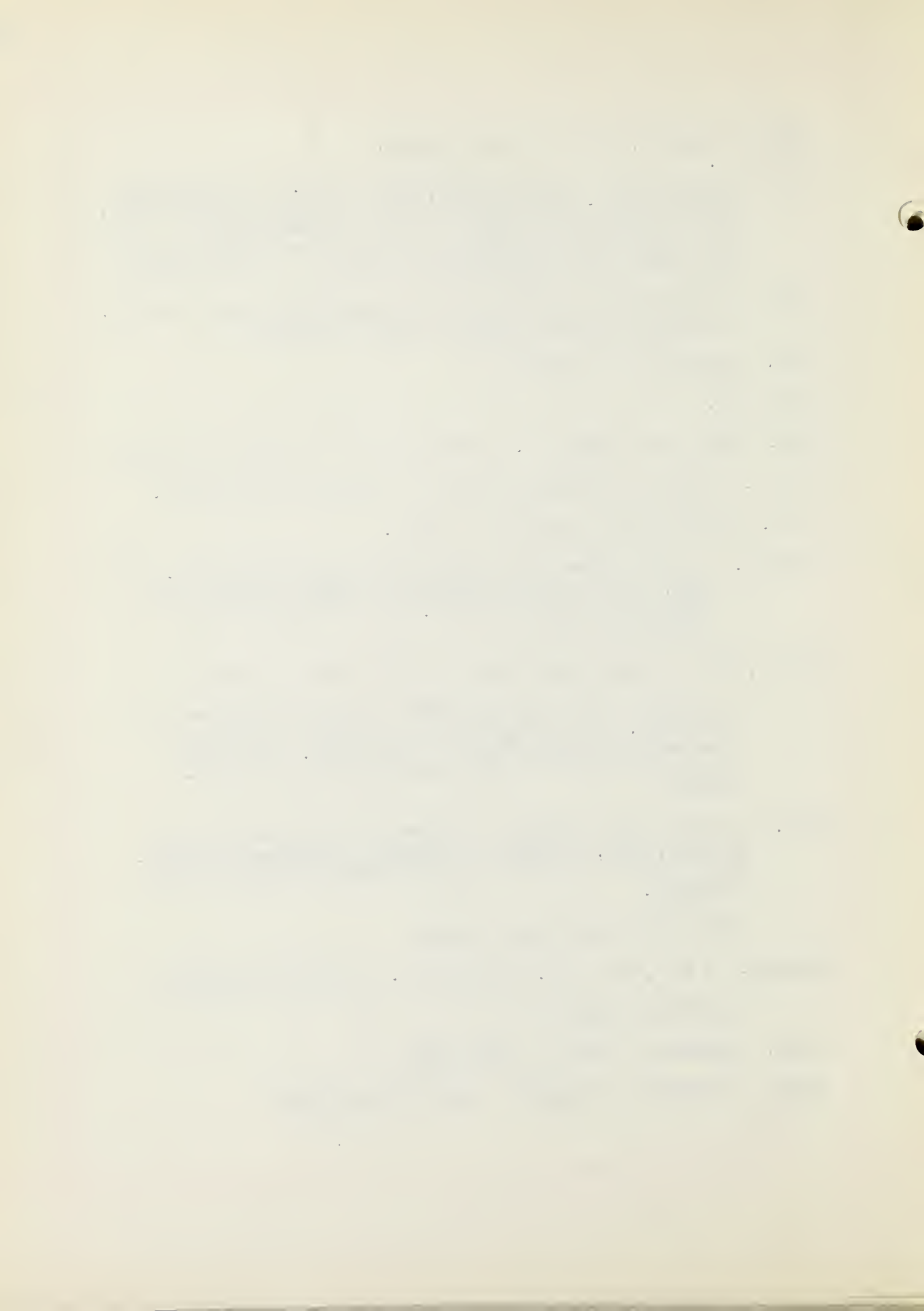
(The hulk shakes his head).

Sidney. I say, old man, let my try. Verstehen messer?

(Another shake).

Jole. Couteau? Canif? Poignard?

Valeo. Coltello? Pugnale? Coltello affilato?



(The hulk suddenly roars with laughter). Spasjyoi? Da! (He draws a great knife from his great coat and with a mighty push sends the children to the ground. He tucks the bread under one arm; he retrieves the violin and the pistol from the ground and strides to the right. He stops, bows and yells "Nozhyare", and walks from the play.)

Sidney. Oh, I say, I'm wretched.

Valeo (weeping). Italia - I shall never see you.

Jole. (weeping) I die! I die!

Sam. (rising to his elbows). But I'm the kid from the new world. Who'se he?

Curtain

* * *

The Kid From The New World is purely a fanciful drama containing allegory of National sentiments and values, thinking, and subtleties.

The opening situation contains the conflict of Sidney and Sam, who want to go in different directions, and Jole, who would simply sit and die, and Valeo who would choose music or some other aesthetic pleasure; but will not move. The contention continues as Sam offers an attempt at solution by a bit of carrot as the way to his becoming leader.

The finding of the bundle accentuates the values: Valeo can only see the violin; Jole seizes the pistol as power;



Sidney secretes the real power; and Sam plays with the cartridge, since that is all that is left and he has been attempting to consolidate these Nationals into one way of thinking.

The above was drawn as a compendium of my memories of Germany during the Russian liberation before the cessation of hostilities. During the first week of freedom the Italians made a point of scouring the Country-side and rummaging through the vast storehouses of German Uniforms. They would travel in small gypsy bands in their dirty Alpine uniforms; and before they would arrive at a liberated camp they would change into the sleek blue of the Luftwaffe, their legs encased in shining boots much too large. Once assembled they would march in playing their pilfered concertinas and violins and talk about how much they wanted to return hom; but they never made a move toward Italy, and one month later those same little bands were still wandering, playing, and talking of the great march to Italy - yet never going.

The French on the other hand, were constantly ridiculed as a lost-Nation during their forced stay in Germany. Upon liberation, they began to pick up every weapon they could lay their hands on; and in very short order their stockade became a warehouse for every conceivable type of German vehicle without gas, and weapon without ammunition. You



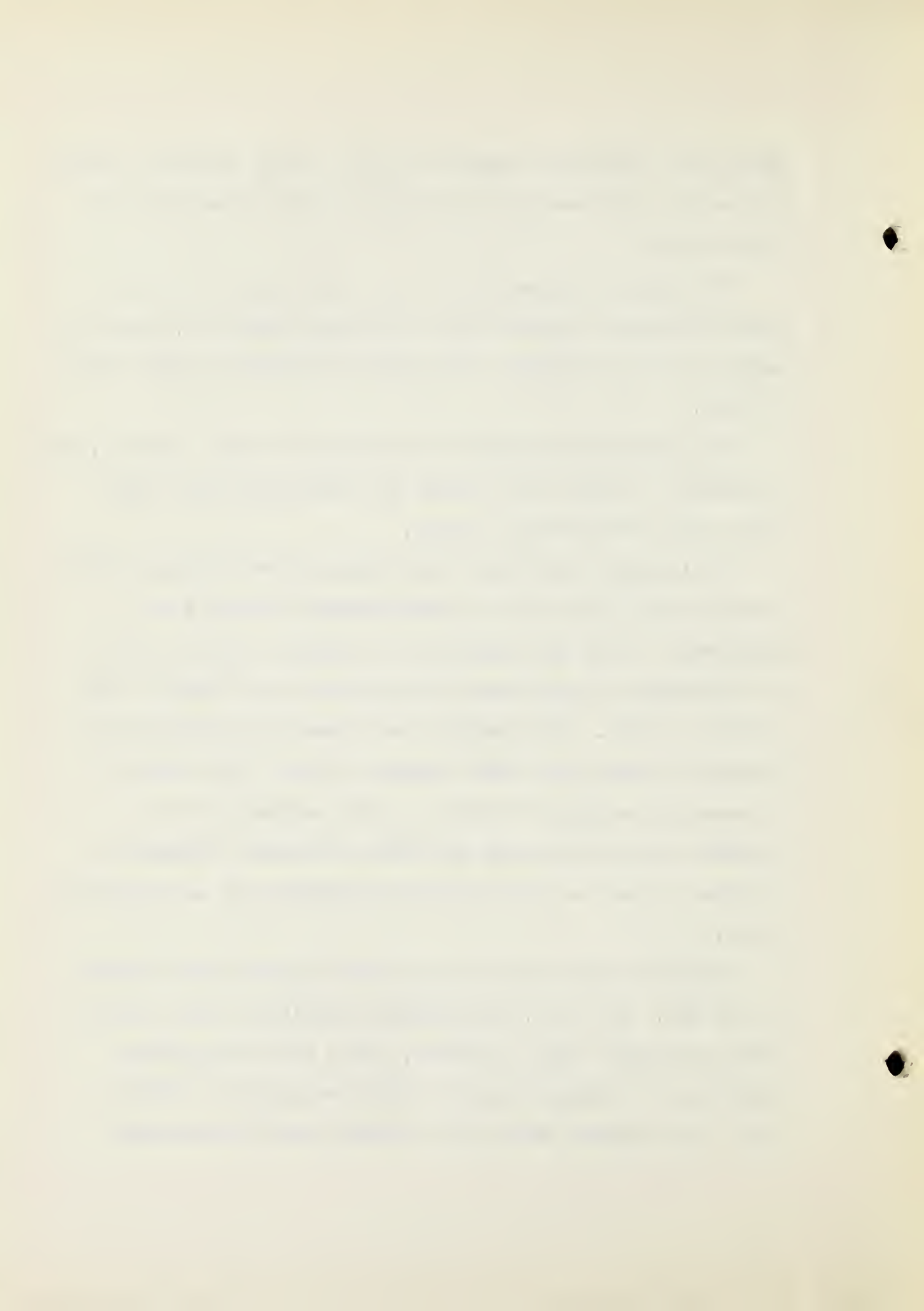
never saw a Frenchman unless he had an empty bandolier slung across his shoulders and two empty pistols protruding from ornate cases.

The English collected all the food there was, as the other Nationals collected their material souvenirs, and then began to buy up trinkets when they had secured a good supply of food.

The Americans seemed to be willing to share with all, and to attempt to make peace during the occasional riots that would ensue from racial dislike.

At the same time that these groups were following their natural vents, there was an undercurrent of battle for leadership. Here the Americans and English took the lead in attempting to establish sole authority over some of the National groups. The Italians and French would argue their history of power; but were content to talk a lot with the accompanying waving of hands; but they seemed like two diseased invalids bearing each other reluctant company in the face of two healthy youngsters fighting for an enigmatic power.

Bread was the one word you heard repeated every minute of the day. As I say, the English collected a lot; and the other Nationals began to hunger, after the soul-lifting experience of liberation; and having ravaged the Country-side. The English traded for a while, and then realized



that their food gave them power, with the result that they no longer purchased an Elsia-Mafia for a loaf, but sat back and began to dole out authority and orders. The remaining Nationals dislike this, of course, and soon the shining boots were traded for the empty pistol; the violin for a steel helmet. I saw this as an attempt to combine power among the decadent in an attempt to express displeasure at being ordered about by another power; certainly these unions had little strength or purpose.

The arguments as to the sharing of power, which was actually bread, shown in the drama is the result of the Russians excluding the French from the bread ration since they had collaborated with the Germans to the extent that they cached 10,000 Red Cross parcels in the event of prolonged starvation. This is probably unbelievable, but the French did a great deal of work for "Jerry", with the result that the Germans would keep their pet laborers well fed. The Americans were for sharing the Russian ration, since it would have been inhuman to let our dear French friends starve; the English were for excluding them. The result, of course, was a great number of riots, arguments and alliances among the Nationals.

In the drama, to give action to these arguments, I had Jole attempt to fire his empty pistol; the contention continues after its failure and the final struggle with the



with the American for the cartridge leading to the complication.

Jole forming his alliance getting poser, and forgetting his agreement is illustrative of an incident that happened after liberation when a group of French managed to excite some Italians into plundering a storehouse. The Italians were to create the furor while the Russian police were occupied with them and the French break in the back way using gangster tactics. The Italians were beaten and shot; the French escaped with 14 loaves of bread. Days afterwards the co-workers would meet; and one would see a madly running Frenchman pursued by an irate, hungry Italian. The Italians learned the hard way never to trust the French and transferred their affections to the more powerful Americans and English.

I had some fun with the transfer of affections and also bearing in mind the intense National pride, false of course, of the French. Feeling sorry for those duped Italians I gave them a literary revenge for having been deprived in the bread riot, at the expense of the National pride and malnouritive eyesight of Jole.

The overall picture is then one of striving for power, which brings out Sam's opinion, and the opinion of every other American, that the main trouble in Europe was this empty, century-old struggle; and the one way to solve it is



to make a United States of Europe, forgetting of course, our delightful race riots, dust-bowl starvations, etc. However, the American did attempt to share everything with the other nations, although I doubt if appreciation is a characteristic of any European heart.

The ending of course is ironical, when the realization comes that power can be divided, only to be suddenly taken away by an unexpected and greater force. The question arises as to just who, and what, this new power is.

