

The Strange Country, Ernest Hemingway

"The Strange Country" comprises four chapters of an uncompleted novel that Hemingway worked on at intervals in 1946-1947 and 1950-1951. These scenes represent preliminary material for an early version of *Islands in the Stream*, which was published posthumously in 1970. Hemingway apparently discarded these chapters when he changed the direction of the novel as he worked on it. Readers will note the reuse of names subsequently given to other characters in the final version of *Islands in the Stream*. None of these rearrangements diminishes the unity and integrity of "The Strange Country."

The Strange Country

MIAMI WAS HOT AND MUGGY AND THE land wind that blew from the Everglades brought mosquitoes even in the morning.

"We'll get out as soon as we can," Roger said. "I'll have to get some money. Do you know anything about cars?"

"Not very much."

"You might look and see what there is advertised in the classified in the paper and I'll get some money here to Western Union."

"Can you get it just like that?"

"If I get the call through in time so my lawyer can get it off."

They were up on the thirteenth floor of a hotel on Biscayne Boulevard and the bellboy had just gone down for the papers and some other purchases. There were two rooms and they overlooked the bay, the park and the traffic passing on the Boulevard. They were registered under their own names.

"You take the corner one," Roger had said. "It will have a little breeze in it maybe. I'll get on the telephone in the other room."

"What can I do to help?"

"You run through the classifieds on motorcars for sale in one paper and I'll take the other."

"What sort of a car?"

"A convertible with good rubber. The best one we can get."

"How much money do you think we'll have?"

"I'm going to try for five thousand."

"That's wonderful. Do you think you can get it?"

"I don't know. I'll get going on him now," Roger said and went into the other room. He shut the door and then opened it. "Do you still love me?"

"I thought that was all settled," she said. "Please kiss me now before the boy comes back."

"Good."

He held her solidly against him and kissed her hard.

"That's better," she said. "Why did we have to have separate rooms?"

"I thought I might have to be identified to get the money."

"Oh."

"If we have any luck we won't have to stay in these."

"Can we really do it all that fast?"

"If we have any luck."

"Then can we be Mr. and Mrs. Gilch?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Gilch."

"Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Brat-Gilch."

"I'd better make the call."

"Don't stay away an awfully long time though."

They had lunch at a seafood restaurant owned by Greeks. It was an air-conditioned oasis against the heavy heat of the town and the food had certainly originally come out of the ocean but it was to Eddy's cooking of the same things as old re-used grease is to fresh browned butter. But there was a good bottle of really cold, dry, resinous tasting Greek white wine and for dessert they had cherry pie.

"Let's go to Greece and the islands," she said.

"Haven't you ever been there?"

"One summer. I loved it."

"We'll go there."

By two o'clock the money was at the Western Union. It was thirty-five hundred instead of five thousand and by three-thirty they had bought a used Buick convertible with only six thousand miles on it. It had two good spares, set-in well fenders, a radio, a big spotlight, plenty of luggage space in the rear and it was sand colored.

By five-thirty they had made various other purchases, checked out of the hotel and the doorman was stowing their bags into the back of the car. It was still deadly hot.

Roger, who was sweating heavily in his heavy uniform, as suitable to the subtropics in summer as shorts would be to Labrador in winter, tipped the doorman and got into the car and they drove along Biscayne Boulevard and turned west to get onto the road to Coral Gables and the Tamiami Trail.

"How do you feel?" he asked the girl.

"Wonderful. Do you think it's true?"

"I know it's true because it's so damned hot and we didn't get the five thousand."

"Do you think we paid too much for the car?"

"No. Just right."

"Did you get the insurance?"

"Yes. And joined the A.A.A."

"Aren't we fast?"

"We're terrific."

"Have you got the rest of the money?"

"Sure. Pinned in my shirt."

"That's our bank."

"It's all we've got."

"How do you think it will last?"

"It won't have to last. I'll make some more."

"It will have to last for a while."

"It will."

"Roger."

"Yes, daughter."

"Do you love me?"

"I don't know."

"Say it."

"I don't know. But I'm going to damn well find out."

"I love you. Hard. Hard. Hard."

"You keep that up. That will be a big help to me."

"Why don't you say you love me?"

"Let's wait."

She had been holding her hand on his thigh while he drove and now she took it away.

"All right," she said. "We'll wait."

They were driving west now on the broad Coral Gables road through the flat heat-stricken outskirts of Miami, past stores, filling stations and markets with cars with people going home from the city passing them steadily. Now they passed Coral Gables to their left with the buildings that looked out of the Basso Veneto rising from the Florida prairie and ahead the road stretched straight and heat-welted across what had once been the Everglades. Roger drove faster now and the movement of the car through the heavy air made the air cool as it came in through the scoop in the dash and the slanted glass of the ventilators.

"She's a lovely car," the girl said. "Weren't we lucky to get her?"

"Very."

"We're pretty lucky don't you think?"

"So far."

"You've gotten awfully cautious on me."

"Not really."

"But we can be jolly can't we?"

"I'm jolly."

"You don't sound awfully jolly."

"Well maybe then I'm not."

"Couldn't you be though? You see I really am."

"I will be," Roger said. "I promise."

Looking ahead at the road he had driven so many times in his life, seeing it stretch ahead, knowing it was the same road with the ditches on either side and the forest and the swamps, knowing that only the car was different, that only who was with him was different, Roger felt the old hollowness coming inside of him and knew he must stop it.

"I love you, daughter," he said. He did not think it was true. But it sounded all right as he said it. "I love you very much and I'm going to try to be very good to you."

"And you're going to be jolly."

"And I'm going to be jolly."

"That's wonderful," she said. "Have we started already?"

"We're on the road."

"When will we see the birds?"

"They're much further in this time of year."

"Roger."

"Yes, Bratchen."

"You don't have to be jolly if you don't feel like it. We'll be jolly enough. You feel however you feel and I'll be jolly for us both. I can't help it today."

He saw on ahead where the road turned to the right and ran northwest through the forest swamp instead of west. That was good. That was really much better. Pretty soon they would come to the big osprey's nest in the dead cypress tree. They had just passed the place where he had killed the rattlesnake that winter driving through here with David's mother before Andrew was born.

That was the year they both bought Seminole shirts at the trading post at Everglades and wore them in the car. He had given the big rattlesnake to some Indians that had come in to trade and they were pleased with the snake because he had a fine hide and twelve rattles and Roger remembered how heavy and thick he was when he lifted him with his huge, flattened head hanging and how the Indian smiled when he took him. That was the year they shot the wild turkey as he crossed the road that early morning coming out of the mist that was just thinning with the first sun, the cypresses showing black in the silver mist and the turkey brown-bronze and lovely as he stepped onto the road, stepping high-headed, then crouching to run, then flopping on the road.

"I'm fine," he told the girl. "We get into some nice country now."
"Where do you think we'll get to tonight?"
"We'll find some place. Once we get to the gulf side this breeze will be a sea breeze instead of a land breeze and it will be cool."
"That will be lovely," the girl said. "I hated to think of staying the first night in that hotel."

"We were awfully lucky to get away. I didn't think we could do it that quickly."
"I wonder how Tom is."
"Lonely," Roger said.
"Isn't he a wonderful guy?"

"He's my best friend and my conscience and my father and my brother and my banker. He's like a saint. Only jolly."
"I never knew anybody as fine," she said. "It breaks your heart the way he loves you and the boys."
"I wish he could have them all summer."
"Won't you miss them terribly?"
"I miss them all the time."

They had put the wild turkey in the back of the seat and he had been so heavy, warm and beautiful with the shining bronze plumage, so different from the blues and blacks of a domestic turkey, and David's mother was so excited she could hardly speak. And then she had said, "No. Let me hold him. I want to see him again. We can put him away later." And he had put a newspaper on her lap and she had tucked the bird's bloodied head under his wing, folding the wing carefully over it, and sat there stroking and smoothing his breast feathers while he, Roger, drove.

Finally she said, "He's cold now" and had wrapped him in the paper and put him in the back of the seat again and said, "Thank you for letting me keep him when I wanted him so much." Roger had kissed her while he drove and she had said, "Oh Roger we're so happy and we always will be won't we?" That was just around this next slanting turn the road makes up ahead. The sun was down to the top of the treetops now. But they had not seen the birds.

"You won't miss them so much you won't be able to love me will you?"
"No. Truly."
"I understand it making you sad. But you were going to be away from them anyway weren't you?"
"Sure. Please don't worry, daughter."
"I like it when you say daughter. Say it again."
"It comes at the end of a sentence," he said. "Daughter."

"Maybe it's because I'm younger," she said. "I love the kids. I love them all three, hard, and I think they're wonderful. I didn't know there were

kids like that. But Andy's too young for me to marry and I love you. So I forget about them and just am as happy as I can be to be with you."

"You're good."

"I'm not really. I'm awfully difficult. But I do know when I love someone and I've loved you ever since I can remember. So I'm going to try to be good."

"You're being wonderful."

"Oh I can be much better than this."

"Don't try."

"I'm not going to for a while. Roger I'm so happy. We'll be happy won't we?"

"Yes, daughter."

"And we can be happy for always can't we? I know it sounds silly me being Mother's daughter and you with everyone. But I believe in it and it's possible. I know it's possible. I've loved you all my life and if that's possible it's possible to be happy isn't it? Say it is anyway."

"I think it is."

He'd always said it was. Not in this car though. In other cars in other countries. But he had said it enough in this country too and he had believed it. It would have been possible too. Everything was possible once. It was possible on this road on that stretch that now lay ahead where the canal ran clear and flowing by the right-hand side of the road where the Indian poled his dugout. There was no Indian there now. That was before. When it was possible.

Before the birds were gone. That was the other year before the turkey. That year before the big rattlesnake was the year they saw the Indian poling the dugout and the buck in the bow of the dugout with his white throat and chest, his slender legs with the delicate shaped hoofs, shaped like a broken heart, drawn up and his head with the beautiful miniature horns looking toward the Indian. They had stopped the car and spoken to the Indian but he did not understand English and grinned and the small buck lay there dead with his eyes open looking straight at the Indian. It was possible then and for five years after. But what was possible now?

Nothing was possible now unless he himself was and he must say the things if there was ever to be a chance of them being true. Even if it were wrong to say them he must say them. They never could be true unless he said them. He had to say them and then perhaps he could feel them and then perhaps he could believe them. And then perhaps they would be true. Perhaps is an ugly word, he thought, but it is even worse on the end of your cigar.

"Have you got cigarettes?" he asked the girl. "I don't know whether that lighter works."

"I haven't tried it. I haven't smoked. I've felt so unnervous."

"You don't just smoke when you're nervous do you?"

"I think so. Mostly."

"Try the lighter."

"All right."

"Who was the guy you married?"

"Oh let's not talk about him."

"No. I just meant who was he?"

"No one you know."

"Don't you really want to tell me about him?"

"No, Roger. No."

"All right."

"I'm sorry," she said. "He was English."

"Was?"

"Is. But I like was better. Besides you said was."

"Was is a good word," he said. "It's a hell of a lot better word than perhaps."

"All right. I don't understand it at all but I believe you. Roger?"

"Yes, daughter."

"Do you feel any better?"

"Much. I'm fine."

