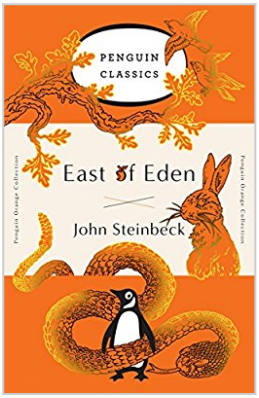

East of Eden

By John Steinbeck

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A masterpiece of Biblical scope, and the magnum opus of one of America's most enduring authors, in a commemorative hardcover edition

In his journal, Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck called *East of Eden* "the first book," and indeed it has the primordial power and simplicity of myth. Set in the rich farmland of California's Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel.

The masterpiece of Steinbeck's later years, *East of Eden* is a work in which Steinbeck created his most mesmerizing characters and explored his most enduring themes: the mystery of identity, the inexplicability of love, and the murderous consequences of love's absence. Adapted for the 1955 film directed by Elia Kazan introducing James Dean, and read by thousands as the book that brought Oprah's Book Club back, East of Eden has remained vitally present in American culture for over half a century.

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Editorial Review

Review
"A fantasia and myth . . . a strange and original work of art."
-- *The New York Times Book Review* (*New York Times Book Review*)

About the Author
No writer is more quintessentially American than John Steinbeck. Born in 1902 in Salinas, California, Steinbeck attended Stanford University before working at a series of mostly blue-collar jobs and embarking on his literary career. Profoundly committed to social progress, he used his writing to raise issues of labor exploitation and the plight of the common man, penning some of the greatest American novels of the twentieth century and winning such prestigious awards as the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. He received the Nobel Prize in 1962, "for his realistic and imaginative writings, combining as they do sympathetic humour and keen social perception." Today, more than thirty years after his death, he remains one of America's greatest writers and cultural figures.

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John Steinbeck Centennial Edition (1902-2002)

EAST OF EDEN

Born in Salinas, California, in 1902, John Steinbeck grew up in a fertile agricultural valley about twenty-five

miles from the Pacific Coast—and both valley and coast would serve as settings for some of his best fiction. In 1919 he went to Stanford University, where he intermittently enrolled in literature and writing courses until he left in 1925 without taking a degree. During the next five years he supported himself as a laborer and journalist in New York City and then as a caretaker for a Lake Tahoe estate, all the time working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). After marriage and a move to Pacific Grove, he published two California fictions, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), and worked on short stories later collected in *The Long Valley* (1938). Popular success and financial security came only with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), stories about Monterey's paisanos. A ceaseless experimenter throughout his career, Steinbeck changed courses regularly. Three powerful novels of the late 1930s focused on the California laboring class: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and the book considered by many his finest, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Early in the 1940s, Steinbeck became a film-maker with *The Forgotten Village* (1941) and a serious student of marine biology with *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He devoted his services to the war, writing *Bombs Away* (1942) and the controversial play-novelette *The Moon Is Down* (1942). *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *The Pearl* (1947), *A Russian Journal* (1948), another experimental drama, *Burning Bright* (1950), and *The Log from the* Sea of Cortez (1951) preceded publication of the monumental *East of Eden* (1952), an ambitious saga of the Salinas Valley and his own family's history. The last decades of his life were spent in New York City and Sag Harbor with his third wife, with whom he traveled widely. Later books include *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (1957), *Once There Was a War* (1958), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), *America and Americans* (1966), and the posthumously published *Journal of a Novel: The* East of Eden *Letters* (1969), *Viva Zapata!* (1975), *The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights* (1976), and *Working Days: The Journals of* The Grapes of Wrath (1989). He died in 1968, having won a Nobel Prize in 1962.

Throughout his life Steinbeck signed his letters with his personal "Pigasus" logo, symbolizing himself "a lumbering soul but trying to fly." The Latin motto *Ad Astra Per Alia Porci* translates "To the stars on the wings of a pig."

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PASCAL COVICI

Dear Pat,

You came upon me carving some kind of little figure out of wood and you said, "Why don't you make something for me?"

I asked you what you wanted, and you said, "A box."

"What for?"

"To put things in."

"What things?"

"Whatever you have," you said.

Well, here's your box. Nearly everything I have is in it, and it is not full. Pain and excitement are in it, and feeling good or bad and evil thoughts and good thoughts—the pleasure of design and some despair and the indescribable joy of creation.

And on top of these are all the gratitude and love I have for you.

And still the box is not full.

JOHN

PART ONE

Chapter 1

[1]

THE SALINAS VALLEY is in Northern California. It is a long narrow swale between two ranges of mountains, and the Salinas River winds and twists up the center until it falls at last into Monterey Bay.

I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers. I remember where a toad may live and what time the birds awaken in the summer—and what trees and seasons smelled like—how people looked and walked and smelled even. The memory of odors is very rich.

I remember that the Gabilan Mountains to the east of the valley were light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation, so that you wanted to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother. They were beckoning mountains with a brown grass love. The Santa Lucias stood up against the sky to the west and kept the valley from the open sea, and they were dark and brooding—unfriendly and dangerous. I always found in myself a dread of west and a love of east. Where I ever got such an idea I cannot say, unless it could be that the morning came over the peaks of the Gabilans and the night drifted back from the ridges of the Santa Lucias. It may be that the birth and death of the day had some part in my feeling about the two ranges of mountains.

From both sides of the valley little streams slipped out of the hill canyons and fell into the bed of the Salinas River. In the winter of wet years the streams ran full-freshet, and they swelled the river until sometimes it raged and boiled, bank full, and then it was a destroyer. The river tore the edges of the farm lands and washed whole acres down; it toppled barns and houses into itself, to go floating and bobbing away. It trapped cows and pigs and sheep and drowned them in its muddy brown water and carried them to the sea. Then when the late spring came, the river drew in from its edges and the sand banks appeared. And in the summer the river didn't run at all above ground. Some pools would be left in the deep swirl places under a high bank. The tules and grasses grew back, and willows straightened up with the flood debris in their upper branches. The Salinas was only a part-time river. The summer sun drove it underground. It was not a fine river at all, but it was the only one we had and so we boasted about it—how dangerous it was in a wet winter and how dry it was in a dry summer. You can boast about anything if it's all you have. Maybe the less you have, the more you are required to boast.

The floor of the Salinas Valley, between the ranges and below the foothills, is level because this valley used to be the bottom of a hundred-mile inlet from the sea. The river mouth at Moss Landing was centuries ago the entrance to this long inland water. Once, fifty miles down the valley, my father bored a well. The drill came up first with topsoil and then with gravel and then with white sea sand full of shells and even pieces of whalebone. There were twenty feet of sand and then black earth again, and even a piece of redwood, that imperishable wood that does not rot. Before the inland sea the valley must have been a forest. And those things had happened right under our feet. And it seemed to me sometimes at night that I could feel both the sea and the redwood forest before it.

On the wide level acres of the valley the topsoil lay deep and fertile. It required only a rich winter of rain to make it break forth in grass and flowers. The spring flowers in a wet year were unbelievable. The whole valley floor, and the foothills too, would be carpeted with lupins and poppies. Once a woman told me that colored flowers would seem more bright if you added a few white flowers to give the colors definition. Every petal of blue lupin is edged with white, so that a field of lupins is more blue than you can imagine. And mixed with these were splashes of California poppies. These too are of a burning color—not orange, not gold, but if pure gold were liquid and could raise a cream, that golden cream might be like the color of the poppies. When their season was over the yellow mustard came up and grew to a great height. When my grandfather came into the valley the mustard was so tall that a man on horseback showed only his head above the yellow flowers. On the uplands the grass would be strewn with buttercups, with hen-and-chickens, with black-centered yellow violets. And a little later in the season there would be red and yellow stands of Indian paintbrush. These were the flowers of the open places exposed to the sun.

Under the live oaks, shaded and dusky, the maidenhair flourished and gave a good smell, and under the mossy banks of the water courses whole clumps of five-fingered ferns and goldy-backs hung down. Then there were harebells, tiny lanterns, cream white and almost sinful looking, and these were so rare and magical that a child, finding one, felt singled out and special all day long.

When June came the grasses headed out and turned brown, and the hills turned a brown which was not brown but a gold and saffron and red—an indescribable color. And from then on until the next rains the earth dried and the streams stopped. Cracks appeared on the level ground. The Salinas River sank under its sand. The wind blew down the valley, picking up dust and straws, and grew stronger and harsher as it went south. It stopped in the evening. It was a rasping nervous wind, and the dust particles cut into a man's skin and burned his eyes. Men working in the fields wore goggles and tied handkerchiefs around their noses to keep the dirt out.

The valley land was deep and rich, but the foothills wore only a skin of topsoil no deeper than the grass roots; and the farther up the hills you went, the thinner grew the soil, with flints sticking through, until at the brush line it was a kind of dry flinty gravel that reflected the hot sun blindingly.

I have spoken of the rich years when the rainfall was plentiful. But there were dry years too, and they put a terror on the valley. The water came in a thirty-year cycle. There would be five or six wet and wonderful years when there might be nineteen to twenty-five inches of rain, and the land would shout with grass. Then would come six or seven pretty good years of twelve to sixteen inches of rain. And then the dry years would come, and sometimes there would be only seven or eight inches of rain. The land dried up and the grasses headed out miserably a few inches high and great bare scabby places appeared in the valley. The live oaks got a crusty look and the sage-brush was gray. The land cracked and the springs dried up and the cattle listlessly nibbled dry twigs. Then the farmers and the ranchers would be filled with disgust for the Salinas Valley. The cows would grow thin and sometimes starve to death. People would have to haul water in barrels to their farms just for drinking. Some families would sell out for nearly nothing and move away. And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way.

[2]

And that was the long Salinas Valley. Its history was like that of the rest of the state. First there were Indians, an inferior breed without energy, inventiveness, or culture, a people that lived on grubs and grasshoppers and shellfish, too lazy to hunt or fish. They ate what they could pick up and planted nothing. They pounded bitter acorns for flour. Even their warfare was a weary pantomime.

Then the hard, dry Spaniards came exploring through, greedy and realistic, and their greed was for gold or God. They collected souls as they collected jewels. They gathered mountains and valleys, rivers and whole horizons, the way a man might now gain title to building lots. These tough, dried-up men moved restlessly up the coast and down. Some of them stayed on grants as large as principalities, given to them by Spanish kings who had not the faintest idea of the gift. These first owners lived in poor feudal settlements, and their cattle ranged freely and multiplied. Periodically the owners killed the cattle for their hides and tallow and left the meat to the vultures and coyotes.