I didn't attempt to go deeply into human nature, since I wanted to retain National types and universality; and too, these Nationals were completely enigmatic to me. I never could understand why the French, Italians, Serbs, Poles, and Greeks made no attempt to go home. Some are still in the Displaced Persons' Camps, waiting for transportation.

The play, of course, was caused by many incidents; but the particular scene was enacted at a cross-roads by four Nationals who fought over a loaf of bread and succeeded in using their remaining strength until they were so weakened they could no longer stand. An aged Russian, who, from his sheepskin coat and crooked back, must have been a slave worker in the salt mines outside of Luckenwalde, simply hobbled up to them, roared with laughter, picked up the bread, and limped down the road, leaving the four gasping and cursing.



THE MEN AND BOYS

The scene is a cafe cellar in Northern France during the Fall drive of 1944. The cellar is lighted by a sputtering hurricane lamp.

Burn, the weary old veteran, is talking to Smith, a youngster aged beyond his years, whose nervous voice is in great contrast to the steady rumblings of Burn.

Burn. You can't hide from yourself down here, Smith.

Smith. Gawdammit it Burn, quit houndin' me!

Burn. You ran out on that kid in the outpost, Smith - admit it.

Smith (raising his rifle). You say that again and I'll give you a second bellybutton.

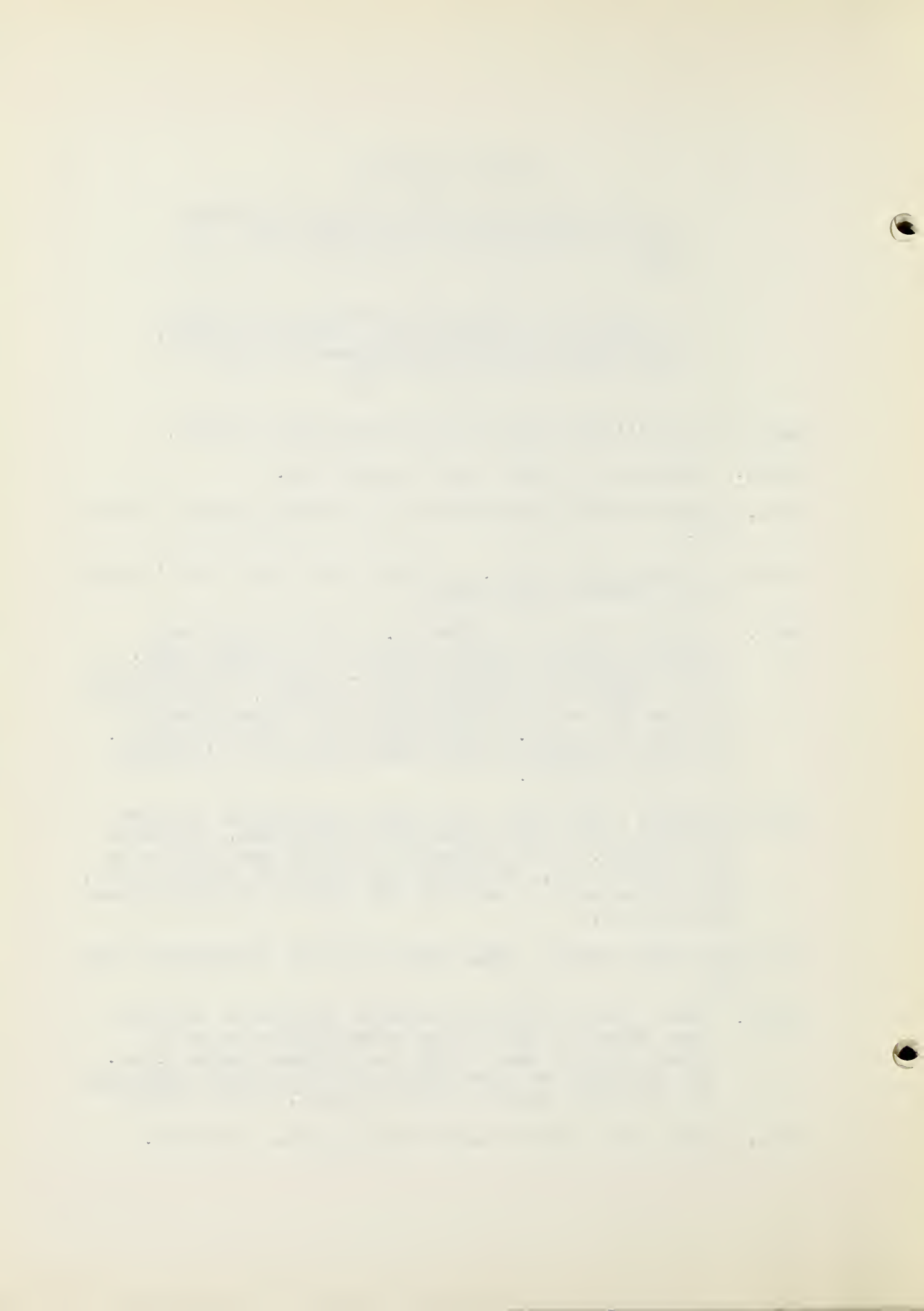
Burn. (seizing him by the throat). You lilly-livered, stinkin' little coward - admit it! (shaking him). I was a hundred yards behind you. I seen you crawlin' by me 'afore the shootin' ever started. That kid was in the hole - his first night - all alone - he's buried there now. (Smith groans as they struggle). You were supposed to be there with him. I'm tryin' to help you, kid.

Black (Running softly down the stair; speaking in a hoarse whisper). For God's sake, shut the mouth. You know what happen. That Lootenant, he just now tell me we are out too far. He don't know where no one of us is. He tell me we have walk off the map and he don't know where we is.

Burn (Releasing Smith). That means we have to fight our way back.

Black. Back? Don't you know we can't go back if we don't know where we is? I have seen with my eyes two Kraut patrols come within two hundred yards of us. If they find us here (He waves at the air) they will get more and more and then - pfoof! We are dead!

Burn. Right here we'll separate the men from the boys.



Wetz (A sallow youth descends the stairs) (He too croaks as though fearing the slightest sound would bring the Wermacht to this cellar). Sarjint - The lootenant just told me to tell you he's takin' a patrol back to find out where we are.

Black. A patrol? My Gawd! Back, back to where?

Wetz. He says you're in command.

Burn (Removing his shoes). Well, that means we'll stay put. Think I'll see if I still have feet.

Black. You keep them shoe on, Burn! I don't even know how many he has left here. (Running up the stair). I'm in command and you keep them shoe on. (He disappears into the hall).

Smith. That must mean we're surrounded.

Wetz. Surrounded?

Burn. That shouldn't be strange, Kid. You was in combat before you joined us this mornin' wasn't you?

Wetz. Oh sure. I told you I was with the Twenty-Eighth at St. Lo.

Smith. You're lucky not commin' into this brand spankin' new. I always feel sorry for those kids that still smell of soap.

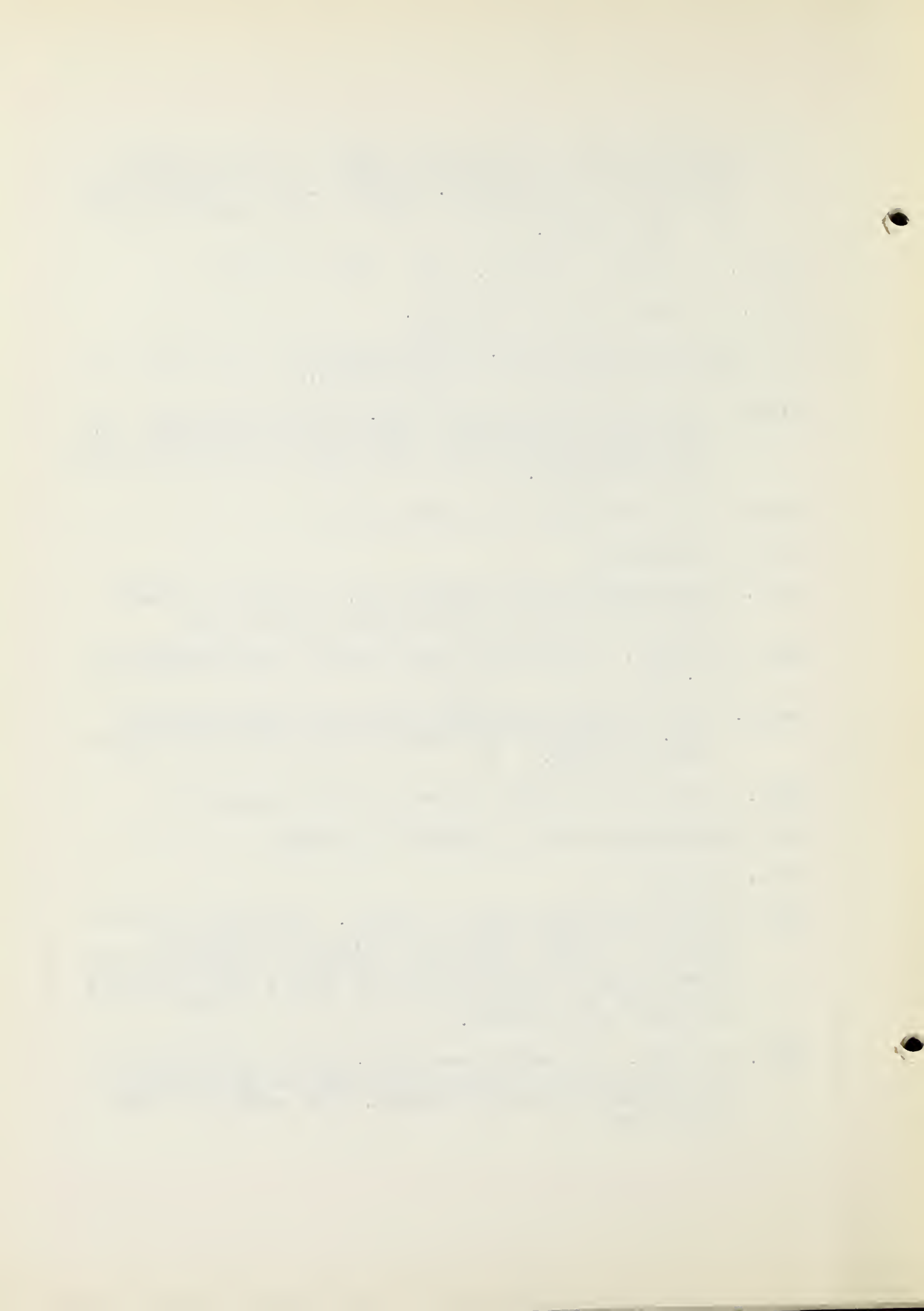
Wetz. Where do you think the rest of the platoon is?

Burn (Rubbing his feet). Grabbin' at straws.

Wetz. Straws?

Burn. Sure, everybody grabs at straws. The minute we stop we try to forget there's a war, and do somethin' crazy. I seen a guy in the middle of a battle sittin' down trying to explode toy caps with a rock one time; some will wear silk hats; me, I like to forget the war and take off my shoes.

Wetz. Oh yeah. I remember one time - (He is interrupted by the appearance of Black, who seems to have lost all the color in his dark features. His whisper is lower than ever).



Black. My Gawd, you know what? That dirty Lootenant took the whole platoon with him. We are four out here on the edge of nowhere.

Wetz. There ain't nobody pullin at straws?

Black. Don't talk about straw. Straw? You crazy, kid?

Burn. Never mind, kid. He wouldn't understand.

Black. You put on them shoe, Burn!

Burn. You go take a flyin -

Black. Goddam, I'm in command. I don't like this. Four of us in a lousy cellar. The town is burn like hell and I can't see no one of us no matter where I look. You put on them shoe.

Smith. If you had one man under you - all alone - you'd go crazy with responsibility.

Black. You hear that? I swear I heard somebody move up there. (He points to the ceiling). Smith, you come with me.

Smith. You go yourself!

Black. (Dragging Smith to his feet). Gawdamn, I'm in command. I say you come. Burn, you peak through that window over there. See if you can spot patrols in the field. (He pushes Smith up the stair).

Wetz (After a short silence as Burn continues to stroke his feet). Ain't you goin' to keep watch at the window?

