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# Long is the journey (a novel)

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

LONG IS THE JOURNEY

(a novel)

by

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Approval Sheet

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Up, wanderer in the wild, and come away,  
Long is the journey yet, and long the fray;  
Enough of roving now in desert places,  
There lies a great wide road before our faces...

--Hayim Nachman Bialik

I

The water had been warmer than the air, and Nathan shivered as he took his jeans from the rock where he had tossed them a short time before. The heat of the sun was in the faded blue cloth, and it felt good as it settled on the dampness of his body. He pulled his shirt on and began to run up the trail from the shore, feeling his blood tingle and watching his shadow as it dodged along before him over the sunlit grass.

He ran until the sweat stood out on his lean brown forehead and it hurt him to breathe. Then he slowed down to an easy jog, and from a jog to a walk. The air was dry and comfortable, and the perspiration evaporated

quickly, leaving him feeling light and strong. He whistled as he walked the path around the lake, quick, nameless tunes such as fifteen-year-old boys have whistled as long as there have been birds to imitate.

He climbed the stone wall which marked the end of the forest and the official beginning of Greene's farm, clearing it easily, a long, too-thin sapling of a boy, dark and ingrown in appearance, looking a curious combination of American woodsman and German Jew.

Shortly after he had entered Greene's property he stopped whistling and stood motionless, for the babble of voices had come to his ears, and old man Greene had been known to go so far as to fill the air around trespassers on his place with no.2 buckshot. But in the quiet of the country sound travels quickly, and no one seemed to be nearby. He waited for a few seconds, and then continued on his way.

Just before the wooded area ended in scrawny scrub oak, and a half-mile of flat, lush meadowland began, there was a giant of a tree, a huge split oak, disfigured and scarred by countless bouts with lightning, and holding suspended from the end of one of its topmost boughs an object dear to Nathan's heart. He had watched the same orioles for three years, spending breathless hours observing how they carried bits of straw and chaff in the

monumental job of fashioning the deep, baglike nests in which they lived. Now it was just about time for the eggs to be in the nest, and he wanted to see them. He leaped up and grasped the lowest branch of the tree, and swung his body up into its leafiness. He climbed quickly and without fear, and it was not long before he was looking down into the nest, marvelling at the eggs. They were speckled, white and pink, and Nathan had seen others like them a dozen times, but always he felt the same awe when he looked at them.

He had almost reached the ground when he heard the voices, and when the first stone went plowing through the foliage above him he froze, thinking that old man Greene had seen him and had come to chase him away. Then he heard the girlish treble and the young tenor of the boy, and he relaxed.

"You're not even coming close, Charlie!" the girl said. "You couldn't hit that old crow's nest in a million years. Watch how I do it!"

Nathan could tell from the squealing which followed that the girl's rock had come close to hitting the nest. The rock tore its way through the foliage and thumped against the broader limbs as it dropped. With every thump Nathan felt more angry. He was just about to shout when the rock hit him on the head. It had been slowed-up,

but it was sharp enough to hurt when it struck, and involuntarily he loosened his grip and started to fall, scraping against the two lower limbs while he yelled at the top of his lungs.

He landed with a thump which knocked the wind out of his body, and he lay writhing on the ground, gasping for breath in a welter of oak leaves and bits of twig, with scratches on his arms and shoulders and the blood wet on his cheek from the wound just above his hairline.

A short boy with angry-red hair and a blonde girl whose freckles stood out against her white face looked at him in speechless fear; then the boy blurted, "He's dead. It's the Jew, Kim, and you've killed him!"

Finally, Nathan's gulping succeeded in forcing some air down his gullet, and he sucked in gratefully. He looked at the two standing over him. "Hhoooh..hh.. Goddam fools!.."

The girl allowed a slow sigh of relief to escape her lips. "Of course he's not dead," she said, turning to her companion. "Charlie, you run down to Mr. Greene's place and fill my bathing cap with water and get some arnica." Nathan scrambled to his feet as the other boy prepared to obey. "No, you don't!" he said. "What do you want to do, have old Greene give you some water and

then turn us in for trespassing?" He raked the other two with eyes sharp with scorn. "What a couple of boobs! Pegging rocks at an oriole's nest, in the first place!"

They looked at each other uncomfortably. "It's a crow's nest," Charlie began, "and anyhow.."

"Look," Nathan said, "a crow's nest is made like an ordinary nest, see? Just a basket of twigs and straw and stuff. But an oriole's nest is made like a bag, get it? And it's hung from the end of the branch. A crow's nest is liable to be near the crotch. And an oriole most of the time builds higher than a crow. You don't know much of anything, do you?"

Charlie MacIntyre shuffled his feet uncomfortably. He had red hair and he hated to be baited. He looked toward his companion in silent appeal.

She cleared her throat. "Why don't you come over to my house with us?" she asked. "Doc Mallin is my uncle, and he can look at the cut in your head."

Nathan stared at her. The light blonde hair pulled back from her freckled face was the color of the moon on frosty winter nights.

"Go suck eggs," he said.

She looked at him for a moment. Then she whirled. "Go on and die, then," she cried as she trotted off with Charlie at her heels. Nathan grinned as he watched the

boy's red head bobbing close behind and below the girl's yellow thatch.

Then the grin faded from his lips as his head throbbed, and he felt dizzy. He sat under the oak tree long enough to insure the other two a good head start, and then rose carefully. It would take him a long time to make his way around the perimeter of the lake. But first he would have to find some water and bathe some of the encrusted blood from his face. He couldn't let Pa see him looking as if he had bled for hours. Pa would be frightened enough.

The letters on the window of the tailor shop read T ILOR. Nathan had knocked the A off when he was nine years old. At the space in the window which should rightfully have belonged to the missing letter, he pressed his nose against the glass and peered in at his working father. Moishe Holoff was a little man. But when seen in the confines of his tiny tailor shop he was in complete proportion, and when on occasion he opened his mouth and began to talk, Nathan knew that he was an impressive personage. Gold-rimmed spectacles worn on the tip of a small, rounded nose combined with a full head of hair and the beard to give an impression of erudition that was not misleading.

His hands, small, white, square and strongly made, were the hands of a craftsman; and Moishe Holoff loved his craft. To him the bolts of cloth which lay in seeming confusion all about his little shop had different personalities. The heavy flannel, droopy and slow-moving, was a child overgrown; tweed was fast-talking and whimsically dry, with a small brown mustache; gabardine was an effete, effeminate boy, reaching out toward distant manhood. But he had no favorites, feeling a deep respect for good cloth and scorning materials of the cheaper qualities. And if the hand which wielded the soapstone and cut the bolts was quick and brisk, the hand which smoothed the wrinkles from the goods was tender and gentle. So had his father's hands fluttered over coarser fabrics in Vilna; so, mit Gott's villen, would his son's hands reverently work after Moishe had taught him all there was to know about tailoring.

Moishe sat on his pattern table, busying himself with his soapstone, the long rays of the late afternoon sun casting shadows from the window into the tiny room. A knock on the window caused him to look up and lock gazes with the mischievous eyes of his son. Nochemil, he thought. Little Nathan. But no longer so little. That devil. Using the good long afternoon hours to loaf around the lake like a fish or an otter instead of putting

them to good use to learn the trade or study his lessons. Oÿ, Gott, if Anita could only see him now, so tall and brown and healthy he was. But more like a gentile than a Jewish boy. And he doesn't seem to mix well with the other young ones. A problem. It's different when you're middle-aged already, and your life is lived and has been buried. But a young one...a problem. Anita. How can I help him?

Nathan watched him for a long moment, then rubbed at the misted-over spot on the glass and entered the shop. A small brass bell jangled as the door opened. Moishe looked sternly at the smiling face.

"Nu, Nochem," he said. "And where have you been since school let out for the day?"

"At the lake, Pa."

"And what do you find at the lake that is more interesting than your school lessons, than learning to be a tailor?"

"I don't know, Pa. I just like it, that's all. I think down there."

Father and son gazed at each other in grave understanding, and a smile broke out on the man's face. "My thinker," he jeered softly, trying to hide the pride in his voice. He tousled the boy's head, causing him to cry out in pain. Moishe's eyes clouded as he saw the dark

stain on the matted hair over the ugly bruise.

"Woe to me, what have you done to your head? Have you been diving from the cliffs again? Never have I seen a head like that since leaving the old country! You might have got a fractured skull! Oy, you devil, tyvel du! Come here and let me fix that head for you!"

"Ah, Pa. Doesn't even hurt. Some dumb kids were tossin' rocks over trees and they didn't even know I was around and I got clipped. MOZESS, I don't need that antiseptic on a little old stone bruise! OUCH! And iodine, too? Cut it out, willyuh, Pa?"

The tailor thoroughly attended to the wound. Then Nathan told him the complete story of what had happened that afternoon, Moishe not interrupting or saying a word, but nodding now and then to show the boy that he was being understood.

"You know what, Pa?" the boy concluded. "It was the same old story. When those two kids first saw who I was they didn't say 'He's Nate Holooff' or 'It's the tailor's son'. They said, 'It's that Jew'. I'm tired of being called 'that Jew'! That MacIntyre kid is Scotch, but nobody calls him 'that Scotchman'."

Moishe looked away, his face naked for a moment. Then he looked at his boy. "Oh, there's a reason for everything," he said, nodding his head as if in complete

agreement with himself. "It's just as if you yourself had seen an eskimo down at the lake whose name happened to be John. You probably wouldn't say 'It's John'. I think you'd say 'It's the eskimo'. Understand?"

The boy was hesitant. "I think so. You mean the difference is that there aren't many Jewish kids in Dutton, is that it?"

"That, and also the fact that for four years, before the new ones came from Europe, you were the only Yiddishe kind here. Look. Remember two years ago, when you found a bunch of ducks attacking the white duckling on the lake and you brought it home? Well, they weren't trying to harm the duckling because they didn't like baby ducks, or even because they didn't like the color white. It was just that they mistrusted the nebichil because it was different from them. All living things are suspicious of anything different. Cossacks or ducks, it's the same story, see?"

"Pa, what did they call you when you were young, in the old country?"

The father smiled. "Moish. And your mother. Chanah. I used to pull her long braids in the shul and call her Henkeh, and once she cried." Moishe brought himself back with a start, and looked at his son. "What do they call you, boychik?"

"Nothing, I guess. I sort of like Nate, don't you?"

Moishe looked at him for a moment, then smiled. "Come, get the chessmen and set up a game," he said. "I haven't been beat for a long time."

While the boy arranged the pieces Moishe opened a drawer in his pattern table and took out a humidor and a crook-necked meerschaum pipe, which he filled and lit. Then, puffing slowly, he sat down to play.

The sharp blue eyes behind the glasses were fixed steadily on the board. "Don't ever start off that way again. In three moves you're up against checkmate. Zun," he said in the same tone, never looking up from the board, "you're not friendly with any young ones your own age, and in many ways that is not right, that is a bad thing. You are never..well..lonely, with no one but me? You are a Jew, Nathan; you should be with other Jews. Come to shul with me this Friday night. Many of the new people have young ones your age."

"Ah, Pa. Those Shulinski kids. Dumbells, And the Poliakoffs stink of garlic. And the shul! Who wants to go to church in an empty store?"

The fire came into Moishe's eyes. "A fool I have raised! Who wants to go to church in a store! We are lucky to have other Jews move into town, lucky to get this store. This Fridy night you dahven in shul and learn

to live with people!" Then as fast as it had ignited the fire dies. "Ah, Nochem, it is not as if you had Christian friends. That, too, would be good, for in the Torah it says that all men are brothers. But to be alone.."  
He closed his eyes, and the gold rims slid halfway down the round little nose as he slowly shook his head.

"Pa. Ah, Pa, don't be sad. I like it. I really do think, when I go down to the lake. I fish and I swim a lot, but mostly I think. Remember how you read me from the bible about how David was a poet and how he made beautiful and strong songs?"

Moishe puffed hard and nodded with interest. "Ye-es."

"Pa, you won't laugh? Honest to God?"

"No, Nochem, I won't laugh."

"I want to be a poet, too, Pa. I want to write about how beautiful it is down by the lake. And how it snows up here in the winter. And how smart you are. As long as I have the lake and you, Pa, I don't need anyone else."

Moishe drew deeply on the meerschaum and looked away as he exhaled the smoke. He felt a warm little glow in his chest.

"All right. Your move."

The two heads almost touched as they bent over the board.

"No, you shouldn't castle down when you're in a fix like that because then my queen can put you in check."

The boy's eyes were round with respect. "Gee, Pa, is there anything you don't know about?"

Moishe was embarrassed, but the warm glow spread in his chest.

"You should only know. You should only know how many things your Pa don't know. Now let's stop all this foolish talk and play chess. It's your move, Noch--It's your move, Nate."

Nathan looked at his father for a moment, his face a mixture of many things. Then the two heads resumed their positions over the chess board and the room was silent save for the puffing of the meerschaum pipe and the buzzing of the flies over the many bolts of cloth.

## II

New England in late June is a maiden just beginning to realize her potentialities. Her color is high and her temperature is warm. Surrounding her there is a feeling of lushness.

The grass bluff upon which Nathan Holoff lay was soft and green and warmed by the sun. A piece of straw, held between his teeth, played a lazy game of tag with the occasional insect that meandered his way. But his eyes, slate-blue and dream-filled, were fixed upon the great banks of clouds which dropped their reflections into the placid spring waters of the lake....

"Lying robed in snowy white  
That loosely flew to left and right--  
The leaves upon her falling light--  
Through the noises of the night  
She floated down to Camelot..."

The boy's voice went thinly out over the water. He closed his eyes, a pleased, contented smile on his face. Underneath the bluff on which he lay a bullfrog registered his dislike of Tennyson in a rolling bass that made the boy chuckle delightedly.

As if in echo of his own laughter the sound of merriment drifted to his ears on the lake breeze. Propping

himself on one elbow, he saw an old flatboat being propelled clumsily along the shore by the boy and girl who had hit him on the forehead with a rock the day before. Two fishing rods stuck out from the boat at odd angles. From the rods line listlessly drooped, every now and then becoming taut when one of the hooks caught on some weeds or other impediment in the water. Nathan smiled. It was obvious that the lines were tangled with each other, and that here were a couple of extremely inexperienced fishermen.

He watched the craft make its way toward him. Each of the two occupants were wielding an oar, the direction in which the boat was heading at any one time being determined by which of the oarsman happened to be in momentary control.

Some ten minutes after he had spotted it, the rowboat was a few feet off the bluff where Nathan Holoff sat, arms over his knees, in nonchalant repose. He nodded to the two fishermen.

"Trolling?" he asked.

Both nodded at once. Beads of sweat rolled down their sun-reddened faces.

The girl looked at her fellow mariner. "Want to rest?" she asked.

"Do you?"

"If you do."

The rowboat rocked under them, as if in victory.

Nathan stood up. "Toss me your rope," He said. "I'll pull you in." He shored the boat, making it fast to some roots which projected from under the bluff. Both of its occupants scrambled up onto the grass. Both, like Nathan, were wearing swim suits.

"Been fishing?" the girl asked.

Nathan noticed that her tan made it look as if she were wearing long gloves which ended on the upper part of her arms, where the short sleeves of a jersey or tee shirt would begin. The rest of her was white, and the whiteness gave him an odd sense of pleased awareness.

"No fishing yet," he replied. "But I'm going to later. I don't use those," he said, pointing to the rods in the boat. "They get in your way. I just use a line."

"Oh." She dropped to the grass and leaned back on her hands. Nathan gazed at her young chest. "How's your head?" she said, and didn't wait for an answer. "You know, we never even introduced ourselves last week, we were all so excited. I'm Karen Inez Mallin, everybody calls me Kim, and this is Charles MacIntyre. Just call him Charlie. And you're Nathan Holoff. Got a nickname?"

For a brief moment he remembered, and the resentment surged through him. Just call me the Jew, he thought, like you do when you don't know I'm listening. Then he thought of Pa and the Cossacks and the white duckling.

"Yeah..uh..Nate."

"Nate." She tasted it. "That's a nice name."

"Thanks." He felt his face go warm, and sought hurriedly to get back on familiar ground. "Had any luck?" He nodded in the direction of their tangled and sad-looking fishing equipment, knowing what the answer to his question would be.

"Not even a nibble. But we haven't been out long." Charlie blurted the words out, his red head bobbing earnestly as he spoke. "We started early this morning and went out past Greene's meadow. Sat and watched the bird up in that nest in the split oak. You were right. It's an oriole."

Nathan was exhilarated but embarrassed by the friendliness behind the unspoken apology. "Oh, that's all right." He waved his hand airily. "I just stumbled on her by accident myself. I've been watching her for three years now." He changed the subject. "Say, if you want to do some fishing, why not drop your lines right here? There's a good, deep pool just a few feet out and there are some big babies in it. What are you using?"

"Worms," Charlie said. Kim wrinkled her nose. Nate

noticed that there was a freckle on the very tip.

"What do you use when you fish?" she asked him.

Nate looked thoughtful, as befit an expert. "Wal.. I almost never use worms anymore. They're okay for the real small stuff, you can always get something, but if you want big fish you have to use big bait. Small frogs are good, or crawfish sometimes, but I like shiners. Let's see what we can find."

The three of them leaned over the bluff and peered down into about twenty inches of water. Nathan was very conscious of the girl who lay beside him, and he studied her reflection in the water as it stared up at him from between Charlie's watery likeness and his own. The water beneath them was clear and blue. Small orange fingerlings, lured by the relative hugeness of the rowboat, drifted in its shadow, motionless except for the opening and closing of their gills and the steady to and fro motion of their fins. Suddenly Charlie stiffened and pointed wordlessly to the roots to which the boat was tied. On a clump of dirt between the roots, almost blending into the coloring of its background, was the large sleepy looking bullfrog which had been disturbed by Nathan's earlier rendition of "The Lady of Shalott". Beady eyes half closed, the frog sat there in a state of drowsy lethargy. They watched the rhythm of the extended throat

pulsing and pumping air into the warty body.

There was a splash as Charlie leaped knee-deep into the water and grabbed the frog, pinning the springy legs to the body as they frantically tried to push out of his grasp.

Nate smiled. "What do you want that for?" he asked.

"Bait," Charlie answered as he danced about excitedly, holding the frog at arm's length. "You said yourself that frogs are good. Boy, can we catch a whopper with this one!"

Nate laughed. "That's way too big. That guy would scare the fish more than the fish would scare him. Better throw him back and we'll try for some shiners."

A hollow plunk, and the frog was gone, leaving only a series of ever-widening circles on the surface of the lake and a look of comic disillusionment on Charlie's face. Nate leaped into the boat and carried their tangled mass of fishing gear onto the bluff. Patiently he untangled the lines. Then, taking a crawler from the old coffee can in which Kim and Charlie kept their worms, he threaded it onto one of the small hooks which they had been using.

Once more the three lay on their stomachs peering over the bank into the water. Three or four small bits of golden liveliness still remained in the shadow under the

boat. Nate held onto the line and let the hook with the worm on it fall into the water. It stopped sinking about six inches from the bottom, where it dangled in the sunlight. The two nearest fish swam over and eyed it curiously. Then one of the fingerlings took a speculative nibble at the tip of the worm which wriggled from the end of the hook. Nate moved the worm a few inches from the fish. This time it made a rush for the bait, and the tip of the hook caught briefly in the flesh of the upper lip. Before it could shake loose Nate had jerked it out of the water, grabbing it just as it fell free.

"Here's our shiner," he grinned.

Running over to the tree from which his overalls hung, he reached into a pocket and pulled out a bass hook on a small coil of line. He held the wriggling shiner in his left hand and pushed the hook carefully through the upper quarter-inch of flesh and out the other side.

"Gotta get it above the backbone," he explained.

"Otherwise it'll die." Charlie and Kim watched the baiting operation with wide eyes.

Nate slipped into the water and handed the coil of line to Kim. "You play it out as I swim," he told her. He placed the line between his teeth, and fish and hook trailing about six inches behind, began to breaststroke out to deeper water. When he thought he had gone far

enough he let the line sink and swam back to the bluff.

"See, the hook is heavy enough to sink to the bottom and keep the shiner from coming back to shore," he explained to the other two when he had pulled himself up on the warm grass to dry, "but the shiner keeps wriggling around and moving on the bottom. We may have to wait a while, but we'll get something."

The three lay back in the grass, tired and happy. A little way from the shore a frog started to croak. Charlie started guiltily and Kim giggled.

"Boys are funny," she said.

There seemed to be no adequate answer, so both boys remained silent.

"I wonder if shiners feel it when you stick the hook through their backs?" she asked.

The boys shrugged lazily.

"Do worms?"

Charlie shot her a disgusted look. "And she says boys are funny!" He yawned, visibly enjoying it.

"Gosh, look at those clouds!" Kim exclaimed. Oily grey clouds, closing in swiftly in the New England manner, were fast taking possession of the sky. Thunderheads, sweeping before the wind, cut off the sun, and the afternoon became cooler, less bright. The lake breeze dampened. The swim suits suddenly were inadequate. Kim shivered.

"Better fishing," said Nate unconcernedly. He rubbed his forearms to get rid of the gooseflesh.

"I wish something would bite!" Charlie muttered.

"It looks as if it's going to rain like all get-out," said Kim. She scowled up at the sky. Nate noticed that her eyes, which had been blue when the sun had shone on the lake, were a soft green. They made him remember a dream he repeatedly had. In it he would be swimming through a dark underwater cavern. He would be running out of breath and would just start to feel the panic when the mouth of the cavern would shiver into view. The sun would stream through the water, shimmering in such a beautiful green that for hours after his awakening he would remember it and feel good. Kim's eyes were like that.

A large, wet raindrop bounced off his nose just as a clap of thunder echoed hollowly across the lake.

"Gonna pour," he yelled. "You two had better leave the boat here for the night. I have to go over to Greene's to pick up some pants for my Pa. Just follow the trail around the lake and you'll make it home all right. Better hurry if you don't want to get soaked!"

"What about the fish?" asked Charlie.

Nate grabbed the line and gave it a quick little tug. "Nothing on it yet," he said. He reached down and tied the end of the line to the root next to the one from which the

boat was moored. "We can leave it overnight," he said.

"I'll come down and look after it tomorrow morning."

"What time will you be down?" asked Kim. Nate thought of David piping to his sheep when he heard her voice.

"Eight o'clock," he said.

It was beginning to spatter. Charlie and Kim grabbed their poles and began to run toward the shore trail.

"We'll see you tomorrow," Charlie yelled over his shoulder.

"We'll meet you here at eight o'clock."

Later the day would become hot, but the morning held a chill that made the goosebumps break out on Nate's arms. He stepped onto the bluff, hands deep in the pockets of his jeans, scuffing through the still-wet grass. The rain had petered out in the middle of the night but the dew of the early hours had not yet dried, and beads of moisture hung from the blades of grass and shone in the pale rays of the sun like pearls from nature's broken necklace.

They said they'd come. He kicked at a small stone, overturning it. In the shallow basin which was left a pink worm lay in a film of water. Nate gently replaced the stone. He walked over to where the bluff fell down to the water, and stretched, yawning gustily. The boat which Charlie and Kim had abandoned in the storm bumped gently

in the wavelets made in the lake breeze. A crumpled candy-bar wrapper floated in an inch of rain water on the boat's bottom. He removed his sneakers and bailed the boat with an empty bait can.

Maybe they have something else to do today. Maybe they have other kids to play with, or the redhead's sore. They know the boat is all right where it is. They probably won't come back.

He stopped bailing and reached for the fishline which he had tied to the root the day before. Carefully and without jerking he pulled in a few feet of line. His hands felt the answering tug at the line's end at the same instant his ears heard the welcome music of Kim's voice coming down the trail. Grinning as he hauled in the dripping fishline, he turned his head to greet his friends. Nathan Holoff's young soul warmed, expanded and explored the heights.

"Hi," he said. "Pretty early, aren't you?"

## III

Nathan had heard it said in Dutton, Massachusetts, that John MacIntyre would be alive today were it not for his desire to escape the officiousness of his wife's tongue. But that is probably not so. For John MacIntyre had died of "consumption", and Mary MacIntyre was overbearing only inasmuch as she was allowed to be. In reality a timid woman, her bossiness was an attempt to compensate for this very timidity. When reprimanded or snapped at, her gaunt figure would lose its authoritative height and her mouse-colored hair, caught in a severe bun at the nape of her neck, would seem even duller and, if possible, more plainly styled.

Nate sat and watched Charlie swallow his milk and cast an anxious glance at his mother. "Well, we're going," Charlie said brightly.

Mrs. MacIntyre looked up from her ironing, her lips compressed. "Where?" she asked. "To hang around that tailor shop again? It don't look right, that's all. Nathan Holoff, you're a nice lad, 'nd all, but it don't do me no good to know my son is growing up around a tailor shop." She sock her head at Charlie. "You're no baby. You're seventeen years old today, but I just can't make you mind," she said.

"Oh, if your father was only alive. He'd make you do what I say."

Charlie sighed. "Look, Mom, I told you before. Mr. Holoff doesn't let us hang around the tailor shop. He's busy. We play chess there with him once in a while when he has no tailoring to do, but most of the time we just meet there. I better be goin'. I'm late." He kissed her hard cheek and desperately signaled Nate to follow him. "S'long."

The screen door banged behind them. Mrs. MacIntyre's voice rose shrilly. "Charles!"

Charlie came back. "Yes, Mom?"

"Are you taking the car? Again?"

"Well, gosh, Mom, that's what we bought it for, isn't it? It's strictly a pleasure car and I want to get some pleasure out of it. I'll be extra careful."

"Well, there's the coupons. 'Tain't patriotic."