When the Spaniards came they had to give everything they saw a name. This is the first duty of any explorer—a duty and a privilege. You must name a thing before you can note it on your hand-drawn map. Of course they were religious people, and the men who could read and write, who kept the records and drew the maps, were the tough untiring priests who traveled with the soldiers. Thus the first names of places were saints' names or religious holidays celebrated at stopping places. There are many saints, but they are not

inexhaustible, so that we find repetitions in the first namings. We have San Miguel, St. Michael, San Ardo, San Bernardo, San Benito, San Lorenzo, San Carlos, San Francisquito. And then the holidays—Natividad, the Nativity; Nacimiente, the Birth; Soledad, the Solitude. But places were also named from the way the expedition felt at the time: Buena Esperenza, good hope; Buena Vista because the view was beautiful; and Chualar because it was pretty. The descriptive names followed: Paso de los Robles because of the oak trees; Los Laureles for the laurels; Tularcitos because of the reeds in the swamp; and Salinas for the alkali which was white as salt.

Then places were named for animals and birds seen—Gabilanes for the hawks which flew in those mountains; Topo for the mole; Los Gatos for the wild cats. The suggestions sometimes came from the nature of the place itself: Tassajara, a cup and saucer; Laguna Seca, a dry lake; Corral de Tierra for a fence of earth; Paraiso because it was like Heaven.

Then the Americans came—more greedy because there were more of them. They took the lands, remade the laws to make their titles good. And farmholds spread over the land, first in the valleys and then up the foothill slopes, small wooden houses roofed with redwood shakes, corrals of split poles. Wherever a trickle of water came out of the ground a house sprang up and a family began to grow and multiply. Cuttings of red geraniums and rosebushes were planted in the dooryards. Wheel tracks of buckboards replaced the trails, and fields of corn and barley and wheat squared out of the yellow mustard. Every ten miles along the traveled routes a general store and blacksmith shop happened, and these became the nuclei of little towns, Bradley, King City, Greenfield.

The Americans had a greater tendency to name places for people than had the Spanish. After the valleys were settled the names of places refer more to things which happened there, and these to me are the most fascinating of all names because each name suggests a story that has been forgotten. I think of Bolsa Nueva, a new purse; Morocojo, a lame Moor (who was he and how did he get there?); Wild Horse Canyon and Mustang Grade and Shirt Tail Canyon. The names of places carry a charge of the people who named them, reverent or irreverent, descriptive, either poetic or disparaging. You can name anything San Lorenzo, but Shirt Tail Canyon or the Lame Moor is something quite different.

The wind whistled over the settlements in the afternoon, and the farmers began to set out mile-long windbreaks of eucalyptus to keep the plowed topsoil from blowing away. And this is about the way the Salinas Valley was when my grandfather brought his wife and settled in the foothills to the east of King City.

Chapter 2

[1]

I MUST DEPEND ON HEARSAY, on old photographs, on stories told, and on memories which are hazy and mixed with fable in trying to tell you about the Hamiltons. They were not eminent people, and there are few records concerning them except for the usual papers on birth, marriage, land ownership, and death.

Young Samuel Hamilton came from the north of Ireland and so did his wife. He was the son of small farmers, neither rich nor poor, who had lived on one landhold and in one stone house for many hundreds of years. The Hamiltons managed to be remarkably well educated and well read; and, as is so often true in that green country, they were connected and related to very great people and very small people, so that one cousin might be a baronet and another cousin a beggar. And of course they were descended from the ancient kings of Ireland, as every Irishman is.

Why Samuel left the stone house and the green acres of his ancestors I do not know. He was never a political man, so it is not likely a charge of rebellion drove him out, and he was scrupulously honest, which eliminates

the police as prime movers. There was a whisper—not even a rumor but rather an unsaid feeling—in my family that it was love drove him out, and not love of the wife he married. But whether it was too successful love or whether he left in pique at unsuccessful love, I do not know. We always preferred to think it was the former. Samuel had good looks and charm and gaiety. It is hard to imagine that any country Irish girl refused him.

He came to the Salinas Valley full-blown and hearty, full of inventions and energy. His eyes were very blue, and when he was tired one of them wandered outward a little. He was a big man but delicate in a way. In the dusty business of ranching he seemed always immaculate. His hands were clever. He was a good blacksmith and carpenter and wood-carver, and he could improvise anything with bits of wood and metal. He was forever inventing a new way of doing an old thing and doing it better and quicker, but he never in his whole life had any talent for making money. Other men who had the talent took Samuel's tricks and sold them and grew rich, but Samuel barely made wages all his life.

I don't know what directed his steps toward the Salinas Valley. It was an unlikely place for a man from a green country to come to, but he came about thirty years before the turn of the century and he brought with him his tiny Irish wife, a tight hard little woman humor-less as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.

I do not know where Samuel met her, how he wooed her, married. I think there must have been some other girl printed somewhere in his heart, for he was a man of love and his wife was not a woman to show her feelings. And in spite of this, in all the years from his youth to his death in the Salinas Valley, there was no hint that Samuel ever went to any other woman.

When Samuel and Liza came to the Salinas Valley all the level land was taken, the rich bottoms, the little fertile creases in the hills, the forests, but there was still marginal land to be homesteaded, and in the barren hills, to the east of what is now King City, Samuel Hamilton homesteaded.

He followed the usual practice. He took a quarter-section for himself and a quarter-section for his wife, and since she was pregnant he took a quarter-section for the child. Over the years nine children were born, four boys and five girls, and with each birth another quarter-section was added to the ranch, and that makes eleven quarter-sections, or seventeen hundred and sixty acres.

If the land had been any good the Hamiltons would have been rich people. But the acres were harsh and dry. There were no springs, and the crust of topsoil was so thin that the flinty bones stuck through. Even the sagebrush struggled to exist, and the oaks were dwarfed from lack of moisture. Even in reasonably good years there was so little feed that the cattle kept thin running about looking for enough to eat. From their barren hills the Hamiltons could look down to the west and see the richness of the bottom land and the greenness around the Salinas River.

Samuel built his house with his own hands, and he built a barn and a blacksmith shop. He found quite soon that even if he had ten thousand acres of hill country he could not make a living on the bony soil without water. His clever hands built a well-boring rig, and he bored wells on the lands of luckier men. He invented and built a threshing machine and moved through the bottom farms in harvest time, threshing the grain his own farm would not raise. And in his shop he sharpened plows and mended harrows and welded broken axles and shod horses. Men from all over the district brought him tools to mend and to improve. Besides, they loved to hear Samuel talk of the world and its thinking, of the poetry and philosophy that were going on outside the Salinas Valley. He had a rich deep voice, good both in song and in speech, and while he had no brogue there was a rise and a lilt and a cadence to his talk that made it sound sweet in the ears of the taciturn farmers from the valley bottom. They brought whisky too, and out of sight of the kitchen window and the

disapproving eye of Mrs. Hamilton they took hot nips from the bottle and nibbled cuds of green wild anise to cover the whisky breath. It was a bad day when three or four men were not standing around the forge, listening to Samuel's hammer and his talk. They called him a comical genius and carried his stories carefully home, and they wondered at how the stories spilled out on the way, for they never sounded the same repeated in their own kitchens.

Samuel should have been rich from his well rig and his threshing machine and his shop, but he had no gift for business. His customers, always pressed for money, promised payment after harvest, and then after Christmas, and then after—until at last they forgot it. Samuel had no gift for reminding them. And so the Hamiltons stayed poor.

The children came along as regularly as the years. The few overworked doctors of the country did not often get to the ranches for a birth unless the joy turned nightmare and went on for several days. Samuel Hamilton delivered all his own children and tied the cords neatly, spanked the bottoms and cleaned up the mess. When his youngest was born with some small obstruction and began to turn black, Samuel put his mouth against the baby's mouth and blew air in and sucked it out until the baby could take over for himself. Samuel's hands were so good and gentle that neighbors from twenty miles away would call on him to help with a birth. And he was equally good with mare, cow, or woman.

Samuel had a great black book on an available shelf and it had gold letters on the cover—*Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine*. Some pages were bent and beat up from use, and others were never opened to the light. To look through *Dr. Gunn* is to know the Hamiltons' medical history. These are the used sections—broken bones, cuts, bruises, mumps, measles, backache, scarlet fever, diphtheria, rheumatism, female complaints, hernia, and of course everything to do with pregnancy and the birth of children. The Hamiltons must have been either lucky or moral for the sections on gonorrhea and syphilis were never opened.

Samuel had no equal for soothing hysteria and bringing quiet to a frightened child. It was the sweetness of his tongue and the tenderness of his soul. And just as there was a cleanness about his body, so there was a cleanness in his thinking. Men coming to his blacksmith shop to talk and listen dropped their cursing for a while, not from any kind of restraint but automatically, as though this were not the place for it.

Samuel kept always a foreignness. Perhaps it was in the cadence of his speech, and this had the effect of making men, and women too, tell him things they would not tell to relatives or close friends. His slight strangeness set him apart and made him safe as a repository.

Liza Hamilton was a very different kettle of Irish. Her head was small and round and it held small round convictions. She had a button nose and a hard little set-back chin, a gripping jaw set on its course even though the angels of God argued against it.

Liza was a good plain cook, and her house—it was always her house—was brushed and pummeled and washed. Bearing her children did not hold her back very much—two weeks at the most she had to be careful. She must have had a pelvic arch of whalebone, for she had big children one after the other.

Liza had a finely developed sense of sin. Idleness was a sin, and card playing, which was a kind of idleness to her. She was suspicious of fun whether it involved dancing or singing or even laughter. She felt that people having a good time were wide open to the devil. And this was a shame, for Samuel was a laughing man, but I guess Samuel was wide open to the devil. His wife protected him whenever she could.

She wore her hair always pulled tight back and bunned behind in a hard knot. And since I can't remember how she dressed, it must have been that she wore clothes that matched herself exactly. She had no spark of humor and only occasionally a blade of cutting wit. She frightened her grandchildren because she had no

weakness. She suffered bravely and uncomplainingly through life, convinced that that was the way her God wanted everyone to live. She felt that rewards came later.

[2]

When people first came to the West, particularly from the owned and fought-over farmlets of Europe, and saw so much land to be had for the signing of a paper and the building of a foundation, an itching land-greed seemed to come over them. They wanted more and more land—good land if possible, but land anyway. Perhaps they had filaments of memory of feudal Europe where great families became and remained great because they owned things. The early settlers took up land they didn't need and couldn't use; they took up worthless land just to own it. And all proportions changed. A man who might have been well-to-do on ten acres in Europe was rat-poor on two thousand in California.

It wasn't very long until all the land in the barren hills near King City and San Ardo was taken up, and ragged families were scattered through the hills, trying their best to scratch a living from the thin flinty soil. They and the coyotes lived clever, despairing, submarginal lives. They landed with no money, no equipment, no tools, no credit, and particularly with no knowledge of the new country and no technique for using it. I don't know whether it was a divine stupidity or a great faith that let them do it. Surely such venture is nearly gone from the world. And the families did survive and grow. They had a tool or a weapon that is also nearly gone, or perhaps it is only dormant for a while. It is argued that because they believed thoroughly in a just, moral God they could put their faith there and let the smaller securities take care of themselves. But I think that because they trusted themselves and respected themselves as individuals, because they knew beyond doubt that they were valuable and potentially moral units—because of this they could give God their own courage and dignity and then receive it back. Such things have disappeared perhaps because men do not trust themselves any more, and when that happens there is nothing left except perhaps to find some strong sure man, even though he may be wrong, and to dangle from his coattails.

