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# KENNY



LOUIS BROMFIELD

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UNTIL THE DAYBREAK  
MRS. PARKINGTON  
WHAT BECAME OF ANNA BOLTON  
THE WORLD WE LIVE IN  
PLEASANT VALLEY  
KENNY

# *KENNY*

BY  
LOUIS BROMFIELD



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KENNY

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*KENNY*

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## KENNY



All morning I had been wrestling with the tractor on the Ferguson Place, a long way from the barns and the repair shop. The engine had been missing and again and again I had stopped to get down and tinker, hoping against hope that it would start going again and behave as a tractor should. I am a poor hand at mechanical things and always hope that things will right themselves miraculously and mysteriously as indeed they very often do. It was a dry, warm day and I was covered with sweat and the dust that arose in clouds from the field I had been fitting.

It was a beautiful, rolling field, high up above the Valley with a view that looked over the hills and lakes, the farms and streams of three counties. It was a lonely field, high against the sky, entirely encircled by deep woods and ravines where in the month of June the growth of ferns and ghostly snakeroot and wild grapevines was almost tropical, like a forest in Brazil or Sumatra. On one side lay a steep, wooded slope that ran abruptly down into a wild piece of ground known as the Jungle. It was mostly marshland and in summer it became very nearly impassable unless you followed the bed of the clear little spring stream which ran through it. The Jungle was given over to birds and wild game. Great blue herons lived there and mink and muskrat and raccoon and on the dry ground grey and red foxes, and even a pair of catamounts which had somehow strayed into our country from the wilder mountainous country to the east.

The Jungle and the lonely hill-top field where I was working were, in a way, haunted places where, as you worked, you felt you were being watched by the myriad eyes of the birds and small animals which lived in the Jungle and the surrounding forest. Yet it was a peaceful, friendly place where even a bucking tractor made you feel less baffled and angry than it would have done in one of the lower fields down on the farms near the highway. Up there on the lonely hill the action of time seemed at moments to have been suspended. You were out of the world, and time and space seemed of no great importance. It was a beautiful and primitive world in which the solid harsh world of reality at times became distant and hazy and the very trees and stones seemed possessed of spirits. No one save the people on the farm and an occasional lonely hunter ever came there.

And so, even covered with dust and sweat and battling with a badly behaving piece of modern machinery, I was not too ill-tempered. The day was a warm, thundery day with great white clouds scudding across the brilliant blue sky. I had an odd feeling that I was being watched, mockingly, by woodchucks from the fence-row, by cardinals and squirrels, who were saying, "The thing doesn't work because something's out of kilter. It can only work so long as it obeys the laws of Nature. When it doesn't follow them, something goes wrong. Everything has to be just right. That's why you're in a fix now—you and your wonderful machinery!"

It got worse and worse and when I came to the near end of the field I got down to tinker with it again, still in the hope that something miraculous would happen and I could escape the long trip down the wooded hillside through the tunnel of trees out into the world of the highway and the machine shop.

I had been tinkering for perhaps five minutes when the sense of being watched became suddenly acute and tangible. It was not simply the old fantasy of the eyes of the wild things; it

was much stronger than that—a sensation of not being *alone* any longer on that high, lonely hill. Without a conscious effort of will I turned and looked behind me and for the first time I saw him.

The sight startled me, not because I suddenly discovered his presence, but because of his face. It was as if I had turned suddenly and caught a faun or Puck himself watching me out of the thicket of sassafras along the fence-row. It was an impish face with blue-grey eyes beneath a tangled mop of black curls badly in need of trimming, and the ears were a little pointed at the tips. He was eleven or twelve years old and as he stepped toward me grinning I saw that he was wearing absolutely nothing save a pair of ragged blue denim pants cut off above the knees and held up by a single strap over one shoulder. From head to foot, he was deeply tanned and the deep color of his skin gave the blue-grey eyes a weird, unearthly look.

When I discovered him he grinned and said, “Hello, Pete!” and I found myself startled as if a bird or a small animal had suddenly addressed me by name. There was only a faint impudence in his greeting. It was natural among country people, even small children, to address neighbors by their Christian names. I was used to it.

I put down the wrench I was holding and said, “Hello! What’s your name?”

Then, as if at first he had been shy and now the shyness had left him, he came nearer and stood with his bare legs far apart, as grown men who live close to the soil often stand, as if their feet are rooted in the earth itself.

“What’s your name?” I asked again.

“Kenny.”

“Kenny—what?”

“Just Kenny. That’s my name. That’s all there is.”

I thought he was being impudent and said, “But everybody has two names.”

“Well, I haven’t,” he said with a kind of impish triumph. “They found me on the steps of the courthouse. That’s what they called me at the Children’s Home—Kenny. That’s all the name I’ve got!”

The concrete facts of the courthouse and the Children’s Home brought me a kind of relief. At least I wasn’t talking to a wood pixie or suffering from delusions.

“Where do you live?” I asked.

“I used to live up at Buckwalter’s.”

“But *now* where do you live?”

“No place.”

“What do you mean—no place? People have to live some place.”

“I run away from Old Man Buckwalter.”

“Why?”

“Because he made me work all the time and he beat me.”

“Where did you sleep last night?”

“In the Indian Cave on your place.” He turned and pointed down the side of the hill above the Jungle, “That one down there!”

For a moment I looked at him. It seemed to me his story was getting a bit thick. The Indian Cave was an awesome place, even in daytime and for a grownup. I shouldn't have slept there myself at night with any pleasure. It was a deep, high cleft in the sandstone rocks with a spring bubbling out of its depths. It was the only place on the farm where one sometimes still encountered a rattlesnake. But it had other evil connotations. It was reported to be haunted at night. Even in the daytime people had reported strange goings-on in the damp, deep tangle of ferns and trailing vines which surrounded it.

“Weren't you scared?” I asked.

“What was there to be scared of?” he asked.

“There's foxes and a pair of catamounts in the Jungle.”

“Nuts!” he said. “They ain't gonna hurt you.” And proudly he said, “I made myself a bed out of branches and leaves.”

“What did you eat?”

He was silent for a moment and then laughed, “I et some stuff out of your garden and stole a couple eggs out of the hen house and et 'em raw.”

This was surely a remarkable kid. I began to suspect that he was also an accomplished liar—or at least a fantasist.

“You don't believe me, do you?” he asked.

“No, I don't!”

“Well, it's all true. I ain't as scared of the catamounts as I am of Old Man Buckwalter.”

“What are you going to do now?”

He seemed to turn shy for the first time. He looked down at his bare feet and dug his big toe deep into the bluegrass. “That's just it,” he said. “That's why I was waitin' for you, I knowed that you was working up here pretty near every morning. I was waitin' for you.”

He dug a little deeper with his bare toes and said, “I want to work for you.”

I grinned, “What can you do?”

“I can do everything,” he said defiantly.

I looked at him for a moment and then came to a decision.

“Well,” I said, “I'll tell you what I'll do. You get up here on the hood of the tractor and I'll drive you down to the house. It's pretty near time to eat anyway. How'd you like a good square meal?”

“Fine,” he said, and climbed like a monkey onto the hood.

Limping, the tractor managed to make the top of the long, steep lane that led from the remote wilderness of the Ferguson Place down into the Valley. It was a lane arched over with trees from which wild grapevines hung down like lianas. The ferns grew high on each side and the moisture dripped out of the rocks. With the straight, bare, brown back before me, I managed to

maneuver the coughing tractor down the uneven, rutted surface. A big fox squirrel scattered across the road and a scarlet tanager flashed like a meteor out of the deep foliage on the side of the lane and into it again on the other side.

As we emerged from the forest into the Valley Kenny turned and pointed to the buildings on the other side of the creek. "That's where I stole some carrots and onions. And I got the eggs out of the hen house over there."

"When?"

"Last night. It was pretty near dark."

I laughed, "You can take care of yourself pretty well."

"I kind of know how."

At the lower farm there is a big quadrangle like the cour of a French farm, bordered by machine sheds and poultry houses. It is in a way the center of life in the valley farm. There are always people there from the farm and visitors and neighbors. A big flock of noisy Toulouse geese makes it their headquarters, spending their time between the near-by pond and spring stream and hissing and squawking at strangers. Like the geese of ancient Rome they are first-rate burglar alarms at any time of the day or night. At sight of us they set up their usual senseless and foolish din. From behind them around the corner of the poultry house appeared Vincent and Blondie, the big Angus bull.

They were walking side by side and Vincent, holding the rope attached to the ring in Blondie's nose, had the other arm thrown carelessly with a curious gesture of affection over the great neck and shoulders of the coal black bull. Vincent was about twenty-five or -six years old and was stripped to the waist as he always was during the hot months. I don't know what blood dominated in Vincent nor do I think he himself knows but he had then a singularly beautiful compact and muscular build like the athletes of the classic Greek sculptures. His black hair was a little too long and his body was tanned a deep bronze. As he and the big black bull moved toward us, the geese, squawking, hissing and flapping their wings, moved out of the way and I was aware of one of those swift and sudden moments of beauty and satisfaction which are a part of life on a farm. It was a moment which, curiously, went backward into time far beyond the borders of the epoch in which I lived, back indeed to the pastoral beginnings of man's civilization. It was a moment, a fragment out of time, which I had witnessed and been a part of, something I had seen before, perhaps in some other life.

The big black bull was an amiable fellow and as the tractor approached he lumbered to a halt as if he felt it was the moment for relaxation and conversation. Vincent leaned on the great shoulder and said, "What . . . another break-down?" And then looked curiously at the boy astride the hood. It struck me suddenly that Vincent and the boy looked extraordinarily alike, as if the boy were a much younger edition of Vincent before he had become a man and the father of four children. They shared a kind of wildness and confidence in themselves and their surroundings that was born perhaps of a great simplicity.

I said, "This is Kenny. I just found him up on the Ferguson Place. He's been living in the Jungle."

Vincent gave me a quick and doubting glance. In his curious simplicity he was often the victim of tall stories told him by others on the farm and he suspected, I think, that I was at it again.

“Trying to kid me?” he asked. And I turned to Kenny. “What about it?” I asked.

“Sure,” said the boy with a wide grin, “that’s right!”

I told him about Kenny’s having run away from Old Man Buckwalter and Vincent looked up at the kid and said, “Well, I can’t blame him for that.”

They looked at each other for the first time and as their glances met something very curious happened. They understood each other, as if they had known each other before and suddenly I was shut out, as if I were not there at all and again within a few minutes I had the impression of having gone swiftly backward through space and time. . . .

The bull rubbed his nose against Vincent like a puppy and made a grumbling sound deep in his great throat. With Vincent he was always docile as a lamb—but that is another story which comes later.

I found myself trying to force the acknowledgment of my presence. I said, “Kenny’s coming up to the Home Farm, to . . .” I checked myself and finished the sentence differently from my intention saying “to stay awhile.” And the boy looked at me with a sudden flash of gratitude, as if he understood why I had changed the sentence.

“What’ll Old Man Buckwalter do?” asked Vincent.

“Probably raise Hell!” I said.

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I left the tractor to be put in order and walked with Kenny trotting by my side up the long winding lane to the Home Farm. There I turned him loose in the bathroom to have a good bath and wash his curly black hair. He stayed there for a long time, thrashing about and enjoying the warm water. Then I sat him down at the table and Mrs. Erskine who came in by the day and kept house for me, fed him until he couldn’t eat any more. It was a meal for a hungry truck driver.

While he sat there in his ragged pants with a shirt of mine hanging on his sturdy shoulders, he kept looking about him with shining eyes. He kept saying, “It’s a mighty pretty house. Yes, it’s a mighty fine house.” And then shrewdly, “Some day I’m going to work myself up to a house like this.”

Sitting there with his black hair and bright eyes and tanned chest showing through the open neck of my shirt, he was like a small, half-tamed animal. Now and then, I caught him watching me as a small caged animal might do. I thought, “He doesn’t belong here. I won’t know how to treat him. Whatever I do, it’ll spoil him.” I couldn’t see him fitting into my hard-working, serious, rather dull life and there were long periods when I had to be away from home. I experienced a sudden feeling of depression, such as I have felt before when I impulsively undertook what could only turn out to be trouble, failure and disappointment. My instinct told me that I had embroiled myself in a problem. And I suspected that I had been buffaloes, hypnotized, cajoled by the mixture of flattery, impertinence and pathos the kid had used with me. And then the truth dawned on me. I had not brought him home with me; he had brought me home.

I noticed the behavior of the dogs. They were big, fierce dogs and none too friendly with strangers but they had taken Kenny over as their own property. They were sitting in a circle about his chair watching him. It was as if he had always been there, as if he and the dogs were old friends. I thought, “He can’t be the little liar I thought or they would have known it.”

Then he slipped out of his chair and said, "I'm going out to look at the cattle." He went out and at the door slipped off my shirt as if it bothered him. The dogs went with him and I watched the five of them barking and running after him as he crossed the pasture and passed the cattle without even looking at them. He went straight toward the barns and I knew suddenly where he was going—to find Vincent. He was polite to me—as polite as his strange upbringing permitted him to be, but I didn't count. I was an outsider. He was going straight to Vincent; the story about the cattle was simply a sop thrown out to me, so that I shouldn't feel hurt or jealous.

The next part of the story belongs to Vincent and his wife, Martha.

They appeared one winter morning out of the mist that fills all the Valley on days when the ice is breaking up and the snow melting. Mrs. Erskine had made my breakfast and I was eating it surrounded by the troupe of big dogs who always sat looking up at me with mournful eyes while I shared three or four pieces of extra toast with them. They behaved well, never actually insisting, but putting on a stricken, hypocritical look as if they were friendless and starving and abused instead of being the most pampered dogs in the world. And then Jenny, the old Border Collie who always heard alarming sounds before the others, let out a yelp and ran for the door. All Hell broke loose as the others followed her to defend their domain against all comers. At the door they piled up in a heap waiting for Gyp, the clever one, who alone knew how to open doors. When he had done the job, they all rushed out barking wildly to surround an ancient jalopy which, I could see from the window, had pulled up out of the mist and stopped at the foot of the steps.

Often enough strangers refused to leave the safety of a car until someone from the house came out to call off the dogs and rescue them but the occupants of the jalopy showed no such alarm. They got out and walked right into the midst of the circle of dogs who stopped their growling and began crowding up on the pair, wagging their tails and barking on a quite different note as if they were welcoming old friends.

The jalopy was a wheezing old Model-T Ford and the pair that got out of it were young. They looked almost like children and could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen. As they came up the path I saw that they were shabbily dressed, the girl in a nondescript hat and a coat trimmed with bits of cheap fur. The boy wore an old but bright-colored mackinaw and a worn fedora hat. He was a little over middle-height and walked with the easy grace of a body that was muscular and extraordinarily well co-ordinated. The girl had bright red hair and blue eyes.

When I opened the door to greet them it struck me that they were like a pair of rather precocious, tired children. The boy took off his hat and said, "We'd like to see the boss!"

"I guess that's me," I said and invited them to come into the farm office.

They followed me silently and shyly and sat down at my invitation. The girl loosened the shabby coat, wet from the cold mist from which the ruined jalopy had failed to protect them. They seemed shy and restrained and the restraint and awkwardness became contagious.

To break it, I said, "Wouldn't you like some coffee?" And the girl said in a low voice, "Yes, thank you. We've been driving for a couple of hours."

I went and asked Mrs. Erskine to bring the coffee and when I returned, the boy said, "Maybe this is a funny thing to do. We've come to see if you could use some extra help."

In a way it was a funny thing to do for it was the winter of 1932 when all the structure of

American life seemed to be falling apart. Everywhere factories were closing down and people by the thousands were drifting back to the villages and farms as a last resort. There was plenty of farm help to be had at low wages or none at all. A good many people were grateful for food and shelter alone, and most communities like our own township took care of their own people first. And these two were clearly strangers coming from a great distance.

The boy was sitting on the edge of his chair, turning his hat in his hands in an attitude of anguish and for the first time I noticed something remarkable about him. He not only looked like a gypsy but he was extraordinarily handsome in an animal kind of way, with high cheekbones and large, close-set ears and a full, sensual mouth. It was a beauty which was not at all obvious. It struck you only after you had looked at him a second or third time. And the girl was pretty although she looked thin and tired. But her attitude was quite different. There was something proud and defiant in the way she sat, very upright, as if challenging the world and defying defeat.

I said, "Could be. There's always plenty to do around here. Are you from the country?"

"No," said the boy, "I've just come from Pittsburgh and my wife has been working in St. Louis. We've been to see the children. They're in Cincinnati. So we just got an idea and drove up here." The speech set me back on my heels for it seemed to me that they were barely old enough to be married let alone have children or even one child.

"Do you know anything about farms?" I asked.

"No," the boy answered. "Not much. My wife here lived with an uncle on a ranch in Nevada when she was a kid."

"Do you think you'd like farm life?"

He answered me directly, with absolute conviction, "Yes, I know I would."

I felt that it was a strange interview and I asked, "What have you done before?"

The boy looked down at his hat and a blush colored his dark skin. "A little of everything. I've been a mechanic. I've worked in a grocery store. I've done all kinds of work in mills but I don't like any of it—and now they're laying off people, there isn't any work anywhere."

Mrs. Erskine interrupted us by bringing in the coffee. She was a big, strong woman—the wife of one of our neighbors—with a heart as big as her body, and she had brought not only coffee but coffeecake and toast and home-made jam. She put the tray on my big desk and when she had gone I poured the coffee and put the tray on the low table beside the girl.

They both drank eagerly, hungrily, the girl shivering a little as she swallowed the hot liquid. And then shyly, almost as if it were acting without her consciousness or will, her hand reached out and took a piece of coffeecake. As I watched them I knew they had had no breakfast—that perhaps they had no money or were saving it for other things more desperately needed. I made conversation about the weather and the farm and the countryside while they wolfed the cake and toast and jam. Then the girl said abruptly, "Why don't you tell him everything, Vinny?" And the boy said, "Maybe he wouldn't be interested."

I said, "Go ahead. I'm sure I would."

"Well," he said, "it's like this. You see, we're trying to find some way to stay together and keep the kids." He looked down again at his old worn hat. "I know we look young, but I'm twenty-

three and she's twenty-two." He coughed and added, "You see, we have three kids." And then I noticed his hands. They were big hands, but well formed and even beautiful, and they were calloused and scarred with traces of oil and grease which can never be wholly removed from the hands of a hard-working man.

"You must have been married when you were very young."

The girl answered me nervously. "Vincent was eighteen and I was seventeen."

Clearly she was impatient with the boy's awkwardness but in the impatience there was a kind of affection and sympathy like that of a mother troubled by a child's backwardness but eager for him to show his best side. There was no more coffee or coffeecake or toast left on the tray.

Then suddenly she took over, the words pouring out of her in a torrent. "You see, I didn't have any family and Vincent's family wasn't very good to him. We got together that way and got married out in Colorado. He was working at a filling station and I was working at the lunchroom. And we've had three kids. Maybe we oughtn't to, but we did. The oldest is four. It seemed all right at first and then everything seemed to come apart. We didn't have enough money and couldn't get ahead and pay off debts and I had to give up working to look after the kids. And finally just to keep going we boarded out the kids in Cincinnati and I went to work again. And then they began firing people and sometimes we had work and sometimes we didn't and pretty soon we had to take work where we could find it to eat and pay for the kids' board and most of the time we were separated, not even in the same town. I worked as a waitress and a chambermaid and at all kinds of jobs."

I listened, aware that it cost the girl an immense effort to tell me all she was telling me. It was as if she were tearing it out of her insides by force. And I noticed other things—the curious passion which existed between the two of them. You could see it in the boy's dark eyes as he watched her. There were so many things she clearly did not tell in the bald, sordid recital of their lives—that they were at the end of their rope, that they wanted to stay together more than anything in the world, that they were hungry and had been hungry many times but that the hunger for food was less terrible than their hunger for each other. What she was really telling me, despite her pride and reticence, was the story of two lonely children who wanted to stay together, desperately in spite of everything—indeed so much that they had come on a fantastic journey to a stranger in a strange place.

And behind it of course lay another tragic story of two children growing up in the wretched Twenties without family, without home life, without anything, who had miraculously found each other and because of some deep eternal, primitive drive were trying to stay together and make a home for their children such as they themselves had never known. And they were themselves no more than children, lonely and frightened. The children came almost before they knew it and then the whole of the country began to fall apart and there wasn't any work even at the price of living apart in different cities.

Suddenly a real passion and despair entered the girl's voice. She said, "I'm scared, mister. We haven't been together more than a day or two at a time for two years. It ain't any way to live . . . just seein' each other a couple of days now and then. We can't go on like this—never havin' a home, never seein' each other or the kids. And now there ain't any jobs anywhere especially for Vincent and me who don't know how to do anything." The tears came into her eyes and she said, "We've got to find something to anchor to or just let everything go to Hell."

There was much more to the story. I've only outlined it, leaving out a hundred small details, bitter, tragic, sentimental. It was the story of two young people hungering for each other, wanting to set up something that would last and bring them peace, wanting to share the same house and the same bed, and all the time they were kept apart from each other and from the three children who had come into existence somehow, almost without their knowing it. There was a quality of innocence about them both, and of health, of real decency and naturalness. What they wanted was what all decent young people wanted and they couldn't have it and now they were puzzled and frightened because they could not understand the reasons, at once so much too intricate and too vast for their little background and education.

And as I listened I remembered that they weren't alone in their dilemma, an isolated, unique case. There were thousands of others like them—young people and middle-aged and even old couples, trying desperately to hold things together in a swiftly disintegrating world. Their story was the special tragedy of two young people grown up during the Twenties without any home or any family, tossed about in adolescence by circumstances in an insane world which they never understood. They had believed quite simply that if two people fell in love, they could marry and set up a home and have children and build up a life for themselves, and now they found out that it wasn't true and they didn't know what to do or where to turn and they understood nothing. They were frightened.

They were strong enough, both of them. They were used to hard work. You could see it from their hands and the look in their eyes. You could see it in the way the girl sat very tense and straight and in the powerful shoulders of the boy and in the way he sat, his whole muscular body upright, his back straight as if it were lashed to a ramrod.

The girl went on talking.

"You see, mister. All we want is to be together again and get a fresh start. We just want a roof over our heads where we can bring the children. I can't sleep right any more because I keep wondering about the kids . . . if they're being treated right and are getting enough to eat." The desperation entered her voice again. "We've got to get organized or go to Hell. We can't do it in the city. I've tried to scrimp on what I eat but that wasn't any good. We're willing to do anything, mister. It doesn't make any difference. Anything is better than the way we're living."

I looked at the boy. He was watching her with admiration, that she found it so easy to talk, to say the things for which he could never find words. And suddenly I found myself thinking how, in spite of anything you could do in life, you were always getting mixed up in the lives of other people, how you became responsible for things and people without even wanting or meaning to do so. Even if I stood up and sent them away, I was mixed up in their lives and those of the children I'd never seen. I might be sending them all to damnation as the girl had implied.

We didn't *actually* need another man on the place, but I found myself trying to invent reasons why we *did* need someone, even while I was talking to them, and I knew that Tom, my partner, would raise Hell when he found I'd engaged another worker. It was easy enough to get farm hands. The cities were collapsing and people were hurrying back to the country to find security, a roof over their heads and enough to eat. Every day there were a couple of men looking for work.

All this was going through my head but there was something else as well. I had a feeling that

these two kids were all right and I found a part of me stirring and coming to life which had always played a big part in any decision I had ever made and almost everything I have ever done. You might call it instinct or intuition or atavistic experience—it doesn't matter. It was something stronger than my own conscious judgment or my intelligence. It was a kind of *animal* thing. The decision I was making—indeed had already made against the dictates of my conscious mind—was mixing me up again in the lives of other people for whom in a way I would be responsible.

I heard myself saying, "We've just bought a new farm. It isn't a very good farm and the house is in pretty bad shape, but there's a good spring and the roof doesn't leak. If you don't mind living there until we get it fixed up . . ."

"It doesn't matter," the girl said dully. "It'll be all right—even if we have to sleep in a barn."

"When could you come?" I asked.

An extraordinary light came into the girl's blue eyes. "You mean you'll give us a chance?"

"That's it," I said.

"We could come as soon as Vincent could get some things together and I get the children from Cincinnati."

"That's fine."

The shabbily gloved hands began fiddling with the handbag again. She looked down and then said: "There's one more thing."

"Yes."

She didn't answer at once and the black-haired boy, summoning all his strength, said, "It's about money. Could you let us have a little money . . . in advance. We'd work it out. We're broke."

I thought, "Here I go again . . . being a sap. Maybe it's just a racket they work everywhere." But weakly I found myself asking, "How much will you need?"

The girl answered, "I think a hundred dollars will do it."

I went to the desk and wrote out a cheque and gave it to the boy. He looked at me out of those honest, black eyes without saying anything and I noticed for the first time they were opaque and almost pupil-less like the eyes of a gypsy or an Indian.

The girl said, "He didn't want to come here, the way we look." And she glanced at her own shabby clothes and handbag. "But I told him we had to come because it was our last chance."

I went with them to the door and watched them go toward the old jalopy. They were walking hand in hand and the sturdy back of the boy seemed even straighter.

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For a week there was no sign of the new couple nor any word from them and I thought, "I guess they've just walked off with the hundred dollars. I suppose their racket is as good as any other in times like these."

Then one morning my partner Tom stopped in as I was having breakfast. He was a practical man, short, stocky, and tough in manner but with a big heart well concealed. We made a good

team. Sometimes I kept him from being too hard and one of his jobs was to extricate the farm from my mistakes and follies. For two or three days I had kept the visit of the young couple a secret. I told him nothing about the cheque; it had nothing to do with the farm but was simply a private folly.

He sat down and poured himself a cup of coffee. Then he said, “The new couple has turned up.”

That was all but I asked a question I need not have asked for I already knew the answer. I asked, “What do you think of them?”

He said, “Since you ask me, they’re a pretty seedy lot.”

He was always impatient with people whose lives got into messes. He had a good wife and three healthy kids and was a partner in a good solid business well enough run so that even the catastrophe that was sweeping the country couldn’t really touch it. He was stubborn and at times impatient, but most of all he believed in the virtues of work and thrift as he believed in God.

Then he said, “I shouldn’t have known they were here but I noticed the smoke down the valley. I thought something was on fire at the new place. I went to investigate and found them already there clearing the place up. They came in by the back lane through the Bailey Place woods. I don’t see how they ever knew about it. It’s mighty funny they didn’t come by the main road and stop down at the house.”

He finished his coffee and hurried off to start the plowing in the bottom fields. I had the impression that he was going to work off his disgust by taking it out on a tractor and plow.