"We're not going far. I won't use much gas."

"Well, you drive slow, y'hear? It gets dark early lately."

"I'll crawl, Mom, I'll crawl."

Nate could feel her watching eyes on them as they unlocked the garage door. He wished he had a mother, but he'd sure hate it if she got nervous like that. Whenever he came over to Charlie's he'd get annoyed by Mrs. MacIntyre,

and then he'd end up feeling sorry for her. A wave of compassion washed over him. She was all right. But it sure was too bad that she had to be so nervous.

The sight of the car wiped all unpleasantness from his mind. It was a forty-two Olds convertible, which was the last model they had manufactured because of the war. He ran his hand across the shiny yellow finish of the fender like a horseman caressing the flank of a blooded mare. The power surged through them as Charlie pressed down on the starter. This bus was a honey, even if it was two years old. The motor sang low and sweet, eight cylinders setting one hundred and ten horses into motion. Charlie let up on the clutch and they cruised out of the driveway, leaving the garage door open. The late afternoon Autumn looked warm and inviting. Charlie pressed the button which lowered the automatic top; both boys enjoyed the envious gazes the process invoked from pedestrians and people in nearby cars.

Charlie pulled over close to the curb at Kim's house, sounding the horn long and loud. Kim's aunt leaned over the porch railing and waved to them.

"She isn't here, boys. She wanted some exercise, so she biked over to where she said she'd meet you. You have any idea as to where that might be?"

They nodded a bit self-consciously as the car purred

away. Charlie waited until he was almost out of Kim's neighborhood, then he groped into the glove compartment with his right hand, bringing out, after a few fumbling seconds, a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He pressed the lighter, and both boys lit up. Charlie inhaled deeply, and the car swerved crazily as he gasped and choked. Nate picked Charlie's butt from where it had fallen on the rubber floor matting, and flipped it out onto the road. His companion craned his neck to get more of the breeze that pushed up over the windshield. Little dots of perspiration broke out on his forehead, and he gulped air.

Nate noticed Charlie's discomfort, and felt very adult as he enjoyed his cigarette. He sat back in the leather seat and noticed how different things looked as he got closer to his own neighborhood and farther away from Kim's and Charlie's. The large houses with the carefully tended gardens and smooth lawns gave way to one and two-family cottages, each with its own vegetable garden. The gardens were just beginning to have a stripped look, but the bean poles stood guard over the brown earth as rigidly as they had all summer over the greenery of the ripening vegetables.

Next came little bungalows, almost identical in their newness, each sporting the small patch of grass which gave its owner the right to feel the pride of the

landed class. These belonged for the most part to workers who had flooded into Dutton from the surrounding countryside, ex-produce and dairy farmers who were attracted by the triple shifts at the war-revitalized lumber mill which squatted rustily at the far end of the lake. Defense industry was fast making a boomtown out of the placid little village of Dutton, but the mill had ruined fully a mile of good water for swimming. Great patches of sawdust filmed the surface, and globs of grease and machine oil poisoned the trout and pickerel until it was a common sight to see the young boys lined up at the shore flinging rocks at the fishes floating white bellies up amid the factory waste and refuse.

The car bounced as it swept onto the bridge which covered the railroad underpass. From here to the tailor shop the houses were three-story tenement dwellings, a few painted and well kept but most of them decrepit and in a state of constant disrepair. A short distance away was the main street and shopping center of the township.

There was nothing to distinguish Dutton, Massachusetts, from the rest of the innumerable war-fed towns which were growing the length and breadth of the United States like clover in a meadow. There was the bank, which specialized in small farm loans; the one story movie house--westerns and second-run class "B" pictures on

Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings; the stationary store from which the weekly newspaper was published; the five-and-ten and department store; the hardware store which had been run by Charlie's father and which he would take over at twenty-one; the town's one barbershop; the town's one show store; the town's one tailor. Charlie stopped the car smoothly in front of Nathan's home, the front part of which was his father's place of business.

Inside the shop Moishe Holoff was chewing on his pipe and was buried behind his paper. Nathan mouthed the sentence, whispering his question through the thick window-glass. "Was Kim around?"

The tailor let his paper drop to the cutting table and waddled over to the doorway. He threw the door wide, letting some of the thick tobacco smoke stream out. The boys liked the smell. All Charlie could remember of his own father was that he smoked strong cigars, spoke with an old country burr, and had a slow, patient smile.

Moishe Holoff chuckled up at them. "It looks like you should be more early from now on, boys. It's four o'clock already, and your mutual lady friend has been gone for at least an hour. Oy, what a little sweetheart that one is! If years were wishes, believe me, I'd wish twenty-five of them away and give both of you young hoodlums a run for your money!"

The boys smiled. Mr. Holoff always seemed to be able to sense their mood and fit right into it.

"Which way did she go?" Charlie cried.

"Down by the apple orchards."

They sprinted back to Charlie's car. He started it jerkily, gunning the motor till it roared, then swiftly threw it into gear and buzzed by Mr. Holoff.

"Gott in Himmel! For heaven's sake don't get killed!" The tailor stood there chuckling until the yellow roadster had disappeared from sight. He put his pipe back into his mouth and drew on it. It had gone out, and Moishe grimaced as the nicotine taste traveled up the cold stem. He knocked the dottle into the gutter and went back into his shop, the bell on the door jangling over the whitehaired little man as he settled himself gratefully behind his newspaper.

Nathan had found her at the far end of the orchard, and was bringing her back to where the convertible was parked, the spot at which he and Charlie had agreed to meet when their search was done. He looked down at the sunlight color of her head. "You are, too, fat," he said, shortening his stride.

The girl ran a little to catch up with him. "I am not fat!" Kim's eyes surrounded him, smouldering green nets which closed over him at will.

He grinned. "It's probably only baby fat," he said.

She made a face. "What did you have to come along for this afternoon?" she asked. "I was having a wonderful time until you came."

Nate grinned down at her again. There was an aura of ripeness about her and already she was learning to wear it skillfully. He ran his fingers lightly across the upper part of her throat.

"Old doublechins."

She tossed her head. "Well, your father says I'm not fat. Your father says I'm...What does he say I am, Nate?"

"Zaftig. Means juicy."

"Well, if your father says I'm juicy that's good enough for me!"

"Ahh, Kim...Shut up."

He reached for her hand and it snuggled into his, their palms pressing hard. She stopped walking and pulled on his hand, swinging him around until he faced her.

"Nate. Nate do you want to kiss me?"

"You ever kissed anyone before?"

"About a dozen times!"

"Who? I bet you've been neckin' in that new convertible!"

"I have not! These were at school, and they were

all different boys."

"Why, Kimmie? Why did you have to do that for?"

"I wanted to find out how it felt! It gets so just reading about it isn't enough!"

"Did you like it?"

"A couple of times."

Nate felt as if his knees were made of water and they were going to spill over. He cupped his hand under Kim's chin. Their tightly closed mouths met for about six seconds, then they drew apart. Nate felt her chin tremble beneath his fingers and he drew his hand away.

"Oh, Nate!" she breathed. "Oh, Nate. That was the best one yet!"

Nate smiled at her. They resumed their walk in silence. Nate's body tingled where it had been pressed to Kim's. He felt embarrassed, and sought for something to say, but could think of nothing. Suddenly he felt very sad, and the thought possessed him that it would never be the same again. They had started the walk as good friends; whether they would end it as something less than that or something more than that he did not know, and the thought saddened him.

She seemed to sense his mood; she stopped walking and faced him, puzzled concern shadowing her face. Nate smiled at her. He reached over and smacked her on the

rear, then leaped away. The girl yelped and chased after him. Laughing hysterically, they ran out of the orchard and across a small meadow. Near a series of long, low sheds the yellow convertible waited. Charlie sat on an apple crate. Sobbing with laughter and gasping for breath they drew up beside the seated redhead.

"Hot damn," he said, "you couldn't have run that fast all the way or I wouldn't have had to wait so long! What kept you?"

"Just talking," Kim said. "And you shouldn't swear."

"I know," Charlie said. He grinned at her. "Going to the dance tonight?"

"Think so. Got a Rainbow Girls meeting first but that'll be over about nine. You going?"

"Yep. Shall I pick you up at the meeting?"

"Swell. Why don't you come too, Nate? The three of us always have a good time. We'll celebrate Charlie's birthday."

Nate shook his head. "Nope. Thanks anyhow, but I'm going to stay up here until later on. Going inside?" He jerked his head toward the sheds.

Kim looked as if she wanted to. "I can't," she said. "I'm late now."

Nate walked them over to the yellow convertible. He opened the door for Kim. "Thanks," she whispered as she

got in.

Nate wondered if she were thanking him for opening the door. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "About a dozen other guys would have done the same thing."

The three of them laughed as the car pulled away. He's laughing at a joke he doesn't understand, Nate thought. But what the hell, it probably feels good and it doesn't cost anything, does it?

"Happy Birthday!" he shouted.

He crossed the yard to the shed and went inside. A long row of apple crates were being packed with red Baldwins. Men and girls worked busily over the crates, sorting the apples for size and quality. The soft ones and the bad drops were tossed into large bins, which would later be emptied into the cider press. Nate inhaled. The shed gave forth an aroma which was a mixture of fresh paint and label glue and the winey smell of early apples.

Nate spotted a girl he knew. "Hey, Rosie Waitkovitch!" he yelled. "Gimme a couple of apples."

Rosie Waitkovitch stopped pasting labels on wooden crates. She carried a handful of Baldwins toward him. Her breasts bounced in a man's blue working shirt as she walked. Nate found himself wanting to see what the tight overalls she was wearing were doing to her ample buttocks. "Be nice to me, Rosie," he said.

She stuffed the apples into his pockets and looked up to where the dark hair curled away from his forehead. She smiled. "If you'll be nice to me. Kid you're growin' up. Hang around until after quittin' and I'll give you more than apples."

Nate felt his face go hot. "Thanks, Rosie," he said. "Some other time."

Two men who were loading crates nearby looked at him and began to laugh loudly. Nate walked away, feeling foolish, the apples in his pockets bumping against his thighs as he walked. As he neared the door Rosie yelled, "Remember, don't be bashful! Just ask!" He heard her laughter join that of the men.

The cool air felt good on his face. He crossed the meadow and started to climb a wooded hill, walking slowly, savoring the dusk. He loved this part of the day best of all. Colors began to fade from the world; everything became different shades of greyish blue. He climbed a low stone wall and skirted the little New England cemetery which housed the settlers of Dutton. He walked faster now until he reached the crest of the hill, then he sank down on the grass under a tree.

He felt tired and the grass was soft beneath his body. He pulled a handful of the green blades and let the breeze blow it from his palm a few blades at a time.

"Loaf with me on the grass," he said aloud. "The beautiful uncut hair of graves." The grass on Cemetery Hill seemed to him the softest and greenest he had ever seen. He felt drowsy. He slept.

When he awoke his first impression was that all of Dutton stretched out before him. Darkness had almost completely fallen, and electric lights began to pop on and off. Now here. Now there. It was as if the rays of the moon were reflected on a giant tinsel which glittered back points of its light.

Nathan reached into his pocket and took out an apple. He rubbed it vigorously against his sweater and then bit into it. The apple crackled as his teeth bit into the firm skin, and the juice ran and dripped off his fingers. He made crunching noises as he chewed, not thinking of anything, but becoming one with the world which lay silent and dark around him.

Moishe Holoff groped jerkily around beneath the bed until he located his bedroom slippers. He put them on and then padded out of the room and across the hall to the sink. The pain was almost gone now. He opened the tap and let the water run until it was cold. It felt good as it trickled down his gullet. Oy, Gott, what pain there had been! It had drawn his arms around him. It had filled

his chest until he had thought it would break something to get outside. Gott, oy, Gott!

He filled the tea kettle, enjoying the drumming sound of the water against the metal bottom. He was no longer thirsty, but a glass of tea is comforting to a man at four o'clock in the morning. He put the kettle on the fire, and decided to look in on Nathan to see whether or not he had kicked his covers off. Half mother, half father, he walked slowly through the darkened house. At his son's bed he peered down for a moment and then swiftly reached and pulled on the light cord. Empty. The boy's bed had not been slept in all night.

Moishe gasped a little as he hurried out of the room. He pulled a flashlight from the drawer and then hurried along the corridor, his right hand holding the flashlight, his left pulling at his flannel nightgown so that it did not get in his way as he walked. He opened the door which let from the house to the shop and puffed down the three steps. Then he stopped. In the beam of the flash, his head cradled in his arms on the pattern table, Nathan Holoff was fast asleep.

Moishe looked at his son. "All night," he muttered to himself. "Ah nahyer zach, a new thing. All night!" He touched the boy on the shoulder. Nathan moved restlessly in his sleep. For the first time Moishe saw the stubby

yellow pencil and the sheet of brown wrapping paper. He picked the paper up. It was a poem.

Kim

Yours are two lips which I have yet to press to mine  
 And yet I know the softness of their pressure well.  
 Your body with mine yet is to entwine,  
     And yet--  
 Clear as the sight of golden fishes drifting in a  
     mountain brook,  
 And sweet as the memory of a childhood trysting place,  
 Before me always is the vision of your face.  
 Within me always is the warmth that is your smile;  
 Your tinkling laughter echoes in my ears.  
 The mottled shadows on the wall take on your form,  
 And spent without you moments seem like years...  
 Yours is a hand which has not reached for mine.  
 And yet I dare to hope that all these things may be.  
 You have not traveled long the road of Time.  
 Oh, come--  
     And travel up that road with me!

Moishe dropped the paper. Then he bent and picked it up again. It was wrinkled from the weight of Nathan's elbow. Carefully, he smoothed it and folded it twice across. Then he put it in the drawer of the pattern table.

He reached over and gently shook his son. "Nate. Nate, wake up. Wake up. Come to bed. Gott in Himmell, how can I ever make a tailor out of you?"

"Where in hell's the paper?" Doctor Mallin stalked

through the lower floor of his ancestral manor like a medieval baron unable to discover where his friar had cached the sacramental wine. "Where in hell is that Goddam paper?"

Belle Mallin leaned over the second floor railing. "Why, it's in your easy chair, dear!" she called.

"It is like you're still able to blush!" the Doctor bawled. "I'm not talking about that Dutton rag. Where in the name of anything decent is the Monitor?"

Belle Mallin sped down the stairs. "Will you keep your voice down to a conservative roar?" she asked. She faced her husband. "Although it is many a year since first we wed, I am still able to blush." She went to the magazine rack and pulled out a folded copy of the Christian Science Monitor, offering it to her husband wordlessly. He ignored it and grasped her under the elbows.

"Ever regretted it, Belle?" he asked.

"What?"

"Us."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Lots of times. My God, Richard, what on earth is the matter with you? You act as if we were Kim's age!"

"'S the way I feel. Where the devil is the girl, anyhow? Haven't seen much of her lately." He narrowed his eyes. "She still have the same preoccupation?"

"It will pass, Richard. She's still a child."

"A child! Hell, Belle, when a gal passes puberty she's a woman, not a child!"

"Richard!"

"Well, she's pubed, hasn't she?"

"Look, Dear, I honestly think you're worrying about something that doesn't amount to a hill of beans. He never takes her out."

"She hangs around that tailor shop so much that her nose grows longer by the month."

Belle's mouth sagged at the corners. She sat down on the couch. "Richard," she said. "Oh, Dick, don't. That doesn't help anything."

He looked at her steadily. "I know what I'm talking about, Belle. A Jew's a Jew, and that's that. You meet them casually, that's one thing. You get intimate, that's another. I know, Belle. I'm telling you I know. I knew a bunch of them in college."

"He's a nice boy. And the old man is a dear. Maybe they've been away from the rest of them for so long that they're all right."

"What can he give her even if that's so, Belle? A persecution complex? What else? From where I stand the kid and his father seem to be the only two chosen people in the world who are next to broke."

"Stop it, Richard! Stop it!" She forced herself to speak more quietly. "We're probably getting ourselves upset over an imaginary situation, darling. Anyway, the old man's a pious old Jew. I don't imagine he'd welcome a gentile daughter-in-law any more than we'd want his son."

"That's another thing, Belle. With luck he can die of old age, but I've been feeding Holoff nitro for eleven months. Angina pectoris. It's beyond me how far he's going to get. That boy doesn't even have the positive asset of a father. He's no bargain for any girl. Now on the other hand there's Charlie--"

"Dick!" Her face was grey. She was silent for a long moment. "You're in a bitch of a business," she said. She leaned over and clicked on the radio. After the hum, dance music gushed into the room. Belle rose and went to the window. She pressed her forehead against the cool glass for a while, then she spun around.

"Want a drink? she asked.

"Yes. Please."

She went off in the general direction of the kitchen. He felt lonely as he sat and listened to her bang the pots and pans as she searched for the cocktail shaker.

## IV

It was Spring and Nathan was eighteen and the blood raced in his veins, but it was also Purim, the day when Jews celebrate the deliverance of their people from an ancient tyrant, and Moishe Holoff and his boy were joining the other Jews of Dutton in celebration and prayer.

The synagogue had prospered; the congregation had faithfully paid their dues and bought their yearly seats of worship, and after only two years of conducting services behind the plateglass windows of the store they had bought a building. It was a humble building, true, but a building of their own all the same. If the frame walls were old, they were whitewashed, and if the roof rose to too sharp a point to be fashionable, the people had raised the Star of David there, and its blueness warmed the hearts of the new Americans who prayed under it.

Nathan sat at the end of the long wooden prayer bench, next to the open window. His father, as the only citizener in the congregation, had been elected president of the Beth Israel Synagogue, and as such was called upon from time to time to lead the group in prayer. Moishe was on the dais now, and Nathan listened as his father chanted the words which had become so familiar to him,

yet which he did not understand.

In his earliest and most formative years, Nathan had been the only Jewish child in Dutton. While these other young worshipers at his shul were learning to read and write Hebrew in European ghettos he had been allowed to fish and swim, and now he always felt out of his element in the synagogue. He prayed in English, reading the English translation of the prayers on the left hand side of the page, conscious of the strange island his non-conformity created in the little house of worship, and of the disapproving stares which the gnarled, white-bearded elders cast his way from time to time, as if to say a pity, Moishe Holoff's zun shouldn't know how to dahven!

Nathan edged his way to the aisle and started for the door. As he passed the dais he read the question in Moishe's eyes and he smiled reassuringly. He just wanted some sun and fresh air. The pallidness and the weak pioussness of the praying Jews depressed him, and he needed to leave that atmosphere for a few minutes.

Outside, Cantor Raphaelson was leaning against the fence. He was large and dark, about Nathan's age. He was not really a cantor, but his parents had wished that he might be one years before, in Poland, and had given him his name in hopes of influencing his later life. He was thoroughly European, and wore a sleek, brown Van Dyke

beard and dipped snuff. He worked in the company of other refugees on one of the large communal dairy farms which the refugee organizations ran in New England, and it was only on his infrequent trips to town, to worship or deliver the cans to the milk train, that he spoke anything but Yiddish.

He smiled at Nathan, displaying an almost toothless mouth. "Ah nice day, hah?"

Nathan smiled back, and breathed deeply. "It sure is," he said. He pushed the little black prayer cap to the top of his head and slipped the blue and white silk prayer shawl off his shoulders and folded it.

Cantor Raphaelson watched him intently. "Kenst du reden Ydiah?" he asked

Nathan shook his head with regret. "Nein," he said, "only English."

The other looked apologetic. "My English, it is so awe-full," he explained.

"No, no. You learn fast. One must make mistakes to learn."

Inside the shul the services had ended, and the Purim songs and games had begun. The sound of Moishe Holoff's squeaky tenor floated through the windows as he taught the youngsters the English versions of the old holiday songs.

Oh, once there was a wicked, wicked man,  
And Haman was his name, sir!  
He would have murdered all the Jews,  
But they were not to blame, sir!

Moishe would be looking for his son to help with the singing, but Nathan suddenly wanted to be far away from the songs and the noise and the little synagogue. He handed the surprised Raphaelson his prayershawl and cap, and asked him to leave them on Moishe's bench. Then he was walking down the street with the Spring sun warm on the back of his neck, while the sound of the singing grew pleasingly faint behind him.

Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
Oh, today we'll merry, merry be,  
And nash some hamantashan!

The Mallin house, like the Mallin name, was old New England. But it had a wide verandah that had been added years after the main structure had been built, and Kim spent hour after hour sunning herself in the deckchairs that her uncle had placed about the big porch. There was also a huge leather couch, and it was on this that Kim lay with Nathan, separated by a chess board, to which both gave rapt attention.

Kim was dressed in white shorts and a black and white striped jersey, and her feet were bare. She raised one leg high in the air and wiggled her toes, then looked to

see what effect it had had on Nathan.

Nathan said nothing.

Kim reached over and took his hand playfully in hers. She let his hand drop just above her knee. Her skin was warm, and rose petal smooth. He looked at her. "Why, you little tease!"

She laughed, a secret, triumphant little laugh, and closed her other knee over his hand. Roughly he jerked free, spilling chessmen all over the floor, and they were gasping and laughing as they wrestled, now on one end of the couch, now on the other, over and over and over, rolling, laughing, aware of the secret softnesses and hardnesses of their bodies, now one on top, now the other, faces touching, arms touching, breast to chest, thigh to thigh...

"KAREN!"

Doc Mallin glared down at his disheveled niece as she lay in the arms of Nathan Holoff. Her jersey had ridden up from her shorts, and the pinkness of her stomach contrasted with the smooth brownness of her legs and arms.

"Get in the house," her uncle said.

She looked up at him and the smile died on her lips. She shoved the blonde hair away from her eyes and shook her head quickly. "Don't be silly, Doc, we were just kidding around!"

"I said, get in the house."

Her face wrinkled almost comically as the tears spilled over. She sprang to her feet and the long, brown legs carried her away. The screen door banged hollowly behind her as Nathan climbed slowly to his feet. He fixed his tie, then picked his suit coat from the chair where he had thrown it and put it on, looking at Kim's uncle, returning the older man's look with slow dislike.

"I can assure you, Doctor--"

"You can't assure me of anything."

"Then I won't try."

"I didn't ask for Kim, Holoff. She was practically tossed to me to raise. By Christ, I'm going to do that. She's got to learn a few things about life. Not the kinds of things you can teach her."

"We were just rough-housing." Nathan laughed. "Good lord, if you want me to make an honorable woman out of her, I'll marry her!"

"That's just what we don't want." Doc Mallin stepped in front of the porch door, blocking Nathan's way. "I understand it's some sort of Jewish holiday, Holoff. They're all down at the synagogue on Harrison Street. Why not go and join them?"

Nathan looked the older man coldly in the eye. He felt his face go red and his knees begin to tremble.

Roughly he pushed by Kim's uncle and walked stiffly off the porch and down the flagstoned path to the street.

He walked for hours, until the hard pavement of the town had turned to rough country road, until the hot midday sun had begun to fall behind the tall pines on the hills, until the awful taste of rage in his mouth had turned to a bitter understanding. Then he climbed Cemetery hill and sat on the new grass and watched the sun go lower and lower until only the last, long rays remained to light his way home. He arose and made his way down the hill.

He shivered as he crossed the orchard, and turned his coat collar up. Summer was still too far away for evening warmth. Beyond the orchard lay the little farms of the Polacks, and Nathan looked at the squares of yellow light in the windows as he passed them by, envying the people inside because they belonged, if to nothing else, then to each other.

The clucking of hens and the sound of a deep yet feminine voice made him stop, and in the half-light Nathan recognized Rosie Waitkovitch, the girl from the apple shed. Suddenly, he felt tired and thirsty. He walked up to her. The jeans and man's shirt were gone, and in their stead Rosie was wearing a loosefitting old house-dress with faded red flowers printed on the material. Her feet were bare in worn black moccasins. She crooned

softly to the chickens as she spread the feed for the noisy flock. When she saw Nathan she stopped and eyed him curiously, not saying anything, but waiting for him to speak first.

"Hi," he said. "Just walkin' by, and I wondered if you had a glass of water for a man."

"Well, well," Rosie said. "I've been wonderin' when you'd drop by! The old man's in town, to the Grange. Want to come inside for the water?" She grinned up at him. Nathan saw that the top two buttons were gone from the housedress, and he noticed how the brown flesh forced itself against the safety pin that held the top of the dress together.

"Sure," he said, "why not?" He followed Rosie toward the farmhouse, his eyes glued to the lush pendulum of her full hips, his mind wondering what Doc Mallin had said to Kim when he had left the long, white verandah and gone back inside the house.

## V

The year that Nathan Holoff turned eighteen was the most confused, difficult and frightening period of his life. He worked in the tailor shop during the day, doing the pressing and some of the unskilled work, and causing Moishe to despair over the havoc he wreaked with needle and thread. After the evening meal he would leave the flat behind the little store and would walk to wherever it was that he told Rosie Waitkovitch he would meet her. Sometimes it was the old boathouse by the lake; sometimes they went into the woods together; other times Nathan took her in the barn or in the farmhouse when her father was gone to town. Rosie Waitkovitch was a stupid girl, but big and comfortable of body and skilled in the business of making love. She demanded nothing but his body from him, and that was all she ever got.

The evenings which father and son spent facing each other over the chess board came to be farther and farther apart, and Moishe secretly sorrowed and worried, but felt instinctively that he could do nothing but wait for time and Jehovah to act. Twice Kim had entered his shop when Nathan was not there, and after both conversations she had run outside and down the street with the wetness of tears on

her cheeks. Moishe could not help her any more than he could help his son. He was a tolerant man, but he came from a generation familiar with the fact that a Jew is a Jew and a shiksa a shiksa, and although it pained him to see the two young people so unhappy, he felt that he was powerless to suggest a solution. So he watched his son begin to learn that there can be great pain in the world, and said nothing, though he wished to say much.

