

The Cheese on the Moon:

A Collection of Short Stories

by

Albina Guarnieri

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Department of English
McGill University
Montreal, Canada.

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ABSTRACT

People's ideas of literature, as of painting and other art forms, tend to change violently, each age rebelling against its predecessor, and seeking fresh ways of expressing itself. The writers of any one period, though different as individuals, generally also have much in common. American literature at the beginning of the twentieth century faced the need to discover a way through to emotional, intellectual and factual truth. It would appear true that in each age the forces of the imagination need to be and can be renewed, in order to restate human values in imaginative terms. The picture of modern man emerging from the modern short story is a disturbing one indeed. It is a picture of alienation, guilt and despair. But the picture is not a new one.

The objective of this creative writing thesis on the short story is to bring to light a bas-relief of man today. I have not intentionally depicted a morbid situation if that is what some may see. The forces which act upon the human being as he struggles through a difficult existence, particularly during the most trying phase of adolescence, are exposed with a certain air of detachment in order to permit a subjective response in the individual reader.

RESUME

La conception que les gens ont de la littérature, de la peinture, et des autres formes d'art, a tendance à changer radicalement. Chacune des époques littéraires se rebellent contre la précédente, et cherche de nouvelles formes d'expression. Il y a beaucoup de différences individuelles chez les écrivains d'une époque littéraires, mais ils ont, malgré tout, bien des points en commun. Au début du 20e siècle, les écrivains de la littérature américaine, ont dû découvrir une approche, qui leur permit d'explorer le monde d'une vérité intellectuelle, émotionnelle et réelle. Il semblerait évident qu'à toute nouvelle époque les forces de l'imagination doivent, et peuvent se renouveler dans la présentation des valeurs humaines. L'image de l'homme moderne, présentée dans les nouvelles et les contes en est une qui est bouleversante, en effet, il s'agit de l'homme aliéné, coupable et désespéré. Mais ce portrait de l'homme n'est pas du tout nouveau.

J'ai écrit cette thèse dans le but d'éveiller l'attention sur le bas-relief de l'homme d'aujourd'hui. Je n'ai pas choisi de décrire une situation morbide, intentionnellement, si c'est ce qui semble apparent. Les forces qui influencent l'être humain, durant sa lutte à travers une existence difficile, plus spécialement pendant la période d'adolescence, sont présentées au deuxième plan afin de susciter une participation plus subjective chez le lecteur.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Experimentation is the spirit of twentieth century literature. Though the short story as a form hardly existed before the nineteenth century, when it originated simultaneously in Russia with Pushkin and Gogol, and in America with Poe and Hawthorne, in such a short time it has not only spurred to a rapid growth but has also blossomed. In America it flourished perhaps because the pace of life demanded a literary form that was both uncomplicated and quick to read. Magazines and similar periodicals, popular in the States from the early days of the nineteenth century onwards provided a profitable and ready market for short stories. Whatever the reason these are without a doubt exciting times for both writer and reader alike. The modern short story has opened new horizons of experience, and in keeping with the spirit of the times has earned the right of emancipation: it has been liberated from the tyranny of adhering to preconceived notions. The collection of stories, The Cheese on the Moon, presented in this thesis has a tinge of flamboyancy of style because each piece was written predominantly when the author was in the grips of a need to write. As a result, rules and regulations governing the art of short-story telling were adhered to only unconsciously, if at all.

It would be hard to forward any kind of definition. Irish-born American writer Fitz-James O'Brien is well known for his cryptic

remark that a short story is a story that is short. Perhaps a reasonable description would be to state that a short story is a story that should be read at one sitting. However, Conrad's Heart Of Darkness is well over 40,000 words. No matter what the length of the short story some form of conflict is an indispensable basic ingredient. Matthew Arnold claimed that certain situations were intrinsically devoid of the power to provide "poetical enjoyment": "Those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous." Yet, Robbe-Grillet writes stories in which nothing overt happens; Borges writes stories in the form of philosophical essays.

The stories in this collection can each be read at one sitting and conflict, whether it be internal or external, is certainly an essential factor.

But in spite of the great emphasis in contemporary literature on experimentation, one must remember what should be considered an important counter truth. Innovation for the sake of innovation is a way of debasing one's art. Complexity is not synonymous with virtue. Too many people are "hung up" on the belief that producing complex material or understanding it is in itself a worthy achievement. The parables attributed to Christ are

childlike in simplicity, yet their philosophical implications are astounding in depth. The Cheese on the Moon, may have the author's personal commentary but only as an undercurrent. It is never so strong as to preclude the reader's own interpretation and reaction.

Any story by any writer is basically a celebration of old meanings perpetuated and revitalized from generation to generation according to the visions and the central preoccupations of the day. It would be wrong to suppose that writers do not regurgitate the material used by hundreds of predecessors. Richard Ellman writes: "Influence is a term which conceals and mitigates the guilty acquisitiveness of talent. That writers flow into each other like waves, gently rather than tidally is one of those decorous myths we impose upon a high-handed, even brutal procedure. The behaviour, while not invariably marked by bad temper is less polite. Writers move upon other writers not as genial successors but as violent expropriators, knocking down established boundaries, to seize by the force of youth or age, what they require. They do not borrow, they override." ² Homer, Dante, Sophocles, Shakespeare were by no means original. They took up old tales and reworked them. In this sense they might be considered as retellers of tales by the use of their cunning and by their projections of meaningful variations. Like moths to the flame all great writers return to the notion of self identity and express concern in regard to how self knowledge may be achieved. The basic themes deal with how one is to move from

ignorance to wisdom. Thus, the fundamental rite is didactic.

"When Tobacco Is Green" follows Ted through a physical and a spiritual journey. Consequently, the didactic element could be twofold. The door is left ajar for the reader to enter where he chooses.

Nevertheless, in The Poetic Principle and the last review essay on Hawthorne's Tales, Poe ridicules the heresy of The Didactic. Poe argues

...that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral, and by this moral is the poetical merit of the word to be adjudged... . We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true poetic dignity and force;--but the simple fact is that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately discover that under the sun there exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified...than this very poem--this poem per se... .³

The expression "art for art's sake" should mean something. According to Poe if an artist were to use his art to force a message with its consequent demand for reform, he would be debasing his artistry. He had much better use an editorial column in a newspaper for such a thing. Not surprisingly, Poe has no patience with allegory. His antagonism is grounded in his theory of the separateness of aesthetic and didactic ends: "The fallacy of the idea that allegory,

in any of its moods, can be made to enforce a truth--that metaphor, for example, may illustrate as well as embellish an argument--could be promptly demonstrated... . One thing is clear, that if allegory ever established a fact, it is by dint of overturning a fiction." ⁴

Though Poe banishes the didactic from art he can be thought of in some respects to be a conventional moralist. Joseph J. Moldenhauer claims that "The Black Cat" can be construed to mean something like "Be kind to dumb animals--or else!" "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson" might be seen as "Crime does not pay" or "The wages of sin is death". "Pride goeth before a fall" is exemplified in "The Masque of the Red Death" and "Each man kills the thing he loves the most" in "The Fall of the House of Usher". ⁵ Poe does concede that a moral or intellectual meaning is acceptable in a work of art provided that it does not distract the reader from the imaginative experience per se. For if the aesthetic unity and pleasure are dispelled the work ceases to be artistic.

Unlike Poe, Chekov believed that truth was to be sought and found in art. Chekov declared emphatically that one cannot lie in art. ⁶ I feel that this is true whenever an author writes spontaneously, primarily for himself and not for the reading public.

"Objectivity", "restraint", "detachment", "indifference" are words that time and again have been employed to describe Chekov and his works. Chekov himself used one of these very labels as early as 1886 in writing to his brother Alexander; he listed "thorough

objectivity" as one of several conditions of true art. Chekov's work might be considered objective in the sense that it is governed by aesthetic values and never moral ones. He is objective only in his refusal to offer no condemnation; he is not impersonal or indifferent. Chekov proclaims: "I would like to be a free artist--and that is all--and regret that God has not given me the strength to be one. I hate lies and coercion in all their aspects.... I consider trademarks or labels to be prejudices. My holy of holies are the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and most absolute freedom--freedom from falsity in whatever form these last may be expressed. This is the program I would maintain were I a great artist." ⁷

Chekov believed that a great writer should only sit down to write when he felt as cold as ice. He wrote in a letter and elaborated upon this: "Here is the advice of this particular reader. When you portray miserable wretches, and unlucky people and want to stir the reader to compassion, try to be cooler--to give their sorrow a background, as it were, against which it can stand out in sharper relief. The way it is, the characters weep and you sigh." ⁸

Thorough objectivity is probably impossible. Chekov does say that the writer "sighs". In "Little Things" it should be difficult not to suspect the author's gentle feelings toward Shifty as he jumps to his death: "He closed his eyes tightly and forced the air out of his lungs. He had not cried since he was a child. He did not want to start now."

In "A Doctor's Visit" Chekov merely appears to be entirely indifferent to Liza, yet he makes us keenly aware of the girl's miserable plight. Liza has been deprived of human warmth and companionship and is a desolate and isolated figure. Chekov conveys Liza's desolation much too powerfully to have been indifferent. His coolness towards Liza stirs the reader's feelings though Chekov manages to avoid sentimentality. He holds his emotions in check in order to concentrate on difficult techniques to achieve the appropriate effects on the reader. The job of the writer is merely to depict life as it really is. Chekov often gives the impression of recording events with an almost scientific passivity. According to Chekov the artist should "show" rather than "tell" the reader about his characters. Chekov makes prominent use of dramatic rendering. The author's judgments and attitudes are implicit rather than explicit. Chekov does not overstate his case. Rather, he uses subtlety to advantage. Hemingway once said the dignity of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. Chekov's stories are deceptive somewhat in the manner of an iceberg.

"Pudding and Pie" tends to fall in this category. On the surface it seems to be merely a boy-girl story. Actually, it is meant to be far more intricate. The characters of both Mike and Joyce are interesting because there are psychological overtones and all sorts of social implications for their respective behaviour. The majority of the other stories in the collection also veer in this direction. There is often a more complicated basis for the overt actions of

the major characters than usually meets the eye. Why does Ted leave home so eagerly in "When Tobacco Is Green"? By merely reading the text one could come up with several reasons.

The difficulty which faced realists before Chekov was that literature must have form, whereas life had none. Chekov broke tradition. He dispensed with the beginning, middle, and end of the story by evolving a kind of short story which relies on a scene rather than on blocks of generalized narrative. He therefore abandoned the practice of introducing characters by means of lengthy formula analysis. The exclusive components of his stories became dialogue or monologue and what might be considered as a behaviouristic reporting of simple and observable facts. In "A Doctor's Visit" the reader expects something extraordinary to happen; when the doctor is summoned in haste the reader becomes expectant only to find out that the patient is a slightly neurotic and hysterical girl. When morning comes the doctor simply drives away. All Chekov attempts to do is to represent one day in the life of a girl, at the same time sketching her environment. "She, her mother, had reared her and brought her up, spared nothing, and devoted her whole life to having her daughter taught French, dancing, music; had engaged a dozen teachers for her; had consulted the best doctors, kept a governess. And now she could not make out the reason of these tears, why there was all this misery, she could not understand, and was bewildered."⁹

It would seem that Chekov believed that the artist did not have the answers to society's ailments; that it would be presumptuous of the artist to lay down some sort of blueprint for society. "Of course it would be nice to combine art with sermonizing, but that kind of thing I find extraordinarily difficult and well-nigh impossible because of technical considerations."¹⁰ For this reason Chekov attempted to project what he termed "a slice of life".

