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more than enough

NANCY LARSEN SANDERS

"Wha's the matter?" George muttered groggily. Ellie had slipped from under the covers and was standing in the darkness. George slid his long arm over her side of the bed, feeling the emptiness of her pillow. "Wha's the matter?" He tried to lift his tired head to look at her.

"Just going out to the toilet, that's all," Ellie whispered sharply. "Don't wake the children, just get back to sleep."

"Huhmm. . . ." George pushed his head into the pillow. A foggy warmth closed around his body and he jerked slightly when he heard the soft thud of the screen door. "Air damp . . . chilly," he whispered, thinking about Ellie's thin nightgown. He hunched his shoulders down under the quilt; his relaxed jaw dropped open and wet snores gurgled through his nose.

When George woke before daylight he found himself wound in the quilt. He pushed himself up with his elbows and tried to kick off the binding covers. He scratched at his chest and rubbed his armpits through his gray underwear, grimacing as he tasted the sourness of his mouth. Letting his mouth fill up with saliva, he ran his tongue over his teeth, trying to rinse his mouth. He swallowed,

then looked around him in the graying darkness.

Ellie wasn't in bed. She must have gone to the outhouse already. George wished she would use the chamber pot on chilly mornings, but she wouldn't do it for fear he would watch her. He didn't see anything wrong with that.

George reached down his shirt from the nail behind the bed. He shivered as its dampness covered his shoulders and arms. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and slid into the overalls that were lying on the floor. He had worn his socks to bed, and all he needed was his shoes. He padded quietly across the floor so as not to wake the little girls, and groped for his shoes by the screen door. The door closed softly behind him. The damp porch step chilled his feet and he sat down quickly to put on his shoes. When he stood up the rear of his overalls was wet and he pulled his clothes away from his skin.

It was foggy. George walked over to the windmill and leaned against one of its supports. He couldn't see the bottom of the slope in the corral, and he wondered if the cows had come in from the pasture. If spring ever got here for sure, he'd be mighty glad. It would be good and warm

after the fog lifted, but right now everything looked chilled to the bone. He unbuttoned his overalls and his warm urine sprayed the side of the water tank. Now Ellie wouldn't like that. She said a feller ought to always go to the outhouse and do things proper. It wouldn't matter so much right now. She wouldn't want him coming there when she was there. His wide, thin mouth broke into a grin, and he ran his hand over his shaggy head. No sir. She didn't like nothing like that.

The water was still and smooth in the tank. There wasn't a breeze in the air. Swirling the surface gently with his finger, he watched the tiny waves lap at the sides of the tin tank. He ducked his head and hands in the water and blew through his nose, the iciness causing him to jerk upward. He shook his head and pressed his damp hair down with his hands.

The fog had lifted some, and he could see the cows waiting in the corral. He must have overslept this morning because the fog made it look earlier than it really was. He hurried to the milk shed to gather his pails and stool.

He was almost through milking when he looked up and saw Marie by the fence. He squinted his eyes at her and motioned her to climb over. She stood close by him, her thin body shivering in the gray air.

"Marie, honey, you ought to wear your Mama's old shawl when you come out this early. What you doing up with the birds?" He put his arm around her shoulders and

tried to warm the bareness of her arms.

The little girl crouched down in the corral dirt and snuggled her braided head under George's warm armpit. "Pa, where's Mama?"

"Ain't she in the house?" He traced the crooked part of her hair with his fingers, then laid his sunburned cheek on her head.

"No, Pa."

"Well, I reckon she's in the toilet. Didn't you look there?"

Marie's voice was muffled as she pressed her face against his shirt. "Mama ain't there, Pa. She's nowhere."

George straightened his back and looked down at the girl. He frowned. "Well, I reckon she's gone to the hen house to see about eggs for breakfast or something. You go look. But," he balanced himself on the milk stool and took her thin face between his hands, "you go get something warm on first. You ain't got enough tallow on your bones to keep you warm."

George looked at the girl closely. He thought he could see tears forming in her eyes. He was puzzled. He figured she was cold. She was too little and scrawny to run around this early in the spring with no coat or shoes. He'd have to ask Ellie if she could fix something for the child to wear. He helped Marie to her feet. "I'm just about through here. You better go on. Okay?"

"Sure, Pa." Marie climbed the fence and straddled the top bar. "She better hurry. Lindy's beginning to whoop it up."

"Go on then and find her."

George shook his head and turned back to the milking. He began stripping the last milk out of the teats, his shoulders hunched against the warmth of the cow's belly.

When George entered the house with two brimming pails of milk the baby was crying and kicking in her crib. Marie stood looking at Lindy, hands on her hips, her mouth twisted with disgust. She turned when George let the screen door slam.

"I told her to quit hollering, Pa, but she don't stop to listen to me. I could holler my ears off and she wouldn't listen. Where's Mama?"

George set the pails on the kitchen table. His eyes widened as he looked around the room. "Ain't she here?"

Marie didn't answer him. She turned her back and tried stroking the baby's jerking hands.

"Well, where is she?" His voice rose impatiently.

Marie hung her head. "I—well, I reckon—I don't know, Pa." Her voice trailed off and her eyes were gray and shiny with tears.

"Ah, baby, I'm sorry I yelled." George pulled her against him and gently pulled her braids.

"I looked ever'where," she tried to hold back her sobs. Marie looked up hopefully, "Do you suppose she's gone calling already this morning? Maybe she'll be back before breakfast."

George evaded her look for a moment, then spoke jokingly. "Oh, I reckon she had to go get a recipe from the neighbors or something. That's the way women are, Marie. They get an idea and there's

nothin' to stop them. You just wait, you'll probably be just as scatterbrained."

"Ah, Pa, you're joking me." She skipped over to the crib side. "What we gonna do with Lindy, Pa?"

George pulled a rocking chair over close to the crib. "Maybe you ought to set down in the rocking chair and I'll let you hold Lindy. I bet she'll stop that way." He picked up the squirming baby.

Marie quickly sat down in the chair. "Can I really? Ma never let me before. She always said I ain't old enough."

"Well, I say eight years is enough." He held the baby's tear-streaked cheek against his neck for a moment. "There, there, now. Easy does it. Now little one, you rock bye-bye with Marie. There she is."

"She's terrible wet!" Marie wrinkled her nose.

"I'll change her purty soon. Just sit tight and rock her some." George stood for a moment in the middle of the room, his clenched fists thrust in his hip pockets. He hurried over to a curtained corner of the room that housed the only closet space they had. He stared at the empty hooks and nails that had held Ellie's dresses. The little wooden trunk that usually stood on the floor was gone. George leaned against the wall, his hand grasping an empty hook.

George turned and saw Marie staring at the empty closet, her eyes wide with fright. The baby was screaming louder than ever. George looked around him wildly,

the cries of the baby ringing in his ears. He hurried over to the door and looked out, knowing he would see nothing but fog lifting in the heat of the sun. The door of the toilet leaned crookedly open and the chicken yard was empty, except for the red hens pecking around the feed troughs. The riding mare stood by the water tank, her head lifted toward the house. George slumped against the door-jamb. He ran his hand over the wood, his fingers stroking, then tugging at the rough frame. He loosened a long splinter from the wood and broke it into tiny bits in his hands. Dropping the pieces at his feet, he turned to look at Marie.

"I reckon your Ma's gone calling all right," he said loudly. "Let's get some dry britches on the little one and feed her."

"Pa?"

"Huh?" he bent over the baby, fumbling at the diaper pins.

"What you goin' to feed her?"

"What do little ones usually eat, baby? They don't ask for much."

"But Ma ain't here."

"That I know."

"But, Pa," her voice rose in anger. "Ma ain't here. Who's going to feed Lindy? Ma's got the milk!"

George jerked upright, his hand dangling the wet, steaming diaper. "I forgot."

"She's mighty hungry, Pa."

"She—she's gotta have milk, Marie. We'll give her some of that fresh milk. It won't kill her—do you think?" he asked hesitatingly.

Marie looked important. "S'pose not, Pa."

"Well, I'll get some ready. Maybe if I wash one of them sheep bottles that'll work best. The nipple ain't the same but she ought to be hungry enough to take to anything."

"Pa!" Marie screamed at him. George whirled back toward Marie. "Looky here! Now see what she done." A big wet stain darkened Marie's little cotton dress. The baby kicked, her face growing red with exertion and crying. "You better git a diaper, Pa!"

George sighed and began rummaging through the chest of drawers, looking for the diapers.

Later, when the baby was fed and asleep, George sat at the table, drinking strong coffee and eating the last of the cold biscuits and syrup. Marie chased a last bit of food around her plate with her fork.

"This is fun."

"What is?" He slurped his coffee.

"Having Ma gone."

"You don't say." George shuffled his feet back and forth, his fingers tapping on the table. "What's to give you that sort of opinion, missy?"

Marie grinned at him. "You don't exactly holler and get mad like Ma does." She stuffed bread and syrup in her mouth. "I like breakfast with you. Not like that old oatmeal and eggs. This is like dessert."

"I reckon your Ma'll get back 'fore too long."

"Where'd she go?"

George looked down at his cup, watching the morning sunlight reflect in the coffee. "I figure she's gone down the road to the Longs'. She talked some about settin' eggs. Probably Deena Long was going to give her some."

"Mrs. Holze done tol' her yesterday that she'd give her some. She's gonna bring 'em the next time she's headed this way to town."

"Well, then. Maybe she didn't go for no eggs."

"Pa, Mama told me yesterday that I should learn to help around the house more and take care of Lindy more. So I better get busy. You get your feet out from under the table so I can sweep up." She took the big broom from the corner and began sweeping, her slight body swinging with the motion of the broom. The dust filtered through the sunlight air.

George stood by the door, his hat in his hand. "Your Ma may be gone quite a spell. So I'm going to see Mrs. Long. She might come help you a bit. What do you think?"

Marie looked up from her sweeping. "Oh, I can manage, Pa," she said airily. "Don't you worry yourself sick."

"I'm goin' to see about it anyhow. If Lindy wakes up, you give her some more of that milk from that there pail. Can you change a diaper?"

Marie shrugged. "I done watched Ma often enough. Ought to be able to do it."

George scratched his chest. "Will you stick her?"

"Try not to, Pa. I'll tell her to hold still. Don't worry." She stirred the dust.

George shook his head. "'Don't worry,' she says. Lindy ain't goin' to hold still for no one. You stay in the house and don't leave her alone," he yelled back at Marie, as he hurried toward the corral.

The road was rutted deep from the spring rains. A well-worn path ran along the road, connecting the two farms. George rode the mare at a fast trot, his eyes squinted against the bright sun. The horse shied at a jackrabbit in the ditch and George's hat, caught up by the breeze, flew into a clump of weeds by the road. He looked at it for a moment, then rode on. The wind blew on his bare head and his brown hair stood up in a thick shock. The whiteness of his forehead, normally covered by the hat, stood out against the weathered redness of his face.

