1960

Risus Sardonicus

Barbara Knight

The University of Montana

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RISUS SARDONICUS

by

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B.A. Montana State University, 1956

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1960

Approved by:

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Chairman, Board of Examiners

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Dean, Graduate School

MAY 27 1960
Date
INTRODUCTION

Wilson Burton, protagonist of *Ripus Sardonius*, appears in the world of Federal as a man opposed to the whole town. He arrives from a world of manners, dreams, and disciplines that are of no value in the town; the town's ways are the ways of utility. To achieve value in the town's eyes is to demonstrate use, to be functional; beyond that purpose little else exists.

To meet this challenge, Wilson undergoes a metamorphosis that causes him to strive toward the town's way of life, to be part of, and to master, ultimately, the very thing he despises. To achieve this end, he half chooses and is half forced to choose the medium of the hunt. This essential pursuit, so vital to the townsmen that it is ritual, forces his limp faculties to heretofore unknown efforts. In the hunter, Willie Smith, Wilson glimpses the essence of a Federal man, the local hero, held as the primitive chieftain is, the epitome of utility.

To emulate Willie and be a hunter becomes Wilson's life for the space of the hunt. His failure, construed as fatal by himself and judged as ludicrous by the townsmen, renews the question of face. As an object of apathetic scorn, tormented by schoolboys, he was one thing; as the defeated figure of the frustrated hunter, he becomes the men's especial
symbol of the outsider re-proving his own asininity. Perhaps even this could be his rural salvation, if his own humor could go beyond the subtleties of painful self-consciousness. Though the butt of the joke, however, he refuses to yield and thereby his folly initiates a legend. Just as the tales of Willie's prowess are repeated so is the single feat that commemorates Wilson Burton in Federal.

At this point, the forces of circumstance that combine with the town to trip up Wilson, are personified by Willie, playfully malicious; and these same forces impel Wilson to a more personal disaster. When Willie presents him with a real deer, compromising his manhood by a gift reserved for widow ladies, indigent relatives, or charity cases, Wilson no longer has the choice of laughing away his failure. He is the victim of his environment, trapped into a final action and committed to a stumbling resistance that only earns him physical abuse. Even the presence of the actual deer lures him again, temporarily, into the Federal world in his abortive attempt to skin it as ordered by Willie.

The night in the sheep shed acquires a special purgatorial horror for Wilson in that it destroys him as a man able to judge; a relative existence ceases to be possible for him. With the extinguished lantern, the world is given over to absolutes of utter darkness or sterile light. He commits himself to Federal and to its abyss. If he cannot conquer grandly, he can seep into the stagnancy completely.
By becoming the perpetual sacrifice, Wilson Burton accomplishes no redemption for himself or for others. He can't become a John Hardy, a facile compromise between mediocrity and self-respect. He can only be the sore on his own back, while to the town he represents a hapless queer one, once a teacher.

The case of the individual versus the town, of the sensitive person opposed to the mindless group has been drawn and redrawn by such writers as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. In *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Main Street* are presented two views of the small, rural empire and the disillusion and rot that exist beneath surface complacency there. Anderson's "grotesques", because they were men and women apart, living extensions of an idea, were molded by the town and, in most instances, incapable of escaping its effect. Whether they remained or fled, they could not cease being "grotesques".

One of these, Enoch Robinson, whose story in the Book of the Grotesques, is entitled "Loneliness", reveals the flight and return of a native. As a boy, Enoch had to be shouted out of the road; as a man, he sought the world beyond his town. As a citizen of that world, he failed and escaped into a world of his own, childishly created, and temporarily abandoned for a fleshly existence. But even this was insufficient for Enoch; finally, "He dismissed the essence of things and played with realities." In this sense, I can equate Wilson Burton of *Ritus Sardonicus* and Enoch
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Robinson; for Wilson, presented with the realities of rich experience and vigor, is finally forced to choose between the useless essence of a disintegrating past and the exterior realities of his crude present. Like Enoch, he is robbed of "the essence of things", both of his past associations and values and of his chaotic environment by "realities": the necessity of the hunt, the elimination of the non-essential in his townfolk's lives, his straining attempt to be a part of Federal.

As Enoch Robinson becomes "a payer of taxes", he falls into the vortex of non-reality. Eventually he returns to Winsburg, no more a mildly-talented expatriate but only another of the grotesques, formed by the non-exotic delights of wine-sweet autumns and wet, fresh springs just as surely as by his room full of people "servants...to his fancies". As Wilson Burton is lured into the pit of the town, he loses the sense of his old world, retaining only the slender filament of attachment for old ways and things he cannot put by. But his hamartia, to be able to see, and to see no further, prevents him from divining the truths of Federal. When he is the lone man with a vision of things beyond the town, it becomes difficult to believe that his vision exists. By the end of the story, his conviction of his own view has been blotted out by the more immediate reality of deer blood and violence, the positive values for Federal.

The character of Carol Kennicott in Sinclair Lewis'
Main Street is, in another sense, comparable to Wilson Burton. She comes to the town armed with a vision of reformation. By proclaiming her program aloud and by attacking the inert intelligentsia of Gopher Prairie, she struggles vainly for a bit until the town can rise to dispose of her as easily as it did of the English poets. In a society in which intelligence is a sin and morality the color of everyone's dirty linen, Carol is denounced for her very energy. The threat of the vigorous outsider to Gopher Prairie is in proportion to the threat of a teacher, as Wilson Burton ostensibly is, to Federal. However, while Wilson's initiative, after his primary experiences in Federal, is lethargic and burrows inward; Carol's extroverted ambition takes the opposite trend and tends to expand chaotically until she can sigh "They're too much for me" and begin the fatal relaxation that will signal her decease as Gopher Prairie's gadfly. Her defeat is resoundingly echoed in Dr. Kennicott's celebration of trivia as he rolls off to sleep in the end.

The final factor to be examined in the attempt to understand Wilson Burton is the measure of his impact on the soil and water souls of the Federal people. Beyond the fact of his act and the resulting derision, he causes scarcely a ripple in the placid inertness of Federal. The town has existed by a policy of absorption. Inexorably, the town will shape and seduce the alien to its own form, to endure
with it. From the point of being a stranger and a potential
danger to the community, Wilson is reduced to an irritant
and finally to a harmless non-entity allowed to shuffle
through its streets no more remarked than the ever-present
range cattle grazing on Main Street or in the front yards.

Thus, while he may have indented the soft pillow of the
town briefly, the indentation will not long remain. This
is the singular reality of Federal, of Winesburg and Gopher
Prairie; they are untouchable. Protected from the penetra-
tion of the world, almost independent city-states in every
sense but the economic, they exist as eternally unalterable.

For this reason, Wilson, having rejected both past and
future chooses to accept the untouchableness of Federal and
to become, in a sense, untouchable himself. If he could
simply re-enter the familiar world that existed before he
came to know Federal, then his experience there would be
invalid; he would be the truly untouchable. But, to him,
his failure has been two-fold, in the utilitarian world of
Federal and in the world of responsibility, implied and
accepted, that he has left. When he chooses to return to
the town, he has, again like Enoch clasped a handful of
"reality" to comfort him for the loss of "essence". In
the picture of the returned Enoch, "an obscure, jerky little
figure, bobbing up and down on the streets of an Ohio town
at evening when the sun was going down behind the roof of
Wesley Moyer's livery barn," is seen a parallel to Wilson
after his retreat. Like Carol Kennicott, he now views the world through a blunted perception; the blurred edges of the town are tilted out of focus and the camera eye is no longer acute.

The story of *Ritus Sardonius*, then, is as universal as its theme: the individual attempting to retain a sense of value and order in his world but faced with overwhelming realities of distortion in these very qualities. The reaction of Wilson is essentially negative, but he has found nothing but negativity in the town and especially in the one other who he feels might offer more to him, John Hardy. The curious warping of his own judgment that causes him to seek again the dark attraction of Federal is that of a man who having escaped from a moribund place becomes confused and turns back into it. It is for Wilson Burton as for those unable or unwilling to escape; Federal offers only the slow ossification of human matter, its peculiar lethe.
RISUS SARDONICUS

When Wilson Burton came to Federal, he was twenty-two and out of school three months and husky in a short, heavy-shouldered way. He had Latin and composition, grammar and music and was hired teacher to the high school. He came on the stage at seven on the vast September morning. The country of low rolled hills and yellow meadowlarks was sweet in his throat. The water of Sweet Creek flowed to the grass tops, the black horses drank there and even then, boys spent afternoons putting hooks into sweet, pink Rainbows. The Elysian Fields, he dreamed. Hay was being slung on the long forks into wagons and mounting stacks or ripe wheat colors flocked out the stubble fields as they crawled up the hills and swayed down.

The rocky motion gave a ship-like feel to him; he loosed his tie, easing the collar, noticing sweat weighing his sleeves under the arm pits.

"Get this warm every morning, this early, here?"

The stageman looked at him from the burnt rust and blue stubs of his face, slowly turned his head back to the fly-twitching rumps of his horses.

"Nope, only in summer anfall, an -- wal, spring too, late."

The sense of the air and all it held, an insect, a bird's wing, shot-red grasses, came on him as they rutted on up country into the raw fields of the town's periphery.
Squat granaries replaced the hay stacks and held ridges of molded mud led off towards the bordering shacks. Federal was low, brown, mean, and nasty to see. The potted ways led past O'Brian's pig sty with the sow snuffling through blackness and mashed corn husks, and finally hesitated, split in twain and opened into the main street.

The town had fed and supplied a band of homesteaders once; it held a milliner's and brick hotel, a feed store and lumberyard. By now, it sagged, dying greenly and weathering into grey decay. The blacksmith's forge ran on call, the mercantile all day, the stained saloon all night and day. Stevenson, thirty miles away, drew the buyers and scooped the wheat-cattle-sheep into its country-dusty maw, spit ping back railway tickets and spring credit.

