THE PLUMB BOB MAN

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"When would you like me to start, Mr. Boettcher?"

"Anytime you like. I don't know exactly what you can do, but--"

"Oh, don't worry. I'll find something around. How 'bout the dishes?"

"A fine idea. I was just dreading the thought of getting up to do them myself." Norelle moved a few plates and cups, emptied a bowl of milky, cold water, clattered the silverware against the brown-stained porcelain. Boettcher watched her tapering thighs and the full, rounded curves of her rump pressing at the threads and rivets of the Levi's. He started to imagine how smooth and soft and white her skin would be, then quickly looked for the headlines as she turned to him.

"Where's your soap?"

"Right there under the sink." When she bent, he watched again and then re-entered The Daily Montanan, turning page by page to Omar's Astrology, thinking about the impossibility of a woman in his kitchen again, like she'd eaten breakfast there, been there all night, belonged there, a daughter or wife. In
the horoscope columns, he searched for some prediction, revelation about how he should understand this high schoolgirl, his neighbor's daughter. At Pisces, he read: New view toward friend. Desire is a necessity. Take time to find out what you really require. Promises are fine, but stress practicality. Don't deceive yourself. The Zodiac was exactly right, and in his usual fashion, Boettcher began interpreting the short, truthful phrases, applying each one to Norelle's employment, like a fundamentalist reading his Bible late Saturday night; now and then peering around the edge of the newspaper at her—a delicious ripe winter pear.

"Where you going, Mr. Boettcher?"

"Something I have to do out in the garage. You go right ahead."

"Whatta ya want me to do when I get the dishes done?"

"Oh, look around. There's a broom and dustpan there. Place hasn't had a good cleaning since Mrs. Boettcher left us, you know. How does $1.50 sound like, enough?"

"Whatever you say."

"All right. We'll start with that anyway. I'll be back in a while." He went out, closing the screen door, but leaving the back door open, sun flooding the kitchen floor, morning air pouring cool into the house now that the breeze had started up the mountain, blowing bunchgrass and wildflowers into steep slopes, lifting dead leaves to a brightening sky.
Boettcher walked down the path to the garage, unlocked it, entered, locked it, and climbed the ladder to the attic where his collected plants dried in the darkness. He earned little money as an herbalist, but the possession of this special knowledge and the pleasure of collecting in the wild made the avocation the center of his retirement. Agents from large drug companies came to his house in unmarked cars to load sacks and inquire about further purchases, a pleasant reversal, he thought, of his former business at the Rexall Pharmacy. And his herbs also gave him time alone, a solitary figure in the mountains, in some field, along a road, collecting what loggers and farmers and tourists thought of as weeds to be sprayed. Boettcher knew tarragon and sage, princess pine and stoneseed, comfrey and ginseng, and hundreds more. He knew where they grew and when they were best; he knew their modern scientific uses; he knew their ancient medicinal values; he knew how to prepare them as tinctures or infusions or poultices; one, an aphrodisiac, another to rejuvenate sexual power, another a potential commercial contraceptive, another the bitter principle in sasparilla. And if he didn't know one, he quietly referred himself to all the old herbals and copies of Remington's Practice of Pharmacy in his library. In those books, he could find anything.

Kneeling on rough planks, he crawled from one end of the attic to the other, turning the pungent drying herb. No one
else had ever touched it, except perhaps the old dean of the School of Pharmacy at the University. No one else had collected, dried, and sold it to that big eastern university for the last twenty years. Professors wrote for more of the old Shoshone contraceptive, said it looked promising... any day now.... Once in production, Boettcher knew that he would be at the ovaries of the ten million women who took the pill. What a place, what power he would hold in secret from his attic in Montana, even though he was retired. And all because of his drying stone-seed, his beloved *lithospermium*.

At both ends of the attic he opened the louver boards so the air, combined with the heat of the sun on the roof, would continue to dry the stone-seed in the dim light. Crawling back toward the ladder, he thought for a moment about a special stimulant for Norelle that used to do wonders for his wife—orgasm after orgasm after orgasm. But then he reconsidered, remembering the horoscope, and she probably knew all about men anyway. What to do? Show her the bitterroot he had transplanted earlier that morning. That would impress her if anything would. Backing down the ladder, scraping soles on the rungs, shiplap and rafters above him cracked, a wooden music in his mind. Good! Very good! Smiling, dropping slowly down, rung by rung, hand below hand, he finally touched the floor. Brass key in the Russwin lock, turning, he opened the door, slammed it, and started for the garden.
"All done, Mr. Boettcher. Guess I'll go home now, unless there's something else. Get your stuff done?" Norelle opened the screen door, squinting against the sun.

"Everything's fine."

"How come you always keep that a secret, what you do out there. Nobody can figure you out. You got a still or something, haven't you." The old man smiled, looked at her intensely for a moment, then raised a mysterious dirty forefinger, bending it back and forth several times. She followed him into the garden until he stopped.

"Look. You're a Montana girl. You know what those are?" Norelle watched him while he pointed at the two rows of flowers, his face not creased with age, eyelids not drooping, teeth not false, hair thick and white. "Well?"

"I don't know."

"You've probably seen them before. Take a guess!"

"Come off it, Mr. Boettcher. Who knows anything about flowers."

"They're bitterroots."

"Like the Bitter Root Mountains?"

"Sure. Look closely. Only bloom in the spring for a little while along high ridges. They were tight little cones when I set them out this morning, but they open with the heat. Indians used them for a sort of flour."

"Where'd you get them anyway?"
"Up in the wilderness. Collected them. That's where I go when I'm gone for so long." Realizing he wanted her to look at them more closely, Norelle knelt, taking the thin, cool florid petals between dishwater fingers, putting her face close, wondering if they had a fragrance. As she knelt at another flower laying wide open and pink in the sun, she sensed that Boettcher was no longer looking at his bitter-root—he was staring at her. She flushed around the throat, hotness crept along her neck into the soft and padded bra as she became more and more self-conscious. Flushing, lifting her face, she looked back at his shoes, shoelaces, cuffs, creases, pants, then bent again at the flower. She had to leave, but she could think of no excuse. Across Francis St., nobody home. Standing up, she walked down the row as though she were going to look at something else, leaving behind the simple whorls of tennis shoes.

"Where you going?"

"I gotta split. I'll see you tomorrow." She stopped at the end of the garden, turned momentarily, then ran toward the gate, Levi's swishing against Levi's, the winter delicious pear alive and running. He called did she like the flowers, but she was out of earshot now, and in a few seconds, she disappeared in her house. Boettcher puzzled about her and tried to fit her sudden leaving under a phrase from the horoscope, but he gave that up, concluding you just couldn't tell about
these young girls. Hands still in his pockets, he studied her tracks for a moment, then went back to do some watering along the south side of the house where the sun now warmed his rich black dirt around an old bed of ladies' slippers and immortelles.

Every summer morning Norelle crossed Francis St. to work for Charles Boettcher. Coming in the back door, she would walk in the kitchen, announce herself, and begin Boettcher's breakfast while he dressed and shaved and read the paper. After eating, he invariably went outside, always busy with something in the garden, the garage, the wilderness. When he worked in the garden, she went out and learned how to transplant or plant, how to thin carrots, or sucker corn shoots that collected dew in their spiraling, tapering leaves. Sometimes she helped with the weeding, kneeling in the rich, black dirt, straddling the row of vegetables at one end and working toward Boettcher straddling the row at the other end. Other mornings she stayed inside and worked in the kitchen, watching through the windowscreen while he cultivated between rows, or trained pole beans onto strings, or helped peas start their winding tendrils around the first strand of woven wire. With hands warm and smooth in dishwater, she listened to his humming, or conversations with the plants or with himself, or the silence when he sat down and just looked around.

From that kitchen window, she also watched him in his
herb garden on the other side of the grape arbor where the plants sprawled thick and rank. Some of them she knew, like spearmint and parsley and dill, but there seemed to be hundreds foreign to her, like okra and fennel, basil and marjoram, coriander and savory, cicely and rocambole, costmary and lemon balm, hyssop and lovage. There were simply too many, and Boettcher made it even more difficult for her by telling her not to go in the herb garden, and also by only bringing in choice leaves or tender stalks for her to smell before he hung them to dry. Never seeing or knowing the entire plant, and being barred from the herb garden bothered her in the beginning, but she accepted his requests after a few weeks as part of her job, and her curiosity about herbs never bothered her again.

When she called out the window that the kettle was boiling, he always came in. After tea and pfefferneusse, they retired to the living room where Boettcher usually explained the Aquarian Age, cusp of the ages, infinite life cycles, and that he was never going to die. He told her almost every day that her life was controlled by the sun and the planets, and he asked her when she was born so that he would know her aspect and birthstone and horoscope. Sometimes Egyptian history, other times pharmacy, now herbs, now a story, now Melchizedek. Norelle just sat and listened to him, fascinated by his mouth and the timbre of his voice talking indoors surrounded by immortelles. Once he told her that she looked like his wife and showed her
old wedding pictures to prove it. Then she was finally ashamed and wanted to leave; but that desire only lasted until he began talking again, his face fixed in a half-smile on her, his eyes always on her, his slow even voice sounding like lightest rain falling on leaves of a sacred grove.

Whenever he went to the wilderness, Norelle cleaned the house, looking through boxes and drawers in the living room and bedroom to see what she could find that might reveal him more. A picture, a letter, dirty underwear, anything would do. She often lay on his bed and wished for a pencil long enough to reach the ceiling—write that obscene version of the pen is mightier than the sword she'd seen once at school. Lying there thinking about him, she wanted to lay him down like a baby and kiss his ear, get him hot, and see what happens. He probably won't do anything anyway—too old and how old do men have to be before they can't. She knew she'd never seen him with one after that first day in the garden, even though she'd watched carefully for the little rise raising on his pants. Anyway, he wasn't like those high school boys who want you to take it right away and if you don't they won't take you out again. Just a funny little old man with his secrets, humming around or fiddling with something all the time. What would he do if he came home and found me here with my clothes off? Say I was asleep? Say just pants and bra? Say I pretended to be asleep?
When he didn't go to the wilderness, Boettcher usually sent Norelle home after she fixed his lunch, telling her that she musn't stay too long or people might talk. He asked her if her parents ever questioned her about him and she said she could handle her parents. Before leaving, she always gave him a small short kiss, like she gave her father when she left last summer for her grandma's over in Washington. For her, the kiss was nothing serious, but Boettcher liked to enhance its meaning for the sake of a more pleasant afternoon and evening alone. He always told her to be careful. Afternoons of talking in cars, or walking downtown, or swimming in the river, or riding in cars, or eating at the lunch counter at Newberrys. Nights with boys at drive ins, or parties at houses, or parked on mountain roads, or eating in front of the T.V.

While she kept boredom at arm's length, Boettcher sat on his front porch in his chaise longue and drank a small can of Olympia and read Whence How and Whither by Schwartz, or Health Aids, or something from his library, or Better Homes, all the time watching across the street for her to come home so that he would not miss her waving to him. After the first few weeks, he became sure of her and began to anticipate her arrival in the morning when he was still in bed, and in the afternoon he found himself wanting to go over and ask her to do something for him, even though he knew she wasn't home. But usually, after drinking the little can of beer and reading a
while, he fell asleep in the chair, head back, mouth open, hands falling protectively in his lap.