While many people came to the Salinas Valley penniless, there were others who, having sold out somewhere else, arrived with money to start a new life. These usually bought land, but good land, and built their houses of planed lumber and had carpets and colored-glass diamond panes in their windows. There were numbers of these families and they got the good land of the valley and cleared the yellow mustard away and planted wheat.

Such a man was Adam Trask.

Chapter 3

[1]

ADAM TRASK WAS BORN on a farm on the outskirts of a little town which was not far from a big town in Connecticut. He was an only son, and he was born six months after his father was mustered into a Connecticut regiment in 1862. Adam's mother ran the farm, bore Adam, and still had time to embrace a primitive theosophy. She felt that her husband would surely be killed by the wild and barbarous rebels, and she prepared herself to get in touch with him in what she called the beyond. He came home six weeks after Adam was born. His right leg was off at the knee. He stumped in on a crude wooden leg he himself had carved out of beechwood. And already it was splitting. He had in his pocket and placed on the parlor table the lead bullet they had given him to bite while they cut off his frayed leg.

Adam's father Cyrus was something of a devil—had always been wild—drove a two-wheeled cart too fast, and managed to make his wooden leg seem jaunty and desirable. He had enjoyed his military career, what there was of it. Being wild by nature, he had liked his brief period of training and the drinking and gambling

and whoring that went with it. Then he marched south with a group of replacements, and he enjoyed that too—seeing the country and stealing chickens and chasing rebel girls up into the haystacks. The gray, despairing weariness of protracted maneuvers and combat did not touch him. The first time he saw the enemy was at eight o'clock one spring morning, and at eight-thirty he was hit in the right leg by a heavy slug that mashed and splintered the bones beyond repair. Even then he was lucky, for the rebels retreated and the field surgeons moved up immediately. Cyrus Trask did have his five minutes of horror while they cut the shreds away and sawed the bone off square and burned the open flesh. The toothmarks in the bullet proved that. And there was considerable pain while the wound healed under the unusually septic conditions in the hospitals of that day. But Cyrus had vitality and swagger. While he was carving his beechwood leg and hobbling about on a crutch, he contracted a particularly virulent dose of the clap from a Negro girl who whistled at him from under a pile of lumber and charged him ten cents. When he had his new leg, and painfully knew his condition, he hobbled about for days, looking for the girl. He told his bunkmates what he was going to do when he found her. He planned to cut off her ears and her nose with his pocketknife and get his money back. Carving on his wooden leg, he showed his friends how he would cut her. "When I finish her she'll be a funny-looking bitch," he said. "I'll make her so a drunk Indian won't take out after her." His light of love must have sensed his intentions, for he never found her. By the time Cyrus was released from the hospital and the army, his gonorrhea was dried up. When he got home to Connecticut there remained only enough of it for his wife.

Mrs. Trask was a pale, inside-herself woman. No heat of sun ever reddened her cheeks, and no open laughter raised the corners of her mouth. She used religion as a therapy for the ills of the world and of herself, and she changed the religion to fit the ill. When she found that the theosophy she had developed for communication with a dead husband was not necessary, she cast about for some new unhappiness. Her search was quickly rewarded by the infection Cyrus brought home from the war. And as soon as she was aware that a condition existed, she devised a new theology. Her god of communication became a god of vengeance—to her the most satisfactory deity she had devised so far—and, as it turned out, the last. It was quite easy for her to attribute her condition to certain dreams she had experienced while her husband was away. But the disease was not punishment enough for her nocturnal philandering. Her new god was an expert in punishment. He demanded of her a sacrifice. She searched her mind for some proper egotistical humility and almost happily arrived at the sacrifice—herself. It took her two weeks to write her last letter with revisions and corrected spelling. In it she confessed to crimes she could not possibly have committed and admitted faults far beyond her capacity. And then, dressed in a secretly made shroud, she went out on a moonlight night and drowned herself in a pond so shallow that she had to get down on her knees in the mud and hold her head under water. This required great will power. As the warm unconsciousness finally crept over her, she was thinking with some irritation of how her white lawn shroud would have mud down the front when they pulled her out in the morning. And it did.

Cyrus Trask mourned for his wife with a keg of whisky and three old army friends who had dropped in on their way home to Maine. Baby Adam cried a good deal at the beginning of the wake, for the mourners, not knowing about babies, had neglected to feed him. Cyrus soon solved the problem. He dipped a rag in whisky and gave it to the baby to suck, and after three or four dippings young Adam went to sleep. Several times during the mourning period he awakened and complained and got the dipped rag again and went to sleep. The baby was drunk for two days and a half. Whatever may have happened in his developing brain, it proved beneficial to his metabolism: from that two and a half days he gained an iron health. And when at the end of three days his father finally went out and bought a goat, Adam drank the milk greedily, vomited, drank more, and was on his way. His father did not find the reaction alarming, since he was doing the same thing.

Within a month Cyrus Trask's choice fell on the seventeen-year-old daughter of a neighboring farmer. The courtship was quick and realistic. There was no doubt in anybody's mind about his intentions. They were honorable and reasonable. Her father abetted the courtship. He had two younger daughters, and Alice, the

eldest, was seventeen. This was her first proposal.

Cyrus wanted a woman to take care of Adam. He needed someone to keep house and cook, and a servant cost money. He was a vigorous man and needed the body of a woman, and that too cost money—unless you were married to it. Within two weeks Cyrus had wooed, wedded, bedded, and impregnated her. His neighbors did not find his action hasty. It was quite normal in that day for a man to use up three or four wives in a normal lifetime.

Alice Trask had a number of admirable qualities. She was a deep scrubber and a corner-cleaner in the house. She was not very pretty, so there was no need to watch her. Her eyes were pale, her complexion sallow, and her teeth crooked, but she was extremely healthy and never complained during her pregnancy. Whether she liked children or not no one ever knew. She was not asked, and she never said anything unless she was asked. From Cyrus's point of view this was possibly the greatest of her virtues. She never offered any opinion or statement, and when a man was talking she gave a vague impression of listening while she went about doing the housework.

The youth, inexperience, and taciturnity of Alice Trask all turned out to be assets for Cyrus. While he continued to operate his farm as such farms were operated in the neighborhood, he entered on a new career—that of the old soldier. And that energy which had made him wild now made him thoughtful. No one now outside of the War Department knew the quality and duration of his service. His wooden leg was at once a certificate of proof of his soldiering and a guarantee that he wouldn't ever have to do it again. Timidly he began to tell Alice about his campaigns, but as his technique grew so did his battles. At the very first he knew he was lying, but it was not long before he was equally sure that every one of his stories was true. Before he had entered the service he had not been much interested in warfare; now he bought every book about war, read every report, subscribed to the New York papers, studied maps. His knowledge of geography had been shaky and his information about the fighting nonexistent; now he became an authority. He knew not only the battles, movements, campaigns, but also the units involved, down to the regiments, their colonels, and where they originated. And from telling he became convinced that he had been there.

All of this was a gradual development, and it took place while Adam was growing to boyhood and his young half-brother behind him. Adam and little Charles would sit silent and respectful while their father explained how every general thought and planned and where they had made their mistakes and what they should have done. And then—he had known it at the time—he had told Grant and McClellan where they were wrong and had begged them to take his analysis of the situation. Invariably they refused his advice and only afterward was he proved right.

There was one thing Cyrus did not do, and perhaps it was clever of him. He never once promoted himself to noncommissioned rank. Private Trask he began, and Private Trask he remained. In the total telling, it made him at once the most mobile and ubiquitous private in the history of warfare. It made it necessary for him to be in as many as four places at once. But perhaps instinctively he did not tell those stories close to each other. Alice and the boys had a complete picture of him: a private soldier, and proud of it, who not only happened to be where every spectacular and important action was taking place but who wandered freely into staff meetings and joined or dissented in the decisions of general officers.

The death of Lincoln caught Cyrus in the pit of the stomach. Always he remembered how he felt when he first heard the news. And he could never mention it or hear of it without quick tears in his eyes. And while he never actually said it, you got the indestructible impression that Private Cyrus Trask was one of Lincoln's closest, warmest, and most trusted friends. When Mr. Lincoln wanted to know about the army, the real army, not those prancing dummies in gold braid, he turned to Private Trask. How Cyrus managed to make this understood without saying it was a triumph of insinuation. No one could call him a liar. And this was mainly

because the lie was in his head, and any truth coming from his mouth carried the color of the lie.

Quite early he began to write letters and then articles about the conduct of the war, and his conclusions were intelligent and convincing. Indeed, Cyrus developed an excellent military mind. His criticisms both of the war as it had been conducted and of the army organization as it persisted were irresistibly penetrating. His articles in various magazines attracted attention. His letters to the War Department, printed simultaneously in the newspapers, began to have a sharp effect in decisions on the army. Perhaps if the Grand Army of the Republic had not assumed political force and direction his voice might not have been heard so clearly in Washington, but the spokesman for a block of nearly a million men was not to be ignored. And such a voice in military matters Cyrus Trask became. It came about that he was consulted in matters of army organization, in officer relationships, in personnel and equipment. His expertness was apparent to everyone who heard him. He had a genius for the military. More than that, he was one of those responsible for the organization of the G.A.R. as a cohesive and potent force in the national life. After several unpaid offices in that organization, he took a paid secretaryship which he kept for the rest of his life. He traveled from one end of the country to the other, attending conventions, meetings, and encampments. So much for his public life.

His private life was also laced through with his new profession. He was a man devoted. His house and farm he organized on a military basis. He demanded and got reports on the conduct of his private economy. It is probable that Alice preferred it this way. She was not a talker. A terse report was easiest for her. She was busy with the growing boys and with keeping the house clean and the clothes washed. Also, she had to conserve her energy, though she did not mention this in any of her reports. Without warning her energy would leave her, and she would have to sit down and wait until it came back. In the night she would be drenched with perspiration. She knew perfectly well that she had what was called consumption, would have known even if she was not reminded by a hard, exhausting cough. And she did not know how long she would live. Some people wasted on for quite a few years. There wasn’t any rule about it. Perhaps she didn’t dare to mention it to her husband. He had devised a method for dealing with sickness which resembled punishment. A stomach ache was treated with a purge so violent that it was a wonder anyone survived it. If she had mentioned her condition, Cyrus might have started a treatment which would have killed her off before her consumption could have done it. Besides, as Cyrus became more military, his wife learned the only technique through which a soldier can survive. She never made herself noticeable, never spoke unless spoken to, performed what was expected and no more, and tried for no promotions. She became a rear rank private. It was much easier that way. Alice retired to the background until she was barely visible at all.

It was the little boys who really caught it. Cyrus had decided that even though the army was not perfect, it was still the only honorable profession for a man. He mourned the fact that he could not be a permanent soldier because of his wooden leg, but he could not imagine any career for his sons except the army. He felt a man should learn soldiering from the ranks, as he had. Then he would know what it was about from experience, not from charts and textbooks. He taught them the manual of arms when they could barely walk. By the time they were in grade school, close-order drill was as natural as breathing and as hateful as hell. He kept them hard with exercises, beating out the rhythm with a stick on his wooden leg. He made them walk for miles, carrying knapsacks loaded with stones to make their shoulders strong. He worked constantly on their marksmanship in the woodlot behind the house.