A piece of George's plowed land lay next to the road, its surface green with thickly grown wheat. A quarter of a mile distant, to the south, lay the boundary line between George's and Herman's fields. A grim smile came to George's face as he rode past Herman's poorly farmed land. Long hadn't even plowed it for planting this year. Its surface was covered with dried and broken cornstalks, tumbleweeds, and a lush growth of spring weeds. Pheasants flew up from its thickness.

When he rode into the yard of the Long farm, several children were scattered under a tree, swinging from its branches and digging

holes in the dirt. They shouted at George and came running to meet him. A ten-year-old boy held the horse's head as George swung from the saddle.

"Hi, Mr. Shannon! Can I tie your horse for you?" The boy stroked the mare's nose.

"You sure can, Robbie. You're a mighty fine horseman."

The boy patted the horse's neck softly. "Gee, thanks, Mr. Shannon! Will she need water, do you think?"

"Think not, son, it was cool riding over." He turned to two little girls who were standing nearby. "Is your Mama home?"

They nodded shyly.

"Could you take me to see her?"

"Sure!" and they ran toward the small house.

The farm buildings and house were run down and sagging with loose boards and weak supports. One wall of the barn had caved in during the winter, but Herman Long hadn't fixed it yet. The walls of the house were made of warped and weatherbeaten boards. The shingles on the roof were cracked and broken and a few more spring winds would finish bringing them down. George eased his weight carefully over the broken porch boards and stepped into the one-room shack.

The room seemed filled with beds. A bed stood in the corner, its feather ticking mattress plumped high and covered over with a bright-colored quilt. Bunk beds lined the wall, six beds for the older children. A small crib, set on rockers, was pulled up close

to the kitchen table and a baby, about Lindy's size, watched the movements of the woman who was kneading and patting bread dough on the table's surface.

"Why, George Shannon! Good to see you. Come on in now and set yourself down." She pulled a chair out from the table. "Take this here chair. Jennifer, honey, get out of the man's way!"

Deena Long's voice was loud and friendly and George felt good as he sat down by the table. She had a pretty face and he admired the way she wore her reddish hair combed in a heavy braid that circled the back of her head. He liked to watch her eyebrows lift above her blue eyes when she was happy or surprised or something. She was bending over the baby's crib, her full lips deepening the crease on either side of her nose as she smiled.

"Well, now, George. Let me get you a cup of coffee." She poured a cup, boiling hot. "It's too awful hot. It's been setting on the back of the stove while I bake bread." She cut a thick slab of hot bread and buttered it heavily.

George chewed the bread and blew on the hot coffee. She began kneading the dough, rolling its spongy bulk on the floured surface of the table. Her hands were broad and strong, and they pounded the dough into a velvety smoothness.

When the little girls finally went outside George spoke. "Deena?"

She gave a loaf of bread a final punch and put it into a baking pan. "I just can't seem to get my

bread baking done this morning." She hurried across the room and set the loaf on the back of the woodstove to raise. Then she began forming another loaf. "Well, George, what do you know this morning?"

"Not much, I'm afraid."

Deena laughed. "We all get that way some time or another." She worked around the stove, adding corncobs to the fire.

George sat bent over the cup of coffee, his elbows resting on his knees. He slowly revolved the cup in his hands, blowing at the hot liquid. "Deena, where's Herman?"

She stood still, her hands holding a piece of dough. "Don't you know?" she asked softly.

"Nope."

She sighed and began rounding the dough into small rolls. "Then I don't know either."

"What do you mean?" George set the cup on the table and clenched his fists in his overall pockets. He tipped his chair back and looked at her closely. "What do you mean, Deena?"

She met his gaze and spoke slowly. "This is maybe one of those times when I don't know much, George. And yet—yet I know quite a bit. There should be a difference there, but I ain't really figured it out yet."

"What do you know?" He rocked back and forth on the chair legs.

"I know that Herman is gone, George. I know where he's done gone, and I know he won't be back. And I know I just got to accept the fact and live with it.

I made my bed and now I got to sleep in it—alone." Her words tumbled over one another and she quickly formed the rolls with nervous hands.

George set his chair down and ducked his head, his long arms dangling between his knees. "Ellie's gone, too."

"I know," she whispered.

George looked up at her, his face pale, the skin drawn tight over his cheeks. "Was there anything I could've done, Deena? Ought you to have told me sooner?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, George, nothing'll do any good now. It would've just hurt you and her. Some things can't be fixed. I found that out long ago." Deena looked down at her sleeping baby. "How's Lindy this morning?"

George felt tired and washed out. "I finally gave her some cow's milk. You think it'll hurt her?"

"Probably not. But it should be scalded next time. It won't hurt now, the weather ain't so warm."

George took a big swallow of coffee. "Marie knows. She saw all of Ellie's clothes gone. She was scared at first, then she took over like a woman."

"That won't always last, George. She'll get scared many a time."

George felt like hollering at Deena. She was being so sensible it hurt him. His voice was edgy. "What can I do? I'm just a man with no know-how. How do I go about caring for those children?"

"You love them, George. You got your battle won already be-



cause those little girls know how you love them."

"Ellie didn't never love them. Did you know that?" He twisted his overall straps. "She was god-awful mad when she knew Lindy was coming. She didn't want Marie neither. I just never could understand. . . ." He was silent and Deena stood looking at him for a moment, thinking. She cupped her hands under her heavy, milk-filled breasts, lifting them to lessen the strain on her aproned bodice. She left a floury hand print under each breast.

"Maybe you better listen to me, George." She pulled a chair close to the table and sat down.

He took a deep breath and leaned back in his chair. "Listen to what?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I should've listened better before and this wouldn't never have happened."

"Could be there wasn't nothing to hear, George."

"I don't get that," he said.

"Oh, I'll just quit talking in riddles. How come Ellie never did care for your little ones?"

"She said they hurt her. But any woman has to go through that. Then she said they made her ugly. She said she didn't want to look like her own Mama."

"Why, George, her mother was a lovely woman."

"I know that, but Ellie didn't see it that way. She said her Mama liked having lots of children around. But *she* wasn't going to put up with 'em. You know, Deena—" he hesitated, "I just never could understand how come

we didn't have no more babies 'tween Marie and Lindy. Maybe Ellie thought so hard agin it that she couldn't get with child. She was god-awful mad when she found out about Lindy."

"George, if you don't mind my asking—"

"I don't mind."

"Did you give her many chances to get with child?"

"A durned lot, Deena. She'd kinda fight me, but she liked it. I just never could understand. . . ."

"I like lots of children. But Herman never wanted me to have no babies."

"He didn't!"

"No. He didn't even want the first one, Robbie. He just wanted freedom. Oh, he liked the fun, but he just didn't want no babies. Herman thought babies cost him too much. He was a good man but he just didn't want to work to raise a big family decent like. He talked a lot about going west. George?" She reached for his hand. "You know—that's where they've gone—west."

He held her hand tightly, his grip pinching into her firm flesh.

"'Way out west?"

"As far west as his money will take them."

"Did he have much?"

"He took every cent, George. They ought to get to California and still have some. I been saving quite a while for lumber for a new house and he took it with him."

George got up and walked over to the window. "You ain't got much left then, I guess."

"I got the farm and all the land—livestock, too. Last night before he left he gave me a paper. He'd been to town and signed everything over to me. So I've got *something* left." Deena walked over to stand beside George. "He also said—he said he and Ellie weren't going to worry about divorces. He said it wouldn't matter none out west. Nobody'd know."

George's finger traced a crack in the windowpane. "I should've helped Herman screen this window before hail weather came," he said dreamily. He swung around to look at Deena. "Those children out there under that tree—" and he gestured toward the window, "they're awful good children. Don't know how he could've helped but be happy with 'em."

"Well, he wasn't." She sat down in a chair, her shoulders slumped tiredly. "He slapped them around a good deal. I'm glad he's gone."

George sat down beside her. "Are you glad, Deena?"

"I am. He just drove me and drove me all these years to quit having children."

"But how could you? It was his fault, not yours."

Deena twisted her hands in her apron. "I could've done something about it. I could've done what Ellie did." She turned away from George. "I'm sorry, I wasn't going to tell that."

"What? What did Ellie do?" He grasped her shoulder and swung her toward him.

Deena was crying. "You know that old woman peddler that drives around in that buggy?"

"The one that sells needles and such things?"

Deena nodded. "She sells sewing things all right. And—" she broke off and hid her face in her apron.

"What else, Deena?" George asked gently.

Her voice was muffled. "She also sells a package of little instruments." Deena raised her wet face to look at George. "They're for getting rid — for abortions, George."

"And—and Ellie used them?"

Deena nodded, her hands covering her face. "One time—one time Herman bought me a packet. I took the ax to them and then I threw the pieces in the gully. That was the only time he ever beat me."

"How many times did she do it, do you know?"

"It don't really matter. It won't help any to know, so I'd rather not say."

"That's okay. You're right, nothing like that matters now. We just got to forget a lot of things."

"I didn't mean to tell you," said Deena.

"I reckon I kinda knew in the back of my head. I just never thought about it though. I knowed she was pretty sick sometimes but I just never figured it out. Probably a good thing I never found out sooner—I'd have been powerful upset."

"Herman was a good man." Deena poured two cups of coffee and set a pan of bread in the oven. "When we was courtin'—you and Ellie were then, too—he had big dreams. He was going to fix me

up pretty and build me a nice house—with a kitchen sink, no less. Them things never really mattered to me but he said he would do it for me anyhow. We got married—and it wasn't too many years before I began to get ugly."

"You ain't ugly! What you mean?"

She smiled grimly. "He thought so."

"That's funny, Ellie used to think she was homely—because of the babies. I never thought so, but she wouldn't believe me. She had some mighty purty dresses but she said her figure was ruined and that the weather hurt her face. I just never thought that at all."

"I like myself the way I am," said Deena.

"So do I," said George. They looked at one another for a moment. Deena flushed and George stared at the floor.

"Well, I reckon I ought to be doing something. The day's passing mighty fast . . . I'm wondering . . . I'm wondering how you're going to manage."

Deena laughed, some of the tension gone from her face. "I think I'll manage better than ever, George. For one thing—these children are going to be a lot happier. They think their Pa has gone to town this morning, but I'm ready to tell them different now. Of course they won't understand but I think they'll be relieved. He never gave them no peace."

George walked over to the doorway and looked toward the corral.

"Did he take the horses and wagon?"

"He took the buggy—I've got the wagon. He sold the horses and buggy to the livery stable in town."

"How were they going to travel then, for God's sake?"

"He showed me how, George. He had two tickets for the train, all the way to California. They had everything planned out. With such plans as those, there ain't no turning back for no one."