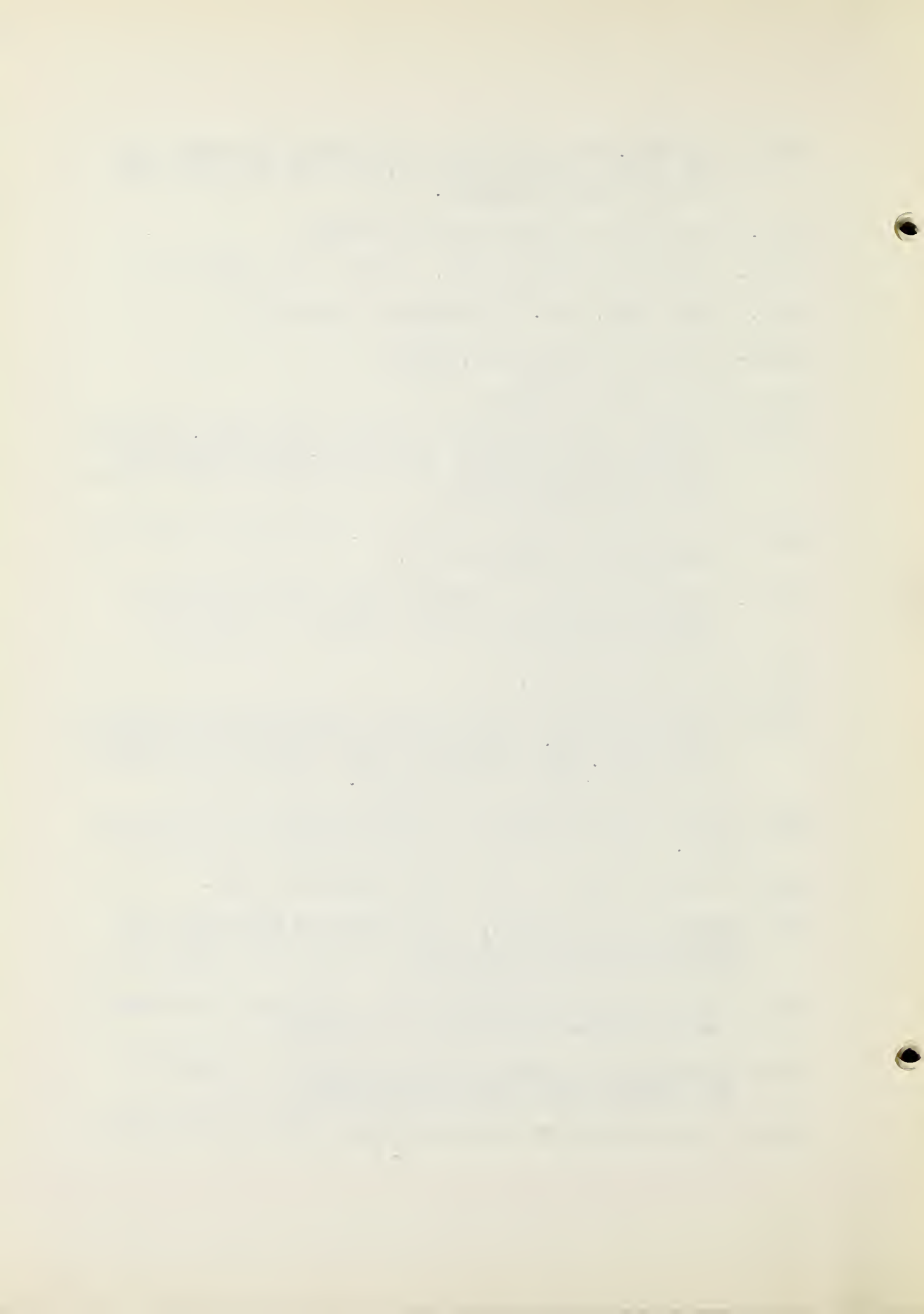
Burn. I don't like to watch death marchin' at me.

Wetz (Moving to the window, a mere slit in the wall, and pushing his rifle out). You sit there and work your feet, old timer, I'll watch.

Burn. What good is it goin' to do? There might be twenty, or two hundred out there - why worry?

Wetz. (Straining his eyes through the slit). I wonder if the Sarjint found anything upstairs?

Burn. He and Smith are probably spyin' from the flag-pole.



Burn. (Cont'd). Did you do much village fightin' with the Twenty-Eighth?

Wetz. Oh sure.

Burn. Where?

Wetz. St. Lo. I was wounded there.

Burn. You're the first "old timer" I ever see put his rifle out a window.

Wetz (Withdrawing the piece rapidly). I-I forgot I guess. (Still straining his eyes through the slit).

Burn. Y'know, I knew a kid one time who pretended he was a real "old timer"; he spent so much time worryin' about whether folks believed him that he went right out of his head. Funny little kid - scared stiff and tryin' not to show it. Couldn't share his secret with nobody - went plumb out of his head. You got to be open in war - can't hide nothin'.

Wetz. Burn, what's it like to -

Burn (Laying back comfortably). I was hopin' you'd ask, kid. Well, first all you can do is think about yourself and burrowin' into the ground (There is a sudden noise above, and the color leaves Wetz' face) Similar to what you heard and felt then. It's just Black searchin' rooms. Then after you put your head up - You a farm boy? Good!

Wetz. But -

Burn. That part will come easy. Then you begin to look at the men around you and then you're veteran! Course, some never get past the burrowin' stage. (He points to his head). It's all up here.

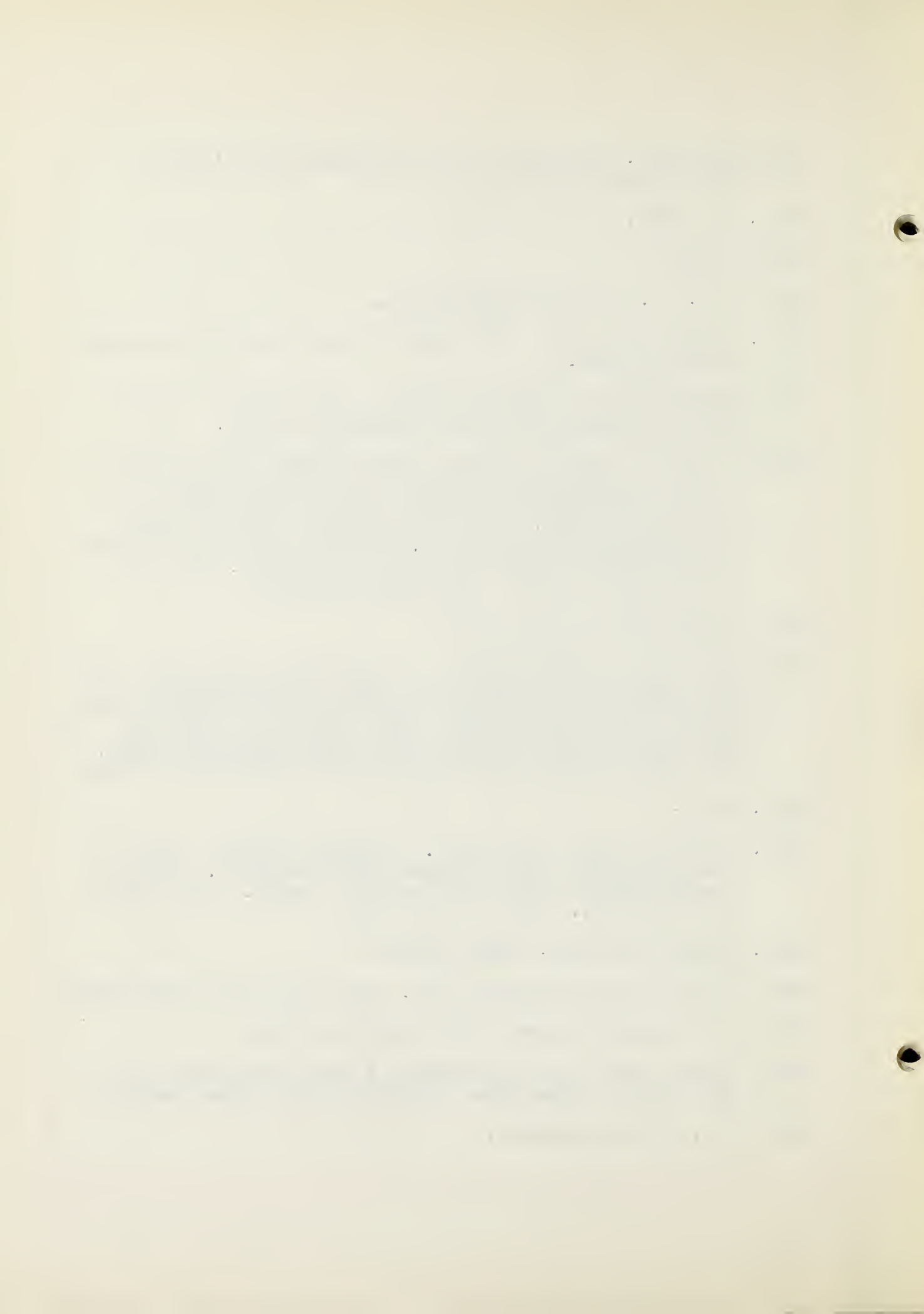
Wetz. I mean killing - just one man.

Burn. I never thought about that. Then you are a replacement?

Wetz. I thought you knew. But what's it like?

Burn. You're the first replacement I ever seen worry about killin' the other man. What are you, a Home Baptist?

Wetz. No. I'm a Catholic.



Burn. Out here it don't make no difference.

Wetz. I just can't kill. Maybe if I knew I was killin' a murderer, or one of them guys that wiped out that town in Poland; but how would I know - it might be some boy - I mean man like me.

Burn. Remember, you ain't a boy no longer. I done some killin' - but never one man. Knocked out a tank once; when they attacked we drove 'em back - we drove 'em out of hedgerows - no, not one man.

Wetz. Way down here I know I couldn't.

Burn. When the time comes you won't have a chance to think (He is interrupted by Black and Smith clambering down the stair).

Black. (Holding a German helmet in his hands). You know what, Burn? Upstair we find five, six bottle of wine - and this. (He holds up the helmet). You know what that mean?

Wetz (Fingering the helmet). That's heavier than ours.

Black. Some Kraut he is living upstairs and he decide to surrender. They always get drunk - throw helmet away - and then look for somebody to surrender to.

Burn. Any signs of life out there?

Smith. The town's like a glowin' coal now. The light's dim and the smoke is heavy - you can't see nothin'.

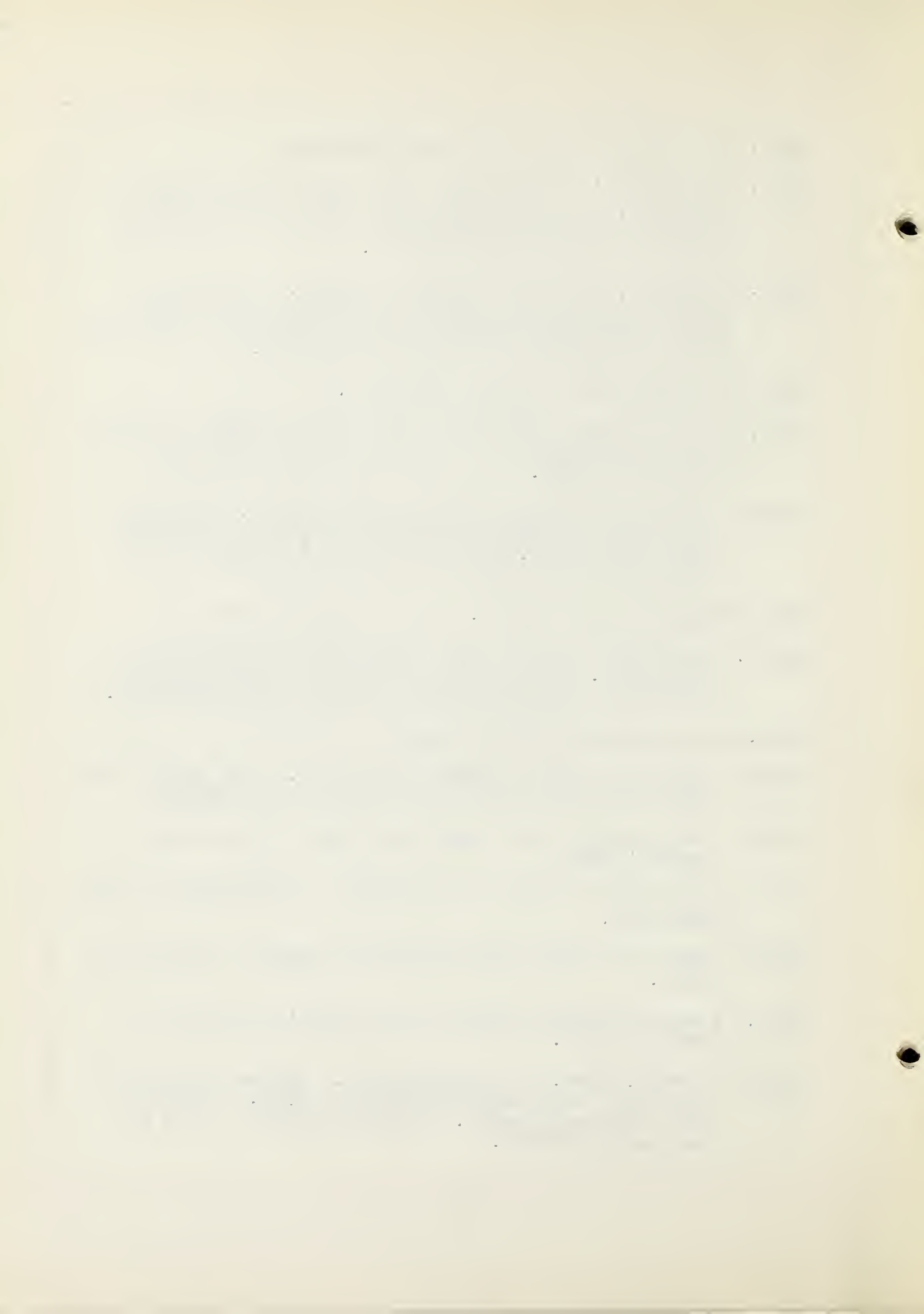
Black. How come you don't know down here? Whose been lookin' out?