Pete in "The Homecoming" has worked extremely hard to overcome setbacks imposed on him by his peers. The most important thing in the entire world for him is to achieve recognition by his equals. Within half an hour at the local bar he attains the heights of success and then falls into the abyss of destruction--so typical of the rise and fall of millions of members of the human race--"that's life!".

Hemingway said something to the effect that no good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in. That kind of symbol sticks out like raisins in raisin bread. This is in direct contradiction to Poe's techniques. Yet, no one can deny that Hemingway was a very successful writer, not only in the format of the novel but also in the short story. Archibald MacLeish proclaimed Hemingway as having "whittled a style for his time".¹¹ In Death in the Afternoon Hemingway insisted that the age of the baroque was over. The writer must develop his own style and his own craft to the point where it will serve as an instrument for his

particular vision of human destiny. Hemingway chose to become a master at the art of the unsaid. He rarely embellished. The effectiveness of the simple declarative sentence comes from the fact that one finds it difficult to argue with it. Once offered it is either accepted or rejected. At the end of "Pudding and Pie" Mike comments on Joyce's behaviour as she drives away in a taxi-cab: "'Stupid broad,' he muttered." It is a particularly useful sentence for the imaginative writer who is first of all committed to getting the reader's conviction that an event happened. A sentence full of relative clauses and complex structure does not have the same force to persuade the reader of its being true. Hemingway's liberal application of the simple declarative sentence is in keeping with his avoidance of adjectives and adverbs. The positive effect of this technique is that it secures verisimilitude and acceptance from the reader easily. The negative effect is that it limits the reader to his own responses and experiences.

My hero, like the Hemingway hero, distrusts the rhetoric of emotion or sentiment. Hemingway avoids a direct statement of either. Beneath the mask there is real emotion. In fact, the deeper the emotion the less it is verbalized. In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" the hero is a poor wretch who has everything except his manhood, his self-identity. An American on an African safari with his wife, he seems to do nothing right. He runs from a charging lion, is always putting his foot into his mouth, and stands helplessly by when his wife spends the night with the guide. But suddenly

something comes over him. He becomes exhuberant during a buffalo hunt and shows remarkable courage." The man has found himself. He knows where he's at. At the moment when he tries to express his "feeling of happiness" Hemingway has the guide admonish him for discussing it. "Doesn't do to talk too much about all this. Talk the whole thing away. No pleasure in anything if you mouth it too much."¹²

In a passage from A Farewell to Arms Hemingway illustrates this even more forcefully: "At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army."¹³ Only seven thousand died of it! This is an example of Hemingway understatement at its best. What he seems to be trying to say is: "What do you expect me to do about it. That's war". He accepts it as a fact of life at this point in the novel. The Crusade of World War I was accompanied by an extreme outpouring of rhetorical propaganda. Thus, a reaction set in against all abstraction. For men like Frederic Henry "abstract words, such as glory, honor, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates".¹⁴ The result was a vocabulary deliberately limited to concrete nouns.

Hemingway forces the reader into the narrative by the very objectivity, the bareness, and what could even be called the inanity

of the dialogue to re-read and find meaning. In the story entitled "Indian Camp" Nick, a mere boy, assists at an operation which his father performs on a squaw. A Caesarian is performed with a jack-knife and a few minutes later Nick sees the husband who has cut his own throat with a razor so as not to hear the screams of his wife. And oddly enough the story ends on a happy note. The sun is coming up. A bass jumps. Nick puts his hand into the water and it feels warm. The meaning of the event is there, but it is the task of the reader to elicit it from the material.

At the conclusion of "Little Things" Joey visualizes Shifty spread out on the concrete below. He does not panic. He does not vomit. He merely sees the cracked watermelon that he dropped once. By the forceful use of understatement his emotions are obliterated from view. This could be considered a protective mechanism which Joey's mind creates. It is not hard to imagine him recovering from this experience and considering himself to be a very lucky person on some bright, spring morning as Hemingway's Nick comes to do. Of course, if the reader focuses attention on Shifty's lot then the point of view is rather depressing and becomes more similar to that depicted in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber".

Henry James' writing also often depends heavily on the reader's personal response based on personal experience. In "The Turn of the Screw" and "The Beast in the Jungle" the reader is presented with two points of view--what Edward Stone has qualified

as the "subjective and objective critical".¹⁵ James succeeds in making every word bear a double burden. His sentences are loaded with meaning. The advantage gained from this method is that it allows James to extract the maximum sense of horror from his theme. In "The Turn of the Screw" James achieves his desired effect by giving the story plausible explanations for both supernatural and natural events. It is primarily through imagery that James ensnares the reader in both "The Turn of the Screw" and "The Beast in the Jungle". The reader, however, becomes responsive only to the extent that his experiences has provided him with a rich stock of images. This is in keeping with what James himself believed. "Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself... and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy, and the horror will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make his think evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specification. This ingenuity, I took pains...to apply." ¹⁶

A similar pattern exists in "The Connection". The story begins quietly enough but it develops to a crescendo of horror and yet no definite answers are given to the obvious questions which the reader will ask. When the climax arrives at the very end it is difficult to realize just what it is that has happened. The reader will be required to re-read the last page or so in order to see whether he has missed some pertinent details. However, he will not

find clues to the mystery.' The effect of the story, and particularly the ending, depends on the vicarious experience of the supernatural which every living human being appears to have deep down in his psyche.

Hemingway, Chekov, James all perform as artists. It is up to the reader to respond to the performance.

Inevitably the chore remains of explaining why one would undertake to attempt a creative writing thesis. In many respects it is insane to be writing post Dante, post Shakespeare, post Joyce. I can only suffer by comparison.

The short story has always seemed to me to be a viable method of explaining the unexplainable. I must confess to a certain amount of zealousness or perhaps simple conceit in hoping to be instrumental in somehow affecting the people who read my stories. This involves a very intimate relation between reader and writer. Sometimes with commentary, sometimes without, the writer presents a situation or chain of events adequate to reveal or evoke a particular emotion; the reader must do the rest--must interpret the symbols, perceive the suggestions of the images, understand the thought, hear the music and at the same time receive the story as a whole. This is perhaps a little like listening to a symphony, where the listener keeps in mind the themes, their developments and recurrences; he hears both the harmonies and the different instruments that produce them; he experiences the emotion that the music evokes--and all this

simultaneously, not separately. In the short story as in music the better the reader knows the work, the easier he finds it to do this. It becomes evident that a fine story is not successful by magic but by directed effort.

Through a combination of communication, expression, and entertainment the reader should enjoy a wide variety of experiences, such as vicarious emotional responses, at times, an elation of spirit, at other times, the underlining of personal convictions or personal prejudices. The reader is also exposed to other social, religious, philosophical or political concepts. Since language first developed man has invented all kinds of stories to preach to his fellowman. The question of barriers, lack of communication between people, is a theme which has been taken up by myriads of writers. Poets, novelists, philosophers, and anybody else who has had to join in the fray, have all expressed their views on the matter. It is no wonder that this is so. Loneliness is something which is feared by everybody. Man is a social animal--the need for empathy is too strong.

My subject is "Everyman". My primary concern is to expose the raw nerves of human experience to close scrutiny. Because of the brevity of the short story I have attempted to make every character, every incident a comment on this objective. Every effort has been made to coordinate character and idea, thereby allowing the feel of human weight of supporting personality and circumstance behind the idea. The richness of my collection as presented depends upon my

having been successful in saturating my subjects with all possible meaning. Any digressions I might have included are not merely long-winded asides but they must necessarily in some way reflect upon my heroes. My main characters are heroes not for sentimental reasons, but rather because they are meant to be real. They are not cardboard figures. They are heroes if only because of their hopeless struggle. The Sisyphus motif is ever present. Living entails exhaustion. They are heroes who time after time in situation after situation must act out the process of confronting the enemy--sometimes this enemy takes an external form, sometimes internal. In this respect they become sacrificial victims who provide the reader with a vicarious experience of the moment. Their manly contest with the vicissitudes of life make up a rite which played over and over again inculcates the reader with a sense of cosmic awareness. The fact that there are so many variants on this pattern is not surprising. Life being so fertile offers many examples to draw upon. The innocence of childhood is destroyed violently merely by the acquisition of knowledge of evil. The epiphany so well elaborated and delved into by Joyce is unfortunately too often also the moment of destruction.

My protagonists, regardless of how fragmented they appear to be, must be contemplated within the circle of humanity. At times they rub shoulders with what appear to be insensitive brutes, but they are somehow different. It is only by seeing them embraced by the community of men that one comes to comprehend their sensibilities,

their moral condition.


The success or failure of my stories will depend upon the application of simple diction, syntax and the forcefulness of presentation of contending opposites. Effort has been made not to overstate emotion except when the case warrants it. I have constructed a mask of clinical detachment which protects me from too close involvement in the world I depict. I often rely on the method of the roving narrator in which I make a conscious effort to suppress myself. Thus, I maintain a psychic distance. As a rule I do not allow my heroes to tell their own story in this collection. To establish a central intelligence throughout I remain simultaneously a little above and outside of these characters. As such the narrator and author are not necessarily one and the same person and as a result should not be confused.

I have moreover ruthlessly borrowed from the techniques of the theatre. Brecht's theory of "epic" or "non-aristotelian" drama in which he introduced what are known as "alienation" effects have always had a special appeal to me. I often deliberately have the narrator pull the reader out of the narrative in order to prevent him from being manipulated too much: he must be reminded that this is not real life but rather a mirror of it. This may seem in fact rather ponderous. However, there are times when mischief, much in the same spirit of Henry Fielding, is the prevailing sentiment. Realism and anti-realism stand side by side.

My style rightly places me in the twentieth-century tradition, particularly as exemplified by Hemingway, Crane, and James. Undeniably, the greatest influence exerted upon me both in form and thematic subject has been that of Hemingway. His style is very apt in modern times. Times of movement and times of change. No time for nonsense and wordiness. People have not been as receptive to long windedness as they were in previous centuries.

Modern day use of low dialect to create satirical effects and idiosyncratic tricks is not new. It is meant to provide fresh insight--insight into a truth which is not new, but which is constant. The diction tends away from the artificially poetic, and toward the incorporation of colloquial, foreign, and even scientific terms. The rhythms frequently broken are based in part on speech. The age we live in demands a new image and the writers have done their best to meet the demand. In "Little Gidding" T.S. Eliot writes: "We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time./Through the unknown, remembered gate/When the last of earth left to discover/Is that which was beginning." Exploration, art, is a long and painful process with no real goal.

I have to a certain extent, followed the tradition of our times. The Cheese on the Moon reflects the theme of loss of innocence in a confoundedly sophisticated world in which civilization, good manners



and goodwill are nothing more than a veneer of paint which cover up a grotesque reality. The stories in the collection are arranged in such a manner as to depict the progression of seriousness of my heroes' encounters with life. In the first four stories the protagonists are merely crushed and not destroyed. The consequences that occur in the next five stories are much more drastic.

The title story "The Cheese on the Moon" sums up the entire collection: life is not a fairyland world of nursery rhymes and proverbial bowl of cherries. However, no matter what length and wind spent on explanations here, the stories must inevitably claim the louder voice and speak for themselves.

Footnotes

1. G.B. Tinker and H.F. Lowry, Poetical Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. xvlii.
- 2 Richard Ellman, Eminent Domain (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.3.
- 3 W.L. Werner, "Poe's Theories and Practice in Poetic Techniques," American Literature, 2(March, 1968), p. 28.
- 4 Ibid., o.36.
- 5 Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision," PMLA 83(May, 1968), p. 285.
- 6 Ilya Ehrenberg, Chekov, Stendal, And Other Essays (New York: Knopf, 1963), p. 31.
- 7 John Hagan, "Chekov's Fiction and the Ideal of 'Objectivity'," PMLA 81(October, 1966), p. 410.
- 8 Ibid, p. 416.
- 9 Ibid, p. 418.
- 10 op. cit., p. 415.
- 11 Arthur Waldhorn, Ernest Hemingway (New York: Farras, Straus and Firoux, 1975), p. 32.
- 12 Ernest Hemingway, The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber (New York: Scribener, 1964), p. 151.
- 13 Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1957), p. 4.
- 14 Ibid., p 185.
- 15 Edward Stone ed., Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1961), p. 244.