George laughed. "Don't you worry about anyone turning back. Once Ellie makes up her mind she ain't going to turn back." He braced himself against the doorway, looking out over the open countryside. "I've got the team and the riding horse. You take the riding horse, because you may need her sometime for an emergency. You can use my team when you got to go to town or anywhere."

"George, I'd like to say no, but I don't dare. I've got to accept your offer and I'm grateful to you. What about Lindy?"

"Lindy? Marie can care for her, with a little training from you."

"Oh, but she's too young to saddle her with a woman's cares!"

"Well, what in the hell do you expect me to do, I'd like to know!" George walked over to the woman and hit the table top in anger.

"I'm sorry," she said meekly. She rubbed the back of her neck tiredly. "I'm not much help."

"No, you ain't." He sat down, surprised at his words. He looked at her in amazement, then they both began laughing. "I'll be

damned, Deena, I never talked this way before to no woman." They laughed again. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "But it sure can make a feller feel good."

"You're right there," she said. "It helps to blow off steam once in a while."

"Deena? Deena—" her eyes widened at the look on his face. "Deena, what are we going to do?"

"We, George?"

"Yes, we."

"You got any ideas?"

He began rolling a small piece of bread dough between his fingers. "Neither one of us is going to manage without the help of the other." He watched her face carefully, but it was expressionless. "You got to have help with your land and I got to have help with my children and housekeeping."

"Looks that way."

"Then I think we'd better hitch up together and see if we can make a go of it. If you'll have me. . ."

Her face softened into a gentle smile. "Did you forget what I told you—what Herman said about no divorce?"

"I didn't forget."

"And you'd live with me—in sin, as folks around here would say?"

"Deena, I'd live with you, not in sin though, because I don't call that sin."

"I'm glad you feel that way."

He twisted his overall straps. "I ain't much, but if you can take me for what I am . . . I need a woman, I need a mother for my girls and—well, damn it all, Deena, I admire you. Oh hell," and he

sprawled in his chair in disgust. "I never could make myself clear. I'm just good at muddying things up."

"No wait!" She laughed, her eyes shining with tears. "I thank you for saying what you did. You're too kind. Now look, I need a father for my children and all, but I can't saddle you with seven children just because I lost my man."

"Deena, I got to be more than just a father." He spoke bluntly and his lips were pressed into a long thin line.

The room grew quiet. Finally Deena's voice broke through the stillness. "I need you as a *man* and because of that, people in this neighborhood would put us through hell. They'd see our being together as a sensible thing to do, but they'd still look at the legal side of things. That preacher in town would say we're living in sin and he'd preach about it. They'd look down at our children and we wouldn't be welcome in this community no more."

"I know all that, Deena."

"But George," and she held his hands in hers, "a while ago you said that *if* I could take you as you are, then—I *could* take you, George, for the kind of person, the kind of man you are. But I'm not sure if I'm ready."

George held her hands against his hot face. "Deena, people wouldn't never look at us for what we really are. They'd just look at us one way—always seeing the wrong. They'd see our failings. And I've got a lot of them."

She smiled. "You don't think I do, too?"

"I ain't worrying about it none," he said, "and I think you can make me a better man."

"George, I've known you many years now. You're a good enough man. You ain't perfect but neither am I. Nobody is. I wish folk could tolerate one another better, knowing none of us is perfect. What about the children, George?"

"What do you think?"

"Would they understand?"

"No, but they'd learn, if we did things right. Folks around here would try to learn them the other way."

"It would take a lot of love," she said.

He spoke firmly, "We would have it."

"I think so," she said. "Things will probably work out for us, but I just need a little time. Just a little time. Can you understand that, George?"

He grinned. "Don't you worry none. You take the time. Well, then," and he jumped up from his chair. "I'd better get busy. Got a lot to do. And I reckon Lindy might be getting hungry. I'm wondering if I could bring her here to you. That is, if you got enough for two babies."

Deena folded her arms across her breasts and laughed happily. "I've got more than enough!"





parker

HOWARD McMILLEN

Parker sat on the burning Kansas clay with his legs crossed like an Indian's and tried to get comfortable. The sweat on his legs and back made his clothes cling hotly to his skin, and his muscles and bones were stiff from his first two days of work. Around him the other members of the bridge crew sat quietly finishing their lunches and smoking. They sat on two long wooden pilings facing each other.

Parker sat alone at the south end of the poles and halfway in between them so he could see all of the men's faces. His face was lean and conspicuously white among the sun-tanned older men, but his dark eyes were intensely alive as they jumped from one face to another in quick anticipation of the crew's starting its favorite noon-time subject.

"Niggers!" one of the men suddenly exclaimed. It was an older man they called Pete. Parker had seen him around.

"Did you just say who your best friends were?" someone asked. The rest of them laughed.

"No, I was just cussin' because it's so hot," the old man retorted. "Ain't 'niggers' a cuss word?"

"If it ain't it should be."

"Did you boys hear the one

about the ninety-nine niggers?" the carpenter asked.

"Not since last Friday, Pete."

"I haven't heard it. Go ahead," someone else said.

The old carpenter was sitting at the opposite end of the pilings so Parker couldn't see him very well, but his eyes stared fixedly in the man's direction. Parker had on one of his old, white, long-sleeved shirts he had brought home for the summer. His sleeves were rolled up two turns on his sinewy arms, and the whiteness of his skin blended in with his shirt and face in strange contrast to his dark, probing eyes and black, ruffled hair. He shifted his eyes down to his hands and tried to shut out the words the old man was saying.

Already there were tender spots on his palms that would be turning into blisters before the day was over. He thought, This afternoon I'll go back up and dig some more holes by myself and it'll be all right. He held his hands close to his face, concentrating on them, and no longer heard the humming drawl of the man's voice. He ran the fingertips of each hand over the soft, pink spots of his palms and the unfamiliar smells of wood and dirt were there. Then the laughter jerked him back to the

men and he knew it was no use. He thrust his arms out and back from his sides and down to the baked ground so he could lean on them. His eyes bolted out to the crew's laughing and smiling faces, and he hated all of them.

The foreman was sitting nearest Parker on his left. "Superintendent showed me a letter he got the other day saying he had to hire niggers if they was looking for work," he said.

"Nothin' says you can't hire 'em and fire 'em," someone said.

"Just like the University of Alabama. Let 'em in one day and expel 'em the next."

"Hire 'em in the morning and fire 'em in the afternoon."

The foreman took off his helmet and scratched his head. "I guess they hired a couple over on the other job," he said.

"Sure did," said a voice from the other end of the piling. "I was up there," the old carpenter continued. "Old John was foreman. Guess the superintendent hired 'em. Anyway, they come out one morning and old John said, 'Those black bastards won't last two days under me.' Didn't either." Pete laughed. Parker saw a thick stream of tobacco juice jet out to the ground from the spot where the old man was sitting. "Hell, he had both of 'em out there runnin' a tamper by themselves that first day. They came in that night lookin' blacker than they did when they went out. Had all that dirt and sweat on their face and in their hair . . . they looked like hell."

"Never did see a good lookin'

one, did you?" someone asked, and the men laughed.

"They came back out the next day," the carpenter went on. "They said, 'Boss, we shore would like to do some other kind of work today,' and old John told 'em to get back on those goddamn tampers and stay there until he told 'em different."

"It was *hot* that day. About two o'clock that afternoon they come up to old John and told him they was going to town and old John said he said 'Goodbye!' Guess there ain't been no niggers out there since."

"Must've got the word spread around," someone said.

"Ain't many of 'em around here anyway."

"What there is sure don't want to do no work, either."

"Ain't none of 'em wants to work," someone said. Words rumbled in agreement and a couple of men laughed.

The ground had gotten harder under Parker's hands, and he twisted his body around in the dirt like an animal. His pants were too tight for him and stuck to his legs as he sweated. He stretched his arms out in front of him and tried to pick the cloth of the jeans from his skin, but he gave it up, leaning back on his arms planted in the hot clay behind him. He listened to the half-southern, half-western accents that belonged to the strange group of company men who followed the bridge work wherever it took them. He knew that, today, he wouldn't be able to keep quiet.

"That's right," a young laborer on Parker's right said. "There ain't none of 'em that wants to work. They like to come out here and stand around in the shade and watch us work. Then come up and ask you for a raise. Damn, that makes me mad."

Parker looked at the boy's long, blond hair that stuck out from his cheeks in dusty sideburns and crawled thickly down his neck to his rough shirt collar. Suddenly Parker found himself on his feet. "How can you get mad at someone for asking for a raise when they haven't even gone to work yet?" he said.

A couple of men laughed and the boy squinted up at Parker. "I think I know what they'd do if they was here," he said. "Why? What do you care? You ain't one of them nigger lovers, are you?"

"I don't have anything against them."

"A nigger lover," the boy said. "Well, I guess it takes all kinds." He looked at the ground and spat.

Parker continued to stare at him. "Most people who've been past the third grade get along with them all right," he said.

"Yeah?" the boy said. "I guess I got that far and I don't get along with 'em at all. Of course I never went to college and learned how to be no nigger lover. Maybe that's my problem."

"I learned how to treat everybody equally; it wasn't too hard."

"Maybe I just ain't smart enough to learn how to love them niggers."

"You're probably right," Parker said. "I should've realized that."

The yellow-haired boy picked himself up slowly from the piling. "Man, you're not even trying to get along," he said.

Parker looked levelly at him. "That's right," he said.

The boy stared at him for a moment, then slowly nodded his head. "A nigger lover," he said.

"The word's Negro," Parker said. "If you want to call me something, call me a Negro lover."

The worker stepped towards Parker. "I'll call you what I damn well please," he said.

Parker started to meet him but he heard a voice from the other end of the group.

"Now this just ain't fair," the voice said, and Parker whirled to see the old carpenter shuffling towards him. "It ain't fair," he went on. "A smart, young college boy like you arguing with some poor, ignorant boy like Tom, here. Everybody knows he ain't got no sense." The men chuckled, and Tom smiled thinly at the old man.

Parker got a good look at the carpenter for the first time. He had his protective helmet pushed back on his head, and his slow, brown eyes rose up to meet Parker's glare. His face was round and whiskery and his right cheek was puffed out with a wad of tobacco. Some of the juice had dribbled out of his mouth that morning and mixed with the dirt of his beard and become pasted to his face below the corner of his mouth.

"Suppose I argue with you,

then," Parker told him. "You seem to know a lot about it."

"Well, I've been around a lot of niggers," the old man said. "How about you?" The men chuckled again, and Tom, who had been standing close to Parker, moved back to his seat.

"I know some Negroes," Parker said.

"That's what they teach you in college, eh? Supposed to call niggers Negroes. Well, I always wondered what you learned up there."

"They teach us to treat everybody equally."

"Is that right? I thought they taught you to learn some trade, like being a carpenter maybe. What trade you learnin', boy?"

"I'm not your boy," Parker said; then he hesitated, looking around at the group. "If everything goes all right I'm going to law school next year."