[2]

When a child first catches adults out—when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just—his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child’s world is never quite whole again. It is an

aching kind of growing.

Adam found his father out. It wasn't that his father changed but that some new quality came to Adam. He had always hated the discipline, as every normal animal does, but it was just and true and inevitable as measles, not to be denied or cursed, only to be hated. And then—it was very fast, almost a click in the brain—Adam knew that, for him at least, his father's methods had no reference to anything in the world but his father. The techniques and training were not designed for the boys at all but only to make Cyrus a great man. And the same click in the brain told Adam that his father was not a great man, that he was, indeed, a very strong-willed and concentrated little man wearing a huge busby. Who knows what causes this—a look in the eye, a lie found out, a moment of hesitation?—then god comes crashing down in a child's brain.

Young Adam was always an obedient child. Something in him shrank from violence, from contention, from the silent shrieking tensions that can rip at a house. He contributed to the quiet he wished for by offering no violence, no contention, and to do this he had to retire into secret-ness, since there is some violence in everyone. He covered his life with a veil of vagueness, while behind his quiet eyes a rich full life went on. This did not protect him from assault but it allowed him an immunity.

His half-brother Charles, only a little over a year younger, grew up with his father's assertiveness. Charles was a natural athlete, with instinctive timing and coordination and the competitor's will to win over others, which makes for success in the world.

Young Charles won all contests with Adam whether they involved skill, or strength, or quick intelligence, and won them so easily that quite early he lost interest and had to find his competition among other children. Thus it came about that a kind of affection grew up between the two boys, but it was more like an association between brother and sister than between brothers. Charles fought any boy who challenged or slurred Adam and usually won. He protected Adam from his father's harshness with lies and even with blame-taking. Charles felt for his brother the affection one has for helpless things, for blind puppies and new babies.

Adam looked out of his covered brain—out the long tunnels of his eyes—at the people of his world. His father, a one-legged natural force at first, installed justly to make little boys feel littler and stupid boys aware of their stupidity; and then—after god had crashed—he saw his father as the policeman laid on by birth, the officer who might be circumvented, or fooled, but never challenged. And out of the long tunnels of his eyes Adam saw his half-brother Charles as a bright being of another species, gifted with muscle and bone, speed and alertness, quite on a different plane, to be admired as one admires the sleek lazy danger of a black leopard, not by any chance to be compared with one's self. And it would no more have occurred to Adam to confide in his brother—to tell him the hunger, the gray dreams, the plans and silent pleasures that lay at the back of the tunneled eyes—than to share his thoughts with a lovely tree or a pheasant in flight. Adam was glad of Charles the way a woman is glad of a fat diamond, and he depended on his brother in the way that same woman depends on the diamond's glitter and the self security tied up in its worth; but love, affection, empathy, were beyond conception.

Toward Alice Trask, Adam concealed a feeling that was akin to a warm shame. She was not his mother—that he knew because he had been told many times. Not from things said but from the tone in which other things were said, he knew that he had once had a mother and that she had done some shameful thing, such as forgetting the chickens or missing the target on the range in the woodlot. And as a result of her fault she was not here. Adam thought sometimes that if he could only find out what sin it was she had committed, why, he would sin it too—and not be here.

Alice treated the boys equally, washed them and fed them, and left everything else to their father, who had let it be known clearly and with finality that training the boys physically and mentally was his exclusive

province. Even praise and reprimand he would not delegate. Alice never complained, quarreled, laughed, or cried. Her mouth was trained to a line that concealed nothing and offered nothing too. But once when Adam was quite small he wandered silently into the kitchen. Alice did not see him. She was darning socks and she was smiling. Adam retired secretly and walked out of the house and into the woodlot to a sheltered place behind a stump that he knew well. He settled deep between the protecting roots. Adam was as shocked as though he had come upon her naked. He breathed excitedly, high against his throat. For Alice had been naked—she had been smiling. He wondered how she had dared such wantonness. And he ached toward her with a longing that was passionate and hot. He did not know what it was about, but all the long lack of holding, of rocking, of caressing, the hunger for breast and nipple, and the softness of a lap, and the voice-tone of love and compassion, and the sweet feeling of anxiety—all of these were in his passion, and he did not know it because he did not know that such things existed, so how could he miss them?

Of course it occurred to him that he might be wrong, that some misbegotten shadow had fallen across his face and warped his seeing. And so he cast back to the sharp picture in his head and knew that the eyes were smiling too. Twisted light could do one or the other but not both.

He stalked her then, game-wise, as he had the woodchucks on the knoll when day after day he had lain lifeless as a young stone and watched the old wary chucks bring their children out to sun. He spied on Alice, hidden, and from unsuspected eye-corner, and it was true. Sometimes when she was alone, and knew she was alone, she permitted her mind to play in a garden, and she smiled. And it was wonderful to see how quickly she could drive the smile to earth the way the woodchucks holed their children.

Adam concealed his treasure deep in his tunnels, but he was inclined to pay for his pleasure with something. Alice began to find gifts—in her sewing basket, in her worn-out purse, under her pillow—two cinnamon pinks, a bluebird's tailfeather, half a stick of green sealing wax, a stolen handkerchief. At first Alice was startled, but then that passed, and when she found some unsuspected present the garden smile flashed and disappeared the way a trout crosses a knife of sunshine in a pool. She asked no questions and made no comment.

Her coughing was very bad at night, so loud and disturbing that Cyrus had at last to put her in another room or he would have got no sleep. But he did visit her very often—hopping on his one bare foot, steadying himself with hand on wall. The boys could hear and feel the jar of his body through the house as he hopped to and from Alice's bed.

As Adam grew he feared one thing more than any other. He feared the day he would be taken and enlisted in the army. His father never let him forget that such a time would come. He spoke of it often. It was Adam who needed the army to make a man of him. Charles was pretty near a man already. And Charles was a man, and a dangerous man, even at fifteen, and when Adam was sixteen.

[3]

The affection between the two boys had grown with the years. It may be that part of Charles' feeling was contempt, but it was a protective contempt. It happened that one evening the boys were playing peewee, a new game to them, in the dooryard. A small pointed stick was laid on the ground, then struck near one end with a bat. The small stick flew into the air and then was batted as far as possible.

Adam was not good at games. But by some accident of eye and timing he beat his brother at peewee. Four times he drove the peewee farther than Charles did. It was a new experience to him, and a wild flush came over him, so that he did not watch and feel out his brother's mood as he usually did. The fifth time he drove the peewee it flew humming like a bee far out in the field. He turned happily to face Charles and suddenly he froze deep in his chest. The hatred in Charles' face frightened him. "I guess it was just an accident," he said

lamely. “I bet I couldn’t do it again.”

Charles set his peewee, struck it, and, as it rose into the air, swung at it and missed. Charles moved slowly toward Adam, his eyes cold and noncommital. Adam edged away in terror. He did not dare to turn and run for his brother could outrun him. He backed slowly away, his eyes frightened and his throat dry. Charles moved close and struck him in the face with his bat. Adam covered his bleeding nose with his hands, and Charles swung his bat and hit him in the ribs, knocked the wind out of him, swung at his head and knocked him out. And as Adam lay unconscious on the ground Charles kicked him heavily in the stomach and walked away.

After a while Adam became conscious. He breathed shallowly because his chest hurt. He tried to sit up and fell back at the wrench of the torn muscles over his stomach. He saw Alice looking out, and there was something in her face that he had never seen before. He did not know what it was, but it was not soft or weak, and it might be hatred. She saw that he was looking at her, dropped the curtains into place, and disappeared. When Adam finally got up from the ground and moved, bent over, into the kitchen, he found a basin of hot water standing ready for him and a clean towel beside it. He could hear his stepmother coughing in her room.

Charles had one great quality. He was never sorry—ever. He never mentioned the beating, apparently never thought of it again. But Adam made very sure that he didn’t win again—at anything. He had always felt the danger in his brother, but now he understood that he must never win unless he was prepared to kill Charles. Charles was not sorry. He had very simply fulfilled himself.

Charles did not tell his father about the beating, and Adam did not, and surely Alice did not, and yet he seemed to know. In the months that followed he turned a gentleness on Adam. His speech became softer toward him. He did not punish him any more. Almost nightly he lectured him, but not violently. And Adam was more afraid of the gentleness than he had been at the violence, for it seemed to him that he was being trained as a sacrifice, almost as though he was being subjected to kindness before death, the way victims intended to the gods were cuddled and flattered so that they might go happily to the stone and not outrage the gods with unhappiness.

Cyrus explained softly to Adam the nature of a soldier. And though his knowledge came from research rather than experience, he knew and he was accurate. He told his son of the sad dignity that can belong to a soldier, how he is necessary in the light of all the failures of man—the penalty of our frailties. Perhaps Cyrus discovered these things in himself as he told them. It was very different from the flag-waving, shouting bellicosity of his younger days. The humilities are piled on a soldier, so Cyrus said, in order that he may, when the time comes, be not too resentful of the final humility—a meaningless and dirty death. And Cyrus talked to Adam alone and did not permit Charles to listen.

Cyrus took Adam to walk with him one late afternoon, and the black conclusions of all of his study and his thinking came out and flowed with a kind of thick terror over his son. He said, “I’ll have you know that a soldier is the most holy of all humans because he is the most tested—most tested of all. I’ll try to tell you. Look now—in all of history men have been taught that killing of men is an evil thing not to be countenanced. Any man who kills must be destroyed because this is a great sin, maybe the worst sin we know. And then we take a soldier and put murder in his hands and we say to him, ‘Use it well, use it wisely.’ We put no checks on him. Go out and kill as many of a certain kind or classification of your brothers as you can. And we will reward you for it because it is a violation of your early training.”

Adam wet his dry lips and tried to ask and failed and tried again. “Why do they have to do it?” he said. “Why is it?”

Cyrus was deeply moved and he spoke as he had never spoken before. “I don’t know,” he said. “I’ve studied and maybe learned how things are, but I’m not even close to why they are. And you must not expect to find that people understand what they do. So many things are done instinctively, the way a bee makes honey or a fox dips his paws in a stream to fool dogs. A fox can’t say why he does it, and what bee remembers winter or expects it to come again? When I knew you had to go I thought to leave the future open so you could dig out your own findings, and then it seemed better if I could protect you with the little I know. You’ll go in soon now—you’ve come to the age.”

“I don’t want to,” said Adam quickly.

“You’ll go in soon,” his father went on, not hearing. “And I want to tell you so you won’t be surprised. They’ll first strip off your clothes, but they’ll go deeper than that. They’ll shuck off any little dignity you have— you’ll lose what you think of as your decent right to live and to be let alone to live. They’ll make you live and eat and sleep and shit close to other men. And when they dress you up again you’ll not be able to tell yourself from the others. You can’t even wear a scrap or pin a note on your breast to say, ‘This is me—separate from the rest.’ ”

“I don’t want to do it,” said Adam.