When I had finished the newspapers, I went down to see them thinking that perhaps I hadn’t been such a fool as Tom believed. He knew nothing about the cheque and I certainly meant never to tell him.

It was a warm day of the false spring which comes in late March to our part of the country. Around the old grey farmhouse the first pale green leaves of the big lilacs were showing and in the untended dead grass of last year the first yellow daffodils and pale-green-white, ghostly Star of Bethlehem were in flower. The house was big and old and shabby but it had the beauty of old, worn houses that, however dilapidated, have been much lived in. And nothing could spoil the beauty of the site half way up the low hill beside the big spring with a view over the whole of the Valley.

The boy, Vincent, was burning the rubbish left behind by the last occupants of the house. They had been a fly-by-night tenant family, coming for a year to take what they could of the poor worn-out farm and going away again to leave behind them all the things they had broken or used up during the year. There was plenty of rubbish—broken china, dirty and ragged old clothing, broken beer bottles and quantities of just plain miscellaneous dirt. The inside of the house would have discouraged Hercules. The girl, Martha, was carrying out the rubbish in a broken bushel basket and heaping it on the fire.

The baby, about eighteen months old, sat tied into a broken chair by a big lilac bush. The other two kids were playing with a barn kitten on the grass by the side of the pond below the old spring house. The oldest child, a girl, had red hair like her mother and the two younger ones were dark like their father. All three had a wild look, with shaggy uncut hair. They looked pale

too and thin and undernourished. The two older ones were wearing cast-off clothing much too big for them. Yet there was something pleasant about the scene, and something primitive too. It was like one of the first families coming into the country when it had been a wilderness. It was a family making a fresh start in life.

We greeted each other and I said, "There was plenty of rubbish in the house. You'll have quite a job cleaning it up."

Martha answered happily, "Oh, that's part of the fun!"

And then I asked if they'd made arrangements about milk and eggs and meat and if they knew where the root cellar was with the abundance of potatoes, apples, squash and carrots from last season laid away on straw.

"Yes," they said, Mr. Warren had been down to see them and taken care of that.

"The kids could stand some fattening up," I said.

"And how!" said Martha brightly. "The old woman who boarded them was cheating on me."

"How about giving you a hand?" I asked.

But Martha didn't want it. "No," she said, "I don't want you to see the inside of the house until I get it all cleaned up."

"Okay."

In the days that followed, I went back again three or four times and each time, the girl made excuses for my not entering the house, but at last the day arrived when I came with the plasterers and painters. There was no way of keeping me out. Then I discovered why she had not wanted me to come in. Inside they hadn't anything at all—no beds, only three mattresses with cheap coarse blankets. There were two broken chairs, left behind by the tenant family, which Vincent had repaired and a table made out of a packing case he had found in the barn. There were three or four pots and pans and some paper plates.

The dark face of the girl flushed and in defense she said, "We're just camping out until our furniture arrives from the West."

For the benefit of the workmen, I said, "I think it's arrived. I had a bill of lading this morning."

There wasn't any bill of lading and I knew there wasn't any furniture but the lie satisfied the workmen. And the girl gave me a sudden brilliant look of gratitude and understanding. When the workmen went away I stayed behind and sat on one of the two chairs.

"Sit down," I said and the girl obeyed me by sitting in the other chair. "We've got to come to an understanding."

She looked away without answering and I went on. "See here. You know I lied to these men."

She looked down at her hands and still did not answer.

"We've got to understand each other," I said. "You've got to understand all the people on this farm. They're very nice people and they want to help you. It isn't going to do any good if you put up a lot of false pride and keep them from helping you. We've got plenty of stuff around here—extra beds and things and chairs. And I'll advance the money to get dishes and cooking stuff. Everybody on the place wants to help if you give them a chance. You see, it isn't like the

city where everybody is fighting everybody else just to live. It's different here. In a way, there's everything—plenty of everything. You've got to get used to that. You see, you've got to let people help you because they really want to.”

She had begun to cry and I saw that there was no stopping her. It was as if all the pent-up pride and emotion of months and years had broken loose. It was the weeping of a child whom life had taught to be suspicious of everyone and everything. I said, “That's right. Go ahead and cry. It'll do you good. And when you've finished don't be proud any more. Just let things work out naturally. Just take it easy.”

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Two days later Tom, my partner, again stopped in for coffee. I knew by his look that he had something on me. It was a look which came into his broad face whenever one of my own follies tripped me up. He said, “I got the pay-off about your friends.”

“What's that?”

“Well,” he said, “you know they came here with nothing, not even . . .” and he used an expressive but inelegant phrase.

“Yes,” I said.

“Well, yesterday Vincent sent his wife to a farm sale with ten dollars to buy something for them to sit on or eat out of. Do you know what she brought home?”

I grinned, “No, what?”

“An organ!” he said. “An old-fashioned country organ! She spent the whole ten dollars on it.”

He didn't say, “I told you so!” or “No wonder they didn't have a nickel.” But his whole manner said it. “I was down there last night,” he continued, “and she was painting it baby blue and pale pink. What the Hell are they going to do with an organ when they haven't got anything to sit on?”

And one day there appeared out of nowhere a shaggy pony, and when I asked where it came from, Vincent said, “I bought it.” When I didn't answer he added, “I know you think I'm crazy and maybe I should have spent the money on clothes for the kids, but they aren't old enough to go to school yet and don't need clothes and they'll get a lot more fun out of the pony.”

There didn't seem to be any answer to that piece of logic.

In the meanwhile all of us on the farm went to work going through attics and haymows and we found a lot of old furniture. It collects on big farms without your knowing it. Most of it had been forgotten but it wasn't too bad on the whole. It didn't match up too well, but anyway it was furniture and the old farmhouse, once so dilapidated and dirty and empty, began to look like a home. Martha did a good deal of cleaning up around the outside and she herself wrestled with the tough old grass until presently she managed to create a patch of new lawn which she kept neatly mowed. And then began the animal phase.

They seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere. There were two or three families of cats and three dogs of uncertain breeds, one with a litter of puppies. And then a she-goat and a calf, which was to be sold for veal but which Vincent asked to bring up because the children liked it. And there were chickens and turkeys and ducks on the pond below the spring. It was a wonderful place for children, and slowly, from the red-headed eldest child I found out why to

them the farm was unadulterated Paradise.

The story came out in bits and pieces until at last the whole picture of their life as “boarders” in a “baby home” was complete. They had lived in a big gloomy house fallen into decay in a shabby part of Cincinnati, a house which once had been in a respectable and prosperous neighborhood. There was only a backyard surrounded by a high fence, paved with cinders and partly shaded by a soot-laden ailanthus tree. The house and that gloomy patch of ground had been their only playground, winter and summer. There wasn't anything to do. There were no toys, no animals, nothing but a cinder-paved backyard and a grey sky above it. And now they had a whole world of green with fields to roam across and animals and pets.

Sometimes you would see a whole procession moving across the high pastures against the blue sky—a half dozen kids, a pony, a calf, a she-goat and three or four dogs. Sometimes even a tomcat or two accompanied them on their excursions into the field. Seen against the sky there was something ancient and Bacchic about the procession of children and animals. In that procession the lion and the lamb lay down together. Martha simply turned them loose in the morning and they came home when they grew hungry.

But on the farm Vincent was becoming a problem. It wasn't that he didn't work hard enough. He worked, voluntarily, long hours, with enthusiasm and a desperate desire to make good and preserve the fantastic, happy little world which was growing up around the old farmhouse on the Hubert Place. But he was a blunderer. He couldn't seem to get his work organized and his effect upon machinery was appalling. On a highly mechanized farm this was a serious thing.

It was as if all the machinery were hostile to him. It was always fighting back at him, skinning his fingers, cracking him on the head. A power mower would fall apart at his touch and a baler or a combine would develop all sorts of kinks and trouble the moment he was put in charge of it. Tom, in disgust, said that “Vincent had the power of a poltergeist” and that very likely at home he could make chairs and tables fly across the room. And so, eventually, I proposed that we take him away from the machinery altogether and simply let him take care of livestock.

It was after this decision that the miracle began to happen.

That was where he belonged—with the livestock. Even Tom came to admit it after a time. He said that when Vincent went into the chicken house he became a chicken and when he went into the barns he became a cow or a horse. It was a simple way of expressing something much bigger than that. When Vincent had charge, the hens in the poultry house grew healthier and laid more eggs. The cows, even a cantankerous old Jersey, grew so gentle that you had to push them out of the way and they would come in out of the pasture at the sound of his voice. The dairy bull still put up a great show of pawing and bellowing but with Vincent around it was only a show. He would rub his head against Vincent like a big kitten. And between the shining black Angus bull and Vincent there grew up what could be regarded as a warm and close friendship.

And then one night very late, I saw that a light had been left burning in the big barn and when I went to turn it off, I found Vincent. He was sitting in the straw of a box stall, his ruffled black hair shining in the electric light, holding in his lap the head of a sick, four-day-old Percheron foal. It had pneumonia and the veterinarian had gone away that evening saying there was nothing to be done and that the colt would be dead by morning.

When Vincent saw me, he looked up, embarrassed. “Maybe you think I'm crazy,” he said. “But I didn't want the colt to die. I'm goin' to set up with it.”

“What can you do?” I asked.

“Nothin’ . . . really, but I didn’t like to think of the little fella being just left alone here to die. Maybe I can do some good.” He grinned, sheepishly. “You know . . . faith-healing. A lot of people think there’s something in it.”

I looked down at the colt. It was breathing so slightly that it seemed not to be breathing at all.

I said, “The Vét says as soon as its lungs fill up, it’ll be dead.”

Stubbornly Vincent shook his head, “The Vets ain’t always right.”

Then he looked down again at the sick colt with an extraordinary expression of tenderness and began pressing gently in and out on its ribs to keep it breathing. And I was aware then of what I suspected and came to believe finally later on—that there was between Vincent and all animals and children and even trees and plants a strong and inexplicable bond. He understood them with an understanding that was beyond any of the rest of us and they in turn responded, trusting and believing in him. I began that night to understand many things about him, that the whole menagerie of animals and birds at the old Hubert Place were a part of the whole thing. But most curious of all was his sudden, flashing likeness to some creature out of another world and another age. There was something strange, antique, and faunlike about the tanned, muscular body, especially in summer when he went about stripped to the waist or when on a hot day the men knocked off work and went swimming in the clear water of Goose Creek. Of them all, only Vincent seemed to belong there, naked, in the clear water and the brilliant sunlight against the background of willows and wild yellow flowering iris. About the others, there was always something “modern” and misshapen, as if they bore the stamp of our times; Vincent, diving, splashing, swimming, belonged there. He was something out of the remote past. There was really nothing naked in his nakedness.

It was the beginning of strange speculations which have gone on and on and which are really what the whole story is about. They are speculations which reach into realms which most of us seldom touch even upon the fringe—realms reaching to the borders of reincarnation, of mysticism and metaphysics. Some of us are insensible to such intimations and others have not in a rushed and complex modern world the time to consider them.

I began to understand why children and animals followed him about. I began to understand that strange intense passion which the red-headed girl-wife felt for him, a passion which drove her to fight to keep him in spite of everything. I began to understand why the three children had happened and why there was another on the way.

And I began to understand another thing—very curious—that Vincent seemed to have brought luck to the farm. There were many things which explained this—that he had a genius for livestock, that he had a curious instinct for the weather, and that he had a feeling for plants and trees that was quite beyond science or anything that science had ever discovered about the earth itself. Nearly all of these things lay in the realm of the un-understood or the un-understandable.

I lay awake for a long time speculating upon all these things and greater ones—how some farmers worked hard all their lives and even intelligently and yet failed because they had lacked these things which a “natural” like Vincent possessed, and how other farmers seemed to know about the earth and about trees and animals without ever having been taught, and how many

ancient beliefs, once regarded as superstitions, had come in time to be proven scientifically sound. And I understood why Vincent was so bad with machinery. I could not think of him working in a mill or a factory but only in the open fields, in the woods, against a background of sun and sky.

At eight in the morning Vincent came into my office, grinning.

“Come on out,” he said, “I want to show you something.”

He led me into the barn and into the box stall where the dying foal had been. The colt was still lying down, but not on his side as I had last seen him. His head was up and at sight of us he gave a faint weak whicker of recognition.

Vincent grinned again. “That’s one on Doc. I called him up and told him.”

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By the time Kenny stepped out of the sassafras thicket into my life, Vincent and Martha were already fixtures on the farm and the new baby was three years old. Again as in the case of Vincent and Martha I knew that my partner regarded Kenny as a major case of foolishness and indeed the whole business of Kenny wasn’t easy. It was a great deal more complicated than you might think. We got him some decent clothes and then after a couple of days Old Man Buckwalter found out where he was and wanted him back. Until then he hadn’t troubled to look for him or even to find out whether he was dead or alive.

So three days later Old Man Buckwalter came storming up the walk to the house. He wasn’t really old. He was not much over fifty but in the neighborhood he’d been known as Old Man Buckwalter for at least ten years, perhaps because of his looks and disposition. He was the kind of farmer who thought what was good enough for his grandpappy was good enough for him and any new-fangled ideas were just so much hog-wash. As a result his farm got a little poorer every day, no matter how hard he worked, and for the shrinking income and waning fertility he always found excuses. It was the weather or someone had cheated him or it was plain hard luck. Misfortune, even though he brought it on himself or perhaps because of that fact, had turned him bitter. He didn’t like the people on our place because we did well. He hated everyone who was successful. At fifty, he was already a bent and worn-out old man. His own four sons had left him as soon as they could run away to the city. At the sight of the lean bent dark figure I knew what was coming.

I met him at the door and he said abruptly, “I’ve come to get Kenny.”

“Come in,” I said. “Let’s talk it over.”

He sat on the edge of a chair in my office, aggressive and hostile. “I’ve had to do the chores all alone for three days. Where is he?”

“I don’t know,” I said, which was the truth since I had told Kenny to keep out of sight.

“Don’t try to hide him! The law is on my side!”

I began to feel angry not only at Old Man Buckwalter but at the system which permitted him to take over an orphan boy like Kenny. So I said, “There’s no good trying to bulldoze me. He’s not going back with you. He’s not going back unless the court orders it. We might as well get that straight now.”

His eyes narrowed shrewdly and he asked, “What’s he been tellin’ you about me?”

“Never mind about that. It wasn’t very nice.”

“He’s a dirty little sneak and a liar. I clothe him and keep him and take him to church on Sunday.”

I looked at him directly. I knew his type. It is common enough in poor country districts—the sort which regards church-going as an excuse for anything.

“He was wearing nothing but a pair of pants,” I said, “and don’t bring up church-going to me. It doesn’t impress me. Besides, he said if they did send him back, he’d only run away again.”

“So you want to make trouble about it?”

“Yes, I’m willing to.”

He stood up. “All right! I’ll have the law on you.”

“Suit yourself.”

He went out and I watched him drive off in his broken-down car. As I turned from the doorway, Kenny was standing there in his new overalls.

“Where were you?” I asked.

“I was listenin’.” He grinned at me.

“Don’t you know people don’t do that. It’s not the right thing to do.”

“If I didn’t listen, how would I know what was goin’ on?”

Then I understood. He was looking out for himself. He’d learned that because he had had to learn it.

“Well, then I don’t need to tell you what happened.”

“No.” He looked puzzled for a moment and then asked, “What are you gonna do—see Mrs. Yokes?”

“Yes.”

“They’ll all tell you I’m a liar and a sneak.”

“Who’s all?”

“Mrs. Sampson and Mrs. Barnes.” They were the wives of farmers living in the county.

“Did you live with them too?”

“Yes. But they was glad to get rid of me.”

So that was it. “Why didn’t you tell me that before?”

“Because I thought you’d send me away without givin’ me a chance.”

I laughed, “Give a dog a bad name . . .”

Kenny grinned, “That’s it.”

“And you’re going to behave yourself here?”

“Sure. Watch me.”

“What makes you think you’ll like it here?”

Then he said a very old wise thing. “You can tell a lot of ways . . . by lookin’ at the animals and the grass in the fields. I could tell I’d like it on the first day when we stopped and talked to Vincent.”

“You like him, don’t you?” I asked.

“Sure I do. I’ve been helpin’ him regular with the chores.”

“Okay! You’d better go and help him now.”

As he went out he said, “Vincent showed me how to feed the calves. He lets me do it every night.” The small, impish face glowed with pleasure and pride.

“Didn’t you help Old Man Buckwalter?” I asked.

“Yes, but it was different. He used to belt the calves around if they wouldn’t drink. I like to feel ’em sucking on my finger to get ’em started.”

Then he ran out and down the path toward the barn. It was clear that he had moved in on us.

The next morning Mrs. Vokes stopped in to see me. She was a tall, rather grim woman who appeared hard and dressed in a mannish way, but she was sentimental at heart. I knew that because I had dealt with her before both in cases having to do with juvenile delinquency and with cruelty to animals. She fought against the sentimentality and the effort warped her judgment so that sometimes she leaned over backward.

I told her everything Kenny had told me and then I asked, “Why did you send him to Buckwalter?”

She grew indignant. “The report was all right. Buckwalter wanted to take Kenny with the idea of adopting him.”

“Buckwalter’s own sons ran away from him as soon as they could.”

“Most farm boys go to the city.”

I grinned, “Well, they’re coming home now in droves . . . to get a roof over their heads and something to eat.”

“Besides Kenny was very troublesome at the Orphanage. He was always disappearing. He didn’t think anything of spending a night in the woods.” She was silent for a moment, “I must say there’s something queer about the boy. He’s very wild . . . as if he were marked.”

“What’s his history?” I asked.

“What I’ve told you. Nobody knows who he is. He was left when he was two days old in a basket on the steps of the Courthouse.”

“What’s his other name? He says he hasn’t got any name but Kenny.”

“That’s absurd. His name is Kenneth Powell. We took the names of two of the employees at the Orphanage and put them together.”

The whole thing seemed plain enough at the moment. I said, “Well, it’s clear you can’t send him back to Old Man Buckwalter. He hates the Orphanage. Maybe he’d better stay here for a time.”

“Do you mean to adopt him?”

“Perhaps.”

“It’ll be difficult for you—a bachelor—with no women around.”

“I can manage. He’s not used to being babied. I don’t even think he likes it.”

“You’ll have to see Judge Knapp about it. Mr. Buckwalter has signed the first papers.”

“I think we can manage that.”

She stood up. “I must say I think it’s a great opportunity for Kenny. I’m not so sure about you. I don’t think you know what you’re taking on.”

She went away and in time we all appeared before Judge Knapp in Juvenile Court—Old Man Buckwalter, Mrs. Yokes, myself and Kenny. The boy told his story and said to the Judge that if he was sent back to Old Man Buckwalter he’d only run away again. He looked very small, standing in the big courtroom and very wild, despite his clean, new clothes and all the efforts he had made with the hairbrush to keep his black, curly hair in order. He wasn’t afraid or shy and answered quickly when the Judge put questions to him. As I watched him I thought I had never seen a child with so much charm and such wild good looks. He was like a young colt . . . like the colt Vincent had saved by sitting up all night with its head in his lap *willing* it to live.

When the hearing was over, the Judge announced his decision—that the boy was to stay on our farm for a period of probation, and if things went well, we could go into the question of adoption later on.

Kenny left the courtroom, wearing a broad grin. He had got what he wanted. It came out exactly as he had planned from that first day when he watched me from his hiding-place in the sassafras thicket. I regarded the grin with alarm and with some suspicion.

It was a suspicion not without foundation. After having had him on the farm and around the house for more than three weeks, I still couldn’t make head or tail of him. He had, I must say, behaved himself except for an inclination to tell tall stories. He had a way of disappearing suddenly to be gone for hours, where, nobody could make out from the stories he told on his return. The only certain thing was that he could not have gone very far in so short a time so that it must have been to the Jungle or into the wild country surrounding the lakes at the far end of the farm.

Once he returned with a wonderful tale of having come upon a litter of fox cubs outside one of the caves and told us that he spent the whole afternoon playing with them. It was a long, imaginative and detached story and while your reason told you that the tale was impossible, the details of the noises made by the cubs, the way they ran into their den and then came out again, and even the scratches on his hands which he said came from their milk-teeth, were so realistic that you found yourself listening wrapt with interest and belief.

And then one hot night with a full moon coming up over the Valley I could not sleep and went to the kitchen for a glass of milk. On my return I stopped as I passed his room and opened the door quietly to look in on him. The room was empty and the bed had not been slept in. The house was empty and in the moonlit barn there was no sign of him.

It was a wonderful night with a low, faint mist hanging over the Valley. By the light of the full moon you could see the cattle far down below. The shadows of the trees lay black across the grass and for a moment I felt an overpowering urge to leave the house, to quit the whole place

to which I was anchored by every possible bond and simply walk off through the mist into that enchanted moonlit, misty world in the Valley below. In the pond and along the creek the frogs were singing and in the gardens the birds were making their soft, startled, rustling noises which birds make at night. Across the Valley a hoot-owl kept up its monotonous hair-raising cry and once one of the catamounts screeched from the direction of the caves. The mood passed quickly and I was again a sober, responsible, middle-aged farmer, walking into his house to get some sleep to carry on with the work of the next day.

Twice during the rest of the night I wakened and went to the room and each time it was empty. When Mrs. Erskine called me for breakfast, Kenny had returned and was sound asleep, the curly, black head buried in the pillows.

Later in the day when I asked him where he had been, he looked at me in alarm and said at first that he had been in his room asleep all through the night, but after I kept questioning him, he finally admitted that he had come in just before daylight. He hung his head and sulked as if my questions were an unwarranted prying into his privacy.

"I didn't do anything," he said. "It was hot and I just went and slept in the pasture."

"Where?"

"By the big spring."

"Why didn't you tell me the truth?"

He didn't answer at once, and after a moment he said, "I didn't think anybody would care." And then he made a curious remark, "I went out because I *had* to."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know. I just *had* to. I couldn't stop myself."

That was as far as I ever got, but I understood why Old Man Buckwalter and the two farm women had called him a hopeless little liar and why the women had finally turned him back to the orphanage. His going and coming at night must have disturbed their peace of mind to a point at which they were afraid of him.

But it wasn't his lying and his disappearance during the day or his night excursions that disturbed me most. It was my utter inability to establish any real bond of understanding between us, or indeed any tie of any sort. I never knew what he thought. It was impossible to know whether he experienced any feeling toward me save as someone whom he had tricked into giving him exactly what he wanted. It was as if he were not quite human. He was like a raccoon which I had once found in the woods and made into a pet. The little beast finally grew so tame that it lived in the house along with the dogs, but in its heart it always remained wild and, like Kenny, disappeared at times to come home only when it wanted to be fed.

Beyond the pleasure of watching him, I felt no satisfaction whatever in Kenny, largely I think, because in those weeks we had been together I had never succeeded in establishing any sort of *human* relationship. I had the feeling at times, when I caught him watching me unawares, that he was far wiser and older than myself and that there was something inhuman about him. I was a convenience and a protection in a strange world where a child like himself had no freedom or dignity unless there was someone to protect him who also allowed him utter freedom. (On the morning I questioned him about his night escapade, he had given me a single glance that

seemed charged with actual hatred and resentment.)

And I think I was jealous too because, although I wanted to like him and he lived under my roof and ate my food, he always ran away to Vincent and the animals. I had a strange feeling that there was some secret between them and that behind our backs, they mocked me and all the others on the farm, who were so clever with machinery and for whom the hens fell off in their laying and the cows fell off in their milk.

So, as I left the courtroom I had, at sight of Kenny's broad grin, a feeling that I had been tricked and that I had taken on a responsibility in which there was no reward or satisfaction. At my age and in my situation I could have taken the boy into my home as a son, but he would not let me.

And then three weeks after we left the courtroom the thing solved itself, perfectly, to the satisfaction of all concerned. Vincent stopped me in the lane and said, "There's something I want to ask you."

It was hard for him to talk and when anything serious came up he grew even more inarticulate.

"Sure, Vincent, what is it?"

Then he blurted out. "Martha and I want to take Kenny to live with us."

For a moment I didn't know what to answer. I said, "But you've got the new baby. That makes four besides all the neighbors' kids that are always hanging around your house. How can Martha manage?"

"That's just it. The baby keeps Martha pretty busy. Kenny is old enough to help her with the older kids."

I couldn't picture Kenny as a "sitter" or a nursemaid. I said, "You know what he's like?"

"He's okay," said Vincent. "The kids are nuts for him."

I felt a great sensation of relief but I had to keep up appearances so, although in my heart the decision was already made, I said, "I'll think it over" and Vincent walked away down the lane toward the pasture with that curious animal grace which was always beautiful to watch. As he disappeared I felt a curious pang of envy for it seemed to me that there went a happy man, without an inhibition, simple as Nature itself, who loved a wife who loved him, passionately, who kept right on having children because he liked them and because that was the natural thing to do. He was like the trees, the frogs on the edge of the pond, the field of wheat ripening in the sun. And I couldn't help thinking of him on that cold February day when he had come in out of another world of cities and machinery and filth and noise and despair, out of a world and an age which had very nearly crushed him and the red-haired girl who sat in her shabby, worn clothes, fingering the cheap handbag and pouring out their story passionately. They had found where they belonged. They lived now in plenty, simply, in their emotions, their love for each other and their pleasure in their children. They were, I thought, the only really happy people I knew in all the world.

That night I said to Kenny, "How would you like to go and live with Martha and Vincent?"

It was as if I had somehow set a fire to the inside of him, as if the whole of the small body gave off an illumination.

"Jesus," he said, "that would be wonderful!"

“You must not say Jesus,” I told him, but what I wanted to say was, “You ungrateful little brat! You might have at least pretended you didn’t want to leave here.” But at the same time I wanted to laugh.

That very night we packed up his clothes so that he could be off early in the morning to the old Hubert Place. I think he would have liked going that very night.

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Of course, I was a damned fool to have had any doubts about the arrangement. Kenny moved in and became immediately a part of Vincent and Martha’s family and from the very beginning it was clear that this too had been a part of his intricate plot—a part I hadn’t even suspected. He now belonged to a big family, with a home like other kids and he had brothers and sisters and a real mother and father, for that was exactly how it was. It was as if somehow without their knowing it, Vincent and Martha had created a fifth child, older than all the others. I could never see, even from the beginning, that they made any difference between him and the others and even before he went to the Hubert Place to live, there was a friendship and an understanding between Kenny and Vincent which is shared by very few fathers and sons.

I must say Kenny largely took the other three kids off Martha’s hands. During the long hot summer they would disappear for the whole day sometimes into the Jungle and sometime into the wild country around the lakes. The dogs went with them and sometimes the goat, and if there were not too many fences, the pony. The fences made no trouble for the goat. She would simply lie down on her side and squeeze under the fence or daintily climb up a post brace and leap to the other side. Chuckling, I watched the procession many times crossing the fields in the Valley.