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WHEN TOBACCO IS GREEN

Fifteen-hundred dollars was a lot of money and Ted already knew what he would do with it. He could easily get a second-hand Buick for a thousand. The five-hundred would go for insurance, licence plates, gas, and other odds and ends. The thought of sitting in the driver's seat for a change made him tingle. His stomach became so unsettled that he let out a burp. He packed the suitcase, left it on his bed, and set out for the poolroom to say goodbye to all the cronies who bummed cigarettes from him. When you're seventeen years old you don't mind being fleeced as long as people pat you on the back and say that you're a "good man".

He jogged up the stairs to the third floor and entered the dingy room which had become a home away from home to him since the day he had come to Balfour High just around the corner. He sauntered in just in time to see Sammy make a great shot.

"Beautiful, Sammy," he shouted. "Couldn'ta done better myself." This remark was greeted with a sneer by Sammy who could have spotted Ted fifty points and still have beaten him at snooker.

"What's new, Teddy-boy?" asked Sammy as he sank the

blue ball in the side pocket.

"Not much," answered Ted as coolly as possible. "Going away tonight." He prayed that his excitement didn't show. This was his first trip away from home and he didn't want to be laughed at by Sammy who had travelled from coast to coast and had spent a whole winter down in Florida.

"Going away?" Sammy looked up from his game. He couldn't imagine where this kid with peach-fuzz all over his face could possibly go. "Alone?" he added.

Ted felt exhilarated. "Yeah," he muttered and scanned the room as though he were looking for someone. "None of the guys here tonight?" he asked as he looked at Sammy through the corner of his eye.

"Steve should be coming soon," the other answered.

"So where are you off to, Teddy-boy?" he added.

Ted hesitated a little before answering. He was enjoying his little secret and was sorry to end the suspense. "Tobacco," he finally said.

"No kidding? You're going to pick tobacco? That's hard work," Sammy told him. He had done it for a couple of summers when hustling in poolrooms had not been too profitable.

"Yeah, I know," replied Ted as though he too had tried it. "It's worth it, though." Blackie came back with fifteen

hundred dollars last year. He said there's nowhere to spend what you make so it's easy to save. Plus, he got lots of fresh air and a helluva tan."

Sammy sized up the kid and said, "Well, you're lean enough. It's fat people who can't pick tobacco 'cause you're always bending over the whole goddam day, you know what I mean?"

"Oh, I know I can do it." Ted replied with confidence.

Saunders came bouncing in. He was smiling like a Cheshire cat. It was obvious he had taken a few tokes, probably on the stairs on his way up. "Hey, Man," he cried out as he saw Ted. "How's it going? Got any smokes?"

Ted took out his cigarettes while Sammy ended the game with a superb shot into the corner pocket and informed Saunders of Ted's expedition into Southern Ontario.

"You're not serious?" Saunders yelled and practically jumped a foot into the air. "Why didn't you let me know? I would have gone with you. When are you leaving?"

Ted was taken aback by Saunders' enthusiasm. "I'm taking the midnight train to Toronto," he answered. "From there I'll probably take another train or maybe a bus to the Tobacco Belt."

"Midnight?" Saunders asked. "What time is it now?"

"It's eight-o-five," Sammy replied.

"Jesus Christ! Maybe I can still make it if I can borrow some dough from my old lady." Saunders was really excited. Ted wasn't sure what to make of it. Maybe Saunders was really keen on going to pick tobacco. Maybe he had taken a few tokes too many. Anyway, he felt a certain sense of relief at the thought of having a companion going with him, even if it were a weirdo like Saunders.

"Hey, look, Saunders. I'll be back here at ten. If you still wanna come, be here. Okay?"

Saunders was already out of the room as he shouted, "Right, Teddy. You wait for me!"

"You sure you want to go with him?" Sammy asked. "He's an O.K. guy but he's on a cloud most of the time."

Ted just shrugged his shoulders. He did feel a bit uneasy. He turned towards the door as it was flung open and saw Steve barge in.

"That son of a dog Saunders almost knocked me down the stairs. Somebody after him or something?"

"He's running home to his mama to bum some bread off her," Sammy said mockingly. "He wants to go pick tobacco with our friend here."

"Oh yeah?" Steve was obviously surprised. "When are

you leaving, Teddy?"

"Tonight," Ted muttered. He was a bit annoyed. If Sammy had said he was leaving for anywhere in the whole bloody world nobody would have batted an eyelid. But just because he, Ted, was going four-hundred miles away everybody was astonished. "As a matter of fact, I'm going home right now to get my suitcase. I'll be back here by ten."

"I'll go home with you," Steve said. "You might need some help with your things." Steve never passed up a chance to go to Ted's house. He was sure to get a glass of wine everytime because he knew Ted's father was an affable man and loved to chat with visitors.

Ted's mother was not too keen on seeing her big baby go so far away. "I wish you would change your mind, Ted. I'm sure you could find a good summer job right here in town," she whined. "Mr. Lieberman would take you back. He always needs an extra help."

Ted didn't bother answering. There was lightning in his eyes as he looked at his mother. One could almost hear the grinding in his stomach. Here was his mother cuddling him in front of Steve. He picked up his suitcase and handed his tote bag to his friend. After shaking his father's hand and saying goodbye to his brother he strode out through the front door while Steve thanked his father for the wine and then

followed him.

"Your mother is a bit much, eh?" Steve remarked.

"She's a pain!" Ted snapped. As they walked towards the poolroom he was conscious of the two-hundred dollars under his foot. For the past week he had dreaded the thought of what would happen if he were robbed or just plain lost his money when he was far away from home. He had taken ten twenty-dollar bills and wrapped them up in a plastic bag and then placed them in his sock. He was proud of this ingenious little trick. Even if he were mugged he would merely lose the fifty dollars he carried in his pocket.

Saunders was waiting for him. Ted saw the bag on the bench and said, "So you're coming. How much did you get from your mother?"

"She could only spare fifty bucks. It'll do. We'll buy a ten-pound salami tomorrow and we can eat for a week."

Fifty dollars wasn't much. It would cost about fifteen just to get to their destination. The thought of lending money to Saunders bothered him. This was something he had not counted upon.

On the way to Central Station the handle of his suitcase

broke and Ted cursed like a trooper. He had packed too many things into the case and it was heavy. The only way to carry it was on his shoulder. It wasn't easy. Luckily Steve was seeing them off. So the two of them took turns. As he shook hands with his friend when it was time to go down the stairs to the train Ted wished that it were Steve and not Saunders who was going with him. Steve guessed what was going on in his mind and said, "Good luck, Pal! See you in a couple of months."

It was cold in the train. Ted took the windbreaker out of his tote bag and put it on. He felt sleepy so he pushed his seat back and closed his eyes. Unfortunately Saunders was wide awake. The son-of-a-bitch had probably smoked up or popped a pill or something and he wanted to talk. After a few vain attempts to shun him Ted finally moaned, "Jesus Christ! You're too much! Let's go have a beer in the Club Car." It was a long night and they drank more than they should have. As the train rolled into Union Station the next morning, they were tired, sleepy, and a little bit hung over. After a quick breakfast in a little café they caught a cab and made their way to the bus terminal. They were just in time to catch a bus for Simcoe. Saunders had passed through the little town the previous summer when he had hitchiked out West and back, and he had recommended it to Ted. The bus was crowded and the two of them could not

sit together. This suited Ted just fine. The lack of sleep and the beer of the previous night were having their effect on Saunders and it was better to pretend not to know him. In Hamilton quite a few people got off so Saunders came and sat beside him. He didn't look well. He was strangely silent and had a fixed look in his eyes. He gave people the creeps. They would look at him and then turn nervously away. Ted began to talk to him and was finally able to bring him out of his reverie. He should never have gone to the poolroom, he told himself. He should have just left town. As the bus rolled along Saunders began to talk quite normally and Ted felt a bit relieved. They began discussing tobacco and how they would approach the farmers for a job. Saunders explained to him how the bottom leaves of the plant were picked--this was "priming". He had never picked tobacco but he had seen others doing it and it was his plan that they should pass themselves off as primers. They finally saw tobacco fields in the distance and Ted began to get excited. His joy was shortlived, however. As they approached the fields, Saunders' face dropped.

"Oh, my God!" he cried.

Ted felt alarmed. "What's wrong?"

"Who told you to come down here now?" Saunders asked through his teeth.

"No one."

"Look at those tobacco plants," Saunders snarled.

"They're about four feet high. They're supposed to be six or seven!"

"You mean we're too early?" asked Ted. "But it's mid-July."

They didn't say another word to each other till they reached the bus station. They got off and headed for a restaurant. "I'm going to ask around to find out when the picking begins," Saunders muttered. He was not in a very good mood. They ordered coffee and Saunders asked the waitress when the tobacco would be ready for picking.

"In about three weeks," was the reply.

Saunders looked into his coffee and shook his head a few times. His left fist was clenched and his knuckles were white. He couldn't hang around this crappy little town for three weeks. He'd already spent over twenty dollars coming down. He would spend another twenty getting back to Montreal. That was a lot of money to a guy who didn't believe in being a member of the labour force. At the the moment he looked just a little bit insane and Ted was uneasy about the whole matter. Saunders had a violent streak in him and he had pounded a few guys in his time. But if he was planning something Ted was ready for him.

He took the cup of hot coffee in his hand and waited. One false move and Saunders would have his face scalded. After that the cup would be broken into a thousands little pieces over his head. Ted was no fool. He had done a little boxing and had taken a three month course in karate. He wasn't going to let this maniac lay a finger on him.

Perhaps something in Ted's face told Saunders that he ought to cool off. Perhaps his unbalanced mind was not violently disposed at the moment. In any case, his tone of voice changed when he addressed his companion.

"Teddy, I'm catching the first bus outa here. I'm going back before I spend my fare. You do whatever you like, but I'm going."

Ted nodded. He was glad to find Saunders so reasonable.

By the time they arrived back in Toronto Ted had made up his mind. He wasn't going home. His pride wouldn't let him do it. He had left to make money and he wasn't going back there till he had done just that. This was a big city and there were all kinds of jobs waiting for him. He would give it a try. He said goodbye to Saunders at the station, left his things in a locker and set out into the city. It was

dark and he didn't know where he was going. The only thing he knew was that he was in Chinatown. This made him nervous because Chinatown back in Montreal had a bad reputation. That was where people would lock their car doors as they drove through.

An idea suddenly struck him. Yorkville! The hippie hang-out. He had heard about the area and decided that there he might find someone to lend him a hand. You know--flower-power, peace, and all that. Someone advised him to take a bus and he was on his way. When he got there he cursed the bastard because it wasn't really far and he could have walked. When you're on your own in a strange city even twenty-five cents is a lot of money.

It was a warm, gentle night and Ted felt like a king as he stepped off the bus. This was a freedom he had never before tasted. He could walk in any direction he felt like going--east, west, north, or south. He didn't have to be anywhere by such-and-such a time. He was his own man. As he walked down the street the familiar smell of marijuana wafted into his nostrils. He was unable to walk along on the sidewalks as they were filled with people sitting or lying down on the concrete, smoking away their problems. He couldn't believe it. And when he saw two policemen strolling along with apparent unconcern he was really amazed. There was nothing like this back in Montreal.