When she came home and looked across the street, she usually saw him asleep on the porch through the sheet of bright water from the oscillating sprinkler. Crossing Francis St., she opened the gate and walked up on him while he slept, remembering how she used to sneak up on him when she was a child, how she used to help him, how he used to hold her on his lap, him sound asleep now, empty beer can on the window sill, magazine or book open on the floor, his hands, little belly rising and falling in the shade. Sometimes she waited, watching the water splatter off the maple leaves and drip on the Virginia creeper, and if he slept on, she went home early. But usually he woke up, apologized for sleeping, and then they talked. When Stan and Violet Hennig came home from the sawmill and Penney's, she left; they always wanted her home when they were there. After dinner she went out again and Boettcher would wave to her as she got in the idling car, his hand floating out to her like a dead leaf in the wind. Then he would sit reading, listening to children play laugh and stumble games, and when it finally got chilly, he went to bed, still listening for the blatant mufflers in Francis St., holding himself, drifting toward sleep.

The day before Labor Day, Norelle Hennig slipped out of her warm white envelope, dressed in front of her mirror, then
tiptoed out of the house and crossed the street to eat breakfast with Charlie Boettcher. As she unlatched his gate, she saw the kitchen lights shining out into the herb garden, his grotesque shadow hovering among the dark plants as he walked back and forth from the table to the Monarch cookstove. Once across the grass, she watched him fixing breakfast, cold sifting in around her sweatshirt, Boettcher stoking his fire, waiting for her.

"Good morning. Ready to eat?" Boettcher turned and stood still as she walked up to him and kissed him.

"What's that I smell?"

"Secret. You just barely got enough clothes on, didn't you?"

"Won't this be enough?" She looked down at the sweatshirt and Levi's, stirred the coffee he poured, stretched out, half-slouched on a chair by the table.

"It's cold up high, Norelle. You're liable to get a chill. I'll loan you a mackinaw. If it fits, you can have it. How's that?"

"You're too good to me, Mr. Boettcher."

He turned to the Monarch, fire cracking, coals glowing through draught holes, and picked up the black frying pan. Brownded sizzling sausage and eggs on her plate, eggs on his, and then a stack of hotcakes as tall as a fist, thick as fingers, three on each plate. Then two little pitchers, hot nap-
weed honey and spiced syrup. She watched him serving, looking for his eyes, and when she caught them, she half-raised like she was going to bow, and gave him another small short.

"What'd you put in these hotcakes?"

"Sourdough and serviceberries. Ever heard of that?"

"Oh, Mr. Boettcher. You're so sneaky all the time with all these secrets of yours."

"Stick around and I'll show you how to make them. Special process you start the night before. Bacteria that does it, about sixty years old. You can't get this flavor any other way."

Butter running down the sides of her stack, pouring on hot honey, it running down too, mixing with butter, melting, dripping pale yellow off the knife and fork, off her lips and chin as she took mouthfuls of hotcake and sausage and eggs and honey together, a gulp of coffee, more mouthfuls, more coffee, and then resting, looking across the table at the old man eating slowly, carefully, thoughtfully. She sighed a small satisfied ping pong ball across the table to him.

"You finished already? I have to eat slower. Full?"

Looking at her, he noticed a droplet of butter and honey that had fallen exactly between her breasts. She saw the direction of his eyes and looked down, thinking she knew the cause of his half-smile. "You dropped a little honey on yourself. Guess I should have put on napkins."
Without replying, Norelle took her knife, licked it, then deftly scraped the droplet off, licked again, her pink and flat tongue, the crease up the center underneath, blue veins standing out.

"There. How 'bout I do the dishes while you finish up and read the paper?"

"Is the paper here? I didn't hear it come yet."

"I'll go see." In a minute she came back with a roll of newsprint in her hand.

"Thank you, Virgo. We couldn't leave without reading this, now could we?" They both laughed as she adjusted the plug, poured in some soap and began running the hot water. "Did your Mother and Father ask about where you were going today?"

"Nope. They don't care, as long as I'm with you."

"You didn't tell them where you were going?"

"Why should I? They didn't ask."

"Some people get funny ideas when they see someone your age and someone my age taking off together in an old truck. You know how folks talk."

"I don't care what they say. Most people don't understand about you and me anyway, now do they?"

"How do you mean?"

"You know--me living across the street all my life and you knowing me since I was a baby and helping you all the time. They just don't get it."

"Has somebody asked you?"
"Nope. But I think some people wonder."

"Well if they ask you, just tell them you've got a summer job."

"That's what I told them. But maybe a little extra on the side, wouldn't you say?"

"Sure. But you don't have to tell anyone about that."

"Just you and me, Mr. Boettcher." She kissed him, took his dishes to the sink and started to wash them as he opened The Daily Montanan to Omar's Astrology, horoscope always on the same page as the comics. Pisces: Good lunar aspect today coincides with romance, creative interests. Feature is change. Excitement of discovery. Wonderful for dealing with opposite sex. Too good! Too true! It all fit with the day again, as it did every day, perfectly revealing what Boettcher hoped for. Just look at her standing there. Why these young girls just don't look young any more. They don't even act young. Boettcher laid the paper down, Norelle watching him smile in the steamed windows, his image blurring as he went out and came back inside.

"Here's your coat. I'll load up the truck."

"What about lunch?"

"I almost forgot. That ice chest over there--bring it--and don't forget your coat."

"I won't."

Boettcher unlocked the garage, gathered some gunnysacks and an old blanket, threw them in the old panel and backed in-
to the alley. Above him the sky was turning into tattered
grey muslin, and to the south the sun just touched the prim­
itive buffalo hump of Mt. Lolo. Boettcher didn't know why,
but every morning he looked that same way, knowing the mount­
ain would still be there, but always wanting to be sure of it.
To look at Lolo was almost instinctive, like looking at the
sky, checking the wind, smelling the air, watching for tracks
and sign on a trail, or the salmon fly hatch. In a few min­
utes, the kitchen lights went out, back door slammed, screen
door slammed, then Norelle stood beside the truck, wearing the
plaid mackinaw, carrying the ice chest. After she climbed in,
they pulled out of the alley, crossed the Clark Fork, and headed
south for the Bitter Root Valley, driving through numbered
acres of rectangular houses with rectangular grass and rec­tangular fences and rectangular cars.

"You been down toward Corvallis before, have you?"
"Lotsa times. We come down here and park and stuff,
you know."
"You must know this country better than I do."
"No, no. To make out and drink and stuff like that. You
know how kids do."
"I think we'll take this road. A couple years ago I did
well up here."
"Hey! I know where this road goes. There's a gravel pit
up here just a little ways, isn't there."
"I think so. How'd you know about that?"
"I've been up here before, but it all looks different in the daytime like this."

"Look at that mountain, the way the sun makes it pink. See it?"

"What we gonna do today, Mr. Boettcher?"

"Just wait and see. You're not worried about it, I hope."

"That depends. You know something, you're sure funny. How come you and me get along so good anyway? I never got along so good with anybody like you before."

"Hard to say, Norelle. Maybe we just get along and that's all you can say. Hold on."

"Well everybody says old people and kids shouldn't get along, don't they? I mean look at my folks and my teachers and everybody..."

Boettcher hesitated before he answered, shifting the old panel into four wheel drive as he turned off the main road onto a spur where grass grew high in the ruts. From its condition, Boettcher could tell that the spur had not been used that summer. And even when the panel passed, the grass seemed to spring back quickly, like nothing had ever gone that way.

"Where does this road go? You sure know the cool roads."

"Wait 'till we git a little higher. You can see the whole Bitter Root from one place."

"We gonna make it?"

"I always do, and everything's still the same."

"I'm along this year. That's a change now, isn't it?"
"It's good to have someone along. Gets lonesome up here once in a while."

"Maybe that's why we get along, do you think?"

"I'd never thought of it like that. Say, you ever tell off-colored stories?"

"You mean dirty jokes, like the little boy fell in the mud puddle?"

"What?"

"Sure. I know a few, but they're not very dirty, like boy's jokes are."

"Well, let's tell some. Make the time go faster."

"O.K. I know one you haven't heard."

"Tell it."

"You sure?"

"I'm an old married man."

"It's not that kind, Mr. Boettcher. Ready? Do you know what the worst thing on a woman is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. What?"

"A man about your age. Ha, ha, ha...pretty funny, isn't it. You shoulda heard Dad laugh when Mom told it to him. She heard it down at Penney's. Pretty good, huh?"

"Sure is. Mostly true too. People figure a man my age--I guess that wouldn't interest you, would it?"

"What?"

"Oh nothing. I was going to say something. Let's see. It's my turn now. Let's see...you know the story of the pro-
spectator who got arrested for sodomy out in the mountains?"
"No. I never even heard of sodomy. What's that?"
"Better look it up in the dictionary."
"What's wrong? Don't you know what it means either?"
"No, no. I know, but I can tell you exactly. Anyway, you ever heard that one?"
"No. But I won't get the joke if I don't know what--what was that word?"
"Sodomy."
"What sodomy means."
"Well, I'll tell it anyway."
"Go ahead."

"Well, this prospector got convicted by the jury and was just about to be sentenced when the judge asked him if he had anything to say. Well, this prospector, his name was Silvagus, or something like that, told the court that he figured he was innocent because of trying circumstances. So the judge recessed the court and had a private chit-chat with this Silvagus in his chambers. Well, Sil, old Sil was what they called him for short, told the judge how he'd been up Deadman Gulch for two years with nothing but this jenny mule, and this mule kept backing right up to old Sil all the time. Judge allowed how he understood because he'd been up there a time or two himself. Then old Sil said how a man without a wife and family ought to be able to do a few things that other folks didn't do. Judge said he agreed. Then old Sil told him how that jenny just kept back-
ing up to him so often and so nice, that pretty soon he just couldn't hold off any more. So he nailed her. Judge said he understood perfectly. Then old Sil told him how the ears moved so easy and old Sil started to laugh and laugh, and when he looked up the Judge was laughing too, so hard he couldn't breathe, holding his belly, and then they both started to cry. Finally, when he could stop for a minute, the Judge says to old Sil, "I know exactly how they move!" And then they laughed some more. And old Sil got off scot free. How 'bout that? You like that one?"

"I don't get it, Mr. Boettcher. What's so funny about that?"

"It's funny; that's all. Either you get it or you don't. I can't explain it for you."

"It sounds just plain gross to me. I must be dumb or something."

"No. It's probably a bad joke and I shouldn't have told it to you I guess. Let's get out here for a minute."

"What for?"

"Pick some princess pine. See those little tree-like plants growing all over out there under the trees? That's what we're after." They pulled up at the end of a switchback, got out, and walked back until they stood where the princess grew. Boettcher dropped her arm and showed her how to pull the plants and put them in the sacks. Then he left her and began working, half-bent, dragging his sack, pulling princess, never
rising, never stopping, a question mark of a man tearing plants out of the mountainside like they were food. Norelle watched, pulled one or two, then watched again. When he finally rested, she ran across the slope and sat down beside him.

"You sure work hard, don't you."

"Nothing hard about this."

"You better take it easy. You'll have a heart attack or something, and then where would we be."

"Not me. See those bushes over there. Ceanothus—a vitamin K source. When a buck is wounded, he lies down in a patch of ceanothus and eats it. Helps clot his blood. Pretty smart, aren't they." He turned and looked at Norelle, expecting her assent, but she leaned over and kissed him, blowing breath gently around the cold and reddened lobe, nuzzling, touching with her tongue. "You like it up here, all quiet, the sun shining through the trees?"

"I like it better at home. This is too far away from everything. Just thinking about all these mountains scares me."

"Really? I guess I'm not like you. I like it up here. Just look how far you can see, and a whole wilderness full of quiet, and if a big buck walks up, you want to jump up and chase him to see what he does all day, or sneak around after a bear sometime to watch him eat chokecherries. If something moves, you know it's alive, and it makes you move and you know you're alive. It's like they're part of you, or you're part of them, it's—you warm enough in that coat?"
"Sure. I just wanted to sit a little closer."
"Let's go, and pick some more on the way back."