Burn. Don't have to look out, Sarjint. I can smell em, you know that.

Black. When I say for you to guard the window, I mean just that.

Burn. I was a Sarjint when you was sittin' up pins in a bowlin' alley.

Black. Gowdam, Burn. I'm Sarjint now. Whether I was pin boy don't make no difference out here. Just for that you go on guard. (He points above). You go on guard up there.



Burn. My feets swelled, Sarjint, and I can't get my shoes on.

Black. I told you to keep them shoe on!

Burn. If I can't get my shoes on I can't go on guard, and I don't think I'd go anyway.

Black (Seething with anger). If that dirty Lootenant was here you'd go.

Smith. He's got an act of Congress behind him, you ain't.

Black. Just for that you go on guard, Smith.

Smith. Put him on (Pointing to Wetz). He only joined us this mornin'.

Black. I order you.

Smith. Go to hell.

Black (The escapist). All right, I'll put that new man on.

Wetz. At the window?

Black. No, upstairs.

Burn (Looking at Wetz). I think two men would be better off up there.

Black. You shut up! (To Wetz). You go up there.

Wetz. Where do you want me to stand?

Burn. I'll go with him.

Black. Ah no, Mr. "I can't get shoe on", you stay here.

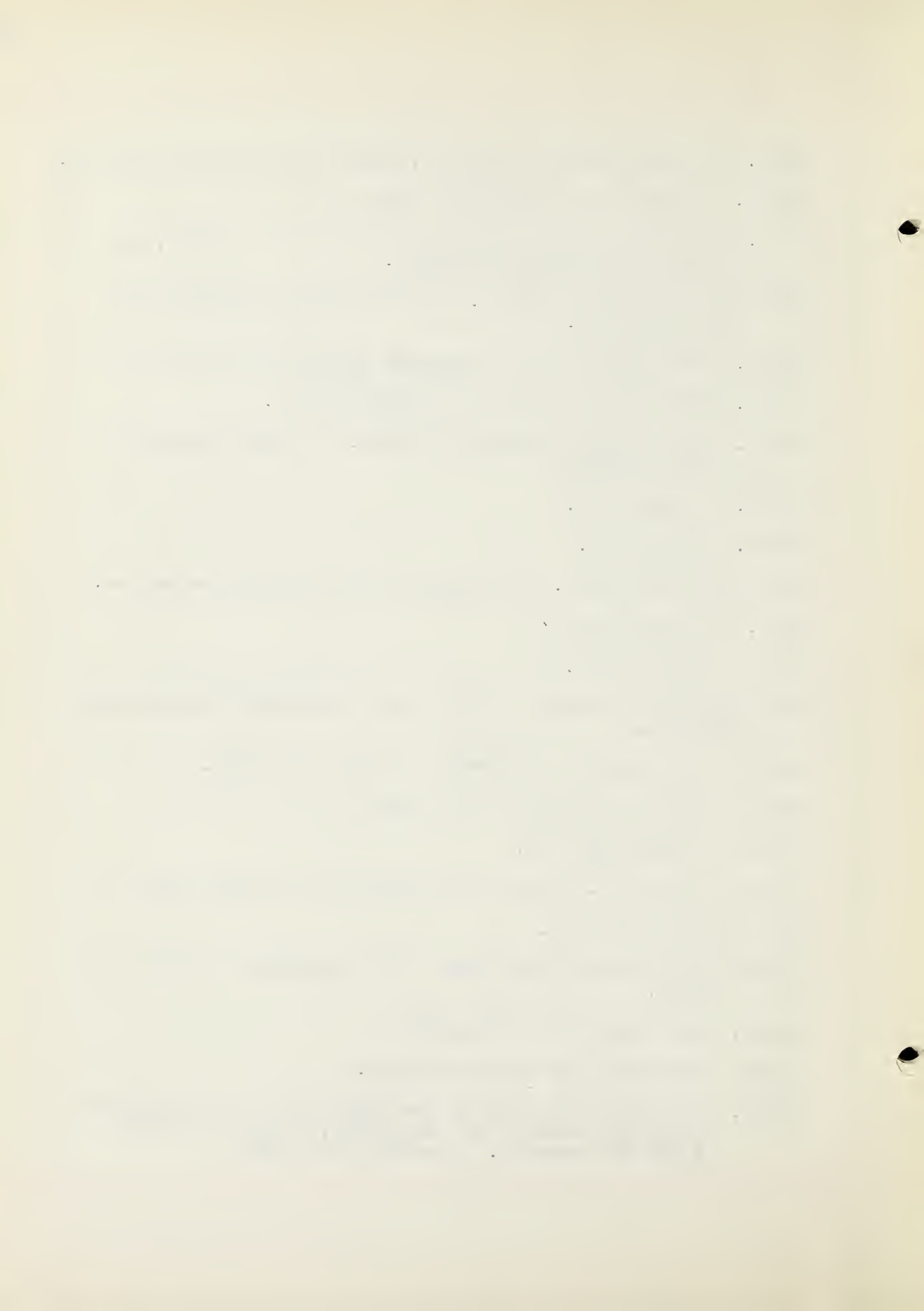
Burn. I'll go anyway.

Black. That two men good idea. You go, Smith, I want Burn here.

Smith. When will we be relieved?

Black. Burn and I be up in two hour.

Smith. As long as he ain't a new man I'll go. It's a good think you ain't a new man. Wetz. I mean a brand spank new recruit. I wouldn't go then.



Burn. Let me go with the kid, Black. I ain't been up.

Smith. It's O.K., Black, this guy was with the Twenty-Eighth Division. He still don't smell of soap. Let's go.

Burn. (As they go up the stair). You ought to let me go, Black.

Black. Look, Burn, you're old soldier - what we do?

Burn. I'm afraid you just fixed up everything.

Black. We are out here all alone. I heard some small arm fire a little while ago - that mean the Lootenant run into trouble. Smith don't hear so good - I know he don't hear. (Sinking slowly down). What you do if you was me? Stay here? Ah my Gawd, I feel like tired old man. Oh my - (He falls into a dead sleep. Burn sits looking at him for a while; then begins to clean his gun. There is a long silence broken only by far distant explosions. Smith suddenly appears and walks down the stair. When he reaches the bottom he sits and throws his body forward, seemingly unaware that anyone is present. Burn rises and shakes him by the shoulders).

Smith. (rousing out of his stupor). You! You told me he was a veteran. Did you know this was his first day?

Burn. What are you doin' down here?

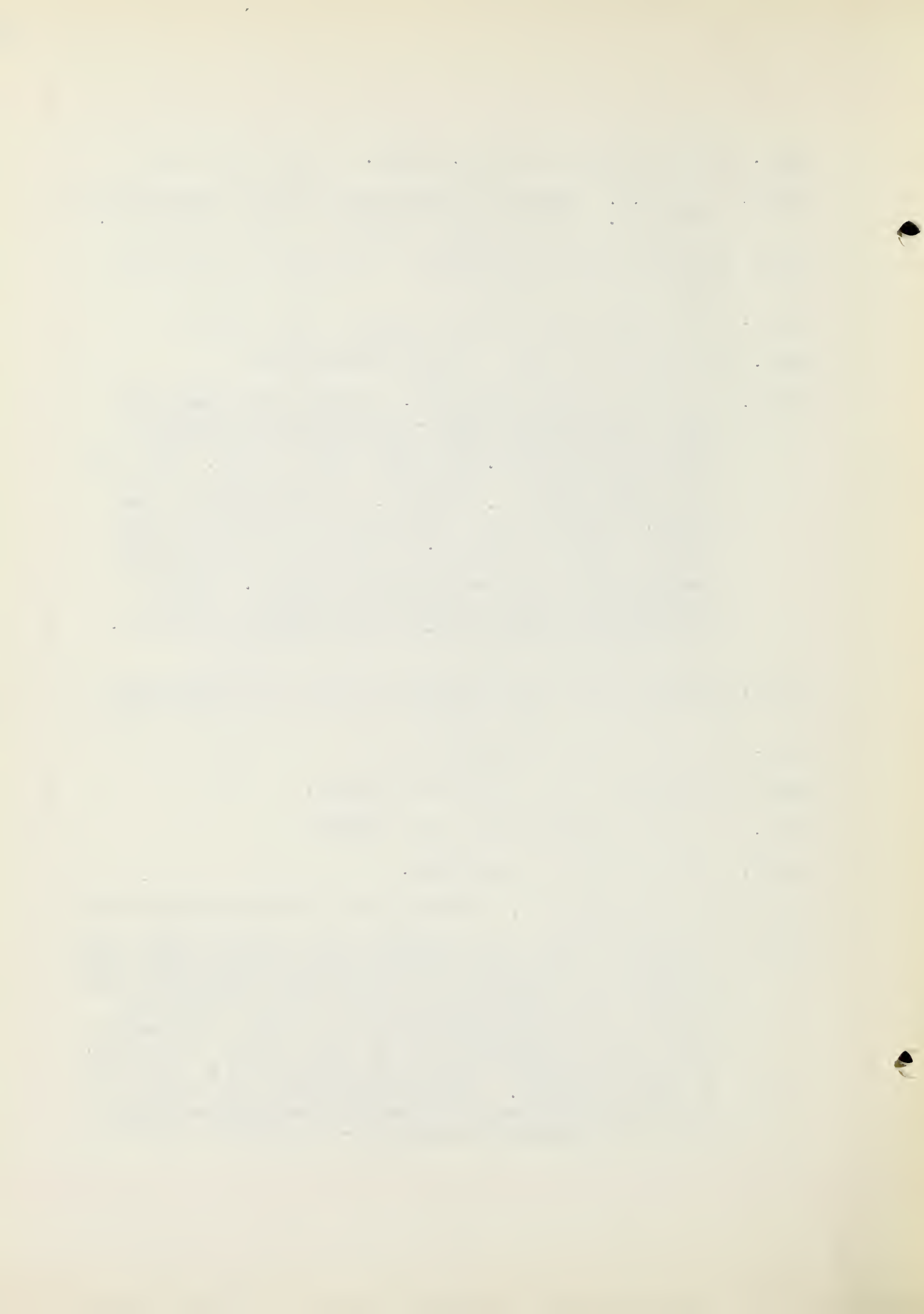
Smith (changing). I - I came for a smoke.

Burn. How come you left that kid, Smitty?

Smith. I just wanted a cigarette.

Burn. And the other kid. Howcome you left him in that hole?

Smith. Aw listen, Burn, you remember how I used to take care of them kids? I'd get to know their first names; see pictures of their Ma's and Pa's; know who their girl friends was; everything about em. Well, everyone got it - sooner or later they'd get hit. It wasn't like losin' a soldier, it was like losin' a brother. I swore I wouldn't listen to another one - just get to know his face. That night-outpost-kid starts in about his farm and his Ma - in five minutes I knew he had a Great Dane named Roy - I couldn't stand it



Smith (Cont'd). rememberin' what happened. I had to crawl away - I thought I'd scream. Well, they got him. This one upstairs. Good God! He's from Vermont, he and his old man work a farm - What's the use. I know what's goin to happen.

Burn. So that't it. Listen, Smitty, you'll get over it. You're just reachin a stage where your beginning to think of yourself. I was just like you when you joined the platoon.

Smith. You were?

Burn. Do you remember you had a girl named Katheryn Bowles, and you had a dog named Rye?

Smith. Sure, sure. I told you all about em.

Burn. The particular time I could have smashed your face in with a rifle butt. I was like you - sick of losin' brothers. Now you get up there and listen to that kid. He's different. He ain't worried about himself - he's worried about killin' somebody else - he's got me worried cause he's got the makin's of a first class infantryman - which is few and far between.

Smith. I couldn't stand it.

Burn. Go ahead - fight with yourself. (pushing him toward the stairs).

Smith. O.K., I'll try (He half mounts the stairs and turns). Say, Burn - (He stops short as he notices that Burn is standing rigid, his face turned toward the window - breathing deeply). What is it?

Burn. Krauts. I can smell Krauts! (Black suddenly wakes and reaches for his rifle. Smith poises cat-like on the stair. Black extinguishes the light as we hear Wetz, his voice almost a shriek: "Halt! Halt!" This is answered by a guttural laugh. Wetz shouts again and there is the low dull report of a rifle. With the stage in darkness we hear muttered curses and a commotion as the men dash up the stairs. There is a long silence and then a return of noise on the stage. Black lights the lamp and its glow shows Burn and Smith looking white-faced in the pale rays.

Black. Gawdam. Why this have to happen? You just wait,

Black (Cont'd). Smitty - I tell that Lootenant how you left that little kid up there all alone.

Smith. I was just goin' up, Sarjint.

Black. You think there are any more, Burn?

Burn. I don't know. I don't know.

Black. It will be light soon. Gawdamn I'm hungry. Where's Wetz?

Smith. How the hell - I'll go and look.

Black. Sure, the shoot all over. You look now.

Smith. Why you black bas- (Wetz suddenly appears in the doorway. He dashes down the stairs).

Wetz. Sarjint, he's still livin'!

Black. So what, you - ?

Wetz. He's clawin' at the air with his hands.

Black. They all claw at the air.

Burn. What happened, lad?