"All right. I'll tell you about him. He turned out to be gay. That was it. He hadn't said anything about it and he didn't act that way at all. Not at all. Truly. You probably think I'm stupid. But he didn't in any way. He was absolutely beautiful. You know how they can be. And then I found out about it. Right away of course. The same night actually. Now is it all right not to talk about it?"

"Poor Helena."

"Don't call me Helena. Call me daughter."

"My poor daughter. My darling."

"That's a nice word too. You mustn't mix it with daughter though. It's no good that way. Mummy knew him. I thought she might have said something. She just said she'd never noticed and when I said, 'You might have noticed,' she said, 'I though you knew what you were doing and I had no call to interfere.' I said, 'Couldn't you just have said something or couldn't somebody just have said something?' and she said, 'Darling, everyone thought you knew what you were doing. Everyone. Everyone knows you don't care anything about it yourself and I had every right to think you knew the facts of life in this right little tight little island.'"

She was sitting stiff and straight beside him now and she had no tone in her voice at all. She didn't mimic. She simply used the exact words or as exactly as she remembered them. Roger thought they sounded quite exact. "Mummy was a great comfort," she said. "She said a lot of things to me that day."

"Look," Roger said. "We'll throw it all away. All of it. We'll throw it all away now right here beside the road. Any of it you want to get rid of you can always tell me. But we've thrown it all away now and we've really thrown it away."

"I want it to be like that," she said. "That's how I started out. And you know I said at the start we'd give it a miss."

"I know. I'm sorry. But I'm glad really because now we have thrown it away."

"It's nice of you. But you don't have to make incantations or exorcisions or any of that. I can swim without water wings. And he was damned beautiful."

"Spit it out. If that's the way you want it."

"Don't be like that. You're so damned superior you don't have to be superior. Roger?"

"Yes, Bratchen."

"I love you very much and we don't have to do this any more do we?"

"No. Truly."

"I'm so glad. Now will we be jolly?"

"Sure we will. Look," he said. "There are the birds. The first of them." They showed white in the cypress hammock that rose like an island of trees out of the swamp on their left the sun shining on them in the dark foliage and as the sun lowered more came flying across the sky, flying white and slow, their long legs stretched behind them.

"They're coming in for the night. They've been feeding out in the marsh. Watch the way they brake with their wings and the long legs slant forward to land."

"Will we see the ibises too?"

"There they are."

He had stopped the car and across the darkening swamp they could see the wood ibis crossing the sky with their pulsing flight to wheel and light in another island of trees.

"They used to roost much closer."

"Maybe we will see them in the morning," she said. "Do you want me to make a drink while we've stopped?"

"We can make it while we drive. The mosquitoes will get to us here."

As he started the car there were a few mosquitoes in it, the big black Everglades type, but the rush of the wind took them out when he opened the door and slapped them out with his hand and the girl found two enameled cups in the packages they had brought and the carton that held a bottle of White Horse. She wiped the cups out with a paper napkin, poured in Scotch, the bottle still in the carton, put in lumps of ice from the thermos jug and poured soda into them.

"Here's to us," she said and gave him the cold enameled cup and he held it drinking slowly and driving on, holding the wheel with his left hand, driving along into the road that was dusky now. He put on the lights a little later and soon they cut far ahead into the dark and the two of them drank the whisky and it was what they needed and made them feel much better. There is always a chance, Roger thought, when a drink can still do what it is supposed to do. This drink had done exactly what it should do.

"It tastes sort of slimy and slippery in a cup."

"Enameled," Roger said.

"That was pretty easy," she said. "Doesn't it taste wonderfully?"

"It's the first drink we've had all day. Except that resin wine at lunch. It's our good friend," he said. "The old giant killer."

"That's a nice name for it. Did you always call it that?"

"Since the war. That's when we first used it for that."

"This forest would be a bad place for giants."

"I think they've been killed off a long time," he said. "They probably hunted them out with those big swamp buggies with the huge tires."

"That must be very elaborate. It's easier with an enameled cup."

"Tin cups make it taste even better," he said. "Not for giant killing. Just for how good it can be. But you ought to have ice cold spring water and the cup chilled in the spring and you look down in the spring and there are little plumes of sand that rise on the bottom where it's bubbling."

"Will we have that?"

"Sure. We'll have everything. You can make a wonderful one with wild strawberries. If you have a lemon you cut half of it and squeeze it into the cup and leave the rind in the cup. Then you crush the wild strawberries into the cup and wash the sawdust off a piece of ice from the icehouse and put it in and then fill the cup with Scotch and then stir it till it's all mixed and cold."

"Don't you put in any water?"

"No. The ice melts enough and there's enough juice in the strawberries and from the lemon."

"Do you think there will still be wild strawberries?"

"I'm sure there will be."

"Do you think there will be enough to make a shortcake?"

"I'm pretty sure there will be."

"We better not talk about it. I'm getting awfully hungry."

"We'll drive about another drink more," he said. "And then we ought to be there."

They drove on in the night now with the swamp dark and high on both sides of the road and the good headlights lighting far ahead. The drinks drove the past away the way the headlights cut through the dark and Roger said. "Daughter, I'll take another if you want to make it."

When she had made it she said, "Why don't you let me hold it and give it to you when you want it?"

"It doesn't bother me driving."

"It doesn't bother me to hold it either. Doesn't it make you feel good?"

"Better than anything."

"Not than anything. But awfully good."

Ahead now were the lights of a village where the trees were cleared away and Roger turned onto a road that ran to the left and drove past a drugstore, a general store, a restaurant and along a deserted paved street that ran to the sea. He turned right and drove on another paved street past vacant lots and scattered houses until they saw the lights of a filling station and a neon sign advertising cabins. The main highway ran past there joining the sea road and the cabins were toward the sea. They stopped the car at the filling station and Roger asked the middle-aged man who came out looking blue-skinned in the light of the sign to check the oil and water and fill the tank.

"How are the cabins?" Roger asked.

"O.K., Cap," the man said. "Nice cabins. Clean cabins."

"Got clean sheets?" Roger asked.

"Just as clean as you want them. You folks fixing to stay all night?"

"If we stay."

"All night's three dollars."

"How's for the lady to have a look at one?"

"Fine and dandy. She won't ever see no finer mattresses. Sheets plumb clean. Shower. Perfect cross ventilation. Modern plumbing."

"I'll go in," the girl said.

"Here take a key. You folks from Miami?"

"That's right."

"Prefer the West Coast myself," the man said. "Your oil's O.K. and so's your water."

The girl came back to the car.

"The one I saw is a splendid cabin. It's cool too."

"Breeze right off the Gulf of Mexico," the man said. "Going to blow all night. All tomorrow. Probably part of Thursday. Did you try that mattress?"

"Everything looked marvelous."

"My old woman keeps them so goddam clean it's a crime. She wears herself to death on them. I sent her up to the show tonight. Laundry's the biggest item. But she does it. There it is. I just got nine into her." He went to hang up the hose.

"He's a little confusing," Helena whispered. "But it's quite nice and clean."

"Well you going to take her?" the man asked.

"Sure," Roger said. "We'll take her."

"Write in the book then."

Roger wrote Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hutchins 9072 Surfside Drive Miami Beach and handed the book back.

"Any kin to the educator?" the man asked, making a note of the license number in the book.

"No. I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about," the man said. "I never thought much of him. Just read about him in the papers. Like me to help you with anything?"

"No. I'll just run her in and we'll put our things in."

"That's three and nine gallons makes five-fifty with the state tax."

"Where can we get something to eat?" Roger asked.

"Two different places in town. Just about the same."

"You prefer either one?"

"People speak pretty highly of the Green Lantern."

"I think I've heard of it," the girl said. "Somewhere."

"You might. Widow woman runs it."

"I believe that's the place," the girl said.

"Sure you don't want me to help you?"

"No. We're fine," Roger said.

"Just one thing I'd like to say," the man said. "Mrs. Hutchins certainly is a fine looking woman."

"Thank you," Helena said. "I think that's lovely of you. But I'm afraid it's just that beautiful light."

"No," he said. "I mean it true. From the heart."

"I think we'd better go in," Helena said to Roger. "I don't want you to lose me so early in the trip."

Inside the cabin there was a double bed, a table covered with oilcloth, two chairs and a light bulb that hung down from the ceiling. There was a shower, a toilet and a washbowl with a mirror. Clean towels hung on a rack by the washbowl and there was a pole at one end of the room with some hangers.

Roger brought in the bags and Helena put the ice jug, the two cups, and the cardboard canon with the Scotch in it on the table with the paper bag full of White Rock bottles.

"Don't look gloomy," she said. "The bed is clean. The sheets anyway."

Roger put his arm around her and kissed her.

"Put the light out please."

Roger reached up to the light bulb and turned the switch. In the dark he kissed her, brushing his lips against hers, feeling them both fill without opening, feeling her trembling as he held her. Holding her tight

against him, her head back now, he heard the sea on the beach and felt the wind cool through the window. He felt the silk of her hair over his arm and their bodies hard and taut and he dropped his hand on her breasts to feel them rise, quick-budding under his fingers.

"Oh Roger," she said. "Please. Oh please."

"Don't talk."

"Is that him? Oh he's lovely."

"Don't talk."

"He'll be good to me. Won't he. And I'll try to be good to him. But isn't he awfully big?"

"No."

"Oh I love you so and I love him so. Do you think we should try now so we'll know? I can't stand it very much longer. Not knowing. I haven't been able to stand it all afternoon."

"We can try."

"Oh let's. Let's try. Let's try now."

"Kiss me once more."

In the dark he went into the strange country and it was very strange indeed, hard to enter, suddenly perilously difficult, then blindingly, happily, safely, encompassed; free of all doubts, all perils and all dreads, held unholdingly, to hold, to hold increasingly, unholdingly still to hold, taking away all things before, and all to come, bringing the beginning of bright happiness in darkness, closer, closer, closer now closer and ever closer, to go on past all belief, longer, finer, further, finer higher and higher to drive toward happiness suddenly, scaldingly achieved.

"Oh darling," he said. "Oh darling."

"Yes."

"Thank you my dear blessed."

"I'm dead," she said. "Don't thank me. I'm dead."

"Do you want—"

"No please. I'm dead."

"Let's—"

"No. Please believe me. I don't know how to say it another way."

Then later she said, "Roger."

"Yes, daughter."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, daughter."

"And you're not disappointed because of anything?"

"No, daughter."

"Do you think you'll get to love me?"

"I love you," he lied. I love what we did he meant.

"Say it again."

"I love you," he lied again.

"Say it once more."

"I love you," he lied.

"That's three times," she said, in the dark. "I'll try to make it come true."

The wind blew cool on them and the noise the palm leaves made was almost like rain and after a while the girl said, "It will be lovely tonight but do you know what I am now?"

"Hungry."

"Aren't you a wonderful guesser?"

"I'm hungry too."

They ate at the Green Lantern and the widow woman squirted Flit under the table and brought them fresh mullet roe browned crisp and fried with good bacon. They drank cold Regal beer and ate a steak each with mashed potatoes. The steak was thin from grass-fed beef and not very good but they were hungry and the girl kicked her shoes off under the table and put both her bare feet on Roger's. She was beautiful and he loved to look at her and her feet felt very good on his.

"Does it do it to you?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Can I feel?"

"If the widow woman isn't looking."

"It does it to me too," she said. "Aren't our bodies nice to each other?"