The stage ceased at the depot. The driver dropped his reins and climbed out backwards, walked slowly to the back and handed out cases, books, and the instrument.

"Professor's over there," the man waved a hand at the line of granaries, tin roofs glinting in the sky. "School's up there," the hand jabbed at the cottonwoods shading the blacksmith's; between a further house and three brown ponies, an orange brick patch showed. While he watched, looking the houses down, the driver, dragging the canvas mail pouch, disappeared into the dun-painted depot.

The sweet-sick nausea washed him from stomach to limbs, until the tips of his fingers shook and ached. The brittle
blue of the sky, sucking air from him, offering only white-hot sun and morning warming air in return, overpowered him, pressing him down, flat against the stubbled ground, making him aware, of Black Butte, of its height, granite and sere drapery of vegetation. It vibrated, hanging over the town, seen through the hands of air as a shimmering thing, never still, animate, and omnipotent. It went up from a rising slope to two thousand feet, a wedge-shaped rudder of granite, bristling, bearded black on its crown with jagged, protruding ledges ruling its face.

He stood solitary, alone against the wood station, seeing the whooping colors of earth around him. Listening to echoes of hammering, distant, insistent, bees, and ever, the meadow-birds, he looked at his crumpled blue suit and polished shoes, at his hands, soft, wet, the scuffed leather of his luggage, the bound parcel of books, reds, maroons, dull green. When he raised his eyes, he was aware of observation; he was the synosure of eyes behind curtains, slitting at him through half shut doors, held behind shading hands at wood lots and water pumps. The hush of birds and halt of hammer sounds made his neck hair rise. He stood, eyes strained at the pump and bucket, the blank window of the depot, the empty lot of three horses, the vacant street across the tracks.

He reached down, gathered the bags and set off across the track, raising soft dust, sighting by the rain-streaked
board, black and white, proclaiming "Hotel".

To the mornings of pain and light, grease and soda water came the sweat-smelling silence of fore-school. The awkward hesitation of being again in chalk-strong classrooms but not a part of them, of being painfully ghostly until tortured, of being a half-existence in a dust world. The instant before the first harsh yell would grate open nerves, deadened by an hour's worth of time, in that caught minute, there was time to look at the shelf of books and force thought, but by a door's slamming and rough feet pounding against the dried-muddy boards, it would be gone.

It was possible to return himself so far into a past; he could be a child, without the caul of evil these children wore, and to imagine himself at these desks, the tippy seats, iron lace grilling the desk box, ink hole and pencil trench. He could seat himself by a window, open enough to admit bees and flies, to draw in yellow-blue air and be able to clutch it into his lungs, unbreathed by anyone before him. He could even open a pale, greyed geography or the detested arithmetic, and swell a little at his blue spelling tablet with the century mark right center of each page. Then came the shatter and eruption as Donald bumped him in the fly and grinned his crooked leer and made an exaggerated obeisance with head pulled down to shoulder and mouth puckered.

"Professor," John Hardy lounged against the windows, calling roll in his big, male voice, a gentle bull of a man,
His blue shirt stretched taut over his shoulders as he leaned out to receive some paper excuse proffered him. He carried a round, ball-like head, thinning brown hair, and a choked-looking neck within a black bowtie. Fenton Reedy stood by him, sombrero pushed back on his grey hair, the tobacco bag in his pocket lumping his linen shirt. He wore manured boots over his pants' legs and taught agriculture.

Four of his brood sat about the room.

Twenty-seven pairs of eyes, encrusted or clear, staring or hooded looked at Hardy. Boots were thrust into the aisles at all points; mud had been scraped off against the metal work or the seats of the desks. The bas-relief of initials had cut the desk tops down around them, slivering the edges. Other fancy knife work had cut notches, gashes and jagged holes through the oak. The best examples were cherished from year to year and desks were guarded.

The students, boys and girls, wore blue jeans fading from azure to some soft, limp and frail as skim milk; with boots and sneakers and worn shirts, the majority came to the school house. Harvey had new black boots, with fleece linings and a multi-colored shirt. Donald had buckskin moccasins. They weren't condemned.

But this was the good time; the lulling trance-like time when Hardy's voice and hand had the audience. This and the thirty minute lunch and the recess, when most, not all, went outside or into the gymnasium. Then he could close the door.
with glass windows and steal fifteen minutes of reading. But perhaps then Clyde would walk in, quiet as the chalk ghosts, gliding girlishly across the floor, holding his breath until he came even with the edge of the desk. Then he would reach out a white hand, touching Wilson's cuff and expel his held-in breath in a rush with a question or a declaration, "I'm going to study Latin when I get in high school!" or "Why do people have to learn grammar for anyhow?" And he would shyly and cheerfully talk on into the end-of-recess bell, nodding his large, pale head and batting his wet eyes behind round, reflective spectacles.

But Clyde was one of the good grade children. Not Ernest, or William, or Dolly. They were the spirits that fired Wilson Burton's dreams with hellfire and haunted his homeward journey each afternoon. They hung, gorgonlike, out of the loft at the Davis barn on meeting nights and leered like swollen fish at him in literature and Latin, history, and "singing".

When assembly was dismissed, they swung their books into their arms and began the ceaseless, wearing away of "teacher".

"Why'n't we take the day, go on over to Hester and swim a little?"

"How's it come we gotta go to school when Stevenson's out today?"

"Teacher, you ever been to the river?"
The questions were the subtle erosion of his discipline, earnest, crafty, constructed of the logic of will and inbred mule sense. Each had to be answered to the satisfaction of the interrogator; in any case the questioner must be placated, however insanely. But from the beginning, they were offensive, forcing him ever more surely onto their especial rack.

"How'd you get to be teacher, you don't know nuthin'!"

"Got yer ticket for teachin', can't teach us without it!" This would be given in defiant contempt and followed usually by, "Know what we dun to the last teacher--" trailing off lingeringly and tantalizingly to smiling silence.

Minutely and beyond resolution, they crawled under his hide, pelting him with fear, producing within him a complete vacuity of self-respect. By Thanksgiving day, his smile in the teeth of his class was a pinched and quizzical thing. A hand flung in front of his face to ward off the verbal blows that slashed across him. And if the hand or smile slipped and skid away, the fulminate would catch him, uncovered, and he would lose even the frail retreat of shouting above the chaos, "Open your books to page forty-three, Robert, read;"

The hunt never ceased in Federal. O'Brian needed meat all year through as did Andrew, and Sabo. The dressing out of deer and elk proceeded daily; during October every shed held the drained carcass and pelts, horns, hoofs, and scraped skulls piled up on every family dump. The cats and dogs
bloated up on scrap and leavings. The Harkins household had three sons and two grandsons to get their bucks. While Grandma Elsie put up chard and packed the garden stuff into the root cellar, the men tracked their animals through twilight; evenings were given to analysis, the verities of peculiar animals, the point construction and its significance, tracking and its intricacies.

On November seventh, John Hardy asked Wilson to a hunt for Saturday morning, lent him Jody Hardy’s deer-slayer, and advised him to wear three pair of pants.

The pre-dawn wind ripped at the corner boards outside his room. Shep’s whining went on and on through half-sleep, becoming the wind’s whine, getting at him under quilt and covers, the morning’s disruption of awakened mice started above him, working at the paper within the walls. Would there be paper within the walls? Would the house burn like the washhouse had? The figures of coal-colored men throwing buckets of kerosene on the burning washhouse, leaping against the yellow flames, turning, calling to each other, turning towards the house, with him in it, cornered in a frame bed, the kerosene splashing now against the house, covering him, soaking into the blankets, kerosene filling his nostrils, until he leapt up, shrieking at them "not me, not me," a leaping figure himself, coal-colored, and burning out.

He was sweating under the blankets, listening to the wind, tearing at the house, slapping the rain gutter, rolling
down the chimney, all around him.

"I hate you, you goddamn wind!" The consecutive thought, that it was actually Saturday came in a physical way; he flung over on his back, stretched completely outspread and recoiled at the loss, sharp and sickening, of immediate realization that his special day was to be wasted. He would not read all day through, nor walk the stubbly moors, nor even write a long, sweet letter of held-in outpourings, nor bum into town and see the Saturday movie. He would shiver across whirled fields, maybe twenty miles, on a stinking horse and crawl up Black Butte in a thirty-mile gale. He would carry a weighted shape of metal, unable even to put it down for fear of discharging it. He would gulp some warmth from scalding coffee, cooling too quickly in his stiff hands and when they chased the living animal in front of him, he would shake, misfire and earn Hardy's silent comment and the others' ridicule.

He slid off and out of bed; the ice of the floor shocked him awake as it did every morning. He grabbed the clothes from the chair back and hopped back to the heaped bed, putting on the new wool socks first.

The house was asleep. The mantel clock, tocking steadily, only Shep moving about in the shed broke the wind's roar that caused all the moans and creakings to be as much as silence would be. The pump creaked and creaked, finally dumping enough water into the basin to allow him to wet his face and scrape the soap across his hands. He peered into
the scrap of mirror, comforted strangely by the lack of reflection in the dark surface.

The lamp required pumping into a fine glow, seemingly warm, highlighting the points and corners, obscuring the posteriors of cabinets and chairs. He wasn't hungry, only empty and slightly queasy. The prescience of the day to be caused him to slice three pieces from the loaf under the cloth on the table. They'd had squash and venison, boiled potatoes, coffee and squash pie for supper. The squash rinds had curled and collapsed on the plates. The coffee cups contained greasy rings and sediment from the well water.

He replaced the cloth, folding it back over the plates and bread and remains. With the bread, he fried eggs and drank milk. Since the slop jar was full he pushed the shells into the trash burner and blew out the lamp.

The wind picked lazily at him in the shelter of the house. Shep looked at him, standing heavily four-footed and irritably close to the wall. He muttered "Lucky dog!" and pushed through the gate, down the path to the privy, angling aslant across the scattered yard.