They must have been delirious excursions, exploring, swimming, fishing with Kenny who knew everything about the woods and the wild things. The other kids would come home at early evening ragged, tired, half-naked, trailing behind Kenny. Martha gave them a bag of sandwiches in the morning, and when they came home there was a big supper waiting with meat and vegetables and pie and quantities of good Jersey milk. The change in the kids from the first day I saw them was fantastic. They were strong now and brown and all their shyness was gone. It was indeed a long way from the sooty, cinder-paved backyard in Cincinnati.

Kenny didn’t change much. He still came back with fantastic stories and the other children seemed to have caught the story-telling talent from him. Or else the stories were true, for they would back Kenny up in his “lies” and insist that everything he said was true. Sometimes on Sundays Vincent went with them and once or twice I went along. Kenny, it was true, knew every coon tree and fox lair for miles around. He knew where the big bass lay hiding on a hot day and where the mallard nests were hidden away on tussocks in the marshes. And once he led us to the shallow water where acres of big carp were thrashing about, churning up the water, in an orgy of reproduction. For him and for the kids there was nothing remarkable in the mating of carp or of any animal on the farm or the mating of humans.

A year after Kenny went to live with Vincent and his family, I asked Vincent if Kenny still kept up his old trick of staying out all night. Vincent looked at me with suspicion, almost as if I knew something I should not have known.

“Why, yes,” he said. “How did you know?”

“He did it once when he was staying with me. What do you do about it?”

“Nothing,” said Vincent. “He can take care of himself.”

The curious thing was that it seemed to happen always about the time of the full moon.

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The luck that Vincent brought the farm seemed to stick and augment and sometimes I thought that Kenny too had something to do with it. We did a good job of farming but so did many others of our neighbors. Nevertheless, crops on our fields seem to yield more than fields just across the line-fence. When there was a bad hailstorm, the hail seemed not to hit our corn and fruit. When there was a thunderstorm during the hot, dry summers the rain seemed to fall on our land while it missed the parched farms a quarter of a mile away. And our dairy cattle had heifers and the beef cattle had bull calves, which was just the way we wanted it. Indeed, the evidence became so strong as the years passed that they came to call us the “lucky farm,” and I began to have strange ideas again about the things we do not fully understand, things out of the remote and misty past when man was far nearer to Nature and its laws than he is today.

As Kenny grew older, as he ceased to be a child and began to be a man, the likeness to Vincent became more and more apparent. It wasn't only the black, curly hair but the carriage, the rippling muscles, the dark tanned skin and the catlike grace—indeed all the things which made other men seem somehow misshapen and awkward. Strangers always took Kenny without question for Vincent's own son and I am quite certain that in the end Vincent regarded him as a son whom he had himself begotten. There were times when I was tempted to believe that somehow Vincent must have fathered the boy who was found on the steps of the courthouse save for the fact that Vincent had never been in our part of the country until he came to see me on that bleak February morning.

In school Kenny made no shining record. Indeed he was always two or three years behind the class in which he should have been. He read and wrote badly and never really learned to spell yet he knew things which others did not know and could never be taught by any school on this earth. In sports and games he led all the others in the village school. He swam and dived as easily, as gracefully, as a seal. And from the time he was fourteen he had a strange, heady effect upon the girls and even upon older women. There was something about him that seemed to excite them and drive them to silliness and folly. The schoolgirls would gather in little groups, watching him, talking about him and giggling, and as he walked along the village streets, middle-aged women would turn to look after him or watch him from doorways, as if a faun had suddenly appeared in the quiet village, or as if they saw in him something for which their spirits and bodies yearned, something which they had never known or would never find.

But of all this he seemed unaware. There was a curious cleanness and chasteness about him and it may have been that always there was only one girl on his mind and that was Maisie. Maisie was Vincent and Martha's oldest child. She was the redhead like her mother, though her hair and eyes were darker—the hair a deep auburn and the eyes violet. From the time Maisie was twelve she no longer went on the long, all-day excursions into the Jungle or the wild country around the lakes. She stayed at home to help and slowly and imperceptibly there grew up the knowledge between her and Kenny that they were no longer children. You could see it happening and you could see too that what happened in the end was inevitable.

And as they grew up there was a cloud growing in the world outside which in the beginning touched directly and immediately neither Vincent, nor his family nor Kenny. In their simplicity and the intimacy in which they lived with the animals and the fields and the trees, they were, I

think, never aware of what was happening in Europe, in Asia, in all the world. They knew nothing of the intrigues, the border incidents, the political maneuvers between nations that clouded the days of the rest of us who read the newspapers, and lived in the modern world and went sometimes beyond the borders of our wild, beautiful Valley. It had nothing to do with Vincent and his half-wild family which grew year after year until there were nine counting Kenny. Yet it was that cloud which was in the end to strike them, more deeply than it struck any of us on the farm.

When Kenny was just past eighteen, the war came, suddenly, I am sure, to the family at the Hubert Place, though not to the rest of us. The sudden knowledge of it seemed to have a strange and unexpected effect upon the boy, exciting and absorbing him. It came right in the midst of the awakening of himself and Maisie to the fact that he was a man and she was a woman. We had noticed the thing happening. In the evenings they would slip away alone together into the woods or they would take Vincent's car and drive off to return late at night. I have never seen a more natural courtship, with no simpering or giggling. There was a dignity about it which prevented the rest of us from making the usual jests, sometimes coarse, which are a habit in the country.

I do not know what went on during those long excursions nor do I think did Vincent or Martha. Once walking with the dogs through the Jungle in the evening, I came upon the young pair by the side of the small creek in the thickest part of the wood. She was sitting on the bank of the stream with Kenny's curly, black head in her lap. I would have gone forward and spoken to them but as I was about to move, the girl leaned forward and the boy raised his body a little, reaching up to clasp both arms about her neck. They kissed then as her dark auburn hair fell over his face hiding them both. It was a long and passionate kiss and his body turned toward her with the slow sensual movement of a panther as he buried his dark, curly head in her breasts.

I turned quickly away, a little startled by what I had seen and went on my way. Again for a moment it was as if time had turned backward. What I had seen for a second was no simple awkward, half-clumsy romance. The whole picture with its queer, animal beauty and the slow movement of the boy's body against the background of the pool, the trees and the heat of the long summer evening was something wild and filled with beauty, which belonged to the remote past in which none of us had had any fear of that in us which lies so near to the very core of the earth and the pattern of the universe.

For the rest of the walk, I felt a curious envy of what I had seen, for what I had never known and what I should never experience—that pure, unchecked, uncomplicated passion which most people in this modern world never know. I had seen it for an instant, aware that in all my experience with women there had always been barriers which kept us apart from each other in a cramped, incoherent loneliness even in moments of great intimacy. I understood that perhaps that was why I had never married—because, without even knowing it, I had been searching all my life for what I had seen during that brief second and had never found. The memory, the picture of the scene beside the wild, shadowed pool, would remain with me as long as I lived, a kind of symbol of those things which had been lost out of the lives of all of us in a world in which machinery had made slaves of us and time and speed had become our rulers.

Then one Sunday morning Kenny and Maisie came up to my house dressed in their Sunday best. They came in and sat down and one of the puppies climbed immediately into Kenny's lap

and as his strong, brown hand began caressing it, the puppy fell asleep. Kenny said, "Maisie and I are going to be married this afternoon and we want you to stand up with us."

I was more flattered by the invitation than I had ever been by any favor or honor in the whole of my life, but what came next pleased me even more. He said, "I never had any real father and Vincent can't stand up with me and give Maisie away at the same time so I want you to be my father."

They were going to be married in the Valley church at four o'clock and, oddly enough, it was Kenny who wanted it to be like a real wedding with a best man and the father giving away the bride. I wondered at the haste and suddenness, but Kenny gave me the reason. He was going to join the Marines. They would go away on a wedding trip for a week and then he was going to war.

My quick impulse was to dissuade him—he was only eighteen and at that time they would not conscript him—but I knew from long experience there was no use trying. Kenny always knew what he wanted to do. And Maisie seemed happy about it, accepting it as a natural thing with a boy like Kenny. Then he said, with a shade of disappointment in his voice, "I'd like to be a flier but I don't know enough. I guess I should have worked harder in school."

"Well," I said, "the Marines are a pretty good outfit with a good tradition." But somehow I felt his disappointment within myself. He belonged in the air flying toward the sun.

So they were married at the Valley church that afternoon with the bright October sun shining through the windows and afterward everybody on the farm went to the Hubert Place for supper. It was a warm night of Indian summer and we all ate the big meal Martha and her girls had prepared on short notice at long tables made of boards laid on trestles under the big maple trees beside the spring house.

The bride and groom sat side by side at the head of the table and the Walker brothers, two old men who were the township fiddlers, and Jim McKewan with his guitar provided music. There was fried chicken and a dozen vegetables and three kinds of pie and lots of beer and hard cider and elderberry wine, and as it grew dark Martha and the girls lighted the Chinese lanterns which hung from the lower limbs of the big maple trees. And once or twice, I felt tears coming into my eyes and a lump into my throat, over what I am not quite sure, except that it had something to do with the human race in general, with its struggles and blunders and general lovability.

And the figure of Vincent had something to do with it. Moving about, happy, simple, jovial, filling the glasses and asking the fiddlers and Jim McKewan to play, "Old Dan Tucker" and "Red River," he was the essence of friendliness and satisfaction. He was in his late thirties now with eight children, nine counting Kenny. And now the boy he and Martha had taken in and whom he loved like his own children was marrying his oldest daughter, and he was happy because nothing would be broken up. He was the herdsman now and the part owner of fat cattle and big uddered dairy cows—an important farmer and citizen.

Even the old house had changed. It looked prosperous now, and lived in. Instead of being what it had been for years, the unloved, battered refuge of fly-by-night tenants, it was loved again and therefore alive once more as it had been once before, a century earlier.

I was present at the party and yet not present for while I enjoyed the fun, another part of me—

the part which always set me apart from people like Kenny and Vincent and complicated all my life—was standing behind my own shoulder, watching. And then someone cried, “Look at the moon!” and we all turned toward the distant hill above the Jungle and a sudden silence fell over the whole party. There above the mists in the Valley and above the rim of the distant wooded hills appeared the great, red, full moon of October. For nearly a minute we all stood in silence watching and then the fiddlers struck up a tune and Vincent brought out another keg of hard cider. Then I thought, “It’s the full moon again” and remembered how Kenny as a little boy had disappeared on just such a night out of my house and on just such a night again and again after he had gone to live with Martha and Vincent. I thought, “He’s going away again at the time of the full moon, only this time he’s taking a nymph with him.”

And I thought of many other things, again of how people became entangled in your life, despite anything you could do, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. I thought again of Vincent and Martha sitting in my office on that dreary February day and of the cinder-paved backyard in Cincinnati, and the cruelty of a world which broke up the lives of people like Vincent and Martha because it was too complex and overwhelming for them to understand it. Because Martha had fought and because Vincent was a simple fellow, they had been saved.

At last the party came to an end. Much cider made the music of the fiddlers and Jim McKewan more and more uncertain and discordant, although no one noticed it. Old Charlie Betts had fallen asleep propped against the trunk of a big maple tree. The dogs, stuffed with what was left over from the table, were curled up asleep under the lilac bushes where people with uncertain feet could not trample them. The younger children lay on the grass or in their parent’s arms as simply and as soundly asleep as the dogs. And overhead the full moon, now high in the sky, had lost its voluptuous red beauty and turned clear and chaste as Diane, lighting all the scene with a clear light, which made filigrees of black shadows out of the half-naked trees.

Then suddenly in the way of country parties it was all over. Kenny and Maisie came out of the house with brand new suitcases and store clothes and were pelted with rice as they climbed into Vincent’s car to drive off. And then just before they went away, Kenny leaned out of the car, his eyes shining, his tousled black hair all on end, and took my hand. He said, “Thanks Pete, for everything always.”

It wasn’t the words which gave me pleasure. It was something in the bright blue-grey eyes and the shake of the hand which told me something I had been wanting to hear, almost since the moment I had caught sight of the impish face watching me from the shelter of the sassafras thicket. With the eyes and the handshake, he had said it all at last. He had taken me into the society of himself and Vincent. He had told me that I was one of them.

It was the last time I ever saw him.

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The routine of the farm went on its way and one by one the younger men were drawn off into the war and everyone had to work longer hours to produce the food the country and the world needed so badly. As the boys left, a certain slow sadness fell over the whole place, but I think it was Kenny whom we missed most of all. You would be working in the barn or in the fields and find yourself thinking about him, as if he were still there and then suddenly you missed the contagious laugh and knew he was gone away. I think the animals missed him too in their own way for Vincent had now only an old man to help him with them, and the old man simply trailed him about carrying out his orders. He was indifferent to animals and regarded them largely as

nuisances. It meant long hours for Vincent who could not sleep if every animal on the place was not dry, warm, fed, and well. In the old days Kenny would spell Vincent in sitting up with sick animals or take over all together the care of a sick calf or colt. You missed the sight of Kenny crossing a field with a whole troop of calves following affectionately after him.

Maisie went twice by day coach halfway across the country to visit him at camp and then he was sent suddenly to the Pacific. She read his letters, or those parts of them which were not too intimate, to all the rest of us on the farm. Kenny was enjoying the experience and became almost eloquent in his letters, but the bad spelling and grammar persisted. Whatever he did in life, he did with all his body and spirit and something of his enthusiasm came through in the pencil-written, badly spelled letters. Before he sailed they had made him a Top Sergeant. That too was inevitable because other men always loved him and respected him. Where women fell in love with him, men admired him. And presently out of the letters there emerged a figure called Buck who was Kenny's pal. Buck came from Tennessee and he was, we gathered, a big fellow with a wild and prankish sense of humor. He was always with Kenny. They went out on Saturday nights together and once over a short week end, Kenny went to visit Buck's family.

There was indeed so much of Buck in the letters that I think for a time Maisie grew a little jealous and presently came to skip the parts of the letter which referred to Buck. And when they had gone to the Pacific the bond between the two boys seemed to be intensified. In each letter it was always Buck, Buck, Buck. Then came a letter saying that both of them had been made Second Lieutenants and with it a snapshot of them standing together against a background of betel palms.

In the photograph Buck showed up big and blond, a few inches taller than Kenny. He was a good-looking kid, a little over nineteen by now—with a big muscular frame and a wide grin. They were photographed in shorts with their arms about each other's shoulders each with a beer bottle in his hand. It was a gay photograph. They were enjoying themselves in spite of everything. Kenny looked a little thinner and very dark but he had lost none of the wild faunlike appearance. In one corner of the picture there was a little dog sitting with his head cocked on one side, his ears erect. Clearly he had been interested in the camera and the whole business of the picture taking. He was short legged, white with dark spots and a tail that curved up over his back—a comical little fellow. Vincent said, "Kenny was sure to have a dog—I could have guessed that. They call him Stinky."

The sight of Kenny in the photograph upset Maisie. Martha said she found the girl crying alone in her room twice and that she had taken to disappearing in the afternoon to go off alone to the Jungle or the wild country about the lakes, as if by returning to the places where she had followed him as a child and where later on he had courted her, she could somehow come closer to him. She was very disappointed too because she wasn't having a baby. Martha said she was sure it would have been all right if there had been a baby.

Then one spring morning, Vincent came into my office carrying a telegram in his hand. I had never seen him look as he looked that morning, his strong, broad shoulders drooping, his feet dragging as if he were very tired, with all the light gone out of his eyes. I knew what was in the telegram. I simply took it from him and read it without speaking because that was easier for him. Then I looked at him and I knew that we were both thinking the same thing. We had both known always in our hearts that Kenny, driving away from the wedding supper, was never coming back.

After the telegram there came two letters from Kenny written before he was killed. He had been in the fighting and enjoyed the danger. He and Buck had been in charge of two platoons engaged in a tough job of landing behind the Japs on a small island and they had done the job well. Reading between the lines you could see why Kenny with all his experience and his nearness to animals, the trees and the earth itself had been a natural for jungle fighting. I remembered suddenly how he had always been able to see things in the dark which were invisible to the rest of us. He had eyes like a cat or an owl. Those night excursions during the full moon which he had made into the woods as a boy had paid off in the end. With Kenny leading the way, he and Buck and their men had wiped out the Japs on the little island.

The two letters had a curious lyric eloquence. They described the phosphorescence of the sea as they splashed ashore. "It was like fire," he wrote, "splashing up all about the fellows." And he wrote of the damp smell of that other jungle on the other side of the world and the night cries of the birds and the jokes Buck made even under the heaviest fire. Vincent read us those parts of the letters which were meant for our ears and when he had finished, Tom said, "That kid is sure a humdinger" and then a sickening silence fell over all of us. While we had listened we were hypnotized into the belief that Kenny was still alive. It was not until Tom spoke that the knowledge that Kenny was dead, like a lump of ice, came into our hearts again.

And it was hard to believe that we should never see him again. He had been so much a part of the farm. A dozen times a day the knowledge would come up and slap you in the face—at the sight of his cap hanging in the milk parlor, or the sight of the heifer he had raised so carefully, at the sound of someone whistling in the mow of the fat-cattle barn or the cry of a hoot-owl or the screaming of the catamount or the sound of foxes barking in the moonlight on the ridge. All these things brought back the memory of Kenny and the knowledge that he was not coming back.

As for Maisie she seemed to have no more interest in living. She dragged herself about the house and she grew thinner and thinner. She carried Kenny's letters with her always, inside her dress, and Vincent said that she read them over and over again until they became ragged. And once Martha said, "You know, the boy wrote the most wonderful things to her . . . the kind of things which a woman loves to hear and would never tell to anyone. He kinda made it seem each time she got a letter as if he was with her again, making love to her. It's a funny thing that even if he couldn't even spell very good, he could write like he did telling her the things she wanted to hear, reminding her of the little things that had happened between them. What he wrote would just tear your heart apart."

Three months after the news came of Kenny's death, Vincent had a letter from Buck. He had been wounded in the same fight in which Kenny was killed and he was still in the hospital. It was the first chance he had had to write. He was sorry about that because he supposed maybe they had wanted to know all about how it happened. He wasn't writing direct to Maisie because the letter might be too much for her. Vincent could judge about showing her the letter. He'd know best.

He wrote,

We had a tough job to do and it was a tough night on which to do it, with a bright, clear, full moon and the sky full of stars. If you stuck your head up the Nips could see you and take a pot shot. We tried to get away without Stinky because we was afraid

that particular night he'd bark. We had him pretty well trained so he'd keep quiet but we couldn't be sure. So we tied him up in the cave we was living in and went off without him.

I guess maybe I'd better tell you about Stinky in case Kenny didn't write you about him. He was just a mutt dog we found in Australia. I guess he didn't belong to anybody but from the moment he saw Kenny, he said to himself, 'That's my boss' and he stuck to Kenny like glue. When we left Australia we smuggled Stinky along with us inside a duffle-bag. He was a smart dog and kept quiet as a mouse, and once we was aboard ship it was all right. He stuck right with us. You couldn't have shook him off if you'd wanted to. He always slept right close to Kenny and if the goin' wasn't too tough he'd go along with us. He was a funny looking cuss with short legs and a tail that curved up over his back.

Well, this night we tied him and left him behind but just as we was getting into the jungle where the going was tough, Kenny felt something cold in the palm of his hand and it was Stinky's nose. He'd chawed through his rope and come along. Kenny said, "Quiet Stinky!" and Stinky flattened out with his belly on the ground like an old-timer and crawled along beside us.

About that time the bullets began to whizz and zing. The Japs was just shooting at nothing. I guess they was nervous and knew something was up, but pretty soon they began lobbing in heavy mortar shells. It was just guess work because they didn't know where we were but we spread out and dug in to lie low till they stopped lobbing in them shells. So Kenny and I was separated and Stinky found himself in the same hole with me and pretty soon in the moonlight I seen Stinky crawling toward Kenny's fox-hole on his stomach, quiet-like just like an old-timer. He was trying to get back to Kenny. We was only about fifty feet apart but some S.O.B. (excuse the language) must have seen the white parts on Stinky moving in the moonlight and shot at him. He hit Stinky but didn't kill him only the dog couldn't get up. He must have been kind of paralyzed because he kept raising himself up on his front legs and trying to drag himself along toward Kenny. And then I seen something dark moving and it was Kenny, crawling on his stomach to go and fetch the little dog. That was the last thing I remember because a big mortar shell landed right between us and when I woke up I was back at the base with a piece of shrapnel through my shoulder.

I guess that's all there is to tell except that they never found anything of Kenny or Stinky. They just went up to Heaven in a burst of fire.

The rest of the letter wasn't important save perhaps that Buck said that as soon as he was well enough he would come and pay us a visit.

When I had finished the letter, Vincent looked at me and said, "Well, anyway, he's got Stinky with him. That's what he would have liked."

But I was thinking of something else—of two lines in Buck's letter—"They just went up to Heaven in a burst of fire" and "There was a big full moon which made everything bright as day."

Then Vincent, with an odd look in his eyes, said, "Funny. There was a full moon."

The rest of the story is really Maisie's. Vincent let her read Buck's letter and, strangely enough, it seemed to make things easier for her. Perhaps it was that the letter made Kenny's death final, that it made her believe at last that she would never see him again. She seemed more cheerful and she began to eat again, but she didn't give up her excursions alone into the Jungle and the wild country. Some of us began to believe that somehow she met him there in the woods among the wild things which he loved and understood so well. And sometimes, if you permitted your imagination to carry you away, you believed that when Kenny met her, he had with him a little mutt dog with black and tan spots and a tail curved high over his back. But she never said anything about the hours spent in the woods, and no one ever asked her. She said once to Martha that she would never get married again because it would be impossible ever to find a boy like Kenny.

The June of that year had been more lush than usual, with the meadows deep and rich and the undergrowth in the Jungle very nearly impenetrable. Late one Sunday afternoon I had gone down to the Hubert Place and was sitting talking with Vincent on the front porch which overlooked the Valley, and while we were talking we both noticed something which fixed our attention and stopped the words in our mouths.

Out of the Jungle into the deep meadow came the figure of Maisie. But she was not alone. There was a man with her and I knew that in Vincent's mind the same thought occurred as in my own. He thought, "Kenny has come back." But almost at once we saw that the man couldn't be Kenny because he was quite a lot taller than Maisie.

Neither of us said anything for a long time but simply watched the two figures coming toward us. We knew that Maisie had gone off after Sunday dinner alone into the Jungle and we knew that there was no road anywhere near that wild part of the farm and that no one save people from the farm ever went there. And now Maisie was coming back accompanied by a stranger.

As they came nearer we saw that he was young—not more than twenty or twenty-one. He was blond, dressed in brand new clothes and carried a small paper suitcase and a coat over his arm. A moment later they crossed the road and came through the gate into the garden. Then Maisie looked up and saw us sitting on the porch and said, "This is Kenny's friend, Buck. He's come for a visit."

But Maisie seemed dazed with a wild, bewildered look in her eyes. It was the look of someone who had just been through an experience that bordered upon the supernatural. We stood up and shook hands with Buck who said, "Pleased to meet you!"

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What had happened Maisie told me later when she came to talk with me about the other strange things she could never quite understand. What had happened in the thickest part of the Jungle was simply this—

Maisie had gone as usual into the Jungle to wander along the creek bank. As she told me the story she said, "Maybe you think I was foolish but going there helped me a lot. You see whenever I thought of Kenny it was always in connection with the woods and the birds and the wild things, and I used to go there and sit and listen to the sounds of the woods. I used to watch the minnows in the ponds and the killdeers running along the wet ground. I used to remember too how when we were kids he used to take us there all day swimming and fishing and exploring the caves. And so when I was there it always seemed that he was somewhere

near.”

On that Sunday afternoon she had gone to the pond where I had come upon them suddenly long ago. She lay on the bank close to the water and in the drowsy heat she presently fell asleep. How long she slept she did not know but presently she was awakened by the presence of some one near her and as she opened her eyes she heard a voice saying, “Hello! Are you Maisie?” And for a second she thought the voice was Kenny’s voice and when she sat up she saw a stranger who said, “I’m Buck!”

For a moment she felt the old jealousy but it went quickly in her astonishment at seeing him standing there with the paper suitcase and the raincoat over his arm, far from any road—in the place where no one had ever come but Kenny and herself and her brothers and sisters. And she said, “Where did you come from?” And Buck said, “From home, down in Tennessee. I came to pay you all a visit.”

Then he sat down beside her in a friendly way, as if he had always known her, but her curiosity still wasn’t satisfied and she asked, “How did you get here? How did you know your way?”

He said, “It was Kenny told me. He used to talk a lot about home and about you, especially at night when we were sleeping near each other. He never slept much and he liked to talk, and I got so that I knew exactly what the farm looked like. I guess I could have drawn a map of the whole place. So I hitch-hiked out here and they dropped me off on the back road where it turns off the highway and I just followed the crick in. I kind of thought I might find you right here by this pond. He told me that’s where you both came. . . . And it was just like he said.”

Maisie accepted his explanation but still she couldn’t quite believe it and after other things happened she believed his story even less. That was why she came to me. There was something about the whole thing she couldn’t understand.

So she brought him back to the house and he stayed for a visit working about the place with Vincent and presently one day he came to me and said that he thought he’d like to stay there and work, and we took him on.

He was a big, pleasant fellow, powerfully built, but with the extraordinary gentleness toward everyone which big, strong men often have. He was very good with animals and a great help to Vincent. He didn’t have that understanding Kenny had always had, as if he and the animals had some power of communication. It was different. Buck was like a mother to them and pretty soon the calves began following him about the same as they had done with Kenny.

At the Hubert Place, they gave him Kenny’s old room—the one he had always shared with Vincent’s oldest boy who was himself in the Army now. The odd thing was that he seemed already to know the room and everything about it; he also knew everything about the house itself and the barns on the place. On the very first day he pitched in without asking any questions. He knew where everything was—the feed, the tools. He even took down Kenny’s cap where it had hung ever since he went away and took to wearing it, without asking whose it was or whether he had permission to use it. To all of us he was a godsend, not only because we needed help badly on the farm but because somehow he filled up the strange emptiness which Kenny had left behind him. The hurt which all of us felt over Kenny’s death grew easier, like a wound healing at last. He never asked questions about his job or what Kenny used to do. He seemed always to know.

At first Maisie was a little strange with him, holding herself aloof from him. She was polite but distant and one had the feeling that she was watching him, partly in astonishment and partly with a faint hostility. I only found out later why this was so—because he had seemed simply to move in and take Kenny’s place without asking permission of her or of anyone else. It was as if he assumed that that was what he was meant to do. Of course, he wasn’t the same as Kenny—I don’t think anyone could have filled Kenny’s place entirely—but gradually almost without our realizing it, he almost did so.

