



The Leg, William Faulkner

The Leg

I

THE BOAT — IT was a yawl boat with a patched weathered sail — made two reaches below us while I sat with the sculls poised, watching her over my shoulder, and George clung to the pile, spouting Milton at Everbe Corinthia.

When it made the final tack I looked back at George. But he was now but well into Comus' second speech, his crooked face raised, and the afternoon bright on his close ruddy head.

“Give way, George,” I said. But he held us stationary at the pile, his glazed hat lifted, spouting his fine and cadenced folly as though the lock, the Thames, time and all, belonged to him, while Sabrina (or Hebe or Chloe or whatever name he happened to be calling Corinthia at the time) with her dairy-maid's complexion and her hair like mead poured in sunlight stood above us in one of her endless succession of neat print dresses, her hand on the lever and one eye on George and the other on the yawl, saying “Yes, milord” dutifully whenever George paused for breath.

The yawl luffed and stood away; the helmsman shouted for the lock.

“Let go, George,” I said. But he clung to the pile in his fine and incongruous oblivion. Everbe Corinthia stood above us, her hand on the lever, bridling a little and beginning to reveal a certain concern, and

looking from her to the yawl and back again I thought how much time she and I had both spent thus since that day three years ago when, cowed and bridling, she had opened the lock for us for the first time, with George holding us stationary while he apostrophised her in the metaphor of Keats and Spenser.

Again the yawl's crew shouted at us, the yawl aback and in stays. "Let go, you fool!" I said, digging the sculls. "Lock, Corinthia!"

George looked at me. Corinthia was now watching the yawl with both eyes. "What, Davy?" George said. "Must even thou help Circe's doves into the sea? Pull, then, O Super-Gadarene!"

And he shoved us off.

I had not meant to pull away. And even if I had, I could still have counteracted the movement if Everbe Corinthia hadn't opened the lock. But open it she did, and looked once back to us and sat flat on the earth, crisp fresh dress and all.

The skiff shot away under me; I had a fleeting picture of George still clinging with one arm around the pile, his knees drawn up to his chin and the hat in his lifted hand and of a long running shadow carrying the shadow of a boat-hook falling across the lock. Then I was too busy steering.

I shot through the gates, carrying with me that picture of George, the glazed hat still gallantly aloft like the mastheaded pennant of a man-of-war, vanishing beneath the surface. Then I was floating quietly in slack water while the round eyes of two men stared quietly down at me from the yawl.

“Yer’ve lost yer mate, sir,” one of them said in a civil voice. Then they had drawn me alongside with a boat-hook and standing up in the skiff, I saw George. He was standing in the towpath now, and Simon, Everbe Corinthia’s father, and another man — he was the one with the boat-hook, whose shadow I had seen across the lock — were there too.

But I saw only George with his ugly crooked face and his round head now dark in the sunlight. One of the watermen was still talking.

“Steady, sir. Lend ’im a ‘and, Sam’l. There. ‘E’ll do now. Give ’im a turn, seeing ’is mate. . . .”

“You fool, you damned fool!” I said. George stooped beside me, wringing his sopping flannels, while Simon and the second man — Simon with his iron-gray face and his iron-gray whisker that made him look like nothing so much as an aged bull peering surlily and stupidly across a winter hedgerow, and the second man, younger, with a ruddy capable face, in a hard, boardlike, town-made suit — watched us. Corinthia sat on the ground, weeping hopelessly and quietly. “You damned fool. Oh, you damned fool.”

“Oxford young gentlemen,” Simon said in a harsh disgusted voice.

“Oxford young gentlemen.”

“Eh, well,” George said, “I daresay I haven’t damaged your lock over a farthing’s worth.” He rose, and saw Corinthia. “What, Circe!” he said, “tears over the accomplishment of your appointed destiny?” He went to her, trailing a thread of water across the packed earth, and took her arm. It moved willing enough, but she herself sat flat on the ground, looking up at him with streaming hopeless eyes. Her mouth was open a

little and she sat in an attitude of patient despair, weeping tears of crystal purity.