Charlie came around to the tailor shop rarely, now that the tie which had held the boys together most strongly was broken. Nathan realized that the red-headed youth must naturally welcome any occurrence which would strengthen his relationship with Kim, and though it grieved the tailor's son to think of the girl with the wind tugging at her hair as she rode about the countryside in the yellow convertible, still he understood the situation, and if he completely dismissed Charlie from his daily life without regret it was also without any feeling of animosity that he did so.

On the morning of his eighteenth birthday he went to the Selective Service board and registered for the draft, standing in line with the farm boys and factory workers who sweated and swore in the overheated, clatter-filled headquarters, and along with them filling out the pink and white forms. In exchange for this he received through the mails a card with a number on it, making him officially subject to

call to military service.

It was late fall, 1944. Europe was a bone being fought over by dogs with bayonets for teeth, and the newspapers peddled streamer headlines, three cents a heartbreak. Nathan Holoff wanted desperately to go away, feeling instinctively that perhaps, sucked up in the unfamiliar anonymity of military life, he would find himself.

When the day came that he received his classification card and he was officially categorized as being 1-A in the potential draft group, he gravely scissored the official square from the postal card and put it away in his wallet for safe keeping. That evening, as he walked toward the lake and the boathouse where he was to meet Rosie Waitkovitch, he felt that he had in his pocket the passport to a new life, and that the day was coming when he could wipe the slate clean of memory and begin anew.

There was a winter chill in the fall air, and Nathan walked quickly, thinking of the warmth which lay in store for him that night. The boathouse was equipped with an old-fashioned pot-bellied iron stove, and the first one to get there filled it with wood and set it on the way to spit-crackling redness.

He paused for a moment before he entered the old wooden structure, and looked out at his lake. A white harvest moon gleamed palely on the skim of new ice which covered the sur-

face of the water, and changed the blackness of the bare trees to a cold brown. The wind rippled the ice and whistled through the tree tops, and Nathan turned with something like relief and pushed open the sliding door. He slipped quickly inside and slid the door shut after him. The heat was all around him, like a hot summer breeze. The glow from the stove silhouetted things, and he looked at the figure lying on the cot across the room, while he waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the darkness.

"Hi, Rosie," he said softly.

But it wasn't Rosie.

It was Kim.

Kim's voice was scarcely more than a whisper. "Rosie isn't here, Nate. I sent her away. I gave her some money and she left."

Nathan could hardly speak. He could tell by the way that her voice trembled that she was frightened, and suddenly he was frightened, too, and ashamed. His voice croaked harshly in the black silence of the room. "Who the hell are you to send her away? Why don't you mind your own business?"

"Nate." Her voice pleaded to him. Don't make me beg you, it said, don't make me grovel.

He crossed the room swiftly and gripped her shoulders with rough hands. "Oh, Kim, why drag it out? It stinks, it's just no good! I don't want to meet you in barns like you were someone like Rosie Waitkovitch, someone to love up

and send home with a pat on the backside and a kind word! And it could never be anything else, the way things are, so for Christ sakes, Kim, why don't you stop this, why don't you let me alone!"

Her fingers bit into his arm, hurting him.

"It doesn't have to be that way. Listen, Nate. We can be in Boston or in Worcester by morning. We can be married. Then it'll be too late for them to do anything about it."

He shook her hand off his arm. "You must be crazy. How would we live? What would I do for a job? Where would you live when I'm drafted? What kind of a life would you have?" He turned away from her. The only sound in the boat-house was the popping of the old stove, but he knew that she was crying. Suddenly he was down beside her, pressing his cheek to her wet face and stroking her hair. "Ah, Kimmie, don't. Don't cry. Smile, Kimmie, be happy. Don't cry." He spoke to her softly, as to a baby, smoothing her hair back and kissing her cheek gently as he spoke. When he felt her body stop shaking he didn't talk anymore, but lay there on the cot with the girl in his arms, not thinking, aware of nothing but the softness and warmth of her. Once, when the stove gave an explosive pop she jumped in fright and he spoke again to reassure her. Then they lay quiet for a long time. Nathan knew when she fell asleep, feeling the body relax in his arms and hearing her breathing become deeper, more regular. He looked down at her wonderingly.

"God help me. I love you so very much," he said, speaking half to her and half to God.

It was six o'clock in the morning when Nathan fitted the key in the lock on the tailor shop door. He pushed the door open slowly, and reached up to hold the bell before it jangled. But he need not have gone to that bother. Moishe Holoff sat at his cutting table and looked at him heavily.

"Sit down, Nathan."

"Pa, I was out with some guys I knew from school and the car broke down way past Whitinsville. What a night!"

"Sit down for a minute."

"I really should go to bed, Pa. I'm dead. We had to walk until we found an all night garage."

"This same car, it has broken down on you many nights recently, has it not, Nathan? I saw Myer Levitsky at the shul last shabbos. He asked me are you engaged to a shiksa. I told him no, you and Kim are just good friends. So he tells me he is not talking about Kim, he is talking about another shiksa, a daughter of that drunken Waitkovitch, the raiser of chickens."

Nathan felt his father's humiliation for having to speak to him like this, and his voice became husky. "Pa, I--"

"Do you know what it could mean? Can you imagine such a life? On top of the fact that she is no good, a tramp, a nafka, can you imagine what it would mean, married to the

daughter of that drunken Waitkovitch?" Moishe's voice rose. "You would have to live on the farm with him, I would not take such a one as that into my house. Your children would be dirty and runny-nosed, left to play with the chicken-dirt in the farmyard--"

"PA, SHUT UP, FOR CHRIST SAKE!" Nathan's shout was almost a wail. He leaned forward, his face contorted, his eyes blazing into his father's. Moishe's face was whiter than he had ever seen it. Nathan watched his father's full underlip trembling. "Pa, I'm sorry, but you're making a big story out of nothing. That girl means nothing to me, and already you've got my kids with runny noses." He laughed weakly. "I'm telling you, Pa, she doesn't mean anything to me."

Moishe had regained control of himself, and his voice was softer now. "Then where have you been all night, Nathan?" he asked.

"I told you, Pa. The car broke down."

"I am not a child. Where have you been all night?"

"Pa, please listen to--"

Moishe brought his hand down heavily on the cutting table. "Answer me! Where have you been all night?" His voice cracked and Nathan saw that he was weeping.

He felt the resentment rise within him. Jesus, what did the old man want, a full confession? "All right, all right,"

he shouted. "So I'll tell you. So I've been with Kim all night!"

The full weight of his father's small hand smacked into his face. Nathan felt his ears ring. Moishe stopped his weeping, and for the first time in his life Nathan saw his father look upon him with eyes of hate. He felt chilled. He sat there looking at his father, feeling the tears spill over onto his cheeks.

"What have I raised?" Moishe said. "Everything else I could stand, yes. You're a boy still, and you make mistakes. But jokes at a time like this, no. Go out, go to your Palishe father-in-law. Don't come back to me until you have learned to be a mench, a human being. Get out!"

Nathan walked out of the shop without looking back at him.

He walked down to the post office and waited outside until they opened their doors at seven-thirty. Then he waited inside and watched the carriers load their bags until nine o'clock, when the Selective Services office opened its doors. He walked across the street, up the rickety old stairs and into the room where he had registered a week before. With the help of a disinterested clerk he volunteered for immediate induction through the draft.

Then he went home and he wept, and Moishe wept, and he told his whole story, and Moishe held him in his arms when he was through just as he had held him when as a little

boy he had been hurt and had come to his father for solace; and the old relationship between father and son was restored, and each rejoiced in his heart.

And three days later Nathan Holoff was called for induction into the Army of the United States.

PART TWO

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## VI

Three years is a long time under any conditions. But three years without sight of Moishe had been one long prison term for Nathan Holoff, a long, drawn-out ache the cure for which was finally in sight.

He got off the train in Dutton at half-past four in the morning. He checked his barracks bags at the station and walked around for a half hour in the changing light of dawn, getting re-aquainted with his home town. When he walked up to the tailor shop the sun was up, and as his trembling fingers fitted the key in the lock he could see the bolts of cloth, the pressing machine, the instruments on Moishe's cutting table, all looking just as they had when he had left home.

Automatically he reached up and grabbed the brass bell before it could jangle. He walked through the little shop and up the three stairs which led to the house. He pushed open the door. From the kitchen at the end of the hall came the sound of running water.

"Pa?" Nathan called softly.

Moishe Holoff shot out of the kitchen on fast-peddling little feet, his faded blue robe open and flowing behind him

as he ran, the heels of his worn leather slippers clapping a welcome to his son.

"NOCHEM!" he shouted. "NOCHEM!" His arms clasped his son to his bosom and the grey stubble of his beard scratched Nathan's cheek.

"Who were you expecting," Nathan said as he smiled through his tears, "Rosie Waitkovitch?"

He slept the sleep of the weary traveler, and when he awoke it was mid-afternoon. He wanted to see the lake. Moishe closed up the tailor shop and for the first time in his life enjoyed holding a fishing pole in his hands. Nathan showed his father every good fishing hole in the lake, and at times they laughed at nothing at all, like two very young boys without a care in the world. They landed three good fish and a couple of small ones which they threw back, and around supper time they pulled up to a good spot on the shore and fried the three fish crisp and brown, washing down the last crumbly flake of trout with beer they had chilled to a piercing coldness by putting the cans in a burlap sack, tying the sack to the anchor, and dropping it over one of the cold springs which fed the lake.

When they finished eating the afternoon was at its most golden and the water had just begun to lose some of its blueness. Moishe filled the meerschaum and Nathan looked at the white hair which rose above the cherry nose and sun-

reddened forehead.

"It's good to be home, Pa," he said.

"Ah freyd," Moishe said. "A thing of great happiness."

He looked at his son curiously. "Was it difficult, this thing you did?"

Nathan smiled. "No, Pa. Not difficult."

"Was there danger?"

"No danger at all. I'm no hero, I'm afraid. I didn't even go overseas. It was just lonely. I missed you."

"I missed you, too, zun. Genoog. That is over now, and I much prefer a live son to a tayteh hero."

Nathan smiled again, and leaned back and closed his eyes. He dozed for a while, and Moishe smoked in silence, watching his son and enjoying the strange pine-and-water smell of the place.

After a while Nathan opened his eyes and looked at his father. "Pa, anything new in town since I left?"

"New? Mostly it's the same town. Not so many people working at the mill, but more than when we first came here. No, nothing new with the town. The same town."

"How about the people I used to know? Anything new with them?"

"Raphaelson went back to Poland with the army. He writes the congregation that he should be back any day now. Meyer Levitsky's boy David was hurt in the Pacific. A great

many Dutton boys were in service. Lots are back. Some are yet to come. That Polish farmer, Kwiatkowski, he lost his son in the Pacific. Did you know his son?"

"No, I didn't," said Nathan. "That's too bad."

"Yes," Moishe said. "It's too bad."

"How about Charlie?" Nathan asked. "Did the army get Charlie?"

"Charlie?" There was a long silence. "Kim is engaged to Charlie, Nochem."

This time it was Nathan who was silent for a long moment. Then he said. "Well, that's wonderful, Pa! I always knew it would be one of us, Charlie or I, who grabbed her off. Charlie's a lucky guy, Pa."

"Yeh," said Moishe, "zayer ah lucky guy."

"Was he in the service, Pa? Did the army get him?"

"No."

"Was he 4-F?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of that! A healthy bulvan like Charlie 4-F! What was the matter with him?"

"Nothing serious. Nathan, he's in trouble. He's in jail."

Nathan stared at his father. "Jail! What kind of trouble?"

"He ran over a boy with the car. He was a bissel shikkar, and when it happened, he got scared, he didn't stop."

He ran home to his mother. She didn't want him to go back, but when the schnapps wore off he called the police and went back to where he had left the boy he had struck down. It was too late. The boy was already dead."

Nathan stared at the ground in dismay. "The boy, Pa. Who was the boy he hit?"

"Stanislaus Waitkovitch, Rosie's brother."

Nathan remembered Stanislaus Waitkovitch. He dimly remembered a little boy of nine whom Rosie had kicked out of the farmhouse when he had gone there to make love to her. He had been such a dirty kid, nose never wiped, face never entirely clean. And now he was dead! Had he been a happy kid? Had he been mistreated? Nathan had never wondered. And now Charlie was in jail for being responsible for his death!

"I'll talk to Rosie," he said. "If Charlie did wrong, he did wrong, but maybe we can make amends, make things easier somehow."

"It's too late," Moishe said. He shook his head. "It's too late for anything. Rosie ran away last year with one of the milk loaders at the dairy co-op. And Charlie was sentenced only a couple of weeks ago. He got twenty years." He shook his head again. "Twenty years!"

"What jail is he in?"

"Somewhere in Boston. I have the address in the shop. I send him little things. You know."

Nathan nodded absently. He poked the ashes of the fire to make certain that it was out. Then they gathered their things together and stored them in the boat and cast off.

Nathan rowed easily for a few minutes and then paused. "Pa, why don't you close the store for a few days, and maybe go someplace with me?"

"Someplace, Nathan? You mean Boston, don't you?"

"Yeah, Pa. Boston."

"It is better that you go yourself, my son."

Nathan nodded, and started rowing again. He pulled harder, long slow strokes which sent the little boat pushing steadily through the green water of early evening.

## VII

His mother had cried when she had seen what they had done to his hair. They had cropped his shiny red waves until the top of his head bristled like the hairs on the back of a boar's neck, and his mother had cried.

"It's almost like being in the army, Mom," he had told her on visiting day. "They'd do the same thing in the army."

"But you're not in the army," his mother had said, and she had cried.

It seemed as if she always cried. Charlie had come almost to dread visiting days. His mother would be there as regular as nature, and would sit on the edge of her bench holding hands with her sorrow, weeping and telling him that he must be brave. And Kim. You could hardly tell what Kim was thinking on visiting days. She just sat there with that damn tight little smile on her face, as if she were holding on hard to something inside of her.

Charlie slid off the upper bunk and walked across the cell to where a grey prison jacket hung on a wall hook. He reached into both pockets and groped around, finding nothing, and then turned to the man who lay on the lower bunk.

"In one of your pockets is a brand-new pack of Camels," he said, looking angry. "May I have one of my own butts?"

His cellmate was a short, wizened little man with hair the color of steel-wool.

"Butts?" He patted his pockets, a look of surprise lighting his face as he came up with the pack of Camels. "What do you think of that! I must have helped meself to a cig an' put the hull durn pack in m'pocket, force a habit like. Much obleeged, Scotty." He tossed Charlie the cigarettes.

Charlie looked at him and grinned. "Force of habit is right. What are you in for, White?"

White grimaced. "Ah, that's a delicate question to be askin' in this joint! But I'm your bunkie, so I don't give a damn. You are lookin' at--" he paused dramatically "--a genuwine three-time loser."

"Three time loser. That means the big trip, doesn't it?"

"Yes, lad. The long one. Unless somebody big changes their mind."

"What'd you do?"

"My big problem is that I like to climb things--trees touchin' on winders, ledges, fire escapes--breakin' an' enterin'. Not once, not twice, but three times!"

"I--"

"Don't tell me, let me guess. Hit-an'-run manslaughter. Twenty years. Welcome home!"

Charlie stared at him. "How did you know?"

White smiled. "Why, I knew before you even set foot in this cell. Get to be here as long as I have, you find out ways a knowin' things."

The clang of the steel corridor door interrupted their conversation. A turnkey stopped before their cell and opened the door. He nodded at Charlie.

"MacIntyre. Visitor."

Charlie looked at him in surprise. "Today's Tuesday. This isn't a visiting day."

The turnkey shrugged. "Special permission."

White chuckled. "If it's the governor, put in a good word for me," he said.

The visiting room was empty. It gave Charlie a queer, exciting feeling to see this room without people, to hear his footsteps echo through the quiet of a place he had never seen empty of noisy beings.

At first he didn't recognize Nathan through the wire screen. He stared hard.

"Hello, Charlie," Nathan said quietly.

He remembered the voice. "Nate," he yelled. "Well, for Christ sake, how are yuh?"

Nathan smiled. He started to reach for Charlie's hand, but the screen was there.

"Okay I guess," he said. "How are you?"

"As fine as I can be under the circumstances." Charlie was embarrassed. "Sit down, huh, and let's talk. God, you

look good in that uniform. You must have put on fifty pounds."

It was plain to Nathan that Charlie had not put on fifty pounds. The ruddy, healthy look which had been so much a part of him when Nathan had last seen him three years before was gone. Already the pallor of the prisoner was becoming evident, and the clipped hair accentuated the thinness of the drawn face.

"You look good, too," he said.

Charlie dismissed the nicety with an almost careless wave of his hand. "When do you get out? I mean when do you get your discharge?"

"I've been a civilian for four days now. I just haven't gotten around to buying new clothes. I can't seem to get into any of my old stuff."

"Oh. I thought they gave you little gold badges. Ruptured ducks or something."

"Yes. Ruptured ducks. Sometimes they sew them on for you and sometimes they just give them to you and you're supposed to sew them on. I never got around to sewing mine on. That's how they happened to give me a special pass to see you. I told them I'm due back in camp tonight."

"Oh." Charlie laughed weakly. "It sure is good to see you. How long's it been? A long time, anyhow."

"Yes. A long time. I heard about you and Kim, Charlie. I want to tell you I think you're a lucky guy."

Charlie stared at him hard. "Are you trying to kid me?" His voice grated and shook.

The blood rushed to Nathan's face. "Oh, Jesus," he whispered. "I am a goddam fool."

Charlie stared at him for another second, and then his face split in an unhappy grin. "Can it Nate. You were never a goddam fool. Forget it. I know what you meant." He shook his head slowly. "I guess none of us ever thought that anything like this would happen."

"No," Nathan said. "I guess none of us ever did."

"About Kim," Charlie said.

"Don't be silly," Nathan said. "I know."

"You don't know," Charlie said. "Twenty years is a damn long time. Too long a time. I don't know how it is with you two, but I want you to know I'm a big boy now."

"Don't be silly," said Nathan. "I haven't even seen her since I got back."

"How long have you been back?"

"Four days. But Jesus when I went around with her we were kids."

"You'll see her."

"Don't be silly--"

"Damn you, will you stop telling me not to be silly? I'm not saying there's going to be anything between you and Kim. I'm just telling you, that's all."

"Sure, sure," said Nathan. He was sorry now that he

had come. "Sure, I understand. Thanks."

"No thanks needed."

They were silent for a couple of minutes, each uncomfortably aware of the other's discomfort.

"Jesus," Nathan said, "how do these things happen, anyway."

Charlie pursed his lips and shook his head. "Oh, they happen. They happen," he said.

It had been a moonless night. That was a funny thing, because it had been a particularly bright August, with the moon out almost every night and the stars giving quite a bit of light. But on August the fourteenth there had been no moon, no stars. He particularly remembered that, because it was one of the points his lawyer had stressed at the trial. Not that it had helped him any.

It had started out like any other evening. A couple of hours earlier Kim had called him at the store and they had made a date to have dinner at the club and then go to a dance. But shortly after the call a truckload of farm implements had come in and he had phoned Kim and cancelled the dinner engagement so that he could get the stuff uncrated. He liked to keep the business in order. He had done well with the store since taking it over, and he knew that if you didn't get incoming shipments out of the way fast, before you knew it you'd have crated hardware lying around all over

the place. So he had cancelled the dinner engagement and sent out for sandwiches.

What the hell, he had figured, it was going to be a long evening; he'd see plenty of Kim before the night was through.

He had worked as fast as he was able, but even so it was eight-thirty when he locked the front door. He had driven home and grabbed a quick shower and then had stopped as he passed his mother's room on the way out, and stuck his head in to say goodnight. She looked as if she had been napping. Her cheek had little red marks on it where the small chenille bumps on the bedspread had pressed into it. She blinked her eyes and smiled at him.

"Evening, Charles," she said. "Just get home from work?"

"A little while ago, Mother. I'm going over to the dance at the country club."

"You're going out again? Seems like you go out every night lately. Seems like you never stay in evenings like you used to."

He chuckled, and winked at her. "A fella takes on responsibilities when he gets engaged, you know, Mother."

"It appears to me that Kim would understand if you took an evening off once and a while and stayed at home with your mother. I don't think that would be out of order at all." He noticed with a familiar sense of dismay that her

lower lip was trembling.

"Tomorrow night, Mother. I promise," he said. He started to leave, but she called him back.

"Aren't you even going to kiss me goodnight?"

He brushed her cheek with his lips.

"Have a good time, Charles," she said, squeezing his hand. "And don't stay out too late."

"I won't Mom," he promised.

He paused for one last look in the full-length hall mirror downstairs. Shoes shined. Razor crease in his blue gabardine trousers. Fresh white handkerchief in his lapel pocket, not much, just the tip showing for the carelessly correct look he enjoyed affecting. Red tie, the color of his hair.

He smiled to himself as he adjusted his tie. Redheads weren't supposed to wear red, it was supposed to clash or something. But he did it on purpose, to call attention to his hair. It had bothered him as a kid, but as he grew older, he had become proud of it. It wasn't kinky or wiry, like a lot of red hair you saw around. It curled up like silky fire from his light forehead. It drew the women as fire draws butterflies. He pulled a comb from an inside breast pocket and ran it through his hair. Then he ran out of the door to where his car was parked at the curb.

He remembered that Kim's face had shone when he first saw her that evening. She leaped at him when he entered the

door, and flung her arms around his neck.

"Charlie, did you hear? DID YOU HEAR? The Japanese--  
they've surrendered! The war's almost over!"

That was when the drinking had started, he remembered.

He had had a couple of shots with Doc Mallin, and then  
the four of them, he and Kim and the Mallins, had gone to  
the dance. The club was a mess of balloons and paper  
streamers and people with noisemakers. Everyone was scream-  
ing and kissing and the band was very drunk, but nobody  
seemed to care.

The stag line had grabbed Kim right away, and with his  
girl gone it was only natural that he had wandered into the  
bar. Everyone was drinking up, happy, laughing, slapping  
backs, feeling good. It seemed to him that he had only been  
there a few minutes when Doc Mallin came in.

"Better go out and dance, Charlie," Doc had said. "I  
think your girl's getting mad."

But when he had gone out Kim was dancing with Bob  
Peterson or Jack Lennox or someone in that crowd, and she  
had smiled at him and waved, so he had waved back and gone  
back to the bar. And then a few rounds later she had come  
into the bar and shot him a look so mean that it had almost  
sobered him up right on the spot.

"Why look at me like that?" he had asked her.

"You brought me here, didn't you?"

"Sure," he said. "Want a drink?"

"How can you act like this?" she had whispered. He remembered that her green eyes had looked almost black. They looked like that whenever she got angry. "You haven't even danced with me once," she had said.

So he had taken her by the hand and led her onto the dance floor. The song was "Me and My Shadow". It was one of her favorites. She didn't stay mad long. She never stayed mad long. At first she wouldn't dance close, but he had looked into her eyes and dipped lower and lower whenever he had an opportunity to, until at the last dip they had almost fallen over. Then she had grinned in spite of herself and they had both laughed. After that she snuggled in his arms with her blonde hair against his shoulder, and he remembered that it had been very nice. She had even sung a little of the song.

"..and when it's twelve o'clock  
we climb the stair.....  
we don't knock...  
'cause nobody's there..."

It had felt good, not looking at her, the sweet smell of her hair, listening to her high, thin little voice, holding her in his arms..

But the dance had ended and they had gone back to the bar. And she had wanted sweet cider. But the bartender had shaken his head. "Too early for sweet cider. I can give you punch, or a carbonated drink."

Nope. Had to be sweet cider.

"You're spoiled," he had told her.

But then someone had claimed her and dragged her back to the dance floor. Bob Peterson or Jack Lennox. Someone in that crowd. So he had had another drink and then he had decided to get her some cider.

He couldn't have been too drunk. It was a very logical idea. She wanted cider. It was too early for the bar to stock cider. But he knew where there was cider. Lots of cider. So he'd go get her some.

He remembered that he had been proud that he had woven his way out of the crowded club parking lot without so much as touching another car. Oh, he was high all right, he stalled the motor a couple of times, but he had complete control of his senses. He even remembered to shut his lights before starting the car each time, because he remembered having heard that starting a car with the beams on caused a big drain on the battery, and there was still a war-time shortage of good batteries. But he must have stalled again on the Orchard road, near the Polish farms, and forgotten to put his lights on again when he started the car, because he remembered very clearly what a fine feeling it had been to rush through the dark night with the top of the convertible down and the black air pouring softly around him, fluttering his tie and pushing warm fingers of wind through his hair.

He had heard the thump off the right fender, but it had never occurred to him that he should stop. "Must be a rab-

bit," he had said. "Poor little rabbit. Ain't never gonna run no more." The words had pleased him and he had sung them out into the night, "Pooo-ore, li'l ole ra-ab-bit, ain' nev' gone run no mooooo." Pretty big bump for a rabbit, he had thought then. Maybe a fox. He hoped that it hadn't been a dog. Damn stupid polacks, he thought, they let their dogs run around on the loose so's it might have been a dog at that.

He had pulled up by the orchard packing shed and he leaned on his horn, splitting the quiet with a long, wailing note. He chuckled as he saw the watchman's flash bobbing down the loading platform towards him. The old man turned the flash on him.

"Who's there?" he quavered. "What you want?"

He had blinked, and closed his eyes. "Shut that damn thing off," he had said. "It's me, Charlie MacIntyre. Sell me some cider, will you, Pete?"