They ate pineapple pie for dessert and each had another cold bottle of Regal fresh from deep in the melting ice water of the cooler.

"I have Flit on my feet," she said. "They'll be nicer when they don't have Flit on them."

"They're lovely with Flit. Push really hard with them."

"I don't want to push you out of the widow woman's chair."

"All right. That's enough."

"You never felt any better did you?"

"No," Roger said truly.

"We don't have to go to the movies do we?"

"Not unless you want to very much."

"Let's go back to our house and then start out terribly early in the morning."

"That's fine."

They paid the widow woman and took a couple of bottles of the cold Regal in a paper sack and drove back to the cabins and put the car in the space between cabins.

"The car knows about us already," she said as they came in the cabin.

"It's nice that way."

"I was sort of shy with him at the start but now I feel like he's our partner."

"He's a good car."

"Do you think the man was shocked?"

"No. Jealous."

"Isn't he awfully old to be jealous?"

"Maybe. Maybe he's just pleased."

"Let's not think about him."

"I haven't thought about him."

"The car will protect us. He's our good friend already. Did you see how friendly he was coming back from the widow woman's?"

"I saw the difference."

"Let's not even put the light on."

"Good," Roger said. "I'll take a shower or do you want one first?"

"No. You."

Then waiting in the bed he heard her in the bath splashing and then drying herself and then she came into the bed very fast and long and cool and wonderful feeling.

"My lovely," he said. "My true lovely."

"Are you glad to have me?"

"Yes, my darling."
"And it's really all right?"

"It's wonderful."
"We can do it all over the country and all over the world."
"We're here now."

"All right. We're here. Here. Where we are. Here. Oh the good, fine, lovely here in the dark. What a fine lovely wonderful here. So lovely in the dark. In the lovely dark. Please hear me here. Oh very gently here very gently please carefully Please Please very carefully Thank you carefully oh in the lovely dark."

It was a strange country again but at the end he was not lonely and later, waking, it was still strange and no one spoke at all but it was their country now, not his nor hers, but theirs, truly, and they both knew it.

In the dark with the wind blowing cool through the cabin she said, "Now you're happy and you love me."
"Now I'm happy and I love you."
"You don't have to repeat it. It's true now."
"I know it. I was awfully slow wasn't I."
"You were a little slow."

"I'm awfully glad that I love you."
"See?" she said. "It isn't hard."
"I really love you."
"I thought maybe you would. I mean I hoped you would."
"I do." He held her very close and tight. "I really love you. Do you hear me?"

It was true, too, a thing which surprised him greatly, especially when he found that it was still true in the morning.

They didn't leave the next morning. Helena was still sleeping when Roger woke and he watched her sleeping, her hair spread over the pillow, swept up from her neck and swung to one side, her lovely brown face, the eyes and the lips closed looking even more beautiful than when she was awake. He noticed her eyelids were pale in the tanned face and how the long lashes lay, the sweetness of her lips, quiet now like a child's asleep, and how her breasts showed under the sheet she had pulled up over her in the night.

He thought he shouldn't wake her and he was afraid if he kissed her it might, so he dressed and walked down into the village, feeling hollow and hungry and happy, smelling the early morning smells and hearing and seeing the birds and feeling and smelling the breeze that still blew in from the Gulf of Mexico, down to the other restaurant a block beyond the Green Lantern.

It was really a lunch counter and he sat on a stool and ordered coffee with milk and a fried ham and egg sandwich on rye bread. There was a midnight edition of the Miami Herald on the counter that some trucker had left and he read about the military rebellion in Spain while he ate the sandwich and drank the coffee. He felt the egg spurt in the rye bread as his teeth went through the bread, the slice of dill pickle, the egg and the ham, and he smelled them all and the good early morning coffee smell as he lifted the cup.

"They're having plenty of trouble over there aren't they," the man behind the counter said to him. He was an elderly man with his face tanned to the line of the sweatband of his hat and freckled dead white above that. Roger saw he had a thin, mean cracker mouth and he wore steel-rimmed glasses.

"Plenty," Roger agreed.

"All those European countries are the same," the man said. "Trouble after trouble."

"I'll take another cup of coffee," Roger said. He would let this one cool while he read the paper.

"When they get to the bottom of it they'll find the Pope there." The man drew the coffee and put the pot of milk by it.

Roger looked up interestedly as he poured the milk into the cup.

"Three men at the bottom of everything," the man told him. "The Pope, Herben Hoover, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt."

Roger relaxed. The man went on to explain the interlocking interests of these three and Roger listened happily. America was a wonderful place he thought. Imagine buying a copy of Bouvard et Pécuchet when you could get this free with your breakfast. You are getting something else with the newspaper, he thought. But in the meantime there is this.

"What about the Jews?" he asked finally. "Where do they come in?"

"The Jews are a thing of the past," the man behind the counter told him.

"Henry Ford put them out of business when he published The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

"Do you think they're through?"

"Not a doubt of it, fella," the man said. "You've seen the last of them."

"That surprises me," Roger said.

"Let me tell you something else," the man leaned forward. "Some day old Henry will get the Pope the same way. He'll get him just like he got Wall Street."

"Did he get Wall Street?"

"Oh boy," the man said. "They're through."

"Henry must be going good."

"Henry? You really said something then. Henry's the man of the ages."

"What about Hitler?"

"Hitler's a man of his word."

"What about the Russians?"

"You've asked the right man that question. Let the Russian bear stay in his own backyard."

"Well that pretty well fixes things up," Roger got up.

"Things look good," the man behind the counter said. "I'm an optimist. Once old Henry tackles the Pope you'll see all three of them crumble."

"What papers do you read?"

"Any of them," the man said. "But I don't get my political views there. I think things out for myself."

"What do I owe you?"

"Forty-five cents."

"It was a first class breakfast."

"Come again," the man said and picked up the paper from where Roger had laid it on the counter. He's going to figure some more things out for himself, Roger thought.

Roger walked back to the tourist camp, buying a later edition of the Miami Herald at the drugstore. He also bought some razor blades, a tube of mentholated shaving cream, some Dentyne chewing gum, a bottle of Listerine and an alarm clock.

When he arrived at the cabin and opened the door quietly and put his package on the table beside the thermos jug, the enameled cups, the brown paper bag full of White Rock bottles, and the two bottles of Regal beer they had forgotten to drink, Helena was still asleep. He sat in the chair and read the paper and watched her sleep. The sun was high enough so that it did not shine on her face and the breeze came in the other window, blowing across her as she slept without stirring.

Roger read the paper trying to figure out from the various bulletins what had happened, really, and how it was going. She might as well sleep, he thought. We better get whatever there is each day now and as much and as well as we can because it's started now. It came quicker than I thought it would. I do not have to go yet and we can have a while. Either it will be over right away and the Government will put it down or there will be plenty of time. If I had not had these two months with the kids I would have been over there for it. I'd rather have been with the kids, he thought.

It's too late to go now. It would probably be over before I would get there. Anyway there is going to be plenty of it from now on. There is going to be plenty of it for us all the rest of our lives. Plenty of it. Too damned much of it.

I've had a wonderful time this summer with Tom and the kids and now I've got this girl and I'll see how long my conscience holds out and when I have to go I'll go to it and not worry about it until then. This is the start all right. Once it starts there isn't going to be any end to it. I don't see any end until we destroy them, there and here and everywhere. I don't see any end to it ever, he thought. Not for us anyway. But maybe they will win this first one in a hurry, he thought, and I won't have to go to this one.

The thing had come that he had expected and known would come and that he had waited all one fall for in Madrid and he was already making excuses not to go to it. Spending the time he had with the children had been a valid excuse and he knew nothing had been planned in Spain until later. But now it had come and what was he doing? He was convincing himself there was no need for him to go. It is liable all to be over before I can get there, he thought. There is going to be plenty of time.

There were other things that held him back too that he did not understand yet. They were the weaknesses that developed alongside his strengths like the crevices in a glacier under its covering of snow, or, if that is too pompous a comparison, like streaks of fat between muscles. These weaknesses were a part of the strengths unless they grew to dominate them; but they were mostly hidden and he did not understand them, nor know their uses. He did know, though, that this thing had come that he must go to and aid in every way he could, and yet he found varied reasons why he did not have to go.

They were all varyingly honest and they were all weak except one; he would have to make some money to support his children and their mothers and he would have to do some decent writing to make that money or he would not be able to live with himself. I know six good stories, he

thought, and I'm going to write them. That will get them done and I have to do them to make up for that whoring on the Coast.

If I can really do four out of the six that will pretty well balance me with myself and make up for that job of whoring; whoring hell, it wasn't even whoring it was like being asked to produce a sample of semen in a test tube that could be used for artificial insemination. You had an office to produce it in and a secretary to help you. Don't forget. The hell with these sexual symbols. What he meant was that he had taken money for writing something that was not the absolute best he could write.

Absolute best hell. It was crap. Goose-crap. Now he had to atone for that and recover his respect by writing as well as he could and better than he ever had. That sounded simple, he thought. Try and do it some time.

But anyway if I do four as good as I can do and as straight as God could do them on one of his good days (Hi there Deity. Wish me luck Boy. Glad to hear you're doing so good yourself.) then I'll be straight with myself and if that six-ply bastard Nicholson can sell two out of the four that will stake the kids while we are gone. We? Sure. We. Don't you remember about we? Like the little pig we we we all the way home. Only away from home. Home. That's a laugh. There isn't any home. Sure there is.

This is home. All this. This cabin. This car. Those once fresh sheets. The Green Lantern and the widow woman and Regal beer. The drugstore and the breeze off the gulf. That crazy at the lunch counter and a ham and egg sandwich on rye.

Make it two to go. One with a slice of raw onion. Fill her up and check the water and the oil please. Would you mind checking the tires please? The hiss of compressed air, administered courteously and free was home which was all oil-stained cement everywhere, all rubber worn on pavements, comfort facilities, and Cokes in red vending machines. The center line of highways was the boundary line of home.

You get to think like one of those Vast-Spaces-of-America writers, he said to himself. Better watch it. Better get a load of this. Look at your girl sleeping and know this: Home is going to be where people do not have enough to eat. Home is going to be wherever men are oppressed. Home is going to be wherever evil is strongest and can be fought. Home is going to be where you will go from now on.

But I don't have to go yet, he thought. He had some reasons to delay it. No you don't have to go yet, his conscience said. And I can write the stories, he said. Yes, you must write the stories and they must be as good as you can write and better. All right. Conscience, he thought. We have that all straightened out. I guess the way things are shaping up I had better let her sleep.

You let her sleep, his conscience said. And you try very hard to take good care of her and not only that. You take good care of her. As good as I can, he told his conscience, and I'll write at least four good ones. They better be good, his conscience said. They will be, he said. They'll be the very best.

So having promised and decided that did he then take a pencil and an old exercise book and, sharpening the pencil, start one of the stories there on the table while the girl slept? He did not. He poured an inch and a half of White Horse into one of the enameled cups, unscrewed the top of the ice jug and putting his hand in the cool depth pulled out a chunk of

ice and put it in the cup. He opened a bottle of White Rock and poured some alongside of the ice and then swirled the lump of ice around with his finger before he drank.

They've got Spanish Morocco, Sevilla, Pamplona, Burgos, Saragossa, he thought. We've got Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and the Basque country. Both frontiers are still open It doesn't look so bad. It looks good. I must get a good map though. I ought to be able to get a good map in New Orleans. Mobile maybe.