Once in the open, the wind tore at him, biting and nosing, then, in fury, roaring at him, sucking his breath until he gasped, openmouthed and flailed at it. The Hardy house was alight downstairs, the yellow of electricity warming him towards it. It stood corner on to the cross-roads, two storied and sturdy in the roaring black morning.
The men, humped over coffee and wheat cakes, were re-counting the million hunts before, the bucks slain, the extraordinary feats that the hunters had performed to outwit four-point, six-point, even eight-point bucks, the grotesque errors that made a man momentarily a deer, turning red wool to the velvet texture of buckskin and effecting the chemical metamorphosis that released, triggered a man's response by throwing the rifle to his shoulder and giving him leave to gun the deer-man down.

"Lissen, I don't care what you seen, nobody's gonna bring down a big buck with a bow and arrow; it couldn't kill 'im, not heavy enough."

"Sure, you kin break his leg and you ever eat a buck like that, tastes ta hell, I'll tell ya!"

"Heard there's a party in from Minnesota, wanting deer, stayin' at the hoo-tel. Hired Willie to take 'em to the breaks,"

"Yeh, well they ain't going to have no easy job there, they's mud to the wagon hubs."

"Ever hear about Willie's buck, the one he bushwhacked so's they was both spit-skereed?"

"Sho, his --- hey, teeacher, ever hear that 'un?"

"I --- no, no, I haven't heard that one, yet."

"This here's a real story, boy." Matt Hawkins, his land-lord's middle son, jabbed him in the shoulder, "Turn around and hear a real story, it's a good one."
"Wal, seems like Willie was a'poaching out'n the breaks, mighty close to the bank when he come out of the bush, too close and fell, rollin' down this little bank. An' he landed jest plumb onto a big, six-point buck, drippin' from the muzzle and surprised as hell jest like Willie was. Well, sir, ole Mr. Buck was the most surprised cause he just stood a minute while Willie prayed and wished ta Christ he hadn't dropped his gun. He knowed that old boy was a meller 'cause he had rutting scars as thick as pimples all over 'im. Jest about the time the buck decided he was gonna run like hell, passenger or no, Willie grabs a antler in one hand and his skinnin' knife in the other and cuts that buck's throat neat and he got mighty messed afore it was over." Old Kemp leaned way back in his chair and sucked his pipe, right pleased at the effect on Wilson Burton. He had been looking a bit bored and half-unbelieving, evidently anticipating the story as an old local hazing. The ending paled him and he merely looked uncertain now, unsure of his own reaction or of the expected response he was to give. He looked down at his cup, then away, rising, he moved towards the stove and the coffee pot.

They had fitted out "Dutch" Kolina's old buckboard with blankets and straw. Kemp, Wilson, the Harkins' boys, his pupils, and Shorty Davis rode it; the main body took to horses and moved out ahead. The Harkins' and Kemp rooted into the straw, tucking blankets around their shoulders and seemingly fell immediately asleep. Shorty Davis humped into
the middle of the bed and rolled himself into a blanket. Wilson pressed against the bare boards, spreading an old fleece and some straw loosely over his legs.

The morning was still black; the wind had settled into a steady whine from the east. The rutted roads and that wind jarred the wagon constantly, a struggling up and the bump, and rattle down. The boards rubbing his back jabbed at him but he tried shutting his eyes, easing into sleep as Tommy and Everett had. Sleep teased him on to its inviting depth but refused to take his conscious mind. He remained awake, drugged, getting sore and already stiff from his position in the jolting bed.

The freak first light showed some landscape; fields ceasing and only fenced sage and slabs of rock. The high imminence of Black Butte slid closer. The approach was a circular trail meandering sidewise around the butte. In summer, the peculiar bluffs fronting its south face held the rocky lairs of sunning rattlesnakes, summer sport for the boys bored of fishing or Limeroad girls. Between the bluffs and the Koda river breaks, reared Black Butte. In the high caves, a band of Shorty Davis' goats, gone wild, leaped and gamboled; the lower slopes sheltered herds of antelope, seen far off on clear days, spooked by the scent or sound of unsaftious hunters.

The buckboard abandoned the circular climb, following deep wagon tracks into shorn brush country. The light was
washed grey, the wind hard and fierce here, on the naked slope, cutting at the men and animals twice as intensely. Now he wished himself into a warm room, away; the force of the wind sustained the Harkins' boys, leaping into its face from the wagon bed. They leaned on it, arms outstretched, jeans pressed against their thin legs and jackets flapping.

Shorty Davis sat up, snorting, shaking himself like a ruffled dog and pushed out of the wagon. The riders were scattered about, dismounting, sheltering behind their horses. He sat up, moving from his hunched position against the boards to the center of the straw. Groping throughout the box, his hands lit on icy metal, the crude shock of oiled, polished walnut. The Harkins' guns.

John Hardy rode up on a high, mild chestnut, a weird horse up from Sabo's river place. It had a yellow-looking eye and kept showing its teeth, trying to spit out the bit. Hardy leaned low to be heard in the wind.

"I've got your gun here. You stay with me and Tommy here, we're going to post out behind those first rocks up above. Supposed to be antelope about. Won't get a shot at them though. Just remember to stay down. Deer are getting scarce, won't be many about, maybe a rare one though, don't give up, don't shoot a doe. Starkie and Shorty are going to try climbing all the way in and drive out whatever's around. Don't get shot, too hard to find a teacher this time of year,"

he handed down a rifle and rode off to a group apart, his
The day began with a sense of foreboding. As the rooster crowed, the shadows stretched across the steely sky, hinting at the gathering storm. The barnyard was quiet, the farmhands still in their beds, dreaming of the sun's warm embrace. But not far away, in the dim light of dawn, a figure moved cautiously, his boots crunching on the dusty earth.

He was a weathered man, worn by the harshness of the land. His clothes were patched and threadbare, his expression etched with a lifetime of toil. Yet in his eyes, there was a determination that belied his age, a will to survive that was as old as the hills themselves.

He reached for the grindstone, his hands shaking with the effort. The stone was heavy, and the task at hand was daunting. But he pushed on, his mind set on the task at hand. He knew that the work must be done, no matter the cost.

As the sun rose higher in the sky, the figure's work continued. The grindstone turned with a satisfying whir, the sound of the stone sliding against the edge of the razor sharp. But the task was not one of joy, nor of leisure. It was a labor of love, a necessity of life in this harsh world.

And then, as the day wore on, he paused for a moment, his mind harkening back to the good old days, when life was simpler, and the world was kinder. But those days were gone, and he knew that he must forge ahead, no matter the trials that lay ahead.

Now, as the sun began to set, the man took his position at the head of the line. The day was done, and the work was complete. He paused for a moment, to catch his breath, then turned and walked back towards the barn, his mind already planning the next day's work. For in this world, there was no time to rest, no room for idleness. The work must be done, come what may.
Just before him, Hardy reached the rocks, withdrawing
behind them from the grey sight. And with a final windy
thrust, Wilson clasped the bush growing between boulders
and heaved himself in next to the others. The boulders
formed a natural blind; rocky shale formed the slippery,
clattering floor, the rocks on three sides higher than
Hardy's head, on the fourth seemingly battered into jutting
shards. Old fires had smoked the walls allowing predecessors
to smut their names and dates into the clinging greasy ash.
Scraps of deer hide and a collection of chicken bones
rustled among the stones. As he slid in, his boots ground
the crackled mound of bones into bits. He leaned the rifle
against the stones and looked at Hardy, waiting. Tommy had
slipped out to explore or watch.

Hardy swung the knapsack into a corner and eased his
big body against a conically slanting wall. The enclosure
was like nothing so much as a stone tepee, space enough for
four men at the bottom lessening away to a narrow cone, save
for the "entrance" waist high, facing north. The wind came
in as brief gusts.

"Not a bad blind, eh?" Hardy had his pipe going, his
head and neck inclined slightly forward by the stone.
"Ever been hunting, after deer, elk?"
"No, this will be my first."
"You think to get one today, first time at it, then--?"
He wondered at his own confidence but he nodded, "I really don't see it as much of a sport, though, I mean it all seems, well, cut and dried. Even before anyone goes, it's all previously assumed the deer will be gotten." He watched Hardy sucking at the pipe, glad it wasn't one of the townsmen facing him, hoping Hardy would really talk, would let him into his life, would become aware of his need to talk and talk, on about the town, his hate, his despair, the filth, anything to be able to communicate beyond Glanders and magpie bounties, the rodeo and Emmy Lou's hot pants. But Hardy was uncommunicative now, beyond the hunt itself.

"Oh, it's a sport, of sorts. These people are sports, but not with their stomachs. They need the venison. They're not fox-and-hound sports, though. It's meat and meal first. If they get their limit they give the extras to a relative--and then go eat off him until it's gone. What'll you do with yours, your buck, if you get 'im?"

The actuality of the objective deer was suddenly before him as if the heavy body were within his lap, blood-warm and alive somehow. What would he do with a bleeding, awkward animal, was it to be merely hauled down a rough slope and hoisted into the wagon? -- Or what?

"Why, I suppose I'd -- I guess I'd give it to Arnold."

The vision of little Arnold Hawkins minus his paining teeth, playing pinochle with Fenton Reedy and their wives, licking his thumb and shuffling, beaming, mouth open or tongue
tucked in the mouth's corner as he "shot the moon" came to Wilson.

"He could sure use it, with his brood." The open cupboard, bread crumbs, and licked pots of the Harkins' kitchen and the thorough, crumb-licking grandchildren swarming through the house, ferreting food like noisy large mice, followed the vision of their grandfather.

"I think that would be best." Hardy held the pipe bowl against his knee, squashing his big shoulders back into the rock wall. Above them Tommy Harkins' face dropped into the hole. "Hey, deer --," he was gone, scraping across the shale, his boots sliding on it.

They climbed out, heads up, hands, elbows and knees grasping the rocks and brush, tugging themselves into the raw wind. The "deer" were loping off a good mile away, crossing the wind-bitten slope just below them, making towards the river.