Smith. What happened, Wetz?

Wetz. He came around the corner of the house singin' to himself. I yelled; but he kept right on, and he laughed as though it were real funny. I yelled again. He was so close I could smell his breath - he'd been drinkin'. You don't suppose he was the one that came to surrender?

Burn. No! No!

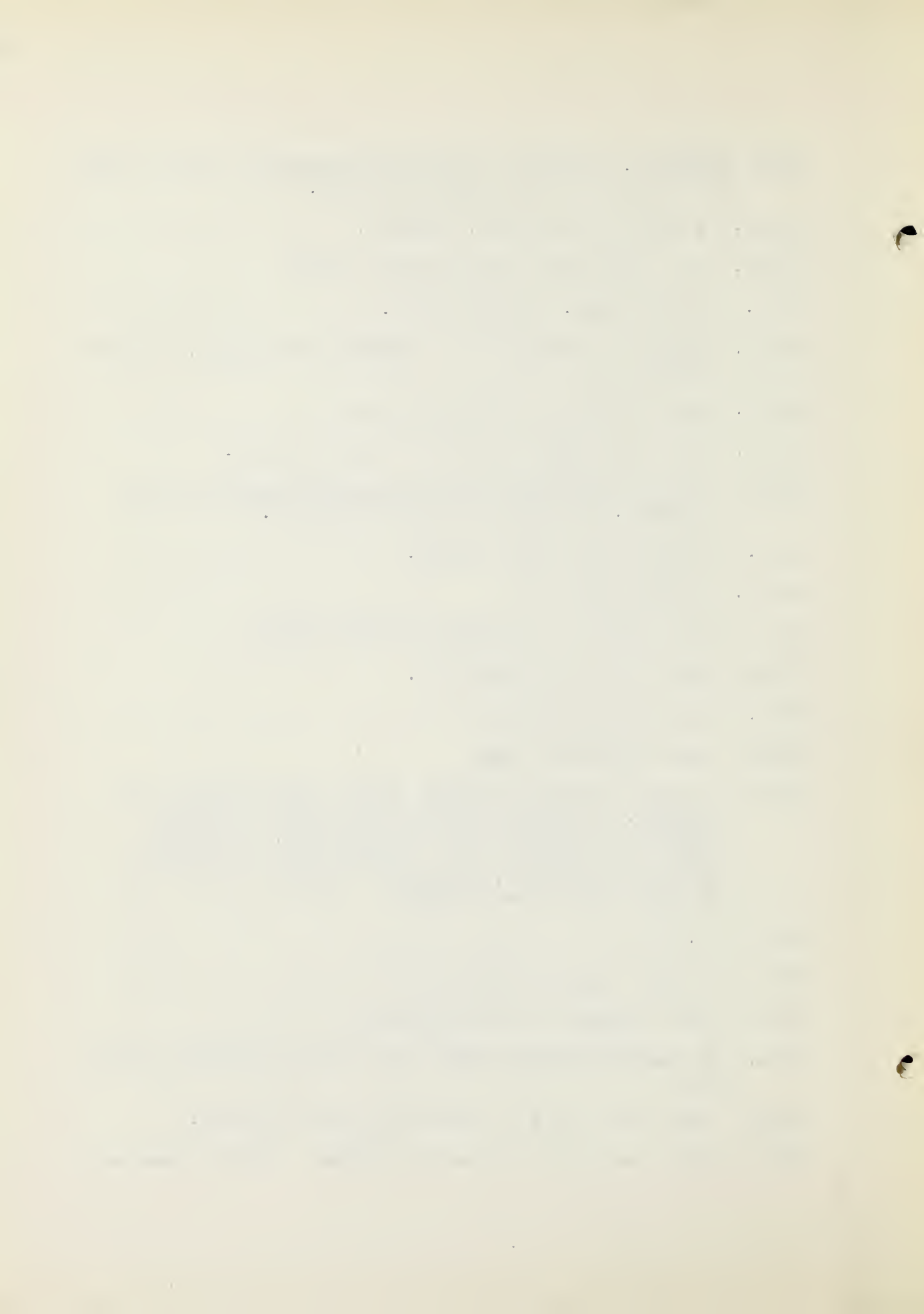
Wetz. He didn't have a helmet on -

Burn. What happened? What happened?

Wetz. He reached for his rifle and I don't remember what I did -

Black. That close it's a wonder they live so long.

Wetz. Aren't we goin to take him inside? There's snow on



Wetz. (Cont'd). the ground.

Black. You think if it was you was shot the Krauts would take you in? If it was you was shot?

Wetz. I'm not though. We should do something.

Black. You leave that Kraut there.

Burn. Maybe we can - no.

Wetz. How can you leave him there?

Black. They shoot plenty our boy.

Wetz. That doesn't mean he did.

Burn. They! Ha, Ha. If we only had some straws.

Black. Straw?

Smith. Some straws. Maybe the Kraut carries 'em. I'll look. (He runs up the stairs).

Black. See if he got any canned fish. That good. Say, what you mean straw? You crazy?

Burn. Why, Blackie, you're askin' Smith to see if there was any fish, is a straw; me keepin' my shoes off, is a straw; now we need some for this Wetz, and he won't feel so bad - good little soldier, but he needs some hay.

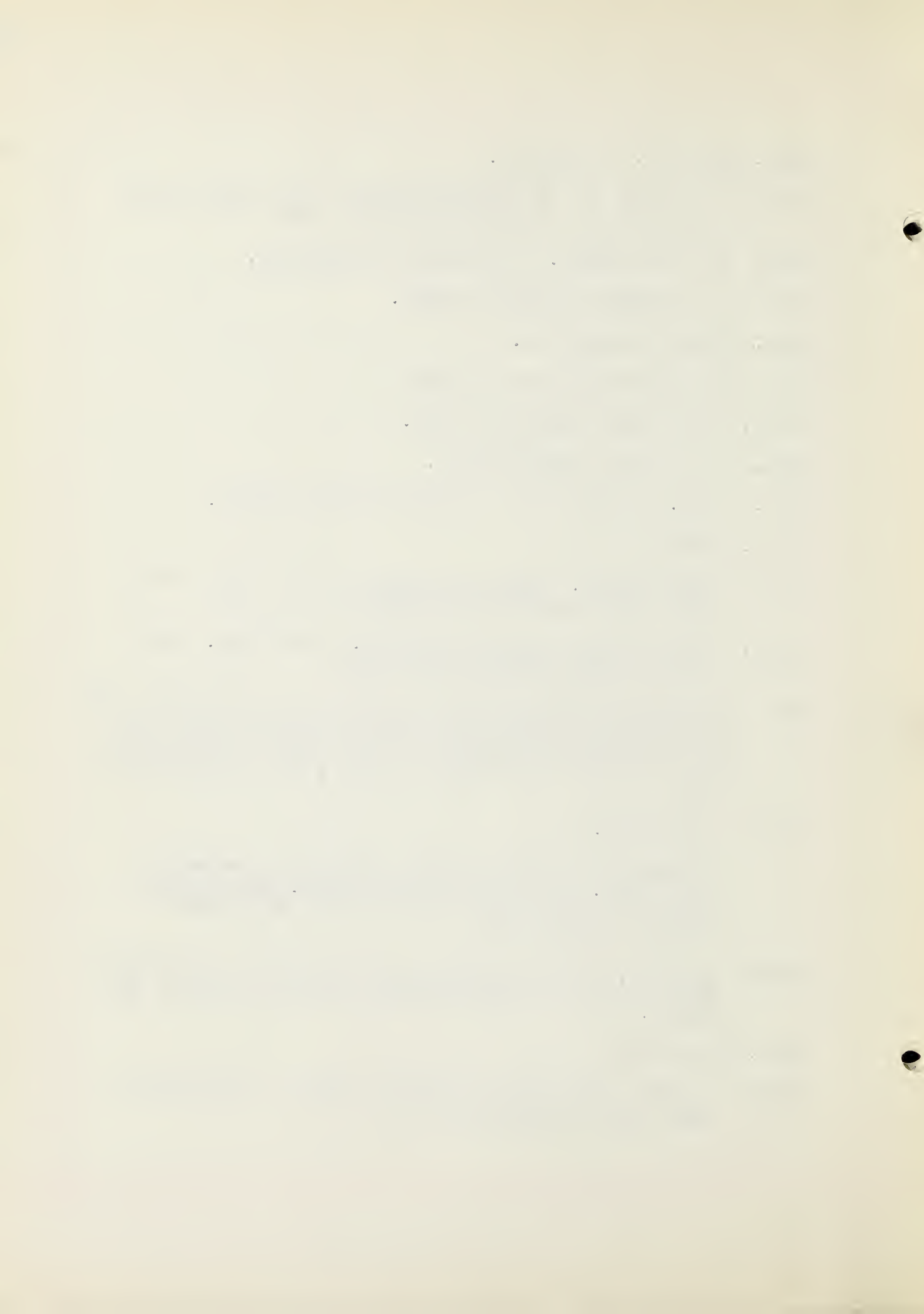
Black. You crazy!

(Smith comes down the stair bearing trinkets in his hands. He offers them to Wetz, who refuses them. He dumps them on the floor and he and Black finger them.)

Smith. A watch, not bad, still a little sticky. Two rings, had a hell of a time gettin' em off. His hands was stiff.

Wetz. Is he -?

Smith. I don't know how he lasted so long. You could put your hand in his chest.



Wetz. Ugh! (He throws himself to the floor).

Smith. Hey, Burn, here's some of that Norwegian fish, you want it?

Burn. Not this time.

Black. With the sauce? I'll take it.

Smith. He didn't have no helmet. He was the one that must have been upstairs.

Black. (Opens the tin with his bayonet). Gawdam, wish I had some bread. That Kraut bread is good and black. (He wipes the bayonet on his leg, wipes his mouth with his sleeve). Hey, let's see the souvenir.

Smith. You want a cigarett, kid?

Black. I'll take one. (Smith glares at him. Black shrugs his shoulders.) Huh-ha (he picks up the rings). One with gawdam swastika on it. Medic give you thirty dollar. They crazy!

Burn. We have the makin's of a good little infantryman here. Lay off, Black.

Black. The wedding ring no good. Maybe you can use it later on - too bad he don't have two. The watch is real Dutch turnip, not so dood. Hey, Burn, is this here Ruski? (Holding up some money from the wallet).

Burn. (Drawn by uncontrollable instincts). That's Russian all right. He must have been one of them Stalingrad Stormers.

Black. Hey, Look! Here's his picture. What's it say?

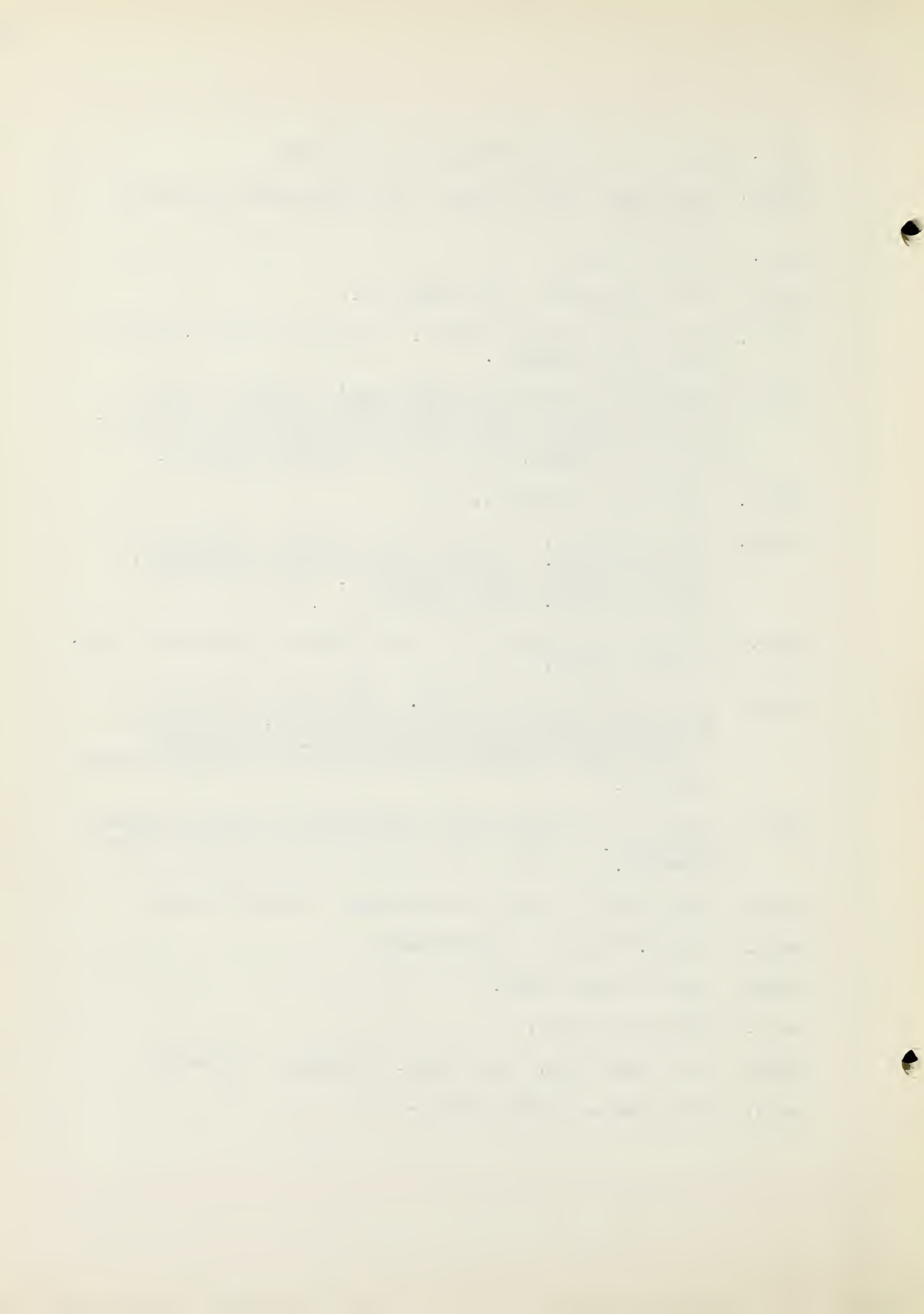
Burn. Walter. Walter, Uberfeldweber.