It wasn't long before a panhandler approached him and asked him for spare change. Ted had over two-hundred dollars on him but he put on a very convincing act and told the seedy looking teenager that he was broke, from out of town, and needed a place to stay. He was told that the "Y" down on College Street had a dormitory called the "Stop-Over" where beds cost a quarter a night so Ted ran down as quickly as he could. On the main street he found a line-up of young people like himself...The queue continued into a lane. He was beginning to feel that he was too late. Once the dormitory was filled he would have to check into a hotel which would relieve him of fifteen or twenty dollars just for a lousy night's rest. He was lucky. He just managed to squeeze through. A moan of despair and disappointment enveloped the dozen or more transients behind.

"Come again tomorrow night, Fellas," a pony-tailed dorm employee shouted at them. "Try to come no later than nine. You'll have a better chance!"

Ted paid his quarter and found himself a bunk. He felt tired and needed sleep. But he also felt dirty and sweaty. Lots of guys were taking showers and he decided he would too. There was just one thing that bothered him. The money in his sock. He had taken twenty dollars out in the morning because the fifty he had in his pocket dwindled to ten. Boy, did those

bills smell when he opened the little plastic bag! Still, money was money, and he would air it out as soon as he got some privacy. The problem that faced him at the moment was how to hide his money. He couldn't take it into the shower with him. He decided to take a chance. He took off his socks very carefully, especially the one with the money in it, and pushed them as far as he could into his boots. He tried to be casual but he couldn't help looking around him very nervously. He took a deep breath and rushed into the showers. He wasn't in there very long. Two minutes perhaps. Just enough to wash the sweat off his body. His hand was shaking just a little bit as he opened the door that separated the dormitory from the showers. He looked across the room to where his boots were. They were there. They seemed to be lying just as he had left them. He felt a bit better as he walked to his bunk and sat on it. Just to make sure he put his hand into his right boot and felt the sock. He smiled as he touched it. He was a lucky dog, he told himself. He would never again take a chance like that, no matter what. His nervous system couldn't take it. He pulled out the sock and thrust his foot into it.

The blood in his heart turned icy cold! He wriggled his toes around. He felt no money. Maybe it was the other sock. In his nervousness he had forgotten which sock contained the

money. He grabbed the left sock and squeezed it all over. He put his hands into it. Nothing! Could the money have fallen out? He looked around on the floor, under the bunk. He grabbed the blanket and tossed it into the air. The money was gone. Many people were staring at him by now. One of the employees came over.

"Hey, Man! Something wrong?"

"I've lost my money," Ted gasped. "Someone took it!"

"Easy, Kid," warned the other. "That's a pretty serious accusation. Those your pants?"

"Yeah," groaned Ted.

"Okay, let's check your pockets."

The youth picked up Ted's pants and thrust his hands into the pockets. He pulled out some bills and counted them. "Twenty-nine dollars," the other said menacingly. "And seventy cents," he added as he counted the change.

"You don't understand," Ted pleaded. "I had one-hundred-eighty dollars in my sock. That's what's gone!"

The other smiled. Everyone around laughed and some began to jeer. That's when Ted realized that the bunk beside his own was empty. "Where's the guy that occupied this bunk?" he demanded.

The employee shrugged his shoulders.

"Who's bunk is this?" he shouted.

"I guess it's empty," he said as he turned to Ted.

"We thought the place was filled. We must have made a mistake."

Ted nodded silently. At least the son-of-a-bitch had not gone into his pockets. He still had train fare to get back home.

"Listen, Kid. I think you should go. I'm not throwing you out but I think it would be wiser if you didn't sleep here tonight. You know what I mean? We'll give you your quarter back."

As Ted got dressed he heard the young man shout out,

"Hey, Bill! We've got room for just two more."

ANGLER'S DELIGHT

Freddy had never been on a fishing trip. He had always envied his friends when they talked about the trout they had caught in such-and-such a lake; about the pike that had put up such a fight; the perch eaten by moonlight around a campfire. He wondered why he had never been fishing. The idea appealed to him. He had lots of friends who fished. They had even invited him to go along a few times. He had always said no. This time he decided to say yes. Brian had his old jalopy running for a change and he was anxious to go to Lake Saint Francis. Frank and Ricky had already left that morning so Brian needed a travelling companion. Otherwise he probably wouldn't have even asked Freddy. And Freddy knew that. Still, he thought it was time he tried his hand at the sport.

The two of them went to Brian's house and got things ready. Brian had already experienced the more sombre aspects of fishing and he insisted on bringing along life preservers.

It was almost midnight before they were ready to roll. They had a strong cup of coffee and then set out. They had eighty miles to go but with the old patched-up Viva it would take about two and a half hours. They didn't have much trouble finding their buddies. There was one restaurant at

the Lake and it was open all night.

"Hi, Guys!" Ricky yelled.

Frank was gulping down a coffee and he froze for a few seconds when he saw Freddy. "What are you doing here?"

"Nothing," Freddy answered almost indignantly.

"Gonna do some fishing."

"I asked him to come along," Brian broke in.

"Okay, relax everybody," said Ricky. "We're going to have a great day." He turned to Brian and Freddy and added, "The sun will be coming up in about an hour so grab yourselves a coffee. You must be tired from your drive."

By six o'clock they had already rented two boats and begun to unload their equipment from their cars. Frank had brought his own outboard with him but Brian had to rent one. The water was oily smooth and the day promised to be a splendid one. Frank had a fifteen-horsepower motor while Brian had been able to rent only a ten-horsepower one. Frank and Ricky were soon out of sight. Freddy was amazed that the Lake was so big. It was only a widening in the St. Lawrence and he had expected something much smaller. There were small islands all over the place and before long both he and Brian were lost. They could not figure out the direction from which they had come. Freddy was a little bit nervous.

"Take it easy, Man," Brian told him. "There's land

all around us. All we have to do is to go in a straight line and we'll land somewhere or other. In the meantime, we have some fishing to do. But first," --here he smiled wickedly as he pulled a flight bag out from the bottom of the boat--"first we have a little business to take care of." He unzipped the bag and pulled his lunch out. "This is for later," he said. Next he pulled out a little silver flask. "This is for now." He put the bottle to his mouth and took a long gulp. He then let out a tremendous yell, shook his head violently and offered Freddy a swig. "Fishing at sunrise is a chilly business," he snorted. "You need something to warm you up."

"What is it?" Freddy asked as he took the mickey.

"Five ounces of brandy and five of rye," Brian beamed as he said it. "I took it from my old man's liquor cabinet. I couldn't take everything from one bottle 'cause he would have noticed."

"Rye and brandy?" Freddy's face contorted.

"Try it! You'll like it," Brian laughed.

Freddy closed his eyes and drank. He too let out a yell.

"Okay, Freddy, that's enough. Let's save the rest for later. Now we fish." Brian put the bottle away, took a rod and spent a few minutes showing his friend how to cast the line.

It was a cloudy day but the sun was trying hard to break through and every now and then he would show his face. Freddy didn't care. He was enjoying himself more than he had imagined he would. The stillness of the water, the serenity that enveloped the boat--it was like a tonic to him. Back in the city his ears were accustomed to the continuous hum. Here he realized that without that dreadful noise he felt more relaxed. He felt at peace with the world. Every now and then the distant roar of an outboard or the quack of a duck would bring him back from his reverie. He and his friend sat like this for at least a half hour before Brian suddenly got up, started the motor and said, "There's no fish around here. Let's move on to another spot."

They plowed through the water for about a mile and came to a halt near an island which looked so appealing that Freddy suggested going in for a landing.

"Aw, come on!" Brian moaned. "We've gotta catch some fish. Frank will laugh his head off if we don't. He's probably got four or five by now." They hit their liquor once more and threw in their lines. Ten minutes later and still no fish. Suddenly, on the other side of the island, there appeared a ship off in the distance. It looked like a freighter and Freddy couldn't believe the size of it.

"Holy cow! Where is that thing coming from?"

"Jesus Christ!" answered Brian. "You ever heard of the Great Lakes?"

Freddy couldn't help blushing a little. What a fool he was! He had somehow forgotten that he was on the St. Lawrence, a busy waterway. His imagination had transported him onto a quiet, isolated lake somewhere up north. Now he began to notice the oily film on the surface of that water. It appeared in patches and in streaks everywhere. He was suddenly overcome by a gush of regret and disappointment. The idea of eating fried fish no longer appealed to him. Thank God he had packed a lunch. If that weren't enough he would buy something at the restaurant. He vowed he would never eat any fish that swam in that filthy water.

"That's okay," Brian smiled. "All the more for me." Things were quiet for a while but then the fish began to bite. The first one was a pike and he put up a good fight. Freddy became so excited that he stood up and almost tipped the boat over.

"Sit down!" screamed Brian, "It's a bit too cold to go for a swim." They finally reeled the fish in and they celebrated their good luck with another guzzle of Brian's wicked concoction. There wasn't much food in their stomachs and the liquor was having an effect. They began laughing like children and when Brian began to sing a bawdy song he had learned at his

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fraternity gatherings, Freddy found himself in stitches. The fish began to come in at regular intervals and the boys' spirits stayed high.

It was around eleven o'clock when a boat appeared and came churning toward them. It was Frank and Ricky. As soon as they were within earshot Ricky stood up carefully and held up about eight fish. Frank raised another seven or eight.

"Hey, you landlubbers!" Ricky screamed. "How many do you have?"

"Six," Brian answered not too loudly, and added under his breath, "That son-of-a-gun Frank has always been lucky. I don't know how he does it."

"When you're a pro, you're a pro," Frank taunted as he manoeuvred the boat alongside.

"You're just lucky," Freddy replied.

"Listen, Guys," Frank said. "Let's head for a cabin on one of these islands and have ourselves a real meal."

"What are you talking about? You don't have a cabin around here," Freddy answered.

"Of course not, Dummy," Frank said. "We'll just break open a lock and make ourselves at home somewhere. Follow us!" He didn't wait for an answer. He and Ricky were roaring away toward a nearby island.

Freddy didn't like the idea. "Brian," he began.

He was cut short. "Don't worry, Freddy. We always do this. We break open a padlock and we make ourselves at home in a cottage. We don't damage anything else. Let's go." With that he turned the boat around and they were soon chasing the other. Frank quickly found a cottage with a small wharf. There were no boats around and the cottage appeared to be locked up. With a small steel pipe which he always brought along on fishing expeditions, Frank broke the padlock on the door of the cottage and the four anglers walked in and looked around. It was a cosy place so they sat down and had a smoke. There was an old stove there so the cooking would be easy. There was only one problem. Frank had left a half gallon of wine in the trunk of the car. Without it the fish would taste only half as good. Someone had to go and get it. It would take an hour to go there and come back. Freddy turned to Brian and said, "Why don't we go?" He was thinking of the restaurant and the food he could buy there. He was definitely not going to eat those fish. Brian didn't mind the ride so he agreed.

Just as they were going out through the door Frank called them back and told them to take his boat. "My motor is bigger," he said. "You'll be back sooner."

Brian and Freddy climbed into the boat and launched themselves off. Frank's motor did make a difference. The boat sped through the water and the two boys enjoyed it

immensely. Suddenly the sun came out. It was bright and warm and a feeling of exhilaration took hold of Brian. He was the one handling the boat and he began to pull off some fancy manoeuvres. He formed beautiful "S" patterns in the water and every once in a while he would suddenly turn the boat at right angles to the direction in which it was moving. Freddy was sitting at the bow and he felt the ride even more intensely. He was shouting like a cowboy and laughing like a happy child. This went on for a few minutes and would have continued much longer if catastrophe had not struck. Just as Brian was pulling off another fancy trick, the motor suddenly broke loose from the stern of the boat and sank into the water in a huge circle of white bubbles. The propeller was still turning.