He figured it as well as he could without a map. Saragossa is bad, he thought. That cuts the railway to Barcelona. Saragossa was a good Anarchist town. Not like Barcelona or Lérida. But still plenty there. They can't have put up much of a fight. Maybe they haven't made their fight yet. They'd have to take Saragossa right away if they could. They would have to come up from Catalonia and take it.

If they could keep the Madrid-Valencia-Barcelona railway and open up Madrid-Saragossa-Barcelona and hold Irún it ought to be all right. With stuff coming in from France they ought to be able to build up in the Basque country and beat Mola in the north. That would be the toughest fight. That son of a bitch.

He could not see the situation in the south except that the revolvers would have to come up the valley of the Tagus to attack Madrid and they would probably try it from the north too. Would have to try it right away to try to force the passes of the Quadarramas the way Napoleon had done it.

I wish I had not been with the kids, he thought. I wish the hell I was there. No you don't wish you hadn't been with the kids. You can't go to everyone. Or you can't be at them the minute they start. You're not a firehorse and you have as much obligation to the kids as to anything in the world. Until the time comes when you have to fight to keep the world so it will be O.K. for them to live in, he corrected. But that sounded pompous so he corrected it to when it is more necessary to fight than to be with them. That was flat enough. That would come soon enough.

Figure this one out and what you have to do and then stick with that, he told himself. Figure it as well as you can and then really do what you have to do. All right, he said. And he went on figuring.

Helena slept until eleven-thirty and he had finished his second drink. "Why didn't you wake me, darling?" she said when she opened her eyes and rolled toward him and smiled. "You looked so lovely sleeping."

"But we've missed our early start and the early morning on the road."

"We'll have it tomorrow morning."

"Give kiss."

"Kiss."

"Give hug a lug."

"Big hugalug"

"Feels better," she said. "Oh. Feels good."

When she came out from the shower with her hair tucked under a rubber cap she said, "Darling, you didn't have to drink because you were lonesome did you?"

"No. Just because I felt like it."

"Did you feel badly though?"

"No. I felt wonderful."

"I'm so glad. I'm ashamed. I just slept and slept."

"We can swim before lunch."

"I don't know," she said. "I'm so hungry. Do you think we could have lunch and then take a nap or read or something and then swim?"

"Wonderbar."

"We shouldn't start and drive this afternoon?"

"See how you feel, daughter."

"Come here," she said.

He did. She put her arms around him and he felt her standing, fresh and cool from the shower, not dried yet, and he kissed her slowly and happily feeling the happy ache come in him where she had pressed firm against him.

"How's that?"

"That's fine."

"Good," she said. "Let's drive tomorrow."

The beach was white sand, almost as fine as flour, and it ran for miles. They took a long walk along it in the late afternoon, swimming out, lying in the clear water, floating and playing, and then swimming in to walk further along the beach.

"It's a lovelier beach than Bimini even," the girl said.

"But the water's not as fine. It doesn't have that quality the Gulf Stream water has."

"No I guess not. But after European beaches it's unbelievable."

The clean softness of the sand made walking a sensual pleasure that could be varied from the dry, soft, powdery to the just moist and yielding to the firm cool sand of the line of the receding tide.

"I wish the boys were here to point out things and show me things and tell me about things."

"I'll point out things."

"You don't have to. You just walk ahead a little way and let me look at your back and your can."

"You walk ahead."

"No you."

Then she came up to him and said, "Come on. Let's run side by side."

They jogged easily along the pleasant firm footing above the breaking waves. She ran well, almost too well for a girl, and when Roger forced the pace just a little she kept up easily. He kept the same pace and then lengthened it a little again. She kept even with him but said, "Hi. Don't kill me," and he stopped and kissed her. She was hot from the running and she said, "No. Don't."

"It's nice."

"Must go in the water first," she said. They dove into the surf that was sandy where it broke and swam out to the clean green water. She stood up with just her head and shoulders out.

"Kiss now."

Her lips were salty and her face was wet with the seawater and as he kissed her she turned her head so that her sea wet hair swung against his shoulder.

"Awfully salty but awfully good," she said. "Hold very hard."

He did.

"Here comes a big one," she said. "A really big one. Now lift high up and we'll go over together in the wave."

The wave rolled them over and over holding tight onto each other his legs tight around hers.

"Better than drowning," she said. "So much better. Let's do it once more."

They picked a huge wave this time and when it hung and curled to break Roger threw them across the line of its breaking and when it crashed down it rolled them over and over like a piece of driftwood onto the sand.

"Let's get clean and lie on the sand," she said and they swam and dove in the clean water and then lay side by side on the cool, firm beach where the last inrush of the waves just touched their toes and ankles.

"Roger, do you still love me?"

"Yes, daughter. Very much."

"I love you. You were nice to play."

"I had fun."

"We do have fun don't we."

"It's been lovely all day."

"We only had a half a day because I was a bad girl and slept so late."

"That was a good sound thing to do."

"I didn't do it to be good and sound. I did it because I couldn't help it."

He lay alongside of her, his right foot touching her left, his leg touching hers and he put his hand on her head and neck.

"Old head's awfully wet. You won't catch a cold in the wind?"

"I don't think so. If we lived by the ocean all the time I'd have to get my hair cut."

"No."

"It looks nice. You'd be surprised."

"I love it the way it is."

"It's wonderful short for swimming."

"Not for bed though."

"I don't know," she said. "You'd still be able to tell I was a girl."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm almost sure. I could always remind you."

"Daughter?"

"What, darling?"

"Did you always like making love?"

"No."

"Do you now?"

"What do you think?"

"I think that if I had a good look both ways down the beach and there was no one in sight we'd be all right."

"It's an awfully lonely beach," she said.

They walked back along the sea and the wind was still blowing and the rollers were breaking far out on the low tide.

"It seems so awfully simple and as though there were no problems at all," the girl said. "I found you and then all we ever had to do was eat and sleep and make love. Of course it's not like that at all."

"Let's keep it like that for a while."

"I think we have a right to for a little while. Maybe not a right to. But I think we can. But won't you be awfully bored with me?"

"No," he said. He was not lonely after this last time as he had nearly always been no matter with whom or where. He had not had the old death loneliness since the first time the night before. "You do something awfully good to me."

"I'm glad if I really do. Wouldn't it be awful if we were the kind of people who grated on each other's nerves and had to have fights to love each other?"

"We're not like that."

"I'll try not to be. But won't you be bored just with me?"

"No."

"But you're thinking about something else now."

"Yes. I was wondering if we could get a Miami Daily News."

"That's the afternoon paper?"

"I just wanted to read about the Spanish business."

"The military revolt?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Sure."

He told her about it as well as he could within the limitations of his knowledge and his information.

"Are you worried about it?"

"Yes. But I haven't thought about it all afternoon."

"We'll see what there is in the paper," she said. "And tomorrow you can follow it on the radio in the car. Tomorrow we'll really get an early start."

"I bought an alarm clock."

"Weren't you intelligent? It's wonderful to have such an intelligent husband. Roger?"

"Yes, daughter."

"What do you think they will have to eat at the Green Lantern?"

The next day they started early in the morning before sunrise and by breakfast they had done a hundred miles and were away from the sea and the bays with their wooden docks and fish packing houses and up in the monotonous pine and scrub palmetto of the cattle country. They ate at a lunch counter in a town in the middle of the Florida prairie. The lunch counter was on the shady side of the square and looked out on a red bricked court house with its green lawn.

"I don't know how I ever held out for that second fifty," the girl said, looking at the menu.

"We should have stopped at Punta Gorda," Roger said. "That would have been sensible."

"We said we'd do a hundred though," the girl said. "And we did it. What are you going to have, darling?"

"I'm going to have ham and eggs and coffee and a big slice of raw onion," Roger told the waitress.

"How do you want the eggs?"

"Straight up."

"The lady?"

"I'll have corned beef hash, browned, with two poached eggs," Helena said.

"Tea, coffee, or milk?"

"Milk please."

"What kind of juice?"

"Grapefruit please."

"Two grapefruits. Do you mind the onion?" Roger asked.

"I love onions," she said. "Not as much as I love you though. And I never tried them for breakfast."

"They're good," Roger said. "They get in there with the coffee and keep you from being lonely when you drive."

"You're not lonely are you?"

"No, daughter."

"We made quite good time didn't we?"

"Not really good. That's not much of a stretch for time with the bridges and the towns."

"Look at the cowpunchers," she said. Two men on cow ponies, wearing western work clothes, got down from their stock saddles and hitched their horses to the rail in front of the lunch room and walked down the sidewalk on their high-heeled boots.

"They run a lot of cattle around here," Roger said. "You have to watch for stock on all these roads."

"I didn't know they raised many cattle in Florida."

"An awful lot. Good cattle now too."

"Don't you want to get a paper?"

"I'd like to," he said. "I'll see if the cashier has one."

"At the drugstore," the cashier said. "St. Petersburg and Tampa papers at the drugstore."

"Where is it?"

"At the corner. I doubt if you could miss it."

"You want anything from the drugstore?" Roger asked the girl.

"Camels," she said. "Remember we have to fill the ice jug."

"I'll ask them."

Roger came back with the morning papers and a carton of cigarettes.

"It's not going so good." He handed her one of the papers.

"Is there anything we didn't get on the radio?"

"Not much. But it doesn't look so good."

"Can they fill the ice jug?"

"I forgot to ask."

The waitress came with the two breakfasts and they both drank their cold grapefruit juice and started to eat. Roger kept on reading his paper so Helena propped hers against a water glass and read too.

"Have you any chili sauce?" Roger asked the waitress. She was a thin juke-joint looking blonde.

"You bet," she said. "You people from Hollywood."

"I've been there."

"Ain't she from there?"

"She's going there."

"Oh Jesus me," the waitress said. "Would you write in my book?"

"I'd love to," Helena said. "But I'm not in pictures."

"You will be, honey," the waitress said. "Wait a minute," she said, got a pen."

She handed Helena the book. It was quite new and had a grey imitation leather cover.

"I only just got it," she said. "I only had this job a week."

Helena wrote Helena Hancock on the first page in the rather flamboyant untypical hand that had emerged from the mixed ways of writing she had been taught at various schools.

"Jesus beat me what a name," the waitress said. "Wouldn't you write something with it?"

"What's your name?" Helena asked.

"Marie."

To Marie from her friend Helena wrote above the florid name in the slightly suspect script.

"Gee thanks," Marie said. Then to Roger, "You don't mind writing do you?"

"No," Roger said. "I'd like to. What's your last name, Marie?"

"Oh that don't matter."

He wrote Best always to Marie from Roger Hancock.

"You her father?" the waitress asked.

"Yes," said Roger.

"Gee I'm glad she's going out there with her father," the waitress said.

"Well I certainly wish you people luck."

"We need it," Roger said.

"No," the waitress said. "You don't need it. But I wish it to you anyway. Say you must have got married awfully young."

"I was," Roger said. I sure as hell was, he thought.

"I'll bet her mother was beautiful."

"She was the most beautiful girl you ever saw."

"Where's she now?"

"In London," Helena said.

"You people certainly lead lives," the waitress said. "Do you want another glass of milk?"

"No thanks," Helena said. "Where are you from, Marie?"

"Fort Meade," the waitress said. "It's right up the road."