I think in the end it was his engaging grin and his gentleness which won her over—those things and a certain warmth and tenderness he displayed for her from the beginning. She resisted him too because she had some foolish idea that she should be faithful to Kenny for the rest of her life. But the longer he stayed and the more the thread of his life became entangled with the threads of all the other lives on the place, the fainter grew the image and the memory of Kenny. He took to calling Vincent “Pop” exactly as Kenny had always done. It pleased Vincent who grinned each time he used the word. And after Buck had been there about three months, he and Maisie began to go out sometimes in the evening to a square dance or into the village for ice cream. About their relationship there was no atmosphere of courting; they were like brother and sister.

I myself had a feeling that there was something strange about the whole thing, something which belonged in the realm of the things which we do not properly understand, but I said nothing to the others because I thought that perhaps they did not notice it and anyway they were inclined to think that my mystical side sometimes became a little moonshiny. So I was surprised on the morning Maisie suddenly appeared at my house and said, “Pete, there’s something I want to talk to you about.”

She looked very serious and young and troubled as she sat down in the big chair in my office—the same chair in which her mother had sat long ago on a cold, foggy winter morning.

“It’s kind of hard,” she said. “Maybe I sound kind of foolish but I can’t make out what’s going on. I’m scared. That’s why I wanted to talk to you. I don’t think the others would understand.”

I said, “Sure. Go ahead!”

“It’s about Buck,” she said. “Are you going to keep him on?”

I said yes, if he wanted to stay, that he was a good man and a nice fellow and a great help. “Why?” I asked. “Do you want him to stay?”

She was silent for a moment and then said, “I don’t know. So many funny things have happened. You see when Kenny was killed I thought I’d never love any other man or ever marry one. I’ll never love anyone the way I loved him. He was special . . . and different.” She looked at me directly. “I think you knew that, didn’t you, Pete?”

“Yes,” I began to suspect something and I asked, “but what has this to do with Buck? Is he falling for you?”

She looked down at her hands and said, “I don’t know. Sometimes I think he is but he never says anything. He never gives any sign.”

“Maybe he’s waiting for you to help him. He was Kenny’s buddy.” I waited for an answer but there wasn’t any and I said, “You understand what I mean?”

“Yes.” Again she hesitated and then said, “You know, Pete. I have a funny feeling that it’s what Kenny wants.” She blushed and said, “Sometimes I think Kenny has sent him here.”

It was odd that this was exactly what I had thought once or twice. I told her so and she said, “That’s why I came to talk it over with you.”

And then she told me how she had wakened that hot summer afternoon by the side of the deep pool to find Buck standing beside her and of the strange conversation in which she could not believe. And there were other things that happened again and again, small things, intonations of voice and fragments of conversation that all seemed as if Buck had always been one of them and had lived with them at the Hubert Place always. The odd thing was that Buck himself seemed to think there was nothing unusual about any of the things he did or said or that there was any reason that he should not have known all the things he knew.

As she finished she said, “It’s all as if Kenny had sent him back to take care of me.”

“What do you think about Buck? Do you love him?”

She smiled an absent, bemused smile, “I don’t know. I like him. You couldn’t help liking him and he’s very kind to me. But it isn’t the way I felt about Kenny. With him I think I loved him from the time I was a little girl, long before he ever loved me or even thought of me in that way. There were times with Kenny when I thought I loved him so much that it would kill me, times when I felt faint as if I were dying.”

I said, “That was because he was Kenny. You couldn’t ever expect to find that again, ever. I never knew any other boy like Kenny.”

I looked at her for a moment wondering if I dared say what I wanted to say and then took the plunge, “You see, I never really believed that Kenny belonged on this earth in these times. I was never quite sure that he was human like the rest of us. He knew things we didn’t know or can never learn.” As I spoke I watched her face and saw the pleasure growing in it. I said, “You see, you were lucky to have had Kenny even for a short time. I never knew any other girl so lucky. Did you ever study Greek mythology in school?”

“A little bit,” said Maisie. “We had a teacher who loved it and she used to tell us stories about the Gods and Goddesses and Jason and Perseus. I used to like them.”

I said, “You remember about how the Gods sometimes came to earth in human form and about the fauns that lived in the forest?”

The brightness grew in the girl’s face, “Yes . . . yes.”

I said, “Well, for me, Kenny was like that. Nobody ever knew who he was and as Buck wrote ‘he disappeared in a burst of fire.’ Maybe you were very lucky even to have loved him for a little while. I know all this sounds foolish but there’s a lot of things we don’t know.”

“I don’t think that it sounds foolish at all,” said Maisie, and then she said, “I’m glad I came to talk to you. You told me what I hoped you’d tell me. You made everything a lot clearer.”

“About Buck, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“I think it would be a wonderful idea for you to marry Buck. I think it’s what Kenny wants. You couldn’t marry a nicer boy.”

She stood up and said, “Thanks, Pete,” and went out. I watched her walking down the lane between the rows of locust trees past the pond. She walked very straight, her auburn hair shining in the early October sun. It seemed to me that the sadness had gone out of her and that she was hurrying.

When she had gone I went down to the dairy barn to see Vincent and as I drew near there came around the corner of the barn, a dog. He was a stranger of no particular breed. He was white with black and tan spots, with a bushy tail which curved high above his short back—an ugly dog but bright and merry with an intelligent eye. He looked thin and dirty as if he had come a long way trying to find his master. The sight of a strange dog on the place was in itself fantastic enough for our own dogs in a pack drove any strange away on sight. Now they were trailing along in a friendly manner sniffing at the heels of the newcomer. Before I had recovered my surprise at sight of him, I heard Buck’s whistle from the calf nursery and then his voice calling, “Here, Stinky! Here, Stinky!” And I felt that suddenly my senses were failing me.

The dog turned and went into the calf nursery and I followed to find Buck bending over him giving him the milk which remained in one of the calves’ buckets. Buck was saying, “There old fellow. Fill yourself up!”

I said, “Where did you find him?”

Buck looked up with a wide grin. “I didn’t find him. He found me. He turned up at Vincent’s last night. You know how stray dogs are always coming there.” He rubbed the dog’s ears with his big hand, “I named him Stinky after the dog Kenny and I had. He’s a smart dog. He knows his name already.” Then he stood up, “He must have come a long way. He’s awful thin and last night he was all worn out.”

I think the courtship began from the moment of my talk with Maisie. She must have given Buck some sign because their relationship changed from that time on from that of brother and sister to that of young lovers. There wasn’t any mistake about it. Vincent and Martha were pleased because Maisie was happy now and because Buck had already become one of their own children.

Six weeks later they were married. This time it was a quiet wedding and again I stood up with the groom. There wasn’t any big supper under the trees by the light of a full moon with hard cider and the fiddlers and Jim McKewan’s guitar. Maisie wanted it that way—small and quiet, and in a way she was right; all the fire and passion and sensuousness belonged to Kenny. This time it was a marriage of tenderness and warmth, not so ecstatic and passionate but perhaps, in the long run, better. At least it was the kind of marriage to heal the wounds that Kenny’s death had left. Maisie was in love with Buck, only it was a different thing.

Last July in the middle of the harvest I was sitting under the trees on the grass looking down over the Valley where the mist had begun to rise over the bottom pastures. We had worked in the fields until dark and it was nearly midnight when a red, hot, full moon began to show above the ridge. It came up like a red shield of burnished copper with the black branches of the trees silhouetted against it and as I sat there I saw a figure coming across country out of the mist. I knew by the walk that it was Vincent. He was past forty now but he still walked like a young man, like a boy, as Kenny had always walked. I thought of Kenny again as I saw him approaching.

He was a little startled to find me there on the lawn in the moonlight. He said, “Maisie has just

had a baby. It's a fine nine-pound boy. I thought you'd like to know."

He was grinning at the pleasure of his first grandchild and I asked him in for a drink. As we raised our glasses to drink to the new baby I knew that we were both thinking the same thing—that no matter how much we liked Buck we both wished it had been Kenny's child. And then I thought, suddenly, "It's the full moon again!"

Three days later I went to see the baby. I stepped over Stinky lying in the sun on the doorstep and went up to Maisie's room where the baby lay in bed beside her. She sat up and lifted the baby and said, "Isn't he a beauty, Pete?"

Even at four days old he was a beauty, but there was something strange about him. He didn't look like either Maisie or Buck. He had quite a head of hair and it was dark and soft and curly, and the small ears set close to the head were a little pointed; there was no doubt about it. For a moment there was an embarrassed silence and then our eyes met and Maisie smiled. We said nothing but we both thought the same thing.

The baby is now seven months old and there isn't any doubt about the color of the hair or the shape of the ears and the eyes are the same strange, intense, grey-blue, fringed with dark lashes as those which I had discovered long ago watching me from among the leaves of the sassafras thicket. I knew that biologists would tell you that no such thing could happen, that a redhead and a blond could never have a dark child, but there was not the faintest doubt that the child was Maisie and Buck's child. I'm not trying to argue or prove anything I'm just telling you a story, as it happened. I only suggest that there are still a lot of things we don't know or understand and a lot of things that Kenny knew that we didn't know and can never learn, because they have to be born in you.

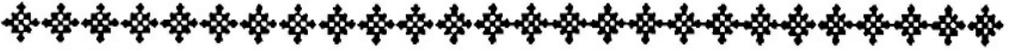
Somehow Kenny—or what was the essence of Kenny—had managed to come back.

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*RETREAD*

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## RETREAD



Frank MacPherson was a big fellow with red hair just beginning to be touched with grey. At forty-seven he still had a good, straight figure, muscular and in good condition, partly because he was naturally a healthy, vigorous man and partly because for twenty-years he had spent all the time he could spare from his insurance office in San Francisco on the ranch he owned in the foothill cattle country. He had very bright blue eyes and a healthy tan skin and a hearty laugh. People liked him because of his health, his vitality and his good humor. Most of all women liked him, even younger women, who felt when he came into a room “Here is a man!” His warm voice caressed and excited them. Here was a man who lived to the full, who hadn’t any complexes, who could be humorous, tender, impulsive and at times even reckless. Any clever calculating woman knew all that at a glance. Any amorous woman knew it from experience. Any feminine, warm-blooded woman felt it instinctively. Here was a man who could protect and care for her, who would be a tender but vigorous lover. It was easy to see, why he was a popular man.

And so when the war came it was inevitable that Frank should begin champing at the bit like one of the big blond Palomino stallions on his own foothill ranch. He was the kind which is made for war and for adventure, the kind which can’t keep out of the big things going on in his generation. He had been like that about the First World War, twenty-eight years earlier, only then there wasn’t anything to get in his way. As a kid of nineteen he hadn’t had any responsibilities to tie him down. He had gotten the permission of his father, a tough old ranchman, and gone off as a volunteer—big, tough, strong, wiry, fearless, just the sort any army would be looking for. He had nearly two years of it and came out with a Croix de Guerre, a Congressional Medal and a couple of holes in spots which didn’t impair his health, his exuberance or his vigor. In fact they only added glamor. He had enjoyed the war, danger, wounds, shellfire, bullets and all. He said, “You couldn’t be out of a thing like that—the biggest thing that happened in your time. If you were out of it, you’d feel that you’d missed something for all the rest of your life. Better get it in the neck than never know what it was like.”

He didn’t, of course, know then that Democracy had not been made safe or that all wars had not been ended or that there would be a bigger war in his time, one which took in the whole of the world. When the second war came he was not a wild, foot-loose kid. He was a prominent citizen, happily married with a pretty middle-aged wife and three children—a boy called Jimmy who was twenty-one, another called Bert who was nineteen and a daughter called Maisie who was seventeen. And he had a big and flourishing insurance business which he had built up himself with the same healthy good-humored vigor which touched everything he undertook.

It was a happy marriage. His wife loved him and she was wise enough to know that she had a good thing. Not many women were so lucky. She knew well enough that sometimes he strayed from the fold but she knew too that he always came back to her and she knew (perhaps the wisest thing of all) that what made him restless was also what made her love him and had made the thought of any other man impossible for more than twenty-four years of her life.

Jimmy, the older boy, was rather like his mother, small and neatly built and quiet. There was a gentleness, a steadiness about him that was very like her. He meant to be a lawyer and was well along in his studies when the war came and disrupted everything. Without any particular

fanfare or excitement he went as a volunteer and ended up, slight, slim and quiet by being a bomber pilot.

Frank loved the boy and was proud of him, but there was always something, some small, indefinable thing which came between them, as if the healthy exuberance of the father embarrassed the quiet boy and made him feel uneasy. It was Bert, the younger one, who got on with his father. He had the same red hair and big muscular build as his old man and he had the same exuberance and zest and the same love for animals and fishing. They looked alike and thought alike and were in fact more like brothers than father and son. When they were together, trout fishing or riding over the range, there was no barrier between them. They understood each other perfectly, often enough without speaking at all. It was Bert who liked to hear his father's stories of the First War long after the rest of the family had come to know them by heart and grown tired of them. You always had a feeling that Bert envied his father's experience which it appeared he himself would never have until the day the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor.

The daughter Maisie Frank loved with all the warmth that such a man has for an only daughter. She, like Jimmy, resembled her mother, a fact which did not make Frank love her the less.

First Jimmy went as a volunteer and the very next day Bert came to his father and asked for his permission to enlist. The going of Jimmy had troubled the father, but that Bert, *his* Bert should want to go too was unsettling.

Frank said, "Listen, kid. You're only nineteen. You've got plenty of time."

"How old were you when you went?" asked the red-haired son.

"I was nineteen."

"And what did your father say when you asked him?"

Frank answered, "Well, he said that he knew if I wanted to go I'd go anyway and nothing would stop me, so what the Hell good did it do not to give permission."

"Well?" said Bert, with a grin.

But Frank didn't like it. Jimmy was older and more serious. He was the kind who wouldn't be reckless and take chances. You had the feeling that Jimmy, in his quiet way, would make an excellent flier of the sort who could take care of himself. The thought of Jimmy going didn't trouble him so much, but Bert was another kettle of fish. Bert was always looking for the wild, exciting things. He liked the toughest, wildest horse, the wildest water in the river, the girl who was toughest to get. It made you love him but it didn't make you feel so good when you thought of him flying a plane.

Frank tried to dissuade both boys from becoming fliers, half-heartedly, because he knew it wouldn't do any good. They belonged to another generation which people called "air-minded." Once he himself had wanted to be an automobile racer, so he couldn't honestly stand in their way.

What he minded most was not having them around to kid with, to go swimming and riding with, not to hear their voices calling out in the front hall when they came in from the University—"Hi, Mom! Hi, Pop! Where are you?" Frank, in some ways, was a simple, affectionate fellow who liked to have the people he loved all about him. It wasn't the same when they were on the other side of the world. It was as if he had physically to touch them now and then. There wasn't

anything especially spiritual about Frank. He was simply earthy, healthy and sensual.

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For the first week or two after the boys left he was like a lost bull, wandering around the house, riding hell-bent over the ranch, trying to bully some satisfaction out of his daily existence by sheer force. He even stayed in town a couple of nights thinking he might find something to distract him, but it didn't do any good. His mind was on the boys. All the time he was trying to enjoy himself he was remembering that when he got home they wouldn't be there. He wouldn't hear their voices. Bert wouldn't be there to ride and fish and cook trout and bacon with him over the week end.

At home it was worse. While reading his newspaper, he found himself listening unconsciously for one of them to come in the door, to slam it behind him and call out, "Hi, Pop! What about a game of pool?" Twice he had thought he half-heard the clicking balls on the billiard table belowstairs and had risen from his chair to go and join in the game before he remembered that they weren't there. His wife and Maisie did their best to take the place of the boys and keep him amused but it wasn't any good. They just couldn't do it. He loved women but they couldn't take the place of a couple of strapping boys.

About the third week, Frank called to his wife as he saw her going through the hall to the veranda.

"Susie! Come in here!"

Susie came in without saying anything. There was a quiet, still look in her eyes, that look of a woman in the presence of a man she loved to the exclusion of all else.

Frank said, "I can't stand it, Susie! I've got to go!"

"Go where?" asked his wife, although she knew perfectly well all the time what he meant.

"I've got to get into this war."

"I know," said Susie. "I knew it was coming. I've been watching you stomp around for three weeks now like a rooster that can't find his roost. But how? What are they going to do with an old man like you?"

He looked at her at first with astonishment and then with indignation and finally with humor.

"Old man! What d'you mean? I'm as good as I ever was. I'm a damned sight better than most of these young lugs who are packing rifles around."

"You're forty-seven years old!"

"Well, I'd never guess it," he laughed. "You ought to know about that."

"Frank, there comes a time when you have to be your age. You're not the age of Jimmy and Bert."

"When the time ever comes when I have to be my age, I hope I die. I can still ride or swim or shoot as well as Bert. Ask him! He'll tell you so."

"Unfortunately, he isn't here to ask. And besides don't say such things . . . like that about dying."

He put his arm about her. "You know I didn't mean it." He kissed her and said, rather like a little

boy trying to wheedle permission to go to the circus. “Susie, I’ve got to go. I’ve just got to!” He could feel her opposition melting away. Then she pushed him away.

“I suppose you’re going to enlist. A fine picture you’d make with a fifty-pound pack on your back.”

“Of course, I won’t enlist. I had a commission in the last war. I’ve had a lot of experience. I’ll go down to Washington and find out what I have to do to get into the thing. I know a lot of important people.”

“I’d be ashamed to use pull if I were you.”

“I’m not going to use pull. I’m just going after information.”

She still kept fighting. “What about Maisie and me . . . alone here in this big house?”

“You can send for your mother for a nice long visit. You can turn the house into a sort of private U.S.O. and have dances. There’s a tennis court and a swimming pool and a billiard room. It’s perfect for that kind of a show. Think of all the fun Maisie can have with a camp full of young soldiers only ten miles away. You and Maisie won’t be lonely.”

“Lots of people—just any kind of people can’t keep you from being lonely. Frank, it’s bad enough having the boys away.” But she knew in her heart that she didn’t have two boys but three and that she wouldn’t be able to stop him no matter what tactics she tried. But she did keep on.

She said, “What about your business?”

“Business!” he said scornfully. “That can run without even missing me. I’ve been fixing it more and more so that I could get long week ends off and even whole weeks at a time. It runs itself. They’ll never miss me.”

At last she said, “D’you know what they call men like you—who were in the last war and didn’t get enough and are now getting back into this one?”

“No,” said Frank. “What?”

“Retreads!” And she laughed.

Frank joined her in the laugh, “Okay! Then I’m a retread.”

That night they went out to celebrate the decision with dinner, the theatre and a night club afterward. At forty-three Susie was a good-looking woman with a slim figure who liked dancing. A stranger would have guessed her age as thirty-six or seven. And Frank was a good dancer, like most people of great vitality. Now and then while they sat on a banquette between dances, drinking champagne, he found it very hard to believe that he and Susie were what people called “middle-aged” with two grown sons who were learning to be fliers. Once he kissed Susie gently and shyly, saying, “We’ve been awfully lucky always, haven’t we?” And pressing his hand, she answered, “Yes, Frank, always!” And she meant it. She wouldn’t have changed anything at all.

But while she danced and while they sat drinking champagne, she looked about her a little wistfully at the young people. Most of them were soldiers and their girls. She thought, “In our hearts we’re as young as they are, but of course we aren’t, really. We ought to be settling down. Frank hasn’t really any business to be running off to war. He’s had one war and that

should be enough for any man.” But she knew it wasn’t enough for Frank. She could see the change in him since everything had been arranged. The sullen uneasiness was gone out of him. He wasn’t “stomping around” the way he did when anything blocked him from doing what he wanted to do. She could tell by the way he danced that he was happy again, that he wasn’t jealous any longer of Jimmy and Bert—especially of Bert. Of course what he wanted was to join Bert and fly in the same Squadron, but that was ridiculous. They’d never let him. Very likely they’d make him a Captain or a Major and put him at a desk and he’d hate that and after a time he’d resign his commission and come home to her.

That was what she hoped, but not what she believed. She knew what he wanted—the Front and action. He’d keep at it until he got what he wanted, the way he always did. Too bad Frank didn’t live in the time of the Renaissance when men could be professional hired soldiers and spend all their lives in adventure and battle and love-making. Yes, love-making! He’d have liked that too. No one knew better than herself. And here he was, just a middle-aged man with an insurance business that brought in about a hundred thousand a year, a leading pillar of the community. At least that’s what people thought he was.

Of course he wasn’t. He was romantic and a little wild and quite as young and as ardent as he had ever been. But people didn’t know about that. And people couldn’t know how much she loved him. For a moment all the champagne made her want to cry but she managed to control herself, thinking, “What have I got to cry about? Even if I died tomorrow, I’ve had everything a woman could ask.” Men were like that—real men. She wouldn’t have loved him if he were any different.

She heard him saying, “A Viennese waltz! Come on, honey, see if we can still do it.”

They could do it. They waltzed more beautifully than any of the young people on the floor and presently the young people drifted away and sat at tables watching them as if they were professional dancers.

That night they did not go back to the country. They spent the night at a hotel in San Francisco.

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It was exactly as Susie had expected. They made him a Major and gave him a desk and an office in Washington. He wrote, “I don’t think it worth while for you and Maisie to come on here for more than a visit. Washington is terribly crowded and it’s unlikely that I shall be here for very long. I think I can find a room for Maisie if you both want to come.”

She knew what that meant—that he was working night and day to get into active service far away from Washington, in England or the Pacific.

So she wasted no time. She went to Washington quickly, leaving Maisie with her grandmother. It was a wonderful visit, like being on a honeymoon again, with no children and no responsibilities. Frank was still the same healthy, exuberant fellow he had always been, but he had begun to “stomp around” again and when one evening he came back to the hotel looking ten years younger with a couple of cocktails in him, picked up on the way home, she knew what had happened before he spoke.

“Come on, Momma, get on your best clothes,” he said. “I’m going to England. We’re going to celebrate.”

So they celebrated again although this time Susie wasn't able to keep back the tears. She was glad Frank was getting what he wanted but she kept thinking what the big house would be like with no Frank, no Jimmy, no Bert . . . no shouting and laughter, no clothes flung around their bedrooms, no clicking of billiard balls from the basement, no shouts from the tennis court. Back in the hotel he took her in his arms and let her cry.

"Nothing is going to happen to me. I'm just a retreat. Susie. . . Remember? Just a retreat. Nothing ever happens to a retreat."

But he didn't reassure her. She knew he wasn't a "retreat" at all, at least not like other "retreads." He'd go snorting on ahead, "stomping around" until he got in the very midst of everything. The worst thing was, she knew, that he could get away with it. He'd never collapse or break down or be sent back. He could take it. He could work or walk all day and sit down in the evening and drink with the best and youngest of them. But always she came back to the point from which she started. She wouldn't have him change. She was proud that he could take it. That was why she loved him—because he was, in a way, indefatigable. Nothing could ever knock him out. If he was like that, you had to accept all the rest as a matter of course.

There was another thing she had to face and that was the women Frank would see in London. It wasn't any use pretending that a man who liked women would turn his back when a pretty one approached. As long as she herself was about, it was all right but when she wasn't there. . . . That too you had to put up with. And long ago she had adopted the philosophy that what a woman didn't know didn't hurt her. Fortunately Frank never went off the rails with women in their own world like some men.

She went as far as New York with him on his way across and afterward on the long train journey back to California, he was really with her all the time. She kept seeing his blue eyes and red hair with a little grey in it. She kept hearing his laugh and feeling the touch of his big freckled hands. It was a little better when she talked to people on the train because sooner or later the war always came into the conversation and she would say quietly, "I have three men in the service. My two boys are fliers and my husband is in England as a Major."

When she arrived home she found her mother and Maisie had the house filled with soldiers on week-end leave. It helped a little but it wasn't the same as having Frank and the boys. During the next week she had letters from both Jimmy and Bert. They were both receiving their wings and would she come to see the ceremonies. She went to see both and although there was a feeling of faintness about her heart when the moment came for the pinning on of the wings, she was happy because both boys were happy, Jimmy in his quiet way and Bert, like his father, bursting with pleasure and anticipation. Bert was a fighter-pilot and was longing "to be up and at 'em." The sight of his red hair and blue eyes and grin made her very homesick for Frank.

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Of course there was a girl in London as Susie knew there would be, but she never heard anything about it. It was as inevitable as the rising of the sun. When Frank came into a room, women noticed him from among all the other men, even men much younger than himself. And so one afternoon at a cocktail party an English girl called Sheila Rountree noticed him and found a way to be introduced.

She was a nice girl, about twenty-eight, with dark hair and fine, intelligent black eyes; whose husband had been killed in the tragic raid on Dieppe. She didn't much care what happened to

her but when she saw Frank standing big and solid in the doorway telling a rough story with great gusto, something said to her, "This is it! This will carry me over. . . . This will make it possible to go on living!" There was something in Frank's eyes and the look of the big, pleasant mouth and the health and vitality that seemed to envelop him which gave her faith and hope and a sense of security.

Sheila worked by day in a Service Canteen and had a pleasant little flat near Portman Square. The next day Frank went there for cocktails and they went out to dinner together. He was homesick and talked a great deal about Susie and his two boys. And Sheila told him about her husband, a young barrister, whom she had loved very much. He was, she said, wild and reckless. He had volunteered to take part in the blunder at Dieppe. There wasn't any doubt about his being dead. A friend had seen him killed on the beach. She had tried to prevent his going but it was no good. He had set his heart on it and she knew that if she persuaded him not to go, he would remember it always and perhaps hold it against her.

"He looked a little like you," she said. "He had the same friendly way with people and the same look in the eye." She knew what the look was. It reduced women to the feudal state of chattels. Behind it lay what women valued more than anything else in the world. Any real woman always knew it.

Frank went back the next day and then, almost imperceptibly, he made the little flat off Portman Square his headquarters. It was an odd sort of affair, in which friendship more than love played a role. He read Sheila the letters from home and from the boys whom he talked about endlessly with the greatest affection and pride. He told her about the ranch and the fishing trips and the Palomino horses and the great mountains and forests beyond and above the ranch itself. And he talked about Susie and even read Sheila parts of Susie's letters which were not too intimate. He managed to bring into the tiny flat in bombed London something of the warmth and happiness of the big, comfortable, well-worn house in California and the feeling of beauty and space of the ranch and the splendor of the mountains beyond.

Once Sheila said to him, "I love to hear you talk, Frank. It makes me feel that I can breathe again. It makes me feel as if I were growing again, as if the world was the kind of place I used to think it was as a child."