"Deer! -- Hell no, not deer, antelope, Jesus, a beautiful herd, look at 'em, look at 'em Burton, Jesus," Hardy trailed off, scanning the faint line of buff movement disappearing into tan fields and the rutted arroyoed slopes. The line undulated like thick, muddied water, creaming in and out of the horizon until it died away, dun smoke sifting into the prairie haze.

"Well, they're pretty, too fast for horses though. You won't take an antelope home to Arnold, anyway," Hardy's
quick, slight smile, sympathized with his hands, tensed and
white, holding the rifle stock so hard, the release was
painful.

"Sure, I know you can't get antelope." He relaxed
again, leaning against a flat slab of sandstone, the tee­
pee's top flap.

"Listen, I'll go see what Shorty and Willie have, if
any. You sit tight, here; if a deer heads down, just make
sure you don't see anyone human in your sights before you
fire. Get 'im in the neck, if possible. If you get 'im,
wait a bit, then tag 'im," Hardy handed him a yellow tag,
wire twisted through the punched hole, and bolted over the
side, crunching into the loose stuff at the "blind" base.
"Don't shoot a cow!" he yelled back, hunching forward,
weighing his big body against the wind tearing at him.

This goddamn wind, it's alive. This goddamn wind, he
thought. If I can get a deer, I'll be o.k. I can hand it
to Arnold, make a buckskin shirt. I can -- he stopped all
conscious thinking, becoming aware of the wind as a sea,
running over him as a sea would some derelict. He was
lapped by it; it ceased, then came at him again. His back
against the rock was straight. He balanced until a gust
would catch him offside and try to drive him down the stone
hole. He planted his knees and slid down, buttocks barely
touching the cold ground, a draft rippled beneath him but
the slanted squat was comfortable and presented less surface
the last legs.

nose, and coarsely, thoughtfully, my hand down
now he perceived a bit aboveウィリson, pointing at his left

into despair.

mother accidenstly brushed it onto the floor, and it shattered
hard memorial beat against jar's thin white chest until her
sorched J.H. + T.H. and breathed it in her mother's oven. The
dawntreader was in love with him. She made a clay heart in-

I saw... and I became..." I came", "Jan Hardy, the twelve-year-old
able to read and write in a fine inscribed style of terse
readers on cold, window-shaded days. As a student he was

anguish to them. He became pungetly trenchant near the
brushed the hand and shoulders out and his rear at an oblique
nose. His usual posture was a standing forward loop that

sleep and his dry fingernails worked consciency at the
unmistakable. In those hot, hazy, steamed up room he

a teether sitting. His chocolate blue eyes were sunken and
rather, and an army fell back, then now under his chin with

he wore a teaed-out, shuddering denim jacket, the Grand-
his serpentine boots. The Gypsy blue-jaded youth was there.

Harkins' eddies and rumbling noise announced him, beside the

"Hey, Mr. Burton, are you asleep? Wake up."

"Me sleep, shaking with needed root..."

doe, a deer, my dear. "They flee from me," that something did
deer, my dear. Now, Hardy, you are a deer, a little brown
to the wind. I gotta get a deer. My
"They got some deer, Shorty did, heard the shots? Gonna drive 'em down so's they ain't gotta trap them in the caves." The information was nasal, a twinge whiney. He continued placidly, "Hell, ain't no deer gonna run them caves," this disgustedly, "only dumb farmer goats. Ever milk a wild goat?" He looked for a moment almost interested but when Wilson shook his head, the strange shaded light died, his brown face was as before, expressionless. Wilson had seen him laugh. At the imminence of such humorous occasion, his face opened flesh dikes, two or three pushing back away from the corners of his mouth. It was a gradual think, like opening locks of a canal, slowly and one by one, until teeth bared, lips drawn back he was smiling. The closing was swift.

"You ever killed a deer?" The insinuation was there, a new tack was before Tommy, he waited looking into Wilson's face.

"Noo-o, can't say as I ever did, why?" To counter with a question was safest. "Have you?"

"Me, sure, I got gran'pa a buck last year and he'p'd dress out Harold's last spring." He looked down, then, "He was poached," he added.

"Are you afraid to shoot a deer?" Like dogs and horses, his students could smell fear on him. The question was quiet and sly.

"Not hardly," he lied into the wind; the wind stole
his answer and squealed, witchy and shrill behind his ears.

From up the mountain a "halloo" came vaguely on the wind. A red and black checkered figure was dropping toward them, coming from rock to rock, quiet but fast, only a little loose shale came with him. By the time he reached them, he was panting slightly, red-faced from the wind and his descent. He was Andrew, the board chairman. "By God," he gasped after a minute. "They's deer, about three big bucks comin' down. Willie's got 'em comin' around and down; they's bound to come down unless they gets 'em up there. You stay here, Tommy, to shoo 'em at Hardy in the sage. N'you with me," He nodded at Wilson and having a deep breath started back up the steepening ascent.

They climbed up steadily, old Andrew three feet ahead of Wilson, struggling one-armed against the gun which threatened to swing askew towards Andrew with every upward lunge. At a point beside a whipping weed, Andrew stopped and pointed above him, "You go on up, until you hit Willie, he needs somebody to hold down the east side there while he drives." He reached into the base of the weed and picked out a new gleaming-barreled rifle, elaborate sight and wrought stock; the gun was unlike Jody's and probably a dear piece to Andrew. Wilson moved off cradling his borrowed weapon, concentrating on finding Willie above him.

At this height, the butte was scraped of vegetation. Spotty weeds and low ruffled sage clung to it, finally
ceasing in slab rock and wildly scattered caves or half-grottoes. Wilson walked, leaning forward, occasionally staggered sidewise by the blast and scanned the ground in a searching for Willie. He turned, shoulder into the wind, and spaced up half-forwards until he rubbed against a great sand-stone boulder.

"Well, okay, teacher, you done found us," Willie Smith leaned around the side of his rock and flicked a cigarette stub into the wind. He leaned back, beckoning Wilson around with his hand. On the other side sat Willie and Fenton Reedy.

Willie was a hunter, all year; officially, during the winter, summer, and spring he ran a band of sheep, sometimes combining with old Arnold Harkins in winter pasturing, sometimes with John Colter. Before sale, the sheep brands merged into each other, then Willie watched greedily, his omnipresent rifle tucked in the crook of his arm, while they put them on the train, his sheep, fat lambs, mud and manure clinging to their fleeces, the ewes crying behind them. He had a wife and two boys anchored in a wood cabin on the southern range, a field of dirt and sparse sheep land.

Standing, Willie wasn't much taller than Wilson. Where Wilson was thick and unmuscleed, Willie was flinty, high cheeks and lean hardness in his spindly frame. He had straw-yellow hair toning into patchy spots of grey. His eyes were deep and blue, burning like low fires at night,
flickering out, then rising. His hard mouth was laughing down now, pulled at the corners by bad teeth and bad humor.

"Sho, I'm goin' be back to school now, you teachers here with me." He nodded at Reedy sitting alongside, gun laid aside and red face slack in the grey light.

Wilson nodded at his fellow, slightly uncomfortable with the man of the people about. He sensed no intelligence in Reedy's slow, bovine response to life. He always seemed more a woman than man, impassive, allowing children and animals to crawl over him, content to hold the latest Reedy baby while his short, sharp wife thrashed the dog or hauled bucket after bucket of water to clean the dun-colored clothing her family affected.

He worked among his cows most happily and taught his class by taking them into the barn or field, explaining the knowledge they'd known all their life while fondling an udder absently or chucking Pat Reedy, two years, or Nels Reedy, nine months, under the chin. He taught math by the simple process of allowing the class to do his bookkeeping; and the Reedy home was furnished by Reedy-inspired, student-made gun racks, cabinets, desks, cupboards and even a broad, flat planked table that fed the whole brood of thirteen.

Wilson had once been invited to supper by Fenton's drawled invitation and had walked into the littered yard to the length of Devil's chain where he hesitated, used to Shep's ferocity but unaware of Devil's potential danger. The dog,
black, short-furred and vicious, leapt, fangs clinking, towards the area of his throat, almost strangling in his repertoire of howls, snarls, and saliva-flecked growls. The chain dancing silver in the air, the ugly-snouted sow grunting in the low-fenced sty, the odor of the buzzing interior of the out-house, gaping through the battered, split door, caused Wilson to back off, wanting air, wondering incoherently why Reedy didn't have his class build a new privy, a six-holer, or even at that, a new house.

The log-cabin's door sagged open, a slanting gap between it and the threshold. The boards of the house's siding, laid on over the logs, were askew, being picked off by the Reedy children able to reach them. The chimney leaned inward against the house. Altogether it looked as if the crunching together of the elements of wind and rain could crush it, heaving it into a matted heap of sodden cardboard and tar-paper. The windows had been sacrificed to warmth, boarded over and tarred to insure against holes or light.

Then the door was pushed out and Mame Reedy grabbed the chain jerking Devil off his feet. He scuttled sidewise, choking and barking. "Come in, Mr. Burton; supper's ready." He followed her in, she-angles and pulled back hair and bun yellowed and caught by old massive pins. This year no baby was coming, at least not in evidence. She was firm breasted and flat-stomached, ostensibly.

The cabin was one large room but a small enclosure with
a double bed and cot had been partitioned off. Around the
calls from the left proceeded the living room, kitchen, and
bedrooms, these were the enclosure, a baby's buggy, a
couch, two other single cots and a mattress near the door.
Newspapers covering the mattress were covered by olive-drab
blankets. The living room held the big board table and two
cherrywood gun racks, one of which had been varnished by a
non-drying solution. It bore signs of misplaced hands,
papers, and clothing in its moist surface.