"Do you like it here?"

"This is a bigger town. It's a step up I guess."

"Do you have any fun?"

"I always have fun when there's any time. Do you want anything more?" she asked Roger.

"No. We have to roll."

They paid the check and shook hands.

"Thanks very much for the quarter," the waitress said. "And for writing in my book. I guess I'll be reading about you in the papers. Good luck, Miss Hancock."

"Good luck," Helena said. "I hope you have a good summer."

"It'll be all right," the waitress said. "You be careful won't you."

"You be careful too," Helena said.

"O.K.," Marie said. "Only it's kind of late for me."

She bit her lip and turned and went into the kitchen.

"She was a nice girl," Helena said to Roger as they got into the car. "I should have told her it was sort of late for me too. But I guess that only would have worried her."

"We must fill the ice jug," Roger said.

"I'll take it in," Helena offered. "I haven't done anything for us all day."

"Let me get it."

"No. You read the paper and I'll get it. Have we enough Scotch?"

"There's that whole other bottle in the carton that isn't opened."

"That's splendid."

Roger read the paper. I might as well, he thought. I'm going to drive all day.

"It only cost a quarter," the girl said when she came back with the jug.

"But it's chipped awfully fine. Too fine I'm afraid."

"We can get some more this evening."

When they were out of the town and had settled down to the long black highway north through the prairie and the pines, into the hills of the lake country, the road striped black over the long, varied peninsula, heavy with the mounting summer heat now that they were away from the sea breeze; but with them making their own breeze driving at a steady seventy on the straight long stretches and feeling the country being put behind them, the girl said, "It's fun to drive fast isn't it? It's like making your own youth."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't know," she said. "Sort of foreshortening and telescoping the world the way youth does."

"I never thought much about youth."

"I know it," she said. "But I did. You didn't think about it because you never lost it. If you never thought about it you couldn't lose it."

"Go on," he said. "That doesn't follow."

"It doesn't make good sense," she said. "I'll get it straightened out though and then it will. You don't mind me talking when it doesn't make completely good sense do you?"

"No, daughter."

"You see if I made really completely good sense I wouldn't be here." She stopped. "Yes I would. It's super good sense. Not common sense."

"Like surrealism?"

"Nothing like surrealism. I hate surrealism."

"I don't," he said. "I liked it when it started. It kept on such a long time after it was over was the trouble."

"But things are never really successful until they are over."

"Say that again."

"I mean they aren't successful in America until they are over. And they have to have been over for years and years before they are successful in London."

"Where did you learn all this, daughter?"

"I thought it out," she said. "I've had a lot of time to think while I was waiting around for you."

"You didn't wait so very much."

"Oh yes I did. You'll never know."

There was a choice to be made soon of two main highways with very little difference in their mileage and he did not know whether to take the one that he knew was a good road through pleasant country but that he had driven many times with Andy and David's mother or the newly finished highway that might go through duller country.

That's no choice, he thought. We'll take the new one. The hell with maybe starting something again like I had the other night coming across the Tamiami Trail.

They caught the news broadcast on the radio, switching it off through the soap operas of the forenoon and on at each hour.

"It isn't like fiddling while Rome burns," Roger said. "It's driving west northwest at seventy miles an hour away from a fire that's burning up what you care about to the east and hearing about it while you drive away from it."

"If we keep on driving long enough we'll get to it."

"We hit a lot of water first."

"Roger. Do you have to go? If you have to go you should."

"No dammit. I don't have to go. Not yet. I figured that through yesterday morning while you were asleep."

"Didn't I sleep though? It was shameful."

"I'm awfully glad you did. Do you think you got enough last night? It was awfully early when I woke you."

"I had a wonderful sleep. Roger?"

"What, daughter?"

"We were mean to lie to that waitress."

"She asked questions," Roger said. "It was simpler that way."

"Could you have been my father?"

"If I'd begot you at fourteen."

"I'm glad you're not," she said. "God it would be complicated. It's complicated enough I suppose until I simplify it. Do you think I'll bore you because I'm twenty-two and sleep all night long and am hungry all the time?"

"And are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen and wonderful and strange as hell in bed and always fun to talk to."

"All right. Stop. Why am I strange in bed?"

"You are."

"I said why?"

"I'm not an anatomist," he said. "I'm just the guy that loves you."

"Don't you like to talk about it?"

"No. Do you?"

"No. I'm shy about it and very frightened. Always frightened."

"My old Bratchen. We were lucky weren't we?"

"Let's not even talk about how lucky. Do you think Andy and Dave and Tom would mind?"

"No."

"We ought to write to Tom."

"We will."

"What do you suppose he's doing now?"

Roger looked through the wheel at the clock on the dashboard

"He will have finished painting and be having a drink."

"Why don't we have one?"

"Fine."

She made the drinks in the cups putting in handfuls of the finely chipped ice, the whisky and White Rock. The new highway was wide now and ran far and clear ahead through the forest of pines that were tapped and scored for turpentine.

"It doesn't look like the Landes does it," Roger said and lifting the cup felt the drink icy in his mouth. It was very good but the chipped ice melted fast.

"No. In the Landes there is yellow gorse in between the pines."

"And they don't work the trees for turpentine with chain gangs either," Roger said. "This is all convict labor country through here."

"Tell me how they work it."

"It's pretty damned awful," he said. "The state contracts them out to the turpentine and lumber camps. They used to catch everyone off the trains during the worst of the Depression. All the people riding the trains looking for work. Going east or west or south. They'd stop the trains right outside of Tallahassee and round up the men and march them off to jail and then sentence them to chain gangs and contract them out to the turpentine and lumber outfits. This is a wicked stretch of country. It's old and wicked with lots of law and no justice."

"Pine country can be so friendly too."

"This isn't friendly. This is a bastard. There are lots of lawless people in it but the work is done by the prisoners. It's a slave country. The law's only for outsiders."

"I'm glad we're going through it fast."

"Yes. But we really ought to know it. How it's run. How it works. Who are the crooks and the tyrants and how to get rid of them."

"I'd love to do that."

"You ought to buck Florida politics some time and see what happens."

"Is it really bad?"

"You couldn't believe it."

"Do you know much about it?"

"A little," he said. "I bucked it for a while with some good people but we didn't get anywhere. We got the Bejesus beat out of us. On conversation."

"Wouldn't you like to be in politics?"

"No. I want to be a writer."

"That's what I want you to be."

The road was unrolling now through some scattered hardwood and then across cypress swamps and hammock country and then ahead there was an iron bridge across a clear, dark-watered stream, beautiful and clear moving, with live oaks along its bank and a sign at the bridge that said it was the Senwannee (sic) River.

They were on it and over it and up the bank beyond and the road had turned north.

"It was like a river in a dream," Helena said. "Wasn't it wonderful so clear and so dark? Couldn't we go down it in a canoe some time?"

"I've crossed it up above and it's beautiful wherever you cross it."

"Can't we make a trip on it sometime?"

"Sure. There's a place way up above where I've seen it as clear as a trout stream."

"Wouldn't there be snakes?"

"I'm pretty sure there'd be a lot."

"I'm afraid of them. Really afraid of them. But we could be careful couldn't we?"

"Sure. We ought to do it in the winter time."

"There are such wonderful places for us to go," she said. "I'll always remember this river now and we saw it only like the lens clicking in a camera. We should have stopped."

"Do you want to go back?"

"Not until we come to it going the other way. I want to go on and on and on."

"We're either going to have to stop to get something to eat or else get sandwiches and eat them while we drive."

"Let's have another drink," she said. "And then get some sandwiches. What kind do you think they'll have?"

"They ought to have hamburgers and maybe barbecue."

The second drink was like the first, icy cold but quick melting in the wind and Helena held the cup out of the rush of the air and handed it to him when he drank.

"Daughter, are you drinking more than you usually do?"

"Of course. You didn't think I drank a couple of cups of whisky and water every noon by myself before lunch did you?"

"I don't want you to drink more than you should."

"I won't. But it's fun. If I don't want one I won't take one. I never knew about driving across the country and having our drinks on the way."

"We could have fun stopping and poking around. Going down to the coast and seeing the old places. But I want us to get out west."

"So do I. I've never seen it. We can always come back."

"It's such a long way. But this is so much more fun than flying."

"This is flying. Roger, will it be wonderful out west?"

"It always is to me."

"Isn't it lucky I've never been out so we'll have it together?"

"We've got a lot of country to get through first."

"It's going to be fun though. Do you think we'll come to the sandwich town pretty soon?"

"We'll take the next town."

The next town was a lumbering town with one long street of frame and brick buildings along the highway. The mills were by the railroad and lumber was piled high along the tracks and there was the smell of cypress and pine sawdust in the heat. While Roger filled the gas and had the water, oil and air checked Helena ordered hamburger sandwiches and barbecued pork sandwiches with hot sauce on them in a lunch counter and brought them to the car in a brown paper bag. She had beer in another paper sack.

Back on the highway again, and out of the heat of the town, they ate the sandwiches and drank cold beer that the girl opened.

"I couldn't get any of our marriage beer," she said. "This was the only kind there was."

"It's good and cold. Wonderful after the barbecue."

"The man said it was about like Regal. He said I'd never be able to tell it from Regal."

"It's better than Regal."

"It had a funny name. It wasn't a German name either. But the labels soaked off."

"It'll be on the caps."
"I threw the caps away."

"Wait till we get out west. They have better beer the further out you get."

"I don't think they could have any better sandwich buns or any better barbecue. Aren't these good?"

"They're awfully good. This isn't a part of the country where you eat very good either."

"Roger, will you mind terribly if I go to sleep for a little while after lunch? I won't if you're sleepy."

"I'd love it if you went to sleep. I'm not sleepy at all really. I'd tell you if I was."

"There's another bottle of beer for you. Dammit I forgot to look at the cap."

"That's good. I like to drink it unknown."

"But we could have remembered it for another time."

"We'll get another new one."

"Roger, would you really not mind if I went to sleep?"

"No, beauty."

"I can stay awake if you want."

"Please sleep and you'll wake up lonely and we can talk."

"Good night, my dear Roger. Thank you very much for the trip and the two drinks and the sandwiches and the unknown beer and the way down upon the Swanee River and for where we are going."

"You go to sleep, my baby."

"I will. You wake me up if you want me."

She slept curled up in the deep seat and Roger drove, watching the wide road ahead for stock, making fast time through the pine country, trying to keep around seventy to try to see how much he could get over sixty miles onto the speedometer in each hour. He had never been on this stretch of highway but he knew this part of the state and he was driving it now only to put it behind him. You shouldn't have to waste country but on a long trip you have to.

The monotony tires you, he thought. That and the fact there are no vistas. This would be a fine country on foot in cool weather but it is monotonous to drive through now.

I have not been driving long enough to settle into it yet. But I should have more resiliency than I have.

I'm not sleepy. My eyes are bored I guess as well as tired. I am not bored, he thought. It is just my eyes and the fact that it is a long time since I have been sitting still so long. It is another game and I'll have to relearn it. About day after tomorrow we will start to make real distance and not be tired by it. I haven't sat still this long for a long time.

He reached forward and turned on the radio and tuned it. Helen did not wake so he left it on and let it blur in with his thinking and his driving.