Twice Sheila's mother came up from Gloucestershire to have tea with them. It was easy to see how close to each other the mother and daughter were and at the end of the second visit the mother, a pleasant rather pretty, middle-aged woman said, "Could you walk with me as far as the bus?" And Frank went with her, thinking, "Now I am going to catch Hell. Maybe she has a shotgun in her handbag." It seemed odd to him that the mother was no older than himself. Mothers were always older.

But it wasn't like that at all. On the way to Baker Street she said, "I want to thank you for all you've done for Sheila. It's changed everything. I thought she was finished. Before you came along she hadn't any interest in anything. Sometimes I was afraid that she might do something very foolish. It was as if she were dead inside. Now she's quite different—the way she used to be before the boy was killed."

Frank laughed a little nervously. "I'm glad," he said. "She's a wonderful girl."

"I wanted you to know," Sheila's mother said. "It has changed everything. She was bitter and suspicious of everyone, even me. She didn't want to see people. All that is changed now. I

wanted you to know how much I appreciated it.”

Then the bus came along and Sheila’s mother climbed aboard and Frank walked slowly back to the flat, a little puzzled because he wasn’t the reflective sort of fellow. He was only aware that war had changed circumstances and altered human relationships, that there were things like tragedy and heartbreak and loneliness and affection which made everything very different and sometimes transcended the values of conventional morality. It all might be hard to understand in America. For the first time it occurred to him that Americans were still a long way from the war.

Sheila was waiting for him with a Scotch and soda already poured. She said, “I know what my mother said to you. I hope she wasn’t too sloppy.”

“No,” said Frank. “What she said was very nice.”

“It’s all true . . . what she said to you. It’s made all the difference.”

Frank flushed because he didn’t know how to make this kind of analytical talk. It wasn’t his line.

“Shall we do a flicker?” asked Sheila.

They never spoke of it again. The flicker wasn’t very good. It was a picture about the war made by men who didn’t know anything about it. Twice the audience whistled and booed, but Frank and Sheila didn’t mind. They were quite happy sitting there in the darkness with Sheila’s head against his big muscular shoulder.

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Nobody ever knew quite how he managed it but Major Frank MacPherson was aboard one of the first boats which grounded on the beaches of Normandy. It was a tough part of the beach. Two of the boats ran into obstructions and sank, three others were blown up by shellfire and those men who got ashore had to face the fire of machine gun nests planted at the top of the cliffs. In the midst of it all was big Frank MacPherson sweating and yelling and working a Tommy gun like a demon. He knew about machine gun nests from the last war and he led the way with four young G.I.’s up what appeared to be an unclimbable cliff to outflank the two nests that were doing the most damage to landing parties. Yelling like an Indian he grabbed hand grenades out of his pocket and hurled them like a baseball pitcher until there was only silence and death inside the pillboxes.

When it was over one G.I. Joe said, “Who is that guy? Where did he come from?” and another answered, “By his insignia he’s a supply officer. I don’t know how the hell he got here, but they’ve sure got him in the wrong service.”

Later, after the opposition had been knocked out and they were burying the dead, Frank sat in what remained of a fisherman’s house out of the drizzle of rain that fell all along the grey coast. He was tired but not more than he had been after the same experience in the last war nor more tired than he had been after riding all day over the range with Bert.

“Retread!” he thought. “So I can’t take it!”

And at the same time he wished that Bert had been with him climbing up that grey wall of rock with the snipers bullets pinging all around him. Bert would have liked that job of cleaning out the machine gun nests. He could see Bert, grinning, excited, swearing and enjoying the bullets

and the excitement. Yes, it would have been great to have had Bert there with him. When he got a moment or two he'd write Bert a long letter that would go round the world and finally reach him in the Pacific somewhere. He'd give Bert a good description of the day's work.

Of course he'd write Jimmy too but it would be a different kind of letter filled with the technical explanations and details which Jimmy liked. And of course there'd be a long letter for Susie and Maisie but then he wouldn't tell them about the climb up the cliff and the gory details of the attack on the machine gun nests. All that would alarm them and make them uneasy and anyway they'd never understand how he and Bert felt about such things. He just wanted to tell Susie he loved her and that as a "retread" he'd made out all right.

An hour later he was down on the beach working hard at his job of getting supplies ashore and up to the Front. The men began to get used to him and the story of the machine gun nests got about. They called him Major to his face but before long they had a private name for him. It was "Old Red."

"Old Red!" they'd say. "He certainly gets things done," or "There is no monkey business about Old Red."

Almost without thinking of it, some of the younger ones, the real kids, began to identify him with their own fathers.

Meanwhile, he didn't think about Sheila at all. That, he knew, was all finished and so it didn't occupy much place in his mind. He knew too that she accepted it as finished when he said good-bye to her in the flat, adding, "I've got to go off tonight. I can't tell you where I'm going."

But she knew where he was going and like Susie, she tried at the last moment to keep him a little longer. But she knew it was no good. She knew that she might never see him again, even if he wasn't killed, and that the best she could hope for was a card or a short letter telling her he was well and that he hoped she was the same and that he wished he could drop in at the flat.

When she closed the door after she heard his footsteps on the bottom step of the stairway she thought, "Well, you're on your own now, honey. You've got to pick up all the broken pieces and carry on." But she knew she could do it now. Because of Frank everything was different now. She wouldn't any more think about taking an overdraft of sleeping medicine. She wouldn't ever again lie face down on her bed crying half the night. She couldn't because she'd always think of Frank and just thinking of him would bring him back into the little flat, sitting there with a whiskey and soda in front of him, telling her about the ranch and the redwoods and his boys and the cattle and the latest funny story he'd heard. He'd be sitting there, big and warm and affectionate, full of love for her. She'd caught something from him the way you caught measles. Somehow he'd made her see people and the whole world in a different way—as an exciting place full of humor and warmth and excitement.

She was right about it all. When she closed the door, he was gone for good, forever. In the weeks that followed the whole affair grew more puzzling to her because it fitted the pattern of no experience she had ever had nor any she had ever heard of. And at last she came simply to the conclusion that Frank MacPherson was simply something special and that she'd been very lonely that day when he walked into the room where she had gone to a cocktail party simply to kill time which had become unbearably empty. Now time was full again, of many things. All that Frank had done for her. She was grateful and no matter what happened to her in the future; even if she fell in love and married again, she would always love him.

Colonel Lauzane was a tall, thin, dark Frenchman with a long nose and kindly dark eyes. He hadn't seen his family but once since the day he was mobilized nearly five years earlier and not at all since the day they dragged him out of the water into a small sloop that was taking men off the beach at Dunkerque. Since then he'd had news of them once or twice a year by some letter smuggled out of France or by word of mouth from one of the men who went to and from France in the work of the Underground. If the Invasion succeeded in a reasonable time, it would be five years since he had seen his children. Solange, the eldest girl, would be a young woman and Pierre, his son, who had been thirteen when he went away, old enough for military service.

At fifty he was a tired, disillusioned man with a certain melancholy look in his dark eyes, but once he stepped again on the soil of France, he began to hope again and to believe in justice and decency. He was, by nature, a philosopher and a studious, quiet fellow who in the days of peace had been one of the finest lawyers in Paris. He had, like many Frenchmen, fought in two wars not because he liked fighting but because he was forced to fight in defense of his country and his family, and when he was given a job, either of organization or of actual combat he did it skillfully, cold-bloodedly and well, but without any special enthusiasm or zest. Like most Frenchmen he was unhappy and homesick when outside his own country, and the years of his exile had been the most miserable of all his existence. He liked a good meal and hours of good talk about obscure points of law or metaphysics. So when he was asked to team up in liaison work having to do with front-line supplies with an American Major called by the barbaric name of MacPherson, he was a little astonished, perhaps even at times a little terrified.

There was something about the Major which Colonel Lauzane could only describe to himself as *animal*. The big American seemed actually to enjoy the mud, the ceaseless Normandy drizzle, the sun. At first, when they were quartered not far from the sea, the American Major would rise early and drive a jeep all the way down to the beach to plunge into the grey, chilly waters of the Channel, spouting and blowing and shouting with an enjoyment which to the Colonel was incomprehensible. He seemed to enjoy being "strafed." Twice when he and the American Major occupied the same fox-hole during a shelling, the Major would jam his steel helmet down over his ears and sit there grinning. When a bomb or a shell came uncomfortably close, the Major would shout, "Whee! That sonofabitch nearly got us." For a time the Colonel believed that he had teamed up with a madman.

At first the Colonel regarded the redheaded American Major as simply one of the hazards of war which you were forced to endure philosophically, but presently, slowly and cautiously, he began to see the good points of his companion. The Colonel had to admit that the Major could certainly get the most out of the local eggs and the army bacon and as a Frenchman, this was a basis for respect. The Corporal assigned to their mess had been a farm hand before the war and greasy bacon and overdone eggs were simply something he accepted as the everyday routine in life and nothing to make a fuss over. When he couldn't learn how to cook them properly nor to keep from turning good coffee into dishwater, the American Major took to rising a little earlier to cook the breakfasts himself, the way he cooked them many a time for himself and Bert while hunting in the mountains. The eggs were exactly right and the bacon cooked a perfect crispness and the coffee strong and rich.

When the Colonel wakened on the first morning to find the American Major standing over him with eggs, bacon and coffee, he was outraged. "Mais, Monsieur," he said, "it isn't proper for you to wait on me."

"I've cooked 'em myself," said Frank. "If we had a cook like that Corporal on the ranch, we'd string him up. Must come from Alabama the way he cooks."

"Mais Monsieur," repeated the Colonel, sitting up in his mauve-striped pajamas. "Mais Monsieur . . ."

But he was glad all the same that Frank had taken over the cooking of breakfast. The whole situation became pleasanter and more intimate and the food a million times better.

There was another thing which made the Colonel uneasy and that was Frank's tendency always to be associated with the supplies that went to the very front line of attack. Quite reasonably the Frenchman believed that as older men of high military rank it was not their duty to follow the supply line right up to the attacking tanks. That was the job of younger men, sergeants and corporals and such. But this redheaded American seemed to be a devil for efficiency. More than half the time he was mixed up with the very line of attack, sometimes shooting right along with the troops. With his honor challenged, the Colonel could not permit the Major to penetrate further into the lines than himself and so he found himself going wherever the American Major went regardless of what he thought of the folly of the proceedings.

Fortunately for the Colonel, he spoke pretty good English so that most of the time he at least knew what the redheaded Major was up to. Frank's own French was of the doughboy variety and pretty sketchy. On the whole the two managed to communicate pretty well.

It was on the matter of families that they really got together. The Colonel carried with him, wherever he went, photographs of his children at various stages from babyhood through the period he had last seen them as well as pictures which had been smuggled out to him through the Underground. The children were dark like himself and the photographs showed them standing or sitting in stiff conventional poses which gave no idea of their character, but the Colonel assured Frank that they were all *très sérieux* and told Frank that his son had won most of the prizes at the Lycée.

Frank's own supply of photographs were limited to four, all snapshots. There was one of Susie, looking very pretty and young on a horse with the mountains in the background; one of Maisie in a very limited bathing suit; one of Jimmy with a tennis racket and one of Bert, looking big and cheery in cowboy chaps. The Colonel admitted that Frank had a *très belle famille* but privately considered the photographs a trifle unconventional. By the time they had been together for a month, he felt that he knew the family very well since Frank was always talking about them and their accomplishments and reading portions of their letters to him. He heard the whole of Bert's letters from the Pacific. There was nothing very intimate about them. They began "Dear Pop" or "Well, how's the old Retread?" or "Hi, there!" All of which the Colonel found a bit confusing and lacking in respect. They were letters filled with stories of action and usually ended, "Certainly wish you were here!" Once he wrote: "If we keep going at the present rate it won't be long till we're all back on the ranch. Boy, could I go for some trout fresh out of the river and a good swim in cold mountain water!"

Every now and then when reading Bert's letters, Frank would stop and say, "That's some boy, Colonel!"

By the time the advance really got going, the Colonel and Frank were old friends. If one was absent for the day on some special mission the other missed him. Frank still cooked breakfast and Pierre ferreted out bottles of first class Calvados or really good champagne. They moved

from tent to half-ruined house, back to tent again and Pierre always had the knack of making the place seem clean and comfortable.

Then one night when the two sat at a table looking at a map on which the Colonel kept a meticulous daily record of the advance, Frank discovered a village called St. Prie-les-Eaux. He looked up suddenly and said emphatically, "That's it! I couldn't remember the name of it. I've been trying to remember for ten years. You know how it is, Pierre . . . how a name will go out of your head and you can't get it back—especially a fancy name like that . . . St. Prie-les-Eaux. Yes sir! That's it, all right!"

The Colonel looked at him with surprise. "Why is it so important? It's just a little place. In summer people came there in the old days to go fishing or boating on the river. In winter it's nothing at all—just a little village."

"It means a lot to me, brother. That's where I had my first love affair as a kid in the last war. The girl's father kept an inn. Her name was Marguerite . . . Marguerite Pugelot. But what was the name of the Inn . . . Le Grand Cerf . . . That was it! The Grand Cerf!"

He sat for a moment in silence grinning, with the cigarette hanging from his lips. "Yes sir. That's the place. When we take that village I'll have to go and look her up. Marguerite . . . That was her name. I was nineteen and she was a year older than me. I was stuck there for a time—supposed to be in charge of supplies left behind there."

The Colonel knew he was going to hear about Marguerite and the love affair whether he wanted to or not. Actually he wanted to hear about it because the American attitude toward *l'amour* had always puzzled him. He said, "One's first experience is always of interest. If it's a real love affair it's always something special one never forgets."

"Oh, it wasn't my first experience," said Frank. "But it was the first time I ever fell in love. You know the difference, don't you?"

The Colonel admitted that he did.

"You see," said Frank, "it was like this."

St. Prie-les-Eaux stood on the edge of the Seine with a long row of houses and shops bordering a water front lined with feathery poplar trees. The houses straggled up the hill behind it in rows of terraces and little summer villas. High above the villas at the top of the hill lay a great plateau crossed by the railroad. Here the American Army had established in 1918 an ammunitions dump and here was sent for discipline a young redheaded lieutenant called Frank MacPherson.

He was the youngest Lieutenant in the artillery and his offense was neither cowardice nor lack of ability but too much ardor. No orders could keep him from using his battery of light artillery as if it were a machine gun battalion. His commanding officer knew that the worst punishment that could be imposed was duty in a safe rear area. He punished the young Lieutenant unwillingly for he hated to lose him, but the offense of disobeying orders was a serious one. Such behavior prevented the Colonel from keeping a check on the movement and position of his batteries. Young MacPherson and his battery were always out of line firing half the time point blank at the Boches. His enthusiasm seemed to infect all his men. Returning him to a depot area for a few weeks would, the Colonel thought, quiet him down.

St. Prie-les-Eaux was quiet enough. Nothing ever happened there. There was no cinema nor any

bawdy house and the men stationed there had nothing to do but spend the evening drinking in the Café of an Inn called Le Grand Cerf.

With his wings clipped, young MacPherson tried to make the best of it, staying on good behavior because he knew that if he ran off to Paris he'd lose his commission and maybe even be sent home. A part of the good behavior meant sitting every evening drinking wine in the Café of the Grand Cerf.

He was a big redheaded kid, ashamed of himself and miserable and unhappy. He tried getting drunk once or twice but he wasn't the type to take refuge in drink. It only left him feeling ashamed and a little sick the next day. About the second week something turned up to arouse his interest.

It came in the form of the inn-keeper's daughter, a dark girl with big brown eyes and a respectable demeanor, a slim figure and very pretty feet and ankles. Her name was Marguerite and she had just returned from a visit to her Aunt in Paris. She and the redheaded Lieutenant looked at each other across the café on that first evening and something happened to both of them.

It is probable that Marguerite was not the dove that her parents believed her to be and that on these visits to her Aunt in Paris she had picked up considerable knowledge of the world. In any case Marguerite liked the glances of the redheaded lieutenant.

It was June and the poplar trees along the river were green and feathery and the evenings long and soft as the breast of an eider duck. Marguerite knew a little English and the redheaded boy had what must have been an adequate supply of doughboy French.

Frank, telling the Colonel the story twenty-eight years afterward said, "The language didn't make much difference. We just understood each other and we got a lot of laughs out of not understanding each other. I never liked a woman who didn't have a sense of humor and I never looked on love as a lugubrious, mournful affair. It ought to be pleasant . . . you know . . . sort of merry and happy. Marguerite was like that. She was always good company and good for a laugh."

"It was my first experience of falling in love. I don't know whether it was hers or not, but I was a little bewildered by what happened. You read a lot about seduction but it wasn't like that at all. We were a couple of young people and it was war time and you know what these long, soft evenings in northern France can be. And St. Prie-les-Eaux and all the country around it is the prettiest country in the world. I guess Nature, which doesn't have much regard for convention, took a hand in it."

The Colonel interrupted him. "I understand," he said gravely. The truth was that he did understand although he had never experienced what Frank was talking about. The Colonel had married at twenty-one his second cousin in order to keep an industrial company in the family. She was a nice girl and made him an excellent wife and housekeeper and an excellent mother for his children. He had never experienced any of the rapture and excitement that his friend, the middle-aged redheaded American Major was attempting to describe in common everyday language.

He kept thinking, "The English and Americans always think that the French are great lovers and romantic. How little they know about us." Here, sitting opposite him was an American

businessman, soldier almost by accident, who was everything that was warm and romantic. You could tell by watching and listening to him how much he loved women, how much he could be in love. As he talked, the years had slipped away from him and he was back again in St. Prie-les-Eaux, a kid of nineteen, ardent, romantic and, as the Colonel could see, irresistible.

The rather cold, intellectual mind of the Colonel analyzed all this, while he listened, as if he were preparing a brief for a celebrated trial. But all the time envy gnawed at his consciousness, because he had never experienced anything like this romance which the redheaded Major was struggling to describe. The words meant nothing. It was the look in the blue eyes, the great and healthy and natural simplicity of the man who told the story. For a little time the Colonel began to feel about Frank almost as Susie and Sheila felt about him and as Marguerite must have felt long ago. The Colonel understood perfectly. It would be hard to resist the ardor of such a man. Any woman but a monster would be lost.

The Colonel thought, "He has that terrifying and irresistible quality of being a lover and being a small boy who wants to be mothered. There is something innocent about him before which everything melts in the end."

But Frank was talking all the time. "We used to lie side by side in the deep grass along the river in the moonlight talking, in our funny language about things which didn't have anything to do with what we felt. I think both of us knew that. In a way both of us were trying to resist and both of us knew that we were just kidding ourselves. In the end it wasn't any good—any of the talk or the resistance, just as we both knew it wouldn't be any good from the very beginning. In the end we were simply swept away. It was like being bowled over by a big wave, one of those waves in the surf which turns you head over heels and leaves you gasping for breath on the beach. That was the way it was. It was the first time I knew anything like it."

Frank put down his glass of Calvados—the good Calvados the Colonel had found in the cellar of a ruined farmhouse. He said, "It's a swell world when things like that can happen. Yes, it's a wonderful world."

"And how did it end?" asked the Colonel.

"Well, it seems my commanding officer decided he needed me back again and one day the orders I'd been waiting for all the time came through and I went back to the front by the first train out of St. Prie-les-Eaux. I never heard from her again. I gave her my address—the right one too—but either she didn't write or the letter got lost and the first thing I knew the war was over and I was back in California and met Susie and the same thing happened all over again only better. And it's been just as fine ever since. It's a grand world that has in it a wife like Susie." He took another drink and said, "It was a funny thing. Marguerite never talked about marriage at all. It was all as if there wasn't any such thing as marriage in the world."

"Maybe she knew marriage hadn't anything to do with what happened," observed the Colonel. "Maybe she thought marriage would be a mistake because she belonged in France at St. Prie-les-Eaux in the frame life meant for her and you belonged in America out in California in another world. Maybe she knew that it wasn't meant to be like that—ending in marriage, I mean. French women, even at that age, can be very wise. They don't do as your American women do—try to legalize their adulteries by divorcing and marrying over and over again."

"Could be," said Frank. "She was awfully smart about a lot of things."

“The chances are,” said the Colonel, “that the letters didn’t get lost at all. Very likely she never wrote to you and finally settled down and married a good solid man and raised a large family.”

The remark seemed to depress the Major. “Maybe that was it,” he said. “Anyway, I think I’ll make a trip over to St. Prie-les-Eaux when we take it and see what’s happened to her.”

“Very likely,” said the Colonel, “she’s become the respectable wife of the Mayor and wouldn’t have anything to do with you.”

“Could be,” said Frank. “But I’d kind of like to know what’s become of her. You know how it is?”

“Yes,” said the Colonel. He did not know but he could imagine. “It might be a shock,” he said. “Sometimes it’s wiser not to attempt reviving the past.”

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The second phase of the Invasion was one of stalemate. Opposition was heavy. The weather was bad. The planes couldn’t do an adequate job. Frank and the Colonel went about their duties efficiently, save for the fact that Frank always went a good deal more to the Front than was necessary. The Colonel had taken up his friend’s habit of carrying a Tommy gun regularly now and occasionally they both got chances to take pot shots at German infantrymen or shots at a sniper-held farm or hedgerow. Once the Colonel had his steel helmet knocked off by a bullet but it did not disturb him. He was beginning to like the excitement provided by his redheaded American friend.

There were occasional letters, arriving sometimes weeks late from Susie telling about the life back home. It seemed likely, she wrote, that Maisie would be getting herself engaged to be married to a young Captain who seemed all right. He would, she thought, fit very well into the family. Always her letters ended, “Now be careful! I know what you’re like. There’s no use taking chances. There’s nothing romantic about the death of a retread.” or “Be your age, Frank. You’ve got a family and you know what you mean to all of us. If anything happened to you, it would be like losing the king-pin.” Always they were signed “I miss you.”

And there were letters from the boys beginning “Dear Pop.” Jimmy was doing all right with his bomber. He had already been cited three times. Bert had knocked out sixteen Jap planes and was to get a Distinguished Service Cross. “Gosh!” thought Frank, “A family glittering with decorations! I’d better catch up with the boys!”

It was always Bert’s letters he liked best of all. They were buoyant and full of stories and excitement. After reading one of them Frank would lean back and imagine Bert, young, redheaded and wild, whirling, swearing and charging up and down the sky. He kept all the letters tied together in one of the big pockets of his Major’s uniform. The growing packet didn’t improve his figure or the cut of the uniform but Frank didn’t mind that. He was always pulling them out and reading them, sometimes to himself and sometimes to strangers saying, “Listen to this from my son in the South Pacific,” or “This one is from my son who flies a bomber in India.”

And one day the whole thing began to crack in Normandy and all at once it seemed that the Germans couldn’t get out fast enough. Village after village, town after town, fell without any fighting at all. Among them was the little town called St. Prie-les-Eaux.

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It was evening when the Major and the Colonel in a jeep came down the long road leading from

the high plateau to the road that followed the Seine. The scene was exactly as Frank had remembered it—the Seine bordered by feathery poplars, pink now in the glow of the sunset, the summer villas perched on the hillside above the river in little terraced gardens planted with lilacs and laburnum and wistaria. They came down the same steep road Frank had climbed many a night on his return from the town to the high plateau where the artillery depot had been, twenty-eight years before.

“It looks just the same,” said Frank. “I don’t believe there’s a new house.”

He felt a strange excitement and in his fashion of living in the moment, he was back again—a tall redheaded kid shavetail coming down the steep road to meet Marguerite when she climbed out of the window and came to the locks on the Seine below the town.

The street along the river front was the same, lined with old houses and shops built of the soft grey Normandy limestone. From a long way off he could see the big sign which hung before the little hotel called *Le Grand Cerf*.

But as he drew near it he discovered, with disappointment, that one thing at least had changed. The sign with its picture of a handsome stag had been brightened up and below the stag just under the word PROPRIÉTAIRE the name was no longer ANDRÉ PUGELOT. It was a different name—ARISTIDE SAMSON.

The excitement went out of him a little and he said, “I guess the place has changed proprietors.”

They were billeted at the Inn as Frank had planned and when they stepped out of the jeep and into the Café, he found the room exactly as he remembered it, save that it had been freshly painted the dull chocolate-brown color favored by Café proprietors everywhere in France. On the walls were the same fly-specked mirrors and the same posters advertising Dubonnet and Amourette and Byrrh. There was the same slightly warped billiard table. The marble-topped tables with the iron bases were the same and the banquettes along the walls and in the corner near the door was the same little platform with the till where Marguerite’s mother had presided during the long smoke-filled evenings when the artillery men drank beer and wine at the marble-topped tables. Only now in her place, Frank noticed, as the bed-rolls were placed inside the door, there sat a big, dark, middle-aged woman in a black dress. She wore pince-nez attached by a fine gold chain to a pin fastened to her capacious bosom. She watched them as the bedding was stacked in a corner and did not come forward at once to welcome them. Frank threw down his coat, tilted his cap back on his head and rubbing his chin, regarded himself in the mirror. They’d been travelling across country nearly all day and there hadn’t been time to shave.

As he turned away, the woman got down heavily from the stool behind the till and came toward them, smiling.

In French she said, “You are the two officers I was to expect?”

The Colonel said yes and explained that they would like to be shown to their rooms and have some hot water. The woman kept staring at them while she talked. She said, “It’s strange to see Americans and Frenchmen instead of Germans. Whatever I can give you will not be good enough. Things are going well?”

“Yes,” said the Colonel, “better than anyone hoped. It will be over soon.” Then he said, “This is Major Frank MacPherson of the American Army. My name is Colonel Pierre Lauzane.”

The woman shook hands with both of them and said, "I am Madame Samson."

Then she herself led them to the best rooms overlooking the river. She asked, "What time would you like to dine?"

"At eight," said the Major.

"And what will you have?" Madame Samson asked. "There is not much choice."

"We'll leave that to you, Madame."

"Very well. I'll do the best I can."

When she had gone Frank stood for a long time looking out of the window down the river toward the locks. Then he took off his shirt and flung himself on the bed. Riding all day in a jeep was hard work. He fell asleep almost at once.

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He was wakened gently by the Colonel who said, "Madame Samson says that dinner will be ready in half an hour and to be on time so that it isn't spoiled."

Frank sat up and rubbed his eyes like a kid, looking sleepily at the Colonel and thinking it was odd how the Colonel had begun to take care of him instead of the other way around.

Said the Colonel, "The proprietress seems to have a mind of her own. It was her orders to wake you. She also sent up two pails of hot water. Thought you might like a bath. They're over by the basin."

"Guess she thought I needed it," said Frank. Lazily he stripped and bathed and put on a clean shirt. After that he felt better. While dressing he called out to the Colonel in the next room, "Think I'll go for a swim in the river when it gets dark. How about it?"

"No," said the Colonel, "I can't swim and I'd be sure to catch cold."