The old man smiled. "I'll bet you're going to be one of them big lawyers for the NAACP, ain't you?"

"That might be exactly where I'll go to work," Parker said. "Then I could make sure the Negroes get into school to show up your kids, if any of them go to school."

"Oh, I guess a couple of them made it," the old man said. "But you ain't gonna get ahold of 'em. I keep 'em in a school down South where they ain't never heard of no integration. Of course, you could go down and tell 'em."

"What are you afraid of?" Parker said. "Your kids are

smarter than Negroes, aren't they? Or are you afraid some of the black will rub off on them?"

"That could be," the carpenter said, "but I ain't aiming to find out. My kids ain't goin' to school with no niggers. But there ain't no need for you to get all excited about it, boy." He peered down at Parker's feet for a moment, then spit a load of brown juice squarely between them. "I got to get me a drink," he said. He turned and trudged slowly up the berm to the water can, and Parker was left standing alone as the rest of the men got up to go back to work.

Parker returned to digging post-holes by himself in the afternoon. The joints of his hands were getting tighter and his back was stiff and sweating, but he kept at it continuously, taking only brief periods of rest to wipe the sweat from his face and forehead. He thought about the noontime incident for a while and wished it hadn't happened. His anger stayed with him for a while but gradually his thoughts became mellow and drifted back to college.

By three o'clock he had dug all of the holes they had marked for him except the last.

He was cleaning out the next to the last hole when Pete, the old carpenter, came sliding down the berm. "Boy," he said, "you work too hard at it." He took the diggers from Parker and started on the last hole with smooth, cutting strokes. It didn't seem that he was working fast, but the hole was soon finished and it looked perfectly round. Pete took out a

red bandanna and brushed the sweat from his brow as he leaned on the sticks. "Nigger taught me how to do that one time," he said and looked up at Parker, who didn't answer him. "Come on, college boy," Pete said, "I need me an assistant this afternoon, and the foreman told me to fetch you."

"I'm not a boy," Parker said.

"OK, then, college," Pete said. "I still need me an assistant." Parker followed the carpenter up the berm and spent the rest of the afternoon helping him. They worked in silence.

When Parker went to work the next morning he was surprised to learn he would be working with the carpenter full time until time for laying the steel and pouring the concrete. He worked alone with the old man every afternoon, but sometimes in the mornings he went down below the bridge and stacked lumber with the other laborers while his thoughts wandered away from the work.

The afternoons were hot and lasted six hours until six-thirty. Whenever Parker caught up on his work he would wander over to the water can at the edge of the berm and sit and drink for as long as he could and hope that somehow it would be quitting time. By fifteen minutes after six there were usually ten or fifteen men there waiting for the foreman to say it was time to pick up the tools. Parker liked to eat the ice that was left over at the end of the day, but sometimes he would just sit and hold the ice and let it melt and cool his hands.

Parker and the carpenter worked out the week together. Occasionally the old man would ask him something about someone in town, but Parker would always answer with a single word or mumble something incoherently. They remained that way until Saturday morning.

The carpenter asked Parker to bring him something. When Parker didn't move the old man repeated his request. "Boy," he said, "I asked you to fetch me my nigger riggin'."

"I don't know what that is," Parker said.

"Boy, you remember that nigger riggin' I made up yesterday. It's in the tool shack."

"You mean those two boards you nailed together like a square?"

"That's right," the old man said. "Maybe I should've said colored apparatus for you."

Parker didn't answer him. He went to the shack and returned with the two pieces of wood.

"I don't see why it has to be a nigger riggin'," he said.

"It don't make no difference what you call it," the carpenter said. "I don't know why it's a nigger riggin' either. But whenever you ain't got something that you need and it don't look like you're going to be able to get it, you rig something up and you call it a nigger riggin'. You could call it a Negro riggin' I suppose, but it ain't got quite the same ring."

"I'll just call it two pieces of wood."

"OK," Pete said, "but the next

time it might not be two pieces of wood."

"I guess I'll have to adjust to that when the time comes," Parker said.

The carpenter squinted up at Parker and flashed his brown teeth. "Boy," he said, "there ain't nothing wrong with saying nigger. It's just a word. You don't call a chigger a chegro, do you?"

Parker didn't answer.

"You could say," Pete continued, "'I just believe in calling a spade a spade.'" The old man grinned and bared his dark teeth again, and Parker wanted to bite into something, hard.

That afternoon was the hottest of the week. The sun pounded at Parker and pulled sweat from his pores in huge, warm globules of moisture. The heat invaded his body and mixed with his anger so that he felt like leaping into his work, but fatigue gradually overcame him as the afternoon wore on. The last fifteen minutes of the day he stood by the water can and watched the others pick up the tools. Pete spoke to him as they were leaving.

"Boy, you driving out here by yourself?" he asked.

"Yes," Parker said. "Why?"

"I was thinking," Pete said. "There ain't no use in you doin' that. I share rides with a couple of boys staying in town. We could use a fourth. Of course, it'd be your turn next week, but we take turns. You want to do it?"

"I don't care," Parker said. "I guess I could do it. But if you're

willing to ride with me you must not think I'm a boy."

"I ain't too sure about that," Pete said. "You sure are particular about certain words, ain't cha?"

Parker carried lumber that next week for the nailers under the bridge. This was the work he liked best because his thoughts drifted away from the job completely. In the afternoons he helped the old carpenter, but in the mornings he was lost in his daydreams by eight-thirty.

The best dream he had was the Negro murder trial. He had started it several times but he was always interrupted by someone or something and would have difficulty getting back into it. But one morning he had no interruptions, and his mind picked him up and carried him away from the road where he was carrying the lumber into the sleepy, little Southern town where he had somehow started his practice.

No one else would take the case except the young lawyer from the Midwest. It was the usual case of an uneducated Negro being accused of a murder, although he fiercely denied it. It was a battle from the start because the first thing the young lawyer did was insist on a Negro jurymen.

The Southern prosecuting attorney had his face stuck next to Parker's. He argued hot and heavy over the potential juror. Several times Parker had to insist that the district attorney refer to the gentleman as a Negro, not a nigger, and the judge reluctantly agreed. Parker liked to watch the prose-

cutor's face grimace when he said the word.

The Southern attorney argued that the Negro was innately inferior to the white and thereby not qualified to serve with the other jury members. Parker argued that if this were so, the Negro defendant was entitled to an all-Negro jury, since the accused was supposed to have a jury of his peers. They finally compromised by admitting one Negro to the jury.

Some of the Northern newspapers got ahold of the story, and soon everyone was aware of the battle in the hot, dusky courtroom. Reporters were jammed in for the first Southern trial of the century with a Negro jury member.

The trial itself was a madhouse. Parker had several Negro witnesses and each time the DA cross-examined, Parker made him call the man "Mr." or "Sir." The prosecutor hated it, and Parker could see eleven members of the jury did too, but he jammed it down their throats. When Parker made his final plea he looked them straight in the eyes and used the word Negro several times and watched them wince.

The hung jury was really an anti-climax for him. They appealed of course, and the case was carried all the way to the Supreme Court but somehow Parker lost track of it in the publicity, and the next thing he knew he was in Chicago on another case, this one involving a housing dispute. Parker succeeded in putting a Negro family in every other house,

then watched their white neighbors squirm.

Traveling on to New York, he started to get involved in the Puerto Rican problem in the Bronx, but before he could solve it he moved on to other cities and soon was making speeches about equality before large audiences. Occasionally he went down South and jammed it down their throats again, but he couldn't stop moving and soon he was back on the road with a 2 by 6 in his hand.

Someone told him that they had enough braces for now so he went up on top to the water can. He stood by the can drinking slowly and tried to get back into his dream again, but he had used it all up. He realized, too, that the Scottsboro trial had been a long time ago.

He started carrying floor joists out over the big timbers of the bridge, and he had to concentrate on maintaining his balance or fall the fifty feet to the road below. The old carpenter was nailing the boards together, and he told Parker to watch where he was walking and not to look down at the ground.

On the next Monday they ran out of joists, so Parker and three other workers had to go down below the bridge to get some more. When the foreman took the three men for another job Parker was left by himself to load the truck with the lumber. He decided to go above to see if he could find some help. When he got to the water can he saw the old car-



penter. "Is it time to pick up the tools yet?" he said.

Pete looked at him and spit some tobacco on the ground. "Why, boy, it ain't even three o'clock yet. What are you talking about?"

"Well, I'm ready to quit," Parker said. "It isn't much fun loading those eighteen footers."

"Why it is too," the carpenter said. "Where's your help?"

"They left."

"Left? Then you've been loading the truck by yourself."

"I wouldn't say that, but I've been trying."

"That was nice. Leaving you there by yourself. Well, I guess we'll have to get 'em up here ourselves. Come on, boy."

Parker slid down the berm behind Pete. With both of them handling one end of the long boards they soon had the truck loaded. Parker was going back for another piece when Pete stopped him. "We've got 25 of 'em," he said. "That's all we needed when I counted 'em a little while ago." He paused and wiped the sweat from his face. "You like to work too hard, boy. Of course, that's why I picked you."

"What do you mean, 'picked me?'" Parker said.

"Why that afternoon I seen you diggin' them postholes. You didn't know nothin' about it, but I liked the way you was tryin'." He winked at Parker. "I told the foreman you was goin' to be my assistant." Parker couldn't think of anything to say.

They used the lumber on the other side of the bridge. On Pete's

side the joists were already nailed together, so Parker started carrying plywood out on the deck with some other workers. Sometimes he would stop for a rest and ask Pete, "Is it time to pick up the tools?" Pete would smile and shake his head and spit some tobacco juice between the joists all the way to the ground below the bridge.

After the plywood had been nailed they tied steel until Friday, when they poured the concrete. Parker worked as a shoveler in front of the giant screed that chugged across the bridge and leveled off the wet, gray mud. On Saturday they started cleaning up the mess left over from the day before. Two men watered down the burlap that covered the fresh concrete but it became obvious that this was unnecessary. It had started to sprinkle, and dark clouds indicated prolonged rain. The foreman was finally forced to turn them loose.

"Well, I guess we can all go to town and have a beer," someone said, and the chance remark had started a chain reaction among them. It was soon decided that the whole crew would go for a beer together. It was something different, and even some of the older ones were caught up in the excitement of getting an unexpected holiday and drinking in the middle of the day.

The entire crew jammed its way into the small beer joint at the edge of town. There were other construction workers there who had been rained out too, and the tavern was bouncing with the beat

of the juke box and clamor of the workers. Parker was squeezed into a booth next to the window with the old carpenter and two others.

Pete bought a round, then someone else bought one. When they had started on the second Pete stubbed out his short cigarette and said, "Well, this is my last. The old lady don't think I'm home enough as is. I'll be here later than the regular quittin' time if I drink any more."

"Is your wife up here?" Parker asked.

"Why, no, boy," Pete said, "I just keep that big trailer house for myself. I don't like to feel squeezed in."