It is awfully nice having her in the car asleep, he thought. She is good company even when she is asleep. You are a strange and lucky bastard, he thought. You are having much better luck than you deserve. You just thought you had learned something about being alone and you really worked

at it and you did learn something. You got right to the edge of something. Then you backslid and ran with those worthless people, not quite as worthless as the other batch, but worthless enough and to spare. Probably they were even more worthless. You certainly were worthless with them.

Then you got through that and got in fine shape with Tom and the kids and you knew you couldn't be happier and that there was nothing coming up except to be lonely again and then along comes this girl and you go right into happiness as though it were a country you were the biggest landowner in.

Happiness is pre-war Hungary and you are Count Károlyi. Maybe not the biggest landowner but raised the most pheasant anyway. I wonder if she will like to shoot pheasant. Maybe she will. I can still shoot them. They don't bother me. I never asked her if she could shoot. Her mother shot quite well in that wonderful dope-head trance she had. She wasn't a wicked woman at the start.

She was a very nice woman, pleasant and kind and successful in bed and I think she meant all the things she said to all the people. I really think she meant them. That is probably what made it so dangerous. It always sounded as though she meant them anyway. I suppose, though, it finally becomes a social defect to be unable to believe any marriage has not really been consummated until the husband has committed suicide.

Things all ended so violently that started so pleasantly. But I suppose that is always the way with drugs. Though I suppose among those spiders who eat their mates some of the mate eaters are remarkably attractive. My dear she has never, really never, looked better. Dear Henry was just a bonne bouche. Henry was nice too. You know how much we all liked him. None of those spiders take drugs either, he thought. Of course that's what I should remember about this child, exactly as you should remember the stalling speed of a plane, that her mother was her mother.

That's all very simple, he thought. But you know your own mother was a bitch. But you also know you are a bastard in quite different ways from her ways. So why should her stalling speed be the same as her mother's? Yours isn't.

No one had ever said it was. Hers I mean. What you said was that you should remember her mother as you would remember and so forth. That's dirty too, he thought. For nothing, for no reason, when you need it most you have this girl, freely and of her own will, lovely, loving and full of illusions about you, and with her asleep beside you on the seat you start destroying her and denying her without any formalities of cocks crowing, twice nor thrice nor even on the radio. You are a bastard, he thought and looked down at the girl asleep on the seat by him.

I suppose you start to destroy it for fear you will lose it, or that it will take too great a hold on you, or in case it shouldn't be true, but it is not very good to do. I would like to see you have something besides your kids you did not destroy sometime. This girl's mother was and is a bitch and your mother was a bitch. That ought to bring you closer to her and make you understand her. That doesn't mean she has to be a bitch any more than you have to be a heel.

She thinks you are a much better guy than you are and maybe that will make you a better guy than you are. You've been good for a long time now

and maybe you can be good. As far as I know you haven't done anything cruel since that night on the dock with that citizen with the wife and the dog. You haven't been drunk. You haven't been wicked. It's a shame you're not still in the church because you could make such a good confession.

She sees you the way you are now and you are a good guy as of the last few weeks and she probably thinks that is the way you have been all the time and that people just maligned you.

You really can start it all over now. You really can. Please don't be silly, another part of him said. You really can, he said to himself. You can be just as good a guy as she thinks you are and as you are at this moment.

There is such a thing as starting it all over and you've been given a chance to and you can do it and you will do it. Will you make all the promises again? Yes. If necessary I will make all the promises and I will keep them. Not all the promises? Knowing you have broken them? He could not say anything to that. You mustn't be a crook before you start. No. I mustn't. Say what you can truly do each day and then do it. Each day. Do it a day at a time and keep each day's promises to her and to yourself. That way I can start it all new, he thought, and still be straight.

You're getting to be an awful moralist, he thought. If you don't watch out you will bore her. When weren't you always a moralist? At different times. Don't fool yourself. Well, at different places then. Don't fool yourself.

All right, Conscience, he said. Only don't be so solemn and didactic. Get a load of this, Conscience old friend, I know how useful and important you are and how you could have kept me out of all the trouble I have been in but couldn't you have a little lighter touch about it? I know that conscience speaks in italics but sometimes you seem to speak in very boldfaced Gothic script.

I would take it just as well from you, Conscience, if you did not try to scare me; just as I would consider the Ten Commandments just as seriously if they were not presented as graven on stone tablets. You know. Conscience, it has been a long time since we were frightened by the thunder. Now with the lightning: There you have something. But the thunder doesn't impress us so much any more. I'm trying to help you, you son of a bitch, his conscience said.

The girl was still sleeping and they were coming up the hill into Tallahassee. She will probably wake when we stop at the first light, he thought. But she did not and he drove through the old town and turned off to the left on U.S. 319 straight south and into the beautiful wooded country that ran down toward the Gulf Coast.

There's one thing about you, daughter, he thought. Not only can you outsleep anybody I've ever known and have the best appetite I've ever seen linked with a build like yours but you have an absolutely heaven-given ability to not have to go to the bathroom.

Their room was on the fourteenth floor and it was not very cool. But with the fans on and the windows open it was better and when the bellboy had gone out Helena said, "Don't be disappointed, darling. Please. It's lovely."

"I thought I could get you an air-conditioned one."

"They're awful to sleep in really. Like being in a vault. This will be fine."

"We could have tried the other two. But they know me there."

"They'll know us both here now. What's our name?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Robert Harris."

"That's a splendid name. We must try to live up to it. Do you want to bathe first?"

"No. You."

"All right. I'm going to really bathe though."

"Go ahead. Go to sleep in the tub if you want."

"I may. I didn't sleep all day did I?"

"You were wonderful. There was some pretty dull going too."

"It wasn't bad. Lots of it was lovely. But New Orleans isn't really the way I thought it would be. Did you always know it was so flat and dull? I don't know what I expected. Marseilles I suppose. And to see the river."

"It's only to eat and drink in. The part right around here doesn't look so bad at night. It's really sort of nice."

"Let's not go out until it's dark. It's all right around here. Some of it is lovely."

"We'll have that and then, in the morning, we'll be on our way."

"That only leaves time for one meal."

"That's all right. We'll come back in cold weather when we can really eat. Darling," she said. "This is the first sort of letdown we've had. So let's not let it let us down. We'll have long baths and some drinks and a meal twice as expensive as we can afford and we'll go to bed and make wonderful love."

"The hell with New Orleans in the movies," Roger said. "We'll have New Orleans in bed."

"Eat first. Didn't you order some White Rock and ice?"

"Yes. Do you want a drink?"

"No. I was just worried about you."

"It will be along," Roger said. There was a knock at the door. "Here it is. You get started on the tub."

"It's going to be wonderful," she said. "There will just be my nose out of water and the tips of my breasts maybe and my toes and I'm going to have it just as cold as it will run."

The bellboy brought the pitcher of ice, the bottled water and the papers, took his tip and went out.

Roger made a drink and settled down to read. He was tired and it felt good to lie back on the bed with two pillows folded under his neck and read the evening and the morning papers. Things were not so good in Spain but it had not really taken shape yet. He read all the Spanish news carefully in the three papers and then read the other cable news and then the local news.

"Are you all right, darling?" Helena called from the bathroom.

"I'm wonderful."

"Have you undressed?"

"Yes."

"Do you have anything on?"

"No."

"Are you very brown?"

"Still."

"Do you know where we swam this morning was the loveliest beach I've ever seen."

"I wonder how it can get so white and so floury."

"Darling are you very, very brown?"

"Why?"

"I was just thinking about you."

"Being in cold water's supposed to be good for that."

"I'm brown under the water. You'd like it."

"I like it."

"You keep on reading," she said. "You are reading aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Is Spain all right?"

"No."

"I'm so sorry. Is it very bad?"

"No. Not yet. Really."

"Roger?"

"Yes."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, daughter."

"You go back and read now. I'll think about that here underwater."

Roger lay back and listened to the noises that came up from the street below and read the papers and drank his drink. This was almost the best hour of the day. It was the hour he had always gone to the café alone when he had lived in Paris, to read the evening papers and have his aperitif. This town was nothing like Paris nor was it like Orleans either. Orleans wasn't much of a town either. It was pleasant enough though. Probably a better town to live in than this one.

He didn't know the environs of this town though and he knew he was stupid about it.

He had always liked New Orleans, the little that he knew of it, but it was a letdown to anyone who expected very much. And this certainly was not the month to hit it in.

The best time he had ever hit it was with Andy one time in the winter and another time driving through with David. The time going north with Andy they had not come through New Orleans. They had bypassed it to the north to save time and driven north of Lake Pontchartrain and across through Hammond to Baton Rouge on a new road that was being built so they made many detours and then they had gone north through Mississippi in the southern edge of the blizzard that was coming down from the north.

When they had hit New Orleans was coming south again. But it was still cold and they had a wonderful time eating and drinking and the city had seemed gay and sharp with cold, instead of moist and damp and Andy had roamed all the antique shops and bought a sword with his Christmas money. He kept the sword in the luggage compartment behind the seat in the car and slept with it in his bed at night.

When he and David had come through it had been in the winter and they had made their headquarters in that restaurant he would have to try to find, the non-tourist one. He remembered it as in a cellar and having teakwood tables and chairs or else they sat on benches. It was probably not like that and was like a dream and he did not remember its name nor where it was located except he thought it was in the opposite direction from

Antoine's, on an east and west, not a north and south street, and he and David had stayed in there two days.

He probably had it mixed up with some other place. There was a place in Lyons and another near the Parc Monceau that always were merged in his dreams. That was one of the things about being drunk when you were young. You made places in your mind that afterwards you could never find and they were better than any places could ever be. He knew he hadn't been to this place with Andy though.

"I'm coming out," she said.

"Feel how cool," she said on the bed. "Feel how cool all the way down. No don't go away. I like you."

"No. Let me take a shower."

"If you want. But I'd rather not. You don't wash the pickled onions do you before you put them in the cocktail? You don't wash the vermouth do you?"

"I wash the glass and the ice."

"It's different. You're not the glass and the ice. Roger, please do that again. Isn't again a nice word?"

"Again and again," he said.

So tly he felt the lovely curve from her hip bone up under her ribs and the apple slope of her breasts.

"I it a good curve?"

He kissed her breasts and she said, "Be awfully careful when they're so cold. Be very careful and kind. Do you know about them aching?"

"Yes," he said. "I know about aching."

Then she said, "The other one is jealous."

Later she said, "They didn't plan things right for me to have two breasts and you only one way to kiss. They made everything so far apart."

His hand covered the other, the pressure between the fingers barely touching and then his lips wandered up over all the lovely coolness and met hers. They met and brushed very lightly, sweeping from side to side, losing nothing of the lovely outer screen and then he kissed her.

"Oh darling," she said. "Oh please darling. My dearest kind lovely love. Oh please, please, please my dear love."

After quite a long time she said, "I'm so sorry if I was selfish about your bath. But when I came out of mine I was selfish."

"You weren't selfish."

"Roger, do you still love me?"

"Yes, daughter."

"Do you change how you feel afterwards?"

"No," he lied.

"I don't at all. I just feel better afterwards. I mustn't tell you."

"You tell me."

"No. I won't tell you too much. But we do have a lovely time don't we?"

"Yes," he said very truthfully.

"After we bathe we can go out."

"I'll go now."

"You know maybe we ought to stay tomorrow. I ought to have my nails done and my hair washed. I can do it all myself but you might like it better done properly. That way we could sleep late and then have part of one day in town and then leave the next morning."