“After a while,” said Cyrus, “you’ll think no thought the others do not think. You’ll know no word the others can’t say. And you’ll do things because the others do them. You’ll feel the danger in any difference whatever—a danger to the whole crowd of like-thinking, like-acting men.”

“What if I don’t?” Adam demanded.

“Yes,” said Cyrus, “sometimes that happens. Once in a while there is a man who won’t do what is demanded of him, and do you know what happens? The whole machine devotes itself coldly to the destruction of his difference. They’ll beat your spirit and your nerves, your body and your mind, with iron rods until the dangerous difference goes out of you. And if you can’t finally give in, they’ll vomit you up and leave you stinking outside—neither part of themselves nor yet free. It’s better to fall in with them. They only do it to protect themselves. A thing so triumphantly illogical, so beautifully senseless as an army can’t allow a question to weaken it. Within itself, if you do not hold it up to other things for comparison and derision, you’ll find slowly, surely, a reason and a logic and a kind of dreadful beauty. A man who can accept it is not a worse man always, and sometimes is a much better man. Pay good heed to me for I have thought long about it. Some men there are who go down the dismal wrack of soldiering, surrender themselves, and become faceless. But these had not much face to start with. And maybe you’re like that. But there are others who go down, submerge in the common slough, and then rise more themselves than they were, because—because they have lost a littleness of vanity and have gained all the gold of the company and the regiment. If you can go down so low, you will be able to rise higher than you can conceive, and you will know a holy joy, a companionship almost like that of a heavenly company of angels. Then you will know the quality of men even if they are inarticulate. But until you have gone way down you can never know this.”

As they walked back toward the house Cyrus turned left and entered the woodlot among the trees, and it was dusk. Suddenly Adam said, “You see that stump there, sir? I used to hide between the roots on the far side. After you punished me I used to hide there, and sometimes I went there just because I felt bad.”

“Let’s go and see the place,” his father said. Adam led him to it, and Cyrus looked down at the nestlike hole between the roots. “I knew about it long ago,” he said. “Once when you were gone a long time I thought you must have such a place, and I found it because I felt the kind of a place you would need. See how the earth is tamped and the little grass is torn? And while you sat in there you stripped little pieces of bark to shreds. I knew it was the place when I came upon it.”

Adam was staring at his father in wonder. “You never came here looking for me,” he said.

“No,” Cyrus replied. “I wouldn’t do that. You can drive a human too far. I wouldn’t do that. Always you must leave a man one escape before death. Remember that! I knew, I guess, how hard I was pressing you. I didn’t want to push you over the edge.”

They moved restlessly off through the trees. Cyrus said, “So many things I want to tell you. I’ll forget most of them. I want to tell you that a soldier gives up so much to get something back. From the day of a child’s birth he is taught by every circumstance, by every law and rule and right, to protect his own life. He starts with that great instinct, and everything confirms it. And then he is a soldier and he must learn to violate all of this—he must learn coldly to put himself in the way of losing his own life without going mad. And if you can do that—and, mind you, some can’t—then you will have the greatest gift of all. Look, son,” Cyrus said earnestly, “nearly all men are afraid, and they don’t even know what causes their fear—shadows, perplexities, dangers without names or numbers, fear of a faceless death. But if you can bring yourself to face not shadows but real death, described and recognizable, by bullet or saber, arrow or lance, then you need never be afraid again, at least not in the same way you were before. Then you will be a man set apart from other men, safe where other men may cry in terror. This is the great reward. Maybe this is the only reward. Maybe this is the final purity all ringed with filth. It’s nearly dark. I’ll want to talk to you again tomorrow night when both of us have thought about what I’ve told you.”

But Adam said, “Why don’t you talk to my brother? Charles will be going. He’ll be good at it, much better than I am.”

“Charles won’t be going,” Cyrus said. “There’d be no point in it.”

“But he would be a better soldier.”

“Only outside on his skin,” said Cyrus. “Not inside. Charles is not afraid so he could never learn anything about courage. He does not know anything outside himself so he could never gain the things I’ve tried to explain to you. To put him in an army would be to let loose things which in Charles must be chained down, not let loose. I would not dare to let him go.”

Adam complained, “You never punished him, you let him live his life, you praised him, you did not haze him, and now you let him stay out of the army.” He stopped, frightened at what he had said, afraid of the rage or the contempt or the violence his words might let loose.

His father did not reply. He walked on out of the woodlot, and his head hung down so that his chin rested on his chest, and the rise and fall of his hip when his wooden leg struck the ground was monotonous. The wooden leg made a side semicircle to get ahead when its turn came.

It was completely dark by now, and the golden light of the lamps shone out from the open kitchen door. Alice came to the doorway and peered out, looking for them, and then she heard the uneven footsteps approaching and went back to the kitchen.

Cyrus walked to the kitchen stoop before he stopped and raised his head. “Where are you?” he asked.

“Here—right behind you—right here.”

“You asked a question. I guess I’ll have to answer. Maybe it’s good and maybe it’s bad to answer it. You’re not clever. You don’t know what you want. You have no proper fierceness. You let other people walk over you. Sometimes I think you’re a weakling who will never amount to a dog turd. Does that answer your

question? I love you better. I always have. This may be a bad thing to tell you, but it's true. I love you better. Else why would I have given myself the trouble of hurting you? Now shut your mouth and go to your supper. I'll talk to you tomorrow night. My leg aches."

[4]

There was no talk at supper. The quiet was disturbed only by the slup of soup and gnash of chewing, and his father waved his hand to try to drive the moths away from the chimney of the kerosene lamp. Adam thought his brother watched him secretly. And he caught an eye flash from Alice when he looked up suddenly. After he had finished eating Adam pushed back his chair. "I think I'll go for a walk," he said.

Charles stood up. "I'll go with you."

Alice and Cyrus watched them go out the door, and then she asked one of her rare questions. She asked nervously, "What did you do?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Will you make him go?"

"Yes."

"Does he know?"

Cyrus stared bleakly out the open door into the darkness. "Yes, he knows."

"He won't like it. It's not right for him."

"It doesn't matter," Cyrus said, and he repeated loudly, "It doesn't matter," and his tone said, "Shut your mouth. This is not your affair." They were silent a moment, and then he said almost in a tone of apology, "It isn't as though he were your child."

Alice did not reply.

The boys walked down the dark rutty road. Ahead they could see a few pinched lights where the village was.

"Want to go in and see if anything's stirring at the inn?" Charles asked.

"I hadn't thought of it," said Adam.

"Then what the hell are you walking out at night for?"

"You didn't have to come," said Adam.

Charles moved close to him. "What did he say to you this afternoon? I saw you walking together. What did he say?"

"He just talked about the army—like always."

"Didn't look like that to me," Charles said suspiciously. "I saw him leaning close, talking the way he talks to men—not telling, talking."

"He was telling," Adam said patiently, and he had to control his breath, for a little fear had begun to press up

against his stomach. He took as deep a gulp of air as he could and held it to push back at the fear.

“What did he tell you?” Charles demanded again.

“About the army and how it is to be a soldier.”

“I don’t believe you,” said Charles. “I think you’re a goddam mealy-mouthed liar. What’re you trying to get away with?”

“Nothing,” said Adam.

Charles said harshly, “Your crazy mother drowned herself. Maybe she took a look at you. That’d do it.”

Adam let out his breath gently, pressing down the dismal fear. He was silent.

Charles cried, “You’re trying to take him away! I don’t know how you’re going about it. What do you think you’re doing?”

“Nothing,” said Adam.

Charles jumped in front of him so that Adam had to stop, his chest almost against his brother’s chest. Adam backed away, but carefully, as one backs away from a snake.

“Look at his birthday!” Charles shouted. “I took six bits and I bought him a knife made in Germany—three blades and a corkscrew, pearl-handled. Where’s that knife? Do you ever see him use it? Did he give it to you? I never even saw him hone it. Have you got that knife in your pocket? What did he do with it? ‘Thanks,’ he said, like that. And that’s the last I heard of a pearl-handled German knife that cost six bits.”

Rage was in his voice, and Adam felt the creeping fear; but he knew also that he had a moment left. Too many times he had seen the destructive machine that chopped down anything standing in its way. Rage came first and then a coldness, a possession; noncommittal eyes and a pleased smile and no voice at all, only a whisper. When that happened murder was on the way, but cool, deft murder, and hands that worked precisely, delicately. Adam swallowed saliva to dampen his dry throat. He could think of nothing to say that would be heard, for once in rage his brother would not listen, would not even hear. He bulked darkly in front of Adam, shorter, wider, thicker, but still not crouched. In the starlight his lips shone with wetness, but there was no smile yet and his voice still raged.

“What did you do on his birthday? You think I didn’t see? Did you spend six bits or even four bits? You brought him a mongrel pup you picked up in the woodlot. You laughed like a fool and said it would make a good bird dog. That dog sleeps in his room. He plays with it while he’s reading. He’s got it all trained. And where’s the knife? ‘Thanks,’ he said, just ‘Thanks.’ ” Charles spoke in a whisper, and his shoulders dropped.

Adam made one desperate jump backward and raised his hands to guard his face. His brother moved precisely, each foot planted firmly. One fist lanced delicately to get the range, and then the bitter-frozen work—a hard blow in the stomach, and Adam’s hands dropped; then four punches to the head. Adam felt the bone and gristle of his nose crunch. He raised his hands again and Charles drove at his heart. And all this time Adam looked at his brother as the condemned look hopelessly and puzzled at the executioner.

Suddenly to his own surprise Adam launched a wild, overhand, harmless swing which had neither force nor direction. Charles ducked in and under it and the helpless arm went around his neck. Adam wrapped his arms around his brother and hung close to him, sobbing. He felt the square fists whipping nausea into his stomach and still he held on. Time was slowed to him. With his body he felt his brother move sideways to force his

legs apart. And he felt the knee come up, past his knees, scraping his thighs, until it crashed against his testicles and flashing white pain ripped and echoed through his body. His arms let go. He bent over and vomited, while the cold killing went on.

Adam felt the punches on temples, cheeks, eyes. He felt his lip split and tatter over his teeth, but his skin seemed thickened and dull, as though he were encased in heavy rubber. Dully he wondered why his legs did not buckle, why he did not fall, why unconsciousness did not come to him. The punching continued eternally. He could hear his brother panting with the quick explosive breath of a sledgehammer man, and in the sick starlit dark he could see his brother through the tear-watered blood that flowed from his eyes. He saw the innocent, noncommittal eyes, the small smile on wet lips. And as he saw these things—a flash of light and darkness.

Charles stood over him, gulping air like a run-out dog. And then he turned and walked quickly back, toward the house, kneading his bruised knuckles as he went.

Consciousness came back quick and frightening to Adam. His mind rolled in a painful mist. His body was heavy and thick with hurt. But almost instantly he forgot his hurts. He heard quick footsteps on the road. The instinctive fear and fierceness of a rat came over him. He pushed himself up on his knees and dragged himself off the road to the ditch that kept it drained. There was a foot of water in the ditch, and the tall grass grew up from its sides. Adam crawled quietly into the water, being very careful to make no splash.