"Okay," Parker said. "Are your kids up here too?"

"Yeah, they're up here now, but they won't be much longer. They're goin' back home with the old lady in August. They got to go back to school."

"They've got schools in Kansas," Parker said.

"They've got niggers too," Pete said. "And they let 'em in the same schools."

"Afraid of the competition, huh?" Parker said.

"Boy, let's not go through that again. Black and white just wasn't meant to mix, that's all. If the good Lord would have wanted everybody the same color he'd have made 'em that way."

"How do you know that the good Lord didn't want black and white to mix and make a tan race?"

"If God would have wanted everybody to be tan he'd have done

it that way in the first place and stopped all this trouble, wouldn't he? No, there's supposed to be two races."

"Three," Parker said.

"Well, however many it is, I'm doin' my part to keep it that way." The old man tipped up his beer and swallowed it with quick, loud gulps until he had drained the can. Two small drops of liquid ran from the edges of his mouth down to the sides of his chin. He wiped the beer away with the back of his hand and turned his brown eyes on Parker.

"I don't care where your kids go to school," he said. "If you can find a school with ninety-nine niggers put 'em in there, I don't care. I'll put mine in the other." He paused and fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco. When he had the plug set in his cheek he got up to leave. "You boys can stay if you want," he said, "but I got to get home." He turned and ambled towards the back to the rest room.

Parker noticed that Pete had left his old, tin cigarette lighter on the table. He picked it up and noticed the warmth it gave his hand that had been holding the cold can of beer. He grabbed the old carpenter by the arm when he came back through and said, "You forgot something." He placed the lighter quickly into the old man's palm, but just for an instant he felt the strange touch of the old man's rough skin beneath his own fingertips, and he looked quickly away from him.

He rejoined the other two work-

ers. The three of them each bought another round, and the conversation became loud and excited. Parker joined in it for a while but he soon tired of trying to make himself heard above the constant din. He left his last beer unfinished and leaned back and let himself be caught up in the mood of the workers without trying to hear what was being said. He didn't drift off into his world of daydreams but remained in that kind of euphoria between wakefulness and dreaming. Sometimes he would hear a shouted word or curse, but none of it seemed very important to him.

He lay his head back against the hard wooden back of the booth and turned so he could see out the window. The men in his booth were talking of bridges and wages and drinking, but he paid no attention. He had lost his earlier ebullience that had kept him in the conversation. He noticed it was still raining and he felt only like watching the drops of rain slide down across the windowpane and down until they reached the sill and he could no longer see them.

When it stopped raining, it was nearly sundown. The beer cans in front of Parker had grown warm, and suddenly he realized how long he had been sitting there. The two workers had left together, so he had to walk home. Outside the air was fresh with the clean smell of rain. Parker walked down the middle of the street towards his home with the sun's warmth sinking into his back.

In front of him his lean, long shadow stepped along. His head was clear now, and he amused himself by watching the form stretch out in front of him. Then his mind drifted back to his afternoon. He walked along pensively, but suddenly he stopped in the middle of the road and kicked viciously at an old can lying there.

The day's rain had been just what they needed to cure the concrete, but it had made the next week the hottest and sultriest of the summer. Parker was lucky enough to be working under the new bridge tearing down braces from the piling. He worked there for two days and had time to dream but thought only of how many hours it was until quitting time.

On the third afternoon they called him up to the bridge to help run the guard rail. There was another laborer pushing one of the two wheelbarrows from the cement truck to the other end of the bridge when Parker got there. The cart left for Parker was the old one that had fallen off a truck and had its right wheel bent. He found it was hard to balance, but he made his trip all right. The old carpenter was in charge of the finishers working on the rail. When Parker arrived with his first load the old man said, "Are you sure you can handle it all right? It's a tricky bastard till you catch onto it."

"I'm OK," Parker said. He held the cart up so the shovelers could get bigger scoops of the concrete.

On Parker's second trip the

truck driver had given him too full a load. He had trouble with it from the beginning, and when he tried to swerve to miss a block of wood the cart tipped over, spilling the concrete over the burlap that covered the bridge.

The next thing Parker knew the old carpenter was standing beside him with a shovel in his hand. "Get yourself a shovel, boy," he said, "and I'll help you shovel it back in."

It could have been the fact that Parker was embarrassed about spilling the concrete that made him resent the carpenter's presence. But there was something in the sight of the old man's brown smile that made him remember why he didn't like to hear "boy," and that was the thing that galvanized him into action.

He took the shovel away from the carpenter. Then he started scooping the concrete back into the cart. He rammed the scoop into the pile and strained his arms hard as he pulled the scoops up and to his left behind him into the wheelbarrow. His legs were spread wide with his back bent low, and he worked faster now, with the sound of the scoop slicing

into the mud creating a rhythm that went with his thought: I'd almost forgotten.

Beads of sweat popped onto his brow as he continued to shovel away at himself and at all of them. The sweat ran down over his eyebrows and nose and some of it got into his eyes and made him wince, but he couldn't let up. But what if I'd been *black*, he thought, and the thought made him lunge with a new fury at himself and at them. His back and chest were soaking and his arms felt like kinked rope, but he continued to punish them with long, driving thrusts into the concrete. He kept shoveling away at them, and he tried to shovel away at the old carpenter too, but his scoop was clanging into the bridge where it cut through the burlap. He knew it was no use any longer.

He stood slightly bent over with both hands wrapped around the shovel handle where it pushed up into his stomach. He was breathing heavily and his legs felt weak, but his mind was lucid, and he knew he had sweated out the last upsurge of his hate.

He turned towards the old carpenter and handed him the shovel.

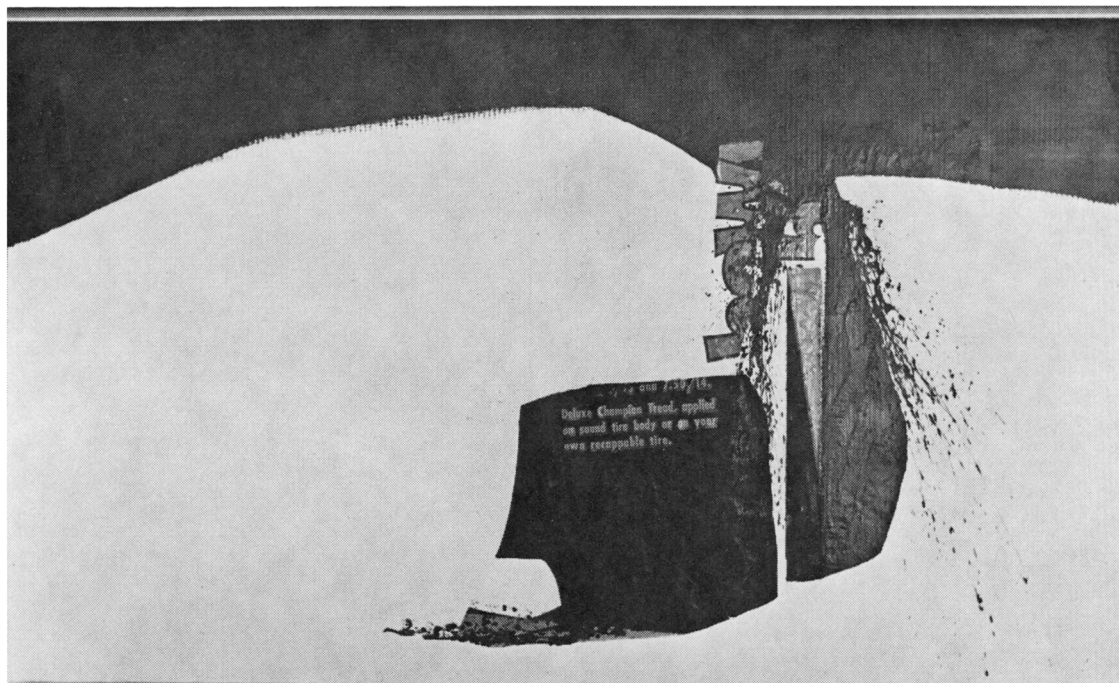
a poem

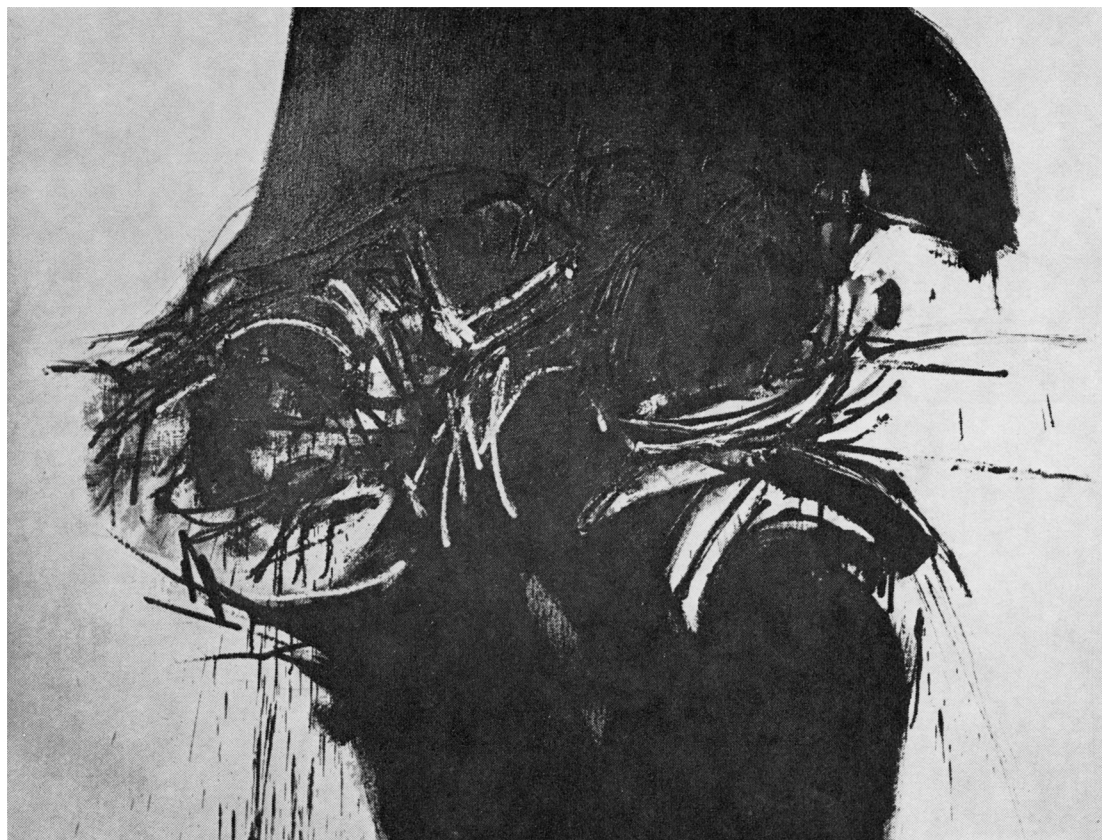
HJOHNSANDERS

The incessant search for metaphor,
The unalive mining of burning-itself-out consciousness—

Where does one stick a pick in,
That the shelved-in self's,
Burning black gold,
Burst not bounds into tarry
Life-choking, heap of merging conflagration?