"That would be good."

"I like New Orleans now. Don't you?"

"New Orleans is wonderful. It's changed a lot since we came here."

"I'll go in. I'll only be a minute. Then you can bathe."

"I only want a shower."

Afterwards they went down in the elevator. There were Negro girls who ran the elevators and they were pretty. The elevator was full with a party from the floor above so they went down fast. Going down in the elevator made him feel hollower than ever inside. He felt Helena against him where they were crowded.

"If you ever get so that you don't feel anything when you see flying fish go out of water or when an elevator drops you better turn in your suit," he said to her.

"I feel it still," she said. "Are those the only things you have to turn in your suit for?"

The door had opened and they were crossing the old-fashioned marble lobby crowded at this hour with people waiting for other people, people waiting to go to dinner, people just waiting, and Roger said, "Walk ahead and let me see you."

"Where do I walk to?"

"Straight toward the door of the air-conditioned bar."

He caught her at the door.

"You're beautiful. You walk wonderfully and if I were here and saw you now for the first time I'd be in love with you."

"If I saw you across the room I'd be in love with you."

"If I saw you for the first time everything would turn over inside of me and I'd ache right through my chest."

"That's the way I feel all of the time."

"You can't feel that way all of the time."

"Maybe not. But I can feel that way an awfully big part of the time."

"Daughter, isn't New Orleans a fine place?"

"Weren't we lucky to come here?"

It felt very cold in the big high-ceilinged, pleasant, dark-wood panelled bar room and Helena, sitting beside Roger at a table, said, "Look," and showed him the tiny prickles of gooseflesh on her brown arm. "You can do that to me too," she said. "But this time it's air conditioning."

"It's really cold. It feels wonderful."

"What should we drink?"

"Should we get tight?"

"Let's get a little tight."

"I'll drink absinthe then."

"Do you think I should?"

"Why don't you try it. Didn't you ever?"

"No. I was saving it to drink with you."

"Don't make up things."

"It's not made up. I truly did."

"Daughter, don't make up a lot of things."

"It's not made up. I didn't save my maidenly state because I thought it would bore you and besides I gave you up for a while. But I did save absinthe. Truly."

"Do you have any real absinthe?" Roger asked the bar waiter.

"It's not supposed to be," the waiter said. "But I have some."

"The real Couvet Pontarlier sixty-eighth-degree? Not the Tarragova?"

"Yes, sir," the waiter said. "I can't bring you the bottle. It will be in an ordinary Pernod bottle."

"I can tell it," Roger said.

"I believe you, sir," the waiter said. "Do you want a frappe or drip?"

"Straight drip. You have the dripping saucers?"

"Naturally, sir."

"Without sugar."

"Won't the lady want sugar, sir?"

"No. We'll let her try it without."

"Very good, sir."

er the waiter was gone Roger took Helena's hand under the table. "Hello my beauty."

"This is wonderful. Us here and this good old poison coming and we'll eat in some fine place."

"And then go to bed"

"Do you like bed as much as all that?"

"I never did. But I do now."

"Why did you never?"

"Let's not talk about it."

"We won't."

"I don't ask you about everyone you've been in love with. We don't have to talk about London do we?"

"No. We can talk about you and how beautiful you are. You know you still move like a colt?"

"Roger, tell me, did I really walk so it pleased you?"

"You walk so that it breaks my heart."

"All I do is keep my shoulders back and my head straight up and walk. I know there are tricks I ought to know."

"When you look the way you do, daughter, there aren't any tricks. You're so beautiful that I'd be happy just to look at you."

"Not permanently I hope."

"Daytimes," he said. "Look, daughter. The one thing about absinthe is that you have to drink it awfully slowly. It won't taste strong mixed with the water but you have to believe it is."

"I believe. Credo Roger."

"I hope you'll never change it the way Lady Caroline did."

"I'll never change it except for cause. But you're not like him at all."

"I wouldn't want to be."

"You're not. Someone tried to tell me you were at college. They meant it as a compliment I think but I was terribly angry and made an awful row with the English professor. They made us read you you know. I mean they

made the others read it. I'd read it all. There isn't very much, Roger. Don't you think you ought to work more?"

"I'm going to work now as soon as we get out west."

"Maybe we shouldn't stay tomorrow then. I'll be so happy when you work."

"Happier than now?"

"Yes," she said. "Happier than now."

"I'll work hard. You'll see."

"Roger, do you think I'm bad for you? Do I make you drink or make love more than you should?"

"No, daughter."

"I'm awfully glad if it's true because I want to be good for you. I know it's a weakness and silliness but I make up stories to myself in the daytime and in one of them I save your life. Sometimes it's from drowning and sometimes from in from of a train and sometimes in a plane and sometimes in the mountains. You can laugh if you want. And then there is one where I come into your life when you are disgusted and disappointed with all women and you love me so much and I take such good care of you that you get an epoch of writing wonderfully. That's a wonderful one. I was making it up again today in the car."

"That's one I'm pretty sure I've seen in the movies or read somewhere."

"Oh I know. I've seen it there too. And I'm sure I've read it too. But don't you think it happens? Don't you think I could be good for you? Not in a wishy-washy way or by giving you a little baby but really good for you so you'd write better than you ever wrote and be happy at the same time?"

"They do it in pictures. Why shouldn't we do it?"

The absinthe had come and from the saucers of cracked ice placed over the top of the glasses water, that Roger added from a small pitcher, was dripping down into the clear yellowish liquor turning it to an opalescent milkiness.

"Try that," Roger said when it was the right cloudy color.

"It's very strange," the girl said. "And warming in the stomach. It tastes like medicine."

"It is medicine. Pretty strong medicine."

"I don't really need medicine yet," the girl said. "But this is awfully good. When will we be tight?"

"Almost any time. I'm going to have three. You take what you want. But take them slow."

"I'll see how I do. I don't know anything about it yet except that it's like medicine. Roger?"

"Yes, daughter."

He was feeling the warmth of the alchemist's furnace starting at the pit of his stomach.

"Roger, don't you think I really could be good for you the way I was in the story I made up?"

"I think we could be good to each other and for each other. But I don't like it to be on a basis of stories. I think the story business is bad."

"But you see that's the way I am. I'm a story-maker-upper and I'm romantic I know. But that's how I am. If I was practical I'd never have come to Bimini."

I don't know, Roger thought to himself. If that was what you wanted to do that was quite practical. You didn't just make up a story about it. And the other part of him thought: You must be slipping you bastard if the absinthe can bring the heel in you out that quickly. But what he said was, "I don't know, daughter. I think the story business is dangerous. First you could make up stories about something innocuous, like me, and then there could be all sorts of other stories. There might be bad ones."

"You're not so innocuous."

"Oh yes I am. Or the stories are anyway. Saving me is fairly innocuous. But first you might be saving me and then next you might be saving the world. Then you might start saving yourself."

"I'd like to save the world. I always wished I could. That's awfully big to make a story about. But I want to save you first."

"I'm getting scared," Roger said.

He drank some more of the absinthe and he felt better but he was worried.

"Have you always made up the stories?"

"Since I can remember. I've made them up about you for twelve years. I didn't tell you all the ones. There are hundreds of them."

"Why don't you write instead of making up the stories?"

"I do write. But it's not as much fun as making up the stories and it's much harder. Then they're not nearly as good. The ones I make up are wonderful."

"But you're always the heroine in the stories you write?"

"No. It's not that simple."

"Well let's not worry about it now." He took another sip of the absinthe and rolled it under his tongue.

"I never worried about it at all," the girl said. "What I wanted, always, was you and now I'm with you. Now I want you to be a great writer."

"Maybe we'd better not even stop for dinner," he said. He was still very worried and the absinthe warmth had moved up to his head now and he did not trust it there. He said to himself. What did you think could happen that would not have consequences? What woman in the world did you think could be as sound as a good secondhand Buick car? You've only known two sound women in your life and you lost them both. What will she want after that? And the other part of his brain said, Hail heel. The absinthe certainly brought you out early tonight.

So he said, "Daughter, for now, let's just try to be good to each other and love each other" (he got the word out though the absinthe made it a difficult word for him to articulate) "and as soon as we get out where we are going I will work just as hard and as well as I can."

"That's lovely," she said. "And you don't mind my telling you I made up stories?"

"No," he lied. "They were very nice stories." Which was true.

"Can I have another?" she asked.

"Sure." He wished now they had never taken it although it was the drink he loved best of almost any in the world. But almost everything bad that had ever happened to him had happened when he was drinking absinthe; those bad things which were his own fault. He could tell that she knew something was wrong and he pulled hard against himself so that there would be nothing wrong.

"I didn't say something I shouldn't did I?"

"No, daughter. Here's to you."

"Here's to us."

The second one always tastes better than the first because certain taste buds are numbed against the bitterness of the wormwood so that without becoming sweet, or even sweeter, it becomes less bitter and there are parts of the tongue that enjoy it more.

"It is strange and wonderful. But all it does so far is just bring us to the edge of misunderstanding," the girl said.

"I know," he said. "Let's stick together through it."

"Was it that you thought I was ambitious?"

"It's all right about the stories."

"No. It's not all right with you. I couldn't love you as much as I do and not know when you're upset."

"I'm not upset," he lied. "And I'm not going to be upset," he resolved.

"Let's talk about something else."

"It will be wonderful when we're out there and you can work."

She is a little obtuse, he thought. Or maybe does it affect her that way? But he said, "It will be. But you won't be bored?"

"Of course not."

"I work awfully hard when I work."

"I'll work too."

"That will be fun," he said. "Like Mr. and Mrs. Browning. I never saw the play."

"Roger, do you have to make fun of it?"

"I don't know." Now pull yourself together, he said to himself. Now is the time to pull yourself together. Be good now. "I make fun of everything," he said "I think it will be fine. And it's much better for you to be working when I'm writing."

"Will you mind reading mine sometimes?"

"No. I'll love to."

"Really?"

"No. Of course. I'll be really happy to. Really."

"When you drink this it makes you feel as though you could do anything," the girl said. "I'm awfully glad I never drank it before. Do you mind if we talk about writing, Roger?"

"Hell no."

"Why did you say 'Hell no'?"

"I don't know," he said. "Let's talk about writing. Really I mean it. What about writing?"

"Now you've made me feel like a fool. You don't have to take me in as an equal or a partner. I only meant I'd like to talk about it if you'd like to."

"Let's talk about it. What about it?"

The girl began to cry, sitting straight up and looking at him. She did not sob nor turn her head away. She just looked at him and tears came down her cheeks and her mouth grew fuller but it did not twist nor break.

"Please, daughter," he said. "Please. Let's talk about it or anything else and I'll be friendly."

She bit her lip and then said, "I suppose I wanted to be partners even though I said I didn't."

I guess that was part of the dream and why the hell shouldn't it be? Roger thought. What do you have to hurt her for you bastard? Be good now fast before you hurt her.

"You see I'd like to have you not just like me in bed but like me in the head and like to talk about things that interest us both."

"We will," he said. "We will now. Bratchen daughter, what about writing, my dear beauty?"

"What I wanted to tell you was that drinking this made me feel the way I feel when I am going to write. That I could do anything and that I can write wonderfully. Then I write and it's just dull. The truer I try to make it the duller it is. And when it isn't true it's silly."