The footsteps came close, slowed, moved on a little, came back. From his hiding place Adam could see only a darkness in the dark. And then a sulphur match was struck and burned a tiny blue until the wood caught, lighting his brother's face grotesquely from below. Charles raised the match and peered around, and Adam could see the hatchet in his right hand.

When the match went out the night was blacker than before. Charles moved slowly on and struck another match, and on and struck another. He searched the road for signs. At last he gave it up. His right hand rose and he threw the hatchet far off into the field. He walked rapidly away toward the pinched lights of the village.

For a long time Adam lay in the cool water. He wondered how his brother felt, wondered whether now that his passion was chilling he would feel panic or sorrow or sick conscience or nothing. These things Adam felt for him. His conscience bridged him to his brother and did his pain for him the way at other times he had done his homework.

Adam crept out of the water and stood up. His hurts were stiffening and the blood was dried in a crust on his face. He thought he would stay outside in the darkness until his father and Alice went to bed. He felt that he could not answer any questions, because he did not know any answers, and trying to find one was harsh to his battered mind. Dizziness edged with blue lights came fringing his forehead, and he knew that he would be fainting soon.

He shuffled slowly up the road with wide-spread legs. At the stoop he paused, looked in. The lamp hanging by its chain from the ceiling cast a yellow circle and lighted Alice and her mending basket on the table in front of her. On the other side his father chewed a wooden pen and dipped it in an open ink bottle and made entries in his black record book.

Alice, glancing up, saw Adam's bloody face. Her hand rose to her mouth and her fingers hooked over her lower teeth.

Adam dragfooted up one step and then the other and supported himself in the doorway.

Then Cyrus raised his head. He looked with a distant curiosity. The identity of the distortion came to him slowly. He stood up, puzzled and wondering. He stuck the wooden pen in the ink bottle and wiped his fingers on his pants. “Why did he do it?” Cyrus asked softly.

Adam tried to answer, but his mouth was caked and dry. He licked his lips and started them bleeding again. “I don’t know,” he said.

Cyrus stumped over to him and grasped him by the arm so fiercely that he winced and tried to pull away. “Don’t lie to me! Why did he do it? Did you have an argument?”

“No.”

Cyrus wrenched at him. “Tell me! I want to know. Tell me! You’ll have to tell me. I’ll make you tell me! Goddam it, you’re always protecting him! Don’t you think I know that? Did you think you were fooling me? Now tell me, or by God I’ll keep you standing there all night!”

Adam cast about for an answer. “He doesn’t think you love him.”

Cyrus released the arm and hobbled back to his chair and sat down. He rattled the pen in the ink bottle and looked blindly at his record book. “Alice,” he said, “help Adam to bed. You’ll have to cut his shirt off, I guess. Give him a hand.” He got up again, went to the corner of the room where the coats hung on nails, and, reaching behind the garments, brought out his shotgun, broke it to verify its load, and clumped out of the door.

Alice raised her hand as though she would hold him back with a rope of air. And her rope broke and her face hid her thoughts. “Go in your room,” she said. “I’ll bring some water in a basin.”

Adam lay on the bed, a sheet pulled up to his waist, and Alice patted the cuts with a linen handkerchief dipped in warm water. She was silent for a long time and then she continued Adam’s sentence as though there had never been an interval, “He doesn’t think his father loves him. But you love him—you always have.”

Adam did not answer her.

She went on quietly, “He’s a strange boy. You have to know him—all rough shell, all anger until you know.” She paused to cough, leaned down and coughed, and when the spell was over her cheeks were flushed and she was exhausted. “You have to know him,” she repeated. “For a long time he has given me little presents, pretty things you wouldn’t think he’d even notice. But he doesn’t give them right out. He hides them where he knows I’ll find them. And you can look at him for hours and he won’t ever give the slightest sign he did it. You have to know him.”

She smiled at Adam and he closed his eyes.

Chapter 4

[1]

CHARLES STOOD AT THE BAR in the village inn and Charles was laughing delightedly at the funny stories the night-stranded drummers were telling. He got out his tobacco sack with its meager jingle of silver and bought the men a drink to keep them talking. He stood and grinned and rubbed his split knuckles. And when the drummers, accepting his drink, raised their glasses and said, “Here’s to you,” Charles was delighted. He ordered another drink for his new friends, and then he joined them for some kind of deviltry in

another place.

When Cyrus stumped out into the night he was filled with a kind of despairing anger at Charles. He looked on the road for his son, and he went to the inn to look for him, but Charles was gone. It is probable that if he had found him that night he would have killed him, or tried to. The direction of a big act will warp history, but probably all acts do the same in their degree, down to a stone stepped over in the path or a breath caught at sight of a pretty girl or a fingernail nicked in the garden soil.

Naturally it was not long before Charles was told that his father was looking for him with a shotgun. He hid out for two weeks, and when he finally did return, murder had sunk back to simple anger and he paid his penalty in overwork and a false theatrical humility.

Adam lay four days in bed, so stiff and aching that he could not move without a groan. On the third day his father gave evidence of his power with the military. He did it as a poultice to his own pride and also as a kind of prize for Adam. Into the house, into Adam's bedroom, came a captain of cavalry and two sergeants in dress uniform of blue. In the dooryard their horses were held by two privates. Lying in his bed, Adam was enlisted in the army as a private in the cavalry. He signed the Articles of War and took the oath while his father and Alice looked on. And his father's eyes glistened with tears.

After the soldiers had gone his father sat with him a long time. "I've put you in the cavalry for a reason," he said. "Barrack life is not a good life for long. But the cavalry has work to do. I made sure of that. You'll like going for the Indian country. There's action coming. I can't tell you how I know. There's fighting on the way."

"Yes, sir," Adam said.

[2]

It has always seemed strange to me that it is usually men like Adam who have to do the soldiering. He did not like fighting to start with, and far from learning to love it, as some men do, he felt an increasing revulsion for violence. Several times his officers looked closely at him for malingering, but no charge was brought. During these five years of soldiering Adam did more detail work than any man in the squadron, but if he killed any enemy it was an accident of ricochet. Being a marksman and sharp-shooter, he was peculiarly fitted to miss. By this time the Indian fighting had become like dangerous cattle drives—the tribes were forced into revolt, driven and decimated, and the sad, sullen remnants settled on starvation lands. It was not nice work but, given the pattern of the country's development, it had to be done.

To Adam who was an instrument, who saw not the future farms but only the torn bellies of fine humans, it was revolting and useless. When he fired his carbine to miss he was committing treason against his unit, and he didn't care. The emotion of nonviolence was building in him until it became a prejudice like any other thought-stultifying prejudice. To inflict any hurt on anything for any purpose became inimical to him. He became obsessed with this emotion, for such it surely was, until it blotted out any possible thinking in its area. But never was there any hint of cowardice in Adam's army record. Indeed he was commended three times and then decorated for bravery.

As he revolted more and more from violence, his impulse took the opposite direction. He ventured his life a number of times to bring in wounded men. He volunteered for work in field hospitals even when he was exhausted from his regular duties. He was regarded by his comrades with contemptuous affection and the unspoken fear men have of impulses they do not understand.

Charles wrote to his brother regularly—of the farm and the village, of sick cows and a foaling mare, of the

added pasture and the lightning-struck barn, of Alice's choking death from her consumption and his father's move to a permanent paid position in the G.A.R. in Washington. As with many people, Charles, who could not talk, wrote with fullness. He set down his loneliness and his perplexities, and he put on paper many things he did not know about himself.

During the time Adam was away he knew his brother better than ever before or afterward. In the exchange of letters there grew a closeness neither of them could have imagined.

Adam kept one letter from his brother, not because he understood it completely but because it seemed to have a covered meaning he could not get at. "Dear Brother Adam," the letter said, "I take my pen in hand to hope you are in good health"—he always started this way to ease himself gently into the task of writing. "I have not had your answer to my last letter but I presume you have other things to do—ha! ha! The rain came wrong and damned the apple blossoms. There won't be many to eat next winter but I will save what I can. Tonight I cleaned the house, and it is wet and soapy and maybe not any cleaner. How do you suppose Mother kept it the way she did? It does not look the same. Something settles down on it. I don't know what, but it will not scrub off. But I have spread the dirt around more evenly anyways. Ha! ha!

"Did Father write you anything about his trip? He's gone clean out to San Francisco in California for an encampment of the Grand Army. The Secty. of War is going to be there, and Father is to introduce him. But this is not any great shucks to Father. He has met the President three, four times and even been to supper to the White House. I would like to see the White House. Maybe you and me can go together when you come home. Father could put us up for a few days and he would be wanting to see you anyways.

"I think I better look around for a wife. This is a good farm, and even if I'm no bargain there's girls could do worse than this farm. What do you think? You did not say if you are going to come live home when you get out of the army. I hope so. I miss you."

The writing stopped there. There was a scratch on the page and a splash of ink, and then it went on in pencil, but the writing was different.

In pencil it said, "Later. Well, right there the pen give out. One of the points broke off. I'll have to buy another penpoint in the village—rusted right through."

The words began to flow more smoothly. "I guess I should wait for a new penpoint and not write with a pencil. Only I was sitting here in the kitchen with the lamp on and I guess I got to thinking and it come on late—after twelve, I guess, but I never looked. Old Black Joe started crowing out in the henhouse. Then Mother's rocking chair cricked for all the world like she was sitting in it. You know I don't take truck with that, but it set me minding backwards, you know how you do sometimes. I guess I'll tear this letter up maybe, because what's the good of writing stuff like this."

The words began to race now as though they couldn't get out fast enough. "If I'm to throw it away I'd just as well set it down," the letter said. "It's like the whole house was alive and had eyes everywhere, and like there was people behind the door just ready to come in if you looked away. It kind of makes my skin crawl. I want to say—I want to say—I mean, I never understood—well, why our father did it. I mean, why didn't he like that knife I bought for him on his birthday. Why didn't he? It was a good knife and he needed a good knife. If he had used it or even honed it, or took it out of his pocket and looked at it—that's all he had to do. If he'd liked it I wouldn't have took out after you. I had to take out after you. Seems like to me my mother's chair is rocking a little. It's just the light. I don't take any truck with that. Seems like to me there's something not finished. Seems like when you half finished a job and can't think what it was. Something didn't get done. I shouldn't be here. I ought to be wandering around the world instead of sitting here on a good farm looking for a wife. There is something wrong, like it didn't get finished, like it happened too soon and left something

out. It's me should be where you are and you here. I never thought like this before. Maybe because it's late—it's later than that. I just looked out and it's first dawn. I don't think I fell off to sleep. How could the night go so fast? I can't go to bed now. I couldn't sleep anyways."

The letter was not signed. Maybe Charles forgot he had intended to destroy it and sent it along. But Adam saved it for a time, and whenever he read it again it gave him a chill and he didn't know why.