Samson in coal-dark, the smoke-red mind,
Bringing the house down
May serve the I better
Than all the smoke-containing, fire-choking,
Explodent-compressing,
Scrubbed beams and planks
Shoring the self's rich energies
Around the skeleton-white emptiness
Of my, your, normal well-adjusted egos.





void

LYNN PARSONS

The lips feel a kiss,
The waist, a pair of arms,
The soul stands off and watches.

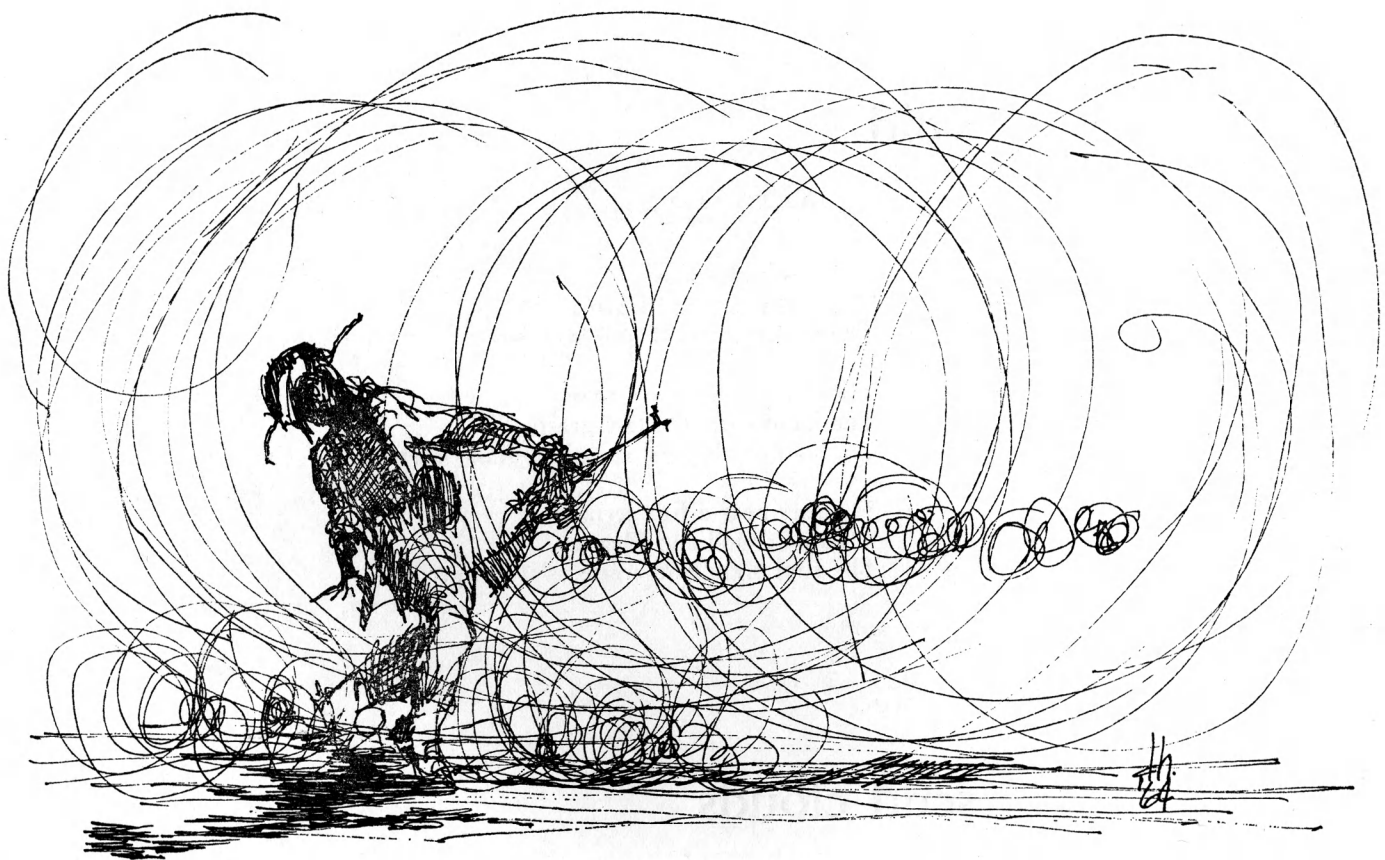
The eyes see a dying man,
The hand feels the last grasp,
The soul sits behind the plate glass observing.

The ears hear a fine sermon
All about God and Heaven,
The soul sighs and inspects its fingernails.

scud clouds

PAT HOOK

A thousand gray clouds blowing
 blowing ragged
 torn from blowing
over the ice sharp edges of December sky
 flags of the winter wind
 flown ragged
high and far away



the wall

JAMES ANGLE

Walking through the deserted campus, Charlie felt the autumn chill become more biting as the sun set. He shivered and pulled the army field jacket closer around his body. His pace quickened, and soon he was moving with a rapid, almost jerky stride. His body was bent forward, and his eyes searched the ground ahead of him. It had been a fine, cloudless day, and the warmth of the midday sunlight had almost made him forget that it was late October and the Michigan winter would soon begin. He shivered again as he thought of the bitter, numbing cold to come.

As he reached the street that marked the edge of the campus, Charlie saw dead leaves swirling in the gutter, moved by a sudden gust of wind. The wind became a steady force against his back, and he turned up his collar and ducked his head, trying to escape the cold air. He began to walk even faster, and the abruptness of his movements became more pronounced.

He hurried on until he came to a small commercial district not far from the campus, then his pace slowed. He stopped in front of a drugstore and stood for a moment, undecided. Then he muttered, "What the hell," and entered the building. He stopped for a mo-

ment in front of a paperback bookstand near the door, and his glance moved impatiently from title to title. Then he shrugged, turned, and walked toward the back of the store.

The clerk behind the counter looked up from his ledger book and saw Charlie. "What do you say, Evans? How you doing?"

"All right, I guess. How about you?" Charlie forced himself to smile.

"Oh, fine, just fine." The clerk leaned forward, his hands on the counter, his hairy, fleshy arms rigid. The glare from an unshaded overhead light was reflected by the man's bald forehead. The reflection caught Charlie's eye, and for a moment his mind was emptied of everything but the gleaming, blank surface.

The clerk said something that Charlie did not hear, and he shook his head, trying to force down a familiar feeling of panic that had seized him. "Sorry, what did you say?"

"Man, you're really off someplace tonight. Too much studying, huh? I said it's starting to get cold at night. Winter's almost here, I guess."

The panic controlled now, Charlie said, "Yeah, I guess it is."

"What'll it be, the usual?"

Charlie nodded, and the clerk turned to the display case behind him, reaching for a fifth of bourbon. As he slipped the bottle into a paper bag and rang up the total on the cash register, he said, "Don't see how you drink this cheap stuff. It'd make me sicker than a dog."

Charlie laughed once, a short, sharp exhalation through his nostrils. "Just practice, that's all."

"Yeah, you get enough of that, all right. Must be about my best customer."

As the clerk handed him the bottle and his change, Charlie forced a smile again but did not answer. Then he turned and hurried toward the front door, the bottle tucked under his arm. He had almost reached the front of the store when the clerk called after him. "Take it easy, Evans. See you later."

The last of the daylight was gone now, and as the door closed behind him Charlie sighed and relaxed slightly, glad to be out of the brightly lighted store and away from the clerk. Then he noticed that the air seemed even colder than before, and he hurried down the street, his head pulled down into his upturned collar.

A few minutes later he reached a two-story frame building that had been converted into an apartment house. Without breaking stride he turned from the sidewalk and cut across the sparse, dead grass of the lawn toward the back of the building. At the door of his basement apartment he fumbled with his keys. His hands were cold and shaking slightly, and he

could not find the right key immediately. Suddenly his patience broke. "God damn it!" he said. Then, finding the key, he laughed with that same abrupt, almost barking sound that had passed for a laugh earlier, in the drugstore.

Inside the apartment he turned on a dim, shaded lamp in one corner, removed his jacket, and tossed it on the unmade bed. Then he hurried to the kitchen alcove with the bottle. There was barely room enough to open the door of the dented and scratched refrigerator in the corner of the room, but Charlie moved with practiced ease in the cramped space as he fixed a drink. While busy with his task, his concentration was complete, and his body, released from his mind, moved with a grace that was quite different from the jerky, forced stride that had characterized his walk a few minutes earlier.

A full glass in his hand, Charlie turned, leaned against the half-partition that separated the kitchen area from the rest of the apartment, and looked out over the one large room in which he lived. The tension was still absent from his body, and the vertical frown lines between his eyebrows, usually prominent, were slightly softened. However, as his eyes moved over the room and its contents, the lines deepened, and his posture became more rigid. His gaze rested for a moment on the rumpled bed, then ranged to the bookcase made of bricks and unpainted boards. Next he looked at the gray walls, with their slightly peeling paint, and

the dark blue overstuffed chair and its misshapen, lumpy cushion. He swirled the ice in his glass, then drank. "Empty," he said. "This place is empty."

He moved impatiently to the bookcase, picked up a geology text, and leafed through the first few pages. He read a paragraph, but the words seemed remote, unreal. Finally he tossed the text back on the shelf, where it hit another book. Both volumes fell to the floor, but Charlie made no move to pick them up. Staring for a moment at the impersonal covers of the books, he thought of the lecture halls that went with them, the brightly lighted auditoriums filled with the rustle of notebook paper and the dry drone of the lecturers' voices.

He felt the panic move in his chest again, and he drained his glass. Then he laughed. "Just too damned old to be a student, that's all." The evening cold seemed to Charlie to be invading the room, making the basement apartment chill and damp. He shivered and turned to mix another drink.

Later, Charlie sat in the overstuffed chair in the darkest corner of the room. A large mixing bowl sat on the floor beside the chair, partially filled with cloudy water and the remnants of ice cubes. The bourbon bottle, half empty now, had been placed beside the bowl. On a small, scuffed table beside the chair was a radio that was tuned to an FM station. The reception seemed bad to Charlie. He reached for the dial and carefully made a minor adjustment,

but it did not help. The music sounded disembodied to him, mechanical and remote. As the record came to an end and the music was replaced by the voice of an announcer, Charlie felt the panic in his chest. To him there was something horrible about the voice of the unseen announcer cheerfully addressing the empty air. Abruptly he reached over and twisted the dial, cutting off the forced cheerfulness of the voice. Speaking aloud in the empty room, Charlie said, "How in hell does he know there's anybody listening? How does he know he's not just talking to nothing?"