Frank, grinning to himself, wondered what the Colonel would think of the icy rushing river of glacial water where he and Bert used to bathe back in California. They'd strip and rush down the steep bank and plunge in, letting out yells when they emerged from the icy water that could be heard a couple of miles away. Just for practice he let out a rather subdued yell, which brought the Colonel to his door in alarm.

"It's nothing," said Frank, "I was just practising."

They went downstairs to the Café exactly on the hour and found one of the marble-topped tables covered with a red-checked tablecloth. In the center stood a vase filled with marigolds. Neither Frank or the Colonel had seen anything like it for weeks.

Then as they sat down the door opened and Madame Samson came in carrying a very battered cocktail shaker and two glasses. Her heavy black-clad figure moved with a rolling motion. She was smiling and said in pidgin English, "Martini, hein? You like Martini?"

"Sure," said Frank, "who'd have expected a Martini. Where did you get the gin?"

In French she said, "It's Dutch gin. The Boches left it here. They got out in a hurry."

Frank kept looking at the shaker. It had been nicked once but the plating had worn off in spots. It was badly battered. He tasted the cocktail which was good although not quite dry enough. He told her it was excellent and then asked, "Shaker!" pointing to the object, "*Où est-*

il?”

Madame Samson grinned and replied in French, “It’s from the last war. There were artillerymen here then. They left it behind.”

Then she left them for ten minutes to finish the cocktails and returned in a little while bringing a big tureen and two soup plates. “*Soupe*,” she said, “*Consommé printanière*.”

It was clear and strong, and floating in it were shreds of new carrots and tiny green peas. Frank ladled out two dishes and placed one before the Colonel while Madame Samson stood by watching.

Then he tasted it and said, “Jeez! This certainly isn’t army food.” Madame Samson only partly understood what he said, but she had had the praise she wanted. She smiled at them and in a little while came back to remove the soup plates. Then there was a little interval and she came back bearing hot plates and a platter on which lay two halves of chicken, brown crisp, hot, juicy, swimming in clear brown sauce and surrounded by heaps of fresh, crisp water cress. There was also a platter piled high with crisp, French fried potatoes. Without expression she deposited these on the table and came back bearing a bottle of Chablis that was a clear, pale golden color.

“My gosh!” said Frank, “I haven’t eaten like this since I was last in France.”

Then Madame Samson went away and returned in a little while with some socks which she was darning, seating herself by them while they ate. There wasn’t much conversation; both Frank and the Colonel were too busy. But the *propriétaire* smiled as she watched them, looking up now and then from her darning.

The chicken, the Colonel explained, had been cooked in butter in which herbs had been chopped up. While cooking it, it had been basted every few minutes with the butter and herb sauce. That was what made it at the same time juicy and crisp on the outside. The wine was, the Colonel said, beyond praise.

When they had finished, Madame Samson asked, “Good? Bon?” She needed no reassurance, but they gave it to her, Frank in pantomime closed his eyes and rubbed his stomach.

Then she rose and took the platters and said, “But there is the other half of the chicken. I will bring it at once.”

When she had gone through the door, Frank said, “I thought they were short of food?”

The Colonel grinned, “Not in Normandy. That’s where most of the butter and chickens and a lot of the good cheese comes from. And the Normans aren’t likely to be cheated out of it. The Germans must have met their match in this part of the country. We’ve certainly hit on a good spot. She’s going to spoil us. Better make this our base for a while.”

Then the door opened and Madame Samson came back in with the platters just as they had been before—the two halves of chickens dripping with butter in a nest of fresh, crisp cress and the other platter piled high with crisp potatoes.

Madame Samson sat and darned while they ate the meal all over again.

But that wasn’t all. When she removed the dishes she brought back a lettuce and cress salad in a wooden bowl, and with it a Camembert at just the right oozing stage. After that there was

strong black coffee and fruit, and Calvados. As she put the apple brandy on the table she said, "Seventy years old. My grandfather put it away."

The Calvados smelled not only of fresh apples but of apple blossoms, like the perfume which fills the air on a Normandy roadside in May. You could not drink because it evaporated as soon as it struck your tongue.

Madame Samson put down her daming and had coffee and cigarettes with them and then she began to talk, telling stories of the long occupation by the Boches, how she and her husband had outwitted them. In addition to the Inn they owned a big farm three miles away on the high plateau and despite anything the Germans could do they always managed to hold out cream and butter and cheese and other food.

"I had a special basket made," she said, slapping her thigh at the joke, "which hung under my skirts. I used to bring stuff back from the farm in it—so my husband and I lived well and were even able to help out neighbors who didn't have farms."

"Have you any children, Madame?" asked the Colonel.

"One," said Madame. "He is a *beau garçon*, tall, big, strong who likes the women. He's just twenty-eight. He was a prisoner but he escaped and came home. Since then I haven't seen much of him. He's been very busy in the Underground. The last I heard of him he was in the Haute Savoie organizing the Maquis."

They learned also that Madame Samson was not a widow. She had a husband, very much alive, who had gone off on business to Paris a week earlier and had not yet returned. No doubt, it was difficult to return now that the fighting was between Paris and St. Prie and all the railway lines were cut.

"He will turn up," Madame Samson said confidently. "He is a very smart fellow."

And then Frank said in his pidgin French, "I have been here to St. Prie before. I was here with the artillery in the last war."

Madame Samson's plump face brightened. "Those were the good days," she said, "I remember them well. I was only a girl then."

"I used to come here then," said Frank. "I knew a girl. She was the daughter of the old proprietor Monsieur Pugelot. Her name was Marguerite."

"Ah, yes," said Madame Samson, looking down at her daming. "That was my cousin—a pretty girl."

"What became of her?" asked Frank.

"She married and went to Buenos Aires," said Madame Samson. "She is very prosperous now and has quite a large family."

Frank was silent for a moment and then he said, "I was in love with her."

"*Tiens!*" said Madame Samson. "Many young folks were. She was a great coquette. She had many flirts." And after a moment, "When she went away and my uncle, her father died, my husband and I took over the Inn." She sighed, the sigh running through the whole of her big, plump body. "Ah! That was a long time ago."

The Colonel yawned and announced that he was going off to bed and Frank rose and said he was going for a walk because he hadn't had any exercise all day except riding in a jeep. He managed a few words of pidgin French, a little surprised to find words returning which he believed long ago had been forgotten.

"I'll leave the Café door open," said Madame Samson, "and a light in the hall."

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Outside the moon was shining, laying a path of light across the Seine and silvering the great poplar trees that bordered the white road. He turned down the road and followed the river. Drowsy with Madame Samson's good wine and dinner he had simply gone out for a walk so that in the morning his joints wouldn't be stiff from the all day ride in the jeep. He thought, "Maybe I'm getting old. Maybe that's where you feel it first—in the joints." But then he remembered that all the younger men who weren't used to it, complained that riding in a jeep made them sore and stiff. Why some of them were just kids, no older than Bert.

And then all at once as if his feet were stepping in footprints made long ago, he knew where he was going—down the river toward the locks where he had gone long ago on so many evenings to meet Marguerite after she had climbed out of the window and down the roof of the stable. They always had to go to and from the locks separately so that there wouldn't be any talk.

Slowly out of the mists of the long distant past it seemed to him that he remembered exactly every tree, every house, every milestone as if he had never been away at all, as if he were still a kid shavetail of nineteen. It was odd, he thought, how everything about St. Prie-les-Eaux was unchanged, how easily it all came back. The only thing was that everything seemed a little smaller, a little more intimate than he had remembered it.

Presently he came to the place where the road turned following the bend of the river and thought, "The locks are only a little way further. I'll go that far and then go back to bed."

The strange thing was that suddenly he found himself hurrying, impatiently, ardently, as if when he arrived at the little flight of stone steps he would find her there waiting for him on the little grassy terrace almost at the level of the river. He kept telling himself that this was ridiculous, that Marguerite was a middle-aged woman, living in Buenos Aires with a big family, and that he had boys as old and older than he had been when he came along this same road to meet her. But it did no good. He felt exactly the same with the blood racing in his veins, hurrying as if every moment he spent without her was wasted.

Then ahead of him he saw the grey old stones of the lock walls painted almost white by the moonlight against the dark river, and a moment later he came to the top of the little stone stairway. Without knowing it, he found himself calling out "*Chérie!*" as he had done long ago. But no voice answered him. He was alone and the ardor had suddenly gone out of him.

He stood there for a moment and then thought, "I'll have a swim anyway" and descended the steps to the grassy plot and there stripped off his clothes and plunged into the water. It was deep below the locks and the water wasn't icy as it was in the river where he and Bert swam at the ranch. It was warm and soft and caressing and once again the illusion returned that when he climbed out Marguerite would be waiting there in the grass in the moonlight as she had waited for him twenty-eight years ago. As he swam, strongly, far out into the river he kept seeing her as they lay side by side in the moonlight, smoking and talking in their funny pidgin English.

He floated for a time completely lost in memories until he discovered that the current had carried him far downstream perhaps as much as half a mile. Then he turned and swam back up the river close inshore, near to the reeds which grew there. Among the reeds the water birds stirred and made nocturnal sounds as his passing presence disturbed them. As he swam lazily, almost voluptuously he thought with gratitude, "I have a good life. It's always been a good life. Perhaps it will always be so."

At last he reached the locks and climbing out he dried himself with his shirt in the moonlight, put on his trousers and socks and shoes and lay for a little while longer listening to the sounds of the night—the singing of the insects, the chur-r-r of the water birds and the sound of the water spilling out of the water-soaked gates of the lock. It was very good to be alive.

And then he remembered that in the morning he and the Colonel would have to set out early and drive forty miles in the jeep to establish a new supply base at a place called Várnés. Reluctantly he climbed the steps until he reached the top at the little path which led off toward the highway. There for a moment he stood looking back at the river. This was the spot where each night they had parted, lingering and clinging to each other as if nothing could ever separate them. Then she would set off down the road and he would follow her at a little distance so that no one should see them together. And sometimes after she had gone a few hundred yards she would step into the black shadows of one of the great poplars and wait for him and they would say goodnight all over again. As he walked along the road, carrying his shirt, exactly as he had done long ago, he half-expected her to step out of the shadows and put her arms about his neck.

Soberly he thought, "It's always like that in war time." It seemed to him suddenly that when he thought of wars, it was of soldiers and girls saying good-bye all over the world, clinging to each other in bars, in stations, in parks, in shadowed doorways.

He was nearly halfway to St. Prie-les-Eaux when he discovered that someone was coming toward him on the opposite side of the road. Thinking that it must be a peasant returning home late from the village he kept to his side as the figure moved through the black and silver patches of moonlight and shadow. And then as it came nearer he recognized the gangling, rather awkward gait and the tall thin figure of the Colonel and he called out "Pierre!"

"Frank," the Colonel's voice answered and he crossed the road toward him.

The Colonel was embarrassed. He said, "I just came out to look for you. You said something about going for a swim. I read for a while and then I couldn't sleep and I got worried." Then he fell into step with Frank as they walked toward St. Prie-les-Eaux.

In the darkness Frank chuckled. "I had a wonderful swim," he said. "The water was great."

Then the Colonel said mildly. "You'd better put on your shirt. You'll catch cold."

Again in the darkness Frank grinned, but out of kindness to the Colonel he put on his shirt as he walked, not troubling to button it or tuck it into his trousers. He knew that the Colonel was thinking him a lunatic to go off alone swimming in the moonlight. It was the kind of thing an officer didn't do—certainly not an officer of his age. But he thought, "It was good of the old guy to get out of bed and dress himself and come out looking for me."

When they arrived at the Grand Cerf, the Café door was open and the light was burning in the hallway.

Upstairs they had a drink of Calvados before turning in. Then they went to bed and just when Frank was about to fall asleep he heard the Colonel's voice, calling softly from the next room, "Frank!" (He pronounced the name as if it were spelled Fronk.)

"Yes," Frank called back.

"You didn't find her, did you?"

Frank chuckled, "No, I didn't find her."

That was all and Frank, grinning in the darkness, thought, "Why the old jerk! He knew all the time!"

They stayed on at the Grand Cerf, using it as a base from which they went out each day in the jeep to carry out their duties. Once or twice they got near enough to the fighting to take a few pot shots with their Tommy guns and a couple of times they came near to being bombed by their own planes, but to the relief of the Colonel life gradually became a good deal less exciting and perilous.

It may have been the memories of St. Prie-les-Eaux and Marguerite or it may have been the excellent beds in the big rooms overlooking the river or it may have been the excellent food of Madame Samson which led Frank to slow down a bit. Very likely it was all of these things.

Madame Samson continued to produce food of an astounding variety and a quality which it was impossible to surpass. There were more chickens done in a dozen different ways, and veal and pork and even beef, and what she was able to do with eggs and potatoes seemed miraculous. And the wines continued to come out of what seemed an inexhaustible cave which somehow she had kept hidden from the Boches.

Each evening she brought her mending—tablecloths, socks, bedsheets, clothing—and worked at it while she sat by the table. Her reserves of pidgin English opened up. The slang from the artillerymen of the last war was a little old-fashioned and made Frank laugh, but no more than his own pidgin French induced her own mirthful reactions. She became mother, housekeeper, and adviser to both Frank and the Colonel, cleaning and pressing and mending their uniforms and shirts and socks.

On the third night Madame Samson's husband appeared, having made his way home at last only through a good deal of shooting and bombing.

He was not at all what one expected in a man called Samson. He was small and wiry with a rather long nose and very bright blue eyes. The clothes he wore seemed too big for him, hanging loose as if they hung from a coat hanger. But in the lapel of his drooping coat he wore the ribbons of the Croix de Guerre and the Medaille Militaire from the First War. He came in after his wife had served the dinner and was introduced with great formality as Monsieur Aristide Samson, and then after a little Calvados, was described by Madame Samson as *le patron*, "the boss," although neither the Colonel nor Frank really believed the statement. You had only to look at the pair, sitting side by side, Madame, big and warm and capable and Monsieur, small, nervous and bright-eyed, to understand the relationship. Certainly Madame was the boss.

Gradually, during the conversation, the truth began to emerge. "My husband," said Madame Samson, with a certain pride, "occupies himself a great deal with politics. He is the leader of the Radical Socialist Party in this community. It does not leave him much time for the hotel. He has

often been spoken of as a candidate for Mayor of St. Prie but his age is against him. You cannot be a serious candidate for Mayor until you are over sixty-five.”

But Monsieur Samson was not much interested in politics at the moment. He was full of stories of the gradually mounting uprising in Paris. People were no longer cowed by the Boches, he said. They were fighting back in a great many ways. And the women . . .

“The women,” said Monsieur Samson, “The Boches forgot what our women were like in the Revolution and during the Commune. Tigresses! That’s what they were! Tigresses! They will claw the Boches apart with their bare fingernails!”

He spoke like a political orator and it was clear that Madame Samson had a great admiration for him—the wonder and admiration which capable, hard-working women have for men who have a way with words. To the Colonel he was a familiar type and as he listened he could not keep his eyes from twinkling and his lips from curling into a smile. Monsieur Samson was a little man but he had, you knew, the courage of a lion. It was his type which kept the idea of liberty eternally alive in France. Sometimes in his enthusiasm and eloquence he rose from his chair and gestured oratorically and even paced up and down a bit.

Then suddenly he lost his oratorical fervor and grew calm and in place of the fire in his eyes there was a kind of warm glow. He began talking about his son François.

“*Quel Gar!*” he said, “What a fellow! You know Monsieur, he is not small like me. He is a real Norman, the kind our good milk and cheese produces. Why, he is twice as tall as me, a young giant! And what a fighter! Why that boy would rather fight than eat! And the women . . .” he chuckled wickedly. “The women love him. I wasn’t so bad myself at his age.” And he turned toward Madame Samson for the smiling look of approval which he expected and received. “Was I, chérie?”

“No,” said Madame Samson. “He was a regular coureur. I was very lucky to catch him, with so many other girls mad for him.”

“But after I married,” Monsieur Samson said, “I never looked at another woman.” Again he chuckled. “I knew when I had a good thing.” And he slapped Madame Samson on her ample thigh.

“But that boy!” he continued, “What a fighter! He’s been with Maquis since the beginning. He may turn up any day now things are beginning to go to pieces. We haven’t seen him for three years.”

And then Frank began to talk about Bert and Jimmy and Monsieur Samson listened, his eyes shining. The Colonel interrupted occasionally to translate. Now and then Monsieur Samson applauded and said, “*Voyons!*” loudly and with wonder over the exploits of Frank’s two boys. On the sidelines it was clear that Madame Samson was enjoying herself. She went on mending one of Frank’s shirts, keeping an eye on the two professional fathers, laughing loudly now and then. Whenever their glasses were empty, she filled them again with the Calvados which smelled like apple blossoms.

At last, the Colonel said, “You know, Frank, it is after eleven o’clock and we have to go halfway to Orleans tomorrow.”

But Frank was enjoying himself as were Monsieur and Madame Samson. When Monsieur

Samson said, "What about a game of billiards before going to bed? It is relaxing. You will sleep better." Frank agreed heartily. Decidedly he and Aristide Samson liked each other.

The Colonel went grimly to bed and Madame Samson turned her chair around and watched while her husband and Frank played two erratic and hilarious games of billiards. They had one more drink before going to bed well after midnight and as Frank happily stumbled upstairs, he thought how much he loved France and what a pity it was that he and Aristide had not met during the last war when they were both younger. Aristide, he thought, must have been good company.

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The next day the Colonel and Frank set out at seven in the morning for the long trip in the jeep. Frank belonged to that healthy school which does not have hang-overs, but about noon he began to feel sleepy and induced the Colonel to agree to stop the jeep while he had a swim in one of the little rivers which fed the Seine. The Colonel sat stiffly by watching, not so much with disapproval as with wonderment at the spectacle of his friend diving and threshing about in the clear, cold water. Maybe, he reflected, all this goings-on was why his friend Frank had the physique and energy of a man fifteen years younger. He decided to consider more carefully the virtues of a *culture physique* and of cold water.

When Frank rejoined him and the jeep started off, Frank said, "We might as well get rid of this damned jeep. Now that we're not right at the Front we're entitled to a Staff Car. There's no use making ourselves deliberately uncomfortable."

The Colonel agreed with enthusiasm and presently he thought, "Good food and comfort are having their effect. The sensible influence of France is operating again."

They returned late at night but Madame Samson had dinner waiting for them—a dinner such as they had never had before. Monsieur and Madame Samson again sat with them, but from the beginning there was something wrong with the evening. The odd jollity was gone although the sense of comradeship remained. The Colonel was the same as usual, grave, quiet, smiling now and then and Frank, although tired, was in high spirits. The trouble was with Monsieur and Madame Samson. They talked seriously. The oratorical fire seemed to have gone out of Aristide. His small figure seemed to droop. All the conversation had an almost gloomy cast. It concerned the French prisoners who had been kept in Germany away from their women for four years, and the sufferings of innocent hostages and the great effort that would be needed in France to re-establish order and prosperity.

That night no billiard game was proposed and when the excellent dinner was finished, the Colonel suggested that early retirement would be good for all of them. As Frank and the Colonel left the room, Madame Samson said to the Colonel, "I would like to speak to you for a moment, Colonel, privately."

The Colonel stepped aside and when Madame Samson heard Frank's footsteps on the stairs, she went to the till, opened it, and took out a bit of paper. Then she turned to the Colonel and said, "It is bad news for Monsieur Frank. I did not give it to him before the meal because it would have spoiled his dinner and so active a man needs good food. It is about his son . . . the one he loves so much . . . the one he is always talking about. The message was not gummed up. That is why I read it. You understand, Monsieur, it is because I like the Major so much. That is why I read it. I could not help myself."

She gave the message to the Colonel and then made a strange observation, "Such things should not happen to men like the Major. He is so frank, so good. He gives so much to other people. It would not hurt so much another man, a man like yourself who is a philosopher. Forgive me, Colonel, but I think you understand what I mean. Poor Major Frank. He has so little to fall back upon. He lives so much in the physical world. He is like a big, intelligent affectionate dog."

The Colonel took the bit of paper and said, "I understand, Madame. You are quite right."

Then he went out of the room and Madame Samson stood quite still until she heard the sound of his footsteps reach the head of the stairs, cross into his own room and then cross into the room occupied by Frank. The tears suddenly filled her big, dark eyes as she turned to put out the lights and lock the door of the Café du Grand Cerf.

Upstairs the Colonel came into Frank's room as Frank was brushing his teeth. He said quietly, "I have bad news for you, Frank. It's about your boy, Bert!"

"Bert!" said Frank, with a curious air of astonishment as if he had believed that nothing could happen to a boy so bright, who loved life so much. "Bert!" he repeated, dully this time as if someone had struck him over the head. Then as he took the message from the Colonel, he said "Bert!" again, this time, as if to himself, in a whisper.

Then he opened the paper and read what was typed there on some machine far back of the lines, perhaps even in London. The message was brief. It read: *Bert missing I am with you darling Susie.*

Very quietly he laid the message on the old-fashioned washstand and said, as if to himself, "Poor Susie!"

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The next day Frank never spoke of the telegram. He and the Colonel rose at seven, had breakfast and set off as usual in the jeep. Monsieur and Madame Samson stood in the doorway as they drove off but neither said anything about the bad news. As the jeep disappeared in a curve of the white road that followed the Seine, Madame Samson said, "It's better like that. Let him speak of it first."

But he didn't speak of it. All day he and the Colonel went about their work, efficiently and dully. When they returned to the Grand Cerf in the evening there was a wonderful meal awaiting them, a dinner such as Frank had never tasted before. Monsieur and Madame Samson sat with them as usual (so that everything seemed as much as possible as it had always been). They talked seriously about the world after the war with that intelligence and information which all small people have in France. Once or twice Frank looked up from the meal and exchanged a quiet glance with Madame Samson. It was his way of telling her that he understood about the dinner and that that was her way of showing her sympathy. She too understood when he did not show all the vigor of the appetite for which he was famous.

When they finished coffee, he said, "If you'll forgive me, I'll go for a walk."

None of them said anything and he went out the door closing it behind him while they sat watching him.

Then Madame Samson said, "It is pitiful . . . and there is nothing anyone can do."

Monsieur Samson said, "He is the type who lives by his affections. In such a case talk does no good."

The Colonel said, "Something has gone out of him. He was like an old tired man all day."

"This dirty, filthy war," said Madame Samson and began removing dishes with an angry clatter.

Meanwhile Frank was walking along the road that bordered the river. This time he did not go toward the locks but in the opposite direction. The road seemed very hard underfoot not because it had changed but because the old spring was gone out of his gait. It was, as Madame Samson had said, as if he had been hit over the head with a club.

He did not think of himself, because that was not his nature. He was thinking about Bert and when, as he walked, the tears came into his eyes they were not for himself but for Bert who had loved life so much. Bert who had loved horses and the mountains and fishing and the great redwoods and dogs. Bert who did everything with a whoop and a holler. And he thought, "If he had to die I hope it was quickly, high in the air, fighting, filled with excitement." That was the only way death should come to a kid like that. The tears were too for all the delights Bert would never know now, all the fishing trips he would miss, the women he would never know, the children he would never have whom he would have loved so much.

Now and then he felt a wild desire to run away and hide somewhere until he had gotten used to the fact of Bert's death, but that he could not do. That was cheap and cowardly. He wished desperately for Susie. Her gentleness and quiet would have helped. He could have taken her in his arms and by making it easier for her would have made it easier for both of them. And he kept seeing Bert's room, always in a kind of wild, eager disorder as if there were no time left from living to pick up clothes from the floor or put books back on the shelves. Jimmy's room was never like that; it was always neat and in order. And then an awful thought crept into the dark, remote recesses of his mind. "Why couldn't it have been the other one?" And ashamed and horrified he thrust the thought quickly away from him. The odd thing, the thing which hurt most, was that he couldn't help seeing Bert all the time. The image of the big, redheaded, boisterous kid had been with him all day long always in front of his eyes no matter what he was doing. Bert shouldn't die. He couldn't die.

Then as he walked he became slowly aware of the rustling of the leaves in the big poplars that bordered the road. The sound came at first as if it were a part of the picture in his mind of himself and Bert riding side by side through the forest that bordered the ranch. For a moment he was swept away from all reality and then slowly he knew again that Bert was gone and that the rustling sound came not from the trees of California but from the poplars along the Seine in distant France in the midst of a cruel and terrible war, and out of the deepness of his pain there emerged a thought strange to a man like Frank. He thought, "Perhaps Bert is trying to tell me something. That is the way he would do it—through the trees, through water or animals."

He stopped, listening. On the white road there was no sound but the rustling. By now the fighting was so far away that there was no longer even the faint rumble of gunfire. For a long time he stood there and then presently he slipped, almost shamefully, down the road to the sloping bank of the river and lay down in the deep grass. Lying there, he felt the loneliness, the darkness, easing the pain a little. Again he could hear the faint sound of running water and the rustling of leaves and the sounds made by the water birds in the rushes. He kept listening for something, he did not know what it was and slowly, without understanding what he was doing,

his big muscular hands dug in a kind of anguish into the roots and earth beneath him, and he felt slowly at peace for the first time since the news had come. It was as if somehow he were in communication with Bert, how or why he did not know, but the pain seemed less and there was peace.

It was a curious moment in which he came, without knowing it, closer than he had ever been to an understanding of what he was and all that was the source of his strength, that he was a manifestation of the earth, of Nature itself.

How long he stayed there he never knew. When at last he found himself walking back toward the Grand Cerf, the sky was turning grey in the east on the other side of the Seine. But somehow the pain wasn't so bad now.

The door of the Café was unlocked and there was a light in the hall. In his room he lay for a little while awake, staring into the awful emptiness of the strange room and twice he heard sounds from the Colonel's room that told him that the Colonel was awake, that he had very likely been awake all the time waiting for him to return. His eyes became moist again, not this time because of Bert but because of the goodness and understanding of people like Susie and the Colonel and Sheila and Monsieur and Madame Samson, at the understanding of people like them over all the world, everywhere.

The next day and the next were a little easier. Once or twice he forgot for a moment the bad news, but remembering it again suddenly only made the hurt worse. The old passionate desire to get into the fighting, to be in the front of everything had died out. On the fourth morning the Colonel noticed that he left his Tommy gun behind and without saying anything he did likewise.

The meals and the wines seemed to grow better if that had been possible and Monsieur Samson on the fourth night even persuaded him into a billiard game on the worn, uneven old table.

When they had finished, the *patron* treated him to a glass of Calvados before going to bed and while they sat there drinking with Madame Samson by their side working at her eternal mending, an extraordinary thing happened.