"What's the matter with you, Charlie, you crazy or some-thin'? You come down here with no lights on, like to kill yourself, and you make a lotta noise! You know what time 'tis? It's eleven-thutty, that's what. No, I ain't gonna sell you no cider."

"Hell, Pete," he had said, "I know that damn road so well I can drive it in my sleep, never mind without lights. Come on, be a good guy, I'll give you five bucks for a jug of cider and no-one'll be the wiser. And you can go back to

cat-nappin' when I leave."

He had grinned as Pete shuffled off to get the cider. Then he had remembered what the old man had said about the lights, and he had switched them on. Only the left beam worked, and he remembered going around to the front of the car to see what was wrong. The lamp was shattered. The other headlight showed brown spots spattered all over the yellow fender.

And then he had seen the rag.

It was caught in the crack between the body and the hood, a piece of dirty white cloth, looking as if it had been ripped from a man's undershirt. He had picked it up and stood there with it in his hand, trying to comprehend what it meant.

Pete had come back with the cider and he had paid him off and driven slowly back down the road. When he had reached the Polish farms he had used the spotlight, travelling slowly, playing the beam up and down the side of the road.

He saw it almost right away.

The kid was small. He remembered that the boy had been wearing sneakers and blue jeans, and that only half his tee-shirt was left on his back. The boy had been lying face down, and in the bad light he looked like an oversized rag doll that someone had gotten tired of playing with. He had started to turn the little body over, but had become wretchedly sick, and then frightened, very frightened. He

had leaped into the car and had started to drive, pushing the pedal down to the floorboard, wanting only to get away from there.

The next thing he remembered was bursting into his mother's room. He didn't recall telling her the story of what had happened, but she must have gotten it out of him, because he could remember that she begged him not to tell anyone what had happened. He could remember her hard hands pressing his head to her bosom, and how she had rocked back and forth, sitting on her bed as he kneeled drunkenly before her.

But he had sobered up.

He remembered calling the club, waiting until Doc Mallin had been paged, and then talking:

"Hello, Doc? This is Charlie. Doc, I ran over a kid. On the Orchard road. I don't know. I left him there. Doc, I think--maybe I killed him."

He realized with a start that Nathan had been talking.

"Do you need anything special?" Nathan asked.

"No. Thanks, I don't. Oh, and thank your Dad for the packages, huh?" Charlie smiled wistfully. "He's still a swell guy."

A guard opened the door and waited until they said good-bye.

"When's the next visiting day, Charlie?" Nathan asked.

"Sunday. But I'll understand if you can't make it. Just got out of the army, and all that." He waved his hand again, that same careless gesture.

"I'll be here," Nathan said.

Charlie waited until he had left the room, then he walked back to his cell with the guard.

White lay on his bunk, his hands behind his head.

"Hiyuh, pal," he said. "I missed yuh. I'm all outa butts. Let's have one, huh?"

Charlie threw him the pack.

White grinned. "Was it the governor?"

"No," Charlie said. "Just a friend."

## VIII

He frequented the places to which she might logically go. He knew that he was playing the romantic, but he took regular walks past the big split oak where she had hit him with the rock years before, and he fished for hours from the bluff where they had first really met. He even walked by her uncle's house twice like a little boy looking for his best girl, past the long gingerbreaded porch which he had once known so well, hoping that he wasn't being obvious, his heart pounding and the nervousness tight in the pit of his stomach. He wanted their first meeting to be memorable, something upon which to build.

But when he met her it was on the Boston train, on Sunday, visiting day at the penitentiary.

He boarded the train a few minutes early and opened the Post to the crossword puzzle. He saw Mrs. MacIntyre first, entering his car just before the train pulled out. He was seated in the rear of the coach, and when he recognized Charlie's mother he half arose to greet her, but then he saw Kim, and he couldn't make himself move; he sank back in his seat, looking at her.

He hadn't realized three years was such a long time.

He had known that she would be changed, that she would be different in some aspects of appearance, but looking at her as she walked down the train aisle he felt with a sense of panic that this was not the same girl with whom he had grown up.

They chose a seat in the middle of the car, and he sat there, just looking at the back of their heads, not knowing what to do.

She had cut her hair, that was one reason that she appeared different to him. He had expected to see it long, shoulder length, and instead it was cropped short, in the latest fashion, so that it fitted her head like a bright yellow cap. It looked shockingly modern, that head next to Mrs. MacIntyre's grey-feathered brown hat. She was wearing a white summer dress, and between the spot where the hair ended and the dress began he could see the smooth tan of her neck. Some of the girlish mischief was gone from her face, and instead she wore a cool, almost brittle, expression of detachment, accentuated by the modernness of her hairdo.

But then two girls entered the car, puffing and laughing about how they had just managed to catch the train, and they sat between him and the seat occupied by Kim and Mrs. MacIntyre, and he couldn't see her anymore, and almost without realizing that he was doing it he was moving down the aisle toward her.

He paused by their seat and cleared his throat. Her

face was a blank for a moment, and then color rushed into it when she recognized him. Her eyes made the biggest impression on him in that first moment. Her eyes had always fascinated him.

"Nate," she breathed. "Well, Nathan Holoff!"

He took her hand. Then he dropped it, for Mrs. MacIntyre stared from one to the other in sharp disapproval.

"Hello, Nathan," she said. "When did you get back?"

"Just a few days ago," he said. "I'm going up to see Charlie."

Some of the disapproval left her face. "Oh. Then you've heard."

It is an old Jewish custom not to express sorrow at a funeral. This was something like that, Nathan thought. So he merely nodded. "Yes," he said. "I visited him there last Friday."

The woman looked up at him. "How was he? He have a cold?"

"I didn't notice that he had."

She thawed a little and gave him a tight smile. "If you don't mind riding backwards why don't you turn that seat around and ride with us."

He tugged at the seat in front of them, pushing it until the back slanted toward them. Then he sat facing them and tried to keep from staring at Kim.

She was much thinner than he remembered her, more so-

phisticated looking. She held some knitting in her lap, and he noticed that her nails were scarlet-tipped. Her figure, too, had matured. He forced himself to look at her impersonally.

Her lips were parted in a glad smile. Her eyes gazed into his warmly. She reached over and pressed his hand gently.

"It is good to have you with me again, Nate," she said.

Kim stood under the shower with her eyes closed, feeling the warm water thrum off of her shower cap and needle along her skin.

She worked up a lather, rubbing the cake of soap with quick, intense movements, then she rubbed the suds slowly over her body, enjoying the warm, exciting way in which her hand slipped over her breasts and stomach.

The warmth and the pounding water was relaxing, and she closed her eyes and stood there sleepily, thinking of how Nathan had looked on the train, of how his shoulders had broadened and his manner had become more self-assertive, less hesitant. Those dark good looks, she thought, only a Jew could have such dark skin and still be so attractive. But not all Jews. In fact, not most of them. Ugh. She thought of the swarthiness of some of the boys she had seen lounging in front of the synagogue on Harrison Street.

Then she smiled. But Nathan was different. Nathan was

Nathan, and the thought of what had happened to the stringy body of the boy she had once known gave her a queer feeling of excitement. He was a man now. And big. She felt her breasts go taut with longing.

I'll be seeing more of you, Nathan Holoff, she thought.

"I'll be seeing more of you," she whispered aloud, as the water thrummed loudly off the bathing cap about her ears and the pellets needled sharply into the tender skin between her shoulder blades.

Three Sundays crawled by and each Sunday he would board the train and wait for Kim to get on with Mrs. MacIntyre. They would talk politely during the trip in, spend a strained, uncomfortable forty minutes watching Charlie through the chickenwire in the visiting room, and take a cab back to North Station. In the station dining room Mrs. MacIntyre would always order vegetable soup without looking at the menu; and when they had eaten and taken the local, grinding stop after grinding stop back to Dutton, Nathan would tip his hat and know that he would not see Kim for another seven days. He could not bring himself to suggest a meeting; there seemed no reason for doing so, and Mrs. MacIntyre's cold eyes stopped him from suggesting purely social contact.

And then on the fourth Sunday Kim walked down the train aisle toward him and he saw that she was alone.

"Hi," he said. He stepped into the aisle so that she

could get to the seat next to the window. He smelled her clean, sweet scent as she brushed by. "Where's Mrs. MacIntyre?"

"She's in bed with a bad cold," Kim said. "She can hardly talk, poor thing. She feels simply awful."

"That's too bad," said Nathan. He grinned down at her. "Now we'll just have to go into Boston all alone."

She smiled back at him and shook her head. "She really isn't as awful as she seems, Nate," she said. "She just loves her son too much, that's all."

Nate nodded. He opened his paper to the crossword puzzle and they started to do it together. He began to feel almost gay; the purpose of the trip to Boston left his mind, and Charlie and jail and manslaughter were forgotten completely as he listened to Kim's clear laughter bubble up over some absurd definition in the puzzle list. Kim responded quickly to his gaiety; a stranger might have thought that they were off on a holiday.

But all at once they were at North Station, and then the things which they had crowded out of their minds rushed back into them, and they were quiet as the taxi threaded its way through the traffic.

Charlie smiled when he saw them, but then Nathan saw his face go white as his eyes moved over the entire room, searching.

"Hi, buddy," Nathan said.

"Hello, dear," said Kim.

Charlie stared at them. "Where's Mom," he said. "She's sick, isn't she? She's sick! What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing much, really," said Kim. "She's got a little cold and her voice became husky, so I told her that she'd better not come in today."

"You told her," Charlie said. "Didn't she have Doc come up to the house?"

"Oh, yes," said Kim, "he dropped in on her last night and gave her some penicillin tablets to suck on. She'll be fine by tomorrow."

Charlie stared at Kim. "You're sure," he said. "You're not lying to me, are you? You're sure she's all right?"

"Of course, dear," Kim said. "Now don't start to behave like a stupid ass."

Charlie smiled wanly. "I'm sorry," he said. "Only I knew that if she didn't come to see me she must be sick, and I got frightened for a minute, that's all."

"Sure," Nathan said. "But she's o.k., she's fine."

"Oh, that's all right then," Charlie said. "I just wanted to make sure."

There are a lot of seconds in forty minutes, thought Nathan. He tried not to fidget as the three of them sat and talked inanely. The conversation turned to Dutton, the apple crop, the cutting down of the mill to one shift. Finally

the visitors began to file out of the bare room, and it was time to go.

"Say, Nate," Charlie said, "Tell your old man that I appreciate the stuff he's been sending me, but that I think he should stop."

"Why?" said Nathan. "He enjoys sending it."

"Most of it ends up with my cellmate anyhow," said Charlie. "I hate to see him waste his money."

"Don't be silly," said Nathan. "Just as long as you get some of it."

"Well, then thank him for me. And thanks for coming today." He turned to Kim. "See you next week, honey?"

"Sure," she said. "See you next week."

In the cab Nathan felt restless. "Let's not go to the station to eat tonight," he said.

"All right," Kim said. "Anything you say."

They left the taxi at Park Square and walked over to Mario's. It was crowded with early diners, full of noise and chatter, but the smell of good Italian food was in the air and a juke box provided a background of soft music. They ate slowly and enjoyed themselves.

"I hate to go home now," said Kim.

"Well, why do we have to?" said Nathan. "Let's catch the nine o'clock."

"Will you buy me a drink?" she asked.

"Will I!"

They went to a place a few doors down from Mario's, a joint that was dimly lighted by a couple of electric bulbs with orange shades around them that threw chunks of the room into an orange brightness and left the corners black and murky. Nathan watched Kim: she sipped the sidecar she had ordered and shuddered. He took a long swallow of his own drink; it scalded his gullet and wormed its way hotly through his insides.

"Boy!" he said.

She nodded. "Mine, too," she said. "They must make it themselves!"

The clarinetist began to play again. He was a large man, and very black, shiny black like the instrument that he played. So was his music; the notes sobbed and wailed and told a story of glory and fear and sweat and stink and indescribable beauty. The sound of the clarinet filled the little dive and rode up and down the orange waves of smoke. Then the little tan guy with the sax joined in. More sobbing, another tale of frustration. But the piano brought them out of it. A lousy piano, no subtlety of meaning or nuance of tone, just a tinkling beat that set the other two instruments going, and soon the three of them were delivering it together, fast, hard and driving.

They finished in a burst of sound that enveloped their

audience, who screamed for more. Nathan and Kim beat their palms together until the little guy with the sax raised his hand for quiet and put the reed to his mouth.

Nathan finished his drink and ordered two more. He began to tingle from the feet up; that meant that he was about to get high. He saw that Kim was staring at him, a pensive little smile on her lips. She wrinkled her nose at him. He kissed his fingertip and touched the tip of her nose.

"I wonder who's going to be the first to say it," she said.

"Say what?" he asked.

"I love you."

He waited for a moment. Then he said, "You are. You have to."

"Why do I have to, Nate?" she said. "Why can't you?"

"You have to," he said. "It's up to you."

"I love you," she said. "I've always loved you."

The waiter returned with their drinks. They said nothing, but sat there and looked into each others eyes.

From the back of the room a skinny colored girl walked to the center of the floor in front of the band and started to sing.

"Aww, it's oney a pay-puh moon..." Her voice grated unpleasantly. Whatever it was that the combo had been able to capture through improvisation was lost on commercial stuff. Nate dropped a bill on the table and grabbed Kim's hand.

"Come on," he said. "I don't want it spoiled."

The night was cool. Hand in hand they walked across Park Square and onto the Common. They sat on a park bench overlooking a pond on which boats shaped like huge white swans drifted serenely. The sounds of the traffic-sifted to them through the night as if from a far-off land.

She reached out and touched his cheek, and Nathan smiled.

"Forget it, Kimmy," he said. "It was the liquor."

"No. It wasn't the liquor. I love you, Nate."

"Charlie--"

"Didn't really count. I've always loved you. Of course I couldn't have waited. I was just a kid. I didn't know if I'd ever see you again. And Charlie was a substitute."

She had started to cry, and he took her in his arms.

"That's all he ever was," she said. "A substitute. I just forgot that I loved you, that's all. But I never stopped. Forgetting isn't the same as stopping."

Her cheeks tasted salty to his lips. He buried his face in her hair.

"No, it isn't," he said.

On the pond the boats moved slowly, like huge white swans.

## IX

Nathan sat on the cutting table, picking with a broken razor blade at the stitches which he had just made in the cuffs of a pair of trousers held in his lap. It was the third time that he was taking the stitches out of the fabric, and he was worried, thinking that perhaps he had ruined the cloth. He cut the thread slowly and methodically, taking care not to do further injury to the material. It made him nervous, this skill-demanding, picayune work. He couldn't enjoy sitting hunched up over a piece of cloth, making the quick, small movements with needle and thread which he had so often watched his father doing. He yearned for work that called for sweat and freedom of motion.

He unrolled the half-finished cuff and swore softly when he saw the tiny gash he had made in the fabric. Before he could do anything else with the pants, the door opened and Moishe Holoff bobbed into his shop.

Nathan smiled at his father and shook his head. "Pa, are you sure I'm your son? I'm still working on Kwiatkowski's cuffs, and I can't get one of them sewn straight."

Moishe frowned and pursed his lips. "He'll be here any minute. Here, give them to me." He inspected the cut with a mixture of amusement and concern. "Ruin them you didn't yet," he said, "but all I can say is that I'm glad I came home when I came home!"

Nathan leaned back in relief and watched the flashing of his father's needle.

"This is a good suit," said Moishe. "One of the finest suits I ever made here." He stopped sewing for a moment, and held the trousers out before him. "Such a piece of material I should have to work with every day!"

"What's Kwiatkowski going to do with a suit like that, Pa? Seems to me he never leaves that farm of his."

"A suit like this he buys for only one reason, Nochem. For church. We like to dress nice for shul, Kwiatkowski wants to put his suit on Sunday mornings and go to church. Ah, he's got the right idea, he's no dope." Moishe nodded slowly. "When he didn't have, he worshipped God dressed in what he could afford. Now.." He looked at the suit and shrugged. "A good suit."

"The insurance gelt, huh, Pa?"

Moishe nodded. "The insurance gelt. You know what they're saying? They're saying that he's collecting fifty thousand dollars. Fifty thousand!" He stared into space.

Nathan snorted. "Bubbie's meisers, Pa," he said. "The most insurance his son could have taken out was ten thousand. That's tops. You can't take more."

"So," said Moishe, "ten thousand or fifty thousand, to a man like Kwiatkowski, got a good farm and everything, ten thousand is the same as fifty thousand. He doesn't really need it, but now that he's got it he'll be able to buy him-

self a few luxuries. He got no one else to spend it on or leave it to. No use in saving it." He shuddered. "Brrrrr. That kind of money I'm glad I ain't got. Poor Kwiatkowski! A nice Palisheh, too. A nice goy."

"Yeah," Nathan said, "it's too bad."

"Too bad," said Moishe. "Like my mother, your Eubbie, used to say to me, you think you got troubles, go visit seven families and you'll find seven worse kinds of trouble!"

Nathan smiled. "Yeah," he said. "That's right."

The door jangled open, and Kwiatkowski came in. He was a big man in faded blue overalls. His workshirt, open at the neck, revealed a hairy chest the color of overtanned leather. Nathan nodded to him and smiled, noticing the way the man's steel-grey mustache spread over his upper lip when he returned their greeting with a nod and a slow, patient smile of his own.

"'Lo," said Kwiatkowski. "Holoff, you got my new suit, like you said?"

"Just finishing, Kwiatkowski," Moishe said. "Sit down, sit down."

Kwiatkowski carefully rubbed his hands on his overalls before he gingerly pushed aside two bolts of cloth and sat on the work bench. Nathan's impression of the man was one of extreme cleanliness. His blue clothing was pink from repeated washings, and although he needed a haircut his white head gleamed cleanly.

"A cup tea?" Moishe asked.

"Would be nice," conceded Kwiatkowski.

"Nochem" Moishe nodded in the direction of the kitchen. Nathan went in and put the pot on. Then he got three of the thick, white cups that Moishe kept stacked in the cupboard. Almost as if he had been watching his son, Moishe yelled, "Nochem. Bring glasses for Mr. Kwiatkowski and me, not cups. And the lump sugar."

"O.K., Pa!" Nathan yelled back. He grinned as he returned two of the cups and took down two water glasses. That was the European style of drinking tea. And the lump sugar! He loved to watch his father drink tea. First Moishe would bite off a good piece of sugar, then, holding it between his teeth, he would sip the tea right through it, that way getting the maximum of sweetness. Nathan piled the tea things on a tray and hurried back to the shop.

Kwiatkowski was standing in front of the mirror looking at his new pants, which he had just put on. Moishe Holooff was a fine tailor, and he had used a good pattern. Kwiatkowski's suit might have been ordered from a firm which advertised in Esquire. The farmer stood there before the mirror, self-conscious in his pride, his face shining.

"Do you like my suit?" he asked Nathan.

"It's a wonderful suit," Nathan said. "Wear it in good health."

Kwiatkowski looked surprised. "Thank you, boy," he said.

He had a gentle way of talking.

They sat in silence for a while, and sipped their tea. Then Kwiatkowski spoke.

"Did you know my Joseph?" he asked Nathan.

Nathan was taken by surprise. He didn't know what to say. "No," he blurted. "No, I didn't."

The farmer nodded. They returned to silence and their tea.

"Another glass?" Moishe asked when Kwiatkowski had set his empty glass down on the bench before him.

"No." He shook his head. "All right I pick up my suit on Tuesday? I expecting a check on Tuesday, pay for it then."

Moishe shook his head in protest. "No, no, take it now, take it now. If you want to pay on Tuesday, all right, fine, but take your suit now."

Kwiatkowski nodded in satisfaction. "Good," he said. He turned to Nathan. "You help your father make my suit?" he asked.

Moishe laughed. "Nathan is not much of a tailor," he said. "He's pretty good using the pressing machine, that's all."

"You like to be tailor?"

Nathan shook his head ruefully. "No, I'm afraid I don't enjoy it very much. I was in the Infantry. I'm used to working outside now, in the sun, in the rain."

"My boy Joseph was in Infantry, too." Kwiatkowski stared at Nathan, as if he wanted to say something and for some reason was holding back. "You like to be farmer?" he asked.

Nathan looked at him. "Sure." He smiled. "Need a hired man?"

Kwiatkowski snorted. "No need hired man." He flexed his arm. "Sixty-one year old, strong as ox." He looked from the father to the son. "My Joseph was going to be farmer, like me," he said. "Two year ago, town sell good plot of land. On Cemetery Hill. I buy for Joseph. Good land. Some of it hard to farm, on hill. But a lot on top of hill, purty flat." He reached into his overalls and pulled out a sack of tobacco and a cigarette paper and started to roll a smoke. "I no want land anymore. Joseph no need land. I sell cheap." He looked again from father to son.

Moishe laughed. "Nathan is not a farmer," he started to say, but his son stopped him.

"Pa, I think I'd like it." Moishe stared at him in surprise.

"Nine huner' dollar," Kwiatkowski said. "Only land, nothin' on it. Lots of stones on slopes, better near top. Have to clear the trees, plow on slopes with horse, no can use tractor there." He stared at Nathan. "You think you like?"

Nathan looked at his father. "If it's any good I can get a G.I. loan through the Veterans," he said.

"You think you can do it?" Moishe asked slowly. "You think you can be a farmer, do all that heavy work?"

"I'd sure like to try," Nathan said.

Kwiatkowski was a little more sure of himself now. "You take land, I give you present, give you all seed for first year."

"What are the boundaries?" Moishe asked.

"The apple orchard, on North. The cemetery wall, on south. Stone marker, half-way down hill, on east. Not much on west. Just a little of the slope yours on the west. But land on the west not much good, anyhow. Too much stones, too many trees." He looked at Nathan. "You know land I mean?"

"Yes," Nathan said. "I know the land. I used to play there. I know it well."

"I got car outside," Kwiatkowski said. "You want go for ride, look at land?"

"I'd like that," said Nathan. "Thank you." He turned to his father. "Will you come, too, Pa?"

"I've got a business to run, clothes to press," Moishe said. "You go ahead. You're no baby. You know what you want." He chuckled. "Anyhow, you know more about farming than I do!"

Moishe put Kwiatkowski's suit in a cardboard box, and

Nathan got into the old '36 Ford with the farmer. It started with a roar. Nathan felt his eyes smart from the fumes which rose from the old motor as they jolted away.

Kwiatkowski handled the wheel as if he had become part of the car in the long years in which he had owned it.

About half way down the orchard road he pulled over to the shoulder and stopped the car. He rolled himself another smoke, lit up, and then started up again and drove off.

"I could have done that for you," Nathan said.

"You know how to roll smoke?"

"Somebody taught me in the army. This fella from Georgia."

"Oh. Nobody roll my smokes. I only like roll my own. You know why I not ask you hold the wheel while I roll cigarette?"

Nathan looked at him. "No. Why?"

Kwiatkowski pointed a gnarled forefinger. "Quarter of mile, half mile down is where Waitkovitch kid got killed. I show you."

Nathan grew cold. Poor Charlie, he thought, poor Charlie.

Kwiatkowski slowed down. "Over there, by bushes."

Nathan could see nothing but clean white dust in the road at the spot to which Kwiatkowski pointed. But the car moved on, and the place where Charlie had run down Stanislaus Waitkovitch was gone.

"That bad business, very bad," Kwiatkowski said.

"Charlie MacIntyre friend of yours, Huh?"

"Yes," Nathan said. "He's a friend of mine. Poor Charlie."

"Too bad," Kwiatkowski said. "Young fella, got a few drink in him, not mean do bad things. My Joseph used to have few drink in him, once in while. Most young fella lucky." He flipped his cigarette out of the window.

"Charlie unlucky," he said.

"He sure was," Nathan said.

"To bad for Waitkovitch, too," Kwiatkowski continued. "Waitkovitch lazy, no-good, but he lose a boy, feel bad. I know."

"Did he take it bad?" Nathan asked.

"Very bad. Oh, bad. Drink, drink, drink, ever since. No tend farm, no feed chickens. Only drink." Kwiatkowski shook his head in pity.

They rode on in silence for the rest of the way, each occupied with his own thoughts. Kwiatkowski jockeyed the old car into the rutted woods road which led from the orchard up the bottom slope of the hill. They jounced along for a few minutes, the wheels of the car following the deep ruts in the road like trolley wheels following steel tracks; then the road ended, and they got out of the car and began to climb on foot.

Nathan felt strangely as if he were in some sort of

dream. This was the hill which had been so important to him as a boy. From its crest he had launched a thousand imaginary careers. Lying on its grassy surface with his eyes closed, he had been king, bandit chief, wandering minstrel, soldier, cossack, American Indian. He felt somehow that he should be showing the land to Kwiatkowski.

At the top they paused to catch their breath. The land fell away at their feet: forest, water, field and farm.

"You can see half the county from here," Nathan murmured.

Kwiatkowski kicked a piece of turf loose with his heavy boot. He knelt and picked a fistful of the rich, brown loam.

"This good earth," he said. "You feel this earth."

Nathan knelt by him and rubbed the earth between his thumb and fingers. It felt cool and fine. He breathed in the moist ground smell.

"When you begin work, clear land?" asked Kwiatkowski.

"I don't know," Nathan said. "It'll probably be at least a week before I can clear the loan papers through."

Kwiatkowski looked at him and smiled. "You want pay for land next week, good, fine. But you start work on land tomorrow, pay whenever you get money." He smiled in deep satisfaction. "Just like I do with your father's suit."

## X.

Far below him the blueness of the lake shimmered in the heat rays. Nathan paused in his work for a moment and wiped his brow with a sweaty forearm. The ghost of a breeze riffled the grass at his feet, and he threw his head back hopefully, hoping to catch some coolness. But the breeze had died as quickly as it had been born, and only the sun beat hotly on his upturned face.