Black. That's awful name.

Burn. That's his rank.

Black. Hey look here! Some baby! (Holding a picture).

Wetz. Not a baby. I've - I've -



Smith. A big blond woman. Probably his girl friend, kid. (Wetz groans).

Black. That wasn't his girl friend, look here. Well, it wasn't. Look here's two kids. Look Smith! One, two.

Wetz (leaning forward). Oh my God.

Black. Sure is funny. Those kids have light blond hair; his wife too. What color hair did he have, kid? It look dark to me. Here's all four. Well, they ain't got no papa now.

Burn. Quiet down, Black. You're ruinin' a good soldier.

Black. Hey, what's this? It's a medal. Sure is, medal of Mother or God, I remember. Suppose he was Catholic?

Wetz. My God, I've killed a Catholic too.

Black. Maybe. I didn't know none of them was Catholic. (He throws the medal on the pile. Smith examines it more closely).

Burn. You dumb bastard. When the medics come, give Wetz to 'em.

Black. Why, he ain't shot! Hey, what's this, Burn?

Burn. (drawn again). I think it's a Russian sleigh. See that hoop over the horse's withers. Look Wetz, you're a farm boy.

Black. Hey look. This is a concentration camp. See them machine gun tower - barb wire all around.

Burn. That's what it is. Look, Wetz.

Smith. Look here, Wetz. Look, damn it. This here medal is St. Joan of Arc - I know, cause there was a school by that name in our town - it says so in French. See these red, white and blue ribbons? This here is a French medal. Ain't that French, Blackie?

Black. I think you right for once. It's a French souvenir.

Wetz. (Studying the medal). He was a human being. I killed a human.

Black. (Dragging Wetz to the light). You see this (holding the pictures before him) That sonabith. You see this. This picture all alone? Well, this is him you kill. Now look at this one. (Burn tries to stop the parade). Burn, you get back there. Look, kid, you tell them what you see. There's your damn human bein'. (Wetz studies the picture, a gradual change coming over his face). You tell them what you see. It's him. Look at the smile on that face.

Wetz. It's him all right. He's standin' under three women.

Burn. What is it, a French post card?

Wetz. They're hung to a tree. He's standin' there with a grin - all alone.

Burn. You evened the score up. That's life, kid.

Wetz. They ain't none of them no good!

(They all laugh nervously. There is a sudden movement at the door. They become cat-like again, as a voice bellows, "You boys all right"?)

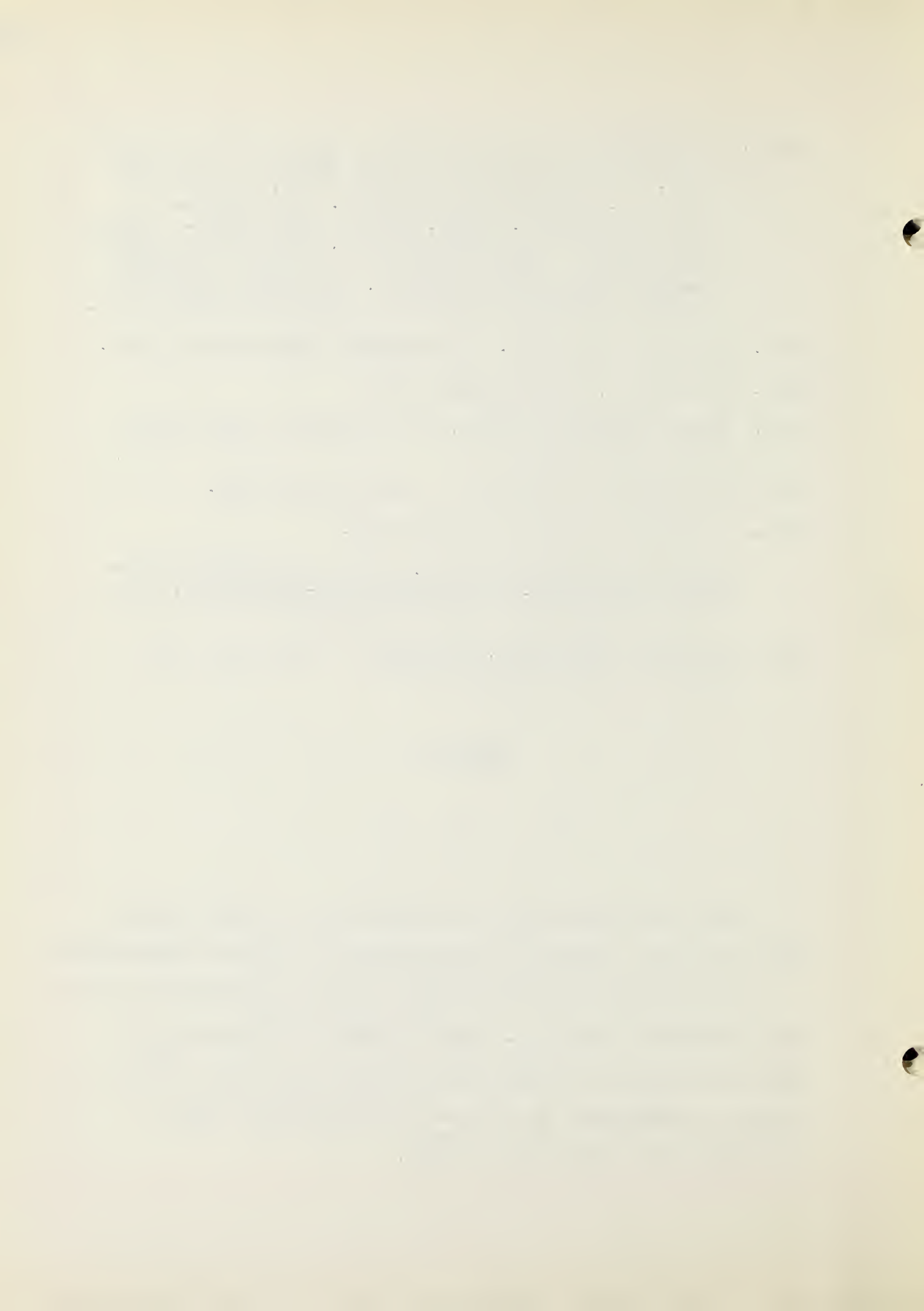
Burn. Only men and straws, Lootenant! (They run up the stairs laughing and pushing).

Curtain

* * *

This play begins with the sharp, vivid action between Smith and Burn, laying the ground-work for future complication.

The hurried entrance of Black creates the suspense which runs throughout the play. Burn's speech of separating the "men from the boys" throws the emphasis upon Wetz, who increases the suspense by his awe; and the remark makes a preparation for the ensuing drama.



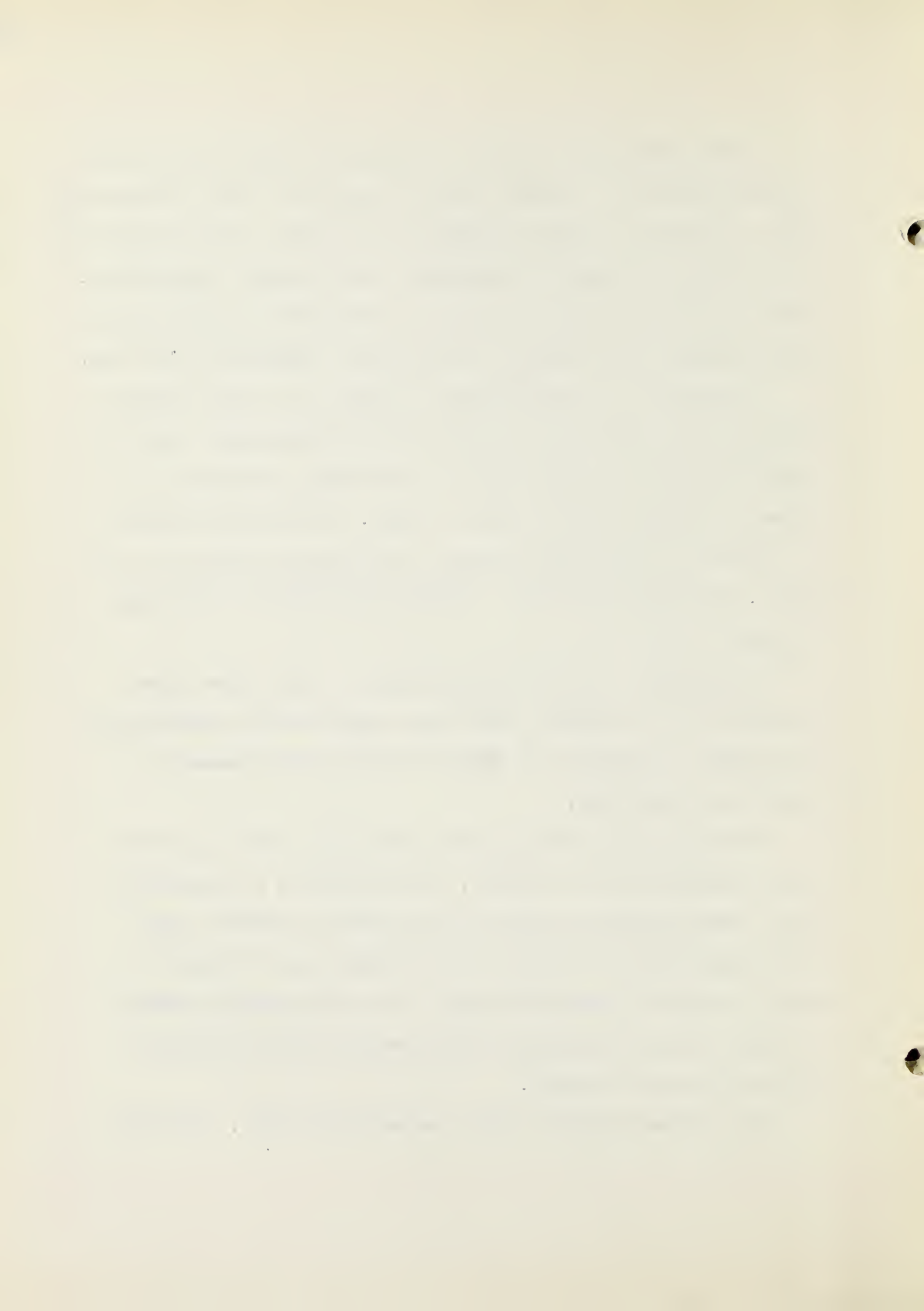
Characterization follows with Black's sudden worry over finding himself in command; Smith's dislike of any replacement; Wetz attempting to paint himself as a veteran; and Burn setting the theme of the play by mentioning the "straws" men live by. There is another return to the tense situation exemplified by Black's worry over command and the men's refusal to obey him.

Attention is then directed to Wetz as he first carries through his tale of past combat and then disregards this in favor of discovering the secret of killing, and shows his inward reluctance and refusal to kill. This scene prepares an interest in Wetz and develops the feeling of Burn for the youth. It ends with Burns' reminder that Wetz is no longer "a boy".

Preparation for the future climax is made when Black returns with the German helmet and announces the probability of a German wandering the streets looking for someone to accept his surrender.

The situation and character developed, Black announces that someone must go on guard. This again is a preparation for a complication to intensify the theme of Wetz's fear; to enlarge Burn's interest to the reader; and to pick up Smith's story of desertion again. The complication results in Smith going on guard and considering himself fortunate he is not with a new man.