Frank, with his Calvados, had been sitting on the banquette with his back to the wall facing one of the ancient fly-specked mirrors. He had put down the glass and lighted a cigarette when vaguely in the cloudy glass he noticed the reflection of something moving. Then slowly he realized that it was the door of the Café opening. Someone was coming in—a man, a young man in a uniform of khaki with insignia in gold on the collar. And the young man was tall and big-shouldered, with red hair and blue eyes. It was Bert himself reflected in the mirror.

And then suddenly he was interrupted by a cry from Madame Samson. She sprang up suddenly letting her precious mending drop unheeded to the floor and cried out, "François! *Mon petit!* François!"

Then Monsieur Samson jumped up too, knocking over his glass of Calvados.

As Frank turned, he saw Madame Samson smothering the big redheaded fellow in her ample embrace and then little Monsieur Samson trying to encircle them both with his skinny arms. Above both of them towered the big fellow with the red hair, grinning and embracing them. . . . Bert, it was exactly as Bert would behave when he returned home.

For a moment there was utter confusion in Frank's brain, a confusion of joy and sorrow, of recognition and doubt. The tears came into his eyes again and then suddenly as the three came toward him, he understood the whole thing. The boy wasn't Bert. He was French. He was talking French rapidly with his arms about the shoulders of his parents. It wasn't Bert but it was his own son, a son he'd never known anything about. And Madame Samson, fat, middle-aged with grey in her dark hair, was *Marguerite*. What a fool he had been!

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In the midst of his confusion and astonishment, he was aware that Marguerite had understood too what had happened. She was saying with her lips, "This is our son François!" And "Mon petit, this is our American Major—Monsieur Frank MacPherson." But her eyes were saying. "You know now! But be quiet! Say nothing!"

Frank, trembling, stood up and shook hands with the big fellow who said, "We must celebrate! And I'm hungry! I want a big omelette and salad and cheese!" To which Marguerite replied, "You'll have it, mon petit—in less time than it takes a hen to lay an egg. And now have an *apéritif* while I make it up."

Monsieur Samson brought a bottle of Amer Picon and poured a glass for François. The young fellow hadn't said anything. He just sat staring happily about him at the room. Once his eyes met those of Frank and he grinned. With an odd feeling at the pit of his stomach Frank grinned back at him. He still felt a little dizzy.

Then François raised his glass, "We've got 'em on the run! Here's to the end of the war quick!"

They all drank and Monsieur Samson, still looking proudly at François, said, "You know, Monsieur le Major, we haven't seen him for nearly three years. You're not married?" He asked suddenly of François.

"No. There hasn't been time. I've been living in bushes and caves and haymows. A fine life for a wife."

Frank felt a warmth stealing over his whole body. He no longer had any doubts whatever. And this young fellow was just like Bert—a few years older but tough and wild like Bert. He had an odd feeling that God had sent him another son in Bert's place. It was very strange that François should have turned up just now.

Then suddenly he was filled with uneasiness about the complications. Watching Monsieur Samson beaming at François, he thought, "Doesn't he see any likeness? Doesn't he suspect anything?" But of course there wasn't any reason for him to suspect. He couldn't have known anything about what happened more than a generation ago. He couldn't even suspect that Frank had even known Madame Samson. Nevertheless he would have to be careful. Perhaps it would be better if he and the Colonel went away.

Then Madame Samson appeared with the omelette and salad and a bottle of her best wine. She came in behind François and Monsieur Samson and before she put down the tray she was carrying she managed again to catch Frank's eye, and again the eyes said, "Be careful! We shall talk this over later! Nobody suspects anything!"

He knew now by the eyes that there wasn't any doubt that this was Marguerite. They were the same eyes that spoke to him in the same fashion twenty-eight years earlier in this same room. Only then they had said, "I love you! I cannot talk to you here! Wait until later!"

Even the thought of Bert couldn't quite dampen the excitement of François' return. While he ate, ravenously, the omelette, the salad and the great pieces of French bread spread with Norman butter, he told them of all that had been happening to him. Two weeks earlier he had broken through the German lines at night and joined the French Army at the side of the Americans. They had made him at once Captain of a Cavalry Regiment. He would fight part of the time; perhaps part of the time he would spend on the other side of the line, carrying information back and forth from the armies outside to the Underground fighters inside Paris. He had only two or three days to spend in St. Prie. Then he would be off again.

It was easy to see that it was the kind of life he liked. While he talked, Madame Samson's eyes grew eloquent from time to time when the occasion was discreet. They said, "You see how much he is like you, Frank? You see? Only you must say nothing."

Then when François had finished, the three of them—François, and his two fathers had a game of billiards while Madame Samson watched. When they had finished and François yawned, she said to her husband, "Put François to bed. His own room is ready. I'll come up as soon as I've washed up the kitchen."

Monsieur Samson and François after saying good night to Frank, left the room, their arms about each others shoulders, a gesture of affection that was difficult because François was so big and Monsieur Samson so small. Frank grinned after them but not without a pang of envy.

Madame Samson picked up the tray, said nothing, but by a nod of the head indicated that he was to follow her into the kitchen.

Once inside, she put down the tray and closed the door and then she began to laugh silently, shaking all over.

Frank, watching her, felt the color coming into his face. He said, "You have made a fool of me, Marguerite."

She stopped laughing long enough to say, "It is you who have made a fool of yourself." Then seriously she asked, "Have I changed as much as that?"

"You have changed," said Frank.

Marguerite chuckled, "I weigh twice as much as I did then . . . but my voice has not changed."

"I don't think I would remember a voice after twenty-eight years," said Frank.

They were talking the old pidgin English they had talked long ago, understanding each other well enough. He said, "Why did you tell me that story about going away to Argentina?"

"When I saw you didn't recognize me, I thought, 'Well, let it go. It's better that way.' You see how my husband worships François. It would be terrible if he ever suspected anything."

"Did he never suspect?"

"Sit down," said Madame Samson, "I must wash and talk at the same time or when my husband returns he will be wondering what we have been doing. He is furiously jealous . . . Oh, yes . . . even today he can be furiously jealous."

Frank sat down and she poured hot water out of a kettle into a big pan in which she placed the dishes. It was a big Norman kitchen with a high ceiling, a floor of red tiles, a huge stove and row upon row of copper kettles which Madame Samson had hid in a cave behind the Inn when

the Germans came.

“You see,” she said, “I didn’t even write to you because there wasn’t any good in writing. You see, I knew it was all over and that the place I belonged was here in St. Prie to take over my father’s hotel. You wouldn’t have been content to stay here and I didn’t want to go to America. If you’re honest you’ll say you didn’t want to marry me any more than I wanted to marry you.”

“I didn’t think much about it one way or another.”

“What happened to us, Frank,” she said, “was like a hurricane and a hurricane is no good basis for marriage. You see, I had a fiancé whose name was Corporal Samson. He came from St. Prie. His father was Mayor. Together we would own quite a little property and St. Prie was where we belonged. Breaking my heart over you wouldn’t have done anybody any good, so when the Corporal came home on leave three weeks after you left, we got married—me in a white bride’s dress and everything. I was a very pretty bride and Aristide was mad for me. It has been a very happy marriage and my husband has a son he worships whom he would never have had otherwise. What is wrong about that? We have never had any other children although I wished and prayed for them.”

But Frank was still puzzled, “But the red hair?” he asked.

Madame Samson was drying the plates now. She said, “Red hair is nothing in Normandy, or big men either. Just because Monsieur is a little fellow, it didn’t mean he couldn’t have had a tall son. Babies are all born about the same size. If François had been born, fullgrown, the way he looks now it might have been different. But as he grew up nobody noticed anything, least of all my husband. They forgot that there was ever a redhaired artilleryman in St. Prie. They only remembered that my grandfather had red hair.”

“But now . . . doesn’t he notice anything?”

Madame Samson put down the plates and grinned, “I have changed, my friend, but so have you. I know that when you think of yourself you think of the way you were twenty-eight years ago. That’s natural. Even a woman like myself does that. Tonight when you go upstairs take a look at yourself in the glass—a good, careful look. Men change too. There’s so much grey in your hair that you could hardly tell that once it was fiery red. And certainly you couldn’t wear the same pants you wore twenty-eight years ago. Remember, I used to watch you swimming in the moonlight. I remember what you looked like.” He did not answer her and her woman’s curiosity pushed her into asking, “Does it make you happy to know suddenly that you have a son so fine . . . one you never knew about?”

“Yes,” said Frank soberly. “It’s a little frightening. He’s a fine fellow.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” said Madame Samson. “And now you’d better go to bed or my jealous husband will be coming down to see what we’ve been doing, if he can tear himself away from the son he’s so proud of.”

Frank rose from the chair and said, “Good night, *chérie*.”

She smiled at him. “It’s good to hear you say *chérie* again, almost the way you used to say it. But that was all finished long ago. It is something I shall never regret because it was fine and beautiful and like a hurricane and it made a great many people happy—you and me and Aristide, my husband, who would otherwise have had no son. Only now we must never speak

of it again. It must be as if it had never happened.”

He felt somehow that he should make some gesture, if no more than kissing her cheek, but he knew that such a thing would seem ridiculous not only to Marguerite but to himself. He knew suddenly that he was middle-aged.

So he left her and when he had gone she stood in the doorway watching him climb the stairs, thinking that she had done right in sending François a message to make every effort to return home as quickly as possible. It had, she knew, made a great difference to Frank. Somehow it had made up a little for the loss of the other boy.

On the stairway Frank met Monsieur Samson coming down from François' room. The two men stopped for a moment to say a polite good night, and little Monsieur Samson still charged with enthusiasm said, “He's a fine boy—my son, isn't he? A strapping fellow!”

“Yes,” said Frank, “a boy to be proud of.”

Then he went into his own room and when he had lighted the oil lamp he followed Marguerite's suggestion and looked at himself in the mirror for a long time. What he saw astonished him, for although he had regarded his face at least once a day in the glass while he shaved for the past twenty-eight years, he had never really seen it at all. Now he really looked at the face and what he saw was the face of a man of forty-seven years old, a little heavy and with countless tiny lines that had come from living so much out of doors in the wind and the sun. The fiery red, as Marguerite had said, had gone out of his hair. It was sprinkled with grey. There was even grey in the faint stubble of beard.

He grinned at his reflection and then brushed his teeth and washed his face splashing the water about as he always did. In bed, in the darkness, he lay awake for a time listening to the sound of the rustling trees and the water and it occurred to him for the first time in all his existence that there was a certain strange continuity in life and that Nature did with you as she pleased. That was what she had done with Marguerite and himself long ago. And somehow the discovery of François had made the news about Bert a little easier to bear. He had a sudden strong feeling that Bert wasn't dead at all, that he would turn up again.

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The next day he and the Colonel went off as usual and when they returned that night they found that Monsieur and Madame Samson were giving a dinner in honor of François' return. The Mayor and his wife were there and the village Priest, a gentle old fellow with white hair and a pink face. And the dinner reached new heights in excellence. They all had a good deal of wine and made speeches. Frank even made a speech in his doughboy French which raised some laughs. For a moment in the midst of the evening, Frank even forgot for a time that Bert was gone. After dinner they played a game of billiards—Monsieur Samson, François, the Mayor and himself while the Colonel and the Priest looked on, keeping the score very accurately with the aid of a billiard cue.

At the end of the evening the Colonel announced that day after tomorrow they would be moving on as the lines had reached Paris and in order to keep in touch he and the American Major would have to move to some billet nearer to the fighting. There were cries of regret all around and then everyone drank to victory, and François suddenly announced that on the next day he would like to accompany the Colonel and the Major on the trip in their jeep. He said he had been shut up for so long inside France he wanted to see what the other armies were like.

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All that day Frank watched and talked to François with astonishment and pride. He was a bright boy and he understood quickly the problems of supply in a huge army which had begun to rush ahead trying to keep up with the speed of the enemy retreat. A dozen times during the day when he caught a sudden view of François' tall figure, straight back and red hair, he had again a quick illusion that he was Bert. Once he found himself very nearly introducing François to a General as "my son" scarcely certain at the moment whether the young fellow was Bert or François. He thought, "I'd better get out of St. Prie before I spill the beans." If it happened, it would happen that way, without his meaning to do it.

On the long ride home François sat jammed into the narrow seat very close to him and Frank kept thinking, "I must do something about this. I must send him some money to start up a business or go on with his education. I shall have to speak to Marguerite about it."

It was very difficult for him not to claim François outright, especially with him sitting there beside him, so obviously his own son, especially when François, in high spirits over all the guns, tanks and trucks he had seen, kept talking and telling stories with that same vitality and enthusiasm which had made Bert so good a companion. "No" he concluded, "I must get out of St. Prie. Maybe some day François can come to America and pay us a visit. He'd get on fine there with the boys and Maisie and Susie." But suddenly he remembered with a numbing pain that Bert wouldn't be there.

Anyway he would tell Susie about François. She'd understand. She'd understood so much. It was a pity she couldn't meet Marguerite. They would get on fine. He'd like Marguerite to know her. Well, maybe after the war when things were settled down again, when Jimmy and Maisie were married, Susie and he would come to Europe and spend a few days at St. Prie.

All the time he kept watching François narrowly as if the sight of the young, tough face made him forget the other things.

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They noticed the decorations a hundred yards away. A great French flag hung from an upper window and beside it a smaller, rather faded American flag. Boughs of trees decorated the doorway of the Café and the main doorway was draped with red, white and blue bunting.

"Look at that," said Frank. It was odd that Marguerite had broken out decorations on the front of the house so many days after the liberation.

The decorations caused the same astonishment in François. "It looks like a wedding," he said. "Somebody must be having a wedding supper at the Grand Cerf."

And then as the jeep pulled up at the door Marguerite and Monsieur Samson appeared in the doorway. Marguerite was beaming and Monsieur Samson called out, "Hola! The heroes are back."

Then Frank noticed that Marguerite carried a bit of paper in her hand. As they climbed down from the jeep she came toward Frank and called out, "I have good news. Tonight we shall celebrate!"

He took the paper from her and saw at once that it was official. It had come from the temporary headquarters at Chartres. As he opened it his hands trembled so badly that the paper shook like a leaf in the wind.

Then he read what was written there:

*Cable forwarded speed orders to Major Frank MacPherson, Hotel Grand Cerf St. Prie-les-Eaux from Headquarters Supply Depot, Chartres—Bert found on atoll Malaria and shock Being sent home love always Susie.*

For a moment the shock and bewilderment of the past few days seemed to explode inside him. For a moment the façade of the Grand Cerf trembled and the figures of Marguerite and Monsieur Samson appeared to recede and advance rapidly backward and forward. Then he was aware that Marguerite was kissing him on both cheeks and that before he knew what had happened Monsieur Samson's big handlebar mustaches were brushing his face. François, looking more than ever like Bert, was shaking his hand and the Colonel slapping his back with surprising enthusiasm.

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That night Marguerite prepared the dinner of dinners. The Mayor and his wife and the Priest were there again and all of them, even the Priest, drank a good deal of champagne and Calvados. The billiard game on the uneven table was hilarious. It was two in the morning before the Mayor and his wife and the village Priest set out, a little uncertainly, for home.

Upstairs, in Frank's room, he and the Colonel talked for a long time. "In a few days," the Colonel said wistfully, "I shall be seeing my family."

"Four years is a long time," said Frank.

"It is nearer five," said the Colonel.

"We must move up to a new billet tomorrow," said Frank. The Colonel said nothing. He was watching Frank who had taken his Tommy gun out of one of the deep drawers of the old carved bureau and was rubbing it lovingly with his handkerchief.

"The more we shoot," said Frank, "the quicker you'll be home. We've got to fix these bastards so that they'll never be able to make another war."

The Colonel frowned a little at the sight of the Tommy gun. It meant that they would be going out of their way again to get a shot at the Boches.

Then Frank looked up at him, suddenly grinning and in a low voice he said, "I never told you about my other son, did I . . . the one I had in the Underground?"

"No," said the Colonel gravely.

"Well, you must never tell anyone about it. But I have another son . . . it's François."

The Colonel smiled, "I guessed that long ago."

Frank regarded him with a look of astonishment. The Colonel was always surprising him. "You guessed about her too?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Colonel. "I even knew that she sent for François to return quickly. She thought it would make the other thing easier."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Frank asked.

"It was none of my business. It was something between you and Madame Samson."

Frank put down the Tommy gun and said, “Well, I’ll be damned!”

There was a little silence in which the faint sound of the river and the rustling trees came once more into the room. Then the Colonel said, “What was it you said they called men who had fought the last war and got back again into this one?”

Frank grinned, “Retread . . . you know . . . a made-over tire.”

“Oh, yes. That’s right. I wanted to remember to tell my wife.”

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*THE END OF THE ROAD*

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## THE END OF THE ROAD



Today there arrived a letter from underground France. It was forwarded from the French Mission in Washington, enclosed in an official envelope. The letter itself had on it only my name and the address "United States of America." Fortunately the Mission in Washington knew my address and sent the message along to me.

The original envelope was stained and dirty. I do not know how it came out of France but doubtless it passed from hand to hand, from priest to peasant to shopkeeper to prostitute, the way such letters find their way out. It was a long letter in French, neither too grammatical nor too good in its spelling.

It recounted at some length the end of Jane Trenoir and was written by her maid. It was addressed to me, the maid wrote, because someone in America ought to know the whole of the story, and she thought of writing to me because once she had been in my employ and because she believed that as an *homme de lettres* I was well enough known that a letter with no address might eventually reach me. It was signed simply Marie Hergot with no address. I suppose she took that precaution in case the letter was seized so that it could not be traced. It was a letter out of the past, in a sense out of the tomb, out of a world which no longer existed, which once I had known very well. Reading it on the porch of a big farmhouse in a quiet valley in Ohio, I experienced only a sense of lurid, melodramatic unreality.

I had never liked the maid called Marie Hergot. She was a meager, pinched woman, nervous and hysterical, with a thin face, black hair and black eyes set much too near together to be trusted. But in some ways she had been an excellent servant. She was neat and efficient and wonderfully industrious and skilled as a seamstress. She could mend the clothes of the women and children of the household so that there was no trace of the mending. She would, without being asked, turn the frayed collars and cuffs of my shirts so that they were as good as new.

There was really nothing against her but her own sinister personality and the rabid, unhealthy interest she displayed in gossip and the affairs of other people. She had, I discovered after two years, an ungovernable passion for listening at keyholes. Twice in the middle of the night I came upon her in the hallway outside the rooms of guests, listening. Twice I reproached her and warned her, but it did no good and so when Jane Trenoir said one night at dinner at the British Embassy that she was without a maid and desperate, I recommended Marie.

The dinner took place in July 1938 at the end of "the season," perhaps the last real "season" there would ever be again in France or in Europe. Everyone was very gay and afterward there was a kind of fête in the big garden to which others were invited. Personally I took small part in the gaiety for the depression of what inevitably lay ahead had already settled over me. It was not lightened by the knowledge that all those about me did not share my depression. All of them, even the officials who should have known better, were gay. There was going to be no war. Everything would work out all right with Hitler. I even heard words of praise for Ribbentrop and had an account, from a French woman who liked hunting, of a wonderful and luxurious visit to Goering's Karinhall. He was, she said, charming and entertained like a *grand seigneur*.

I told Jane that she might have Marie because we were leaving for America at the end of the

summer, perhaps for good.

“Why?” asked Jane.

“Because in another year or two Europe will not be a nice place to live in. For myself I would not care. I have been through a good part of the last war. But I have a wife and young children. They are not European. They have no obligations to suffer from the stupidity of the people who are here tonight.”

She laughed, “What you are saying is absurd.”

I shrugged my shoulders and she said, “You don’t think I know what I’m talking about?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t.”

She leaned a little nearer to me and lowered her voice. “I know from the best possible sources.”

I knew what she meant. They were not French or English sources. They were Nazi sources. I knew of Jane’s friendliness toward some very dangerous people.

“Abetz! I suppose.”

“Yes, since you’ve guessed it.”

“Abetz isn’t very safe company.”

She laughed again. “Don’t be absurd. In Europe today, it’s *sauve qui peut*—everyone for himself. Abetz is a charming and cultivated person.”

“Let’s talk of something else.”

“Very well. When can I have that maid?”

“Whenever you want her.”

“I’ll speak to your wife.”

“If you like.”

Then the table turned and she began talking to the Roumanian general on her other side. I felt a sense of relief at being rid of her and of getting free of Marie so easily.

Jane Trenoir had been a beauty and she was still a very handsome woman but as she grew older she had grown harder and more treacherous too. Although I had known her well for a good many years, I hadn’t seen much of her lately. It was like that then in Paris. It had begun really with the Popular Front Government and continued through the Abyssinian War and the Civil War in Spain. People had come to fall more and more into two different camps. The division was perfectly clear and sharp. It was between those who favored democracy and those who liked the Fascists and the Nazis. There wasn’t even anything national about it. There were plenty of English and French and even Americans who saw no wrong in the Fascists and Nazis; indeed they favored them, believing that in them lay their salvation. They were pretty much people of one kind. By 1938 the two factions rarely met save at diplomatic dinners. I would have been happier that night if I had been seated far from Jane. She had become in a way not quite human, but merely a symbol of all those people who no longer had any loyalties left save to themselves and their interests. I think they all firmly believed that the Nazis could not lose and that Hitler would protect their shallow but powerful world from destruction. In this symbolism, even her origins, so obscure, were significant since no one ever really knew what

nationality she was.

But my relief on the score of the maid Marie was even greater. She had come to get badly on my nerves, to the point where I fancied that she was always following me even into the garden. I was convinced, among other things, that she was a potential black-mailer and perhaps a little crazy. I am certainly not a vain man but I sometimes suspected that in her frustrated soul she had come to have a kind of fixation about me.

Marie Hergot and my family parted as good friends as one can be with a character of that order. I had no scruples about unloading her on Jane, for I knew that if any woman on earth was able to take care of herself it was Jane. It seemed to me that she and Marie were made for each other. I seem to have been right for they remained together for seven years until Jane came to the end of the road.

I never knew much of Marie's history, only that she came from a small provincial town in the Auvergne, which is the same country Laval came from. Once while she was with us she returned there for a visit and while she was there her mother died and Marie inherited what property the old woman left. She did not like her mother and said so frankly.

The old woman, according to Marie, was *un monstre*. Concerning that, I cannot say. I should doubt it only because Marie had a habit of taking cold and unreasoning hatreds for people, bordering in their intensity upon insanity. She hated the postman and one of our neighbors and a guest who came frequently to stay with us. There is something about French provincial towns which produces characters like Marie. The pages of Balzac are filled with them, and the French newspapers regularly recount crimes, cold and terrible murders, committed, I think, out of revolt against the narrowness, the avarice, the meanness of life in small towns in the French provinces. Marie had never married and in a perverse way bitterly resented the fact yet, perhaps logically, she professed to hate all men and to consider them beasts and swine. At times she would shut herself up in her room on the third floor under the eaves and cry hysterically.

So much for Marie. That is about all I knew of her until the letter came today out of the midst of the confusion and desolation of Europe.

As for Jane, I had known her well for nearly a generation yet I still do not know what was her origin, nor do I think, does anyone else. It was always supposed that she was American and for years she carried an American as well as a French passport, but I am not even sure that she was American. Some said she was Canadian, some Australian, some that she was Irish. She never talked much of what lay beyond the period at which she appeared upon the horizon of New York as the wife of a rather brash and handsome young stockbroker in the midst of the First World War. Nevertheless, whatever the facts, the United States and New York in particular played a great part in her adventurous career.

She had black hair and blue eyes and the last time I saw her, when she was nearly sixty years old with white hair, she was still beautiful although the features, and particularly the mouth, had grown hard. With her beauty she had wit and intelligence and above all the shrewdness which goes so often with the character of an ambitious, ruthless, successful, self-centered woman.

I saw her for the first time when I was about twenty years old at a week-end party on Long Island. She must have been at that time about thirty or thirty-five years old. She had immense health and vitality and high spirits, but even then she had what might have been described as a

divided personality. The high spirits, the gaiety, if you looked closely, all appeared to be on the surface. Beneath them there appeared to be another Jane, still, calculating, watchful as a cat, who stood apart never becoming involved in what went on about her.

She had very little interest in one who was simply a friend of the household, a kid at whom now and then, in the course of dinner or on the tennis court, she would toss a dazzling smile which set the heart to jumping. Undoubtedly I bored her by my juvenile attentions but she was always polite and even flattering. At that time I thought her charming as well as beautiful. It was only later that I came to understand why she was what might be described as kind to me. Jane never overlooked a chance. I was a nobody, but you could never tell; someday I might become someone important who would be useful to her, and I would never forget the smiles and the words. No, Jane never overlooked a chance. A smile or two was a cheap investment which might one day pay off.

It must be said that the times in which she lived favored her ambitions. What happened to her before I met her at that Long Island house party I do not know. She had had an earlier husband but I never found out what became of him. But during the First World War she appeared in New York as the wife of a stockbroker, younger than herself, who was in the Navy. She appeared at bazaars and at charity benefits and presently people began seeing her name in the papers as a member of this or that committee. Of course, her beauty helped her. Everyone was always asking who she was and gradually she came to know all sorts of important people.

It was a period of disintegration of morals, manners and behavior, a period of sudden great fortunes and sudden financial collapses. After the war it was even worse. Such a society and such an era was made for a woman like Jane, and she missed none of its opportunities.

At the time I saw her first she had been married to Eric Stanton for about five years. He was actually three or four years younger than Jane but he was already losing his rather florid good looks and his promise seemed to be waning. He was drinking badly and looked bloated and actually much older than his wife. By that time I think Jane very likely was already providing most of the money which came in. She did this in two ways—one by gambling. With the expertness, the shrewdness which lay behind all the beauty and charm she played all games of chance extremely well, and she played viciously for very high stakes, nearly always winning. I do not know that she was a cheat as well, but there is nothing in her character to indicate that she had any scruples about such things. Very likely at that period, she won thousands of dollars a year.

The other source of income could be described quite simply and accurately as prostitution. It was an elegant, high-toned sort of prostitution, very discriminating and calculated. No doubt occasional checks or cash were involved, but most of the profit came to her in less obvious ways. A lover would give her a fur coat or lend her and Eric a house for the season or give them a flat on Fifth Avenue rent free because he happened to own the building. Or he would invest money for her in the market or pay her debts if she lost at gambling as she rarely did. There were a hundred ways in which she turned her affairs to a profit.

On that first week end on Long Island, there was in the offing a man called Byerly. Although he is forgotten today, he was in those days a big shot on the Stock Exchange, a rather burly, ruthless man of about fifty-five. The affair was conducted skillfully enough on Jane's side. I might never have suspected anything save that Byerly could conceal neither his admiration nor

his desire to show off his conquests. She had a difficult time with him, trying to keep him in control and within the limits of the game.