He looked down at the lake again; it looked cool and inviting. He thought of the icy springs on the bottom, around which schools of fish took refuge on days like this, and through which he had swum in deep green water, so cold that his body had tingled and he had had to take faster strokes to warm himself.

But then he looked about him, and sighed in satisfaction as he picked up his axe and resumed work. All about him lay the evidence of his labours. For ten days he had been cutting down trees, and many white-cut stumps squatted where timber had risen a few days before.

He swung his axe steadily. The rhythmic biting of the blade rose above the smaller noises of the birds and the insects; it was the only large noise on the hill. Even the farm dogs, whose barking sometimes rose to him

from below, were silenced by the heat. His axe rose and fell, flashing in the sun. He wore no shirt; the sweat rolled down his bare brown back and soaked into his army suntan pants.

He saw Kim when he stopped for his next break. She had already started up the hill. She was dressed in a white frock, and the sun shone in her blonde hair. He leaned against the tree and watched her climb. She walked easily, taking long, yet feminine, strides. She swung something in her right hand as she walked; when she got closer to him he saw that it was a thermos jug.

"Hi!" he shouted, when she had reached the stone marker. She didn't answer or indicate that she had heard. She walked up to the tree in the shade of which he rested, and sank to the ground.

"You poor kid!" he said. The dress, which had looked so crisp and fresh against the greenery of the hillside vegetation, stuck limply to her body. Her face was flushed, and beaded with perspiration.

"You madman," she moaned, "to be working on a day like this!" She slipped her loafers off her feet and sighed gratefully as she sank back in the grassy shade, her eyes closed against the hot brightness of the early afternoon. "I lugged up some lemonade," she said.

"Pour me some, won't you?"

He slipped the cup off the top of the thermos, and gave her a drink. She gulped the lemonade down and handed him the cup wordlessly. He was thirsty, but he drank slowly, savoring the cold tartness of the drink. It left a cool, puckerish taste in his mouth. He placed the jug in the shade, and dropped to the grass beside Kim with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Mrs. MacIntyre called this morning," she said. Her eyes were still closed; he looked at her face, but it revealed nothing.

"Yes?" he said. "What did she want?"

"She wanted to know if my cold was any better."

"Oh."

"I told her it wasn't. Then she wanted to know whether your cold was better. I told her I didn't know."

"Do you want to go in to see him this Sunday?"

Nathan asked.

She opened her eyes. "I won't go without you," she said. "And I can't go in with you and act as if nothing had happened," she said fiercely. "I can't, I can't!"

Nathan said nothing. He leaned back and shut his eyes.

"It isn't easy, Nate!" she cried. "I'm not strong enough to make it a clean break. He's a nice person, and he'll be hurt, dreadfully."

"But you can't go on kidding the world forever," Nathan said quietly. "And it's better for you to tell him than for someone else to add shame to the hurt."

She moaned and rolled over on her stomach. She lay there face downward. He didn't know whether or not she was crying. He reached out his hand and let it rest on the small of her back; under his palm he could feel the gentle swelling of her buttock.

"Kim," he said.

She sat up and pulled his head down to her breast. She stroked his head gently, burying her lips in his hair and holding his cheek close to her bosom.

Nathan felt her lips on his head. "Don't, Kim," he said. "The heat, I'm so sweaty and hot.."

She kept him pressed close to her. "I love your sweat," she said as she fumbled with the top button of her frock. "I love your heat!"

You are all alone, Mary MacIntyre, the house said to her. You are all alone, all alone. All you have is me, and the familiar things within me, the things which are the sum and total of your life, from the Japanese fan he gave you when he courted you, to the letter with the prison postmark, sent by his son. You are all alone, alone in your house, alone in your world, cut off from

fruition and meaning by prison walls and blue-uniformed guards. Alone. Alone, alone.

She arose from the chair and walked to the curiosity table. The Japanese fan. So old. She was so old, dry and brittle, like the fan, she who had once been so young.

She touched the fan, carefully.

She hoped that the phone wouldn't ring tonight. She hoped that he would leave her be, let her alone. She was so tired; she needed sleep.

That was what she needed, she said to herself. That's what she needed, a good night's sleep. Do wonders for her, sleep would.

Seven o'clock.

If she got by nine o'clock everything would be all right, and she could go to sleep. It was funny, but he never called after nine o'clock. Maybe by then he was too intoxicated to call. That was probably it. What else could it be. He was a sick man, poor soul.

She went to the bureau and took a bundle of knitting from out the top drawer. Might as well finish the sweater by Autumn, she thought. Perhaps they'd change their minds after all, and allow her to give it to Charlie. She couldn't understand why they were being so stubborn. It wouldn't cost them money if she were to give her own son a sweater, would it now? Some of these people the state

hires, so stupid, couldn't see the forest for the trees.

She was nearing the end of one sleeve. She stopped knitting, trying to picture the length of his arms. But she couldn't, so she gathered up her knitting and climbed the stairway to his room upstairs. The hallway was cool and dark. She must watch out for the torn carpeting at the top of the stairs, she thought. She must remember to fix that torn carpeting. All it would take is a hammer and a few nails. Trouble was, she had been spoiled, both her men being so handy around the house, and all.

She turned on the light in Charlie's room and went in. The closet door was open, and Charlie's clothing hung neatly on a rack. She opened a drawer and took out one of Charlie's sweaters, a lovely tan cashmere. She spread it on the bed and covered it with the half-finished gray sweater she was knitting. She had once liked gray; how could she have!

She measured the sleeves. Another two rows and it would be long enough. She folded the sweater carefully, and put it back in the drawer. Her hand fluttered to the little watch which she wore pinned to the front of her dress.

Seven-twenty.

She gathered up her knitting and started to leave the room. But as she reached to put out the light, she

glanced at Charlie's suits, hanging all in a row. She realized suddenly that none of them were in moth bags, and here summer had already crept halfway past her! Goodness, she muttered to herself, Goodness. The moth bags were stacked in the back of the closet. She pulled them out, shaking her head at her negligence. What would Charlie have said if, when he came home, he had found all his favorite suits moth-eaten! She took the first suit down and began to pull the mothproof bag carefully over it. She smiled happily. There were a lot of suits. This would give her something to do until it was time to go to bed.

She had fitted bags on three suits and had just taken down the fourth when the phone rang.

Let it ring, she thought; I won't answer it. Let him ring, and maybe he'll get tired and give up.

She reached for the bag and started to work it down over the suit with trampling hands.

The phone rang shrilly and insistently through the quiet old house.

Perhaps it isn't he, she thought. Perhaps it's someone else. Suppose Charlie were sick and needed her, she thought, feeling the panic settle around her with a chill.

She laid the suit carefully on the bed.

She wouldn't say hello, she reasoned. She would merely lift the phone off the hook and put it to her ear. Then, if someone else said hello she would talk; but if it were he she could hang up.

Go slowly, she told herself, no need to hurry. Watch out for the torn carpeting at the head of the stair.

She walked slowly down the stairway, toward the shrilling of the telephone in the dark hallway.

She lifted the receiver to her ear. The man on the other end of the line had started talking the moment the phone had been taken from its hook.

"I got no son," he blubbered. "Got no son. You got son. Your son killed my boy, my little son." He was weeping; he sounded drunk.

She felt the strength drain out of her body. She strained to drop the receiver back into the telephone cradle.

"Got no son," he wept. "Your boy murderer, kill my son. Your boy murderer, MURDERER, kill my son, kill my son..."

She cleared her throat. "Mr. Waitkovitch," she said firmly, "you're going to make yourself sick. Mr. Waitkovitch, this can't keep up, you know. Why don't you go to bed and get a good night's sleep?"

"A murderer, murderer...A murderer killed my son, little son. Twisted head, all bloody, bone all broken, my little son..." He had become incoherent.

She broke the connection and stood there in the dark, trembling, the telephone receiver pressed into her cheek so hard that it hurt. After a few seconds she dialed Operator.

"I should like to register a complaint," she said.

The voice on the other end was crisp and efficient, and reassuring, somehow.

"What is your complaint, Madame?" it asked.

"I'm being bothered by an anonymous caller," she said, trying to keep her voice from trembling. "Is there anything you can do in a case like that?"

"Surely, Madame," the voice said; it sounded kind.

"We can request the names of all callers and announce them to you before making the connection. You do not have to accept the call if you do not wish to do so. What is your name and number, please?"

She felt relieved. She gave the girl her name and telephone number, thanked her, and hung up.

She walked into the kitchen. She needed something to relax her, to settle her nerves. She filled the percolator with fresh coffee and set it on the fire to brew.

And the phone rang.

She turned the lights on as she passed through the dining room and the living room. The dining room chandelier threw a great shadow across the hall.

She picked up the receiver.

"Hello?"

It was the same operator. "I have a call for Mrs. MacIntyre. The gentleman gives his name as Waitkovitch. Will you accept the call?"

Why should he give his name, she thought. Why should he give his name? As long as he's willing to give his name, perhaps I should accept the call. Perhaps he wants to apologize and end the whole thing.

"Will you accept the call?" The voice was beginning to sound impatient.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, put him on."

"Ready with your call, Mr. Waitkovitch," she heard the operator say. Then there was a click, and silence.

"Hello?" she said. "Hello, Mr. Waitkovitch?"

The blubbering sounded through the earpiece once again. "I have no son," he sobbed, "head all bloody, bone all broken, I have no son, no son....."

## XI

Moishe waited until the butter had melted in the frying pan, then he broke the eggs and dropped them in to fry. Nathan yawned noisily, and stretched.

"What time did you get in, Nochem?" his father asked.

"Around one. Kim and I went to the movie."

"Was it a good movie?"

"Uh-huh." Nathan yawned again.

"Tonight, Nochem, what will you do tonight?"

"Tonight? I don't know, Pa. Why?"

"This is Friday." Moishe concentrated on the eggs.

"On Friday evenings I go to the shul. I thought maybe, if it should be that you're not busy, I thought maybe you could come with me tonight."

Nathan smiled. "I don't think so, Pa. You know I'm not religious."

"How do you know you're not religious?" Moishe said heatedly. "Does a man know that he hasn't a taste for beer until he drinks a few glasses? How do you know, how?"

Nathan chuckled. "Pa, look here," he said. He slapped the top of the table with his palm. "Why on earth should I develop a taste for something I can do

without? I feel no need for religion, so why should I go out of my way to look for it? Why?"

Moishe slipped his eggs from the pan to his plate and sat down at the table. He waved his knife. "Religion isn't something new, Mr. Holoff," he said. "It isn't something that was just found out about, day before yesterday, like a new medicine. God has been in business for a long time!"

Nathan poured himself a cup of coffee. "So is that a good reason why I should trade with him, because he's been in business a long time? Listen, Pa." He leaned forward. "I believe that everybody has a right to make up his own mind. You want to go to shul? Fine, go to shul! But I don't want to, so I'll stay home."

Moishe shook his head unhappily. "Oy, zun, zun. It's a long, long journey, the road to happiness. A religion is one of the stops. You have to believe in something!"

"So how do you know that what you believe in is the right thing?" Nathan asked. "Look, he said, "old lady MacIntyre is a Protestant, she goes to one church. Kwiatkowski is Catholic, he goes to another church. You're a Jew, you go to shul. Who's right? Which of you is praying in the right way?"

"A shlameel," Moishe said softly. "A big dope my son is! He leaned over and touched Nathan's arm. "How many roads are there to Boston?" he asked.

Nathan looked at him. "Lots," he said.

Moishe looked back at his son. "Nu?" he said. "They all get you there, don't they?"

Nathan looked at his father fondly. "Eat your eggs, Pa," he said.

Moishe's eyes twinkled. "A dumkopf answer. That's the way a dumkopf will always answer. You have no answer, so you tell me to eat my eggs." Then his face sobered. "But it is not all a joke, Nochem. You are the only son I have. When I die, if you do not care sufficiently for shul, who will be there to say Kaddish, the prayer for the dead? I do not like to think that no one will say Kaddish for me."

"Pa," Nathan said, "Pa, don't talk foolishly. You're still a young man, why do you talk of dying!"

"We must all die," Moishe said calmly, finishing the last of his eggs.

"I don't like that kind of talk," Nathan said.

"The young never do," Moishe said. "You are too sensitive." He reached for the coffee pot. "Tell me," he said. "Tell me the truth. If, God forbid, I should die tomorrow, would you go to the shul to say Kaddish

for me every morning?"

"I refuse to talk about anything as silly as that," Nathan said.

Moishe smiled. "Why silly? It isn't silly."

"It's very silly," Nathan said. He looked at his watch. "And this morning I have no time for silly talk. I still have trees to clear." His face brightened.

"Kwiatkowski came up yesterday. He said that at the rate I'm going the land is sure to be cleared and ready by the time winter sets in. That means I can try my first crop next spring!"

"Good," Moishe nodded. "Very good." He reached for the coffee pot. "I, too, have a lot of work today. Pressing. And I want to get it done before it gets too hot. You'd better not try to chop in the hot sun this afternoon, either."

"I'll quit if it gets too bad," Nathan promised. He picked up his lunch pail. "So long, Pa," he said. "I'll see you later."

"So long," Moishe said. "Are you going to shul with me tonight?"

"We'll see," said Nathan.

"All right," Moishe said. He watched his tall son walk from the room. Then he started to gather up the dirty dishes and carry them to the sink.

"May it please God we should all live," he said softly to himself.

Moishe smoothed the wrinkle from the pants leg and leaned on the handle which brought the two boards of the presser together. Steam hissed through the cloth as his foot trod the pedal of the machine. The damp heat rolled out at him. Sweat had formed beneath the white hair in large, round drops which rolled down his cheeks and dripped off his nose. Moishe protruded his lower lip and blew upward. Anything, he thought. Anything to feel a little coolness on the face.

He finished the pants and put them on a hanger. He reached for the next garment. A tuxedo jacket. The pile of unpressed clothing seemed enormous and without end.

Oy, when age, it creeps up, he thought, then we realize that work is for the young ones. Maybe I should leave these for the boy to do later. But, no, he works hard enough. Ahh, what is the matter with me? Like an old, old man I talk, instead of like just an old man. I'll finish the pressing and then it will leave time to read the paper. So. The sleeve pulled down over the corner nice and tight. So. Push down and press. So. A good presser. An old presser but a good presser.

Second hand this machine was when I got it, but good then and good now. The other sleeve. So.

Now the hard part was over and he was nearly done. He did the back of the garment quickly and then hung it alongside the other things.

He reached into the drawer of the pressing table and took out the meerschaum. He filled it slowly and lát up, then went back to his pressing. A dull pain in the middle of his chest made him bite hard on the stem of his pipe. He walked swiftly to his cutting table. From the drawer he took a small green bottle. His hands trembled a little as he rolled the metal cap off the container and shook a tablet into his moist palm. He placed the tablet under his tongue and closed his eyes. He waited like that until the pain went away, then walked over to the sink and let the water run until it was cold. He drank.

He went back to the pile of clothing by the presser. Through the sweat his face shone white in the dim shop. He placed the little green bottle on top of the pressing machine where he could get it if he needed it in a hurry. He picked up his pipe and relit it, using several matches to get a fine draught of smoke flowing through the yellowed stem.

He was beginning to feel better. He reached for a topcoat and pulled it towards him to place it on the presser.

One of the sleeves swung loose and knocked the green bottle from the top of the machine. It fell between the machine and the wall. Cursing under his breath he started to go after it and then changed his mind and began to pull the topcoat taut on the steamer.

The new pain came to him gradually, starting as an ache and becoming a sharp shard of glass someone was slowly turning through his breastplate. He thought of the nitroglycerine tablets on the floor and swayed forward in their direction, but his legs wouldn't work. His foot hit the steam pedal. The boards were open and the steam rose in a cloud around him, misting the lenses of his spectacles.

He gasped, the meerschaum falling from between his grey lips and clattering to rest amid the network of piping at the base of the presser. The room reddened and began to move in on him. He felt the weight on his chest, making it impossible to breathe. He began to cough, halting, apologetic little hackings that cut off the air from his lungs. With every cough the shard of glass went in an inch deeper.

He dropped to his knees in front of the pressing machine. Through the maze of pipes he could see the green bottle. He crawled forward a little way before his arms gave out.

The smell of seared flesh reached his nostrils and he realized with a sort of dim wonder that it was his own flesh he smelled. He pulled his hand from where it had rested on a hot water pipe and fell forward on his face.

Whiteness, greyness, blackness. Nothing.

Kwiatkowski hated to go to the Jew with a late payment. Holoff had been nice to him, had let him take his suit on credit, and he hated to be late with the money for it. True, he had more than paid him back for his kindness by giving his son a start in life, but he realized that he had done that as a sort of memorial for Joseph, his own dead son. He cursed the government for having been late in sending his insurance check. He was a man who liked to pay his bills on time; was it his fault that the check had been nine or ten days late?

He pushed open the door to the tailor shop.

"Holoff!" he shouted. "O moj boze, my God, Holoff, what wrong?"

He turned Moishe gently over on his back, lifting him as easily as if he were not a plump, heavy little man. Running to the sink he wet his handkerchief and began to bathe Moishe's face and neck. Moishe breathed in great, noisy gasps. His eyes were closed.

Kwiatkowski dropped the handkerchief and began to chafe Moishe's wrists. He stared in horror at the burned left hand.

"O moj boze," he said again. "Moj boze, moj boze, moj boze!"

Moishe opened his eyes. He looked at Kwiatkowski, his eyes flickering recognition.

"Get my pills," he whispered. "My pills." He turned his head weakly in the direction of the presser.

Kwiatkowski followed his gaze. He reached under the pressing machine and recovered the little green bottle.

Moishe sucked gratefully at the nitroglycerine capsule. He lay there on the floor for a few minutes, under the farmer's anxious gaze.

"Thank you," he said hoarsely.

"You feel better?" Kwiatkowski asked. "You want doctor, mebbe?"

Moishe shook his head. "No. No, thank you." He hugged the bottle of pills to his bosom. "As long as I have these I am all right." He started to climb to his feet. Kwiatkowski shot out a huge hand to steady him, and eased him onto the work bench.

"You got medicine for hand?" he asked Moishe. "You tell me where, I get, fix hand."

Moishe stared in surprise at the burn. He had forgotten it, and now recognition of its presence brought the first throb of pain.

"I feel better now," he said. "I can get it myself."

He waddled into the house, reappearing shortly carrying ointment, scissors and gauze.

The farmer tended deftly to the burn. Then the two old men sat back and looked at each other.

"I owe you a lot," Moishe said.

Kwiatkowski shut his eyes and shrugged. "You owe me nothing," he said. "God look, see you need help. But you no take care. Should always have pills near, if sick man!"

Moishe smiled. His color was returning fast; he felt better. "Yes," he said. "You are right. I should."

Kwiatkowski rose to go. "I bring money," he said, "to pay for suit. Check late, but I bring money now."

Moishe waved his hand. "Stay, stay," he said. "Have a cup of tea with me." He did not wait for a reply, but hurried up the stairs to start the kettle boiling.

Kwiatkowski listened to the bustling noises which came from the kitchen in the rear of the shop. He carefully pushed a pile of unpressed clothing to one side and sat down, staring in fascination at the little green bottle half-filled with strange, white capsules.

Nathan gazed again at the thick white padding of bandage on his father's left hand.

"I still don't know how you did it, Pa," he said.

"I told you, I was careless," Moishe said. He carried a tie over to his son. "Can you make this for me, I must go to the shul, I am already late."

Nathan stooped slightly to make the tie.

"Are you coming with me?" Moishe asked.

"Not tonight, Pa," Nathan tightened the tie and straightened his father's collar. "I'll go with you next week. Tonight I'm too tired to go anywhere."

"Let me tell you a story," Moishe said. "It is from the Torah."

Nathan held his coat for him and grinned. "I thought you were in such a big hurry to get to the shul," he said.

"It seems that there was once a man who didn't believe in God," Moishe said, "man who claimed there was no God, who defied anyone to prove to him that there was one. So a wise old rabbi carried to this man a bucket. He filled the bucket full of water, and then said to the man who didn't believe, 'Throw a handful of dirt into this water'. The man picked up some dirt and threw it into the bucket. Naturally, it sank to the

bottom of the water. 'See?' said the rabbi, 'the dirt is heavier than the water, it sinks to the bottom. But go and walk anywhere, and wheresoever you stop, dig, and sooner or later you will come to water. It is only someone as powerful as God who could have created a world in which the earth does not sink through the water.' And the cynical man was convinced, and could say nothing in argument."

Nathan grinned again. "Not even 'eat your eggs', Pa?"

Moishe chuckled. "Not even 'eat your eggs'." He reached for his hat, looking reluctant to leave. "You'll be here when I get home?"

"I may take a walk," Nathan said, "but if I do I'll be back early. Do you want me to finish your pressing for you?"

"On shabbos? Nobody works in my store on shabbos." He gave his son a long look. "Ahh, Nochem, you still don't know why the earth don't sink to the bottom of the water, do you?"

"Sure, Pa," Nathan said. "I took science in high school."

Moishe put his hat on his head and started for the door. "Say hello fo Kim for me," he said.

"I will."

Father and son grinned at each other in complete

understanding, then Moishe opened the door and walked up the street, eager to reach the Beth Israel synagogue and the comfort of the old scrolls and ancient Hebrew chants.

## XII

Mrs. MacIntyre sat on the edge of the taxi seat and looked straight ahead. "How nice that you could make it this week," she observed coldly. "Charles has missed both of you."

"How is he?" Nathan asked.

Mrs. Mac Intyre sighed. "He's got a cough I don't like," she said. "It's a very bad cough. They don't take care of those poor men like they should." She sniffed and shook her head.

"How's the sweater coming?" Kim asked.

"They won't let me give it to him. It's almost finished, but they won't let me give it to him. Oh, it makes me mad enough to cry. I'm going to finish it, though. Perhaps we can dye it and he can wear it when he comes home."

"Yes," Kim said gently.

The moment they got out of the cab Nathan felt the prison atmosphere envelop him. The grayness of the place, the lack of all color and warmth, the uniformed guards walking the walls, all gave him an odd, frightened feeling in the pit of his stomach. He had come to loathe the idea of spending even the short visiting hour in this place.

They stopped at the desk for their passes, then walked down the long corridor with the grey walls and into the visiting room with the grey walls and ceiling. They sat on the gray bench and fixed their eyes patiently upon the grey door. The prisoners came through the doorway one by one, some smiling, some looking sullen and morose, all of them searching, searching for the sight of a familiar face.

When Charlie came into the room Nathan felt a quick sense of shock at his thinness. From Mrs. MacIntyre's description of her son he had expected that Charlie would have lost weight, but he was not prepared to see the man who walked listlessly toward them. Charlie had been quick and bright, easy with his laughter and ready with his smile. Now he wasn't smiling. He slumped down on the prisoner's bench behind the wire.

"Hello," he said.

The three of them answered his greeting at once. Nathan noticed that his hair was still alive, the most live thing about the man. Fiery and shining, it curled away from his

forehead and made his face seem all the more wasted by comparison. His eyes burned as if with fever, but his skin had a ruddy, quite healthy glow about it which contradicted his almost emaciated appearance.

"How are you doing, Charlie," Nathan said.

Charlie shook his head. "AAh," he said. He looked away.

Kim cleared her throat. "Is there anything wrong?" she asked. "Aren't you feeling well?"

Charlie looked at her and smiled. "I guess I have a cold," he said. "But maybe I can get rid of it by next week." He looked at his mother, "They're making me a trustee. That means I can work on the prison farm, get some hot sun on my back." He closed his eyes. "God, but I want to feel some hot sun on my back."

"I knit you a sweater," Mrs. MacIntyre said to him. "But they won't let me give it to you." She glared at the guard by the door.

Charlie smiled at her; for the first time there was warmth in his smile. "It's all right, Ma. Everything's going to be all right, Mamma."

Nathan felt Kim's eyes on him. He looked towards her. There was a special pleading in her gaze. He nodded slowly at her.

How could he expect her to give the ring back when

Charlie was like this?

"Is good," Kwiatkowski said. "Is very good." He gazed about them at the clusters of short stumps where trees had once stood. "Hardest job is stumps," he said. "You can use tractor?"

"I never have," Nathan said.

Kwiatkowski reached down and pulled a stalk of grass. He chewed on the grass for a moment. "Is not matter," he said with satisfaction. "I can use tractor." He pointed toward the steepest part of the slope. "We have trouble there. No can use tractor on stump there. Have to use horse, chain."

Nathan picked up his axe and began to rub the blade with an oily rag. "Mr. Kwiatkowki," he said, "what can I hope to make from this land?"

Kwiatkowski gave him a blank stare. "I no understand," he said in his slow, patient way.

"How much money can I expect every year?"

Kwiatkowski shrugged. "Farmer no know how much money to expect every year. Some year market good, make lots a money. Some year no rain, crop fail, lose money. But land is money. No make money one year, plant more seed in spring, mebbe make money next year."

"I'm getting married tomorrow," Nathan said. "I just

want to make sure that I can support a wife."

Kwiatkowski's face lit up. "A wife!" he said. He slapped Nathan on the shoulder. "A wife! Oh, but that fine!"

Nathan smiled back at him. He liked this huge man, with his gentle way of speaking and his quiet, old-world strength.

"Yes," he said, "it's fine enough, but I want to be able to feed her!"

Kwiatkowski pushed his arm disdainfully. "Ahh, you feed her until she big and fat!" he said. "Look at me. I have less land than you when I start to be farmer. Land not good, soil thin, water bad. But I work hard and I always have plenty eat, plenty drink, and now I got big, fine farm, good land, many cows."