The fact that a four-hundred dollar outboard motor had just sunk to the bottom of the lake did not seem to register on the boys' minds. They had both been in the midst of hilarious laughter when suddenly the boat and the motor went their separate ways, and they continued to laugh. As the boat came to a halt, they stared at the spot where the motor was going down for a well-deserved rest. Then they stared at each other, and finally they held their sides as they broke into a fit of laughter which brought tears to their eyes. After a couple of minutes they sobered up and

decided that this was a serious business and that Frank might not take it too well. Luckily, every rented boat was equipped with a pair of oars so Brian took them and began to head back toward the cottage. They were both astounded by the slowness of their progress.

"It took us five minutes to get out here," Freddy whined, "and here we are after half-an-hour of rowing back and still a long way to go." Nevertheless they continued to joke around and the time passed by. They finally tied the boat at the wharf after a good hour of strenuous rowing and now it struck them that they were going to tell Frank that his motor was gone forever. They suddenly became very quiet.

Frank and Ricky were already frying the fish. As a matter of fact, they were wondering why their buddies had not yet returned.

"Christ Almighty!" roared Frank. "What took you? And where's the wine?"

Neither Brian nor Freddy spoke. They looked at each other uneasily. They looked at the floor. They scrutinized the ceiling and then the walls.

"Come on, out with it! What's up?" Ricky finally moaned.

"We had an accident," Brian began.

"Yeah, just a little accident," Freddy added. "I don't know how it happened, but there it is."

"There WHAT is?" Frank was getting angry. "You didn't drop the goddam jug, did you?"

"It's a bit more than that, Frank," Brian answered. And then quickly, "We lost your outboard."

Frank and Ricky looked at each other, puzzled. "You lost the outboard?" Ricky asked laughingly. "Have you guys smoked up or something?"

"It's true!" Freddy exclaimed. "I swear it's true. We were just chugging along and POOF! the bloody motor fell off and sank into the water. Brian came close to being pulled overboard. He had his hand on it when it happened!"

Frank's eyes were getting bigger and bigger. When they began to glaze Freddy felt nervous. The former looked at the two culprits and said ominously, "You guys wouldn't be trying to screw me out of a motor would you?"

Brian was startled. "Aw, come on, Frank! That's not fair. You asked us to take your boat. I didn't want it. You probably didn't tie the motor properly onto the boat." He was careful not to mention the acrobatics.

"Okay, fine!" Frank replied. "We'll go down and get the damn thing. You remember where it happened?"

"Wait a minute," Freddy answered him. "It could be fifty feet deep over there. I'm not going down."

"That's right, Frank," Ricky interjected. "It could be suicide to try something like that. You need experienced divers for such a stunt."

Frank sat down and began to brood. "That's my motor down there," he mumbled. "I paid good money for it. One way or another you guys are gonna help me..." he never finished his sentence. His face lit up and a grin spread out all over it. "It's a good thing I've got something up here," he said as he tapped his head with his forefinger.

"What is it, Frank?" Brian asked uneasily.

"How many boats are there on this lake right now?" Frank asked. "Hundreds, right? That means hundreds of outboard motors."

"Oh, my God!" Freddy gasped. "You're not going to steal one. Are you, Frank?"

Frank looked at him straight in the eye. "Freddy boy! I'm not going to steal one. WE are!" Frank laughed long and hard. The other three looked at each other and squirmed. They realized that Frank was entitled to a motor. There was no other way but to steal one for him. Freddy protested but Brian soon silenced him. "You wanta buy him a motor instead?"

They tied Frank's boat to Brian's and set out towards the marina where their day had begun. Frank wanted to make sure he got a good motor so they moved along very slowly among the boats tied up there. They drew some curious glances. Perhaps it was because of Frank's boat being tugged along by Brian's. Perhaps the four of them looked as though they had mischief in mind. At any rate, a security guard came along and asked them whether they needed any help.

"No thanks!" Ricky yelled. "We're okay." The boys tried to look nonchalant but the guard's brow was still wrinkled.

When they had gotten far enough to be out of earshot Frank said, "We'll come back when it's dark. If we tried it now we'd be spotted in no time."

They packed their gear into the cars and headed for the restaurant. "Hey, listen, Guys!" began Freddy. "I'm not sure about this whole thing. That guard made me nervous."

Frank's upper lip twitched. "I want a motor," he said quietly.

A few hours later the four of them were casually walking towards the boats that were bobbing up and down at the marina.

"Okay, this is it!" Frank became very businesslike.

"Brian, you come with me and help me with the motor. You two stay here and keep an eye out. If there's any danger whatsoever

start whistling 'O, Canada'. Got it?"

Fred and Ricky nodded.

Frank quickly spotted a fifteen-horsepower Johnson. It would do just fine. He lifted it from the boat to which it was tied and with Brian's help was soon scurrying towards their cars with it. By the time the two of them had reached their buddies they were exhausted. "You guys take it from here," Brian gasped.

Freddy touched the machine as though it were a rattlesnake. "Come on, move it!" Ricky snarled under his breath. Brian and Frank had already gone ahead to make sure the road was clear. Freddy couldn't help feeling horribly frightened as he and Ricky trotted along with their loot.

Suddenly a strong light blinded his eyes. He knew instantly that this was his first and his last fishing trip.

PUDDING AND PIE

Joyce knew that Mike was worthless but she still hung around, hoping that sooner or later he would see something worthwhile in her. He was a bum. A twenty-two year old bum with the mind of a sixteen year-old. He had to be proving himself to everyone around him every moment of every day. Being a passenger in his old Chevy meant putting your life down on the line. He would take corners at fifty miles per hour, go the wrong way on one-way streets and completely disregard stop signs. When traffic was light even red lights were no barrier. But his big kick was to splash pedestrians. There was the time when a huge pool of water and mud had formed at Pine and St. Lawrence. Joyce remembered it well. She was one of five passengers that night. When Mike saw the miniature lake his eyes lit up.

"Jesus Murphy!" he cried. "Look at that! Somebody's gonna get it tonight."

Everyone in the car was excited. This was going to be fun. Joyce squirmed a little bit in her seat but she didn't want to be a party-pooper so she just smiled and kept her mouth shut. There was no one on the sidewalk at the moment so they just drove around the block. Still no one! Around the block

once more. The fourth time around they hit the jackpot. "An old lady!" yelled Mike with enthusiasm. "She won't be able to move fast enough to avoid the splash. And look at that, will you? She's wearing a fur coat!" With a wild, cowboy-type yell he floored the gas pedal. The car lurched forward like a wild bronco and screamed towards the pool. The old lady looked up at the screeching car and realized instantly what was happening. Just as Mike had guessed, she was unable to move back fast enough. The only thing Joyce remembered was the look of horror on the old lady's face as she lifted up her arm defensively and was engulfed by a five-foot wave of grey, dirty water.

There was mayhem in the car. Mike was laughing so much he went into the lane for oncoming traffic and almost collided head-on with an old truck. There were two other girls in the car and they had enjoyed the incident just as much as the guys had. Joyce found herself in the position of having to feign approval. She had been accused several times of being a prude and she resented the accusation. Mike always ridiculed anyone who was a "Good-goody", so she tried hard to be nonchalant about many things. Nevertheless, the look on the old woman's face haunted her. She wondered to herself how much it would cost to have a fur coat cleaned. She really didn't enjoy her coffee when they were all sitting in a booth at Mama's later that evening. Every

thirty seconds one of them would burst out laughing and they would all go into hysterics.

Then there was that other night at the Mazurka. It was almost midnight and the guys had been drinking steadily since ten. The liquor loosened their tongues and they were becoming rather crude. Even Linda felt uncomfortable and it took quite a bit to shock her. Joyce finally yawned a couple of times and announced that she was ready to leave.

"Aw, come on!" Mike whined. "Wait for the band to come on again so we can dance some."

Mike didn't ask her very often to dance so she was tempted to stay but Timmy made some lurid remark about the way Linda danced so the two girls decided to leave. Just as they got up Timmy growled like an animal and threw himself at Linda, sinking his teeth into one of her buttocks. The manager came running when he heard the girl scream and found poor Linda in tears while the guys--Mike, Timmy and Sid--were just about rolling on the floor. Joyce helped Linda down the stairs to the washroom and there they examined the damage. They couldn't believe it! Poor Linda was actually bleeding. She was wearing corduroy slacks and yet Timmy's wicked teeth had penetrated them and broken the skin underneath! The swine must have really been sloshed.

The guys were waiting for them at the door and Timmy apologized; however, it was hard to take him seriously since he was still laughing. Mike, especially, was in a fit.

"How does it compare with T-bone?" he screamed at Timmy. And this set off a new outburst. Joyce looked at him and wished he would grow up a bit. He could be quite nice if he were a bit more serious.

Linda refused to go to the regular hang-outs for a couple of weeks. It took that long for her pride and her flesh to heal. Joyce also stayed away. Without a female companion she would not go down to where the guys spent their leisure time. But it was a long two weeks. She missed Mike. So when Linda asked her whether she would like to drop in at the Mazurka she did not have to be persuaded.

By nine o'clock they were already on their second drinks and the guys had not shown up. Ten o'clock and still they hadn't arrived. Joyce began to despair. She wondered what a girl from the Town of Mt. Royal was doing in a place like this. Her mother would definitely not approve. But she also realized how much she missed Mike and asked herself why she was attracted to him. She just didn't know. When they finally arrived at eleven thirty she almost wished that they hadn't come. They had

been drinking somewhere else and they were not exactly sober.

The first thing that Mike said to her made her arch her back.

"Hey, Joyce! We were just talking about you. Sid was saying that you're probably loaded with dough."

"What are you jibbering about?" Joyce answered.

Discussing money always made her nervous. She had been working for three years, didn't spend much, and had put something aside, but she felt about her pennies the way a dog feels about a bone.

"Well, Sid was saying that you've worked for a while and he figures you've got at least four thousand."

"What I've got is none of Sid's business," she retorted.

"And none of yours either!" She was so indignant that she would have left immediately. But she hadn't seen Mike for two weeks so she controlled herself.

"All right, relax," Mike replied. "We was just funnin!"

The guys sat down and the evening went by pleasantly with no further incidents. Around one o'clock Mike had a brainstorm. He was hungry and suggested going down to the Main for hot dogs. Joyce and Linda were wary. That strip of St. Lawrence called the Main was the seediest place in town. It was a tough, dirty place in the daytime and at night it was supposed to be even worse.

"The best steamies in town!" cried Sid as though he

were dangling a worm before fish.

"Not only that," added Timmy, "but there you see Life, Baby--Life in the Raw."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Linda jeered. "People like you!" She had not forgiven him yet.

Mike turned to Joyce. He knew she would listen to him.

"Come on, we'll have a couple of steamies and a few laughs and then we'll all go home."

She was reluctant but she finally agreed. "Okay just for a while."

St. Lawrence was deserted as they walked down towards Sherbrooke and the cold drizzle made them trot towards their destination. As they made their way down the hill towards Ontario Street Joyce was definitely afraid. There were so many doorways and everything was so dark. She was almost relieved to reach St. Catherine in spite of the reputation of the area. At least it was well-lit and there were people everywhere.