He picked up his wet glass, and it slipped halfway through his fingers. Diluted bourbon splashed on the arm of the chair. "Damn," he muttered. He finished the drink and pushed himself out of the chair, lurching slightly. Then he walked with exaggerated care to the kitchen alcove and reached for a towel.

As he turned with the towel in his hand, Charlie thought he heard a voice. He started, then laughed his barking laugh. "Radio. Didn't get it turned off." He recrossed the room and reached for the dial, but the radio was not on. In one continuous motion he threw himself into the chair and reached for the bottle. His hands shook as he poured liquor into the glass, and sweat began to form on his forehead. A pleading note came into his voice as he said, "No. No, not again." But his memory would not be blocked, and he was no longer in the safe, dim apartment.

A harsh, bright light illuminated the lecture hall. It was the first day of classes, and seats were being assigned. As the first few names on the roll were called, the panic mounted in him. Finally he heard it. "Evans. Evans. Mr. Evans." The glare from the overhead light was reflected by the glasses of the man on the raised platform as he leaned forward. Charlie could not see his eyes. The voice kept repeating, "Evans, Mr. Evans," but Charlie could not answer.

He was leaning forward in the overstuffed chair, his arms clutching his knees. His body rocked back and forth in time with his rapid, shallow breathing. Under his rumpled clothing he could feel sweat form, chilling him. Charlie forced himself to sit upright, then he picked up the glass from the table with both hands and drank until it was empty.

After putting the glass back on the table, he stood. Then he hurried across the room to the telephone, running into the telephone stand in his haste. He caught the instrument as it teetered on the edge of the stand, lifted the receiver, and began to dial feverishly. As he waited, listening to the repeated ringing, he nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

Finally the ringing stopped and was replaced by a sleepy, irritated voice. Charlie responded to this voice, saying, "Jeanie? Hi, baby, this is Charlie, Charlie Evans." He rushed on, not giving her a chance to answer. "Just thought I'd give

you a ring and see how everything's going. I mean, I was just sitting here, and I got to thinking about you, and . . ." His voice went on, and Charlie was powerless to stop it. He was talking faster and faster, and his words were running together and becoming unintelligible.

Finally the woman interrupted him, her voice sounding metallic and distorted. "Charlie, what are you talking about? Are you drunk again? What do you want, anyway?"

He laughed the short, barking laugh and said, "Oh, like I said, I was just sitting here, and I happened to think that I hadn't seen you in a while. Just wondering if you wanted to come over. Thought we might have a few laughs, that's all."

"Charlie, it's after midnight. You must be nuts or something. I'm not going over to that apartment of yours at this time of night. I have to get up in the morning. Get to bed and sleep it off."

Charlie heard a click and then the dial tone. He stared at the receiver for a moment, then carefully replaced it in the cradle. He stood, his arms hanging limply at his sides and his eyes staring unseeingly at the peeling paint on the wall. Then he sighed, reached for the telephone, and dialed another number.

He waited for the answer at the other end of the line, then he said quietly, "Ann, this is Charlie. Can you come over? It's important." He listened for a few moments,

then said, "Thanks, Ann. I'll be looking for you."

Then he replaced the receiver, walked back to the chair, and sat. He picked up the empty glass and began to roll it slowly between his palms as he waited.

A whispering voice called to him, and Charlie strained forward to hear the words, his numbed body tensing on the frozen ground. "Let's go, Evans. Got to move now. Come on, let's roll it." The speaker's shadow loomed up to the left. Charlie stood, his legs shaking from exhaustion and the cold, and followed the indistinct form of the sergeant. Suddenly the winter night was cut by a wall of harsh, white light and the crackle of automatic rifle fire.

Charlie dropped to the ground, the knuckles of his left hand, which clutched the rifle barrel, striking the rough, frozen mud painfully. He saw the sergeant, distinct now in the glare of the searchlight, stumble and fall heavily to the ground. The sound of firing ceased, and the light went off, leaving the Korean night untouched, unchanged. Charlie heard a voice, his own, calling, "Williams? Williams? You OK, Williams?"

Charlie stirred in the chair, rocking forward and clasping his arms around his knees again. In a part of his mind he knew that the worst was over now, that the rest should be easier, but the panic had grown so big in his chest that he was barely able to breathe. As he straightened in the chair and tried to draw air deeply into his lungs,

he unconsciously rubbed the knuckles of his left hand against the arm of the chair.

The white glare was even more intense now, and Charlie had to squint to see the form bending above him. Although something was covering him, the cold was worse, and his body was shaking uncontrollably. As the form bent nearer, an arm, grotesquely bulky in the winter clothing, was stretched toward him. The hand touched his forehead, and Charlie tried to jerk away. Then he saw the Red Cross arm band. As the face came nearer, he could see the dark circles of fatigue under the medic's eyes.

A voice behind the medic said, "How's this one?"

The medic turned toward the voice, and Charlie heard him say, "He's OK. Just shock. What's next?"

"Wait a minute. What's his name?"

"Evans. I already got the tag made out. Let's hurry up and get this bunch loaded."

Charlie's body rocked back and forth in the chair. The movement was accompanied by the ragged, gasping sound of his breathing.

He stood rigidly beside the steel army cot, staring at the second button of the captain's coat. The button shone so brightly that he could see a distorted image of himself in it. "Evans, your foot locker is messy. Do you understand, Evans? Messy."

"Yes sir," Charlie said, and he raised his gaze to see the same dis-

torted image repeated in the dead, impersonal eyes.

When the knock sounded at the door, he was making the short, barklike noise every few moments. It sounded like his laugh, but his head was thrown back and his eyes were tightly closed. The tendons of his neck stood out, and his fists repeatedly clenched and unclenched.

Hearing the knock, Charlie threw himself out of the chair, stumbled, then almost ran to the door. He fumbled with the night lock, and when he finally succeeded in opening the door he seized the girl by the shoulders and drew her into the room. He pulled her convulsively to him, feeling the reassuring pressure of her breasts against his chest. "My God, I'm glad you're here."

She pulled back from him, startled. "What is it, Charlie? What's the matter?" Then, looking around the room, she saw the chair and the area around it. "Charlie, you're drunk." She pulled back even more, turning as if to go.

He drew himself up and stood rigidly for a moment, his eyes closed. Then he laughed, making the same short, sharp sound. "Well, maybe a little, I guess. But it's all right. Don't worry. I'm all right." He moved toward her, saying, "Come on, sit down. I'll take your coat. You want a drink?" She shook her head and let him take her coat, which he immediately draped over a kitchen chair. He took her hand and led her further into the room, still talking. "You

know how it is, sometimes you get lonely, that's all. I just suddenly decided I'd like to see you, you know?"

As they sat down on the edge of the bed, she said, "Fine, Charlie, I'm glad you called me. You know I always like to see you. But what's wrong? I don't understand. What's bothering you?"

Charlie drew his feet up, leaned forward, and clasped his knees. "Oh, it's nothing to worry about. I'm just a little jumpy and depressed, that's all." Abruptly he straightened and set his feet on the floor. "You sure you don't want a drink?"

"No, I don't think so. Are you going to have another?" She hesitated, glancing at him nervously. "I mean, you've had quite a bit."

"No, what the hell, I don't need it." His lips drew back in a tight smile. "You're here to keep me company." He stopped smiling, thought for a moment, then said, "Oh hell, I shouldn't have pulled you into this. It's not your problem."

She shook her head, and the long, dark brown hair swayed. "I'm glad you called, Charlie. I'll try to help, if you'll just tell me what's wrong."

He sighed, and his shoulders slumped. Then he put his arm around her waist. "Ah, Ann baby, I'm glad you came. It's all right now. No problem now." He drew her closer, and she lowered her head to his shoulder.

They sat quietly for a while, then Charlie began to tap his foot

restlessly. Finally he shrugged and said, "I need a drink."

He started to rise, but she pulled him back. "Please stay here, Charlie. Don't drink any more." She placed her hand on his cheek, turned his head toward her, and kissed him. They stretched out together on the bed, and in a few moments he began to stroke her breasts, his hand shaking.

Lying against him, she put her arms around his neck, but when he started to loosen her clothing, she pushed him away and said, "Oh no, Charlie, don't. I promised myself it wouldn't happen again."

But he continued to stroke her, saying, "Ah, Ann, Ann. It's all right. It's all right now."

He helped her to undress, his movements becoming almost frantic. After quickly pulling off his own clothes, he lay beside her, holding her tightly against him. He felt the panic rising again, but he tried to force himself to relax. He stroked her smooth, young, unmarked body for a long time, but it was futile. She was breathing heavily and trying to pull him closer, but he felt no correspond-

ing passion. Finally he fell away from her, exhausted.

Raising herself on one elbow, Ann put her other hand on his chest. "What's wrong, Charlie? What's the matter?"

In the dim light he could see tears starting to form in the corners of her eyes. He said, "It's no use. No use. I can't do it." His voice sounded unreal, muffled in his own ears.

"What's wrong? I don't understand. What's happened to you?" The tears were running down her face now.

In the same dead, dull voice, Charlie heard himself saying, "Just too much whiskey, that's all."

"That's not it. There's something else. Tell me what it is. Please tell me." But he was not able to answer her.

She was sobbing now, and Charlie held her, feeling the soft pressure of her young breasts. Her face was against his shoulder, and he could feel the warmth of her tears on his flesh. He stroked her back, saying, "It's all right, it's all right." In his mind the cold, opaque glare began to rise again, like a wall.



birth beginning

REBECCA BOOSTROM

dark
seed
quick
slowly
form
forming
infinities combine
infinitesimal differences
identify
identical
love
loveless
or loving
matters not
matter
forming
labor
ending
movement
beginning
ending
instinctively

finite bodhisattvas (a parable)

BERNARD R. McDONALD

Evolving from a womb of sun and carbon, a simple race, a quiet race, growing wise and great and gently powerful, journeyed from planet to planet, from star-system to twinkling star-system, and kissed both the heavens and the earths. Old, diffused, and multiplying its potential, this species escaped the binding prisons of body and form; and, reborn in this awesome metamorphosis to freedom, thus also achieved the goodness, the kindness, the beauty fused from aged maturity, from compassion and love. And, curiously, this quiet race called itself by an odd, uncomplex name . . . Man.

They walked planets' surfaces alone, differentiated, and proud. And sometimes, when the time was right, they would visit those most dear to them, those they loved . . .

. . . the void entered upon him and bathed him and clothed him and balméd his aching torso and spewed him forward. It aligned the pulsing fibers in his veins; it kindled the bubbling essence of his cortex; it excited the driving libido brawn. And he, the tiny bowled fish, swam through it.

He was transcending and the great void existed as the eternal escalator, a perpetual carrier of

throbbing mind - force. He squatted on its river and it carried him and he was like the leafless twig cast upon rapids, upon un-oiled frothing waters of nomena to phenomena, buoyed and lifted and borne on to extinction.