Chapter 5

[1]

ON THE RANCH the little Hamiltons began to grow up, and every year there was a new one. George was a tall handsome boy, gentle and sweet, who had from the first a kind of courtliness. Even as a little boy he was polite and what they used to call "no trouble." From his father he inherited the neatness of clothing and body and hair, and he never seemed ill dressed even when he was. George was a sinless boy and grew to be a sinless man. No crime of commission was ever attributed to him, and his crimes of omission were only misdemeanors. In his middle life, at about the time such things were known about, it was discovered that, he had pernicious anemia. It is possible that his virtue lived on a lack of energy.

Behind George, Will grew along, dumpy and stolid. Will had little imagination but he had great energy. From childhood on he was a hard worker, if anyone would tell him what to work at, and once told he was indefatigable. He was a conservative, not only in politics but in everything. Ideas he found revolutionary, and he avoided them with suspicion and distaste. Will liked to live so that no one could find fault with him, and to do that he had to live as nearly like other people as possible.

Maybe his father had something to do with Will's distaste for either change or variation. When Will was a growing boy, his father had not been long enough in the Salinas Valley to be thought of as an "oldtimer. " He was in fact a foreigner and an Irishman. At that time the Irish were much disliked in America. They were looked upon with contempt, particularly on the East Coast, but a little of it must have seeped out to the West. And Samuel had not only variability but was a man of ideas and innovations. In small cut-off communities such a man is always regarded with suspicion until he has proved he is no danger to the others. A shining man like Samuel could, and can, cause a lot of trouble. He might, for example, prove too attractive to the wives of men who knew they were dull. Then there were his education and his reading, the books he bought and borrowed, his knowledge of things that could not be eaten or worn or cohabited with, his interest in poetry and his respect for good writing. If Samuel had been a rich man like the Thornes or the Delmars, with their big houses and wide flat lands, he would have had a great library.

The Delmars had a library—nothing but books in it and paneled in oak. Samuel, by borrowing, had read many more of the Delmars' books than the Delmars had. In that day an educated rich man was acceptable. He might send his sons to college without comment, might wear a vest and white shirt and tie in the daytime of a weekday, might wear gloves and keep his nails clean. And since the lives and practices of rich men were mysterious, who knows what they could use or not use? But a poor man—what need had he for poetry or for painting or for music not fit for singing or dancing? Such things did not help him bring in a crop or keep a scrap of cloth on his children's backs. And if in spite of this he persisted, maybe he had reasons which would not stand the light of scrutiny.

Take Samuel, for instance. He made drawings of work he intended to do with iron or wood. That was good and understandable, even enviable. But on the edges of the plans he made other drawings, sometimes trees, sometimes faces or animals or bugs, sometimes just figures that you couldn't make out at all. And these caused men to laugh with embarrassed uneasiness. Then, too, you never knew in advance what Samuel would think or say or do—it might be anything.

The first few years after Samuel came to Salinas Valley there was a vague distrust of him. And perhaps Will as a little boy heard talk in the San Lucas store. Little boys don't want their fathers to be different from other men. Will might have picked up his conservatism right then. Later, as the other children came along and grew, Samuel belonged to the valley, and it was proud of him in the way a man who owns a peacock is proud. They weren't afraid of him any more, for he did not seduce their wives or lure them out of sweet mediocrity. The Salinas Valley grew fond of Samuel, but by that time Will was formed.

Certain individuals, not by any means always deserving, are truly beloved of the gods. Things come to them without their effort or planning. Will Hamilton was one of these. And the gifts he received were the ones he could appreciate. As a growing boy Will was lucky. Just as his father could not make money, Will could not help making it. When Will Hamilton raised chickens and his hens began to lay, the price of eggs went up. As a young man, when two of his friends who ran a little store came to the point of despondent bankruptcy, Will was asked to lend them a little money to tide them over the quarter's bills, and they gave him a one-third interest for a pittance. He was not niggardly. He gave them what they asked for. The store was on its feet within one year, expanding in two, opening branches in three, and its descendants, a great mercantile system, now dominate a large part of the area.

Will also took over a bicycle-and-tool shop for a bad debt. Then a few rich people of the valley bought automobiles, and his mechanic worked on them. Pressure was put on him by a determined poet whose dreams were brass, cast iron, and rubber. This man's name was Henry Ford, and his plans were ridiculous if not illegal. Will grumblingly accepted the southern half of the valley as his exclusive area, and within fifteen years the valley was two-deep in Fords and Will was a rich man driving a Marmon.

Tom, the third son, was most like his father. He was born in fury and he lived in lightning. Tom came headlong into life. He was a giant in joy and enthusiasms. He didn't discover the world and its people, he created them. When he read his father's books, he was the first. He lived in a world shining and fresh and as uninspected as Eden on the sixth day. His mind plunged like a colt in a happy pasture, and when later the world put up fences he plunged against the wire, and when the final stockade surrounded him, he plunged right through it and out. And as he was capable of giant joy, so did he harbor huge sorrow, so that when his dog died the world ended.

Tom was as inventive as his father but he was bolder. He would try things his father would not dare. Also, he had a large concupiscence to put the spurs in his flanks, and this Samuel did not have. Perhaps it was his driving sexual need that made him remain a bachelor. It was a very moral family he was born into. It might be that his dreams and his longing, and his outlets for that matter, made him feel unworthy, drove him sometimes whining into the hills. Tom was a nice mixture of savagery and gentleness. He worked inhumanly, only to lose in effort his crushing impulses.

The Irish do have a despairing quality of gaiety, but they have also a dour and brooding ghost that rides on their shoulders and peers in on their thoughts. Let them laugh too loudly, it sticks a long finger down their throats. They condemn themselves before they are charged, and this makes them defensive always.

When Tom was nine years old he worried because his pretty little sister Mollie had an impediment in her speech. He asked her to open her mouth wide and saw that a membrane under her tongue caused the trouble. "I can fix that," he said. He led her to a secret place far from the house, whetted his pocketknife on a stone, and cut the offending halter of speech. And then he ran away and was sick.

The Hamilton house grew as the family grew. It was designed to be unfinished, so that lean-tos could jut out as they were needed. The original room and kitchen soon disappeared in a welter of these lean-tos.

Meanwhile Samuel got no richer. He developed a very bad patent habit, a disease many men suffer from. He

invented a part of a threshing machine, better, cheaper, and more efficient than any in existence. The patent attorney ate up his little profit for the year. Samuel sent his models to a manufacturer, who promptly rejected the plans and used the method. The next few years were kept lean by the suing, and the drain stopped only when he lost the suit. It was his first sharp experience with the rule that without money you cannot fight money. But he had caught the patent fever, and year after year the money made by threshing and by smithing was drained off in patents. The Hamilton children went bare-foot, and their overalls were patched and food was sometimes scarce, to pay for the crisp blueprints with cogs and planes and elevations.

Some men think big and some think little. Samuel and his sons Tom and Joe thought big and George and Will thought little. Joseph was the fourth son—a kind of mooning boy, greatly beloved and protected by the whole family. He early discovered that a smiling helplessness was his best protection from work. His brothers were tough hard workers, all of them. It was easier to do Joe's work than to make him do it. His mother and father thought him a poet because he wasn't any good at anything else. And they so impressed him with this that he wrote glib verses to prove it. Joe was physically lazy, and probably mentally lazy too. He day-dreamed out his life, and his mother loved him more than the others because she thought he was helpless. Actually he was the least helpless, because he got exactly what he wanted with a minimum of effort. Joe was the darling of the family.

In feudal times an ineptness with sword and spear headed a young man for the church: in the Hamilton family Joe's inability properly to function at farm and forge headed him for a higher education. He was not sickly or weak but he did not lift very well; he rode horses badly and detested them. The whole family laughed with affection when they thought of Joe trying to learn to plow; his tortuous first furrow wound about like a flatland stream, and his second furrow touched his first only once and then to cross it and wander off.

Gradually he eliminated himself from every farm duty. His mother explained that his mind was in the clouds, as though this were some singular virtue.

When Joe had failed at every job, his father in despair put him to herding sixty sheep. This was the least difficult job of all and the one classically requiring no skill. All he had to do was to stay with the sheep. And Joe lost them—lost sixty sheep and couldn't find them where they were huddled in the shade in a dry gulch. According to the family story, Samuel called the family together, girls and boys, and made them promise to take care of Joe after he was gone, for if they did not Joe would surely starve.

Interspersed with the Hamilton boys were five girls: Una the oldest, a thoughtful, studious, dark girl; Lizzie—I guess Lizzie must have been the oldest since she was named for her mother—I don't know much about Lizzie. She early seemed to find a shame for her family. She married young and went away and thereafter was seen only at funerals. Lizzie had a capacity for hatred and bitterness unique among the Hamiltons. She had a son, and when he grew up and married a girl Lizzie didn't like she did not speak to him for many years.

Then there was Dessie, whose laughter was so constant that everyone near her was glad to be there because it was more fun to be with Dessie than with anyone else.

The next sister was Olive, my mother. And last was Mollie, who was a little beauty with lovely blond hair and violet eyes.

These were the Hamiltons, and it was almost a miracle how Liza, skinny little biddy that she was, produced them year after year and fed them, baked bread, made their clothes, and clothed them with good manners and iron morals too.

It is amazing how Liza stamped her children. She was completely without experience in the world, she was unread and, except for the one long trip from Ireland, untraveled. She had no experience with men save only her husband, and that she looked upon as a tiresome and sometimes painful duty. A good part of her life was taken up with bearing and raising. Her total intellectual association was the Bible, except the talk of Samuel and her children, and to them she did not listen. In that one book she had her history and her poetry, her knowledge of peoples and things, her ethics, her morals, and her salvation. She never studied the Bible or inspected it; she just read it. The many places where it seems to refute itself did not confuse her in the least. And finally she came to a point where she knew it so well that she went right on reading it without listening.

Liza enjoyed universal respect because she was a good woman and raised good children. She could hold up her head anywhere. Her husband and her children and her grandchildren respected her. There was a nail-hard strength in her, a lack of any compromise, a rightness in the face of all opposing wrongness, which made you hold her in a kind of awe but not in warmth.

Liza hated alcoholic liquors with an iron zeal. Drinking alcohol in any form she regarded as a crime against a properly outraged deity. Not only would she not touch it herself, but she resisted its enjoyment by anyone else. The result naturally was that her husband Samuel and all her children had a good lusty love for a drink.

Once when he was very ill Samuel asked, “Liza, couldn’t I have a glass of whisky to ease me?”

She set her little hard chin. “Would you go to the throne of God with liquor on your breath? You would not!” she said.

Samuel rolled over on his side and went about his illness without ease.

When Liza was about seventy her elimination slowed up and her doctor told her to take a tablespoon of port wine for medicine. She forced down the first spoonful, making a crooked face, but it was not so bad. And from that moment she never drew a completely sober breath. She always took the wine in a tablespoon, it was always medicine, but after a time she was doing over a quart a day and she was a much more relaxed and happy woman.