"Let's go into this joint," Mike said as they came to a billiard parlor which also sold hot dogs and french fries. Joyce looked about nervously and took hold of Linda's arm as they all entered. There were so many leery characters on the doorstep and inside the establishment itself that she wished she were out of this area. She had never seen so many depraved-

looking persons all in one place. They were staring at the two girls the way a hungry wolf stares at a lamb. She ordered a hot-dog and began nibbling at it. All the while she made sure she stayed close to Mike, and Linda stayed close to her. A few minutes later they were treated to a real show. In came a troop of entertainers probably from the Rialto across the street or some other nearby club. It must have been their coffee break. What amazed Joyce was that they appeared to be continuing their act. One girl could have been the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*. She wore a long, satin gown with all kinds of frills and her face was completely covered with glittering paint. She danced around the place doing pirouettes and tapping the greasy monsters in there with her little wand and everyone loved it. One of her companions was a young man with a striped shirt and striped pants. He pulled his little cap over his eyes and squatted down under the long counter which ran along the wall. He then began to pout. A young woman in seventeenth-century French-Canadian dress tried to coax him to come out but he stubbornly refused. Joyce began to laugh and almost forgot how nervous she was. She couldn't believe that this was happening. But then she saw something that jolted her back to reality. In came a monstrosity which made her shudder--a man, barely four feet tall yet with the head and shoulders of a man who should have been well over six feet. The

most terrifying part of it all was that his feet pointed backward! Everyone looked twice. There was no trick. How could there be? No one could turn his feet around one-hundred-eighty degrees and still walk about. Joyce felt her stomach squirm. The man was dressed meticulously in a white suit and was incredibly cool and went from girl to girl in the troop patting their bottoms with hands the size of a shovel. While Joyce watched this freak another one of the entertainers approached her. He was an effeminate-looking creature with purple tights and rouge on both cheeks. He wafted over to Joyce and began to circle around her.

"Mike!", she pleaded. But Mike was laughing. He thought that this was quite humorous. The young man touched her on the shoulder a couple of times and she looked at Mike again. "Please, Mike! Make him stop!" She was not merely annoyed. She was frightened. Mr. Purple Tights continued to harass Joyce and began in slow deliberate tones to chant: *Georgie Porgy, pudding and pie/ Kissed the girls and made them cry / When the girls came out to play / Georgie Porgy ran away.* She turned to Linda and said "Let's get out of here."

As the girls made for the door the young man under the counter suddenly leaped out and intercepted them. He grinned wickedly and tip-toed towards them. He reached out with both hands and cupped them around Joyce's face. She turned

towards Mike and his companions and saw that they were still laughing. When the guy in purple tights came over, she and Linda felt trapped. The laughter all around them seemed to be getting louder and louder. She suddenly screamed and pushed the pouter out of her way. Linda followed quickly. Once out in the street they began running. There was a cab on the corner and they waved to him. As they were getting in Mike and the guys caught up.

"What's the matter with you?" Mike cried. "They were only kidding. Christ! Afraid of a couple of fags. They just wanted to have some fun."

Joyce looked at him straight in the eye. She still had a lump in her throat and she needed a few seconds before she could speak.

"Mike, you ought to grow up a little bit. Right now, you're a big, fat baby. You know what else you are? A goddam bastard!"

At this Mike grew flushed. "You really think you're something else, don't you? Well, I'll tell you what you don't know. At least the people in there are alive. They're not made of cardboard."

She slammed the door shut and the car moved away.

Mike turned to his friends and saw that they had been smiling at each other. "Stupid broad," he muttered.

SLIM PICKINGS

Slim knew he could do it. He had the brains. He had the drive. All he needed was the opportunity. It would come. He could feel it deep down in his guts somewhere. He had already tried a few times and failed. But he had not quite given up. He attributed his falls to bad luck. And as any good gambler knows, luck changes. Sometimes for the better. Sometimes for the worse. His had always been bad. It could only get better.

He remembered his first bungling attempt at making money. Eighteen years old and ready to bowl over the world, he had gotten himself tied up with some real characters who knew where things were really at. Slim became a "pusher". He didn't make millions, but he always had money in his pocket. He pushed grass, hash, and a few pills in local poolrooms and taverns, and he felt quite content for a while. But it began to dawn on him that if he wanted real bread he had to push hard stuff. He had to meet the big guys and not the riff-raff who gave him a pound or two of marijuana to peddle. He began to investigate the whole situation, the scene, and had almost made a contact with the big boys when he found himself up before Judge Savard. Six months in Bordeaux persuaded him to reconsider his plans. Luckily it was late fall when the gates closed in on him. He would have hated to be inside during the summer. Still, Christmas was rough. His mother coming to visit him, crying and all.

It was a beautiful morning in May and the sun tumbled all over him as he stepped outside. His sister said he looked awfully pale. His mother thought he had lost so much weight. His pal Andy shook his hand and welcomed him to his new status--ex-con. Andy had already travelled the same road. But it was good to be out! Young, hopeful, still lots of energy in him, Slim laughed long and loud as they headed for the waiting cab.

It doesn't take long to realize that being ambitious is one thing and being successful is another. Slim tried several things but uneasiness began to set in when things didn't move fast enough. He had found a clerical job with Domtar. A very good company. But it would take at least ten years to become president or even vice-president. He tried going back to school. He had his junior matriculation. The marks were good so he signed up at Loyola College. He became a Christmas graduate. God, those papers and exams and class presentations! Definitely not for him.

For a while he settled into a comfortable niche and collected unemployment insurance. But this was admitting to failure and he knew he was much more than that. People were getting rich all around him. Business ventures. That's what he would do. Go into some sort of business. Take a few risks. It's the only way. But what kind of business does an unemployed, flat-broke teenager

get into? One idea that came to him--oh, he was proud of himself--was to buy old cars, fix them up a little and resell them at a profit. It took him two months to convince Sal, an apprentice mechanic and a friend of his, to agree to a partnership. Sal had three or four thousand stashed away. That was the capital. He also knew quite a bit about engines. That was the know-how. Slim had lots of time on his hands and could look around for bargain jalopies. He could also get customers for the renovated autos. He was the brains behind the operation.

Though Sal was reluctant to invest his hard-earned money, Slim was such a smooth talker that he finally agreed. And they were off.

The first car they bought was a '56 Pontiac. Body still solid. They just don't make cars like that anymore. But the engine was finished. Sal spent three weekends working on it. Slim was running all over town getting spare parts. They finally got the damn thing to purr. When they sold it they made a clear profit of two-hundred dollars.

"You see that, Sal?" Slim cried with joy. "It works. It really works!"

Sal wasn't quite as happy as his partner. "Slim, I spent three weekends--six days--working on that damned thing. You musta done a hundred and fifty miles all over this town getting parts. And all for two-hundred bucks split two ways! Forget it, man. It

ain't worth it."

But Slim wasn't ready to quit. He shoved half his cut into Sal's pocket. "I'll settle for fifty, Pal. You did most of the work anyway. I'll take twenty-five percent in all our deals. Don't give up now, for God's sake! I mean, the system really works. You can see that. With a bitta luck our profits will be higher. Give it a chance."

It wasn't easy convincing the mechanic but Slim did it. The partnership continued. Slim found a '61 Biscayne at a bargain price. They also had to sell it at a bargain price. With a '66 Parisienne they just broke even. Slim contemplated another course of action, stealing cars, but his memories of Bordeaux Jail brought him back down to earth. Sal unilaterally dissolved the company and Slim was again wandering through the streets.

If you are ever depressed right out of your mind and you happen to be in Montreal, then there's a place you should know about. Man and His World. It's an annual exhibition. The son of Expo '67, Set on islands in the St. Lawrence River, it is an enchantingly beautiful place which will appeal to any of any age. Do you want excitement? Then go for a few dare-devil rides at La Ronde. Perhaps culture is your thing. In that case you may browse through several pavilions from countries all over the world. Maybe you are in the

mood for a quiet stroll along the riverside and you would like this to be accompanied by soft, soul-setting music. Fine! It's all there. Seriously, if you ever come here to Montreal, do drop in on the Exhibition. You won't regret it. But we were talking about Slim. Well, Slim was depressed and he was at Man and His World. Not for rides. Not for culture. Nor for a quiet stroll. Slim was here to meet a female. Not any particular female. Anyone would do. Provided she was utterly and superbly attractive. He had a certain prowess in exploits with the opposite sex and when you're a depressed twenty-year-old what better diversion than a little bit of fishing in the St. Lawrence? But Slim was not destined to find what he was after. Instead he ran into an old friend. A former classmate.

"Slim! Slim Jenkins!" a very assertive voice called to him.

He turned and recognized Chubby Berton immediately.

"Chubb! I mean Jack." He corrected himself because Chubby was with a girl. And what a dish! Slim's eyes began to pulsate. A ravishing brunette accompanied his fat friend and he intuitively understood why. Chubby had the aroma of success all around him. A three-hundred-dollar suit, eighty-five-dollar shoes, a gold watch, a ruby on his fat little finger, and an expensive cigar in his mouth. These told the story of success quite well.

Slim wondered where the Lincoln Mark IV was parked.

"So after four years we meet again, Slim. How's life

treating you?"

"Not as well as it's treating you, Chubb. I mean Jack. Sorry, I didn't mean..."

"Forget it, Slim. All my old pals still call me Chubb. I don't mind anymore. There was a time when it bothered me," he added to his little ornament. She didn't seem to mind his nickname or his layers of fat. She merely smiled and blew off a small speck of dust from a sparkling stone on her finger.

"Listen, Slim," said Chubb. "Here's my card. Come and see me sometime."

Slim stood there, mute. Here was his fat friend walking around with a Miss Universe. Money was practically falling out of his pockets as he walked. And Chubby was no more than twenty-two. He remembered clearly that Chubby Berton had failed a couple of times. Not too bright. He had just barely squeezed through his matrices. Slim looked down at the card.

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JACK BERTON, Agent

He waited a few days before calling on Chubby. He didn't know why he should go over. Whether or not something might

come of it. But he went. As he walked into the office, there was Chubby. A big cigar in his mouth. Talking firmly and decisively into a telephone. Eyeing his secretary voraciously as she swung her hips around the desk.

"Slim! Nice to see you!" He indicated a comfortable chair and continued to talk into the phone. Slim sat down and began to feel rather uneasy. He looked around and began to wish he had not come.

"So, what's new, Pal?" Chubby reached out across the desk and shook Slim's hand. He certainly had a vigorous handshake. "What do you say we go for a drink, Slim? It's lunch time anyway."

Slim had a dollar thirty-seven in his pocket and he almost froze in his seat. "Come on, it's on me," Chubby added. Slim couldn't believe the astuteness of this man.

When the third martini arrived the conversation was flowing quite freely and before the glass was empty Slim had unburdened himself totally. His fears, his frustrations, his despair. Everything tumbled out into his drink and Chubby was uneasy. In his world one showed only strength and not weaknesses.

"Slim, you're feeling your liquor right now so there's no point talking business. But I remember we were friends. You never needled me the way some others did. I'm gonna do you a favor. If you have time meet me at my office tomorrow at six.

"We'll take a drive and I'll show you something interesting."

Slim didn't sleep much that night. He was round the corner from Chubby's office at four-thirty. At five to six he sauntered in. There was Chubby. Still smoking the cigar. Still talking into the phone. The secretary's hips were still swinging.

"Five minutes, Slim. I'll be with you."

As they walked toward the parking lot Slim wondered whether it would really be a Mark IV. It turned out to be a Caprice. But it had air-conditioning. They drove clear across town to St. Leonard. Slim didn't utter a word. He was afraid to speak. Chubby looked so determined.

They finally pulled up to a shabby-looking house with an irregular hedge around it. "Look!" said Chubby. "You wanta get rich? Buy that house!"

"I don't understand, Jack."

"Call me Chubb for Christ's sake. It's more natural. Listen to me, There's an old geezer in there who wants 34,500 for this shack. He'll probably let it go for 30,000. But if he doesn't, give him what he wants. You'll never regret it."

"Jack, I mean Chubb, I don't have any money," Slim protested.