Simon watched them, the boat-hook — he had taken it from the second man, who was now busy at the lock mechanism, and I knew that he was the brother who worked in London, of whom Corinthia had once told us — clutched in his big knotty fist. The yawl was now in the lock, the two faces watching us across the parapet like two severed heads in a quiet row upon the footway. “Come, now,” George said. “You’ll soil your dress sitting there.”

“Up, lass,” Simon said, in that harsh voice of his which at the same time was without ill-nature, as though harshness were merely the medium through which he spoke. Corinthia rose obediently, still weeping, and went on toward the neat little dove-cote of a house in which they lived. The sunlight was slanting level across it and upon George’s ridiculous figure. He was watching me.

“Well, Davy,” he said, “if I didn’t know better, I’d say from your expression that you are envying me.”

“Am I?” I said. “You fool. You ghastly lunatic.”

Simon had gone to the lock. The two quiet heads rose slowly, as though they were being thrust gradually upward from out the earth, and Simon now stooped with the boat-hook over the lock. He rose, with the limp anonymity of George’s once gallant hat on the end of the boat-hook, and extended it.

George took it as gravely. “Thanks,” he said. He dug into his pocket and gave Simon a coin. “For wear and tear on the boat-hook,” he said.

“And perhaps a bit of balm for your justifiable disappointment, eh, Simon?” Simon grunted and turned back to the lock. The brother was still watching us. “And I am obliged to you,” George said. “Hope I’ll never have to return the favor in kind.” The brother said something, short and grave, in a slow pleasant voice. George looked at me again. “Well, Davy.”

“Come on. Let’s go.”

“Right you are. Where’s the skiff?” Then I was staring at him again, and for a moment he stared at me. Then he shouted, a long ringing laugh, while the two heads in the yawl watched us from beyond Simon’s granite-like and contemptuous back. I could almost hear Simon thinking Oxford young gentlemen. “Davy, have you lost the skiff?”

“She’s tied up below a bit, sir,” the civil voice in the yawl said. “The gentleman walked out of ’er like she were a keb, without looking back.”

The June afternoon slanted across my shoulder, full upon George’s face. He would not take my jacket. “I’ll pull down and keep warm,” he said. The once-glazed hat lay between his feet.

“Why don’t you throw that thing out?” I said. He pulled steadily, looking at me.

The sun was full in his eyes, striking the yellow flecks in them into fleeting, mica-like sparks. “That hat,” I said. “What do you want with it?”

“Oh; that. Cast away the symbol of my soul?” He unshipped one scull and picked up the hat and turned and cocked it on the stem, where it hung with a kind of gallant and dissolute jauntiness. “The symbol of my soul rescued from the deep by—”

“Hauled out of a place it had no business being whatever, by a public servant who did not want his public charge cluttered up.”

“At least you admit the symbology,” he said. “And that the empire rescued it. So it is worth something to the empire. Too much for me to throw it away. That which you have saved from death or disaster will be forever dear to you, Davy; you cannot ignore it. Besides, it will not let you. What is it you Americans say?”

“We say, bunk. Why not use the river for a while? It’s paid for.”

He looked at me. “Ah. That is . . . Well, anyway, it’s American, isn’t it. That’s something.”

But he got out into the current again. A barge was coming up, in tow. We got outside her and watched her pass, empty of any sign of life, with a solemn implacability like a huge barren catafalque, the broad-rumped horses, followed by a boy in a patched coat and carrying a peeled goad, plodding stolidly along the path.

We dropped slowly astern. Over her freeboard a motionless face with a dead pipe in its teeth contemplated us with eyes empty of any thought.

“If I could have chosen,” George said, “I’d like to have been pulled out by that chap yonder. Can’t you see him picking up a boat-hook without haste and fishing you out without even shifting the pipe?”

“You should have chosen your place better, then. But it seems to me you’re in no position to complain.”

“But Simon showed annoyance. Not surprise nor concern: just annoyance. I don’t like to be hauled back into life by an annoyed man with a boat-hook.”

“You could have said so at the time. Simon didn’t have to save you. He could have shut the gates until he got another head of water, and flushed you right out of his bailiwick without touching you, and saved himself trouble and ingratitude. Besides Corinthia’s tears.”