Samuel and Liza Hamilton got all of their children raised and well toward adulthood before the turn of the century. It was a whole clot of Hamiltons growing up on the ranch to the east of King City. And they were American children and young men and women. Samuel never went back to Ireland and gradually he forgot it entirely. He was a busy man. He had no time for nostalgia. The Salinas Valley was the world. A trip to Salinas sixty miles to the north at the head of the valley was event enough for a year, and the incessant work on the ranch, the care and feeding and clothing of his bountiful family, took most of his time—but not all. His energy was large.

His daughter Una had become a brooding student, tense and dark. He was proud of her wild, exploring mind. Olive was preparing to take county examinations after a stretch in the secondary school in Salinas. Olive was going to be a teacher, an honor like having a priest in the family in Ireland. Joe was to be sent to college because he was no damn good at anything else. Will was well along the way to accidental fortune. Tom bruised himself on the world and licked his cuts. Dessie was studying dressmaking, and Mollie, pretty Mollie, would obviously marry some well-to-do man.

There was no question of inheritance. Although the hill ranch was large it was abysmally poor. Samuel sunk well after well and could not find water on his own land. That would have made the difference. Water would have made them comparatively rich. The one poor pipe of water pumped up from deep near the house was the only source; sometimes it got dangerously low, and twice it went dry. The cattle had to come from the far fringe of the ranch to drink and then go out again to feed.

All in all it was a good firm-grounded family, permanent, and successfully planted in the Salinas Valley, not poorer than many and not richer than many either. It was a well-balanced family with its conservatives and its radicals, its dreamers and its realists. Samuel was well pleased with the fruit of his loins.

Chapter 6

[1]

AFTER ADAM JOINED THE ARMY and Cyrus moved to Washington, Charles lived alone on the farm. He boasted about getting himself a wife, but he did not go about doing it by the usual process of meeting girls, taking them to dances, testing their virtues or otherwise, and finally slipping feebly into marriage. The truth of it was that Charles was abysmally timid of girls. And, like most shy men, he satisfied his normal needs in the anonymity of the prostitute. There is great safety for a shy man with a whore. Having been paid for, and in advance, she has become a commodity, and a shy man can be gay with her and even brutal to her. Also, there is none of the horror of the possible turndown which shrivels the guts of timid men.

The arrangement was simple and reasonably secret. The owner of the inn kept three rooms on his top floor for transients, which he rented to girls for two-week periods. At the end of two weeks a new set of girls took their place. Mr. Hallam, the innkeeper, had no part in the arrangement. He could almost say with truth that he didn't know anything about it. He simply collected five times the normal rent for his three rooms. The girls were assigned, procured, moved, disciplined, and robbed by a whoremaster named Edwards, who lived in Boston. His girls moved in a slow circuit among the small towns, never staying anywhere more than two weeks. It was an extremely workable system. A girl was not in town long enough to cause remark either by citizen or town marshal. They stayed pretty much in the rooms and avoided public places. They were forbidden on pain of beating to drink or make noise or to fall in love with anyone. Meals were served in their rooms, and the clients were carefully screened. No drunken man was permitted to go up to them. Every six months each girl was given one month of vacation to get drunk and raise hell. On the job, let a girl be disobedient to the rules, and Mr. Edwards personally stripped her, gagged her, and horsewhipped her within an inch of her life. If she did it again she found herself in jail, charged with vagrancy and public prostitution.

The two-week stands had another advantage. Many of the girls were diseased, and a girl had nearly always gone away by the time her gift had incubated in a client. There was no one for a man to get mad at. Mr. Hallam knew nothing about it, and Mr. Edwards never appeared publicly in his business capacity. He had a very good thing in his circuit.

The girls were all pretty much alike—big, healthy, lazy, and dull. A man could hardly tell there had been a change. Charles Trask made it a habit to go to the inn at least once every two weeks, to creep up to the top floor, do his quick business, and return to the bar to get mildly drunk.

The Trask house had never been gay, but lived in only by Charles it took on a gloomy, rustling decay. The lace curtains were gray, the floors, although swept, grew sticky and dank. The kitchen was lacquered—walls, windows, and ceiling—with grease from the frying pans.

The constant scrubbing by the wives who had lived there and the biannual deep-seated scourging had kept the dirt down. Charles rarely did more than sweep. He gave up sheets on his bed and slept between blankets. What good to clean the house when there was no one to see it? Only on the nights he went to the inn did he wash himself and put on clean clothes.

Charles developed a restlessness that got him out at dawn. He worked the farm mightily because he was lonely. Coming in from his work, he gorged himself on fried food and went to bed and to sleep in the resulting torpor.

His dark face took on the serious expressionlessness of a man who is nearly always alone. He missed his brother more than he missed his mother and father. He remembered quite inaccurately the time before Adam went away as the happy time, and he wanted it to come again.

During the years he was never sick, except of course for the chronic indigestion which was universal, and still is, with men who live alone, cook for themselves, and eat in solitude. For this he took a powerful purge called Father George's Elixir of Life.

One accident he did have in the third year of his aloneness. He was digging out rocks and sledding them to the stone wall. One large boulder was difficult to move. Charles pried at it with a long iron bar, and the rock bucked and rolled back again and again. Suddenly he lost his temper. The little smile came on his face, and he fought the stone as though it were a man, in silent fury. He drove his bar deep behind it and threw his whole weight back. The bar slipped and its upper end crashed against his forehead. For a few moments he lay unconscious in the field and then he rolled over and staggered, half-blinded, to the house. There was a long torn welt on his forehead from hairline to a point between his eyebrows. For a few weeks his head was bandaged over a draining infection, but that did not worry him. In that day pus was thought to be benign, a proof that a wound was healing properly. When the wound did heal, it left a long and crinkled scar, and while most scar tissue is lighter than the surrounding skin, Charles' scar turned dark brown. Perhaps the bar had forced iron rust under the skin and made a kind of tattoo.

The wound had not worried Charles, but the scar did. It looked like a long fingermark laid on his forehead. He inspected it often in the little mirror by the stove. He combed his hair down over his forehead to conceal as much of it as he could. He conceived a shame for his scar; he hated his scar. He became restless when anyone looked at it, and fury rose in him if any question was asked about it. In a letter to his brother he put down his feeling about it.

"It looks," he wrote, "like somebody marked me like a cow. The damn thing gets darker. By the time you get home it will maybe be black. All I need is one going the other way and I would look like a Papist on Ash Wednesday. I don't know why it bothers me. I got plenty other scars. It just seems like I was marked. And when I go into town, like to the inn, why, people are always looking at it. I can hear them talking about it when they don't know I can hear. I don't know why they're so damn curious about it. It gets so I don't feel like going in town at all."

[2]

Adam was discharged in 1885 and started to beat his way home. In appearance he had changed little. There was no military carriage about him. The cavalry didn't act that way. Indeed some units took pride in a sloppy posture.

Adam felt that he was sleepwalking. It is a hard thing to leave any deeply routined life, even if you hate it. In the morning he awakened on a split second and lay waiting for reveille. His calves missed the hug of leggings and his throat felt naked without its tight collar. He arrived in Chicago, and there, for no reason, rented a furnished room for a week, stayed in it for two days, went to Buffalo, changed his mind, and moved to Niagara Falls. He didn't want to go home and he put it off as long as possible. Home was not a pleasant place in his mind. The kind of feelings he had had there were dead in him, and he had a reluctance to bring them to life. He watched the falls by the hour. Their roar stupefied and hypnotized him.

One evening he felt a crippling loneliness for the close men in barracks and tent. His impulse was to rush into a crowd for warmth, any crowd. The first crowded public place he could find was a little bar, thronged and smoky. He sighed with pleasure, almost nestled in the human clot the way a cat nestles into a woodpile. He ordered whisky and drank it and felt warm and good. He did not see or hear. He simply absorbed the

contact.

As it grew late and the men began to drift away, he became fearful of the time when he would have to go home. Soon he was alone with the bartender, who was rubbing and rubbing the mahogany of the bar and trying with his eyes and his manner to get Adam to go.

“I’ll have one more,” Adam said.

The bartender set the bottle out. Adam noticed him for the first time. He had a strawberry mark on his forehead.

“I’m a stranger in these parts,” said Adam.

“That’s what we mostly get at the falls,” the bartender said.

“I’ve been in the army. Cavalry.”

“Yeah!” the bartender said.

Adam felt suddenly that he had to impress this man, had to get under his skin some way. “Fighting Indians,” he said. “Had some great times.”

The man did not answer him.

“My brother has a mark on his head.”

The bartender touched the strawberry mark with his fingers. “Birthmark, ” he said. “Gets bigger every year. Your brother got one?”

“His came from a cut. He wrote me about it.”

“You notice this one of mine looks like a cat?”

“Sure it does.”

“That’s my nickname, Cat. Had it all my life. They say my old lady must of been scared by a cat when she was having me.”

“I’m on my way home. Been away a long time. Won’t you have a drink?”

“Thanks. Where you staying?”

“Mrs. May’s boarding house.”

“I know her. What they tell is she fills you up with soup so you can’t eat much meat.”

“I guess there are tricks to every trade,” said Adam.

“I guess that’s right. There’s sure plenty in mine.”

“I bet that’s true,” said Adam.

“But the one trick I need I haven’t got. I wisht I knew that one.”

“What is it?”

“How the hell to get you to go home and let me close up.”

Adam stared at him, stared at him and did not speak.

“It’s a joke,” the bartender said uneasily.

“I guess I’ll go home in the morning,” said Adam. “I mean my real home.”

“Good luck,” the bartender said.

Adam walked through the dark town, increasing his speed as though his loneliness sniffed along behind him. The sagging front steps of his boarding house creaked a warning as he climbed them. The hall was gloomed with the dot of yellow light from an oil lamp turned down so low that it jerked expiringly.

The landlady stood in her open doorway and her nose made a shadow to the bottom of her chin. Her cold eyes followed Adam as do the eyes of a front-painted portrait, and she listened with her nose for the whisky that was in him.

“Good night,” said Adam.

She did not answer him.

At the top of the first flight he looked back. Her head was raised, and now her chin made a shadow on her throat and her eyes had no pupils.

His room smelled of dust dampened and dried many times. He picked a match from his block and scratched it on the side of the block. He lighted the shank of candle in the japanned candlestick and regarded the bed—as spineless as a hammock and covered with a dirty patchwork quilt, the cotton batting spilling from the edges.

The porch steps complained again, and Adam knew the woman would be standing in her doorway ready to spray inhospitality on the new arrival.

Adam sat down in a straight chair and put his elbows on his knees and supported his chin in his hands. A roomer down the hall began a patient, continuing cough against the quiet night.

And Adam knew he could not go home. He had heard old soldiers tell of doing what he was going to do.

“I just couldn’t stand it. Didn’t have no place to go. Didn’t know nobody. Wandered around and pretty soon I got in a panic like a kid, and first thing I knowed I’m begging the sergeant to let me back in—like he was doing me a favor.”

Back in Chicago, Adam re-enlisted and asked to be assigned to his old regiment. On the train going west the men of his squadron seemed very dear and desirable.

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