They both got up, Boettcher taking the gunnysacks and pulling more princess as they walked together down through the timber toward the road. In the open, she left him, bounding downhill through the grass in long, easy strides, her hair floating out behind her in the uprisoning breeze that made Boettcher's eyes water as he watched her sail clear from the hillside, like a hawk coming over a ridge, and then land hard in the road. She waited there for him to come down, but he stayed on the hillside, walking for the truck at the point of the switchback. Once turned uphill, they were off again, zigzagging through the timber, breaking out onto grassy slopes, then entering the timber again. Pine squirrels scurried across in front of them, ran halfway up lodgepole, then sounded shrill warnings while the truck passed like a monster beneath them; little unblinking obsidian eyes watching turning wheels, moving mouths, diminutive ears hearing the steady transmission groaning and wavering voices, words drifting out the windows and disappearing like wingbeats in the wind.

"The trail starts over here, Norelle."
"How far is it to this meadow?"
"Oh, I'd say about two miles and some. You're the first person I've told about it."

"That's kind of like having a secret hideout when you're
little, isn't it? Up in some attic, or underneath a church, or a treehouse or something. A place where nobody can get you."

"I guess you could say that. I'm not too old for that, am I?"

"Why should you be?"

"Some people would say that's kind of childish. I just wondered what you thought."

"I never thought about it. I just said it."

"You don't think people get too old for some things?"

"Well, sure. Everybody gets where they can't do stuff like they used to."

"What do you mean?"

"Everybody has to retire when they're sixty-five, like you did. My dad wants to retire. That's natural."

"You know something?"

"What?"

"I'm not going to die. I'm not even going to be old like everyone else."

"You say that all the time, Mr. Boettcher, but you can't--"

"But I can, I can. Men in China have done it and so have men in England, even old Indians. Nobody knows how old I am."

"You don't really believe that, do you?"

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't. You know me. You probably think I'm even too old to be married, don't you?"

"Well, that all depends--"

"On what?"
"On lots of things!"
"Like what, for instance?"
"Well I don't know. How you expect me to know stuff like that? You should know more about that than me."
"What would you say about two people, say forty years apart, getting married?" They walked the trail in silence when Boettcher finished, his question hanging between them like a buck carried out on a pole. "What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?"
"Be kinda like marrying your grandpa, wouldn't it?"
"Would that be so bad?"
"Not if you didn't care about having kids. Then it might be all right...except the girl might always wonder what it would be like to marry someone her own age."
"What if he couldn't keep her happy?"
"Oh, Mr. Boettcher. I don't know about all this. Why you asking me all this stuff anyway? Why don't you ask somebody else. Ask my Mom."
"I just wondered what you thought. It's kind of an interesting subject, don't you think?"
"I guess. But let's not talk about it. Let's just get to this place.
Boettcher continued up the trail that wound along a side-hill through the timber while Norelle followed a few steps behind him, gathering berries as she passed. After another hour, they reached the top of the hogback; a thick impenetrable stand
of lodgepole and tamarack and buckbrush covered one side, but the other opened down the ridge in a matting of bunchgrass and fescues, shaded here and there by ponderosa. Boettcher and the girl walked along the top and dropped down through a small grove of lodgepole, beyond which the hogback seemed to end. But on emerging from the timber, they stood at the rim of a hollow, a sunken meadow almost mathematically circular, two or three hundred feet across and deep enough to conceal the stand of tamarack that grew along its outer edges. On the far side, a spring seeped out of a limestone face, its water collecting in a small basin below the rocks.

"How do you like this?"
"Man! This is really cool. It's too bad there's no road."
"At the right time of year you can find bitter root here, in bloom."
"Where? Show me one!"
"You look around. There goes a buck. See? Over there in the shade?"
"Why doesn't he keep running?"
"Bucks always stop to have a last look at you. There he goes. You want to follow him, see where he goes?"
"Let's not and say we did."
"All right. I'm going to do some collecting before it gets too hot. Why don't you put the beer over there in the spring?"
"O.K. Then we can take it out and drink it like they do on T.V., can't we?"

"You'd know more about that. Say--don't get lost."

"I won't."

Norelle walked off toward the rim, then dropped down on the trail to the spring. Boettcher, watching her go in that familiar mackinaw, realized he shouldn't have told her not to get lost. After all, kids know more nowadays. Thinking about the buck, Boettcher turned and wandered off through the timber, almost floating, an incubus only touching the ground now and then to smell something, to nibble at a root or leaf, to pick one and stuff it in his worn sack. Eventually, he worked his way back to the rim of the hollow, looking for Norelle, then disappeared in the timber again. After another half hour, he came back to the rim and Norelle was still gone. He almost shouted her name, but then he remembered that Helen never liked to be called especially when they were up here together, and the air over the meadow looked like it might shatter at any loud sound. So Boettcher stood next to a tree, kicking at the duff, uncovering roots and rot, and waited until she returned. Then he disappeared again, floating, stuffing his sack for the coming meal. When he had gathered enough choice roots and leaves, he floated back to the edge of the hollow, but stopped in the shadow like a buck to avoid being seen. He watched her by the spring, looked at the sun, and then suddenly floated out of the shadow into the meadow, his feet hardly touching the ground.
Picking up the blanket, he spread it with a flourish, then threw down the sack and sat. She came to him carrying two little cold cans, sat beside him and watched him mix the salad. Two leaves rocket, two leaves upland cress, one large basil leaf, four sprigs tarragon, six wild onions, chicory, cos lettuce. When he had broken everything, he poured on a thin stream of dressing, looking up at her now and then as he started to mix the salad. They ate with their fingers from the bowls, broke chunks of bread, drank from little cold olympian cans. Boettcher took off his coat, laid down on the blanket and looked at the sky, full, satisfied, sleepy. Norelle lay down beside him propped on one elbow so she could see his face. He asked her where she had gone, and she told him, and then she asked where he had gone and he told her he found a special root. Did she want some to chew? It was good with beer. He gave her some and he took some, and when they had broken off small pieces, he said to chew it slowly and chew it all, letting the bitterness mix with the saliva and letting it all go down the throat burning. He told her to get more cans. She got them and they drank long and he asked her how she felt. Hot and sleepy but she didn't want to sleep. She leaned over and kissed him around the mouth between more drinks and bites of the bitter root, him telling her to drink it all, drink it all, and she watched his eyes and his pants and kissed him again and again. She bent to him, he took her breasts in his hands and she stayed, watching him come up and she moved her hands around his chest, rubbing, ca-
ressing, slowly and easily feeling the skin under his shirt as she moved down and took him inside and held him and felt him there and then he asked her a question and she answered and they talked no more. And she felt herself moist and her nipples hot inside the soft and padded bra and her face hot and his breath on her neck, and she felt him move toward her and she moved toward him and they lay in the hollow hot against each other, mouths moving together and everything in the hollow still. She took him and exposed him and he raised his head to look down, but she pushed him back, laying her breasts across his chest and took him in her hand and moved the foreskin in the sun and stroked the swelling and florid head and he writhed under her weight and she moved the foreskin and squeezed and moved and touched with her tongue until the flower opened, a heaving mass of sweat and sperm saying no more Norelle, please, no more and her saying yes and yes and yes and he could not see, the wind blowing in his eyes. She tapered off and off with shorter, more gentle strokes and finally she held him and felt him soften and turn color and die.

Under the huge and empty sky, she pushed against him remembering the car seat, sound track, radio playing, slight vibration of the motor, his fingers, his hand moving over her body, dark protection of the car. She wanted him to wake up if he was going to live forever so she could go. After all, she did have a date and just because she helped him get them
off didn't mean she had to stay there and do it again, or lay around and watch him sleep. Him and his special root would have to wait. Maybe he isn't going to wake up. Still against him, pushing slightly, Norelle had almost decided she would have to shake him when Boettcher opened his eyes, rolling his head slowly toward her, feeling for her hand and smiling. She pulled back, patting him.

"What's the trouble?"
"No more now, big boy. We gotta go. I gotta get home."
"I thought it didn't make any difference."
"But I gotta go now."

Boettcher frowned, then got up, arranged his clothes and collected the herbs and his sack and started across the hollow. Norelle followed him uphill, downhill, all the way to the old panel, and then they drove back to the city. Once in the garage, Boettcher asked her to take the pack inside and told her he'd pay her for the week, if she wanted to wait a minute. He took the herbs and carried them up the ladder to the attic, spread them on the floor and closed the louver boards against the dampness. As he backed slowly down the ladder, scraping soles on the rungs, the roof and rafters above him began to crack again. Smiling at the sound, dropping slowly down, rung by rung, hand below hand, thinking about the afternoon, he finally touched the floor. Walking out, locking the door, he went inside where Norelle waited in the kitchen. Boettcher
walked over to her, expecting the usual short, got it, and then went into the bedroom; after a few minutes he called to her.

"How much do I owe you?"
"Just for this week. That's $7.50."
"Fine."
"Thanks, Mr. Boettcher. Well, see you around sometime."
"Certainly. You'll still come over on weekends or after school, won't you? Keep your money coming in."
"I don't know, Mr. Boettcher. I might not be able to make it very often, with homework and stuff all the time."
"Well I won't take much of your time. Just an hour or so now and then, a little cleaning or maybe some baking. I'll count on you, all right?"
"I gotta go. Mom's calling me."
"Of course. If you take any chemistry or botany, why be sure to bring it over. I can be lots of help you know. We could trade work."
"Sure, Mr. Boettcher. That's an idea. We'll see."

Norelle leaned over and gave him a small short, then ran out the front door. Boettcher, not knowing quite what to say, stood staring after her, and then suddenly realized she had forgotten her mackinaw. Picking it up, he walked quickly to the front door and opened it just as she closed the gate.

"Norelle. Oh Norelle! You forgot your coat." The girl
"Oh did I? Why don't you keep it for me?"
"You'd better take it. Might come in handy this winter."
"I've got lots of other coats. If I need it, I'll come over and get it."
"Are you sure?"

Boettcher started to walk after her, expecting her to stop and wait and answer, but she crossed Francis St. and disappeared.
As he watched his grandfather break the last bale of alfalfa for the sheep, Karl sensed again that Alder, not Tacoma, was the only place he really belonged. Here he was Karl Fyfe, Andrew Fyfe's grandson; in Tacoma, the preacher's adopted son whose father died. This summer like every summer Karl left one place and name for the other, tires sizzling over wet pavement, dull roar of the engine and your driver Safe Reliable Courteous. Here, relatives said he looked exactly like his father; in Tacoma, an old lady said every Sunday he certainly doesn't look like the rest of the family, does he? Big for his age, and he'll grow up some day, words in his ears in Tacoma like wildroot cream oil holding down the cowlick on Sundays down in the front pew. BEHAVE AND DON'T SCRATCH AND SIT STILL. But here, sheep munching alfalfa, weathered board and batten cedar, sheep and goat smells mixed with bacon and eggs, glistening red rubber boots splashed with timothy seed, everything proved to Karl that this was his place.

"What's wrong with that sheep, Gramp?"
"Which one, boy?"

"Over there in the corner under the stairs. See?"

Karl pointed, then waited, watching his grandfather kneel beside the one animal which had not risen for the morning feeding. Finally he went inside.

"What's wrong?"

"Don't know, my boy. I thought she was cast, but she don't want to get up, even if you help her. You better run along. I'll have to take care of this myself."

"Will it be all right?"

"I don't know."