“Ay; tears. Corinthia will at least cherish a tenderness for me from now on.”

“Yes; but if you’d only not got out at all. Or having not got in at all. Falling into that filthy lock just to complete a gesture. I think—”

“Do not think, my good David. When I had the choice of holding on to the skiff and being haled safely and meekly away, or of giving the lie to the stupid small gods at the small price of being temporarily submerged in this—” he let go one oar and dipped his hand in the water, then he flung it outward in dripping, burlesque magniloquence. “O Thames!” he said. “Thou mighty sewer of an empire!”

“Steer the boat,” I said. “I lived in America long enough to have learned something of England’s pride.”

“And so you consider a bath in this filthy old sewer that has flushed this land since long before He who made it had any need to invent God . . . a rock about which man and all his bawling clamor seethes away to sluttishness. . . .”

We were twenty-one then; we talked like that, tramping about that peaceful land where in green petrification the old splendid bloody deeds, the spirits of the blundering courageous men, slumbered in every stone and tree.

For that was 1914, and in the parks bands played Valse Septembre, and girls and young men drifted in punts on the moonlit river and sang Mister Moon and There’s a Bit of Heaven, and George and I sat in a window in Christ Church while the curtains whispered in the twilight, and talked of courage and honor and Napier and love and Ben Jonson and death.

The next year was 1915, and the bands played God Save the King, and the rest of the young men — and some not so young — sang Mademoiselle of Armentieres in the mud, and George was dead.

He had gone out in October, a subaltern in the regiment of which his people were hereditary colonels. Ten months later I saw him sitting with an orderly behind a ruined chimney on the edge of Givenchy. He had a telephone strapped to his ears and he was eating something which he waved at me as we ran past and ducked into the cellar which we sought.

I told him to wait until they got done giving me the ether; there were so many of them moving back and forth that I was afraid someone would brush against him and find him there. "And then you'll have to go back," I said.

"I'll be careful," George said.

"Because you'll have to do something for me," I said. "You'll have to."

"All right. I will. What is it?"

"Wait until they go away, then I can tell you. You'll have to do it, because I can't. Promise you will."

"All right. I promise." So we waited until they got done and had moved down to my leg. Then George came nearer. "What is it?" he said.

"It's my leg," I said. "I want you to be sure it's dead. They may cut it off in a hurry and forget about it."

"All right. I'll see about it."

"I couldn't have that, you know. That wouldn't do at all. They might bury it and it couldn't lie quiet. And then it would be lost and we couldn't find it to do anything."

"All right. I'll watch." He looked at me. "Only I don't have to go back."

"You don't? You don't have to go back at all?"

"I'm out of it. You aren't out of it yet. You'll have to go back."

"I'm not?" I said. . . . "Then it will be harder to find it than ever. So you see about it. . . . And you don't have to go back. You're lucky, aren't you?"

"Yes. I'm lucky. I always was lucky. Give the lie to the stupid small gods at the mere price of being temporarily submerged in—"

“There were tears,” I said. “She sat flat on the earth to weep them.”

“Ay; tears,” he said. “The flowing of all men’s tears under the sky. Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation, and the world seething away to sluttishness while you look on.”

“No; she sat flat in a green afternoon and wept for the symbol of your soul.”

“Not for the symbol, but because the empire saved it, hoarded it. She wept for wisdom.”

“But there were tears. . . . And you’ll see to it? You’ll not go away?”

“Ay,” George said; “tears.”

In the hospital it was better. It was a long room full of constant movement, and I didn’t have to be afraid all the time that they would find him and send him away, though now and then it did happen — a sister or an orderly coming into the middle of our talk, with ubiquitous hands and cheerful aseptic voices: “Now, now. He’s not going. Yes, yes; he’ll come back. Lie still, now.”

So I would have to lie there, surrounding, enclosing that gaping sensation below my thigh where the nerve- and muscle-ends twitched and jerked, until he returned.

“Can’t you find it?” I said. “Have you looked good?”

“Yes. I’ve looked everywhere. I went back out there and looked, and I looked here. It must be all right. They must have killed it.”

“But they didn’t. I told you they were going to forget it.”

“How do you know they forgot it?”