The climax unfolds, Smith leaves Wetz alone. Suspense



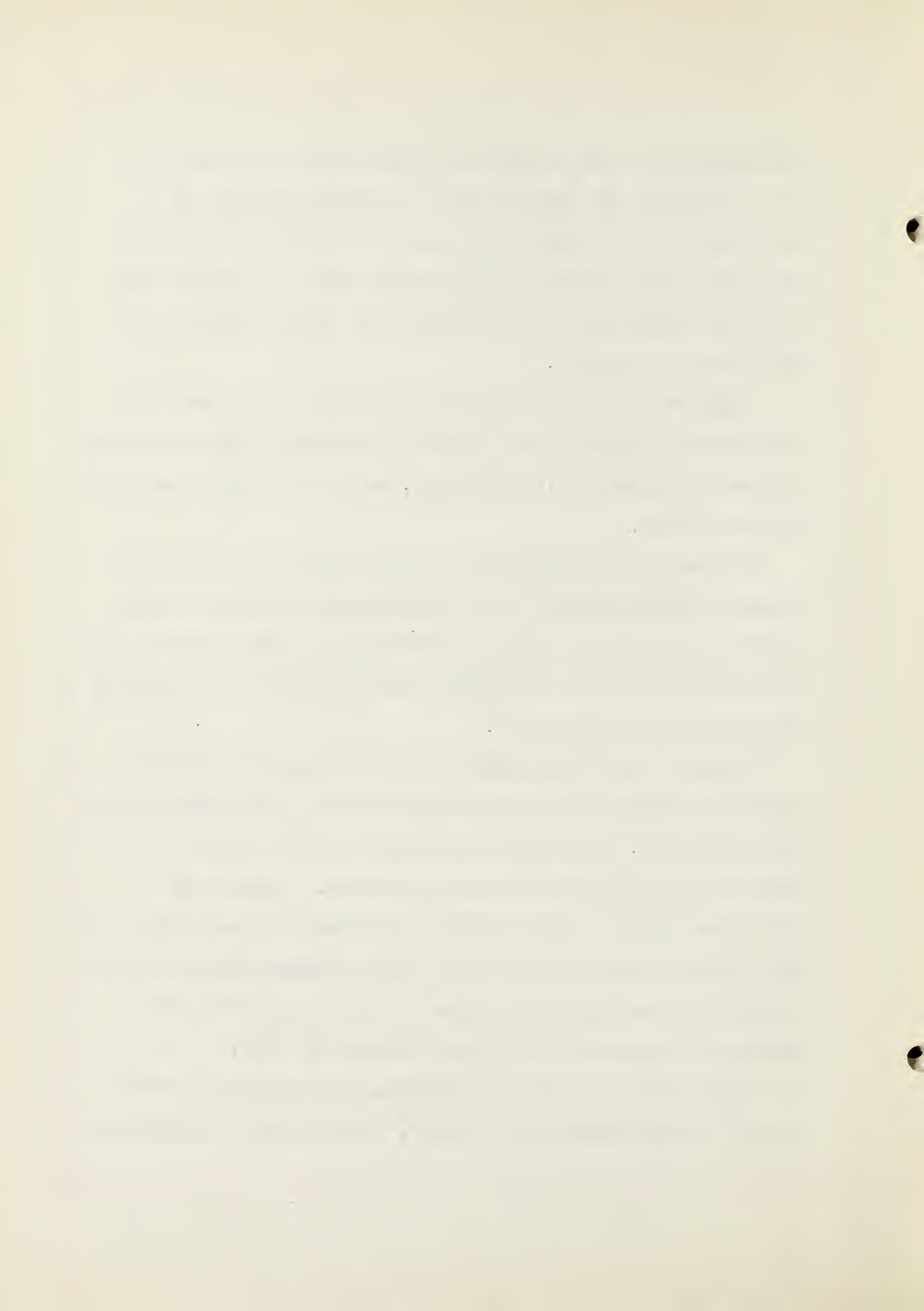
is developed in the realization that Wetz is on guard and will not kill. The Smith story is rapidly brought to a close with his explanation of why he deserted the replacement; and Burns forces him to a resolution to return which fails to materialize with the sound of shots outside and Wetz' fearful calling.

Suspense is added in the long silence that ensues and the return of everyone but Wetz to the scene. This is done to create excitement in his story, and to stimulate tension in the outcome.

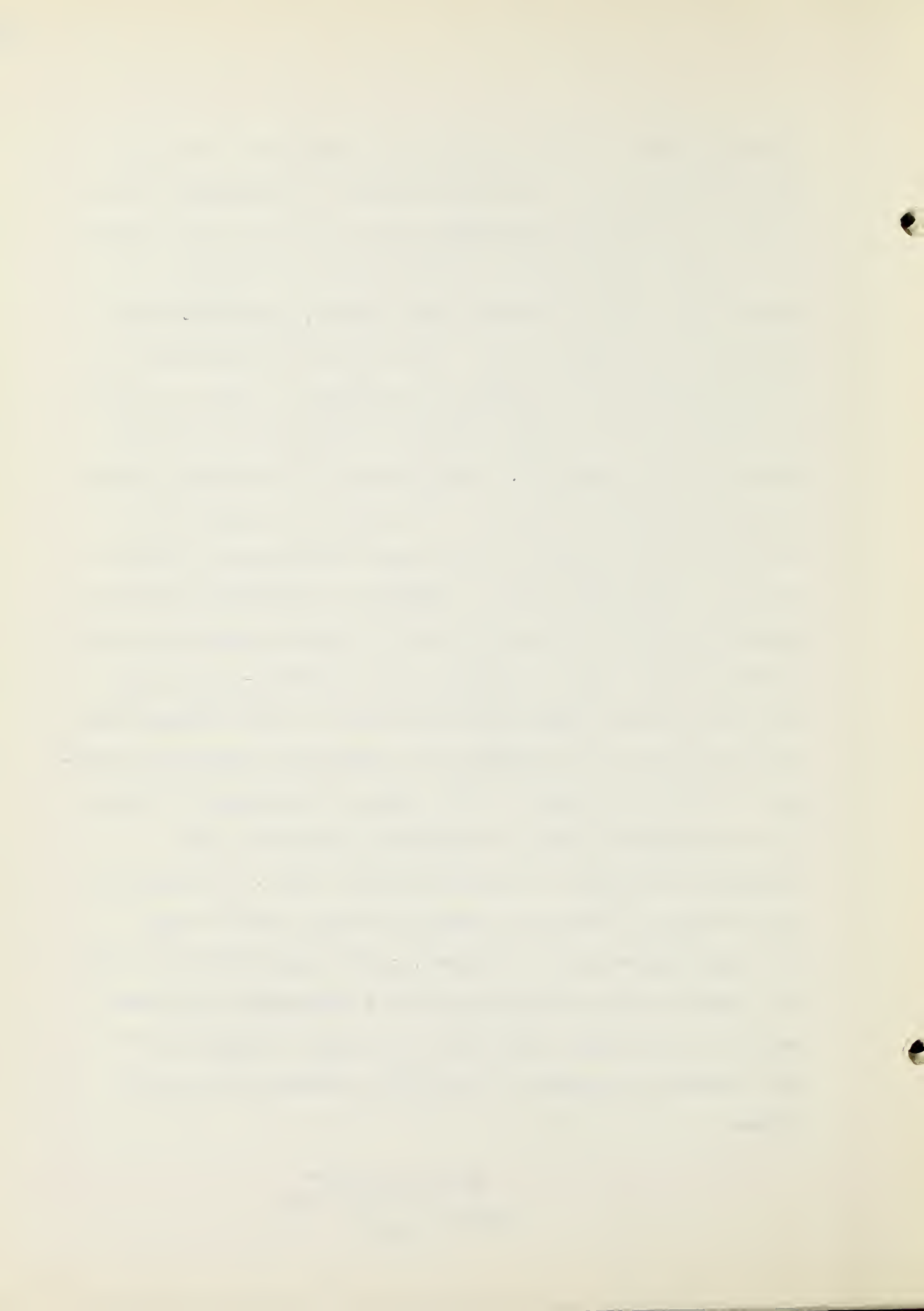
Suspense is intensified as Wetz pleads with the group to aid the dying German; and collapses from mental strain as the men display a natural callousness. Burns pleads for "straws" to save his "good little infantryman", thus paving the way for the resolution.

Suspense and preparation for the resolution is built up in the gradual display of trinkets; each one making Wetz feel the worse. The added discovery that he killed a Catholic is the high-point in his sorrow. Tension is heightened in the slow building of the dead German's character, with the final result that Wetz is cured of his phobia of homicide and begins to refer to his victim with the universal connotation of "they" instead of "he".

Behind this story of a youngster becoming acclimated to war lies the theme of "straws". In most war reports the



annoying humour of the American is depicted as a National characteristic; but I found this humour a transparent thing in that it appeared immediately before an action and following it, never in the actual grim business of fighting. I believe that this humour was a thin escape, and rather than depicting this comedy which I think would be detrimental to the ugly business of killing in the drama; I chose to illustrate escapism by the men pulling at straws for the understanding of the audience. Burn pulling off his shoes; Wetz pretending he was a veteran, and citing his religion as a reason for his refusal to kill; Black treating his job as a pin boy is the reason why his orders are questioned; Smith's interest in the new men, which is so closely connected to the business of war that it proves a near cracking-point with him; the veterans' uncontrollable desire to look through the German's wallet; and above all the continual impersonal reference to "they" in regard to the enemy. The danger of thinking on individual lines is exemplified by Wetz' near collapse in thinking of the dead man as "him". The youth's final remark of "they ain't none of them no good" shows his ready acceptance of "straws". This plural reference was also used to give universality to his experience and necessarily is used again, after the particular of painting the dead German's character, so that the universal will be retained.



The scene and action of the play are based upon an actual incident. There are few changes in the original happening, except for the building up of theories to accentuate the story of Wetz. The final decision of his return to normality through the medium of photographs has been criticized as implausible; but fortunately, the youngster was eagerly grabbing at straws and the photograph of this particular German standing beneath the hung women filled him with ire and he snapped out of his near collapse. Another factor was our being ordered suddenly to assist a rifle company, so that there was little time to remain by the dead body. Actually this order wouldn't have erased the feelings of Wetz, but I think it illustrative of my theory of escapism by straws.

There is also a faithful portrayal of character. Burn might appear to the eye as the conventional type of philosophizing, fatherly soldier - actually, he was just that; an old regular army man who didn't seem to care whether snow or shrapnel fell, and whose one concern was to give his feet a rest.

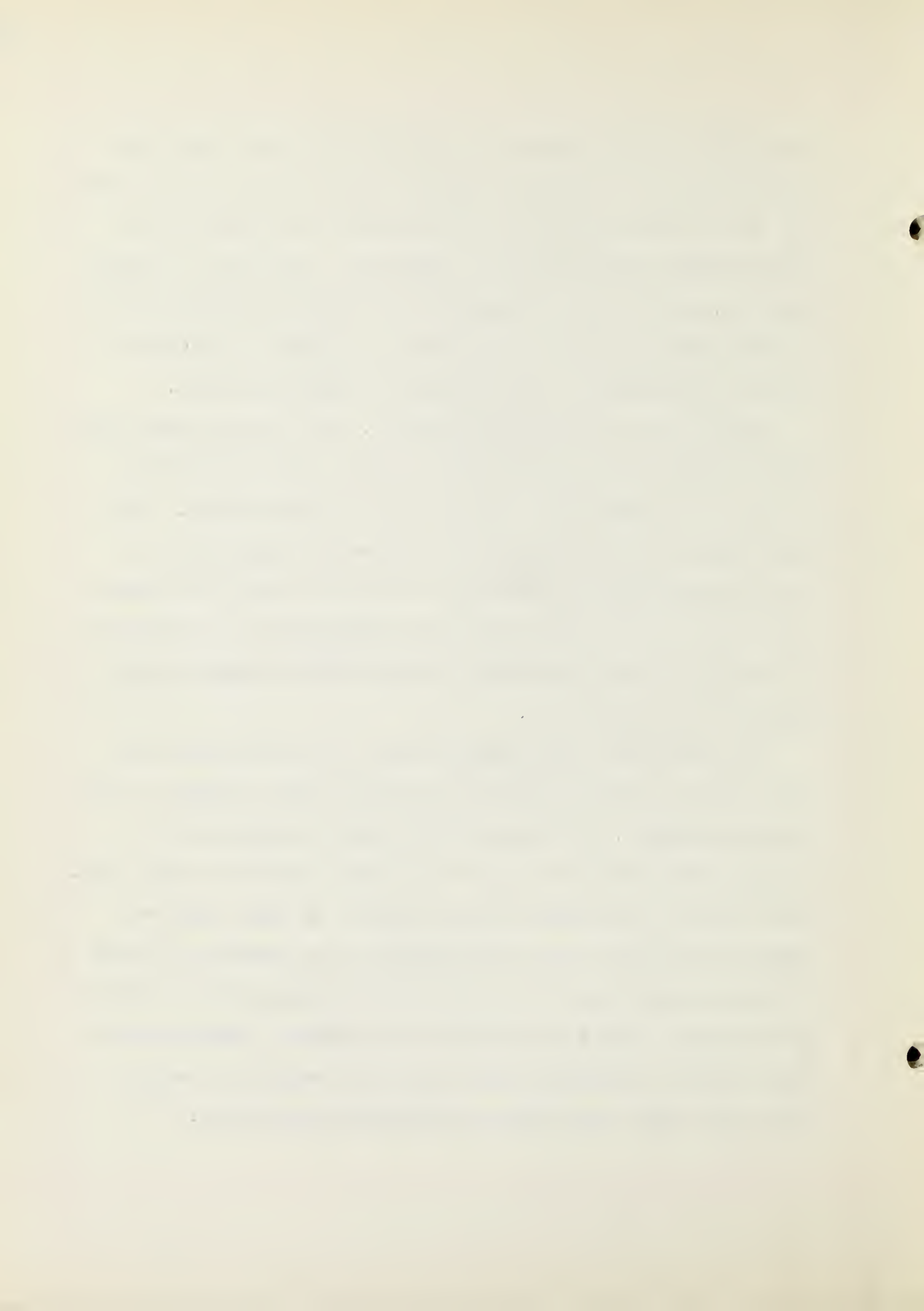
Black was a lad from Western Massachusetts. His chief fear after his promotion to sergeant was that someone would discover he was a pin boy. Once this was discovered, he used it as a reason or factor for everyone disobeying him. (Another example of escaping from the actual.) He wasn't actually cruel; but he lacked understanding and depth with



the result that he appeared calloused and hard. His chief virtue lay in his ability to carry out an order to the letter; his worse fault was that he was lost and in a dither if he found himself forced to make a decision. Black was a French-Canadian, and I have attempted to capture the peculiar flavor of that nasal dialogue in his speech - using it in favor of the more conventional tough speech of "dees and dats".