Skirting the house to avoid drying dishes or mowing lawn or taking out garbage, Karl climbed the rusty barbed wire by the chickencoop and walked deep into his alder woods through the undergrowth of blackberry vines, salmonberry bushes, sword-fern and maidenhair, bracken and swamp grass, slipping his hands from alder to alder, looking at the smooth white-grey bark, walking a cedar windfall across a skunkcabbage bog, crawling under devil's club, sure that nobody could follow him to his stump camp, not even God.

"Where's Karl?"

"Down in the woods I think."

"You shouldn't let him go down there. I been waiting all month to have the lawn mowed and you know it."

"We got a sick ewe on our hands, Ma."
"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know. You can't ever tell about a sick sheep."

"I knew it, I just knew it. You should have finished that short course in animals. Now where are we?" Andrew Fyfe looked away from his wife, trying to remember an article in one of his farmer's magazines, rummaging through an old stack by his chair.

The most remote part of the woods. Karl stopped outside his huge cedar stump that rose above the dense foliage and examined the huge curving fluted roots, the springboard notch, the moss, ferns and spider webs around the base, wanting to be sure that no one had found his camp since he left last summer. Climbing the side by using the notch as both handhold and foothold, he crawled over the upper edge and dropped into the center.

No one had been there. His cache of food untouched back in one root; his wood and pitch and matches undisturbed; his rope ladder, hidden from everyone, still perfectly concealed; dry bracken and needles on the floor unmarked. Standing there in the dark hollow center, he was satisfied that the stump was still safe, a place where nobody could find him. After checking a few more secret cracks, he uncovered the rope ladder and climbed out to sit on the lip and listen for someone coming, but only a winter wren flitting through undergrowth. Good! After nine months of school, he could now pretend again to be
a tree with roots on his feet, or floating thistle seed in the wind, or a white moth circling high around a snag, or...

"Hey Father! Wake up! What you gonna do about that ewe?"
"Don't know, Ma. I can't find that article. It probably ate a piece a wire or some nightshade or something."
"You better call the vet."
"She ain't worth his fee for comin' out from town. And besides, when a sheep gets sick, there's not much you can do."
Andrew Fyfe started reading again, and then started sleeping again, veins on his old legs standing out like rivers on Geographic maps in the attic, faded blue wiggling west from Wisconsin to Washington. Once, legs young and white walking behind a horseplow through a cornfield, fresh dirt cool on his footpads, sun burning his neck. Then legs of the dairymen slopping through manure, bent beside a cow, rubber boots patched and worn. Then the logger, crosscut and felling axe and caulked boots, tiny steel spikes all over the Cascades for forty years. And now legs resting on a hassock, pointing toward a silent television, arthritic joints disintegrating while he slept with the papers in his lap. Helen Fyfe came in, looked at her husband with perfect disgust for his lack of ambition since he'd retired, and then went out to look at the sheep herself.

Forty-five years she'd put up with Andrew Fyfe and his ignorance and his always moving around, hoping to find something better. And now he still didn't know what to do! And
nothing ever got better until she finally forced him to buy this thirteen acres of stump ranch. Wisconsin to Washington, tents and top floor apartments, two daughters and the Depression: he'd put her through nearly everything until the house, intentionally larger than the barn, was finished and the locks on all the doors finally gave her the power to close their separate bedrooms. Helen Fyfe, formerly Helen von Bargen, looked over the small flock of sheep and called them by name: Abraham, the ram; Mary and Martha and Ruth and Eve and Lot's Wife, the pregnant ewes; Cain and Abel, the weathers. Walking through them into the barn, she studied the young, pregnant ewe back in one dark corner, and she decided what to do.

When she returned to the house, Andrew Fyfe was awake, watching a midday word guessing program without sound.

"May, that ewe's got something. We're gonna have to do something so the rest of them don't get it."

"I say butcher it. We can use the meat."

"Too dangerous. It might have the fever or liver fluke."

"We sure need the meat."

"I can't help that. It's sick now. Be dead before night."

"It ain't dead yet."

"It will be. Just give it time. I think I'll burn it."

"You haven't got a fire permit."

"I don't need one."

"Get out here now and eat. Lunch is on. Where's Karl?"
Didn't you tell that boy to come back?"

"Nope."

"I'll call him."

"He probably won't hear. He's down in the woods."

"Karrrrrrral. Luuuuuuuuuuch tiiiiiiiiiiime."

At the top of another second growth fir, popping pitch blisters turning his hands black and sticky, making him remember the smell of pitch and bacon grease, the fleche thin and swaying in the wind, Karl decided not to risk eating. He looked out over the countryside at the fences and pasture and sheep he hadn't seen for nine months, the old crow cawing and circling above him, at A.R.'s house a mile away with smoke and a few people. Holding on, eyes watering, he wondered if A.R. was home, if she remembered how to find his camp, if she could see him now against the sky in the top of the tallest fir. He wanted A.R. to come over again, especially after what they did last summer when he didn't let her out of his stump. It was a good trap. But now it didn't look like she was home, so he climbed down through the interlocking limbs and needles, still ignoring his calling grandmother.

He looked up through the black-green mosaic for the crow's nest he knew would be full of chicken bones and safety pins and tinsel from the Christmas tree, and full of young crows squawking and trying not to be found, flopping and trying not to be seen.
He carved a two-note flute from a red willow by the creek, whittling on a rock, letting the shavings swirl away in the small clear stream. When he finished it, he played, thinking of his dead father's saxophone in his grandfather's attic, cold silver instrument in a dusty case which he once tried to play without a reed.

He went hunting a good vine maple crotch for a slingshot to replace the one lately confiscated by the preacher in Tacoma. He'd broken a stained-glass window in the huge brown church next to his huge brown house, a violation of the sanctuary a boy could forget when he remembered the sound of breaking glass.

"I'm going out to get the firewood ready, Ma."

"You still haven't got a permit. What if the warden goes by?" Feigning deafness, Andrew Fyfe went out the back door of the farmhouse to the woodshed. As he collected cedar kindling and chunks and diesel for the fire, Karl crept up and watched through a crack in the wall. Finally, he came around to the door.

"What you doing, Gramp?"

"Take these chunks and that can out in the pasture, will you boy?" Karl loaded the wood and diesel and walked out through the Canada Thistle and Bull Thistle that had taken over when Andrew Fyfe gave up swinging the scythe. Karl asked last summer if he could use the scythe, but they both told him that was a
man's job. Give yourself a few years, give your muscles a chance to harden and you'll be able to, just like your Dad. He was strong, they said, and a good worker. And they gave him the old dull sickle. Throwing down the chunks, Karl waited while his grandfather came out through the thistles to the small rise where Karl stood. The ewes and weathers and Abraham surrounded him and followed him, hoping for alfalfa, fat ugly sheep ticks on their backs unseen except at the coming shearing.

"What you gonna do, Gramp?"

"We gotta burn that dead ewe. The one from this morning?"

"What for?"

"Confound it boy. You're as bad as Helen! Now go get her up her and make it snappy, for G's sake!" Karl waded down to the barn through the imminent darkness, and then returned.

"Where's the ewe?"

"I thought you said she was dead, Gramp. She's alive."

"Well she oughta be dead. Bring her up anyway and let's get this over with.

When Karl walked up to the ewe again, she bleated, one green eye glistening in the dim light through cobwebbed windows. He hesitated, trying to think of ways to save her. He offered her oats from his pitchy hand, but she refused them. He waited a while longer, hoping for some alternative, even though he knew his grandfather wouldn't change his mind with that tone in his voice. That voice wasn't his. It reminded
Karl of his stepfather and some Sunday School teachers when he asked them why he was LOST and GOING TO HELL, and why everything was GOD'S WILL. Just do it anyway. Do your lesson. You'll never understand it. Don't try! And finally Karl gave up, grabbed the ewe by the hind legs and dragged her out from under the stairs, across the rich matting of manure and straw, and up to the rise. She was stiff and heavy and bloated, full of lambs, full of milk, bleating now and then and then and trying to hold her head up to see where she was going.

"Better go get the shotgun."

"What should I tell Grandma?"

"Say I want it. Don't tell her why."

Karl ran across the pasture of thistles to the house, took the gun from the rack on the back porch and started outside.

"Where you going with that gun? And where have you been?"

"Gramp wants it. Here. Why don't you take it to him."

"Get that thing away from me."

"Do I have to?"

"Did he tell you to?"

"Yes."

"Well hurry up about it. Dinner's ready."

Helen Fyfe walked out on the back porch, turned on the light, and watched Karl as he went back out with the gun. When he gave it to his grandfather, Helen shouted clearly and au-
"Father! Send Karl in! Get in here Karl!"

"Should I go Gramp?"

"Stay here. You're old enough to help."

"Gramp says I should help him."

"All right for you, Father. It's on your soul. Not mine. And you still haven't got a permit." She slammed the back door, rattling the glass, and then stood inside and watched the shadows move in the pasture.

"Where's the shells?"

"I put two in already."

"Only need one, boy. You figure I'd miss?"

"I thought you might want to shoot something else. There's crows around sometimes." Karl laughed silently at his ability to make up excuses to cover his own habit from crow hunting. He had considered taking a shell out after he'd automatically loaded the gun, but once he almost shot himself trying to unload, so he left them in. He looked at Gramp, but couldn't see his face.

"You want to kill her, or should I?"

"You go ahead. I don't know where to aim."

"Get out a the way, boy!"

Karl stepped back and tripped over the ewe and fell flat in the wet timothy, knowing Gramp was coming to shoot, and scrambling on hands and knees to get up and get away. Behind him, he
heard the metallic slip and lock of the action, the light
swish of old boots walking on grass. By the time he turned
around, he could see Gramp's form lifting the gun to his
shoulder and holding the muzzle right behind her drooping
ear.

"Well, sorry old girl." The ewe's skull flashed all over
the pasture of thistles, brains rolling out, eye bulging down
running bloody staining, the ewe kicking all four black hooves
at the sky and then gradually stopping. A piece of skull hit
Karl's boot and lay shining in front of him like oyster shell.
Gramp mumbled something, pumped the empty shell out as the
steam rose from her shattered head. Dead sick lumps crawled
in Karl's stomach like full ticks as he wondered about the
lambs inside, the parasites beneath the wool. "Get her on the
fire, boy."

Choking sour in his throat and nose, spitting it on the
grass, Karl took the ewe by the warm back legs and dragged
her, dead sickening lumps rolling again in his empty stomach,
sick from her head slogging from side to side, blood gurgling
and rattling in her throat. He tried to obey his grandfather
and get her on the fire before it got too big, but she was
awkward, rolling, flopping back and forth, and it seemed to
Karl like hours before he dropped her across the fence posts,
her belly wool right in the flames. Then the bonfire flared,
lighting the whole glistening black pasture and reflecting
red off the eyes of Abraham and the ewes and weathers that were coming back now after bolting at the gunshot, now curious to see the ewe burning. Standing motionless, staring at the bonfire, their jaws ruminating, the sheep bleated occasionally at the night from behind the hanging red balls, the wool before them curling and singeing black in the growing flames. Karl started to think that the ewe wasn't dead and then she wasn't a ewe, maybe a tick, a man, woman, someone terrible...

"You don't like this much, do you boy?"
"Do you?"
"Somebody's got to do it. There ain't no way around it. We gotta look out for the rest of them, or first thing you know, we haven't got any."
"I still don't like it."
"If it's got to be done, it's got to be done. There ain't no ifs or ands or buts about it. Now throw some diesel on her. We don't want any of those worms getting out alive."
"Throw it on yourself. I'm going in."
"Don't sass me boy."
"I don't have to do what you tell me. You're not my father."
"Are you helping me or aren't you?"
"Not any more. I'm sick."
"Little green around the gills, eh? Well, just don't stand around here. Go on in and stop bothering me."
Karl backed away from the heat of the bonfire, and when he felt safe, he turned and ran toward the back porch where the light came on. His grandmother still stood watching, framed and mounted by the glass and the door.