"Give me a kiss."

"Here?"

"Yes."

He leaned over the table and kissed her. "You're awfully beautiful when you cry."

"I'm awfully sorry I cried," she said. "You don't really mind if we talk about it do you?"

"Of course not."

"You see that was one of the parts of it I'd looked forward to."

Yes, I guess it was, he thought. Well why shouldn't it be? And we'll do it. Maybe I will get to like it.

"What was it about writing?" he said. "Besides how it seems it's going to be wonderful and then it turns out dull?"

"Wasn't it that way with you when you started?"

"No. When I started I'd feel as though I could do anything and while I was doing it I would feel like I was making the whole world and when I would read it I would think this is so good I couldn't have written it. I must have read it somewhere. Probably in the Saturday Evening Post."

"Weren't you ever discouraged?"

"Not when I started. I thought I was writing the greatest stories ever written and that people just didn't have sense enough to know it."

"Were you really that conceited?"

"Worse probably. Only I didn't think I was conceited. I was just confident."

"If those were your first stories, the ones I read, you had a right to be confident."

"They weren't," he said. "All those first confident stories were lost. The ones you read were when I wasn't confident at all."

"How were they lost, Roger?"

"It's an awful story. I'll tell it to you sometime

"Wouldn't you tell it to me now?"

"I hate to because it's happened to other people and to better writers than I am and that makes it sound as though it were made up. There's no reason for it ever happening and yet it's happened many times and it still hurts like a bastard. No it doesn't really. It has a scar over it now. A good thick scar."

"Please tell me about it. If it's a scar and not a scab it won't hurt to will it?"

"No, daughter. Well I was very methodical in those days and I kept original manuscripts in one cardboard folder and typed originals in

another and carbons in another. I guess it wasn't so cockeyed methodical. I don't know how else you'd do it. Oh the hell with this story."
"No tell me."

"Well I was working at the Lausanne Conference and it was the holidays coming up and Andrew's mother who was a lovely girl and very beautiful and kind—"

"I was never jealous of her," the girl said. "I was jealous of David's and Tom's mother."

"You shouldn't be jealous of either of them. They were both wonderful."
"I was jealous of Dave's and Tom's mother," Helena said. "I'm not now."

"That's awfully white of you," Roger said. "Maybe we ought to send her a cable."

"Go on with the story, please, and don't be bad."

"All right. The aforesaid Andy's mother thought she would bring down my stuff so I could have it with me and be able to do some work while we had the holiday together. She was going to bring it to me as a surprise. She hadn't written anything about it and when I met her at Lausanne I didn't know anything about it. She was a day late and had wired about it.

The only thing I knew was that she was crying when I met her and she cried and cried and when I would ask her what was the matter she told me it was too awful to tell me and then she would cry again. She cried as though her heart was broken. Do I have to tell this story?"
"Please tell me."

"All that morning she would not tell me and I thought of all the worst possible things that could have happened and asked her if they had happened. But she just shook her head. The worst thing I could think of was that she had tromper-ed me or fallen in love with someone else and when I asked her that she said, 'Oh how can you say that?' and cried some more. I felt relieved then and then, finally, she told me.

"She had packed all the manuscript folders in a suitcase and left the suitcase with her other bags in her first class compartment in the Paris-Lausanne-Milan Express in the Gare de Lyon while she went out on the quai to buy a London paper and a bottle of Evian water.

You remember the Gare de Lyon and how they would have sort of push tables with papers and magazines and mineral water and small flasks of cognac and sandwiches with ham between sliced long pointed-end bread wrapped in paper and other push carts with pillows and blankets that you rented? Well when she got back into the compartment with her paper and her Evian water the suitcase was gone.

"She did everything there was to be done. You know the French police. The first thing she had to do was show her carte d'identité and try to prove she was not an international crook herself and that she did not suffer from hallucinations and that she was sure she actually had such a suitcase and were the papers of political importance and besides, madame, surely there exist copies.

She had that all night and the next day when a detective came and searched the flat for the suitcase and found a shotgun of mine and demanded to know if I had a permis de chasse I think there was some doubt in the minds of the police whether she should be allowed to proceed to Lausanne and she said the detective had followed her to the train and

appeared in the compartment just before the train pulled out and said, 'You are quite sure madame that all your baggage is intact now? That you have not lost anything else? No other important papers?'

"So I said, 'But it's all right really. You can't have brought the originals and the typed originals and the carbons.'

"'But I did,' she said. 'Roger, I know I did.' It was true too. I found out it was true when I went up to Paris to see. I remember walking up the stairs and opening the door to the flat, unlocking it and pulling back on the brass handle of the sliding lock and the odor of Eau de Tavel in the kitchen and the dust that had sifted in through the windows on the table in the dining room and going to the cupboard where I kept the stuff in the dining room and it was all gone.

I was sure it would be there; that some of the manila folders would be there because I could see them there so clearly in my mind. But there was nothing there at all, not even my paper clips in a cardboard box nor my pencils and erasers nor my pencil sharpener that was shaped like a fish, nor my envelopes with the return address typed in the upper left-hand corner, nor my international postage coupons that you enclosed for them to send the manuscripts back with and that were kept in a small Persian lacquered box that had a pornographic painting inside of it.

They were all gone. They had all been packed in the suitcase. Even the red stick of wax was gone that I had used to seal letters and packages. I stood there and looked at the painting inside the Persian box and noticed the curious over-proportion of the parts represented that always characterizes pornography and I remember thinking how much I disliked pornographic pictures and painting and writing and how after this box had been given to me by a friend on his return from Persia I had only looked at the painted interior once to please the friend and that after that I had only used the box as a convenience to keep coupons and stamps in and had never seen the pictures.

I felt almost as though I could not breathe when I saw that there really were no folders with originals, nor folders with typed copies, nor folders with carbons and then I locked the door of the cupboard and went into the next room, which was the bedroom, and lay down on the bed and put a pillow between my legs and my arms around another pillow and lay there very quietly. I had never put a pillow between my legs before and I had never lain with my arms around a pillow but now I needed them very badly.

I knew everything I had ever written and everything that I had great confidence in was gone. I had rewritten them so many times and gotten them just how I wanted them and I knew I could not write them again because once I had them right I forgot them completely and each time I ever read them I wondered at them and at how I had ever done them.

"So I lay there without moving with the pillows for friends and I was in despair. I had never had despair before, true despair, nor have I ever had it since. My forehead lay against the Persian shawl that covered the bed, which was only a mattress and springs set on the floor and the bed cover was dusty too and I smelt the dust and lay there with my despair and the pillows were my only comfort."

"What were they that were gone," the girl asked.

"Eleven stories, a novel, and poems."

"Poor poor Roger."

"No. I wasn't so poor because there were more inside. Not them. But to come. But I was in bad shape. You see I hadn't believed they could be gone. Not everything."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing very practical. I lay there for a while."

"Did you cry?"

"No. I was all dried up inside like the dust in the house. Weren't you ever in despair?"

"Of course. In London. But I could cry."

"I'm sorry, daughter. I got to thinking about this thing and I forgot. I'm awfully sorry."

"What did you do?"

"Let's see I got up and went down the stairs and spoke to the concierge and she asked me about madame. She was worried because the police had been to the flat and had asked her questions but she was still cordial. She asked me if we had found the valise that had been stolen and I said no and she said it was dirty luck and a great misfortune and was it true that all my works were in it.

I said yes and she said but how was it there were no copies? I said the copies were there too. Then she said Mais ça alors. Why were copies made to lose them with the originals? I said madame had packed them by mistake. It was a great mistake, she said. A fatal mistake. But monsieur can remember them surely. No, I said. But, she said, monsieur will have to remember them. Il faut le souviennne rappeler. Oui, I said, mais ce n'est pas possible. Je ne m'en souviens plus.

Mais il faut faire un effort, she said. Je le ferais, I said. But it's useless. Mais qu'est-ce que monsieur va faire? she asked. Monsieur has worked here for three years. I have seen monsieur work at the café on the corner. I've seen monsieur at work at the table in the dining room when I've brought things up. Je sais que monsieur travaille comme un sourd.

Qu'es-ce que il faut faire maintenant? Il faut recommencer, I said. Then the concierge started to cry. I put my arm around her and she smelled of armpit sweat and dust and old black clothes and her hair smelled rancid and she cried with her head on my chest. Were there poems too? she asked. Yes, I said. What unhappiness, she said. But you can recall those surely. Je tâcherai de la faire, I said. Do it, she said. Do it tonight.

"I will, I told her. Oh monsieur, she said, madame is beautiful and amiable and tous le qui'il y a de gentil but what a grave error it was. Will you drink a glass of marc with me? Of course, I told her, and, sniffing, she left my chest to find the bottle and the two small glasses. To the new works, she said. To them, I said. Monsieur will be a member of the Académie Française. No, I said. The Académie Americaine, she said. Would you prefer rum? I have some rum. No, I said. Marc is very good. Good, she said.

Another glass. Now, she said, go out and get yourself drunk and, since Marcelle is not coming to do the flat, as soon as my husband comes in to hold down this dirty loge I will go upstairs and clean the place up for you to sleep tonight. Do you want me to buy anything for you? Do you want me to make breakfast? I asked her. Certainly, she said.

Give me ten francs and I'll bring you the change. I'd make you dinner but you ought to eat out tonight. Even though it is more expensive. Allez

voir des amis et manger quelque part. If it wasn't for my husband I'd come with you.

"Come on and have a drink at the Café des Amateurs now, I said. We'll have a hot grog. No I can't leave this cage until my husband comes, she said. Débène-toi maintenant. Leave me the key. It will all be in order when you get back.

"She was a fine woman and I felt better already because I knew there was only one thing to do; to start over. But I did not know if I could do it. Some of the stories had been about boxing, and some about baseball and others about horse racing. They were the things I had known best and had been closest to and several were about the first war.

Writing them I had felt all the emotion I had to feel about those things and I had put it all in and all the knowledge of them that I could express and I had rewritten and rewritten until it was all in them and all gone out of me Because I had worked on newspapers since I was very young I could never remember anything once I had written it down; as each day you wiped your memory clear with writing as you might wipe a blackboard clear with a sponge or a wet rag; and I still had that evil habit and now it had caught up with me.

"But the concierge, and the smell of the concierge, and her practicality and determination hit my despair as a nail might hit it if it were driven in cleanly and soundly and I thought I must do something about this; something practical; something that will be good for me even if it cannot help about the stories.

Already I was half glad the novel was gone because I could see already, as you begin to see clearly over the water when a rainstorm lifts on the ocean as the wind carries it out to sea, that I could write a better novel. But I missed the stories as though they were a combination of my house, and my job, my only gun, my small savings and my wife; also my poems. But the despair was going and there was only missing now as after a great loss. Missing is very bad too."

"I know about missing," the girl said.

"Poor daughter," he said. "Missing is bad. But it doesn't kill you. But despair would kill you in just a little time."

"Really kill you?"

"I think so," he said.

"Can we have another?" she asked. "Will you tell me the rest? This is the sort of thing I always wondered about."

"We can have another," Roger said. "And I'll tell you the rest if it doesn't bore you."

"Roger, you mustn't say that about boring me."

"I bore the hell out of myself sometimes," he said. "So it seemed normal I might bore you."

"Please make the drink and then tell me what happened."

The End