The Reedy family, on chairs, boxes and two short benches
sat at table. Fenton at the head, holding Pat, with Nels in
a kitchen chair tied by a dishtowel on his right. Wilson
was given a place between his own pupils, Carrol, thirteen
and as languorous as his father, and Susan, fourteen and
pushing her thin breasts against her faded dress for Wilson's
benefit and admiration. The other Reedys looked at him with
open or shy curiosity.

Conversation was between Mame, him, Susan, and Carrol,
Fenton replying slowly to a direct question but giving most
of his attention to Nels' feeding, holding the spoon, tipping
it up into the baby's round mouth, catching the dribbles
and repeating while Nels slobbered earnestly looking at
Wilson and up at his father from time to time. His cheeks
were round, amazingly red and his pale blonde head was globe-
like in the kerosene glow. Looking over Delbert Reedy's
head, Wilson stared directly into a triangular hole in the
floor. There were several holes of various shapes and sizes; with one, the children had been playing, digging up dirt and spreading it along the crack; the spoons were scattered along the dirt. He tried to keep his eyes on the table and keep from following the heaped piles of clothing on every surface and the antics of two brown cats that leapt and played from pile to pile, occasionally leaping onto the sideboard and rustling paper or bumping dishes.

The dinner was quiet, the children good, eyeing their mother before a hand stole out to get more bread. The food was boiled potatoes, bread, venison stew and coffee; the half gallon pitchers of milk were refilled twice, the bread plates once. Susan cut pie at the sideboard and Wilson remembered inwardly to forget the cats. After two months he had forgotten flies and unstrained milk, alkaline water -- a natural physic -- and creamed food remaining overnight on the table. His weight had dropped twelve pounds in three weeks but fortitude and the Hardy family example had restored him. When the pie was set before him, little Delbert breathed "Oh boy, pie!" and looked up at Wilson in gourmet adoration for causing it to happen.

Now the Reedy dinner evaporated, eclipsed by the past as he and Reedy and Willie waited the bucks. The other two sat morosely, untalking, Willie restless, and impatient for the first sign. The day had turned to slate grey, the wind dropping slightly, a bleary sun withholding above the butte.
Above the line of rocks facing him to the north, Wilson saw the buck, dancing out, rippling with the air currents, just poised above him, front leg crooked, sniffing. Far to the animal's left, a red spot appeared and bobbed out of sight below slate-coloured slabs. He leaned forward, touching Willie's arm, "Willie, a buck - a deer, right up above us." He had tightened into coiled strings controlling his arms and needle-pricked legs. He felt as if the phantom deer weighting him had been lifted off his lap, alive and set to face him, perhaps pursue him. His scalp prickled and he was a water-moving thing, something in the depths seen eerily by a swimmer.

Willie had sprung to the rocks holding his rifle at ready, spotting the deer. He shook his head, murmuring, "Oh, pretty, Jesus, a pretty 'un." Reedy had moved up against the rock, caressing it with his body, easy and ready.

"You stay right here, I'm goin' after 'im; he's mine." Willie went out of the rocks, flattened and clung to the slope out of the wind climbing towards the buck. It had stayed, head up, above them, then gone a few steps to the right and stood there nearly immobile blending into the terrain. Wilson thought he'd lost the sight then, looked away and back. It was a big buck, antlers high and broad in the chest and flank. He wanted to aim and send a bullet into it. He encircled the barrel with his hand, keening toward the deer.
"There's another, above him," Reedy's voice blew against his ear. He looked beyond the buck, along a line of tumbled boulders where a brown form showed itself moving erratically southwest. "Go get it, it's yours," Reedy looked away, "Willie's too anxious sometimes. He don't wait his turn, sometimes." He was getting out his tobacco bag and papers, slouching down into the rocks.

"But, you, Fenton you go. I'm just along - I don't need - don't want a deer." He was aware of the phantom again, watching him coolly and scornfully just waiting to race him up the slope and win.

"Nope, you go on. Hurry, you'll lose him, you don't go. I'm in no hurry to chase up a mountain," Fenton's wrinkles folded into a yellow-stained smile, his grey eyes reflecting the wind-strewn day even to the minute disks of muted suns there in the iris. "Okay?"

"Okay, I'll get him, give you a deer dinner." He scuttled flatly out of the rocks, following Willie's method, still plagued by the gun's weight and his own stiff, un-athletic body.

"If I were only naked and it were summer and there were no wind and - I'm hungry," he said into the wind and dirt. He could see nothing but the immediate area. To lift himself up from the nebulous trail took time and spoiled his concentration on emulating Willie and enjoying the game of the hunter. His crabbed scuttling amazingly
The impression of green and brown, green and
just stand still and I'll get you.

deep's direction.

He stepped on the running and stood panting.
The pseudosense was a false grill, ending at a rock wall.

The pseudosense ended on the far side, no sense of direction then. The
rooted at them, behind them, the deer had halted, then
them were short and bent by a perpendicular standing with that
hand, seeming toward the turfed. The trees, when he understood
he stepped into a recessed run holding his rifle in his right
hand of prime and seeming to make a way into a rock turfed.

From the time of his elevation, as closest as he could.

off top of the butte.

series of rolling plateau, gently ascending to the chopped-
necessity for careful, the slope had ruined into a
was gone now but at this point there was no longer any
read him carefully to the rock time of witness' book.
brown, of trees and shrub, and boulders sheared past him. He stopped, at the foot of angling, waist-high slabs. The
deer had leapt down an incline, landing in a three-sided
grotto opening onto Black Butte's northern face. It was a
stage-like projection below him. He leaned down against
the rocks, setting his rifle into a nick, pressing it against
his cheek and shoulder.

The deer had circled his platform; unable to escape,
he sheltered behind limestone outcroppings exposing only a
flank and the perimeter of his back.

Wilson rubbed his sweating forehead, trying to ignore
the wind playing at his jacket and pants. He aimed down the
barrel, and, open-mouthed, squeezing slowly, infinitely
slowly, he pulled the trigger. The crack reverberated
through the wind, hurting as much as the unusual motion of
the gun that snapped his fingers against the rock. He had
no sense of having fired other than the immediate physical
reactions he alone evidenced. His old expectation of fear,
of looking into animal eyes, of the phantom deer were ab-
sent. A whole hollowness was within him, a sense of, is
this all?

He looked down for his victim. The buff flank and
back were gone. He was immediately disappointed. The loss
of his first trophy overwhelmed him; he didn't want to chase
again. Their tracking wasn't for him, just the catching.
He rose, pushing away from the rocks, picking up the lagging
gun, and walked slowly along the edge of the cliff, seeking a way down.

At one point, with a jump of some six feet and guarded scrambling, he could reach the overhanging ledge. He hesitated, lowered the rifle, barrel first, and kneeling, finally hanging close to the rocks, he dropped and fell into the dirt-covered rocks below.

From the scattering of stones he picked himself up, feeling excessively heavy and shaken. The rifle had plugged with dirt. He shrugged, supposing it wouldn't interfere with any firing he might do. He turned to find his deer or the loss of it.

From the ledge itself it was immediately obvious that the animal couldn't have sprung away to tease and deceive him any more. The sky opened before him, the widest space presented there, narrowing to an area of shrub and rock piles, accumulations from above. The animal had hidden itself behind these piles.

When he stretched around the barrier, gun at ready and tensed, he was prepared for sudden movement, the sly deer straining away from his presence toward freedom. The dun body was so incongruous with its short, stubby horns and tobacco-goatee, he couldn't comprehend for an instant. The presence of the yellow tag in his pocket was too imminent.

The goat was still living, breathing out its life in
laboring gasps. His bullet had shattered the spine. He was numb and unthinking, now faced with a thing he'd visualized, having to kill a living animal near enough to know it as more than the obscure target. He knelt, reached out a trembling hand and touched a curved horn. He pulled back the hand feeling it as a thing alien and lifted the gun.

The second crack echoed out of the area and reverberated through the wind. He felt strangely diseased, a sweet, strange taste growing in his mouth, his ears beginning to ache, a harsh line of pain crawling up his skull. The swift recognition of his kill sloshed in his stomach, releasing all of the acids of his self-consciousness. He was going to be sick at the grotesqueness of his position. From an object of meditative contempt, he would become the scrapgrace fit to ridicule. The strutting hunter-boys in school would eat him and the hunting men would silently cease stringing him to despise him silently.

Here the wind's rattle shook down the hoots of Tommy Harkins as lifted cacophonies of wild sound. They were coming to check his progress, the rifle shots had reached them; and he, unable to escape, just as his "deer" had been, was held, trapped on the table of granite.

Tommy's grey hat and looming face poked over the cliff's edge.

"Hey, you, Mr. Burton, did ya get a buck?" He washed his right sleeve under his nose.
"No, you little bastard, I got a billy. Just one word and I'll open your guts with this thing." He stared up at the boy desiring him to be within physical distance to be hit, to be pounded, and all the time cold and crying inside. Beside the figure of Tommy appeared Willie and Andrew. They rimmed the edge, a malicious crescent.

"Hey-a, what ya got down there? Picked a helluva place to bring it up at. Did ya cut 'is throat yet?" Willie started the leap down, grabbed an anchored stone and slid down, steadying himself against the side. He dusted his hands and came over to Wilson, his jacket undone and his shirt open even in the raw wind.

"Well, boy, let's see what ya got?" He looked at Wilson expectantly, amused at the novice.

"Sure, I -- it's over here," he turned and strode to the brush. "Right here, Willie, but his throat isn't cut yet. I thought maybe you'd like to show me how." He pointed at the goat.

Willie looked blankly at the dead animal, then at Wilson, then snorted "My Gawd, ya got one of Shorty's goats!" He dropped to one knee and tugged the straggling goatee, starting to laugh and yell at Tommy who had begun plunging down the cliff.

"Hoo-ee, Tommy, Hey, Andrew, come see this man's buck, biggest damn one I ever seen hereabouts!"

They ran over, Tommy first, followed by old man Andrew
who seemed now affected by a day of riding, climbing, and battling the wind. He came stiffly but gamely, clutching the shiny rifle. They stood over Willie, who, nodding and laughing, still knelt beside the goat.