“I know. I can feel it. It jeers at me. It’s not dead.”

“But if it just jeers at you.”

“I know. But that won’t do. Don’t you see that won’t do?”

“All right. I’ll look again.”

“You must. You must find it. I don’t like this.”

So he looked again. He came back and sat down and he looked at me. His eyes were bright and intent.

“It’s nothing to feel bad about,” I said. “You’ll find it some day. It’s all right; just a leg. It hasn’t even another leg to walk with.” Still he didn’t say anything, just looking at me. “Where are you living now?”

“Up there,” he said.

I looked at him for a while. “Oh,” I said. “At Oxford?”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” I said. . . . “Why didn’t you go home?”

“I don’t know.”

He still looked at me. “Is it nice there now? It must be. Are there still punts on the river? Do they still sing in the punts like they did that summer, the men and girls, I mean?” He looked at me, wide, intent, a little soberly.

“You left me last night,” he said.

“Did I?”

“You jumped into the skiff and pulled away. So I came back here.”

“Did I? Where was I going?”

“I don’t know. You hurried away, up-river. You could have told me, if you wanted to be alone. You didn’t need to run.”

“I shan’t again.” We looked at one another. We spoke quietly now. “So you must find it now.”

“Yes. Can you tell what it is doing?”

“I don’t know. That’s it.”

“Does it feel like it’s doing something you don’t want it to?”

“I don’t know. So you find it. You find it quick. Find it and fix it so it can get dead.”

But he couldn’t find it. We talked about it quietly, between silences, watching one another. “Can’t you tell anything about where it is?” he said. I was sitting up now, practicing accustoming myself to the wood-and-leather one. The gap was still there, but we had now established a sort of sullen armistice. “Maybe that’s what it was waiting for,” he said. “Maybe now . . .”

“Maybe so. I hope so. But they shouldn’t have forgot to — Have I run away any more since that night?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” He was watching me with his bright, intent, fading eyes. “George,” I said. “Wait, George!” But he was gone.

I didn't see him again for a long time. I was at the Observers' School — it doesn't require two legs to operate a machine gun and a wireless key and to orient maps from the gunner's piano stool of an R.E. or an F.E. — then, and I had almost finished the course.

So my days were pretty well filled, what with work and with that certitude of the young which so arbitrarily distinguishes between verities and illusions, establishing with such assurance that line between truth and delirium which sages knit their brows over.

And my nights were filled too, with the nerve- and muscle-ends chafed now by an immediate cause: the wood-and-leather leg. But the gap was still there, and sometimes at night, isolated by invisibility, it would become filled with the immensity of darkness and silence despite me. Then, on the poised brink of sleep, I would believe that he had found it at last and seen that it was dead, and that some day he would return and tell me about it. Then I had the dream.

Suddenly I knew that I was about to come upon it. I could feel in the darkness the dark walls of the corridor and the invisible corner, and I knew that it was just around the corner. I could smell a rank, animal odor. It was an odor which I had never smelled before, but I knew it at once, blown suddenly down the corridor from the old fetid caves where experience began.

I felt dread and disgust and determination, as when you sense suddenly a snake beside a garden path. And then I was awake, rigid, sweating; the darkness flowed with a long rushing sigh. I lay with the fading odor in my nostrils while my sweat cooled, staring up into the darkness, not daring to close my eyes. I lay on my back, curled about the gaping hole

like a doughnut, while the odor faded. At last it was gone, and George was looking at me.

“What is it, Davy?” he said. “Can’t you say what it is?”

“It’s nothing.” I could taste sweat on my lips. “It isn’t anything. I won’t again. I swear I shan’t any more.”

He was looking at me. “You said you had to come back to town. And then I saw you on the river. You saw me and hid, Davy. Pulled up under the bank, in the shadow. There was a girl with you.” He watched me, his eyes bright and grave.

“Was there a moon?” I said.

“Yes. There was a moon.”

“Oh God, oh God,” I said. “I won’t again, George! You must find it. You must!”

“Ah, Davy,” he said. His face began to fade.

“I won’t! I won’t again!” I said. “George! George!”