I caught them together in the boathouse when I returned from a midnight sail alone on the Sound. Byerly was angry but Jane laughed it off. For me, at twenty, half in love with Jane myself, the experience was disillusioning. But it did accomplish one thing. It established a curious bond between me and Jane. Always afterward when we met, there was the memory of that night between us. Jane did not follow the technique of English women under such circumstances, pretending the incident had never occurred; she referred to it when we were alone, laughing about it. "That Byerly!" she might say. "What a swine!" But at that time he was undoubtedly doing well by her in a financial way.

I don't know what became of him. The last I heard was that he had been wiped out in the Crash. Jane and I used to talk about him sometimes up to the very eve of the War but she no more than myself knew what had become of him.

At that time she and Eric were coming to the end of things. She wanted to be rid of him, to marry somebody more important with more money, and Eric was in the way. Divorce wasn't quite as casual then as now and she didn't want a divorce until she found the right man to succeed him. All the time she was hoping, I think, that his drinking would finish him off and leave her free.

Years afterward she said, "He knew perfectly well what was going on. He knew that we were invited everywhere only because of me. He knew that we'd be broke but for the money I made gambling. He knew it and couldn't take it, so he just settled down to the bottle and followed me around."

That sounds a hard statement, but Jane was hard.

She did become aware presently that she was overplaying her hand a little for she knew that talk of her behavior was doing her harm, even in the fast circles in which she travelled. That was one of the reasons why she did not want to risk a divorce and bring out the possibility of Eric suddenly turning vicious and bringing up in court all that he knew.

Then mercifully he fell a victim to pneumonia and died, and that left Jane exactly where she wanted to be—a handsome widow of thirty-seven, free again to step up in the world. This time she picked from among her prospects a solid banker of impeccable respectability with a great deal of money. His name, which the older generation will remember, was Ellsworth Chase. He was nearly sixty when he married Jane. He married her because he was at that age when this was his last chance at love and he had to have Jane and no one else. The marriage included a settlement which gave her forty thousand dollars a year for the rest of her life.

But the life with Ellsworth Chase was dull. He did not like the fast friends who surrounded her during her life with Eric Stanton. He wanted to travel, quietly, to places like Taormina and Aix-les-Bains and Baden-Baden and for a time Jane went with him, bored to death, surrounded by dull people trying to find amusement by gambling for the small stakes which were allowed in the third-rate casinos she found in such places.

She had always wanted to see Europe and now as Mrs. Ellsworth Chase she was seeing it but not at all in the way she wanted to see it. I will say for Jane that whatever she wanted, she wanted out of the top drawer. As a cheat and chiseler, as a trollope, finally as a traitress she was

always high-class. She didn't like the dull, dowdy people who surrounded them in the quiet places which Chase preferred. He let her spend money on clothes, although he was mean about jewelry, and she did well by herself so far as dressing was concerned. She always had wonderful natural taste about clothes and furniture and houses and things like that, and with her good looks it was inevitable that when they were in Paris or London, she should attract attention. She became known as "the beautiful Mrs. Chase" and now and then she managed to induce her husband to accept an invitation from people in the international world. She had tasted that life and it had gone to her head. She wanted more of it.

"It was rather hard," she said, "to have all that in front of you to take for the asking, but the old man didn't want any of it. He didn't like clever and brilliant people and that kind of life wore him out. All he wanted was me. I was an obsession with him. You know what men are at that age. It was unendurable!"

You see, Jane, never for one moment in her life, was in love with anyone. She was sensual enough but self-controlled and cold-blooded. During that dull period with Chase, she began again to cheat, not this time for money or furs or free rent or any of those things but only because she was bored. She had casual affairs—with a young Englishman, with a White Russian gigolo in Gstaad, even with a croupier from the Nice Casino. They had to be with obscure people because she didn't dare risk her husband's finding out about them. Always in the back of her mind was the hope that something would happen, that he would die suddenly while still infatuated with her and that she would come in for a great deal more money.

About this period she once made a curious but illuminating remark. She said, "I never really enjoyed the affairs themselves. I liked the excitement of sneaking out and meeting a man in some back street hotel. I was never in love with any of the men."

In the meanwhile Chase was aging rapidly. In his obsession for her he went to excesses which I am quite certain she encouraged and which ruined his health, and then one day at Marseilles, he was poisoned by seafood and died under the none too skillful ministrations of a Marseilles doctor.

As a handsome widow of forty-two, looking much less than her age, she took the body back to New York and when the will was read, she discovered that he must have known about her all along, for he left her nothing, claiming that she had been taken care of in the marriage settlement. She tried to break the will and failed but got a little extra money through settlement with the family lawyers. Then she returned straight to Europe.

She had forty thousand a year and a little over. She was still handsome and attractive. She took a flat in Paris and plunged into the life which until now she had watched from a distance. It was a world which suited her wolf's nature, in which everyone was on his own, a world that grew like a brilliant fungus upon the manure heap of the Europe between wars.

During this period I saw much of her. Whatever her standards or her morals, Jane was decidedly a positive character, of no little interest. We talked of mutual friends and went all the way back to Byerly and the incident in the boathouse on Long Island Sound. There was about her an engaging frankness and a certain vicious wisdom. She behaved herself and lived discreetly and well in a flat in the Avenue Dufresne. She had never had any lack of brains. It was the kind of mind which could have run a big shop or an industry, but she chose to put it to other uses. It was not long before she knew "everybody who was anybody." The forty

thousand a year went a long way in Paris. She gave dinners and musical evenings and her reputation as a woman of taste and of wealth increased. And then one day she married Monsieur Trenoir and I understood the reason for her good behavior.

Monsieur Trenoir himself had a curious history. Vaguely by birth he was an Argentine who at some period had become a naturalized French citizen. He was very rich and owned one of the best stables of horses. His position was good and he was a widower without children when Jane married him. She went to live with him in his big house in the rue de Bourgoyne and there began the opulent period which might be described as “the last phase of Jane Trenoir.”

In the Thirties, I went often to dinner at the house in the rue de Bourgoyne. It was there, I think, that I first began to divine the evil things that were taking place in Europe. There were grand dinners with important people but nearly all of them of the same category. The guests were of all nationalities but all of a common interest—in industry, in banking, in cartels. There were cold-blooded calculating Englishmen, gross heavy Germans, French industrialists and bankers, always of the same category, White Russians and Fascist Italians. I saw in Jane’s house the Cianos, Laval, Thyssen, Colonel Beck of Poland, Schacht, Ribbentrop, Abetz and scores of smaller fry. And slowly I began to see the significance.

It was a bad period in France with the country divided against itself and falling to pieces, and nearly all the people who came to the house in the rue de Bourgoyne seemed to be plotting to hasten the disintegration. Nearly all of them were like Jane herself, adventurers of the most unscrupulous sort, yet they were important people in the Europe of those times, with immense power over the people of the world. The history of the period is largely one of scoundrels, fools, hypocrites and adventurers and most of them came and went in the thirties, to and from the house of Monsieur and Madame Trenoir.

Oposing them were the Communists and radicals, all those elements which went to make up the *Front Populaire*. It was with this element that my own sympathies lay and there was many a political battle at the Trenoir dinner table. Few of the people there had any more loyalties than Jane. Their only loyalties were to themselves, their fortunes and their power. They worked together only because that was the shrewd thing to do. At the time, sitting among them, it was impossible to believe in the full depth of their villainy, yet as time has passed the record has become clear. They were guilty of the worst that one could believe of them and their intrigues in the end brought down the whole of European civilization upon their heads, with utter ruin and sometimes violent death charted by fate for all of them.

I think that Jane was happier than she had ever been in all her life, playing a part in a kind of sinister Sardou melodrama. As she grew older all her passion slowly became concentrated upon money and possessions. At fifty she had in her blue eyes a look of avarice such as one sees in the eyes of secretly rich beggars. It was not that she felt any reluctance to spend money; she spent it freely, lavishly—both her own money and that of her husband—so long as it bought power and luxury for herself and for him. Like many people who have been miserably poor themselves and built their own fortunes, she came to have a hatred of the poor and the unfortunate. But most of all, she hated those who sought to help the poor.

Once she said, “They are only poor because they are stupid, lazy people. I worked for whatever I have and I mean to keep it and the power that goes with it. To Hell with the poor and the weak. You can’t do anything to help them in any case.”

She spoke thus with unmistakable conviction. The world, she really believed, should belong to the clever, the unscrupulous, the ruthless. It was not only her own philosophy that she uttered; it was a perfect statement of the philosophy of most of the people who came to her house.

It was inevitable that eventually we should part company. It happened one night after dinner early in 1938 in the house in the rue de Bourgoyne. Of all those present I was the only one who did not espouse the cause of the Nazis. The end was drawing near in Europe. Chamberlain would soon be going to Munich to return with “peace in our time.” Czechoslovakia was about to be murdered, Austria enslaved, all through the intrigues of the people dining that night in Jane’s house, or people like them who might well have been dining there.

Jane said to me, “The Nazis are right. Nature does not encourage democracy. Nature does not operate for the benefit of the weak and the stupid. The Nazis have hit upon a political philosophy which will change all the world!”

The others in the room echoed her sentiments. I rose quietly and said good night to her and then outside the door of the drawing room, I said, “It’s good-bye too, Jane. Whatever friendship we may have had is finished. I have frequented the company of whores and sometimes find them good companions. I am not a line-drawer but a Nazi is beyond the pale!”

She only laughed at me and said, “You’ll see who will come out on top!”

The *maître d’hôtel* opened the door for me and I stepped out into the dim light of the rue de Bourgoyne aware that it was the last time I would ever see the beautiful house again. I only saw Jane once after that at the Embassy dinner when I wished Marie upon her. Although I did not know it then, I was also wishing retribution upon her.

It must have been after midnight and the old street was quite empty so that the sounds of my footsteps echoed back and forth between the ancient houses that had looked down upon the mobs of the revolution. I thought, “Something like that will happen again. Once again people will be hanging from the lampposts, very likely Jane among them.”

Marie went to Jane the week after the dinner at the Embassy and I saw her only once again, in 1939 during the period of the “phony war.” I had sent my family home at the time of Munich and had stayed on myself and one late autumn afternoon I went to visit a friend who lived in the rue de Bourgoyne. As I left an early snow was falling and in the twilight I suddenly heard someone running behind me and a voice called out, “*Attendez! Monsieur! S’il vous plaît! Attendez!*”

Vaguely I recognized the voice and as I turned I understood why. Coming toward me was the maid Marie Hergot. She had a wild-eyed look and was panting. There were times when Marie became excited when it seemed to me that there must be inside her an unbearable tension like that of an overcharged battery or a spring too tightly wound—a tension so great that somehow she transferred to you something of its agony.

“I must see you, Monsieur” and then breathlessly, “How are Madame and the children?” and without waiting for an answer, “Can you give me but a moment? There are things I must tell you!”

I did not want even to see her again much less to talk to her, but I was, I think, actually a little afraid of what she might do if I refused. So I said, “We can’t talk here. Shall we go to a *bistro*?”

“Oui, Monsieur!”

She moved alongside me and we went to a taxi-drivers’ *bistro* on the corner of the street. It was a dreary, liver-colored little place. I had a beer and she ordered a glass of that insipid *bistro café-au-lait* which is like dishwater.

Then she settled to what she had to say. I led to it by asking if she were still with Madame Tre noir.

“Oui,” she said.

“Do you like it?”

“Non, Monsieur.”

I did not ask why but I was a little surprised that two women like Jane Tre noir and Marie Hergot could live together in the same house for long. As it turned out I had simply underestimated the power of hatred, a hatred so great that it could keep people together, like prisoners handcuffed to each other.

Marie lighted a cigarette and said, “That’s what I wanted to tell you about. I know you do not like Madame Tre noir.”

“How did you know that?”

“I sometimes overheard Monsieur talking.”

While she sipped her coffee, she kept on talking wildly, staring at me all the time out of the black witch’s eyes set too near together. She had been up to her old tricks again, listening at keyholes, eavesdropping at the top of the stairway. She told me the story of what she had heard. It was a startling, unreasonable, indeed unbelievable story of treachery and treason, so lurid that I discounted most of it as impossible or simply the result of the hallucinations of a half-mad old maid.

What emerged from the story was this—that the Tre noir house was the meeting-place of those who were discreetly plotting the downfall of France. Of course there were no Germans or Italians about now; the plotters were French, those who were Nazi at heart or hated the Left so much that they were forced into Fascism. And there were some who, sincerely and perhaps reasonably, believed that France’s future lay in friendship and collaboration with Germany and a few who hated England so much they leaned toward Germany. According to Marie’s wild tale, some of the best known people in France, in the government and in the army, met in the Tre noir house to plot. Some of the names were astonishing ones whom, until now, I had never suspected. What Jane’s own motives were I knew well enough, for she had told me.

The long, breathless tale depressed me and I found it so fantastic as to be unbelievable. If what she said was true there was little chance that France could defend herself if the war turned into anything but a “phony war.” It seems to me now that the Nazis must have known everything that happened in the house in the rue de Bourgo yne and elsewhere and that the war at that time was a “phony war” partly because the Nazis believed they could eventually reach a settlement and win all France without fighting.

But at the moment, sitting there in the *bistro*, I could not believe that men high in politics and in the Army could be guilty of what Marie was accusing them. Of course they were guilty and most of them have ended disgraced, ruined, in prison or against a wall.

Once she stopped in her story and said, "I see that you are doubting me, Monsieur. I swear that everything I am telling you is true. I swear it on the head of my Mother."

Such an oath was not especially convincing, in view of the fact that she had always avowed her mother was a monster and that the old woman had died under peculiar circumstances while Marie was paying her a visit. I asked her why she had not informed on her employers, but a mad wild look came into her eyes and she said, "What good would that do? They would only do away with me or say that I was mad and shut me up. They are more powerful than you think. They are everywhere."

Then quite suddenly she stopped talking about the Trenoirs and their world and asked again, listening this time for my answer, after the health of my wife and the children and the dogs.

"I have always regretted leaving you," she said. "I was very happy there. The life was so different. Nothing ever happened in your house."

Then I told her that I must go and before we parted I said, "Why don't you leave the house and find a place elsewhere?"

The black witch's eyes narrowed and a look of insane glee came into them. "No," she said, "it is like a story. I must see the end of it. I can't stop reading it in the middle, in the most thrilling part. You see, she can't discharge me because I know too much, not only what I have told you but many things about her personal life. She may poison me but she will never send me away."

Then she hurried away, down the silent street, toward the house of Monsieur and Madame Trenoir.

I never saw her again nor did I hear of her until this morning, when the soiled fat letter bearing only my name and the address United States of America came from the French Mission.

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At the end of 1939 I returned home for good to a world very different from the one I had left.

Then overnight the "phony war" ended abruptly and the Nazis murdered Holland and marched into Belgium. Dunkerque followed and Paris fell and then Jane and her party showed their hands, openly, for the first time. At the house in the rue de Bourgoyne, there was a dinner to welcome certain of the Germans, the same ones, like Abetz, whom I had seen long ago at dinner in the house. From then on, little news came out of Paris. There were rumors and gossip which filtered through into Switzerland and Spain and always one heard that Jane and her husband were very much in with the Nazis. Like so many others they believed that the War was already over, that the Nazis were victorious and that the future of Europe was assured for the Hitlers, the Cianos, the Ribbentrops and all the other unscrupulous adventurers. The Trenoirs rode high. Monsieur took an important post in the Vichy government but spent more of his time in Paris with Jane and the Germans than in Vichy.

Thinking about her, it seemed to me that her life had been only one long betrayal. She had betrayed friends and husbands and lovers and at last even the country she had adopted. She had worshipped always what she believed was the main chance and always she had won. Most of all, she had always been a "taker"—she never gave anything. I was certain that in Paris, entertaining Nazi officers and military men, she was sure that she had won again in the greatest gamble of all. I could imagine her very well—handsome, triumphant, vicious and hard—an important figure in the "New Europe."

Then the Germans occupied all of France and very few rumors came out of Paris. Now and then Trenoir's name was mentioned in the news as a power in the Vichy government but nothing else came through until the letter from Marie Hergot arrived. I cannot do better than let her tell the rest of the story in her own words. Throughout the letter she refers to Jane as "Madame" and Trenoir as "Monsieur" like a proper servant.

On the thin crumpled pages she wrote—

I thought you would like to hear the rest of the story. Perhaps you have read of it already in the papers, how both Madame and Monsieur were shot in their bedroom in the house in the rue de Bourgoyne. But the journalists could not know all the story.

You see, everybody here in Paris began about a year ago to believe that the War was finished and that the Boches were beaten. A lot of the collaborationists began making plans for getting out of France and a few even tried to run away to Switzerland or Spain, but Monsieur and Madame would not leave. They insisted the Boches could not lose. I think Monsieur was frightened at times but Madame never seemed to lose her courage or her confidence. And she was moved by hatred too. She hated all those French who resisted. She hated the Underground which she could not reach. She hated anyone who believed that France would be free again. You see, she had no country. She was loyal to nothing. I heard her say often enough to the Boches that they should shoot more hostages because that was the only way to stop the resistance. It got around Paris that she was worse than Monsieur and she could no longer go out save in a closed car with bullet-proof glass. The Boche governor of Paris provided her with such a car and she used it to go to the dressmaker's and to dinner with the Boches and to a few restaurants like Maxim's where the Boches had taken over altogether.

Then they put steel doors with shutters and heavy locks on all the doors and windows and Monsieur had the Garde Mobile stationed outside the house to prevent anyone from breaking in. Monsieur began to be sick with fear. He lost his color and his hands took to trembling with palsy. But there wasn't anything they could do. They had only the Boches to protect them because they couldn't trust any honest Frenchman.

And then one afternoon when I was consoling myself with a little brandy at the corner *bistro*—the same one where you and I had a farewell drink—a man sat down at the same table and began to talk to me. He was cautious in the beginning, feeling his way and before long I began to see what he was after. He was a short, dark man with black eyes from Bordeaux. I guessed he was from the Underground. He knew I worked in the house and he wanted help. I let him know that I wouldn't mind doing what he wanted, which was to help his friends get into the house. We arranged another meeting in another part of town, near the Place de la Republique where the Underground really controlled the Quarter. He didn't trust me yet, but after we had met two or three more times with a couple of other men, he came to believe in my hatred for Madame. I was to get a key to the great steel door and open it on the inside for them. Madame locked the door at night and took out the key and hid it.

It was easy enough. I found that, as I suspected, Madame kept the key in her room in

the casket with her jewels, and during the daytime while she was out, I went there and made an impression of it in wax. This I took to my friend in the Underground and in a day or two he returned a duplicate key to me.

They set the early morning of November 10th for the murder. I was to come down at four in the morning and open the great door with my key while their men outside overpowered the two guards.

All that night I sat up keeping myself awake with black coffee. About midnight Monsieur and Madame came in from some Boche dinner party. I listened to them from the hall above stairs. Monsieur was more frightened than usual. Evidently he had heard something at dinner which disturbed him. I heard her lock the steel door and take out the key and then say to him scornfully, "Go away? Where would you go? There is no place. Wherever you go they will find you! If we're lost, we're lost! They'll come after us in Switzerland, in Spain—wherever we go. They'll track us down and shoot us wherever we are. They won't forget so long as they live—the dirty swine. Our only hope is to sit tight. The Boches will protect us until they want to be rid of us. Stop your damned whimpering!"

It was wonderful to hear them—Madame, bitter and hard, abusing Monsieur while he whimpered and sobbed. I tell you it did my heart good to watch them coming up the grand stairway of that rich house where once there had been so many important people planning how they were going to run the whole world. I watched and listened in an ecstasy, thinking, "You don't know how soon death is going to catch up with you. By daylight you'll both be dead in your own blood!"

Then they went into the bedroom they shared and closed and locked the door. That didn't trouble me. It was only a wooden door, very old and worm-eaten. A gun butt or a good kick would smash it open. Once they had had separate rooms but since Monsieur had become frightened they had been sleeping in the same room.

It will be difficult for you to believe how much Monsieur and Madame had changed. As I told you, he seemed to grow older and older and greyer and greyer as fear ate him up and Madame, who was always hard, slowly became haggard and immensely old. For three years, day after day, I watched them both, changing, suffering, both being eaten up—Monsieur by terror, Madame by hatred and frustration. And for the last year the *thing* has been closing in upon them—in Russia, in North Africa, in Italy, in Roumania. They knew there wasn't any escape because even if they weren't arrested by the government, they would be killed sometime, someplace by assassins whose brothers had been murdered or whose sisters had been violated. No, it was all a long way from the days when they were riding high and entertaining at dinner all the crooks and swindlers and criminals of Europe.

So when I heard them, trapped and quarreling, climbing the grand stairway, all my hatred was nourished and satisfied. I have never been so happy in all my life. I was in ecstasy.

After they closed and locked the door of the bedroom, I went back to my room and kept awake by playing solitaire and reading the cards. Four times I read the cards for Monsieur and four times for Madame—and would you believe it?—each time they

spelled disaster and death.

When the clock showed three-thirty, I went downstairs in my felt slippers and quietly pushed open the little shutter in the steel door. It was dark in the street outside but I could hear the two guards walking up and down talking to each other. They were talking mostly about the women they had slept with and comparing amorous experiences. That last half hour seemed to go on forever. I thought something had gone wrong and my friends were not coming at all and then I heard a truck coming through the street and I took the key from around my neck and put it quietly into the lock.

The truck came up to the doorway and I heard the sound of many boots striking the pavement as men jumped out of it. The odd thing was that the guards made no outcry and did not fire a gun. I heard talk but could not make out what they were saying, and then suddenly I heard two or three blows and the soft sound of bodies hitting the ground and of steel helmets striking the pavement. That's all the sound there was—not even a scuffle.

I turned the key and opened the door and seven men came through the doorway. I understood then why there hadn't been much resistance. All of them were dressed in the uniform of the Garde Mobile, the same as the two men on guard outside, and they hadn't suspected anything until they were clipped on the jaw and put out of commission.

My friend was in command and I told him about the locked bedroom door and how it could easily be kicked open.

Then I led the way up the stairs. We went very quietly because we didn't want them to become alarmed and start screaming out of the window. When we reached the door my friend and another big fellow lunged at the old door. It split and shattered at once and suddenly we were all in the room. I went too because I wanted to see this thing.

The room was dark but at least Madame was awake for I heard her cry out, "Henri! Henri!" and then "Who is there?" I knew where the light switch was and turned it on.

Madame was sitting up in bed and Monsieur was half-raised on his elbows. It was very clear that they knew what was coming. Even the Garde Mobile uniforms didn't deceive them. Monsieur's face was pitiful. He was very scared. He looked for a moment and then pulled the bedclothes over his head and huddled into a ball, the way babies lie in the womb. Madame's face was the picture of fury. Her white hair was done up in *bigourdis* and she looked old and evil and the hard face was contorted with hatred.

I must say she showed courage. She didn't ask, "What do you want?" She knew well enough what they had come for. She said, "Let us talk reasonably" and then, noticing me, she said, "What are you doing here, Marie?" But she quickly understood that too, for we had hated each other for so long. From under the bedclothes you could hear the voice of Monsieur praying. My friend, the leader, said rather formally, "There is nothing to discuss, Madame. It is too late!" She had come to the end of the road. There was no one left to betray and she knew it.

All this happened in a second or two. It was embarrassing because they had come to kill and now Madame had put them off. Each second made the whole thing seem more terrible and cold-blooded. It might have been worse but one of the men, a young fellow, had no patience with talk because his young brother, a boy of seventeen, had been shot the week before as a hostage. He had what they call a Tommy gun and he fired, directing it at the body of Monsieur, hidden under the bedclothes. Then Madame cried out, "Fire, you swine!" and all of them began shooting. It was all over in a minute. Madame fell forward on her face and on the other bed, the blood began oozing through the sheets.

Then my friend, the leader, said, "Come!" and they went out and climbed into the truck and drove away.

I went upstairs, took my valise, and went out of the house closing the steel door behind me. It was just beginning to be light. The two guards still lay, bound and gagged, on the sidewalk. An old woman had pushed open the shutters of the house opposite. She seemed to be the only one in the whole street aroused by the shots. Perhaps she was already awake. As I passed the window she called out, "*Bon voyage et bonne chance, mes enfants!*" She must have understood what the sound of the shot meant.

My valise was very heavy. I didn't take away any clothes. It was filled with jade and miniatures and the snuffboxes out of Monsieur's collection. I knew the Germans paid high prices for such stuff and I could buy all the clothes I'd ever want for what I could sell it for.

I thought you would be interested in what happened to Monsieur and Madame. Please remember me to your wife and the children and give the dogs a pat for me. Perhaps you will be coming back to France after the War. *Amitiés.*

*Marie Hergot*

There was no address and no clue as to where she went on the morning she closed the steel door behind her.

The letter simply left her walking down the ancient rue de Bourgoyne through the mist into the rising dawn.

I don't know why she wrote to me save that perhaps she had to tell the whole story to someone. Perhaps she remembered the evening we drank together in the corner *bistro* on the last night I ever saw her and wanted me to know that all the unbelievable things she had told me were true.

I must say that while reading the letter on the porch of a farmhouse in Ohio, I was swept by a sense of complete unreality. Things like that couldn't happen, especially to people you knew.

Of course, I have come long since to know that they can happen. Since then I have read stories far more fantastic than Marie's tale—of Ciano shot in a courtyard in Verona at the orders of his father-in-law. He was shot, not at dawn but at nine in the morning when the light was good so that they could take moving pictures of his death to show the Duce who had been too ill to attend the execution of his foreign minister and the father of his grandchildren. They had even

taken close-ups of the revolver in the hands of the chief of police as he gave the *coup de grâce* which finished the Count.

And of course, since then the Duce and his mistress, dead and kicked beyond recognition, have been hung up like butchered steers head downward from the girders of a garage in Milan. And Laval, three times Prime Minister of France, shaken by the poison they had removed with a stomach pump, carried to a stake and shot. And Goering, whose hospitality had been so admired by the French lady who liked hunting, dead from cyanide a moment before they took him away to hang him. And the arrogant Ribbentrop, haggard and defeated long before his death by hanging, on a slab beside the gallows.

I remembered then the games of poker and backgammon I had played with a smiling, confident Ciano, the Duce smiling at the cheers from the mob that filled the square before the Palazzo Venezia, Laval across the table at the lunch that celebrated the *fiançailles* of his daughter, and Ribbentrop in the place of honor at dinner in the great houses in Paris and London. Perhaps these things could happen to people you had known. Somehow they all seemed to have come at last to the end of the road.

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## Transcriber's Notes

Obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected.

Everything else has been left as it was in the original.

[The end of *Kenny* by Louis Bromfield]