And then . . . he desired to halt . . . and the void ended. The black cradle opened and he gently stood upon a star-system. The great leap completed, he walked now in a new complex of star and planets. He hovered. He gazed ahead. The new ordered system, the great star-planet quilt, dangled on elliptical wires before him, waiting impatiently for someone to beat the dust from its seams. Resembling some drunken orange in a bowl of black fruit, the sun swayed and danced in the middle. The worlds drifted around it, caressing its hot feet. And lo, ever so quietly, he walked upon this system.

This cosmic collection, this vast-small checkerboard of mother-star and children, was the home and bed of his brother, was where his brother once had traveled and where he now dwelled. He had searched long for his brother and now he sensed his nearness and the anticipation was a spongy warming radiance, a growing and swelling within him.

Ah, reunion. Then a joke, a



laugh, a smile arising from recalled memories!

He was happy. A loving lost-brother was nearly found. And the love between them was soft fragrant strength, a strength enjoyed by that which is new and good and lasting.

He hurried. Scurrying past the dead worlds, past the frozen ice-worlds, past the gigantic gaseous worlds, he swept toward the inner system, the home of the life-possessing tiny planets . . . small green-brown-blue living globes. And finally, he arrived at the planet third from that sun—a small world clothed in ocean and peaked mountain and green prairie. And the sun shone on this planet and lighted it and it was truly beautiful.

Here the smell of his brother was strong. The odor tickled him and his sinews twitched, his nerves leaped, his excited body quivered and shimmered.

He was happy. The warm glow came alive and cleansed and walked within him. He recalled the distant misty memories of youth and children's play, of his brother and he strolling together through the heavens. Oh, how they had skipped among the stars and laughingly hidden themselves and chased the exploding suns! He remembered. He was happy.

He looked at the planet. He knew his brother was there. He flew quickly. Entering the denser atmosphere of the planet, he transformed his body and warped his structure, assuming the guise of a great white bird with silver wings

and blue-kind eyes. And as the great bird, he descended slowly in ever-broadening spirals, severing summer skies. The other birds, seeing this ghostly interloper, grew afraid and fled and he was again alone. He beheld the oceans and tasted the mountains and drank the wastes and studied the creatures of the world.

Lower, and lower, and finally, he beheld a city amid cities, a tiring collection of mud cubes and brick molds and stone edifices, sleeping and squatting haphazardly, suggestive of the discarded, scattered building-blocks belonging to some giant half-mad child. And the city, washed with baking sunlight, sprawled between desert and fertile field and mountain.

His myriad senses twinkled. His bird-body erupted, sparkling with minute explosions. His brother was near! Oh, hurry!

Yet, . . . he held back, hovering, puzzling.

His senses, questioning descent into the city, halted him.

Quiescent, flaunting peace and limp tranquillity, the city enjoyed a sleepy mid-day rest. Yet, he hesitated. Wary. Unsure. He felt fear. He dissolved and reformed, lifted himself and spread his wings and spiraled.

And finally he descended.

Lower, lower.

His feathered body kissed the winds.

Lower, lower . . .

AND SUDDENLY . . . OH . . . suddenly, the unexpected, the by-product of fear and malignant envy, *that* single intangible so

deadly and sickening to his sensitive race—*hatred*—terrible hatred rose, welcomed, and caressed.

They collided high in the dry air, the unexpected bird and the hungry emotion. And the ominous, that wildly intangible hate gushed at him, flowing over his wings, smothering his legs and head and body, tearing, ripping at his brain. Pain! Daggered fists and liquid flame caged him. He staggered and collapsed, casting away existence and passing into nothingness. Pain, terrible pain . . . and hate . . . like hate he'd never known. His brother was near and his brother was hated and his brother was dying! And that hate, channeling toward his brother, whipped him high in those heavens. He wept.

His walls, his mental defenses, vomited into substance, like bulwarks, thousands of steel jaws snapped the flooding energy. Hate eddied and danced and swirled around him. He was engulfed in the very essence of its strength—a hapless ant tumbling into the dynamo. Frantically he leaped upward, backward, landing instantly on the planet's single moon.

The surging forces dissolved, leaving him in vacuum. He was weak and he wept. He wept and cried, "Brother!" and lay in the dust.

He lay and rested in the milk dust of the moon's craters and mended his body, healed his open wounds. His mind was panic. Hate was a killer of his race. Yet, his mind yearned for his brother.

And his body was pain. Fear and love.

"Brother?" he whispered.

Gathering his strength, groaning, lifting, he rose to search. He divided his lower body into a thousand unconnected portions and sent them scurrying over the world below. They swam through the atmosphere, probing. Some became animals and searched the ground, some became insects and searched the air, and some became fish and searched the sea. Some ran to the white-capped mountains, some traveled to the brown deserts, some to the black forests. They dusted and swept the world from pole to cold pole, and when the unknown was known, they returned. One by one, piece upon tiny differentiated piece, they returned and united with him. Many had found nothing—one had discovered his brother. The brother lay in the baking city.

He was both deliriously joyful and infinitely sad.

He cried again, "Brother!" He poured his seething potential into the message.

"Brother!"

"Brother?"

But his keen ears received only a chaotic scramble, a maddening staccato of rhythms. His brother's mind was ceasing to function and his brother, his kind loving brother, knelt weakly near limbo, swaying on the portal of death. And the hatred that seared him was slowly killing his brother.

He lifted himself to return to the city.

He stood, a glistening entirety

on the scarred surface of the moon, and the great red sun was settling behind the round breast of the world. A day's cycle was ending. He walked through the crater dust, kicking it into tiny whirling billows. Little billows, breathing billows, that climbed and spiraled, tickling his glimmering body. He looked at his hands and they pulsed, glowing with blue radiance. He looked at his feet and they divided the dust and twinkled as tiny jewels. He looked at his footprints and they melted, merging with the sands.

Gathering himself, amassing his many sections, he slowly rose like phosphorescent gas from the surface of the moon. Collecting himself tightly, he hurtled toward the earth. And as he floated above the world, he saw the city. The weird and the fanatic had warped its appearance. It lay prostrate on the earth reminiscent of a giant dying amoeba. It was the decaying dead.

And his brother lay in this city.

He descended slowly. Here and there the inhabitants of the city walked and stood talking and pointed to the west and hurried through the avenues. It was hot and dry and the stagnant air oozed tiny sparks, but the hate had momentarily vanished.

For a moment, standing on the ground, he hid in nothingness, and then, spying an aged man, he swept into his mind and body. The old man's mind squirmed, fighting the intrusion; but, he thrust the resistance into a misty webbed corner of the brain and when the old man questioned, he hushed him, he

softly quieted his cries. Crushing them tenderly, he squashed the man's thoughts with his fist, and he held them prisoner. He became dominant in the old man's body. He *was* the old man.

Still the transformation, the merging failed completeness. A mellow glow remained, surrounding his feet, his shoulders, his head. The red shimmer appeared, hovered, disappeared, and appeared again—he was unable to draw himself wholly into the body. Fearing the other creatures would note this oddity, this aged glowing man, he hid himself.

And there was a great movement among the people of the city. They flowed through the avenues and toward the suburbs, conversing excitedly and tugging at their friends. Rigid excitement and expectation seemed to funnel, to suck and drag them from the city. They pushed and shoved and chattered and pointed and banded in throngs and the scent of sweat and people floated in the air.

He followed. He traveled along the side streets and scurried through alleys lest the creatures take notice of his difference, pause and comment on the odd fluxing glow.

The overhanging buildings clothed these passages in gloom and they were hot and odorous, filled with garbage and trash and accumulated filth. He staggered through the refuse and litter and moved toward the city's edge.

A great force swirled within him. He was dizzy, excited. His

brother was very near, the long-awaited reunion imminent.

He would soon see his brother and heal him.

Hurry. Stumble. Run. And suddenly, pushing the captured body through the final narrow streets, he heard a painful groan and rapid shuffling. He extended himself, examining the alley, multiplying his senses. His vision swept ahead and the tiny particles of his inner-body began to twitch, wishing to join in the search.

And he saw . . .

A pitiful creature crouched in a dark corner, behind a mound of filth and rubbish and waste. It was trying to cover itself, it was weakly attempting to hide. Its yellow flesh, infested with lice and parasites, hung in loose folds and the poisoned skin screamed of angry cancer. The person coughed, shook, spit blood, and crept farther into its hole.

He stopped. He could go no farther. He looked down upon the creature and it looked up at him. It was a woman. She shivered and tried to melt into the wall, to disappear and hide, to vanish from his stare. Shame bled from her and fear dressed her and together they held her within their arms.

He was sad.

Oh, so sad.

He touched her forehead and she recoiled and shivered and moaned. Compassionately he poured himself into the woman and he swam in her mind and he healed. He destroyed the cancer and disease and mended the flesh.

The woman looked at herself

and felt her healed body. Tears flooded her eyes and poured down her cheeks. Kissing his feet, she knelt before him and worshiped him.

"You are God," she whispered.

"No," he murmured and he turned and he walked away. The woman sat in the dirt of the alley and watched him go and felt her healed flesh and cried.

As he left the city and went into the fields, a great depression draped him.

And . . . again, as suddenly as before, out of the darkness the brilliant pain, that walking *hatred* reappeared and bubbled, striking him, beating him, hacking his mind. He was torn between bursting hissing nova and bottomless abyss and his body parted. He stumbled and fell. He was on his knees. The pain was essence and it was blinding and it was hot and cold, black and starch white, flame and ice. And it stopped. His brother had died! He had paused too long!

His brother had died. . . .
"Aaaah!" He tore his hair.

He would never find him. The envy, the jealousy, the greed and evil so alien to his brother's essence slew him.

He looked across the plain where the vast host had gathered. He looked far across the field to a hill, a high hill reddened and silhouetted by the setting sun. He looked and he saw earth, forest, and flowers. He saw the white heliotrope and the dragon's breath, the beasts and the multitude, the mountains, the clouds, the sea.

He looked . . . he looked and he saw three crosses. His brother's soul dangled on the middle cross. The body in which he had dwelt was wounded and mutilated and its blood dripped and scurried in little rivers down the post and created tiny pools. And the little pools soaked into the moist earth and were gone.

"Unjust!" he screamed. "Unfair!" ached his mind.

Rage, ancient, ancient rage, twisted him. Fury and anger were the blood in his veins. He trembled and he shook the ground and he

called forth the thunder and the lightning, and he summoned the winds and the rains, and he turned the sky black and blotted the sun.

And the rage drained from him. And he drew back the holocaust.

A Man had been killed by men.

He wept and moaned and cried and beat himself with his fists and finally rose from the body of the old man. Running to the void, he fled the planet, the sun, the system. And he left that race, that poor, poor, half-mad race, to stagger an eternity alone.

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