Tommy swung around, opened his mouth to jibe and shut it, seeing Wilson's look of unfiltered hate. He snapped around and ran for the cliff, scrabbling and heaving to climb out and announce his triumph. Andrew swung around, his skull-like face drawn in a sneering grin. He nodded at Wilson. "You did fine job, busted his back neat." He laughed, head tossed back and nostrils gaping.

Willie had stood up and stopped his laughing. He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and came over to Wilson, halting in front of him.

"Well, teacher, you got a goat fer yerself anyhow. Don't know how these tough old bastards taste; they're wild 'uns. Shorty lost 'em a few years ago; they grewed wild and holed up in these caves. Kids come up'n rope up or ketch 'em -- by hand," he stood, hands in his hind pockets, teetering on his heels and grinning with his hard, insinuating smirk.

Wilson hesitated, desiring to smash the rifle across Willie's face, to flail at him despite the meanness he couldn't penetrate or ignorance beyond his power to touch. He breathed more heavily, smothering in frustrated violence, seething with held-back despair. "I thought he was a dëger,"
he spelled the words out, clipped and singly. "I chased him, he was brown, like a deer is. I thought I had a buck. It was a mistake, I couldn't see him clearly -- the wind --" He would have talked on, desperately trying to reason Willie to him, to seek the bond of sympathy even yet, but Willie was already turning away to call at Tommy, now gone, and Andrew, struggling against the cliff.

"She, teacher, she, here, Andy, let's -- aw, hell, he's too far gone -- okay teacher, too bad for you but if you want your billy goat, you gonna have to drag 'im out yerself." He started toward the cliff. "I got as pretty a little buck as ever you seen waitin' for me," he threw back at Wilson and climbed the rocks swift and sure.

In the sudden absence, Wilson went to one knee and hugged the stock of the gun. The memory of rough woolen cloth and the smooth wood of the rifle would eternally touch him with a sense of hate; now the touch of them rubbed his face causing an ache. He wondered suddenly at the unreality of the buffeting wind, rocking him and the coldness of the stone he knelt on. He remembered being so rubbed rawly sensitive only once before, in a class, a college situation, not unusual but always humiliating. He was being chided by the man, a tall, brooding man, a translation, and others sitting around him, secretly pleased he was being held to account because they too hadn't the lesson. The man had gone on and on, spicing his harangue with Greek and
German, and returning always to the minor point at hand, Wilson's misinterpretation.

Now he could stop that vision; the gun and wool and stone were beyond him. He heaved himself up and went at the cliff.

The members of the hunt had gathered at the buckboard. They stood or huddled low against the ground, eating venison sandwiches of heavy meat slabs and thick homemade bread. Coffee was being drunk from tin cups. On the buckboard, three deer clustered in points of legs and antlers and the speckled greyish buff of hide. Willie and John Hardy sat almost under the buckboard, eating, and Hardy nodded while Willie talked, gesturing with his cup or sandwich. Hardy bit off large chunks of his, sipping coffee in an oddly dainty way. He looked up at Wilson walking slowly down the last rise and gestured with the cup at a pot a few feet away.

Wilson walked into them, pale, but toting the rifle over a shoulder and exaggerating his steps to almost a swagger. Tommy's news had reached everyone. Several grinned at him or japed at a neighbor. Behind him came the drawn out "Ha-a-a" of a comedian, probably Tommy himself or brother Everett. Willie saw him and grinned around his bread and meat.

"Hey -- teacher," he called. "C'mon over heah. We got room fer a big game hunter here." He looked around for
his laughs and back at Hardy, chewing openmouthed and winking.

"Coffee, Wilson?" Hardy handed him one of the huge sandwiches and again indicated the coffee pot. The coffee-maker, Kemp, handed him a cup of black, black coffee already bearing the familiar ring of oily-like sediment. "For you, Mr. Hunter." The old man grinned like the rest, relishing the joke mightily.

The sun had finally broken through the bank of grey clouds but offered no warmth. The wind had changed, less violent but more steady. A new smell was in the air, the odor of unpleasant cold and snow coming down out of the Butte and its northern slopes. The horses were bunching and tossing their manes. The talk was of moving down to the river country or continuing a flushing of all the northern range. At this point in the fall, the deer were hunted out or had fled into almost inaccessible country in the foothills of the Sharon Mountains north and west of Federal.

The Sharons had snow already waist deep; this range was rocketed by intensified prairie winds all year. Trails could be blotted into white, cravassed sheets in thirty minutes. The hunting was moving south but three bucks were good hunting by now.

At Willie's urging and bullying prodding, the majority decided to wait along, plying the lines until dark. Seven chose to leave, among them Andrew and Shorty Davis, feeling
his rheumatism, his short bowed legs painfully gripped around Dutch Kolina's pony behind the burly Dutch. Wilson determined to stick with Hardy. Maybe another deer would come to him. The kidding had lessened as the cold increased, every man seeming to turn to his own miseries except Willie. As long as he was close, he dug away, exploiting the dead goat and Wilson's prowess. Hardy had smiled and changed the subject twice and then retreated, letting Willie wear it out alone.

Darkness, coming out of the land itself, brought snow in round spits against his face, as he crouched in the blind waiting and waiting for the wind to cease and the jogging ride to begin and to be in his bed, washed, clean, under sweet sheets and the comforter Grandma Harkins had lent him for a winter's bed. When Hardy touched his shoulder and nodded at the sky, he followed him out, too tired to care about how he held the rifle. He'd unloaded it when Willie had left them and Hardy remarked that the deer wait was futile.

Supper, between the smell of frying venison and Tommy and Everett's sly, "The teacher done killed a bill-y goat" and Arnold's tucked-in tongue, was an ordeal prolonged to the eternal pinochle game that began while the dishes were being cleared away. Arnold and his grandsons sent out to set the farm to rights while Mrs. Harkins declined his offer of dishwashing and began to stir up the bitter fudge candy that would be spread on salt biscuits as the game's refreshment.
He went into his room but she called in, "Don't go a-readin' now, Wilson, hit's almost time fer the Reedys to come." In the mirror over his dresser he saw his own form reflected as a grey-eyed stranger in blue shirt and denim pants. His eyes were strangely recessed, his face drawn and windburned. The seriousness of his square forehead, brown, straight hair, and clear eyes was marred by his short nose, a clownish, babyish feature he hated. Once he'd longed for the hook of his Uncle Jason but he was wrong side of the family for that. To him, the ignoble nose and pouting lips and chin of his small, fluttering mother.

He shut his eyes and grabbed the book, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*; he wanted only bed. He lay down on it, shutting out the yellow-red-pink-green flower sprigged wallpapers, the maroon drapes, and painted hurricane lamp. The book slid from his fingers onto the comforter.

"You, Wilson, my Lord, I never see a body sleep or read more'n you; Reedys is here, c'mon out and be sociable," Mrs. Harkins bustled her bulk out of his doorway as he came awake, dozed, then pushed his feet off the bed and stood up, shaking his head.

The Reedys and Harkins, except for Mame, sat at cards. She held Nels and rocked him gently as she exchanged the postoffice news with Mrs. Harkins' milk-and-egg gossip of the morning. Arnold addressed him as the hunter and commenced to tell Fenton the tale with many "Oh, goah's" and thigh
slaps. Fenton smiled pacifically and ate fudged biscuits. Tommy and Everett began a subtle game between themselves.

"You ever eat a billy goat, Tommy?"

"Nope, but I eat venison out to Willie Smith's, tastes just like that, though."

"How'd you knowed it was venison?"

"Cause it wasn't like mutton, I knowed that taste all right."

"How'd you like that venison at Willie's?"

"Oh, it wasn't ba-a-ad," Everett collapsed with laughter at his extended humor and Tommy grinned and grinned. Wilson was partner to Emmy Harkins and tried to concentrate on the game, ignoring the boys and smiling faintly at Arnold's gibes.

Sunday, the snow had ceased with the wind, patches of the dry snow specks lay in sheltered spaces; the little wind blew them about like dust. Even the sun had appeared brightening the fields lying tan and white. The air was fresh, faintly stirring even at dawn. Arnold's rattling of milk pails and the opening-closing of the spring door woke him. There was the feeling never lost, of being a child awaking in a strange house, fated to listen to morning sounds coming muffled through thin wooden walls. Chairs scraped in the kitchen; the wood box was filled, crashing and rattling to "My land such a noise!" and slowly not cutting through the walls but sifting sinuously around corners, the bacon smell and coffee pungently urging him.
He closed his eyes, resisting, and rolled deeper into the blankets. The error of sudden twisting expressed itself in his body; points of pain struck at his right arm and the backs of his legs while the rest of him throbbed dully. "Oh God!" He fought the blankets, kicking out with his feet to the bed side. Warm, nice-smelling breakfast airs surrounded him, flannel pajamas and wood fire. He sat against the bed waking and dreaming into his clothes.

The stolen peace of a Sunday morning began as Emmy and the Harkins boys left for Baptist Sunday School and Arnold drove them off. He would go into the cafe with Kemp, Shorty Davis, and maybe Easter Colter, sitting at the round tables playing pinochle or weighing sheep to come with sheep past. Wilson waited, book in hand but not reading, until they had driven out of the yard and Shep had resettled himself by the door. His non-church attendance had been accepted, grudgingly, along with that of the other males, but Emmy never ceased working at him. As the schoolteacher, he should have taught Sunday School and assisted Mr. Frye in his ministrations.

The common ground between Elton Frye and him consisted of their both being unmarried and prime targets for Emmy and the Federal Women's Club, the community guardians of morality and temperance. The tall, ruddy Baptist had little use for Wilson, dismissing him as a godless hedonist at their first mutual social affair, the Royan wedding. They
remained passively indifferent, despite Emmy's puckered queries of "I just don't know why you two 'uns don't chum, you both got so many things you know'd together."