Chubby smiled. "Listen Man. You don't need 30 g's."

All you need is three or four. Borrow it. Steal it. But get it." He moved closer and almost whispered. "Listen to me. The old fool in there doesn't realize it, but his property will be worth three times what he's asking. In about a year's time. Trust me. I know. A contractor is buying up land around here. For apartment buldings. Look at the size of this lot. You know how big it is? Seventy-five by a hundred. By this time next year, this land will go for ten bucks a square foot. Take it Slim. You can't go wrong."

Slim stiffened for a second. "Why don't you take it for yourself, Chubb. I mean, why so generous towards me?"

Chubby sighed almost with disappointment. "You young fool! You think I don't have my own little deals going? I've got a few, don't worry about it. But I can't grab every good opportunity that comes along. This one is yours. If you want it. Sleep on it. But don't wait too long."

Within forty-eight hours Slim had gone back to the house, agreed to thirty-two thousand, borrowed two from his mother and fifteen-hundred from his sister for a cash deposit and had a piece of paper in his hand which stated that his offer had been accepted. Within ten days all parties concerned would present themselves at the notary's and the deed would be signed. He was in ecstasy,

though mamma had only cautious optimism.

Sunday was Uncle Roderick's birthday so they were invited over to his house for dinner. Uncle Rod was a teacher and was the leader of the entire clan of Jenkinses by acclamation. He was a wise man and relatives sought his advice on important matters. It was natural, then, that Slim's mother would bring the matter of the purchase of the house to her brother's attention. Especially since she was a widow and had no man around except for Slim. Over dinner she brought the matter up and was careful not to omit anything. Especially not Chubb's remarks. At which point Uncle Rod momentarily stopped munching his food and looked carefully at Slim. The latter sat staring at his uncle, hoping for approval.

"You're a smart cookie, ma boy. It sounds as though you're on to something. I wish you luck."

Well, needless to say, dinner ended on a happy note. It occurred to Slim later that day that his mother had not even seen their investment. Early the next morning the two of them were off to see the house and more important, the lot. Poor sister had to go to work. Just as they got off the bus at the corner Slim thought he saw his uncle Roderick driving by.

"Don't be silly, dear. Rod is at work. It's Monday, remember?"

They walked up the street but Slim kept looking back.

"I'm sure it was Uncle Rod," he kept saying.

They got to the house and Slim knocked. An elderly man opened the door.

"Hello, Mr. Dobie. This is my mother. I brought her to see the hosue, if you don't mind."

"There's no point in your doing that, Sonny. I'm not selling."

"Mr. Dobie, you and I have made an agreement. Thirty-two thousand. You signed!" Slim shouted back.

"Listen, fella. I don't want to be nasty. I accepted your offer but I've changed my mind. We never signed a deed of sale. I received a better offer. You can understand that, I mean, I'm retired. I need every penny I can get." The old man seemed to be quite reasonable. His argument certainly was sound. But the blood had shot into Slim's eyes. His mother was muttering to herself but nobody was listening.

"I'll bring you to court for this!" Slim shook his fist.

"Well, now that's fine. Do that," the old man answered quietly and closed the door.

"Slim, let's take a taxi home," his mother lamented.

"I don't feel like the bus just now."

Not a word was said during the entire ride. Back home they sat down and stared at things. The wall, the floor, out through the windows. Suddenly, Slim jumped up and went for the phone.

"Who are you calling?" asked his mother.

Her son didn't answer. He was breathing hard as the phone rang at the other end. Finally, someone answered.

"Hello. Uncle Rod? You didn't go to work today? Not feeling well, eh?"

He dropped the phone as his mother groaned and fell sobbing onto the couch.

THE HOMECOMING

Not one member of the gang would believe it. Everyone knew that Pete could shoot the bull fast and thick. They smiled at one another and sipped their beer. Oley crushed his cigarette under his foot, much to the disdain of Mr. Kovak who had bought a fancy set of ashtrays for the club, and said, "Sure, Pete. So now you're a big man. Maybe you can do us a favour if any one of us ever gets busted."

Pete's nostrils expanded and his lips tightened. It was obvious that these morons didn't believe him. He slowly put his hand in the inside pocket of his jacket and took out a wallet. An ostentatious-looking piece of paper was taken out and thrown with contempt towards Oley. The latter looked at it uneasily. He considered himself the leader of this pack of vagabonds and was not keen on being put down.

"Come on, look at it," Pete sneered. This was his big moment. In his whole life he had never had a "big moment". Oley unfolded the document as though it were an ancient parchment which might crumble in his hands if handled too roughly. Everyone at the table held his breath. It couldn't be true. Not Pete. He was such a jackass.

"Son of a bitch!" exclaimed Oley. This was followed by

a mad scramble for the paper. Mike and Jimmy happened to pull it together and they tore it right down the middle along the crease. Pete uttered such words that Mr. Kovak had to come over and ask him to mind his language. Some of the females at the other tables were shocked at his barrage. The proprietor was afraid of the ruffians and tried to look the other way whenever they misbehaved, but there were limits to his patience.

"Watch your step, Mr. Kovak," Jimmy retorted, "or else Pete will take you in. He's with the R.C.M.P. now!"

"What! Is that true Pete?" Mr. Kovak somehow felt relieved.

Pete was cool as a cucumber. "Yeah, that's right, Mr. Kovak. I was sworn in last week. Flew in from Regina this morning."

"Well, congratulations, Pete. Let me shake your hand."

Mr. Kovak called for drinks on the house for the group, told Pete that he was a good boy and always had been and went back to looking after his business with a new peace of mind.

Pete had been out of town for a long time. He had informed everyone that he was going to hitchhike across Europe. Oley and the gang smirked everytime Pete's name was mentioned. He wasn't in Europe and they knew it. They figured he had probably found a job out of town somewhere--probably as a lumberjack in northern Ontario. He was strong. You couldn't take that away from

him. He was a jackass, but a strong one. He dedicated himself to weightlifting the way a Trappist dedicates himself to God. He had the body of a Charles Atlas. He was probably chopping trees or mining copper or something. Nobody could have dreamed that he was at the R.C.M.P. training center in Regina. But he was. Pete had to prove something to himself, the world, and more importantly, to Oley and the gang. They had never accepted him as an equal. He would go all out to impress them. And he did. They looked at him with wide-open eyes. Maybe they had been wrong about him, never given him a chance. As they looked at him they forgot about his asinine attempts to impress them in the past. They forgot about the lies he had told about his age. He was twenty-two till one night Oley went through a red light and the cops asked everyone in the car for an I.D. Pete was eighteen. What a scream!

They forgot about the time that Jimmy was getting baffed out by three guys on the doorstep of the Club while Pete was driving his big muscles around the block in his father's car, too afraid to come and help his friend.

They forgot all these things and more. Pete was now an R.C.M.P. officer. Maybe he had needed time to grow up. They patted him on the back and he glowed inside. They were finally looking up, not down. He looked at Marylin serving customers at the next table. If she would throw a sigh in his direction

his victory would be complete. But Oley dragged his attention away from Marilyn.

"Hey, Pete. Have they already given you a piece?"

Pete smiled very smugly. "A snub-nosed .38 and I've got it on me."

"Jesus!" Mike exclaimed under his breath. "Let's see it."

"I can't take it out here," Pete answered severely.

Oley had already gotten up. He grabbed Pete's arm and said, "Come on. We'll take a look at it in the can."

Pete made a weak protest but thirty seconds later the four of them were in the washroom.

"Come on, take it out!" Oley demanded. Pete looked around uneasily and pulled the gun out from a holster under his arm.

"My God, look at that," Jimmy gasped. He had never seen a real revolver this close up.

The door suddenly swung open and an old gentleman sauntered in. He couldn't see the gun. Mike was in the way. Oley's face lit up. He grinned his diabolical grin and as he pushed Pete against the wall he screamed at the old man. "Watch it, Man! He's going to shoot us!" The old man looked at Pete and was startled out of his mind when he saw the gun. He rushed out of the washroom screaming "Help!" and "Murder!" and a few other unpleasant things which brought Mr. Kovak running. Pete was so dumbfounded that

he had not put his gun away. Mr. Kovak entered the washroom and saw him, gun in hand, and looking as though he were stark mad. He rushed out screaming, "Call the police! Quick!"

Oley was almost on the floor. He had never laughed so loudly in his whole life. Mike and Jimmy were laughing nervously. They weren't too sure whether this were really all that funny. Meanwhile, Pete's face had turned purple. His eyes were glazed. He grabbed Oley by the throat and squeezed. "Do you realize what this might do to my career?" he muttered under his breath. Oley was in trouble. Pete didn't realize how much pressure he was applying to that miserable throat which had uttered so much disdain toward him. As Oley gasped what he believed to be his last breaths he became desperate. He reached into his pocket. Pete heard the blade come out and panicked. He brought his .38 down onto Oley's head and he felt the skull collapse. Mike and Jimmy had stood there all this time trying to decide whether the situation was serious enough for them to intervene. When the knife came out and the gun came down they realized they had waited too long. Pete slowly turned his head towards them. They trampled each other as they dashed out of the washroom.

Pete sat down on one of the toilet bowls and looked at the heap that used to be Oley. He told himself that he would wake up soon. Nightmares are not supposed to last very long.

THE MECHANICS OF IT ALL

Tiny was sitting on the hood of a car in the Bel-Air Garage watching his friend Wayne working on another car when Gino walked in. There was an air of suavity about the stranger which made Tiny stop in mid-sentence and look this guy over.

"Someone to see you, Wayne."

The mechanic looked up, grinned from ear to ear and stretched out his greasy palm.

"Gino! Where have you been hiding? You're looking good".

"Hi, Wayne. Nice to see you. I would have dropped in sooner but I've been busy with the things." He made "things" sound important and mysterious. "Who's your little friend here?"

The skin on Tiny's back curled. He didn't like being referred to as little. True, he was only five foot four and weighed a hundred and twenty pounds. So what? And even if his friends called him Tiny who the hell was this guy calling him little? For a stranger he was just a little bit presumptuous.

"This is Tiny. Tiny meet Gino."

"What do you say, Little Man?" our cool friend asked.

Tiny felt the adrenalin rushing through his system. His mind was made up. He did not like this wop. He decided to

leave.

"I gotta go now, Wayne. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay, Tiny," Wayne answered. "If you can come around two o'clock you'll make yourself a couple of bucks. I'll need a hand with some tune-ups."

"I'll be here."

Tiny was punctual. A high-school drop-out, he had been bumming around for four years, doing odd jobs. He didn't seem to fit anywhere. He considered himself to be a nice guy but no one took him seriously. He had a real chip on his shoulder and could not make friends. Wayne was the exception. He was a man brimming with empathy and gave the little guy a break. He would have Tiny do odd jobs around the garage, change oil and filters and give him a few dollars in return. He didn't have to pay him because Tiny would have worked for free. He had nothing else to do, nowhere else to go. Besides, he looked up to Wayne--a big, burly, guy who handled cars like toys. He had put a few customers in their places; I'll tell you.

"Okay, Wayne. Where do I start?"

"Well, I had that chevy lined up. The owner has been very patient. But he's gonna have to be a bit more patient. That Buick over there belongs to Gino. He wants the carburetor

cleaned."

The very mention of Gino's name made Tiny's lips curl with anger. He tried not to show it because Wayne might disapprove. An hour later Gino appeared. He nodded casually at Tiny in a manner which seemed to say, "I hope you realize that you're lucky I nodded at all. I don't usually bother with riff-raff."

"Is Wayne around?" the son-of-a-bitch asked.