Smith was an enigmatic character. His change from a kind understanding man to a calloused soldier was an actuality, but had to be sketched vividly in the confined drama. This change back to the original Smith never did occur; but it was again necessary in the play to have him look for straws, and attempt to help Wetz, since a turning point in character is necessary in any drama and the Smith-story played an important part in the play.

Interestingly enough Smith began to run away from himself early in November previously having been a father to all the replacements. He finished his career of escapism by running away from Black whom he had been ordered to stay with. Black had his leg blown off by a shell. At that time the company was filled with replacements and we thought it would be best to have one of the "old men" stay with him and adjust the tourniquet until the medics could arrive. Unfortunately Smith was the choice and Black died as a result of neglect; days later Smith was picked up hopelessly psychotic.



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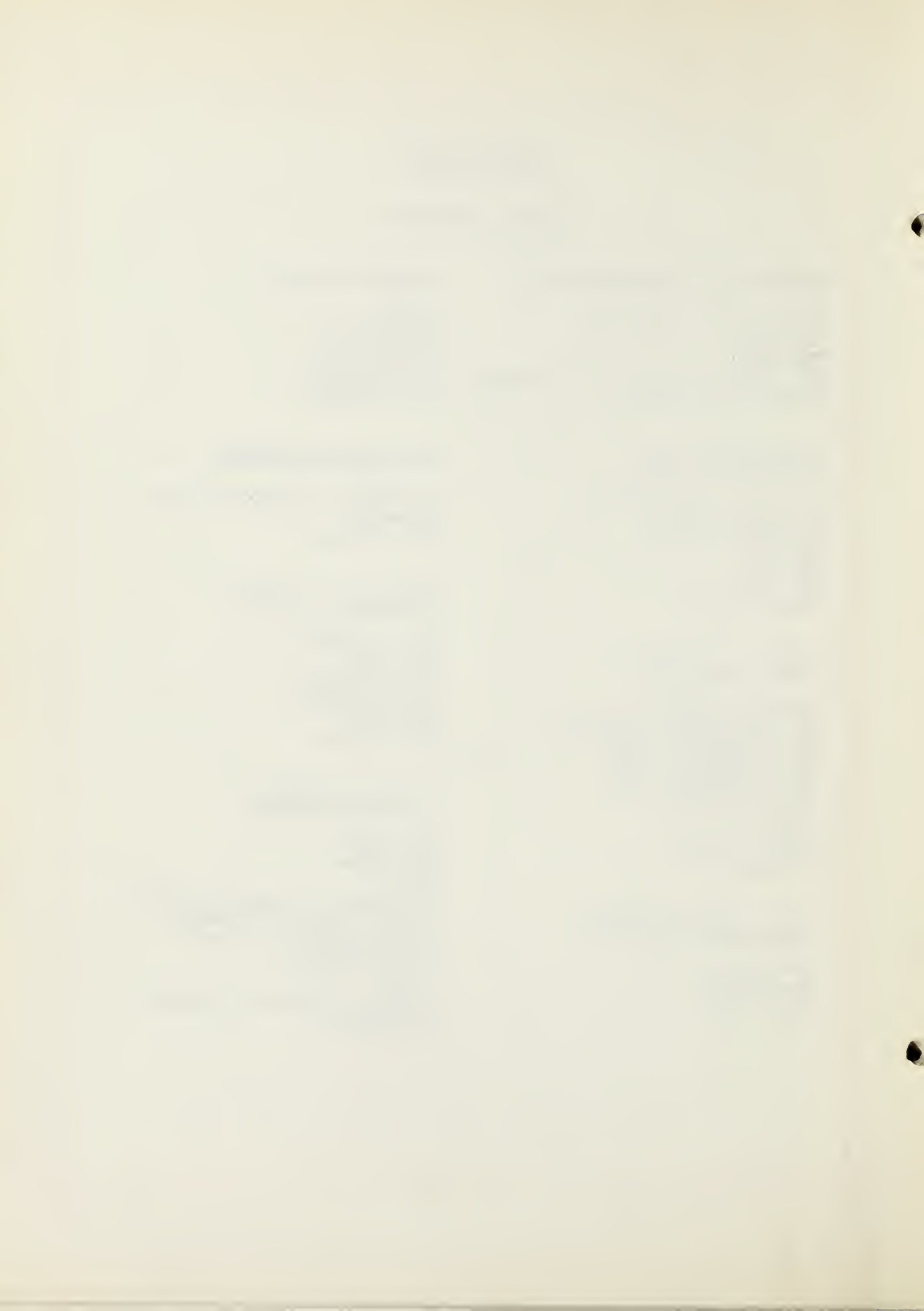
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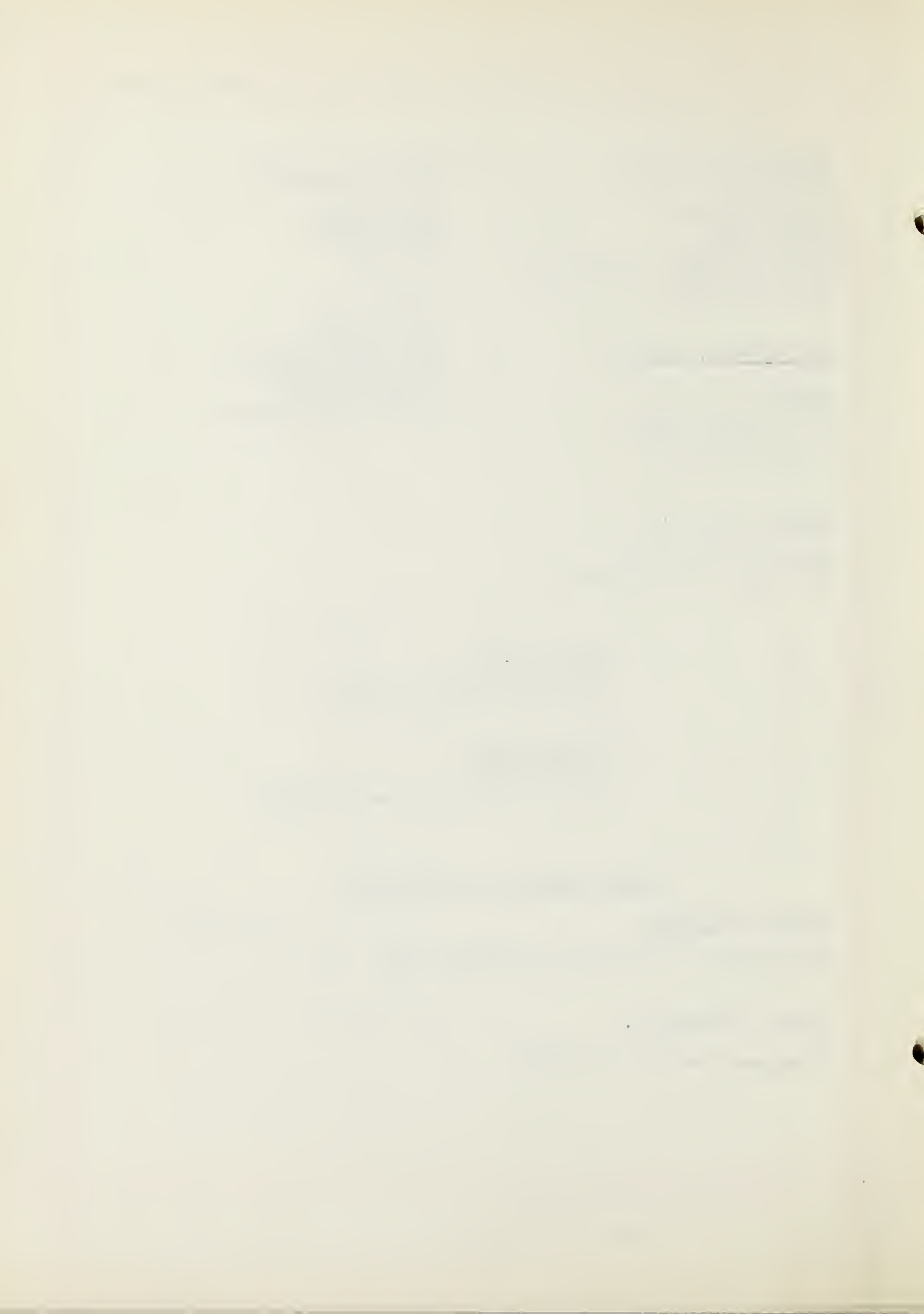
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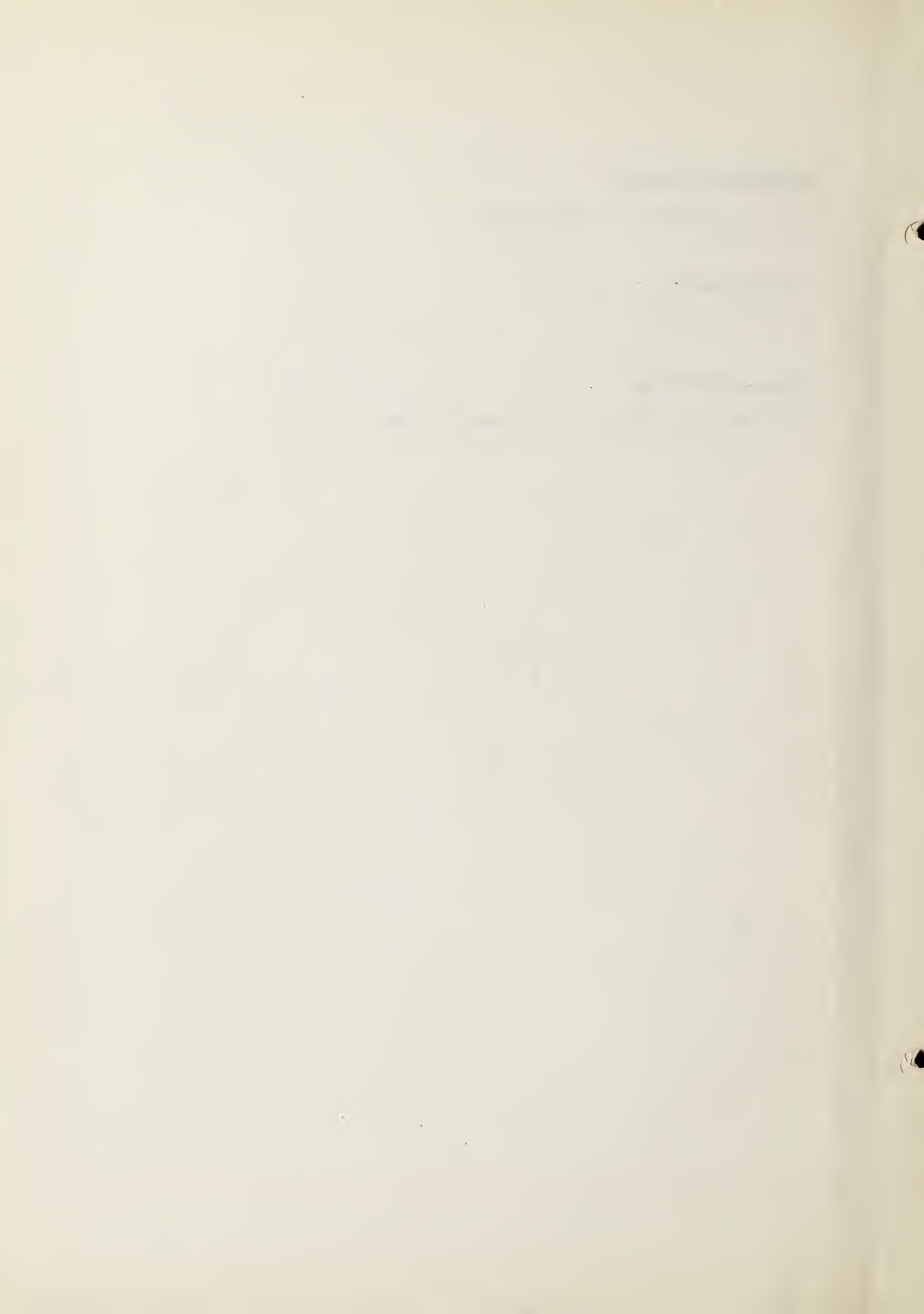
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