He came out of the bedroom and stood, steeping in the isolation, almost a physical presence with him. It was the delightful phantom of Sunday come to release him from the six-day accumulation of filth and smells, non-grammar, compounded ignorance, and soul-killing despair that now could grip him as the dog the rat and shake him ferociously in its mouth.

He stretched up to the door height, reaching for some relief from his sore body. The empty livingroom invited. Dust danced in the blear light from the white sun's reflection in the parlor mirror. Sunday cleanliness was obvious in the plumped pillows on a low, backless couch and the replacing of the old doll in its adult stand on the piano. Its weighted sandbottom indicated age disrespected by the younger Harkins' grandchildren.

He wandered about the house which reeked with powder ghosts of the family, the cataclysms of spoken words, odds and snatches, conversations and curses lingered there. When he was full of aleness, and satiated with the absence of men, he chose his secret pleasure, a strange flute with oriental characters to build fountains of minor sound by; the books of poetry to read aloud from, inflecting, shading, wooing away an hour's time; or the perverted expression of
his physical desire, a bath, wholly and completely, reclining full length in the zinc tub now hanging in the wash house. For his muscles' sake he chose the bath.

It involved pumping and heating water, wrestling the tub off the wall, with Shep's low-rumbling disapproval, and setting it up in the kitchen by the wood stove. The weekly scrubbing down in his room from the basin was supplemented in this way on stray Sundays when itching overcame art for him. Now he poured the last bucket full of hot water in and stripped out of his clothes.

Mrs. Harkins' soap was strong and potent for skin though good against clothes. Soaping and rinsing were accomplished to the tickling against the hour of return by the family. He allowed fifteen minutes to Arnold's final summation of the farm problem to Easter and ten for Emmy's end-of-church chat with Elton Frye. He fell asleep, head just tucked over the rim of the tub.

The cooling water woke him, shivering and alarmed. The time was pushing at 12:45. He grabbed his towels, scrubbing at his chilled body. By 1:00 he had dressed and was bailing the water into the wash tubs to get it out the door. As he splashed the third tubful into the garden, Arnold's rig rounded the house, Emmy beside him, the boys in back, jumping off as soon as they entered the yard. They pushed past him in the doorway in haste to discard their church clothes.

He'd heard the assembly crew discussing religion once.
Their god was a strange being constantly invoked and threatened, blasphemed or defied. He reminded Wilson of an ancient horse destined to be cursed and beaten as its function. Of the rudiments of any faith beyond that, they seemed unaware despite annual awards for their loyal attendance at church school. The other aspect of religious experience was Father Michael's futile attempt to keep the range cows off his Mission's steps. Every Sunday morning, the old man with a broom and bucket washed down the animal's presence. He railed at the altar boys to wipe their heavy farmer's boots before mass and left each Sunday, shoulders sunken a little lower. His oft-repeated cry to his parish "You have nothing, you know nothing, you want nothing - and what is worst of all, you know this and are proud of it..." had cheered Wilson. He looked with freshly inspired contempt at his class the next morning.

As he hung the tub back in place, he remembered the other religious experience, of Easter Colter, the bristling old man with a blind wife who had talked to God, when he'd died, twice. His twice-told deaths which he insisted had occurred some years apart but in which each time he had held long and genial conversations with the Lord had revealed a Plan to him. The Plan involved the old man's farm and how it would provide him with milk and monies not requiring Easter's labor but only that of Cliff and Emery, his two sons. To keep them on the land, Easter had planted Cliff in
a sheep wagon on the most desolate range, packing him provisions month by month. But Cliff had seen Jean Berry one day at shearing when she swung her brown hair and twitched her jean-clad body at him.

He was replaced by young Emory. To keep him content, Easter brought up Jean's kid sister Janet and set her in the same sheep wagon. Still Emory herded and Janet rode a white mare to school each day to flirt with Ernest and giggle with the other girls about the methods, the means, and the men.

Of this Sunday, mild for November, he remembered only the unusual sense of his own being. He was left apart, not invited or inveigled into the family. By sundown, he was mellowed into murmuring tolerance of his especial lot and the misfortune of his environment. He had taken a cup of coffee from the pot at the rear of the stove intending to carry it back to Dreiser and the cave of his room when Shep set up his coughing-barking. Hushing at the dog, he opened the spring door and its heavy storm door and found Willie Smith standing just beyond the gate; near him were two mounted men, faces indistinct in the darkening last light. Behind the foremost rider a trussed shape broke the saddle line.

"How're ye, school-teacher, got some coffee for us?" Willie had his hands stuffed into his jacket pockets, his sombrero shoved back, almost tipping off his head. Before Wilson answered, Willie had advanced to the gate, leaning
against it at the thighs and swore at Shep, now growling in his throat. He leaned up at Wilson, satanically outlined against the fading sky. "I brung ya' a deer," he said, softly, wooingly, "I felt so bad you didn't get yourn yesterday, I had ta get ya' one, there it is," he pointed at the hulk on the rider's horse.

Wilson stood on the threshold, unwilling to commit the act that would take him beyond himself and the place but lured to the brink of it by Willie's outline, mesmerized by the hunter's stance and the first stars marring the clear night belly of the sky. He walked out to the gate, grasping the rough pickets, telling Willie "I don't need your deer, Willie, I've got no one to see to, to tend, just me, you keep the deer," hearing his own voice as soft as Willie's had been. He turned, looking beyond the man's right shoulder at the Colter's light glowing miles away.

Willie's arm came up, he grabbed Wilson's shoulder, turning him roughly back toward himself. "You don't tell me what to do with the animals I get, Boy." His breath hung, puffed in the air an instant, "I give it to you, all you gotta do is dress it out and give me the first steak off'n it, now that ain't askin' much." Wilson jerked away from his hand, retreating a step, "I don't want the damn thing, I can't clean a deer," he would have walked away, back, out of Willie's stupidity or more than that his total lack of feeling, good or bad, but now Willie pushed open the gate
and grabbed his shoulder, jerking him around to face him.

He twisted his gloved fist in Wilson’s shirt, his breath was sickly warm with whiskey that melted into a rank odor of sage, sweat, and horse. "You’re gonna clean yer dear," he started dragging Wilson towards the gate.

Wilson stumbled, caught at Willie and pushed, hearing his shirt ripping where the fist still held him; the movement brought Willie half around, with his right he swung at Wilson, catching him across the cheek and eye, stunning him. He felt himself half pulled, half supported to the rider who swung off the mount and grabbed him from Willie.

"Let’s get the shed open first," Willie led on to the sheep shed down the slanting trail opposite the privy. With his arms gripped behind him Wilson was propelled after the hunter. The burdened rider had dismounted too, unsteady enough to have to stand, hands against his horse before he led it to the shed.

"We need a lantern here, Ernie, go on get one from Arnold," Willie had pulled the shed doors open, the interior gaped just darker than the night about him. Wilson pulled against his guard but that one just sussed and twisted his wrist until he ceased. The sores of his climb and the cold air combined against him. He saw Ernest, the senior tormentor in his classes, drunk enough to even be unaware of his signal honor, staggering up the incline, clutching once at a post, to the house. The appearance of Arnold, hat askew,
and jacket slapping, holding the barn lantern, preceded Ernest's return. The light on the old man's spectacles owled him inhumanly. Wilson listened wearily to Willie's explanation of the funning they were giving the teacher. Arnold stood, looking from face to face, most uncomfortable at Wilson and Willie. Reluctantly he nodded to the question of the shed's utility. His captor suddenly shoved him apart, into a corner of boxes and feed sacks. He had been held by John Colter, his Indian eyes glazed and slitting in the tallow-like glow of the lantern.

They rigged the block and tackle, hooking the split deer spraddled by its hind legs from rope and wire lashings. The ties were secured to the screwed in hooks on the ceiling, the deer slung below, its head drooped and twisted and resting on the ground. The antlers stretched wide and knotty, seeming some fine grained, molded beach wood. It was a six point. A buck's rutting scars gouged deep below the eyes, these gilding into distance, reflecting spots of lantern light like Arnold's glasses. The tongue lolled from the mouth, the spot touching the ground coated dusty. The swollen neck seemed expanded to bursting.

The dry dust of the shed had gathered and puckered about each drop of blood. They remained coated blisters. One of the barn cats had ambled in, across the lit patches, pausing to stretch, lifting the right hind leg, then the left, yawning and licking and finally, sitting, had scooped
its front paw in air and washed it across its face, licking, tugging and mildly biting.

The men had moved around ignoring the cats and Wilson, silent in the feed sacks, no longer resisting, only dully fascinated by the reality of the deer and the cat. Willie, John and Ernest had filled the interior of the shed with their stale breath. He noticed Arnold as near the door as possible and gasping out at the night air now and again.

The cat had finished its washing, it sat looking about, then rose with a half-questioning "mee-ow" and crossed to the deer. Willie was jabbing his knife at the bullet holes, flicking bits of stained flesh away from the diagonally drilled wound at the neck, and stepping back, straight through the ripped shatter of the hindquarters. He withdrew it again, grunting in annoyance at the speckled blade. He swiped it down against his thigh, smoothing it off except for the residue of drying blood and hairs.

The cat had paused and thrust its pink nose out, smel- ling, and bared its fangs, curling back its under jaw, darting its head toward the deer. A drop of blood spilt in front of it, the cat moved, looked at it and back at the deer. He stretched himself up, front paws on the neck, smelling, and put out his tongue to the flesh.

Willie waved the blade at the cat. It jumped sidewise and jogged off to a corner of the shed to sit down and look at him and, occasionally, the deer. Soon it nestled there,
paws tucked under, alert until its eyes slid closed, to
open and close several times until it slept.

Willie looked at his hands; they had stiffened with the
blood on them and the rubbing of the knife in his palm. He
pushed his hat back and left a red dab at the hairline.