"When's Father coming in?"
"I don't know. He said I could go."
"I hope he falls in—that'd fix him."
"He won't."
"Phew! You stink! What's that you got on you?"
"Where?"
"Just look at you. Just filthy dirty. Why can't you be careful? You'd think all I have to do around here is wash your clothes. And look at those hands!"
"I couldn't help it."
"Why didn't you come when I called?"
"I didn't hear you, and then Gramp told me to help him."
"Take those clothes off before you come in here. You better stick around the house tomorrow instead of running off all day. And take your boots off. I just waxed the floors."
"I'm not going to eat."
"Why not? It's all ready."
"I'm not hungry."
"A growing boy like you has to have three good meals a day. Now get those clothes off and get in here."

When Helen Fyfe went into the kitchen, Karl turned and
ran for the woods. Looking back he saw Andrew Fyfe sitting by the bonfire, and Abraham and the ewes and weathers coming up and settling themselves like they were waiting in line. Ahead of Karl the glare of the bonfire shifted up and down on the trunks of the alder, black and pale saffron shadows hanging everywhere from limbless trees. When Helen Fyfe called to come back here, Karl kept running, slapping his jacket under his arms. Jumping the barbed wire, he hid behind the chicken coop and waited, heart thudding in his ears, holding his breath to hear like a dog, listening for the thump of footsteps. After a while he peeked around the corner; Gramp and the sheep still sitting around the flames shifting in the wind, lambs inside her and ticks beneath the wool, wood cracking in red hot cubes, making Karl think of brimstone and gnashing of teeth and his stepfather preaching the GOOD NEWS. He pulled back, shivered, then looked around once more. Helen Fyfe walked right at him, a black amorphous shadow in a roast-scented apron.

Slipping from alder to alder, Karl felt his way along in the dark on the trail to his cedar stump. He knew Helen Fyfe had stopped at the fence and stood there calling; he knew she would never come farther because she wouldn't know how to act. The woods were too dirty. Night noise to his right made Karl wonder about skunk and bear, porcupine and deer, and something giving way from some unknown weight, like a rotten snag falling. His grandfather would stop at the fence too and call because
he was too old and crippled to crawl through the brush, even though he was a logger who once cut twelve thousand snags in a summer. Their voices calling him to come back echoed weakly off the alder. A flashlight feeling the trees up high. What were they looking for up there? His hands in mud, ferns, briars, his hands in everything, he finally found the stump, the notch.

Down inside he could barely hear them calling him to please come back. Soon, they gave up, sure he would return in the morning for breakfast. In the stump, Karl wished for A.R., and decided to go over to her house in the morning and ask her if she wanted to see his camp. She was nice and talked quietly all the time and had a short laugh that sounded to Karl like pale yellow needles when he walked on them in the fall. Blonde hair and more soft white skin than Karl had ever seen. Even if she was in high school, she said it didn't matter. If she was only there now, they could trade wishes. Karl would wish he was a tree with boughs, a cedar or fir, and A.R. might wish she was a kitten or something. Maybe he would wish for something else, a hawk or a trout. Maybe he would tell her all his secrets about his woods—where yellowjackets nest, where bald-faced hornets boil, where woodpeckers work, where crows live—and maybe that would make her stay with him and she wouldn't go home any more either. They could play together under the same blanket, making those noises and whispering and they lying very quietly until they went to sleep.
While Andrew Fyfe slept in his chair, and Helen Fyfe watched her favorite musical program on Saturday night television, and the ewe burned, and Abraham watched, Karl sat staring at his small, bright fire, thinking about climbing trees and circling crows and a cold silver saxophone and a ewe and a gun and a tone of voice and a house to avoid, now and then adding a small stick of cedar to his fire so it wouldn't die before morning.
"Stay here. I'll be back in a minute."

Karl watched his grandfather crawling, bobcat stalking bluegrouse, mouth opening and closing silently, toward the surveyors who stood talking beside their transit, its conical lead weight pointing perfectly downward among the three wooden legs. Sitting down on a boulder, he picked the leaves off a swordfern, always watching the rippling tan length sliding through the bracken below. If they hear him, they'll run. Then leaping from the ferns, pouncing on the transit, breaking its neck with a dull snap, men throwing up their blueprints at the unsheathed claws. Whirling, threatening the surveyors stumbling away through the brush, god damn sons a bitches stay off my land or else. Distant sound of an engine, a yellow-jacket buzzing away, erratic zigzagging against a mountain. His grandfather climbed back to him, swaying through the bracken slapping heavily at his legs, redfaced, puffing, bluegrouse in his mouth, warm salt taste of fresh blood spattered on his jaws, in his eyes, feathers and down strewn in the grass by Nisqually.
"Here! I got another one for you." He pushed the perfect, pointed lead cone into Karl's hand—cold, smooth, heavy, a weight in a boy's pocket, flopping against his leg, walking away joking about the City of Tacoma dam.

Fresh from Vietnam, Karl stood in the greying dusk looking at the flat, riverless reservoir, the symmetrical sign and square lettering: CITY OF TACOMA POWER CO. ALDER LAKE, A MULTIPURPOSE FACILITY. RECREATION, POWER, FLOOD CONTROL. Beyond the black and white label lay the four cement piers of the hilltop school, now a schooless island. On the other side of the valley, old highway 60 curved DEADEND into the water. Half a mile down, the trail to Old Crazy Dick's cabin. Go up there and throw rocks on his roof at night. Watch him come out, shoot up the huckleberry and salal and let out a blue streak and go back inside muttering. He's got a silver plate in his head. Hey Dick! Let's see your plate. Boys catcalling from a tree, just out of reach of the old soldier's flailing cane. Karl shifted his feet in the gravel and tried to reconstruct Alder before the war and reservoir by going down the highway or by going down the trail from the school, remembering to the right and left, fixing on the black fir snag—lightening struck it, burned all alone on Stall Mountain until rain put it out, sizzling, steaming, smoking like a roman candle on the fourth of July down at Nisqually.

He'd planted the plastic charges easily, something he'd learned in the Marines. No, it didn't build MEN, but where else
could he have gone and still have been taught so much: sniper, tunnel rat, demolition, you name it. Night after night tying the fuses, biting on the cap, brass or copper hurting his teeth, hoping it wouldn't blow his head off, hissing fuse, pulling the trigger for Company D. Then running and hiding, the flash and thunder signifying an end of tunnels or bridges or supplies or...you name it and it's as good as done! So rent a rowboat at the Alder Reservoir Boathouse, load it and make as many trips as you like. It would work. It had to, alone at night, unsuspected, unseen, the dam unguarded. How easy! At dusk now, the echoing bonk of frogs, a high fine trill of crickets, or a random splash of a heartless hatchery kokanee, the circle of little waves flowing out like an undulating labyrinth. The damn things hardly fight—no flavor either. Listening, Karl walked down to the water to undress. But as he started to take off his coat, he heard his father and grandfather talking down in the house where he knew they, were, where they had to be, where he had to be too.

"Tell that son of a bitch to get out and take his checkbook with him!" Bristling whiskers and profanity, the old porcupine scratched a quill on the wood stove and sucked flame into his pipe, warm cloud in his mouth, staring through it with small red eyes at his son and Harry Wright.

"We never homesteaded this place so we could sell it. You know that, Ernie. We come out here to stay, and if you'd stay-
ed as long as I have, you wouldn't sell either, check or no check."

"But sir--"Harry Wright protested--

"Don't sir me. I work for a livin. Now. This place still isn't for sale, and even if it were, I wouldn't sell to a bunch a goddamn engineers who don't know what they're doin."

Wind ruffled the water, blurring Karl's vision of the house on the bottom, russet barn, russet-white cattle, russet chickens scratching and pecking under trees in the orchard, Rhode Island dust bathing on a hot summer afternoon. He shook off his coat and sat down to start on his boots, scuffed toes wanting a spitshine in the Portland bus depot, the fast cloth popping like a sail filling in the wind. Rifles fire. Karl hugging the ground, flat belly down hard. That instinct. Driving along, hear a sonic boom and you're out of the car and in the ditch before you think, civvies and all. Where am I anyway? Can't hunt any more. Firecrackers put him back in the hospital at Ft. Lewis. Are you sure you're all right now? Behind a cedar stump, Karl listened: their voices sounded faint but clear, like shouting at Gramp from up on the mountain.

"Whaaaaaaaaat?" Gramp's voice wavered back in the wind.

"Take another shot at the son of a bitch, Ernie. Right there behind the barn."

"You shoot him. If they got dams on the Skagit and the Skokomish, the Deschutes and the Nookachamps, then they get
one here too. Let'em."

"I must not have brung you up right. Pass me a biscuit and a chop, will you Ernie? Can't expect a man to fight on an empty belly." Ernie crawled to the stove and brought the porcupine his food.

"Where's Karl?" As he ate, the porcupine looked at Ernie, making Ernie water around his tongue, making him swallow.

"I sent him down cellar."

Press your cheek close to light between logs, hear dragging and guns firing overhead, Ernie and Gramp talking. Holding your weights in one hand, slingshot in the other, watching yellow monsters ripping skin off your back, clanking of steel tracks, burning brushpiles, ground shaking. Wonder where your mother's gone. If your house will float like Gramp says--cedar is the most floating wood you ever saw.

"How long you think they'll stay out there?" Cabin fever was driving Ernie up the wall. He wanted to get out, but the siege and the porcupine kept him in, and Ernie had no choice but to obey his parents in all things, for this was well-pleasing unto the Lord. Right? They were down to salt pork and sourdough, but even that would be something he could stand--man shall not live by bread alone, right--if the boy downstairs didn't look so much like his mother. And if she were here, if she hadn't decided she liked herself more as a little girl than as a wife in bed, it wouldn't be so bad. But loggers can't stand every-
thing. Now, Ernie was hungry for some fresh eggs and butter, and a woman, a can of Ole and a powersaw.

"Maybe a minute, maybe longer. Can't ever tell what folks who don't know where they belong will do." The porcupine checked the safety on his quill, squirmed on his soft vulnerable belly to get a better look out the window past his straw barricade. Outside, the miniature voice on the bull horn exhorting him to consider this seriously, cajoling him with rotund promises, commanding him to give up and get out! Now! While the crackling little voice—the still small voice—carried on, Ernie and the porcupine listened and ate, and when it stopped talking, the porcupine raised himself, exposing his belly.

"Bullshit," splattering incontrovertibly on the barn floor, a forkful mixed with bedding flying back at the silent funnel. The porcupine ducked, uncupped his hands and stared at Ernie dying, his mouthful of pork choking him as the bullets drifted in the window again like curious horseflies.

"I must not have brung him up right. He shoulda known better than to stand up and look right out. I taught him better."