"That's what I want to do after we make a decent start with truck crops," Nathan said. "I want to get a few head and try to begin a herd."

"That good idea," Kwiatkowski said. "This good country for dairy farm, New England. Lotts grass." Suddenly, as if just struck by the idea, he slapped Nathan on the shoulder. "That's what I gave you for wedding present!" he chortled. "We got nice baby cow in barn, pretty, li'l calf. I give you first head livestock." He

Looked at Nathan. "Who you marry?" he asked. "You no tell me who you marry. Jew girl, Polish girl, who?"

"No," Nathan said, "She isn't Jewish or Polish. It's Kim Mallin. You know, Doc Mallin's niece."

Kwiatkowski nodded slowly. "Ah," he said, "A Yankee." He looked at Nathan quizzically. "She strong enough for work on farm?" he asked.

Nathan was embarrassed. He sensed that Kwiatkowski felt that it was obvious that she wasn't suited to life on a farm. Hell, he thought, I'm not buying a work horse, I'm marrying a wife!

"Sure," he said gruffly. "We've talked it all out. She wants me to make a go of this thing. She's willing to work."

Now Kwiatkowski was embarrassed. "Sure," he said. "Sure, why not? She good girl. Good, pretty girl." He pulled the makings from his pocket and began to roll a smoke. "I go back now," he said. "I take you back?"

"Yes," said Nathan. "Yes, thank you."

They walked slowly down the hill toward the car.

"This nice place for house, top of hill, Kwiatkowski said. "You build here?"

"Nathan laughed shortly. "Some day," he said.

"Where you live with wife?"

"I hope that Pa..." Nathah shook his head. "Pa

always liked Kim. I hope maybe he'll let us live with him, for a while. Besides, I don't like to leave him alone. If not.." He shrugged. "I still have a few dollars left from the money I saved in the army. We'll make out all right."

"No worry," Kwiatkowski said. "Your Pa good man. Besides.." He grimaced. "Lonely for old man live alone in empty house. I tell him that."

"Don't talk to him now, Mr. Kwiatkowski," Nathan said. "He doesn't know about it yet."

"So?" Kwiatkowski nodded slowly.

They got into the car and jounced slowly down the rutted country road.

"This good car," Kwiatkowski suddenly declared.

"Yes," Nathan agreed. "It seems like a pretty good car.

"How you go away to get married?"

"We plan to take the afternoon train to Boston," Nathan said.

"You stay away long?"

"Three days."

"You take car."

"This car? Your car? I couldn't do that." Nathan stared at him.

"You take car," Kwiatkowski said with finality. "If my Joseph lived to marry, he take it." He was silent for a

moment. Then he smiled. "I no use it for few days, anyhow. Your Pa teach me chess. I play with him for two, three evening, practice up."

Nathan could not answer him. They sat there in silence, bouncing up and down as the old car rode slowly down the bumpy, tree-shadowed dirt road.

## XIII

The water blurred the windshield and made driving difficult. Nathan switched on the windshield wipers and turned on the lights. It was mid-afternoon, but the rain-storm had filled the sky with clouds of darkness, and the beams helped.

He came to a stop in front of the movie house. Kim ran toward the car from where she had waited under the marquee. He held the door open for her and she leaped in beside him. She was wearing a blue raincoat, and a kerchief covered her hair against the rain. He looked at her damp face and smiled.

"Hi," she said. "Do you promise to take this woman to be your lawful wedd~~le~~ puddle?"

"This is a helluva day to be married on," he answered. He started the car and they pulled away.

"What kept you?" she asked. "Did the car break down? I've been getting dripped on out there for ages!" She removed her kerchief and shook her head. Her hair seemed to light up the car.

"I don't know what it was," he said. "Kwiatkowski came over, on schedule, but then he took Pa some place and I almost went crazy until they came back, thinking of you

waiting out there in the rain."

"Oh, well. Doesn't matter," she said. "I didn't melt." She squeezed his arm. "I love you."

"I love you, too," he said. "Mrs. Holoff!"

They turned onto the highway. The car swished over the watery road, its headlights pointed towards Boston.

Nathan cleared his throat. "Did you leave a note?" he asked.

"No," she said. "No, I don't know why, but I couldn't." She laughed, a too-gay, forced little laugh that made him want to stop the car and hold her close. "It will be more fun if we call them by phone afterwards," she said.

"Yes," he said. More fun, he thought.

"Nate?"

"What, darling?"

"If you want to..it doesn't really matter to me..we can go to a rabbi. You see, I don't care now. Just as long as we're married."

He smiled at her. "Thanks, Kimmie," he said softly, "but it doesn't matter to me, either. Besides," he added, "I don't think we could get one to perform the marriage. We'll go to a Justice of the Peace."

"You have everything, haven't you?" she asked.

"Money, license, your mother's ring..I guess I have everything."

"Do we have enough money, Nate?"

"I guess so."

The car pushed its way steadily over the wet highway.

"The suitcase!" Kim blurted. "Where's the suitcase?"

She squirmed around in her seat. But the suitcase lay on the floor of the car. She looked up to see Nathan laughing at her.

"I've got a right to be nervous," she said. "I've never been married before!"

"You won't be able to say that in a couple of hours," he said.

"What's this box?" she asked.

"What box?"

Kim reached over and took a cardboard clothing box from the back seat. She held it in her lap and opened it. She caught her breath, and threw the cover off so that Nathan could see.

It was filled to the bursting with wildflowers.

A great rhododendron bloomed in the center of bunches and bunches of cowslips and violets. Nathan could recognize wild mustard and azalea blossoms. Dandelions made a gay yellow border around the inside of the box.

"What the devil?" said Nathan. He pulled the car over to the side of the road and stopped.

"Aren't they gorgeous?" Kim asked.

"They sure are," he said. He picked up the cover. A grin covered his face as he showed the red crayoned scrawling on the inside. Polish Custom, it said. Peter.

"Nathan reached behind the wheel and twisted the leather tag containing the car's registration. The name on the registration was Peter Kwiatkowski.

"I never even knew his first name," he said softly.

"Nate, there's an envelope in here!" Kim pulled the envelope from the flowers. It was wet from the raindrops which still glistened on the bright blossoms, but they could see that it was addressed to Kim. She ripped it open. It contained a fifty dollar bill and a note.

"Nahchuss, my daughter, - Moishe Holoff," she read. She looked at Nathan. "What does it mean?" she asked.

Nathan cleared his throat. "Great happiness," he said. He started the motor, and the car began to move through the rain once more.

"So that's where they were," Nathan said. "They were getting the flowers, in the rain."

Kim leaned over and buried her face in the wet fragrance of the flowers. When she lifted her head her face was shining.

"I'm so glad you were late!" she cried.

The shop was dark. "Turn the light on, if you wish," Moische said.

"Aah, leave off," Kwiatkowski said. "No more chess tonight, no more." He lit his cigarette.

Moische leaned back against the pattern table. "I wonder where they are now," he said.

"Not come to Boston yet. Too early."

Moische sighed. "I hope he's doing the right thing, Peter," he said. He split the darkness with another match, and lit his pipe.

Kwiatkowski chuckled. "He be all right. Is like young tree, all full of new sap."

"But new sap sometimes turns to bitter juices."

Moische smiled. "They'll make a nice couple, though. They should have nice children." He slapped his knee. "Nathan was the son of my middle age. I would like to hold his son on my knee before I die."

"You will," Kwiatkowski said. "You will. He will probably attend to that this very night!"

They started to laugh together, and the sound of their laughter rose and filled the little shop. It was good, mellow laughter, that of old men who had seen much pain and yet still could laugh. When they had quieted down, Moische

arose from his workbench.

"Come," he said, "a cup of tea." He chuckled again.  
"Old men like us should not pick flowers in the rain!"

The laughter rose again as they made their way through the darkness. It sounded younger with every peal.

SECOND BOARD

PART THREE

W. F. O.

W. F. O.

SECOND BOARD

## XIV

"Hayah, hyah!" Mathan urged the horse onward as they slowly climbed the slope, man, horse and plow, leaving behind them a wavy brown furrow of rich spring earth. The plowshare made crisp little cutting noises as it sliced through the new sod. The sun was warm on Nathan's body, and a mischievous spring zephyr riffled his hair. He leaned on the smoothworn wooden handles of the plow and fought it as he tried to buck its way out of the earth.

"Hyah, hyah!" he cried.

"Hyah, hyah!" The sound came from the bottom of the hill. Nathan grinned. He knew the only man that it could be, with a bass voice as deep as that one. He reined the horse to a halt and turned to face Peter Kwiatkowski.

Nathan was tired, but he felt as if he could go on working forever, for this was his land, and he was preparing the earth to receive the seeds from which would sprout his future. He breathed deeply, the smell of horse and hot-sun-on-moist-earth tingling its way up his nostrils and filling him with pride and exhilaration.

Kwiatkowski looked around in approval, when he reached him.

"That good horse," he said, his eyes sparkling.

"Horse know how to plow good, straight furrow."

"Yeah," Nathan said. "I don't know what I'd do without that horse to lead me!"

"I bring seed, putty soon," Kwiatkowski said.

"Bime-bye be ready for seed."

Nathan's eyes shown as he looked over his farm. Seed! It had been a long, hard struggle, taming this hilltop. After the trees had been chopped down, there had remained the stumps. Kwiatkowski had loaned his tractor, but some of the trees had been very old, with taproots sunk far into the earth, and each time they had encountered one of these stumps extracting it had been like pulling a tooth from the mouth of Mother Nature. But they had been pulled, and now there was a treeless area large enough to farm.

"If you have good crop, mabbe put up barn bime-bye," Kwiatkowski said.

"Maybe this Autumn," Nathan said. "We've just got to have a good crop!"

Kwiatkowski smiled at his impatience. "Will have, will have," he said. "But lotsa hard work, first. Who gonna help you seed? Your wife?"

Nathan was startled. "Kim?" he said. "She can't do heavy farm work."

Kwiatkowski's face portrayed disgust. "Seedin" not heavy farm-work," he said. "Oh, lotsa bending, but mabbe back ache, first day, second day, then wife not even feel it."

"We'll see," Nathan said. "I'll talk it over with her."

"Yah, you talk. She good girl. She help husband."

"Of course she will, if I want her too." Nathan snapped. Immediately he felt ashamed of talking to Kwiatkowski in such a tone.

The farmer looked bewildered. "You mad at me?" he asked. Nathan walked over to him and put his arm around the brawny shoulders.

"No, no, Peter," he said softly. "Of course I'm not mad at you."

The smile on Kwiatkowski's face was like the early summer dawn coming over the foothills, welcome and warm.

Moishe stacked the dishes noisily and dumped them loudly into the sink. He was angry. Anger was an emotion in which he rarely indulged, preferring to save it for the larger issues which arose in his life. He felt that he now was faced with a major problem. He lifted the tea kettle from the stove and held it under the cold water tap, which he turned on full force. The water pressure was high, and the stream made a deep drumming

sound against the kettle bottom. Moishe looked gloomily at the closed bedroom door. Still no sign of life. Eleven-thirty, and still she lay abed behind the closed door. He had made breakfast for himself and for his son. Now he must start the lunch that she would help him eat, and still the breakfast dishes had not been done.

His face dark with ill-humor, he put the kettle on the fire to boil and began to mince an onion for a soup.

The squeaking of bedsprings coupled with little squealings and grunts told him that his daughter-in-law was yawning, and would soon be out of bed. Moodily he reached for another onion and stripped it of its paper-like skin.

The honeymoon is over, he thought. For how long can this go on? Ah shandeh, a shame it was. She didn't work outside, to help her husband with money. She didn't do a lick of housework, she wouldn't cook a meal...He shook his head from side to side, thinking of how it had been when first he had married his dark-skinned little Anita, the good Jewish dishes she had prepared just for him. His eyes smarted from the onion fumes. He reached into a brown paper bag next to the sink and pulled out an apple, from which he cut a chunk. He gripped the piece of apple between his small white teeth and began to peel

another onion.

The bedroom door opened, and Kim came into the kitchen, pulling her housecoat tightly about her and yawning as she came. She looked at him with sleep-filled slits of eyes.

"Momin', Pa," she said as she yawned again.

"Goo--" he removed the piece of apple from his mouth. "Hello," he said. He put the apple back between his teeth and went back to his work.

Kim grimaced. "Oh, that onion!" she said. "It.." she searched for the word.

Moishe removed the apple. "Stinks?" he offered.

"It's awful." She looked at him. "You mad at me, Pa?"

Moishe stuck the knife into the half of onion which he held in his hand, took the piece of apple out of his mouth, and sighed heavily.

"No," he said. "No, tochter, daughter, I'm not mad." He sighed again. "But I think it's time we had a little talk." He stuck out his lower lip and patted the table. "A little talk," he repeated.

Kim sat down. She squinted heavily. "Oh, those onions!" she said again.

"Here," Moishe said. He cut her a piece of apple and held it out to her. "Hold it between the teeth. It does

not allow the strongness to reach the eye."

She looked amused, but she closed her lips around the apple.

"Also," Moishe said, "It keeps you from talking, and I do not wish to be interrupted until I have finished what I wish to say." He looked into the eyes of his daughter-in-law. "You have never done much housework?"

She shook her head.

"I did not think so," he said. "But that does not matter." He sighed. "I was fourteen years old when I was apprenticed to a tailor, and I thought I would never learn to sew a straight seam, to cut without ruining cloth. But you learn, you learn."

Kim took the apple from her mouth. She smiled at him. "You mean you want me to cook the meals and serve them?" she asked.

Moishe closed his eyes. "I do not expect miracles," he said. "Perhaps if you began by dusting the furniture, or mopping the floor."

Kim nodded. "Sure," she said. "You want me to do anything, just tell me."

"But I shouldn't have to tell you!" Moishe said. "Look, I run a business, a tailor shop, that takes a lot of time. My boy, he works a farm, that takes even more time. But you sleep in bed like a princess until quarter to

twelve!"

"You don't have to yell about it," Kim said coldly. She reached into the pocket of her negligee and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. "Got a light?" she asked.

Moishe held the match while she lit up. "I'm sorry if I yelled," he said. "But you will try to help out, huh?"

"Sure," she said. "Sure I will, Pa." She walked over to the icebox and opened the door. "What's for lunch?" she asked as she looked inside. "I'm starved."

"I don't know where she went," Nathan said. "Probably to see her aunt and uncle." He stared at the chess board. "She's a young girl, Pa, she doesn't have to stay in every night with two men. Let her go out and see some other faces, once in a while."

"Of course," said Moishe. "Of course, why not?" He puffed quickly on his pipe. "She is angry over something?" he asked.

"Nathan scowled. "You shouldn't have talked to her like you did this morning," he said.

"I talked to her like I would to my own daughter, like I always talk to you."

"It isn't the same thing, Pa," Nathan said. "When we've been married five, ten years, then maybe it will be, but all this is still new to her. She's never done housework

in her life. She told me what you said to her.." He shook his head.

"Shah," Moishe said. "Quiet. If it is going to cause trouble, it is best that we all forget about it." He puffed on his pipe. "Only I thought that perhaps she would like it if I taught her a few things about the house, for later, when you have a place of your own."

"You meant well, Pa," Nathan said. "Only she's not used to things like that, that's all."

"She knew when she married you that you were not wealthy," Moishe said. "The poor are their own servants."

"I know it, Pa. Just give her time, that's all. She'll come around O.K."

"Genug. Enough discussing it," Moishe said. "Let us play chess." He watched his son's head as it leaned over the chess board. His sharp blue eyes behind the silver-rimmed spectacles were puzzled and troubled, and his little left foot beat a steady, worried tapping underneath the battered old pattern table.

"How's Nathan?" her aunt asked.

"He's just fine," Kim said brightly.

"Good," her aunt said. She pushed forward the platter of pastries. "Have some more," she said.

"No, thank you," said Kim. "I've had enough."

"More milk, then?"

"I'll take a little more." Kim poured herself another glassful of milk.

"How are you getting on, down there?" her aunt asked.

"At the house? Oh, fine, fine," Kim said. "Couldn't be better."

"Oh, I doubt that," her aunt smiled.

Kim gripped the glass of milk hard. "What do you mean?" she said.

Her aunt looked at her, still smiling. "Just that it always seems as if things could be better, six months after you've been married," she said gently.

Kim felt her eyes fill. "Oh, there are little things," she admitted, gazing into the glass of milk.

"Of course there are. Wouldn't be normal if there weren't."

Kim cried. She felt the tears slip out from between her closed eyelids and glide down the smoothness of her cheeks. But she cried silently, and her aunt talked on, unaware.

"I can remember when we were first married," her aunt was saying. "Doc was just out of medical school and--" She stopped short and stared at her niece in distress. "Well, now, what on earth is the matter?"

Kim set her milk down and, throwing herself on the

couch next to Mrs. Mallin, allowed the sobs to rise from where she had held on to them so tightly.

"There, there, Kimmie. Don't be silly, honey. You tell me what this is all about."

She felt the sympathetic hand on her shoulder, and she felt better. She sat up and began to fix her face.

"It's nothing important, really, Auntie Belle. I mean, we haven't had a fight, or anything like that. Only, his father..." She gave her head a quick little shake, and powdered her nose.

Belle laughed in relief. "Oh, Kim you fool!" she said. "You don't mean that you're not getting along with that sweet old man?"

"Oh, we get along," Kim said. "Only, he's got some very funny ideas, that's all. He expects me to make all the meals, attend to all the housework, work like a horse while he sits there in his shop and sews buttons on shirts or plays chess with that old Pole." She looked at the other woman. "Oh, they're two sweet old things, really I suppose, but I see so much of them they get on my nerves." She picked up her glass again and sipped the milk. "And I hate housework!"

Her Aunt Belle looked at her. "I'm afraid we did a bum job on you, hon," she said. "Now don't start to cry again!" she said hastily. "What I mean is you've

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been spoiled, Kimmie, that's all there is to it. You were such a cute little thing to lose both parents like that, and we made things much too easy on you, didn't give you enough responsibility." She poured herself a glass of milk and took a gulp. "Do you know where we lived, Doc and I, the first year we were married.?"

"Where?"

"In a little dump behind Boston City Hospital. Doc was interning, so he could only come home to me two or three evenings a week. But I made those evenings count, let me tell you!" She set her glass down with a thump. "I was the best doggone cook in Massachusetts in those days, I'll bet!"

"Kim finished fixing her face. "Can you tell I've been crying?" she asked.

"Nope," Belle said.

The girl put her compact back into her bag. "Auntie Belle?" she said.

"Uh huh?"

"You said something about it never being perfect, six months after you've been married. Is it always like that?"

Belle smiled. "I'm afraid so, honey," she said.

"Except possibly in the fairy books you used to read!"

"Do you always love them less?" Kim sounded frightened.

Belle touched her arm. "You don't love him less, darling," she said. "It's just that it takes six months for you to see his faults, and to realize that you married a man, not a knight in shining armor."

They smiled at each other. Belle jumped as gravel in the driveway crackled under the wheels of a car.

"That's Doc!" she cried. "I have to get dressed. We're going to the club, and he's like a bear when I'm not ready."

Kim stood up. "I'll go!" she said. "Get out of your way."

Belle pressed her hand. "Look, Sweetie," she said. "Doc's in Boston next Thursday and Friday. How about bringing Nate over for dinner?"

"He still won't allow Nate in the house when he's home, will he?" Kim asked.

"One thing you have to learn," Belle said quietly. "You can love a man and still see where he's wrong."

They heard the door from the garage to the kitchen open and close.

"Belle!" Dock Mallin shouted. They heard him walk

quickly toward the parlor.

"Hurry up," Belle said. "Tell me before he gets here. Will you come to dinner on Thursday?"

Kim watched her uncle come into the room.

"We'll see," she said.

Doc Mallin cursed softly as his shirt stud slipped through his fingers and rolled under the bureau. But not softly enough.

"Whatever is the matter now?" his wife called from the bathroom.

"Damn stud, as usual," he grumbled. He bumped his head when he reached down to pick it up, and he was glowering by the time Belle Mallin swept into the room in her evening dress.

"Here, give it to me," she laughed. "Just like a baby, I swear." She slipped the stud into place with skill which came from practice in doing the same chore for many years.

He looked mollified. "Turn around," he said.

She whirled slowly.

"Nice," he said.

"Glad you approve, sir!"

"A little low-cut, but nice. Definitely nice."

"A little low-cut!" she wailed. "There's just no pleasing you, that's all there is to it! The only reason I bought this gown is because you usually accuse me of dressing like a mummy!"

"Look more like a baby, in that one. But good enough to eat. Shut up, and tie my tie." He reached over and kissed her behind the ear. "There won't be a lusty old bachelor at the club tonight who doesn't envy me when I walk in with this on my arm."

"I hate you," she said, reaching for his tie. "Stand still!"

"How long was Kim here before I came home?" he asked.

"Oh, not very long. She just took a little walk after dinner, and wound up here."

"Hey, that's too tight!"

"Sorry, darling." Belle loosened the tie and began to reknit it.

"How is she?" Doc asked.

"You saw her, dear. She looks perfectly fine to me. Even a little plumpish."

"Dammit, Belle, you know what I mean! How's she finding it?"

Belle finished the tie and pushed him gently away from her. "No better or worse, I imagine, than if we had arranged her marriage personally, Richard."

"I don't believe that, Belle. But she's such a fool kid I'm going to let her stew in her own juices for a while before I do anything about it. Then maybe she'll behave like a woman, in the future, instead of like a child."

His wife stared at him. "Don't you think you'd better ask Kim whether she wants anything 'done about it' before you start making elaborate plans." Her voice shook. "It's bewildering, Richard. After all these years of married life there come moments when I realize that I don't really know you. That girl happens to be in love with her husband." She turned away from him. "Now you leave them alone," she said.

"God, Belle," he said, "I love you more than anything in the world, which is why it comes as a distinct shock to me every time I realize that you're not too bright."

"You leave them alone, hear?" She turned to face him, her lips set in a straight line.

"Tell you what, Belle." He grasped her by the elbows. "I'll make a deal with you. I won't interfere unless it becomes evident that Kim wants me to. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough."

He looked at her soberly. "Still friends?"

She smiled suddenly. "Still friends," she said. She walked over and took his coat from where it hung in the closet. "Got a clean handkerchief?" she asked, and she reached into the drawer to get one for him.

The house was dark when Kim got back. She washed up and then tried to sneak into her pajamas in the dark, so as not to awaken the sleeping Nathan.

She crept carefully into the bed and snuggled against his warmth.

"Where'd you go, hon?" he asked.

"Oh. I didn't know you were awake." She gathered him into her arms and kissed him. Nathan ran his hands over her body as if welcoming her home.

"Where'd you go?" Nathan said again.

She toyed with the buttons on his pajama top. "Miss me?" she asked.

He touched his lips to her cheek and held her close. "You know I did," he said.

"I went over and had a talk with Aunt Belle."

"About us?"

"Yep."

Nathan raised himself on his right elbow. "What'd she say?"

"She said that I married a man, not a knight in shining armor!"

His hand went out and touched her. "She's right!"

She pulled away. "No, Nate. Please. Not now." She looked at him through the darkness. "I know it's silly, darling, but I think that's what's the matter with us. I didn't marry just a man. I married a knight in shining armor, someone who used to write poetry about my body. I used to be in love with a kid who wanted to be a poet, but instead I married a farmer. Oh, it's a good, honest living, and I suppose you can make money at it, but why, Nate, why haven't you tried to write a poem in years, since you were a kid? Why don't you want to be a poet any more? Why?"

"I'll try to make you see how I feel about this farming thing, Honey," he said slowly. "You build a poem, word by word, line by line, thought by thought. And when you're through, if you're lucky, you have something: a poem. That was what I liked about it, I was constructing while the rest of the world was destroying. I was growing up in a world that sent boys off to kill when they turned eighteen, but I could create something!" He stirred restlessly. "It was wonderful, Kim, a wonderful feeling. But, you know.." He laughed almost apologetically. "I never was much of a poet, that was the only trouble.

And farming is the most creative business there is, as far as I'm concerned. You see the whole process, from beginning to end. The seed germinates, it bursts into a bud; the bull tops the cow and the farmer helps deliver the calf; the stallion impregnates the mare and you see the foal born. Farming is life, Kim, from start to finish."

She was silent for a while. "But you don't need me anymore." Her voice was a small thing in the darkness.

He drew her into his arms. "I do need you," he whispered. "Believe me, I do!"

Her lips were on his ear. "You're so self-sufficient," she said. "So off-by-yourself. You don't need me, you don't, you don't....."

In his bed in the room across the hall Moishe Holoff stirred restlessly. He rolled over on his back and looked up through the darkness toward the ceiling, listening to the squeaking of the bedsprings in the other room and thinking that the air of tension would be gone when he met his daughter-in-law in the kitchen next morning.

## XV

"It's nothing," Charlie said curtly. He held the handkerchief to his lips. "I've been on the butts too much lately, that's all. It'll go away just as soon as I quit smoking." White's knowing look irritated him. He walked to his bunk and dropped heavily down on it, feeling the lassitude creep through his veins. He lifted his hand, noticing how heavy it was, how hard to lift, how like a dumb thing it was when he relaxed his will and it fell to his side.

"Just the same, kid," White was saying, "it wouldn't do yuh no harm to have the boys down in the infirmary give yuh a quick check. What the hell, it don't pay tuh take chances. Yuh know," he added hastily, "I ain't worried about me, or anythin' like that. I don' catch things easy. But for yuh own good.." He grimaced.

Charlie felt too weary to give argument. "Too tired," he murmured to himself. "So tired.." He slept, and dreamed that he glided swiftly down a long white ribbon of a road in a yellow convertible, the black night pouring in around his head like ink, rippling through his hair and making him feel light, light, weightless and airy. But he was tired, very sleepy and tired.