"I reckon it's all yours, teacher, you do a good job
now and I'll be back before school to check up on ya' and
let ya' out." He was serious-faced, not grinning. He flicked
the knife at Wilson, it skidded across the straw-littered
dirt floor, stopping some two feet from him.

They clumped by the doors of the shed, looking in; he
was reminded of the men above him on the cliff watching him
but then unaware he was a goat-slayer. They withdrew, the
last Willie, and the doors were slammed; against the wooden
doors the bolt was laid in its iron arms, he became sealed
into the lantern's expanse and the litter of the shed itself.
The hung deer and a sleeping cat to comfort me, he thought,
and a knife.

He stood up, brushing off the dusty straw, aware of
the chill of the barn. They wouldn't leave him all night.
The snow yesterday and this morning was warning enough for
that surely. He picked up the knife curiously; it was a
heavy-bladed buffalo-skinner, most of his older students
wore them on their hips to school. The saw-toothed edge
and curved tip with the other razor edge was standard hunter's
equipment here.
The shed had no windows, the bolted doors alone entered the brown, aging walls. He had no intention of touching the deer. He'd try to sleep, hold out until Willie's return or Arnold gained courage. If he didn't arrive to teach (a secret blessing in itself) Hardy would be forced to take a hand at last. The insistent coolness that lingered between his superior and himself had always offended and puzzled him. Hardy had made him welcome to the extent of issuing tentative invitations to supper which Hardy ate and smoked through replying briefly or not at all to all of Wilson's literary questions. Of the citizens of Federal, he said little beyond a hinted at, somehow mystic understanding of their nature which he did not disclose.

Mrs. Hardy, Carolyn, was a year or so younger than John, was talkative, generally cheerful, most interested in a monologue she carried on concerning her pretty children, dark Jody and broody Jan, and would ply him with coffee, cup after cup, to hear him tell of seas and music. She, too, ignored his life except as it touched hers or her family's, pleased at his attentive attitude to the children, wondering that he could strain so to be away. She did not see his yearning towards her but even more towards her family.

But now he visualized the Hardys, man and wife, coming forward to lift him out of this too, as they would alleviate his minor error of the goat, reducing it to its infinite
perspective, a thing to be smiled at, a thing to be forgotten.

He was outrightly shivering now. He stood up and began moving about the shed. He pushed against the double doors; they gave an inch or two and squealed as old wood and metal could under stress. The cat had roused and sat, tail slowly pendulum-like, switching back and forth. It watched his swinging at the doors, then stretched itself and began the washing once more.

He turned and faced the deer. The raw gash of the opened animal was in front of him. He tried to remember the deer carcasses he'd seen hung from trees, slung in salt sacks or swaying in barns. Only visions of shriveled liver-red flesh with strips of fat came to him. From the moving deer to the eaten deer there was no recollection. Still, looking at the thing, he couldn't understand how he was to have dressed out the deer, it seemed cleaned and ready to him. Except for the hide. The sudden prospect of skinning the buck presented itself and was not unpleasant. He wondered about the time, knowing only that the lantern would extinguish sometime and then the night would exist around him within and without the shed.

But the temptation to undo the deer overcame his caution. He lifted the knife, probing in uncertain jabs at the skin about the ribs, afraid to thrust too hard for fear of committing some sin against the code of Willie's skill.
He, finally, by holding a section of skin in his fingers and snipping with the hooked end of the skinner, separated the hide from the flesh and received the strange sensation of ripping them apart. As he worked standing as far from the draft at the door as he could and, from time to time, glancing over at the lantern, he became obsessed with the flash of the blade as he wrought it across the air. The fine, bright streak of blood lying along the keen edge held him. He flailed the knife, streaking the bright blood across the shed's light.

By the time the lantern hissed out, the ground below the deer was littered with rusty scraps of flesh coated hide. He had loosened a fatty flap of hide, cut down, away from the legs and body, allowing it to drape there, held by the stretched, remaining membrane of the neck and head. The darkness was so swift and complete he remained motionless, waiting for a return of light. Finally he dropped the knife and moved back, bumping the doors emitting their squealing groan. He groped about the wall to the right, working his way back towards the corner of the feed sacks. The boxes and equipment impeded him until he struck soft cloth and straw underfoot. He knelt among the sacks, arranging and ordering them into warmth against the night.

The bolt's being lifted and scraped aroused him from his latest dream of red and black. The noise set off his shivering and made him unable to act at once. A lantern
entrance then took out his pipe and moved into the room.

readiness for the drive to begin. Harry stood at the
bed, trying to stay until every word of the
announcing announcer was

When John Hardy came, Milton was packed. Tying on the
to the doors and left the shed.

bent top; around stood, rooted, until Milton turned back

light, he turned at the window, sitting in the hand into the

surrounding around to around a face, in the

by your support, and showed away, saying at the end mouth.

bent, I'll tell you, he snapped the head against the

hit the shoulder and pulled him up against the wall, "you nutri

Milton leaned over Milton, our rights steadied, exposed

Milton.

From the window and into the hard dirt, the lantern bobbed

cheese out Milton's dropped earrings, snapping it away

the wall, where he bunched, seating against it, around had

word Milton's fall. He came around and bunched Milton into

The surprise of the man hatted Milton, swingin the two;

the force pushed him past Milton's shoulder, into the dirt.

run, caught Milton across the mouth with his clenched fist.

Milton rose, out of the berth of sheets and, in a short

...the between his fingers.

rumpled and sleep-worn then usual. He had a disheveled glow

and sleep-worn. He had no hat or jacket. He looked more

He is above the need, was around behind him, Milton, Gent

pinched him and advanced across the shed, behind it, stood
pushing the desk chair opposite the bed. He lit, and puffed
a cloud of smoke into the haze of the darkening room.
"I've got your money." He fished the bills out of his
shirt pocket, laying them on the table. "I thought you'd
want cash instead of the warrant." He cleared his throat,
sucked the pipe, then taking it from his lips, looked at
the sunset through the window near him.

"I don't think anything I can tell you will make a
difference here. I think you know the thing you faced; I
did once, but—" He shrugged that off. Wilson watched him
with his one open eye, lying still and containing all the
lights that danced within his head, reducing them to
minimums he could cope with. One pain at a time, he told
himself, just one each instant, including you, Hardy.

Hardy made another attempt at him, "Where are you
going now?"

He spoke slowly, muffling the words even beyond his
bruised mouth, "I'm going home, to Raleigh, for awhile,
need some money now, to come back, Hardy."

Hardy's expression reflected a flicker of something
more than surprise, "You're a fool," he said, looking now
at him directly. "You'll ruin and rot here," he put on
his little quick smile, "like Fenton?"

"Like you, Mr. Hardy?" The big man stared at him,
then laughed slightly, standing up, moving aside the
chair. He stopped by the door.
"I think you'll do well to find a life, not here, don't waste yourself. Carolyn says goodbye, good luck."

The November fields were wind-stripped, early snow spotting the hillocks and the alkaline crust of the dams. Arnold's rig labored over each twisted rut, the brown horse shaggy with winter fur, bouncing off its huge feet each step. Black Butte loomed out of the haze of imminent snow, casting its pall over the declining shacks of Federal.
EPISODE

I want to be buried in ground, brown earth, crumbling and rankly musk. The fields near Black Butte are my choice of burying place. Black Butte is high and granite, limestone and cinderstone, weed and tuft; a nasty place to lean against the wind on raw spring days; I hate and love it. Odi et amo.

Day in and out, I've gutted these fields, raped them with a plow, enriched them with a cow's dung and sent the fine, soft dust of them to the river breaks to mud up the coffee, tobacco juice, and lye-leached water of the Koda river. Indians called it friend; it's a fiend, the northerm side knows best; they've been flooded out, spring upon spring, and still sit, battened in their chicken shacks, dead lambs bloating in the sacked branches of the southmost tree. God hates those squaw men and back-strapped women, breeding and sotting. A kerosene lamp is high heaven to them, God's curse. Job was a good-humored man by them, The reservation Indian is formed in God's image. They can only sing the old turtle songs and suck beer through two black and yellow teeth.

They say the street of Limeroad is wet, Saturday nights, women lie in it, coupling for beers and chew. If the bucks don't teepee creep there, they'd go to town and ravish girls. The girls are in Limeroad on Little Mountain-- Saturday shows and Sunday drunks.
for weeping women the mission was full of conversation. Very
the half hour of him in the dam box. The wave was full
for, they laid him in a box, buses and wood and cattle
but that’s more true. Here we’re purely white! —
he watched the rounds with him, and talked on the whole
after blue eyes. And he stood, the doc’s kid, town cop.
woman’s eye? I guess, that’s dark, prompt brown hair and
he cottered to a white woman too. He was a good man in a
They say he read some in the youth, too much? they say,
the white house and drank some more.
end dress. Then he’d tell away, back a hundred years to
my clothes, he’d tear, I’m estranged. My land, with shades
him what he was about he was done. I, I’m free!
the Grindle Runner teach the wife and there, a
common, they’d spint and sprawl the eel, and me’dleased at
against the second time around. A SfP maudume’s like a small
take the collection to the south field. Time, we up and kill
Irish, pinning it off, and sunders, un Esringen morninges he’d
green, white room, bared and naked at times and drink the
daughter. He didn’t do nothing but the one in the back in a
women too. Maybe she was crooked, an octoroon or planter’s
Johnny. A broken breed, Irish and Indian and some southern
Johnny, a broken breed, Irish and Indian and some southern
he thought of that. A hundred dollars for a quarter
Johnny. O, died last week. He was thirty-two and thin.
Youngman spoke the piece; his girl wanted to slip a necklace over Jon, he held her wrist tight till they shouldered the box and carried it to the black hearse. The graveyard's by the highway, another tourist attraction.

By God, tonight's cold. It's almost midnight now. The sky is clear, dark and starry for a million miles. The air's bell clear. The kids are racin' cars at the arena. Door slamming, and laughing, beer bust tonight.