Karl laughed to himself as he took off his shoes and socks, picking the lint and crud from between his toes, thinking about his weights, looking at the steep black-green mountains above the border of scrub alder and maple around the reservoir. Can you still bite your big toe? He would swim to the island and
wait there for the sudden fall and rush of water toward the
destroyed dam. It would be easy to make it back after that.
Just follow the deertrail along the ridge, cut down past the
water tank, jump the creek behind Hedborgs, picking black-
berries along the way, turning his tongue purple. And he might
even see A.R., if she was out riding after school. She was good
in the woods at night. But that was before the war and the
reservoir, before he got all jumpy being taily charley, always
watching both ways. Something moves behind you, shoot the son
of a bitch. Burn him off. He'd probably kill her now if she
walked up behind him. But she was home in bed someplace with
a preacher and three kids. Her sister might be around. He wanted
A.F. He'd always wanted her, his mouth on her sweet, soft nip-
ple at night in the woods, rising, hot--A.R. I love you I know
it Karl please let me--then her mare broke loose and they had
to go home; her father would come looking if her horse came
back riderless, trailing reins into the dusty yard. Karl even
wrote her, telling about the overgrown monkeys and war disease,
telling her to remember the night in the woods. But he was
cured, those massive doses of penicillin. Karl picked at his
big toenail and smiled. He might even bring her back here so
she could listen to the river again. All the blacktails and
blackbears, crows and baldfaced hornets boiling out of the
ground. Karl rubbed his crotch in anticipation. Then he lis-
tened again into the motionless water as voices broke the sur-
face, floating chunks of soggy driftwood, or a bluebutt hem-
lock, or a turtle's head, or a perch playing with a bobber.

"Where's Harry?"

"Over getting his ass chewed by the engineers. I wouldn't go over there if I was you."

"There's some guy from the Fish and Game on the phone."

"Tell him to call back. Did you see my five eighths socket?"

"Hell no! What's Harry catching it for? That house again?"

"You know what I'd do? Take one of those D-9's over there and set the throttle wide open and let er go."

"What's wrong with a B-25? God dammit! I can't ever find anything around this fucking shop!"

Bare feet sinking into the duff as he stood up, Karl unbuckling his belt and looking around to see anyone watching, his white shape almost camouflaged among silver dry barkless stumps. Not much light, now and then a mood disc cutting through scudding clouds, slicing the shifting ridges of thunderheads rolling at Mt. Rainier. Dropping his trousers heavily, stepping out of them, then folding the creases together like Ernie taught him, like the Sergeant told him. Keep your hair combed, your face washed, your teeth brushed, your nails cleaned, and you'll always have a job. Remember that Karl! Do what you're told and you won't get into trouble! Yes sir. Karl heard the whine of choppers hovering for a landing on his bare leg, skids touching in the black grass, settling to probe the jungle. Get
that son of a bitch. Goddamn mosquitoes anyway! Poised, ready
for the kill, thinking of napalm, when the water opened its
mouth, distracting him.

Thud of a canister upstairs, Gramp shouting and shooting,
acrid burning fog, tears hot in his eyes, sneaking out the door,
terrible choke and cough behind, the weight of his sack in his
hands, the cool and dark rootcellar, dank vegetable smell and
voices outside yelling where did he go, did you see that kid.

"What happened?" Harry Wright leaned over several Tacoma
shoulders with his flashlight held high.

"He's dead."

"Suicide?"

"Tear gas, Harry. Probably had bad lungs. You know how
old men are."

"Any sign of the boy?"

"Nope. Something smells dead around here."

"He must have got away. Tell the engineers they can drop
the gates."

Karl crept back to the house, rat running up a mooring,
strong smell still in Gramp's bedroom, in Gramp's pillow. Waking
to water sloshing in and out the front door in the dark, then
up to the windows, flowing over the mantle. Will it float? I
don't know. Upstairs shouting into the morning fog, a boat
coming, afraid to jump but jumping. Hurry up kid, we haven't
got all day. Sack carrying him down colder and colder down,
hand grabbing in his hair. Floating drowned mice and rats and snakes and everything swimming, water alive and ashes everywhere, chickencoop suddenly bursting to the surface full of drowned Rhode Islanders, tilting and sinking slightly, oarlocks squeaking, driftwood bumping against the bow, huddling cold and wet in the thwarts, fog thick above rising water.

"Whatta we do with him?"

"Oh, leave him there. He won't go anyplace, will you kid?"

Karl alone running into the woods with his sack, a weight flopping against a boy's back. Behind him, men's voices like hammers pounding huge nails into planks, hiding from the men and spotlights until morning and sneaking away toward the N.P. tracks. Behind him a house of hewn cedar listing, full of tables and chairs and beds and pictures and trunks and a wooden leg, a house drifting with the flood, derelict black eye in a fleshless socket.

Then run at the front of a rolling boxcar, ride the rods around the country like Ernie. Be sleeping by the tracks outside a little town in Georgia. Wake up, have a couple of little kids come up when you're thirsty and hot, thinking of Nisqually.

"Hey. You kids want to make some money?"

"What you want, mister?"

"Here! You keep the change and bring us back two bottles of Pepsi. OK?"
"You got a mother someplace?"

Karl and his friend lay back and looked at the inscrutable sky, a flock of migrating blackbirds, dry grass stalks waving slightly, waiting for a drink. A car skidding on gravel, gunfire, whizzing, and come out with your hands high. Some cops thought they were somebody else. How much money you got? $1. Vagrancy. Out in three days. And back in. And out, and on the rods again, hearing about the days when bindlestiff meant a way of life, the rails and wheels smacking triplemeter in your head, Nisqually, Puyallup, Kapowsin, in your head in your head in...

So wash dishes in New York and live in a YMCA and take a shower, your body hot and soapy, water beating like little hammers on your back, raining on a roof. Close your eyes and put your face up to the water slapping on your skin like Nisqually under the upper falls with A.R., deep clear pool with native cutthroat spurring, A.R. diving so nude. Then hear the door open and turn around and wipe your eyes clear in time to see a huge, red cock with a hand pumping it, two red eyes staring at your crotch, the wraith saying would you like to come down to my room buddy, just before he comes all over and you're sick and want to kill him--a weight between his eyes.

Then a toilet paper factory in Pennsylvania where you inspect eighteen rolls every second, where a girl won't leave
you alone, who tantalizes, who wants a husband, or a father for her little boy, who cuts you off and makes you want her more. But she lacks the calm, the smooth voice, the easy movements of A.R. walking up behind you in the woods, her finger in your ribs saying guess who.

So join the MEN, old enough now to lie successfully, no longer wrapping yourself in newspaper in boxcars or bummimg on Christmas Day in Walla Walla, no longer singing an hour for a cup of coffee and a doughnut in the rescue mission with its expensive blinking sign: ETERNITY WHERE? blink off, blink on JESUS SAVES blink off. A fat, smooth-faced preacher telling you about your sins and John Barleycorn, your stomach growling and cramping, empty for a week. So sign and swear and shave for three squares a day and bed, pulling the trigger singing this is my rifle, this is my gun, this is for pleasure, this is for...

Running his fingers up the small plastic buttons, then throwing his arms back and shaking, Karl caught the heavy shirt by the cuffs and folded it neatly. Several miles away, the high Alder Dam stood solidly in the dark, arching and curving against the reservoir, cement bone in the throat of the Nisqually. Water sliding in gleaming sheets down the spillway, three hundred feet down where Nisqually began again, a glacier river without silt in a bed of boulders. Pulling off his t-shirt, Karl dug the lint and hair from his navel and held it
up to smell it; sometimes important things came back that way. But not now. Then he took his shorts by their thin elastic and pulled them down. Naked now. Ready. In front of him the water ran thick with words, like smelt running silver, flashing at the mouth of the river in the fall.

He dove deep into the reservoir, water cold and murky, his feet fluttering, arms reaching in front, hands pointed together, gliding from the momentum. Staying under with his eyes open, he searched the bottom for his weights, for toys he might have lost or a treehouse he might have built, searching for anything he could reach down and pull out of the muck before he had to breathe. How long can you stay under Karl? A.R. dove with him into the pool. Finally, Karl broke the surface, a rainbow throwing the hook, water splashing chaotically, his body muscular and writhing as he fell back and looked around, treading water. You lost Karl. Didn't you? Smooth blackness broken by his head, buoyant but heavy. Clearing his throat with a scraping guttural spit, he turned on his back, deadman floating until he caught his breath. Arms outspread, feet apart, head back, listening to the voices lapping in his ears, their pressure on his drums.

Raucous cawing of crows, firboughs bending, one sitting sentinel, ready to caw and fly when Karl shoots lead from his slingshot. Or a bell ringing on Sunday morning, Gramp pulling the rope, rasping it through the hole drilled in the church
ceiling, cane tapping with the shuffle of feet in squeaking black leather toward the sanctuary. Or a cougar screaming far away at night like a mother dying in the woods. Or a grouse exploding beside the trail, slap and whir of feathers and then dead quiet and where did she go Karl, did you see where she lit, heart thudding in your ears. Gramp snoring, Ernie rattling the stove, snapping kindling, chicken flopping around, gurgling and squirting blood, the corporal's artery, head on a chopping block. Makes you want to eat fish, doesn't it kid. Karl turned back on his belly, looking ahead for white blotches of the old schoolhouse piers as he started again for the island.

Rolling from side to side, laying white arms in front, pulling himself through the water, ventral fin shriveled and cold, feet still fluttering, heavy swash of watery voices in his ears, A.R.'s probing love tongue at night. Winded, he lay over on his back for the deadman float, but as his feet sank, he touched something. Instinctively, he pulled his feet back and tried to look into the water. Black wake. So he dove, a harlequin feeding on Nisqually, his bill in thick mud and grass, clutching two handfuls, springing for the surface, losing the mud from the ridge below the island. Swimming again toward the white schoolhouse blotches, he touched in the mud and weeds and stood up, dripping body half out of the water. The trail along the top where A.R. rode after school, a place they had been together in the grass, a place where no one could find
them. If you take your clothes off, I'll take off mine, and promise you won't tell anybody. A secret. A.R. I love you I know it Karl but don't tell anybody. A loud voice from the bottom saying this is my son with whom I am well-pleased. And a kingfisher whisking down over the water saying it over and over, perched on his lobe, hammering like a woodpecker in his ear, driving a hot spike, a stake through a grommet, grinding into the ground.

Feeling with his feet for something familiar he could pick up. What's that one, A.R.? He bobbed under and loosened a boulder and lifted it, back bent with a weight twice heavy on the surface, a weight to roll down a hill, a muskrat breaking water. Roll it! Watch it bound and crash and careen, then the noise stops and Karl and A.R. laughing and looking for another boulder. Here's a big one. You push it. I pushed the last one. Let's get our clothes on. No? Swimming? What if? I know a place where they won't, past the upper falls. Karl slid the rock off his knees and tried to hear it rolling downhill underwater, tried to see the little breaks in the surface. Then he rested, drunk against a streetlight, singing to himself the first song of hundreds he knew, but hundreds he had not remembered for years. Yet another song, splashing, trying to squeeze a handful of water. And another, playing, turning the water white around him, his hands and arms wanting to flow smoothly, gracefully legat' o, like a conductor who held the notes in his
hands and let them out like birds being set free, a flock of
tree sparrows rising, spreading, shifting, reforming, emptying
the wintersky into a blue spruce, rusty-capped notes resting
on rigid limbs.

Then he heard the river again. Just hold on boy. Don't
let go of that branch or you're a gonner. Fast white water
roiling under his feet, then smashing at his face, tumbling
end over end downstream. He thought he could walk that wind-
fall, but slipping on the spray, dangling over Nisqually. Sure
I can swim Gramp. Well don't fall in anyway! Faster over rounded
boulders thumping at his back, Ernie and Gramp racing the cur-
rent, saplings in hand, red mouths open, Karl carried away
with the turbulent roar of rapids ahead and shifting river.
White water cold around him, silt in his nose, floating silver-
bellied away. I can swim, can't I. Bobbing downriver, appear-
ing and disappearing, crash and mist of falls ahead, green
thick water tearing through broken cement, a disintegrating
hole. We just about lost you that time boy.