A white bunny ran from the wall of black on the right

hand side of the white ribbon-road, moving in little hops, looking straight at him with small, bead-like eyes. He knew that he had plenty of time to go around the rabbit, but when he tried to turn the wheel he found that it had grown, and he pulled desperately at a large, rusty hoop, the kind he had rolled along the street in front of his house as a boy. He gripped the hoop with weak, weightless fingers, trying to turn the rushing car, and then the hoop melted and he started to laugh. The bunny was gone; it was somewhere behind him in the night, in the past, and he laughed again.

"Pooo-ore li'l ole ra-a-bit, ain' nev' gone run no moooo.." he sang. He heard his voice float up to him through a sea shell which he had found at the beach when his father was alive and had taken him to the shore on his first vacation. He looked at the shell, touching its smooth, sun-warmed surface. And the shell began to grow and swell. He cupped both hands about it, feeling its hard surface soften, watching the bright blond hair sprout from the stone-like stuff and grow until it covered his hands and he looked into the mocking green eyes of Kim Mallin.

"Kiss me," she whispered, and he smiled at her.

"Kiss me," she whispered.

"Pooo-ore li'l rabbit," he said. He kissed her. She squirmed against him.

"Say 'I love you'" she whispered.

"I love you," he echoed. "Poor li'l rabbit. I love

you, but I ain' nev' gone run no more."

She started to sing, and her voice was high and thin, and it went through him like an icicle scraped down his back, making him feel cold, making him start to shiver. The song sounded far-off, without words, without meaning.

"I'm losing you," he cried. "Stay with me. I'm afraid!"

She smiled at him and stopped singing. "Say 'I love you'," she said.

"I love you," he said loudly. "I love you!\*\*\*Don't leave me!"

She started singing again, the same wailing, wordless song.

"The words!" he screamed. "Sing the words!"

"..and when it's twelve o'clock

we climb the stair.....

we don't knock...

'cause nobody's there..."

But then his mother held him tightly against her, pressing his head to her breast and rocking back and forth.

"Don't cry, my son," she crooned. "Don't cry. We won't tell anyone it was you. Nobody will know it was you."

And he looked up and saw that Kim was fading away into the blackness. "Wait," he said. "Wait!" he shouted, hearing his voice bounce hollowly back from the black walls which surrounded him. He rushed forward and pulled her back, but his mother hung on to him, pulling him towards her, and he

felt weak, so weak and tired. Then he saw Nathan Holoff take Kim's other arm, and start to lead her away.

"Hello, Nate," he whispered. "You can have her because I want her so very much!" It didn't make sense to him, and he giggled. Then he was back in the yellow convertible, rushing down the winding white ribbon of a road with the speed of a falling star, and the great black walls on both sides began to fall slowly in on him.

"I'm all alone," he said to the seashell which he cupped in his palms. "All alone." And suddenly the shell disappeared in a cloud of grey dust that puffed up like a smoke-screen, covering everything, getting into his eyes and nose and mouth, and he started to cough. He coughed so long and so hard that he couldn't catch his breath.

He awoke and reached for his handkerchief, his hands scrabbling through his pockets until his shaking fingers found it. But the red stickiness had already come, and it oozed out of his mouth and dripped off his chin, staining his grey prison uniform.

White stood at the door, rattling it and yelling loud for the turnkey. The jailor came running down the corridor. "Shut, up, shut up!" he yelled. "What's all the racket about?"

"Take him outta here!" White shouted. "Take him outta here!" He gripped the bars of the door and rattled it again. "I don't hafta stand fer nothin' like this. Put'm in the

infirmery!" He swung around and pointed a grimy forefinger at Charlie, his eyes slits of fear and annoyance. "Lookut'm!" he rasped. "Lookut the blood on that shirt. He's been spittin' blood for a week!"

"I tell you, something has happened to Mr. Waitkovitch," Mrs. MacIntyre insisted. She drew a deep breath and looked in turn at Peter Kwiatkowski, Kim, Nathan, and Moishe.

"How do you know, Mrs. MacIntyre?" Nathan asked. He looked at her a bit uncomfortably. He hadn't seen her since the evening he had gone with Kim to return Charlie's ring.

"How you know that, Ma'am?" Kwiatkowski said. "I see him in town just last week."

"How did he look?" Mrs. MacIntyre asked. "Did he appear to be sick?"

"No worse than usual," Kwiatkowski chuckled. "He drunk again!"

"Well, something awful has happened to him!" She glared at the people around her. "I think it's our duty to go up to his place and see if he's not all right!"

"But what makes you think that?" Kim asked. "How do you know that he's not all right?"

"I just know, that's all," Mrs. MacIntyre said. "Please believe me when I say I know. I can't tell you how, I just know it!"

They looked at one another, wondering whether the

woman's troubles had affected her mind.

"Do you have your car outside, Peter?" Moishe asked.

"Yeh."

"Well, it might not be a bad idea to drive up there, don't you think?" I do not know why this lady is concerned." He smiled kindly at Mrs. MacIntyre. "But if we can help her, ease her mind in any way.. " He shrugged. "What do you think?"

Kwiatkowski arose from his chair. "Don't mind," he said. "Nice night for ride, anyhow!" He looked at Nathan and Kim. "You want go for ride?"

They all filed out of the shop and into Kwiatkowski's car, Nathan and Kim getting in back with Mrs. MacIntyre, and Moishe sitting beside Peter in the driver's seat. Peter was a slow, careful driver, and Mrs. MacIntyre fidgeted.

"Perhaps I'm wrong about this whole thing," she said. "But I just couldn't sleep at night until I made sure." They drove the rest of the way in silence. Nathan cleared his throat nervously when they passed the scene of Charlie's accident, but if Mrs. MacIntyre noticed the spot, if, indeed, she had ever been shown exactly where it was that her son had snuffed out a human life, she gave no indication of the fact.

And finally they were in Waitkovitch's driveway, facing his farmhouse. The house was dark and unlit.

"I'm afraid," Kim said.

Nathan took her hand. "Don't be silly," he said.

"There's nothing to be afraid of."

Moishe sounded hesitant, unwilling to go on. "He might be asleep," he said. "It does not seem right, breaking in on a man's sleep." He looked apologetically at Mrs. MacIntyre. But she, too, faced by the dark and forbidding house, was less certain than she had been.

"Well, I don't know," she said nervously. "I said I could be wrong..."

Kwiatkowski held up his hand. "Shhh," he said. He craned his head out of the open car window, listening to the chicken noises coming from Waitkovitch's hen house.

"What is it?" Mrs. MacIntyre whispered.

Peter shrugged. He opened the door and walked to the henhouse. The racket from the chickens increased in volume. Then he came back, rummaged around in his glove compartment until he pulled out a flashlight, and disappeared again, going in the direction of the barn.

In a few minutes he had returned. "I don't like it," he said. "None of livestock been fed for two, three day. Chicken hungry, too."

"I knew it, oh, I knew it!" cried Mrs. MacIntyre. "Oh, the poor man!"

"Perhaps we had better take a look inside the house," Nathan said. They left the car and walked up the path to the door. Moishe tapped timidly, and they were silent, straining to hear a footfall or some sign of life from within. But only the noise of the chickens and the deep,

hungry lowing of the cows from the barn reached their ears.

Kwiatkowski banged his hamlike fist against the door until it threatened to give way.

"Waitkovitch!" he roared. "Is anybody?"

He turned the handle. The door was unlocked, it opened easily, and they filed into the darkened kitchen.

Waitkovitch leaned over his kitchen table. The beam of Peter's flashlight shone blue on the barrel of the shotgun which seemed to grow out of the dead man's mouth like a horrible plant. The back of his head had been blown off, and the oilcloth which covered the table was red with a great pool of drying blood which had run off the sides and stained the floor.

They hurried out into the fresh air. Mrs. MacIntyre had made no noise, but now she started to shriek, long, pathetic, weak screams that ended in throttled, gasping sobs. Kim put her arm around the woman's skinny shoulders. She herself felt weak and sick, but she dug her fingers into Mrs. MacIntyre's meatless arm and said nothing.

Nathan looked at Mrs. MacIntyre. He stared at her screwed up, working features.

"I don't understand," he said. "I don't understand at all. How did you know that something had happened to him?"

Mrs. MacIntyre sobbed broken-heartedly and clung to Kim. "Because," she said. "Because four nights ago he stopped calling me on the phone!"

## XVI

Mrs. MacIntyre sat on the hard wooden bench outside the warden's office and stared anxiously at her son. She reached over and patted his hand. "Now don't you fret," she said. "Doc Mallin went to college with the prison doctor, and he says he'll fix things up real fine."

Charlie smiled at her. "I'm not fretting, Mom," he said. He reached into the pocket of his denim jacket and took out a sputum cup, into which he spat. "These things are awfully messy, aren't they?" he said apologetically.

"Never you mind about that, Charles," his mother said. "You just do what they tell you. If your father had only had all these new-fangled medicines and fine doctors that we have today--" She sniffed. "What I want to do is get you up in the mountains, where you can get some hot sun and good air. If we can only get you out of here I'll feed you until you burst the seams of your clothes!"

"It isn't so bad here. I was beginning to get used to it when this happened," he said, nodding at the sputum cup. "They put me to work down in the machine shop. It's nice down there in the machine shop." He

smiled at her again. "Of course, I miss you, Mamma."

"Of course you do."

He started to cough, and she watched him closely, sitting on the edge of the wooden bench and twisting her handkerchief in her thin, nervous fingers.

"What ever happened to Higgins?" the prison doctor asked.

"Last thing I heard," Doc Mallin said, "he was resident at some Catholic hospital out in northern California some place."

"That's a good place for Higgins," the prison doctor said. "He always was a crazy bastard."

They laughed together. "Yes," Doc said. "Yes, he was." "But" he said, "As Cleopatra said to Mark Anthony when he crawled into her tent at two o'clock in the morning, I didn't come here to talk about Higgins."

"No," the prison doctor said pleasantly. "No, you didn't, at that." He rummaged through the drawer of his desk, finally coming up with a manila folder. "Well, here's all the dope we have on the case, Mallin," he said. "You the family physician?"

Doc reached for the folder. "Yes, he said, "but more than that. We're very close friends." He pulled out some chest x-rays and held them up to the light from the

window. "I'm interested about something," he said as he examined the negatives. "Can a man with a good record be recommend<sup>ed</sup> for parole by the prison physician if he's found to have an incurable disease?"

The other doctor picked a pipe from a rack on the top of his desk and blèw through its stem. "Yes," he said. "In certain cases. Where such action is warranted."

"I see," Doc said, nodding. "This must be pretty interesting work." He looked away from the x-rays for a moment, watching the man on the other side of the desk.

The prison doctor returned his glance coolly. "It is," he said, "if you like social work."

"No."

Doc smiled. "Sounds pleasant," he said. "Do you have a staff?"

"No," the prison doctor said. He reached for a canister of tobacco and began to fill his pipe. "I can call in whomever I want from the outside, on a consulting basis, but I'm the only regular physician."

Doc nodded. He returned to a study of the negatives. "Poor kid," he said. "These look bad."

"Not so bad," said the prison doctor.

"They look bad enough to me."

"It'll cost you money," said the prison doctor.

"How much?" asked Doc.

"I don't know. I can't say right now. But a lot."

Doc gave him a long, level glance.

"Oh, it's not all for me," the prison doctor said.

"These things are tough. You have to think of all the angles, make sure everyone is taken care of."

"Shall I contact you in a couple of days?" Doc asked.

"Better make it a week." He hesitated. "It will come to a fairly large sum, you know."

"We don't expect it to be cheap, but it has to be within reason."

"Oh, yes." The prison doctor smiled. "Of course."

Doc nodded at him shortly and walked out of the office. As he entered the corridor the first thing he saw was the two faces, the four eyes looking like question marks as they burned towards him in the weak light which bounced off of the light-grey walls.

Nate sat underneath a tree and ate his lunch, chewing slowly the thick sandwiches Moishe Holoff had put up for him early that morning, and resting his back. Planting was tough on the back, hard on the muscles of the legs. He finished his lunch and stuffed the wax paper which had wrapped his sandwiches into his dinner pail. He was full and tired and the sun was high. He leaned back against the tree trunk and dozed.

He opened his eyes listlessly after a few minutes had passed, and shook his head, willing himself back to wakefulness. Now was the time to plant, not tomorrow or the day after. The season was short, and the seeds had to be sown while the earth was moist and fertile. He pushed himself off the ground and walked over to where the fat purlap seedbag squatted as if heavy with child. A smaller bag lay next to it on the ground. This he hung around his neck by a rope fastened to the top of both of its sides. He was starting for the furrow on which he was sowing when he had quit for lunch when he saw the figure approaching, half-way up the hill.

It was a woman. At first he thought it might be Kim, but almost immediately he realized that it was not. She was shorter than Kim, stockier, and her hair was a dull mass atop her head, indistinguishable as to its color. She plodded slowly up the hill, head down, shoulders hunched, hands in the pockets of her shiny, cheap-looking dress, her glance directed at the ground before her. She almost passed him by as she started to cross the crest of the hill not far from where he stood.

"Wait," Nathan said loudly. "Rosie. Rosie Waitkovitch!"

She looked up at him. "Hello, Nate," she said.

He walked over to where she stood. She stared at him, taking in the seed bag, the tanned body, the old, stained trousers, the boots encrusted with globs of dried mud.

"Well, get you," she said with a twisted grin. "How long you been doin' hunky work?"

"This is my land," Nathan said.

She looked around her with the eyes of a farmer's daughter. "Yeah? Looks like a good hunk o' dirt."

"I hope it is," Nathan said. "Thirsty?"

She looked hopeful. "What've you got?"

"Just lemonade, but it's cold."

"Oh. Yeah, thanks, if you got enough."

He led the way to the thermos in the shade of his tree. He waited until she had drunk, and then he spoke again. "You're back for the..?"

She nodded. "Yeah. The funeral." She laughed bitterly. "The old guy doesn't bother me so much," she said. "Ever since I can remember, way back when I was a little girl, he'd hit the bottle and bum around. He even used to hit the old lady, when she was alive. But the kid!" She shook her head. "Anybody got a right to live for a while. Nine years old!"

"You're right, Rosie," Nathan said. "Nine years old is too young to die."

"Too young to die? Jesue, Nate," she raised a face streaked with tears and mascara, "A kid nine years old ain't even begun to live!" She drew a handkerchief from her pocket and b~~l~~ew her nose loudly. "Well, at least someone in the family died a virgin!" she said.

Nathan didn't know what to say. "How did you hear about it?" he asked.

"I read it in the papers. The old man didn't pick the quietest way to go." She shuddered. "Jeez, it was bad enough readin' about him that way, but when I came to the last paragraph about how he was grievin' over the death of his son, who was killed in a accident.." She looked down, and her voice squeezed to an end.

"You've had some bad breaks, kid," Nathan said. "Do you need any money?"

"She looked up and smiled. She drew herself up a little straighter. "Money?" she said. "No. No, I don't need any money. Fact is.." A look of satisfaction drove the grief from her face. "Fact is, I could prob'ly buy an' sell you!"

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I'm selling the farm. I never did like the damn place. I'm going back to the carny."

"The carny?"

"The carnival," she explained. "I work for a carnival."

It's up in Burlington, Vermont, right now. I'll patch up to it at its next stop."

"You still with...?" Nathan searched his mind for the man's name.

"You mean, Frank, the guy I left town with." She shifted her weight restlessly from her right leg to her left. "No. Naw, I ain't with him no more."

"Oh," Nathan said. "What do you do with the carnival?"

"I run a pitch. That's a concession. See, there's a little platform marked off with squares with numbers on 'em. You talk loud at the girls and wink at the men, and then they throw pennies at the squares and try to win prizes.

"Oh," Nathan said again. "Yes, I think I've seen them."

"Sure you have," she said. "I'm going to stick with this outfit for the rest of the season, but I'm goin' to keep my eyes open. That farm should bring a good piece of money, and I'm goin to get me a pitch of my own." She drew herself up proudly once more. "With a pitch of my own I can really rake in some of that dough the suckers throw away. I can live like a lady, for a change."

"Sure," Nathan said. "Well, if that's what you want, good for you."

She glanced up at him. "How about you, Nate?" she said. "You got yourself a steady girl yet?"

"Me? Oh, I'm married, Rosie," he said.

"Yeah?" She said. "Who's the lucky girl?"

"Kim Mallin," he said. "Remember Kim?"

Surprise flitted across her face. "Yeah," she said.

"Yeah, I remember her." She chuckled. "She bought you from me one night," she said. "Gave me ten bucks to beat it. How is she?" she asked, looking up at him.

"She isn't as good as I am, is she?"

Nathan didn't know whether to laugh with her or call her a whore and kick her off his land. But I helped make her what she is, he thought, or at least I didn't improve her any. So he deliberately misunderstood the question.

"Oh, she's feeling fine," he said. "Just fine."

Rosie stared at him. "I always did like you," she said.

"Well, thanks, Rosie," he said. "I like you, too."

"If I'da thought somethin' woulda come of it, that night, I would a thrown that ten bucks in her face."

He stared at her. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"She's no better than I am!" Rosie glared at him defiantly. "I don't know what happened afterwards, but that night she paid me ten bucks she was just lookin' for

a cheap thrill!"

"Look Rosie," Nathan said quietly, "I like you, and all that, but that happens to be my wifewe're talking about."

Rosie grinned. "It looks like I got the best deal that night, anyhow," she said. "I got my ten bucks and that was the night I met Frank!"

Nathan picked his seedbag from where it lay at his feet, and Rosie smiled and prepared to leave.

"Well, take care of yourself, Rosie," Nathan said.

"Oh, don't worry about me," she said. "I always take care of myself. So long!"

"So long," he said. He hung the bag around his shoulder and walked to where he had interrupted his planting. He moved up and down the warm furrows, sowing the small yellow seeds which were his stake in the future. When next he looked up she was half-way down the hill. It seemed to me that she walked proudly now, with her head held high. The sun made a shining line of brightness down the back of the glossy dress she wore.

## XVII

Kim met her uncle as she was coming out of the supermarket, her arms full of groceries.

"Well," he said, "at least you eat well over there, don't you?"

She smiled. "Don't I look it?" she asked.

He grunted. "Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Get in the car. I want to talk to you."

"All right." She followed him over to his black Buick and dumped her bundles in the front seat before her as she got in.

Doc started his car and drove down Main Street, passing Moishe's shop without a glance.

"Hey," Kim said. "That's where I get off."

"I told you I wanted to talk to you," her uncle said.

"Well, talk," she said. "What's the matter, do you need volunteers to give blood to the Red Cross?"

"Charlie's coming home," Doc said. He pulled over to the curb and half turned in his seat as he looked at her.

"Why--" She touched her cheek with her right hand.

"Why, Doc, why, Doc, that's wonderful." She stared at him.

"But how?" she asked. "How is he ever getting out?"

"We managed," Doc said. "he should be out and home, very soon. He has tuberculosis."

She sucked in her breath sharply. "Bad?" she asked.

"Not bad. We'll ship him up to the mountains and feed him well and he'll be all right, physically. He can't go out-of-state, of course, as a parolee, but there's always the Berkshires. We'll find some nice spot off the Mohawk Trail."

"I can't believe it," Kim said. Her eyes gleamed with tears. "Mrs. MacIntyre must be beside herself with joy!"

"Yes, she's happy," Doc said. "But I'm not."

Kim stared at him. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't you be happy?"

"We can cure Charlie's T. B., Kim," her uncle said.

"But sometimes medicine and fresh air aren't enough. He has to have incentive, he has to be happy for a while, relax, have fun, forget about everything that has happened."

"What are you building up to?" Kim asked.

"I think you should go with him to the mountains."

"I'm married!"

"All the better. It will be perfectly respectable. His mother will go, too. But you can give him the type of companionship his mother can't. He needs to be taught to laugh again."

Kim stared at him in amazement. "Nate would never hear

of it," she said. "He'd never allow me to go."

"Work on him," Doc said. "The old man kept house for years; he can do it again if he has to. And that's another thing. You'll have a vacation, too. There'll be a house-keeper up there, of course."

Kim twisted a lock of hair on her forehead with her forefinger. "I don't know. I don't know, Doc. We'll have to see if it can be worked."

She lay on her back on the bed and closed her eyes. She could remember the exact shade of red and how his hair had felt under her fingers, but she could not bring his face out of the well of her memory and into exact focus.

Charlie.

She remembered the night they had become engaged, and exactly how his hands had felt upon her body. How well-kept his hands always had been, hardened by work, but always manicured and cared-for. She had teased him about his hands.

She felt suddenly guilty, remembering that Charlie belonged to the past, that now she was a married woman. She thought of Nathan as he was when he came home from working his farm, tired, no longer fun to be with. His hands were horny and felt rough.

Once, she remembered, Charlie had cried in front of her. It was when he was seventeen years old and she was deeply in love with Nathan and neglecting him. True, Charlie had been

drunk at the time, one of the first times in his life that he had been drunk. But he had cried. And over her.

She wriggled on the bed. It would be nice to kiss someone else, she thought resentfully. Nathan was a competent enough lover, but...

No housework. No remarks from the old father-in law. No worries. Just a vacation away from everything. And with Charlie.

Of course, his mother would come along. But that could be handled. She smiled dreamily. It wouldn't be hard to get Charlie to kiss her. And from then on it would be easy.

Not, she told herself hastily, that she wanted to be unfaithful to her husband. Of course she wouldn't do anything rash. But a flirtation looked appealing to her. So appealing.

Suddenly she remembered the way he looked, and she closed her eyes and concentrated on every feature.

"Hello, Charlie," she whispered.

"I've never heard of such a thing!" Nathan shouted. He glared at Kim. "A married woman going off to the mountains with another man!"

Kim took a cigarette from a pack and lit it coolly. She blew out a thin stream of smoke and let the rest trickle from her nostrils. "I told you that his mother will be there," she said.

"That should settle everything, I suppose," Nathan said. "His mother will be there, so it should be settled that I should let my wife go to the mountains with the man she used to be engaged to!"

Kim smiled at him sweetly. "Don't fret so, husband," she said. "Everything is set. I'm going, so you had better make up your mind that you think it a simply wonderful idea.

"Kinder!" Moishe looked from one to the other. "Children! Like two babies you act, fighting over a lollypop or a toy. You are big people, adults! Act your age." He rustled his paper in disgust. "You Have a problem, talk it out, discuss it, settle it."

Kim mashed her cigarette into her empty coffee cup. "Don't worry about it, Pa," she said. "That's what we've just done, talked it all out. And now its settled. I'm going."

Moishe picked up her coffee cup and carried it to the sink. "Please," he said. "I've asked you a million times. Use the ashtrays." He came back and placed an ash-tray on the table in front of her.

"I have the answer to all your problems," he said.

"We don't have any problems," Kim said.

"What is it, Pa?" asked Nathan.

"Why don't you have a baby?" Moishe asked. He smiled.

"I would love to see a grandson."

"I'm way ahead of you, Pa," Nathan said. "Way ahead of

you." He glanced sullenly at Kim.

Moishe looked at Kim. "You don't want to have a baby?" he asked softly.

His daughter-in-law returned his gaze unsmilingly. "We'll see," she said in tones so final that Moishe could almost hear the clanging of iron doors closing the issue for once and for all.

"It's nice up in the mountains this time of year," Kim said. She looked at Moishe with a little half-smile on her lips. "Have you ever been in the mountains?" she asked.

"Mountains?" he said. "Surely I have been in the mountains. I have seen mountains in the Alps so high that their peaks of white snow would not melt, not even on the hottest summer day!" He paused impressively. "Surely I have been in the mountains," he said again. "In my sixteenth year I was sent to help a sick uncle in Bavaria. What mountains. Talk about mountains! These mountains are so high, some of them, that they rise above the clouds."

Kim threw herself upon the couch. "Oh, but those are foreign mountains," she said. "I'm talking about American mountains."

Moishe shrugged. "A mountain's a mountain." He chuckled. "I remember how strange I thought the people in Bavaria dressed, with the men wearing short pants, and long feathers in their leather hats."

Kim giggled. "They must have looked cute. I'll bet they looked cute in their short pants."

"To me they did not look cute," Moishe said, "only new and strange." He went to the buffet drawer and took out a cloth, with which he began to dust the furniture.

"It must be very frightening to come to live in a new country," Kim said.

Moishe smiled. "Most of the time it is more frightening to stay in the old one," he said.

"I mean it must be horrible to be a foreigner," she said, "not to be able to speak the language well or anything." She looked at him. "Aren't you ever sorry that you're not back in a country where you really know the language and you're an equal?"

"I did not know that my accent was so bad," Moishe said slowly. "And most of the time over here I have been treated as an equal."

"Oh, sure, Pa," Kim said quickly. "You know what I mean."

Moishe looked at her. "Yes", he said, "I know what you mean." He busied himself with the dusting. He stooped to do the legs of the buffet. "Tell me," he said, looking up at her, listening to the age and weariness in his voice, "is that why you do not wish to have a child, because part of his family would be foreign?"

"She didn't look at him. "Oh, Pa," she said, "don't be

crazy."

"Old I may be," Moishe said, "but crazy I am not." He pulled himself to his feet. "You want to go to the mountains very much, don't you?" he asked.

She hugged a sofa pillow to her breast, a secretive little smile on her face, a far-away look in her eyes. "Yes," she breathed. "Very much. Oh, very much!"

"I do not think that you will ever return from the mountains as my son's wife," Moishe said slowly.