A match flared; a face sprang out of the darkness above me. “Wake up,” it said. I lay staring at it, sweating. The match burned down, the face fell back into darkness, from which the voice came bodiless: “All right now?”

“Yes, thanks. Dreaming. Sorry I waked you.”

For the next few nights I didn’t dare let go into sleep again. But I was young, my body was getting strong again and I was out of doors all day;

one night sleep overtook me unawares, and I waked next morning to find that I had eluded it, whatever it was.

I found a sort of peace. The days passed; I had learned the guns and the wireless and the maps, and most of all, to not observe what should not be observed. My thigh was almost reconciled to the new member, and, freed now of the outcast's doings, I could give all my time to seeking George. But I did not find him; somewhere in the mazy corridor where the mother of dreams dwells I had lost them both.

So I did not remark him at first even when he stood beside me in the corridor just beyond the corner of which It waited. The sulphur reek was all about me; I felt horror and dread and something unspeakable: delight. I believe I felt what women in labor feel. And then George was there, looking steadily down at me. He had always sat beside my head, so we could talk, but now he stood beyond the foot of the bed, looking down at me and I knew that this was farewell.

"Don't go, George!" I said. "I shan't again. I shan't any more, George!" But his steady, grave gaze faded slowly, implacable, sorrowful, but without reproach. "Go, then!" I said. My teeth felt dry against my lip like sandpaper. "Go, then!"

And that was the last of it. He never came back, nor the dream. I knew it would not, as a sick man who wakes with his body spent and peaceful and weak knows that the illness will not return. I knew it was gone; I knew that when I realized that I thought of it only with pity. Poor devil, I would think. Poor devil.

But it took George with it. Sometimes, when dark and isolation had robbed me of myself, I would think that perhaps in killing it he had lost his own life: the dead dying in order to slay the dead.

I sought him now and then in the corridors of sleep, but without success; I spent a week with his people in Devon, in a rambling house where his crooked ugly face and his round ruddy head and his belief that Marlowe was a better lyric poet than Shakespeare and Thomas Campion than either, and that breath was not a bauble given a man for his own pleasuring, eluded me behind every stick and stone. But I never saw him again.

III

The padre had driven up from Poperinghe in the dark, in the side car of a motorcycle. He sat beyond the table, talking of Jotham Rust, Everbe Corinthia's brother and Simon's son, whom I had seen three times in my life.

Yesterday I saw Jotham for the third and last time, arraigned before a court martial for desertion: the scarecrow of that once sturdy figure with its ruddy, capable face, who had pulled George out of the lock with a boat-hook that afternoon three years ago, charged now for his life, offering no extenuation nor explanation, expecting and asking no clemency.

"He does not want clemency," the padre said. The padre was a fine, honest man, incumbent of a modest living in the Midlands somewhere, who had brought the kind and honest stupidity of his convictions into the last place on earth where there was room for them. "He does not

want to live.” His face was musing and dejected, shocked and bewildered.

“There comes a time in the life of every man when the world turns its dark side to him and every man’s shadow is his mortal enemy. Then he must turn to God, or perish.

Yet he . . . I cannot seem . . .” His eyes held that burly bewilderment of oxen; above his stock his shaven chin dejected, but not vanquished yet. “And you say you know of no reason why he should have attacked you?”

“I never saw the man but twice before,” I said. “One time was night before last, the other was . . . two — three years ago, when I passed through his father’s lock in a skiff while I was at Oxford. He was there when his sister let us through. And if you hadn’t told me his sister’s name, I wouldn’t have remembered him then.”

He brooded. “The father is dead, too.”

“What? Dead? Old Simon dead?”

“Yes. He died shortly after the — the other. Rust says he left his father after the sister’s funeral, talking with the sexton in Abingdon churchyard, and a week later he was notified in London that his father was dead. He says the sexton told him his father had been giving directions about his own funeral.

The sexton said that every day Simon would come up to see him about it, made all the arrangements, and that the sexton joked him a little

about it, because he was such a hale old chap, thinking that he was just off balance for the time with the freshness of his grief. And then, a week later, he was dead.”

“Old Simon dead,” I said. “Corinthia, then Simon, and now Jotham.” The candle flame stood steady and unwavering on the table.