Violently head over heels, topsy-turvy, the falling swim-
mimg singing soldier thrashed at the suck of the current, be-
hind him dank popping dead grass and waterlogged weeds, square
outlines of apparent foundations sliding away. But I was senior
lifesaving. But I can't hold on to this! My arms ache. Listen
to the river Karl. Hear the rocks pounding together, hollow
bonk of rocks against each other under water every night in
the canyon. Look at the mountain Karl. Watch the glacier melting. Thick water thickens, pouring down and away, swirling wild toward Tacoma, chunks of Alder Dam riding the crest. Put some sinkers on your line, boy. You'll never catch anything that way. You've got to get down where the fish are. Karl floating, arcing clear, falling, cascading free, so far, so quiet, so easy, so light, so cold, so smooth, so heavy. But still as light as a neat pile of clothes beside an empty reservoir, the pockets of a uniform full of pointed lead weights, lead weapons, permanent collection of plumb bobs waiting to be dangled from strings, testing for depth and straightness. Deadly splash in a pool thick with sockeye wondering where to go now.
One shoe off, one shoe on, Christopherson listened by himself at the back of the long rectangular lecture hall at the University of Salamanca, bull-necked historian in front rehearsing the Reconquista, generals, Pelayo, Covadonga, honey pouring thick and heavy out of his mouth over dutiful Spanish students gathering it up with pencils in tight fingers. Long, dependent, sticky generalities about Mozarabes, la cultura, el Duero, crackled through the two rectangular honeycombs which hung dripping on the walls of the hall, transmitting history for five minutes, then silent for five minutes. Christopherson drowsed, tipping forward, jerking back, trying not to dormir. He turned his chair, sprawling, shoeless black sock up on the next desk, closing his eyes, feeling Spanish syllables flowing into his mind. Professorial voices rising and falling over the castration of the Santiago cathedral, Califate of Cordoba, siege of Toledo. Nondescript knights Templar riding over nondescript meseta with nondescript swords looking for heathen
Moors, holy Moors looking for heathen Templars, wanting to kill each other, bloody riverbank sand in the sun. Christopherson pressed at his closed eyes, black and red dots, yawning, then listening to the street outside: children slapping leather over Calle de Libreros, women bickering over onions, Vespas whizzing over cobblestones, lottery seller chanting "El gordo para hoy," el afilador, flute rising in half tones, distant minor music, mixolydian scale, then falling decrescendo as he ground a knife which he, muezzin, had called out to his turning stone. Valencia taste fresh in his mouth, on his fingers sticky, licking them, smelling them orange.

Then the loudspeakers cut back in, crackling with more names, and Christopherson considered concentrating on the morning history lecture, justification for his presence in Spain. Universidad de Salamanca? Where's that? Sounds like salamander to me. The traditional year abroad, preparatory to what? How nice! That's not far from Pamplona. Yes it is! But the experience will do you good. Travel is part of every education, francis bacon frying his English eggs in a pan. Better in Salamanca than elsewhere, everyone wanting to suck your mind. But the supply of Traveler's Checks was low, the Spanish Red Cross would only take his blood every ten days. He tried teaching English to a class of little girls at a language institute, but they were too disturbing, too conducive to staying awake at night thinking. Teaching how to pronounce kiss
or thigh, the dark face of Mercedes Paz, dark hair, lips pronouncing labios, remembering her while the historian bulldozed into the discovery of America. Then the voice stuck, record warped, bouncing, turning, repeating haga el favor de acercarse, haga el favor de acercarse, haga... 

Christopherson wiggled black sweaty this little pig went to markets, opening his eyes and looking forward. All Spanish faces turning toward him, the flute fading, Mercedes Paz gone, honeycomb crackling perfectly now. Haga el favor de... Pulling his foot off the chair, the tall, thin, fair whisp of a student picked up his shoe in one hand and walked down the center aisle staring at the historian's horn rimmed glasses, feeling the pesetas in his pocket. What for? What for? Spanish students buzzing and snickering and giggling at the extranjero, Christopherson seeing a few familiar faces, smiling, walking, one shoe off, one shoe on, toward the important lecturn. For effect? Four hundred bees stop sucking, eight hundred oh Spanish eyes watching him, Christopherson walking until he stood in front. He looked up at the man in the black suit, red-orange ribbon on his lapel, head down, banderillas in his back from prisms and the sun outside.

"Where are you from?"

"That's not important." Four hundred Spanish bees smile at defiance, stirring their drab wings.

"You comport yourself like you were in some club." Solemn,
blood from his nose, the historian for some comment from Christopherson speaking perfect Spanish.

"I hear better with my eyes closed."

"Why have you come here?"

"To...uh...I like Spanish-speaking people."

"Is that all? Is that sufficient?"

"I believe so." Christopherson thinking de gustibus, an old bee's line.

"Please do me the favor of not attending these lectures until you can show proper respect and comport yourself as a gentleman." Throwing his head back, rattling papers, snapping the leather brief case shut, pawing the podium.

"Como usted quiera, senor profesor." Himx, minx, Christopherson winks, the fat begins to fry in his eyes, smiling almost laughing his way out the heavy ornate wooden door of the lecture hall in front of the historian, inscrutable swarming in Christopherson's mind, turning to see the frantic buzzing bees, voices and laughter, coats and pencils and books and eyes, following the huido out the door.

Christopherson carried his shoe until he knew the bull was no longer behind him, then stopped to put it on outside the lecture hall of Fry Luis de Lion. Ear to the ornate panel, hearing Fry talking about translating the Song of Songs for his favorite nun, whispering about the accuracy of the Vulgate, destroying the Inquisition with "As I was saying yes-
terday," when he'd been in prison five years. Huge ears burning, Christopherson crept away from evesdropping, down the marble slabs and out of the University into Rua Mayor. Early October sun made him squint and hesitate and watch, then accepting the noon street crowd pouring toward the Plaza Mayor, square classical center of the sandstone city. Listening around him, trying to catch phrases or bits of conversation between friends, always gleaning, then seeing Unamuno bursting into the street from Palacio de Anaya, screaming philosopher. In the city he was el loco, in the University deserving the marble bust half way up the broad stairs. Christopherson stopped to hear his scatological rail, but the crowd pushing at his back to move along. Anda, forestero!

Absorbed and jostled on his way, Christopherson realized that he had repeated his reasons for traveling so often to his parents, grandparents, College Dean, Draft Board, that now he almost believed them. Almost told the historian he came to study. SERIOUS STUDENT. Show proper respect and comportment. Bullshit. History, art, literature, all could be ignored. The whole University could be ignored. But he had paid. But that didn't matter. But a two year program. Finish what you start, son! But that didn't matter. But he could transfer credits. Think of the transcript. Think of the diploma on the wall. In Latin. But he couldn't. Junior year abroad. Enriching, enlightening, educational. But he couldn't. How could he believe so
long reasons, stories, he invented for everyone else. Maybe they satisfied him, a place to begin, a device, an excuse. Not a place to end. Not now.

But walking away free from the University down Rua Mayor, too tall, too blond, too fair, Christopherson knew he was still a foreign student, his name Douglas Ernest Christopherson untranslatable. So inventing a name using his middle name, but that sounding foreign still. And forgetting it when he introduced himself to a Spaniard, or when a Spaniard called him Ernesto Hugo. What? Did I tell you that? But my real name is... Sometimes falling into the abyss between his name and his translation, his invention. Then making a ladder of his passport, always with him, a reassurance, identification, weapon against plastic tricorn snub-nosed Guardia Civil. Su carta de identidad, por favor. He felt in his breast pocket for the little square hard booklet, remembering the rungs as he turned down the worn steps of Plaza Mayor---Christopherson, Douglas Ernest, Age 23, Date of Birth, 10/12/42/ 6'2", Hair Blond, Eyes Hazel, Occupation Student, Signature Scrawl, Visible Peculiarities None, Issue Date, Nationality, Birth Place, Passport Renewal. No Saint. No Saint's Day.

What to do with a brilliant, brittle Castillian afternoon completely unendorsed by the University of Salamanca?

In a bookstore browsing through all unrevolutionary books
until he realized that books and reading were too estudiantil. The invented story. Stop being estudiantil.

Now going down into the Mercado below the Plaza, watching fishwives swish and whack fins and heads and tails with razor knives, wrinkled old haggard women, but never any of their blood on the marble counters.

Or walking down Calle San Pablo, buying eight chestnuts from la castanera, old snaggle-tooth woman sitting by a kiosk, keeping warm by her brazier, peeling the outer husk with quick strong hands, selling her warm roasted nuts out of her charcoal toaster, making a funnel out of newsprint, dumping sooty chestnuts into last week's Sun.

Watching and eating the mealy hot lumps while children buy them to keep red raw hands warm on the way home from school, dressed warmly only to the waist, hands and knees seared cold by the knife wind blowing from sierra to sierra, Cantabria to Gredos, Gredos to Guadarrama.

Or sitting in the farmer's cafe in the Plaza, ordering tea with lemon so the waiter could think him English, then watching into the crowded Plaza, taking down in his mind the amber mood of heavy sandstone and dark women strolling.

Rich roasting peanuts, a vendor hunched close to his engine, smoke disappearing, blending against the bright cold sky.
Fingering pesetas, Christopherson sidling out of the crowd, away from the current of black berets and brown overcoats and school uniforms, approaching the peanut vendor para comprar unos cacahueutes. His nose, look at his nose, Pyrenees dividing his forehead and face, Africa begins at the Pyrenees, statues on Easter Island. Long sloping, direct, almost wooden, polished, sagging eyebags, eyes watering in the wind, black in deep sockets, heavy old coat pulled up and buttoned tight around his neck. Christopherson held open his expensive pocket, the vendor dumping peanuts from a bent tin can, Christopherson paying, both hands unwilling to come out into the cold. Walking off cracking nuts toward anywhere, wondering, looking, listening, anything his ear picks up, a piece of paper scraping down the sidewalk. The vendor turned to his friend the condor keeping warm by the roasting engine.

"Manolo, there goes a foreigner."

"How do you know?"

"The way he walks. And he doesn't say anything."

Feeling warm peanuts in his jacket, Christopherson strolled and ate until he came to Plaza de Espana. Across the street a park, at an intersection, chestnut leaves falling, caged peacocks, monopattern fountains, wet sand trails winding. Attracted, digging more peanuts from his pocket, walking down one of the trails to a pool full of geese and ducks and swans nesting on the island in the center. He stood staring, trying to see
the bottom, but seeing his face blurred by the wind shifting. Munching peanuts, looking at black-green water, a peanut for a fat goose, throwing a peanut for a swan, long black bill and head disappearing underwater, long feathered hose uncoiling in search of peanuts, gracefully recoiling, pursuing the sinking nut. Mallards watched, then laughed their thousand feathers toward him. A little girl approached him, perhaps Mercedes Paz.

"You like to throw one?"

"Si!"

"Here. Take this and give half to your amigo."

"You want to throw one too?" Looking down at the small schoolboy, smooth-skinned, a lovely Moor, straight black hair falling in black eyes, sand under fingernails, shoes scuffed.

"Si! Si!"

"Here. Throw it to that one out there on the edge."

"De donde eres?"

"Does it matter?"

"I live in Calle Zamora, over there."

"Pero de donde eres?" The little girl asking her question again, holding out her hand for more cacahuetes.

"Divina. I'll tell you if you're right." She turned to the group of children, skirt and hair swishing plaid, flourishing veronica in the sun, announcing the game. Children pushing closer, asking for more peanuts, swans diving, ducks out of
range.