She turned her head and stared at him, a curtain of annoyance dropping over her face and shutting off the expression of secret enjoyment which had shone there a moment before. "Well," she said, "you certainly talk crazy."

Moishe stood there holding the dustrag in his hands and looked at her, feeling very frightened in his heart for his only son.

Mrs. MacIntyre leaned over her son anxiously. "You hungry, Charles?" she asked. "Or thirsty? I'm sure Doc won't mind if we stop for some refreshment."

"No, course not," Doc Mallin said over his shoulder as he sat behind the wheel. "Care to stop someplace, Charlie?"

"No," Charlie said. "I don't care to stop. Keep on driving." He opened the window by his side and leaned out a little way, letting the air slap into his face and beat against his head until he couldn't breathe.

"Don't lean out of that window too far, Charles," his mother said. "Lots of accidents happen that way."

He pulled in his head and smiled at her. "I love riding in an automobile," he said. "It's so long since I've been in a car." He leaned back against the cushioned seat and sighed, closing his eyes. He was wearing a blue slack suit, new. His mother had bought one a size too large for him, and it hung a bit loosely, but the gabardine felt smooth and cool after his prison uniform. Suddenly he laughed.

"What is it?" his mother asked.

"Nothing much," he said, "really."

His mother smiled, and patted his hand.

He had been thinking of White, back there in the prison cell mooching cigarettes and candy from a new cellmate.

The car zipped swiftly over the fine highway, cutting an invisible swath through the sun-warmed air. Charlie stuck his head out of the window again and felt the air beating about his cheeks, celebrating his deliverance.

Nathan carried out the last of the bags and stowed it away in the trunk of the black Buick.

"Well, that's the last of them, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," Kim said. "I guess that takes care of everything."

Doc Mallin got back behind the wheel. He started the motor as Charlie held the door open for Mrs. MacIntyre.

"Do you need any more money?" Nathan asked. He noticed Moishe watching them from inside the shop.

"No," she said. "What would I spend it on, up there?"

Doc leaned on the horn. Kim jumped at the blast of noise. "Don't be so impatient," she said. "I'm coming!"

"Well say goodbye and get it over with," Doc said. "We have a long ride ahead of us."

"You will write, won't you?" Nathan said. He shot a quick look toward the black Buick and felt the quick rise of anger as he saw the small, satisfied smile on Doc Mallin's face.

"Of course I'll write," she said.

Mallin leaned on his horn again.

"Well, I guess I'd better go," Kim said.

Nathan kissed her, lightly at first, then long and hungrily, reluctant to release the softness of her lips.

"Nate," she said. "Nate, I..." She turned and ran into the car. As soon as she had entered Doc started the Buick rolling, and it shot past Nathan, scattering pebbles and raising dust. He stood there in the street looking after it, watching the black chassis grow smaller and smaller, until finally it turned the corner and was gone.

Then he turned slowly and started back for the tailor shop, thinking of the secret smile of satisfaction on Doctor Mallin's lips.

## XVIII

The chair he sat in was like an island. The floor which lay between him and the bottle of pills was like a sea, too large and fraught with danger. Moishe rose quickly and walked to the shelf. He reached up and clasped the pill bottle almost caressingly before he slipped it into his pocket. He never felt quite safe unless the bottle were somewhere on his person.

He felt tired. Always now he was tired. But he was due soon to be present at the shul. He sighed. One could not neglect one's duty to the shul. He was one of the ten men on whom the congregation counted to show up regularly in order that there be a minyan, ten men, so that religious services could be formally held. If there were less than ten men under Talmudic law the Jews could not worship as a congregation, but only as individuals.

He pushed off his shoes without untying the laces and leaned back in his chair. He closed his eyes, remembering how it had been in the old country on Friday nights. The whole family would gather around the table for a huge meal before sundown, for from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday there could be no cooking in an orthodox Jewish home, and the Saturday meals were all cold ones.

But the Friday night meal was the highspot of the week. And after the meal he remembered how his mother would light the sabbath candles, and how each child watched and waited breathlessly for the last candle to be lit, so that he or she could be the first to shout, "Ah guten Shabbos!"

He smiled, remembering how seriously his young wife had lighted the candles for the first time on the Sabbath following their wedding. He could see her dark, pretty face, intent and serious as she bent over the candelabra, a woman at last.

He smiled again. How rich and beautifully the pulse of the Sabbath beat within him, he thought, fed with the memories of childhood and youth. Nodding sleepily, he thought of other Friday nights, some happy, some sad, all connected with the era of his life which could not be called back from the past.

He dozed.

Nathan saw that he had aroused his father from sleep.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Go back to sleep, Pa. Why don't you go to bed?"

Moishe spread his arms and strained half out of the chair in a yawn. "No," he said. "No, I must go to shul. It is a good thing that you woke me." He started to yawn again. Then a strained look crept into his face. "Nathan," he said. "Nathan, a glass of water. Please. Quickly!"

Nathan stared at him. "What is it, Pa?" he asked.

"What's wrong?" "A glass water," Moishe whispered. He pulled the bottle of pills from his pocket.

"Sure," Nathan said. "Sure, sure." He ran to the sink and returned in a moment with the water.

Moishe gulped down two-thirds of the water in the glass and stuck a pill under his tongue. Nathan watched him anxiously until most of his color had returned and his breathing was free and regular.

"What is it, Pa?"

Moishe smiled. "It is nothing," he said. "High blood pressure. I get these attacks, once in a while."

"You mean you've had one of these before?"

"I get them once in a while." Moishe started to get up.

"Wait," said Nathan. "I'll help you to bed."

Disgust twisted the features of the father. "Bed! I'm going to the shul."

"You can miss one Shabbos service," Nathan declared.

"You don't feel well tonight. It would be foolish to go to shul."

"It is never foolish to go to shul!" Moishe stood up.

"I am going to services."

Nathan sighed. "Who have you been seeing about this blood pressure?" he asked.

"How many doctors do we have here?"

"Perhaps Mallin doesn't know enough about this," Nathan

said. "Perhaps we should go to a Boston doctor."

"You don't have to like a man to admit that he knows his business," Moishe said. "Mallin is a good doctor."

"It wouldn't hurt to see someone else," Nathan said.

Moishe laughed. "Don't be afraid of shadows," he said.

"The world is enough of a dream without making it a nightmare."

He walked toward his bedroom. "Now I must change," he said.

In his room he put on his good navy blue suit and a clean shirt and tie. He started to walk out when he had changed, then stopped short. He walked back to his closet and took the bottle of pills from the pants he had worn at work, and slipped it into his coatpocket. He liked to feel it joggle against his hip when he walked.

In a way Nathan felt glad that his father had gone to the Synagogue. He wanted to be alone. He turned on the radio, twisting the volume up loud, letting the music gush into the room and surround him and tug at his loneliness and try to sweep it away. He lay down on the couch and closed his eyes.

One letter, he thought. One letter, full of news about Charlie.

The song was Summertime. When the livin' is easy, Nathan thought. The song's a lie. Living could never have been easy.

He lay there in the darkening room and thought about

his wife. He thought of her and he wanted her. He turned over on his stomach and lay with his head on his forearm.

Kim.

He should never have let her go, he thought. But then, he thought, rolling over on his back and staring at the ceiling, he should never have stayed in this town with her. There were too many distractions for both of them, here. It was as if there were two forces pulling them both in opposite directions. He sat up and rubbed the back of his neck.

Kimie. Kim, I love you.

I love you.

He sank back on the couch again, feeling himself weep inside, manlike, without tears. His fist rose and fell, hitting the padded arm of the couch with an impotent-sounding thud. He lay there and beat his fist into the couch again and again, searching for tears.

Moishe walked home slowly through the night. The sky was velvet black, hung with pinpoints of sparkling white stars. Moishe breathed deeply and smiled to himself. His right hand automatically patted his pocket for his pipe, but only the bottle of pills nestled against his palm. Of course, he thought. It was shabbos, and one did not smoke on the sabbath. He looked at the stars again. Such a night was made to be enjoyed to the utmost degree, and he felt the

tobacco hunger tantalize him. But he would not let his enjoyment be marred.

From its perch high in a tree ahead of him Moishe heard a bird trill faintly. "Hello, little night-bird," he said softly. "Ah guten shabbos. And may all your sabbaths be this good!" The bird whistled again, alone but not lonesome-sounding.

Moishe grinned. The night air was cool and bracing. He felt less tired, younger. He even swaggered a little as he walked, as he had done when, as a youth in the old country, he had turned his footsteps homeward after having spent an evening courting his wife-to-be.

The bird trilled again, overhead. Or, he reasoned, quite possible it was another bird, or a series of birds. For it seemed that the sound of the liquid whistling followed him as he walked toward his house, a happy, bubbling message of friendship that poured down on him from the branches above.

He reached the door of the shop, but lingered outside in the moonlight, reluctant to go in. If only it were not shabbos, he thought, he would sit on the stoop and smoke his pipe.

He listened to the bird-calls again. He would sit on the stoop anyhow, he thought, and listen to the birds.

The stoop was hard, but the night was soft. It is nice to be alive, he thought. Nice to feel the soft night

on his skin, nice to listen to the sound of a bird, the rustle of the wind through the leaves of the trees.

Then he arose. Nice, too, to sleep, to feel the softness of a bed.

He undressed in the dark, then lay awake in his bed, listening to the sounds of the night which drifted in to him through the open window. He fell asleep slowly, enjoying it, letting the drowsiness enfold him.

He had not slept long when his heart began to flutter. It beat on uncertainly in his breast, and then stopped.

But he felt no pain, and when Nathan found him in his bed next morning his eyes were closed and he was smiling. For he had died dreaming that he had just kissed his young Anita good night, and the birds sang him on his homeward way.

## XIX

When Moishe Holoff died there was no Jewish cemetery in Dutton. Peter Kwiatkowski went to inspect a sparse little burial plot in the so called "new cemetery". But Nathan had played there many times in his younger days, crouching behind the shiny marble markers and leveling imaginary firearms at nonexistent Injuns, and he remembered it as a dismal place.

It faced a spur railroad which ran through the woods a few miles to reach a logging camp, and the antiquated locomotive threw showers of soot and cinders into the air. If the wind was right the dirt would float past the cemetery into the woods, but if it wasn't the trees and the graves and the narrow paths between them got covered with a fine layer of black railroad dust, so that when someone walked through the cemetery his shoes made crunching noises as he stepped along.

And it was not a Jewish cemetery, and Moishe was a Jew.

So Nathan chose the highest spot on his farm, on the green crest of the hill. And it came to pass that Moishe Holoff's grave lies on the edge of the old Dutton cemetery, in the place where his son had lain in life as a boy and dreamed his dreams, and as a man had worked the soil.

From the hill where Moishe lies may be seen the full nature of the countryside which adopted him as its own. The rains come in the spring and melt the snow, until the water gurgles as it makes its way down to the lake in the valley. The sod awakens and the ground begins to shift and move, and each new season finds one or two stones settling into the yielding softness of the new grass. In the summer the wild flowers spring lushly from the death-enriched earth and bow before the hilltop breeze. And when autumn comes each year the bustle starts in the apple orchard down below and the sweet smells and tiny noises drift up to the hill crest along with the grey smoke of the wood fires. It is quiet on the hill, and filled with the peace which accompanies perfect loneliness.

And Nathan knew that in the winter the snow covers everything.

## XX

Nathan had paid the rabbi from Boston and the little group around the grave on the hill had broken up and gone their separate ways. And now he rode back to town in Peter's car.

"Aaah." The old farmer sighed heavily. "Mebbe is bad life, after all."

Nathan closed his eyes for a moment in silent agreement. He opened them to see Kwiatkowski staring at him.

"You like stone," Peter said. "You quiet, got ever' thing inside you. That no good. Thing gotta come out, bust loose. Be better you cry, you feel better."

"I can't cry, Peter," Nathan said.

"Better you cry than get sick."

"I can't cry."

They drove on in silence for a long while. Then Peter spoke again.

"Kim not a funeral," he said. The way he said it made it a question, not a statement.

"I didn't let her know," Nathan said. "What would have been the use?"

Peter looked straight ahead and nodded. "You gonna close shop down?" he asked.

"I guess so."

"Why you not come out on farm, live with me. Until Kim come home from mountain, anyhow?"

Nathan chewed on his lower lip. "I can get along, Peter."

"Sure. Sure, you get along. But is foolish. Is foolish both of us be lonely, live alone. I got big, wonderful farmhouse. You come out and visit for few days, huh?"

"Thanks, Peter," Nathan said.

"Is better that way," Peter said in his gentle voice.

"Is better leave the old house."

Nathan nodded. "God, but I'll miss him," he said.

"I never realized before how much I'd miss him."

"You hold too much in," Peter said. "Be better you cry."

"I can't cry, Peter," Nathan explained patiently.

Charlie watched her run ahead of him up the trail, thinking that she twitched her buttocks as she ran just the way a puppy wags its tail, happily.

Kim stopped running and half-sat, half-leaned on a lichen-covered rock. She threw her arms open as he approached, and gazed up at the morning sun, head back, eyes closed, reminding him of a picture he had once seen in a pulp magazine of a naked maiden kneeling in supplication before Ra, the Egyptian sun god.

"Arise," he said.

Kim opened her eyes. She breathed deeply. "Isn't this wonderful!" she said. "Don't you just love the mountains?"

"They're pretty nice, I suppose," Charlie said. "Nice and free, anyway."

"Poor Charlie!" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," he observed. "Here I am, at liberty and comfortable, and there they are, all those miserable wretches still cooped up under guard... I wouldn't call that being poor, now, would you?"

"It must have been awful for you."

He smiled, looking at her fixedly. "It wasn't too pleasant at first, while I could still feel desire, because I missed you then, baby. I missed your body like mad. I used to lie there on my bunk at night, thinking of you, thinking of your body, thinking of us together."

She drew a shuddering breath. "Charlie..." Her hand crept out and squeezed his arm. "Charlie," she whispered.

He smiled at her gently. "And then, later on," he said softly, "I used to think of you and Nate, and that was even worse, that was the worse time of all."

"I'm sorry, darling," she whispered. Her face stared up at him, warm looking and alive. "I'll make it up to you, I will!" Her hand caressed his arm.

"But then it got better," he said. "It got better when I began to get physically worse. When I was incapable of anything sexual myself I could think of you with Nate and not give a damn." He looked at her. "Why, do you suppose?"

"I don't know," she said in a low voice.

"Selfishness, do you think?" he suggested. "Interest only when I could conceivably have partaken?"

"I don't know."

He watched her eyes grow large with tears.

"Yes," he said. "I think it was selfishness. I've learned to be very selfish. I've learned not to care about other people. And that's why I think I'll be very happy from now on. I don't care that Nate has had you. Just as long as I can take you from now on and make you mine, that satisfies me."

"Charlie--" she said, but he interrupted her.

"And another thing," he said. "Now that I'm so damn selfish I understand you. We're going to be surprisingly happy, you and I. Because the minute you show signs of bitchery I'm going to knock you down and kick it out of you!"

Her eyes shone now, but not with tears. "How soon will you be--well?" she asked.

"Doc says within a matter of weeks."

He was unprepared for the suddenness of the way she fell upon him. Her fingernails dug through the silk on his back, and her mouth was wet warmth, covering his own, searching, searching for something which lay a matter of weeks into the future.

The man was ratty-faced. He wore rimless glasses in front of his blinking brown eyes. His once white suit was

sweat-stained at the armpits.

"Fifty dollars is my final offer," he said, blinking rapidly.

"I want to sell everything," Nathan said. "Cutting tables, all his shears, the pressing machine." He waved his hand. "Everything."

The man grimaced. "Let me explain something to you," he said. "Used tailoring equipment is valuable mostly as junk. Oh, every now and then I get rid of something to a kid just starting out in business on a shoestring. But let me tell you," he shook a dirty-nailed finger at Nathan, "I've been in the used equipment business for twenty years and I'm not rich yet."

Nathan walked to the window and looked out. A dun-colored sky promised rain. He hoped that it would be a gentle rain, one that would be good for his vegetable crops. "Take it for whatever you want to pay," he said.

The man turned and looked at the old presser. "I'll tell you the truth," he said, "I'm being generous with you. If I had known it was such a pile of junk I don't think I would have made the trip from Burlington." He shook his head. "A waste of my time," he said.

The door of the shop opened and Charlie MacIntyre came in.

"Charlie!" Nathan said. "Where's Kim?"

"Hello," Charlie said. "She isn't here. She's still

in the mountains."

"Still in the mountains?" Nathan said. "Is she all right?"

"Oh, yes," Charlie said. "She's all right." He looked at the man in the white suit. "You go right ahead with your business, Nate," he said. "I can wait; I've plenty of time."

"Our business is just about completed," said the man in the white suit. "You be here on Tuesday morning and I'll bring the check when I come for the stuff with the truck."

"All right," Nathan said.

Nathan turned to Charlie when the door slammed shut. Charlie was still thin, but he looked more fit, more alive. He was filling a short briar pipe with tobacco.

"Since when are you smoking one of those?" Nathan asked.

"Doc switched me. He says this doesn't allow you to soak up as much nicotine." Charlie put the pouch back in his pocket and lit the briar.

Nathan cleared his throat. "How come Kim didn't come in with you?" he asked.

"I'll give it to you straight," Charlie said. "She doesn't want to come back to you."

"What do you mean, she doesn't want to come back to me," Nathan said. "She's my wife! I'll wait until she tells me that she doesn't want to come back to me! Who in hell are you to walk in here and tell me a thing like that?" He felt his lips begin to quiver.

Charlie sucked on the pipe and made a face as if it tasted bad. "It's a pretty fouled-up mess, I'll admit," he said. He reached inside his jacket and pulled an envelope from his pocket. "She wrote you a note," he said.

Nathan looked at him. "Shove it," he said.

Charlie shrugged and flipped the envelope onto the table.

"I don't get this," Nathan said.

"Couldn't you see it coming?" Charlie asked.

"I don't mean that I can't understand her leaving me. As to that maybe yes, maybe no. But why didn't she just mail the letter. What are you pussy-footing around here for? What's the angle?"

Charlie's pipe had gone out. He puffed on it and reached into his pocket for another match. "That's the trouble with these things," he said. "They burn matches. I'll never get used to suddenly smoking nothing but air." He lit up and blew the match out. "Yes, Nate, we've an angle," he said softly.

"Spit it out." Nathan sat on the pattern tables. He pressed his hands against the edge, feeling his legs grow weak.

"We want to ask a favor of you," Charlie said.

Nathan looked at him. "That's a laugh! Do you want me for your best man?"

"No, really. A favor." He set the pipe down on the table. "A divorce is long and messy. Someone has to file

for it, it takes lots of time, there are a great many small details. Doc came up with a better idea."

"He would," Nathan said.

"If a marriage isn't consummated it can be annulled."

Nathan showed his teeth briefly. "This marriage was consummated," he said, looking steadily into Charlie's eyes. "Not once, or several times, but dozens, maybe hundreds of times."

Charlie returned his gaze. "Of course we know that," he said quietly. "That's where the favor comes in. Doc's a reputable physician. His testimony to the effect that Kim is a virgin would be enough proof that consummation didn't take place. Doc can fix it."

"Yes," Nathan said. "He's a great little fixer, isn't he!" He stood up and walked to the window. "As I understand it my good deed lies in my not contesting his testimony or demanding that another doctor examine my--" he gave a bitter little laugh, "--wife."

"That's right," Charlie said.

Nathan looked out at the grey sky.

"There wouldn't be any publicity, or anything like that, if you didn't contest," Charlie said.

"This is all pretty well-planned, isn't it," Nathan said. "This isn't something just decided upon. All the angles were thought of." He laughed again. "Tell me something, Charlie," he said. "How long has my wife been your

girl?"

Charlie smiled, a tight, well-controlled little smile. "You have it a bit mixed up," he said. "It's my girl who's been your wife. A bit confusing, isn't it?"

"A bit," Nathan said. "But nothing surprises me any more. Next thing you'll probably want to compare notes and ask me for intimate advice."

Charlie ran lean white fingers through his wavy red hair. "You'd find that I have no notes to compare with yours," he said shortly. "You see, I'm still a pretty sick man."

Nathan said nothing; he stood by the window and looked out at the grey, grey day.

"Can I tell her that you won't give us any trouble, then?"

Nathan turned. "All of a sudden I'm very tired," he said. "I'm tired of Kim and I'm tired of you and I'm tired of this whole mess." He shoved a bolt of cloth off the cutting table. It fell to the floor with a dull thud. "You can tell her to do anything you damn please," he said.

Charlie arose from the chair he sat in. "I won't bother you any more, then," he said. He hesitated. "Nate, as I said before, this is a peculiar situation. Each one of us would probably think it queer if we read about a deal like this in the newspapers." He flushed, and made a little tapping sound against the table top with the bowl of the

briar. "What I mean is that I honestly still like you, and although I know that we can never be real friends again, I'm sorry."

"I feel better already," Nathan said, not looking at him. "Put it in writing; it'll give me something to treasure on cold winter nights."

He bent down to pick the cloth from the floor. He heard the footsteps walking to the door and then outside. The bolt of cloth was heavy. He heaved it back onto the table and began to dust it off, remembering how angry Moishe had become whenever a bolt of fine goods had been soiled.

And as he beat his palm against the roll of cloth his eyes kept themselves fixed upon the envelope on the table. It looked white and new, and very business-like.

And what now, he thought numbly. And where do you go from here, Nathan Holoff? What lies ahead?

He thought briefly of his wife. Flittingly, for the fraction of a thought, desire tightened his loins, followed by a sense of shame and disgust. It had never been any good, not from the time he had come back from the army. What had happened before had been childhood, and once childhood is gone it is lost and never to be regained.

He felt a peculiar sense of relief, a feeling of well, that's over. It was something he no longer had to worry about, the holding of Kim, because he had lost her, and it

was done, over, with, finished.

He thought of his marriage, of its unfruitfulness. Unfruitful in every way, he thought bitterly. How Moishe had wanted a grandson!

Pa, he thought guiltily, feeling the bitter needless press against his eyelids. Pa, I'll say Kaddish regularly. You'll know I remember you, Pa. I will, I will, I will.

"I will," he said aloud in the quiet room.

He felt an overwhelming desire to be as close as possible to his father, to see his grave. He walked quickly out the door of the shop, leaving it unlocked, and started to run in the direction of Cemetery Hill.

The breeze was dank and smelled of rain. It whipped his shirt as he ran.

## XXI

The grave was still unmarked and new-looking. Nathan sank down upon the earth and lay with his head buried in his arms. The breeze on the hill was damp and cold, and the earth on the grave seemed warm and almost comforting in comparison.

"Oh, Pa," he whispered. "Pa, I need you."

The first drops of rain splattered on his forearm.

"Pa, I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry that things didn't turn out right, the way you wanted them. I'm sorry you have no grandson. Oh, Pa, Pa.." His shoulders shook as he sobbed. It was as if the tears released the rain, and the drops began to fall more and more frequently, large drops that bounced wetly off his neck and arms and made round, dark stains on his shirt and jeans.

He had been holding-in the tears too long. It was as if a knot inside of him had been untied. He cried on and on in great, gulping sobs, the tears on his face mingling with the rain.

The rainstorm increased to cloudburst intensity. The drops pelted off of his body, matting his hair and turning the earth on the grave to mud. The water poured off of him in little rivulets, falling into the new-dug earth and

running off the sides of the grave into the sod.

Finally the sobbing ceased, and Nathan lay still on his father's grave while the water fell from the sky and struck at his body with many liquid fingers.

He raised himself slowly to his feet.

"Thank you, Pa," he said, looking at the muddy grave. The worst of the cloudburst was over, but the rain continued to fall raggedly on the hilltop. Nathan looked in dismay at the soggy pools which had once been his fields. Where nubbins of green plants had pushed their tips through the brown earth, tangled shoots floated in the rainwater. The work of a season had been ruined in an hours time.

He looked back at the muddy grave.

There is always next season, he thought. Next season there would be greenness above his father's resting-place, and greenness in his fields as well.

Pater would know what to do.

I must go for now, Pa, he thought. I'll be back often, and soon.

He started to descend the hill, picking his way between the new streamlets which gurgled their ways into the valley below.

The air was warm as he neared the shul. The storm was past. The grey clouds in the sky had been swept away to

reveal the blueness beyond and as Nathan looked up at the blue star atop the shul roof he could see a rainbow coloring its path from one corner of the heavens to the other.

He pushed open the synagogue door. The murmured prayers of the old and bearded men came to his ears. The sound rose and fell, warm with age and alive with their earnestness. Nathan reached into the box by the door and took out a black prayer cap, which he put on his head. He started to walk toward the front of the room, blinking his eyes to accustom them to the dim light.

He walked down the aisle until an old and claw-like hand touched him weakly on the arm.

The man in the pew had the ancient, ageless look of the aged Jew who lives alone with religion in his twilight years. His long white beard fell like old lace from his bewrinkled face. He looked at Nathan, noticing the matted and uncombed hair beneath the black yamikah on his head, the mud and filth on his clothing.

"Bist Moishe Holoff's zun, no?" he asked.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, ich bin Moishe Holoff's zun." He knelt swiftly by the old man's pew. "Little grandfather," he said, "Will you teach me how to say Kaddish for my father?"

"May he rest in peace," the old man said in a hoarse whisper. He pulled himself to his feet and stepped into the aisle. Nathan held his arm, feeling it tremble with age under his hand. They walked down the aisle together

toward the platform upon which the Torah rested.

Nathan kept his eyes firmly fixed upon the Star of David embroidered in gold upon the blue velvet of the altar cloth. He walked slowly, feeling the old man lean upon him for support and feeling strong in his ability to give it.

THE END