“Was that her name?” he said. “Everbe Corinthia?” He sat in the lone chair, puzzlement, bewilderment in the very shape of his shadow on the wall behind him. The light fell on one side of his face, the major’s crown on that shoulder glinting dully. I rose from the cot, the harness of the leg creaking with explosive loudness, and leaned over his shoulder and took a cigarette from my magneto case tobacco-box, and fumbled a match in my single hand. He glanced up.

“Permit me,” he said. He took the box and struck a match. “You’re fortunate to have escaped with just that.” He indicated my sling.

“Yes, sir. If it hadn’t been for my leg, I’d have got the knife in my ribs instead of my arm.”

“Your leg?”

“I keep it propped on a chair beside the bed, so I can reach it easily. He stumbled over it and waked me. Otherwise he’d have stuck me like a pig.”

“Oh,” he said. He dropped the match and brooded again with his stubborn bewilderment. “And yet, his is not the face of an assassin in the dark. There is a forthrightness in it, a — a — what shall I say? a sense of social responsibility, integrity, that . . .

And you say that you — I beg your pardon; I do not doubt your word; it is only that — Yet the girl is indubitably dead; it was he who discovered her and was with her until she died and saw her buried. He heard the man laugh once, in the dark.”

“But you cannot slash a stranger’s arm simply because you heard a laugh in the dark, sir. The poor devil is crazy with his own misfortunes.”

“Perhaps so,” the padre said. “He told me that he has other proof, something incontrovertible; what, he would not tell me.”

“Then let him produce it. If I were in his place now . . .”

He brooded, his hands clasped on the table. “There is a justice in the natural course of events. . . . My dear sir, are you accusing Providence of a horrible and meaningless practical joke? No, no; to him who has sinned, that sin will come home to him. Otherwise . . . God is at least a gentleman. Forgive me: I am not — You understand how this comes home to me, in this unfortunate time when we already have so much to reproach ourselves with.

We are responsible for this.” He touched the small metal cross on his tunic, then he swept his arm in a circular gesture that shaped in the quiet room between us the still and sinister darkness in which the fine and resounding words men mouthed so glibly were the vampire’s teeth with which the vampire fed. “The voice of God waking His servants from the sloth into which they have sunk. . . .”

“What, padre?” I said. “Is the damn thing making a dissenter of you too?”

He mused again, his face heavy in the candle light. "That the face of a willful shedder of blood, of an assassin in the dark? No, no; you cannot tell me that."

I didn't try. I didn't tell him either my belief that only necessity, the need for expedition and silence, had reduced Jotham to employing a knife, an instrument of any kind; that what he wanted was my throat under his hands.

He had gone home on his leave, to that neat little dovecote beside the lock, and at once he found something strained in its atmosphere and out of tune. That was last summer, about the time I was completing my course at the Observers' School.

Simon appeared to be oblivious of the undercurrent, but Jotham had not been home long before he discovered that every evening about dusk Corinthia quitted the house for an hour or so, and something in her manner, or maybe in the taut atmosphere of the house itself, caused him to question her. She was evasive, blazed suddenly out at him in anger which was completely unlike her at all, then became passive and docile.

Then he realized that the passiveness was secretive, the docility dissimulation; one evening he surprised her slipping away. He drove her back to the house, where she took refuge in her room and locked the door, and from a window he thought he caught a glimpse of the man disappearing beyond a field. He pursued, but found no one.

For an hour after dusk he lay in a nearby coppice, watching the house, then he returned. Corinthia's door was still locked and old Simon filled the house with his peaceful snoring.

Later something waked him. He sat up in bed, then sprang to the floor and went to the window. There was a moon and by its light he saw something white flitting along the towpath.

He pursued and overtook Corinthia, who turned like a vicious small animal at the edge of the coppice where he had lain in hiding. Beyond the towpath a punt lay at the bank. It was empty. He grasped Corinthia's arm. She raged at him; it could not have been very pretty.

Then she collapsed as suddenly and from the tangled darkness of the coppice behind them a man's laugh came, a jeering sound that echoed once across the moonlit river and ceased. Corinthia now crouched on the ground, watching him, her face like a mask in the moonlight.