"Aleman?"
"No. No soy aleman."
"Frances?"
"No. No soy francés."
"Holandes?" A boy from the back.
"No."
"Sueco?"
"No."
"Yo se. Yo se. Americano."
"No. Ni hablar!"

Spanish children staring at his excellent clothing, his black polished shoes, hearing his perfect Spanish, him tall, blond, fair beside the pool. Then the little girl, perhaps Mercedes Paz, took him by the coatsleeve.

"These big ones with long necks are cisnes, those over there are gansos." She pointed toward the rock island in the center where pieces of straw and grass and weeds collected in nests in little coves. "And those little ones are patos."

"A ver. Patos, cisnes, gansos," Christopherson repeated, pointing to each one as he spoke. Then looking back at her.
"You speak Spanish very well."
"Thanks. You want to throw another one?"
"Si."
"Here. Take it. You want another one? You? Here! Have a couple. Everybody have some. Take some more." Now little hands appearing rapidly, left hands like it hot, right hands like it cold, nuts splashing in a pool, swans and ducks and geese diving and darting and hissing and fighting, cracking shells, tons of warm nuts from a coat pocket, October sun and sandy trails filled with children nine years old.

"The cacahuetes are gone." Christopherson pulled out the lining of his pocket.

"Where are you going now?"

"No se. Somewhere."

"Will you come tomorrow, extranjero?"

"Tal vez. I don't know."

"Bring more cacahuetes. We will wait for you here." She swirled away, serpentine of children down a sandy path toward the school where a priest, black flowing triangle beckoned and called from the door, bells in his tower bonging back and forth the heavy hour. Children's voices humming in a classroom waiting for a teacher, then silence and posture when the door opens. Buenas tardes, senor profesor. Buenas tardes, clase. Ahora, the lesson. El descubrimiento de America fue realizado en el ano 1492 por Cristobal Colon.... The priest's tall pale son sat incognito at the back of the dim room listening to his father.

Christopherson strolling away, hearing the bells over his shoulder, trailing his shadow in the wet sand, stopping at the
curb, accosted by a tourist.

"Excuse me, but you look like you might speak English. Do you know where there's a decent restaurant?"

"No hablo ingles, senora. Lo siento." Christopherson stared at the feathered tourist turning to Mildred to tell her that he didn't speak English. Well, why doesn't he. Ask him anyway. I'm hungry. The tourist turned back to him as the policia conducting traffic changed hands, the tourist almost shouting, enunciating slowly, loudly, gesturing with each hungry word.

"Do-you-know-where-there-is-a-restaurant?"

"No senora. No entiendo ingles."

"He still doesn't understand, Mildred."

"What are we going to do? I'm starving."

Escaping, crossing Avenida de Mirat in front of each waiting Fiat, Fiat, Fiat, looking for someone he might know, white bees' eyes waiting. Three serious months in Salamanca at the University. He should know someone by now. Mercedes Paz? El afilador? La castanera? Fishwives? The historian? Students? And Columbus. He would probably be in the Plaza Mayor now, eating a cream pastry or taking a glass of wine and some snails in the bar in Calle de Clavel. Hurrying now, walking down narrow curving streets, acrid diesel spewing from passing busses, dead rabbits lying in a row for sale, window-
ful of harmonicas, windowful of guitars, windowful of botas, windowful of pastry. Nothing can be resisted, cream and crust, wiping sugar off his chin, licking fingers, eating a minor branch of etiquette on the streets. Always available, always willing. Three pastries gone, three pastries gone, see how they run, see how... or Columbus, Columbus, where have you been? I've been to the cat house to visit the Queen. God save the weasel. Pop goes the Queen. Knick knack paddle y whack, give the pope a bone. Wafna! Haha! Diddle, diddle dumpling my hijo juan... watching a pair of perfect golden calves, hilarious free interior. Bumping into a squat housewife, little solid black tank of flesh going home from the market full of slippery fish.

"Ay, perdomame, senora."

"De nada, extranjero, de nada," squinting from behind her shawl.

Entering the Plaza from Calle de Generalissimo Franco, Christopherson peered into the farmer's cafe. Sitting in the back at one of the small marble-topped tables, Columbus had just ordered tea with lemon, then turned to study some small maps he had laid out in front of him. Christopherson at the window, face against plate to be sure the sailor was alone, then opening the door and walking back through smoke and low farmers' voices to the sailor's table where he sat down and tried to read the maps upside down. The sailor did not raise his head or speak, but continued studying, making notes to
himself, absorbed in his plans and calculations which had con­vinced him the sea had another shore. Christopherson ordered his usual tea with lemon and the waiter thought him English again and brought the cup as Columbus closed his maps and looked up, angry red hair from under his silk hat.

"You've heard the news?"
"Of course. It's in the air."
"What do you think, Ernesto?"
"You can't expect me to tell you what to do. If they re­fuse you once, they'll probably refuse you again."
"But what am I supposed to do now? Forget my experience at sea? My maps? My globe?"
"I don't know, so don't ask me. Didn't they say anything favorable?"
"A few did. But most of them don't want to believe that there's any land, or any thing else, out there. They've learned so much about one thing; it's made them blind to everything else."

Christopherson averted himself, turned his chair thinking he saw part of something he wanted to see in full--people passing, street crowd thickening under the arcade, hora de pasear. Squirming, scuffling his shoes, watching farmers talk, he fi­nally turned back, sipping his tea and lemon, avoiding Columbus, then looking up at him staring past his shoulder into the sand­stone arches of Plaza Mayor, arches curving from column to col­umn, bas relief of famous men facing inward on the solid clas-
sical square. Above, balconies, shutters, flagpoles, a few pigeons against the afternoon sky. Columbus twisting his beard, his face in his hands, his plans rejected by the famous University that morning at the College of St. Steven. Who ever heard of sailing east by sailing west. It's contradictory!

"Mesero! La cuenta, por favor!" The waiter glided over to the table. Columbus grunted, threw down a few pesetas as he stood.

"Ernesto, I may not see you again."

"Where are you going?"

Columbus bent and whispered in Christopherson's ear.

"The Inquisition!"

"The Inquisition?"

"Quietly. They might hear you."

"Has anyone been following you?"

"I haven't been watching." Flourishing his hand, his cape, his silk hat softly in place, shouldering through the smoke and farmers' conversation, disappearing in the Plaza Mayor crowd. Christopherson turned, realized that all the farmers were watching him as he started after Columbus, wanting to see where he would go.

Crowd circulating under the arcade, a soft silk hat ahead to follow, a hat bobbing along above the Spaniards, trying to keep it in sight, trying not to bump too many, Christopherson
hurried after the sailor. Round and round, above the crowd, beneath the facade financed by the Church, beneath the facade financed by the State, beneath the facade financed by the City, beneath the facade financed by the University. A technique for evading any officer of the Inquisition who might want his name, nationality, occupation, none of which he could answer without heresy. University, Church, State, City, Universidad, Iglesia, Estado, Cuidad, here we go round the mulberry... or round and round the cobbler's bench the mono chased the weasel, the shop windows full of pasteles and gimmicks for tourists, and shoes and bits of conversation floating by as a little boy leads a blind man to his begging pillar, bas relief of Cristobal Colon, el ciego intoning, rich baritone, "La loteria para hoy, para hoy, para hoy. El gordo para hoy. Toca." Across the Plaza the woman with the huge goiter under her chin answers, an ugly echo, the same words... para hoy mismo.

Then Columbus turned out of the square, large silk hat heading toward the cathedral and University, up Rua Mayor past San Martín, past Casa de las Conchas, trying to follow him closely through the maze of people and twisting narrow streets of the medieval city. Looking at the intersection into the dusk south down Calle Jesús, east down Calle Valencia, north down Calle Compañía, west down Calle Sereno. Frantic from corner to corner, hoping to catch sight of the sailor, or silk hat floating away down cobblestone, sandstone canyons. O where o where
has Columbus gone, o where or where can he ser, with his plan cut off and his life cut long, o Columbus, Columbus....

At the bar El Meson, Christopherson listened into the cool smell of wine and wood soaked together for the sailor singing or laughing, eating little plate after little plate of cosas finas—olives, anchovies, snails, muscles. Nothing to be resisted with a glass of red wine, red cylinder, wand for magic. But no Columbus, no Colon, no Colombo, no Colomo. No Entiendo el ingles. Americano? Ni hablar! Only a hunch-backed gypsy wailing cante hondo as he walked out refreshed, in front of him a shout in the street, boys chasing dogs chasing cats in the dark past a market.

Wandering, checking his passport again, watching for the hat, the man, the sailor swaggering down Calle San Pablo, hungry and satisfied, Christopherson walked aimlessly toward the River Tormes, almost passing the large statue in the Plaza de Colon. There he was! High above everyone, solid, quiet, hard, smooth, brass pointing into the dusk through naked chestnut trees. The perfect disguise for him. The Inquisition would never think of a statue, a refractory statue. Walking over through some children playing with a new ball, Christopherson looked up at the sailor concealed.

"What are you going to do now?"

The question hung unanswered in the fading light, silence
around him like olive oil cold, the mouth of Columbus cast perfectly in a closed weathered lip tight smile. Under one arm a globe to prove his idea and a few maps in his pocket with notes on them about how to sail east by sailing west, the other arm draped in brass cloak and pointing straight. A little girl watched him from a distance, then came up to Christopherson. Perhaps Mercedes Paz.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing. Just looking at the statue."

"Como se llama usted?"

"Ernesto."

"My name is Mercedes. I go to school at San Esteban, over there. Do you go to school?"

"I used to, but not any more."

"You know our saying about Cristobal Colon?"

"No. Que es?"

"A que indica Colon? La Calle de Pan y Carbon. See! He points over there to that little street. It's too dark now to see the sign. Shortest street in the city."

"Where did you learn that?"

"I guess I always knew it. It's a dicho salamantino."

Christopherson turned to leave, to do something, anything to get away from the Plaza de Colon.

"Where you going?"
Christopherson didn't answer, walking out of the Plaza toward Bread and Coal Street, a dark narrow passage leading uphill, short, stinking urine, garbage, but a shot light on in a small store half way up, slabs of yellow light filtering through greasy windows, leather and canvas smells strong and heavy from the slightly open doorway, a woman laughing at the back behind a curtain as Christopherson went in, browsing through the buckles and grommets, straps and whangleather, wanting everything.

"Can I help you?"
"I'm still looking."
"Something I can help you find?"
"No thanks."

Writing a Traveler's Check, carrying his new rucksack and groundcloth back to his room at La Perla Salamantina, Christopherson packed matches, olive oil, bread, sardines, a map, bedroll, threw his suits and shirts under the lumpy bed, threw his books and papers into his trunk, putting on old clothes and heavy shoes, throwing on the mochila, switching out the light. Knocking on the landlord's door, opening, sallow face peering out, scratching his belly, Christopherson loaded like a snail, gave the fat little man his books and papers and polished black shoes, fish frying behind him, wife and children hushed and listening to the crazy extranjero jabbering on, telling his plans, laughing too loud, rhyming too
much.

Christopherson clomping down wooden stairs and out into Rua San Pablo, heading for the Tormes, heading for the highway to Portugal, end of the known world. Faldaree, faldara.... Thinking of men with one huge eye, one huge foot, a long tail, an island ruled by women, boiling southern seas, dropping off the edge of the world. Thinking of everywhere, tramping away from Salamanca, out of the shadow of the cathedral. Nothing to be resisted, leaving a classical square, watching for a floating silk hat as he waved his thumb at passing Fiats following their own lights, looking for the first ride at dusk beside the road through the open countryside, thistle seed in the wind. Faldaree, faldara, faldaree, faldara ha ha ha ha...