He rushed into the coppice and beat it thoroughly, finding nothing. When he emerged the punt was gone. He ran down to the water, looking this way and that. While he stood there the laugh came again, from the shadows beneath the other shore.

He returned to Corinthia. She sat as he had left her, her loosened hair about her face, looking out across the river. He spoke to her, but she did not reply. He lifted her to her feet. She came docilely and they returned to the cottage. He tried to talk to her again, but she moved stonily beside him, her loosened hair about her cold face. He saw her to her room and locked the door himself and took the key back to bed with him. Simon had not awakened. The next morning she was gone, the door still locked.

He told Simon then and all that day they sought her, assisted by the neighbors. Neither of them wished to notify the police, but at dusk that

day a constable appeared with his notebook, and they dragged the lock, without finding anything. The next morning, just after dawn, Jotham found her lying in the towpath before the door.

She was unconscious, but showed no physical injury. They brought her into the house and applied their spartan, homely remedies, and after a time she revived, screaming. She screamed all that day until sunset. She lay on her back screaming, her eyes wide open and perfectly empty, until her voice left her and her screaming was only a ghost of screaming, making no sound. At sunset she died.

He had now been absent from his battalion for a hundred and twelve days. God knows how he did it; he must have lived like a beast, hidden, eating when he could, lurking in the shadow with every man's hand against him, as he sought through the entire B.E.F. for a man whose laugh he had heard one time, knowing that the one thing he could surely count on finding would be his own death, and to be foiled on the verge of success by an artificial leg propped on a chair in the dark.

How much later it was I don't know. The candle was lighted again, but the man who had awakened me was bending over the cot, between me and the light. But despite the light, it was a little too much like that night before last; I came out of sleep upstanding this time, with my automatic.

"As you were," I said. "You'll not—" Then he moved back and I recognized the padre. He stood beside the table, the light falling on one side of his face and chest. I sat up and put the pistol down. "What is it, padre? Do they want me again?"

“He wants nothing,” the padre said. “Man cannot injure him further now.” He stood there, a portly figure that should have been pacing benignantly in a shovel hat in green lanes between summer fields. Then he thrust his hand into his tunic and produced a flat object and laid it on the table.

“I found this among Jotham Rust’s effects which he gave me to destroy, an hour ago,” he said. He looked at me, then he turned and went to the door, and turned again and looked at me.

“Is he — I thought it was to be at dawn.”

“Yes,” he said. “I must hurry back.” He was either looking at me or not. The flame stood steady above the candle. Then he opened the door. “May God have mercy on your soul,” he said, and went out.

I sat in the covers and heard him blunder on in the darkness, then I heard the motorcycle splutter into life and die away. I swung my foot to the floor and rose, holding on to the chair on which the artificial leg rested.

It was chilly; it was as though I could feel the toes even of the absent leg curling away from the floor, so I braced my hip on the chair and reached the flat object from the table and returned to bed and drew the blanket about my shoulders. My wrist watch said three o’clock.

It was a photograph, a cheap thing such as itinerant photographers turn out at fairs. It was dated at Abingdon in June of the summer just past. At that time I was lying in the hospital talking to George, and I sat quite still in the blankets, looking at the photograph, because it was my own face that looked back at me.

It had a quality that was not mine: a quality vicious and outrageous and unappalled, and beneath it was written in a bold sprawling hand like that of a child: "To Everbe Corinthia" followed by an unprintable phrase, yet it was my own face, and I sat holding the picture quietly in my hand while the candle flame stood high and steady above the wick and on the wall my huddled shadow held the motionless photograph. In slow and gradual diminishment of cold tears the candle appeared to sink, as though burying itself in its own grief.

But even before this came about, it began to pale and fade until only the tranquil husk of the small flame stood unwinded as a feather above the wax, leaving upon the wall the motionless husk of my shadow.

Then I saw that the window was gray, and that was all. It would be dawn at Pop too, but it must have been some time, and the padre must have got back in time.

I told him to find it and kill it. The dawn was cold; on these mornings the butt of the leg felt as though it were made of ice. I told him to. I told him.

The End