Tiny pointed to the front. He had a screwdriver in his hand and the juices flowed in his mouth as he imagined driving the tool deep into the back of Gino's head and then turning it a couple of times. He felt so angry that he had to stop working. He went to the can instead. When he came out Wayne and his bastard friend were talking.

Gino turned towards him and said, "Hey, Kid. Wayne tells me you cleaned out my carburetor. It had better work good."

Tiny looked at Wayne, his eyes blazing. The mechanic knew Tiny and tried to come to his rescue. "Don't worry, Gino. He's watched me work. He knows what he's doing."

"Okay, Wayne, I'll see you soon." Gino roared away in his flashy car and Wayne went over to where Tiny was sulking in a corner.

"Hey, Tiny. You're taking things a bit too seriously. He didn't mean anything when he mentioned the work you'd done on his car .

"Yes, he did!" Tiny snapped back. "You see the way he looks at me? As if I'm dirt. Why does he do that? I ain't done nothing to him!"

Wayne contemplated the floor for a while and then said, "You jack-ass! You don't like him? He bugs your ass? You had his car in your hands. Why didn't you screw him up? Nobody would have known the difference."

Tiny's eyes opened up, for a few seconds he couldn't say anything.

"But Wayne. I don't get it. You're telling me I should have done something to your friend's car?"

"Friend?" Wayne screamed. "Friend? That whore! He didn't even pay me! He told me he was kinda short right now and that since we're such good friends couldn't I wait a week or so? What could I say? And now when Mr. Olton comes in for his Chevy he's gonna have to wait. My best customer. A guy who doesn't believe in credit. He would pay me in advance if I asked him to." Wayne's face was red. He made an effort to calm himself. He then put an arm around Tiny's shoulder and led him to the vending machine. When they both had a coffee in

their hands he said, "Tiny, I'm gonna talk to you like a father. Real frank." He sipped his coffee and continued. "You see, Tiny. When you're in this business everyone's your friend. People you haven't seen for twenty years will suddenly look you up and pat you on the shoulder and tell you what great friends you've always been. They all want a special deal for fixing their goddam cars. Same thing with this ass-faced Gino. We went to high school together. We were never friends. I even punched him out once in grade 8. Now just because he found out I was a mechanic he drops in and reminds me of our friendship. The goddam whore doesn't even pay me on time. And the couple of times that we've talked recently he's always insinuating that he knows important people and dangerous people and all that crap. I'll tell you, Tiny, the next time he brings his car in you service it. You can take out your frustrations anyway you want. Just don't be too obvious about it."

Tiny could have jumped for joy. He prayed every night for Gino's return the following day. He had to wait a month. So did Wayne for his money.

"Sorry, Wayne, I was really tied up," was all Gino had to say.

"Think nothing of it, Man," Wayne answered cheerfully.

"Tiny, would you take Gino's car and change the oil and filter?"

Tiny could have gurgled with glee. It wasn't easy to look nonchalant. Wayne led Gino to the front and the two had coffee while they chatted.

Before doing anything else, Tiny drained the brake fluid. He left just enough so that the brakes would work for a little while. When Gino drove away Tiny waved him cordially out of the garage.

"Well?" Wayne came over and asked.

"His brake fluid!" Tiny chuckled.

"Oh, Jesus!" Wayne looked scared. "Tiny couldn't you have thought of something else? He could kill himself. He might run over a kid or something."

"I don't give a shit!" Tiny retorted. "The worst that can happen to him would be too good."

"Well make sure you keep quiet about this. Don't mention it to anyone."

"Don't worry, Wayne!"

Fifteen minutes later Gino phoned. Wayne hopped into the truck and went to pick him up. When they arrived at the garage with the shiny car in tow, Tiny had to go hide in the can. He had broken out into a fit of laughter and needed time to straighten himself out. Gino was cursing and shouting and

yelling. He loved his car. He caressed it daily. To see the front end crushed was to see his own foot or his hand crushed.

"Goddam brakes! No fluid!" he kept repeating.

"Relax, Gino," Wayne said nervously. These things happen. It could have been worse. You could have been hurt."

When Tiny came out of the car he tried to appear to be sympathetic. "Sorry it happened to you Gino. If I'd known you needed brake fluid I would have given you some when I changed your oil."

Gino's face changed. "You changed my oil! And you didn't check my brake fluid. You little pimp! And you wanna be a mechanic?" With that Gino stepped forward and slapped Tiny across the head. The blow brought tears to Tiny's eyes as he rushed over to the tool rack and picked up a crowbar. Wayne had to step in.

"Tiny! Put it down! I mean it! And you, what did you hit him for? He doesn't have to check your brake fluid unless you ask him to. Now lay off him."

Tiny ran out of the garage. Wayne was angry, "You see what you did, Gino? You really upset the kid. Now I've noticed you don't like him. What's the problem? Spill it!"

"I--I don't know, Wayne. I just don't like his face."

What else can I tell you? It must have happened to you at some time that you just didn't like someone's face."

"Okay, Gino. Do me a favour. Don't bring your car here anymore."

"No, no, Wayne! You and I are friends. I wanta come here. I'll lay off the guy. Promise." Then he added "Only do me a favour. Service the car yourself. Don't let him touch it. I mean, in light of what happened, you understand?"

"I understand," Wayne answered and thought to himself, "Tiny was right. Nothing is too bad to happen to you."

Gino had his car repaired in a body shop and kept returning to Bel-Air Garage for regular servicing. When he arrived, Tiny would leave by the other door. Wayne's orders.

Time passed and time is supposed to heal.

One day Wayne got a phone call.

"Tiny, I've gotta go to Ottawa for a couple days. My father's dying. I'm going to leave you the keys. You just sell gas and do minor repairs. Don't take on any big stuff. Okay? Gino is going to bring in his car later. Wants his winter tires put on, oil and filter changed. Now, Tiny. No funny stuff. He payed plenty. Understand?"

"I understand, Wayne, I'll be good."

Gino didn't arrive till six-thirty. Tiny should have

closed at six but he lingered. When the flashy car appeared he pretended to be closing up.

"Sorry, Gino. I'm late for supper as it is. Leave the car and I'll have it ready for eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

Gino eyed him suspiciously. But it had been eight months since that little incident. Tiny's heart was pounding. Tiny acted as though he was going to leave. At the last moment Gino relented. He left the car.

That night Tiny made a phone call. "Karl, you can repay me the favour you owe me. Do this and we're even."

When Gino picked up his car the next morning he drove away with some reservations. He drove slowly. A few blocks from the garage he stopped and did a spot check. Tires, oil, brake fluid, brake lines, no scratches on the car. He smiled and drove on.

For three weeks Tiny followed him whenever he had any free time. He would park a couple of blocks from Gino's house and then wait till his victim came out and drove away. Saturday nights, Sunday afternoons, any time. With the homing device secured tightly under one of the fenders of Gino's flashy car he could hang back as far as he wanted. He was

never spotted.

One day Gino left the confines of the city. He was bringing a few cases of beer and lots of groceries up to his chalet. It was going to be a good skiing weekend. He had unloaded all his groceries and was just about to lock up and return to town when he saw that a black jeep had blocked his driveway about a hundred feet down. There appeared to be no one in the vehicle. He walked cautiously up to it and looked inside. No one. He noticed footprints leading away from the jeep towards a clump of evergreens. He never saw more than a quick movement.

The crack of the .22 seemed extremely loud to him as his forehead opened and received the hot lead.

LITTLE THINGS

"It's a cinch, Joe," Shifty said casually. "I've got a friend who works in there and he gave me the lowdown. We have to make sure we break in on a night when the fur coats are there. My buddy will let us know."

Shifty was so cool about the whole matter that Joe was not sure whether to take him seriously or not. He knew that Shifty was not a hero. A cunning rascal, but not a hero.

"I don't know, Shift. I'm kind of nervous about the whole thing. Who is this 'friend' of yours?"

"Don't ask me that, Old Buddy. He wants to remain anonymous. You can understand that."

"Yeah, but you can't understand my nervousness, I think."

"Joey-Boy, I'm letting you in on this score because I like you and I thought you'd trust me. Don't let me down. I'm telling you, Man, there's about five-thousand each for us if we pull it off."

"There's also about ten years for each of us if we blow it," Joey answered.

"Man, if you don't take chances," smirked Shifty, "you don't get no where! Where else do you get so much dough for an hour's work?"

"And you know, Shift. Ten thousand sounds like a gip to me. If your info is correct we'll be heisting fifty thousand worth."

Who the hell is this fence of yours anyway?"

"That's another question I can't answer, Joe. Sorry. But listen. He's providing the truck. We won't have the stuff for more than fifteen minutes after we make off with it. Everything considered, it's a pretty good deal."

Joe nodded his head and thought for a while.

"Okay, Shift. I'm in."

"Good, man! You won't regret it. Now remember. Be available every night for a week or so. The moment I get the word we gotta move. Those coats are stored only for a night and then they move on to retail outlets."

"I'll be ready when you are." Joey had already decided when he heard how much he would get. He was just affirming it to his accomplice. He wondered how he had come to this stage of thinking. Less than a year ago he was in his junior year at college and doing well. Now he was a dropout and on his way to a life of crime. A drastic change had occurred inside him. But he refused to analyse his past. Somehow even the present mattered little. It was the future that concerned him. He had plans. And they were big. Moreover, he wasn't about to break his back making it big. Work and drudgery were for suckers. He had already done a bit of shoplifting and he enjoyed having eight-dollar albums and ten-dollar lighters for free. He estimated his earnings for the past two months to be about five hundred dollars. It was a good feeling. Now he

was in on something that would net him five grand. My God! he thought. So much money for so little work. It was damn-well worth the risk.

"I'll be in touch," Shift said and left the poolroom.

The next couple of days were very anxious ones for Joe. He was nervous and his parents noticed it.

"Is there something bothering you, Joe?" his father asked him at supper.

"No. Why do you say that?"

"I've noticed that for the past two days you've been very restless. I thought that maybe you were in some kind of trouble."

"No, Dad. I've been thinking of getting a job and I can't think of a place to start looking. That's all." Joe hoped that this answer would satisfy his father and alleviate any suspicions he might have.

"Well," his dad began, "you could get a newspaper and check the ads. That might be a good beginning. At any rate, I'm glad to see that you're doing some serious thinking."

The phone rang. Joey jumped slightly. His mother answered and called to him. "It's for you, Joe. He said he's a friend."

Joe was almost afraid to pick up the phone. "Hello."

"Joey, it's me. I've gotta see you. Tonight's the night,

Pal."

"Okay, I'll be down at the poolroom in half an hour."

"No, no! Meet me at my place. It's better."

"Okay, Shift. I'll see you."

As Joey walked to his room to get his windbreaker his legs shook so much he could hardly walk straight.

"Goddam it! I'm not so cool, am I?" he thought to himself.

He caught the bus at the corner and made his way to the back. He sank into the seat and clasped his hands to stop the shaking. His teeth tingled all the way down to the roots. It was as though he had bitten into a big, fat lemon. He wondered how Shifty would react to this horrible case of nerves.

As the door opened, Shifty gave him a broad smile and a wink. "Come on in, Big Boy! We're on our way!" He did a little jig, pulled Joe inside and slammed the door shut. "Sit down, Joe. Wanna cigarette?" Joe nodded and took one. Shifty became serious. "Listen, I can see you're bloody-well shaking. If you figure you're not up to it, I want ya to tell me now. We can't afford to bungle it. I'll get somebody else!"

Joe was horrified. "No, no, Shift! I can do it. I can! You'll see. Just give me a chance, will you? It's my first heist."

"Okay, Joey. But you're going to have to come down. You're hyper. I've got some gin in the cupboard over there. Take a couple

of shots--but not too much, eh?"

Joe went over to the cupboard and took out the distinctive green bottle of "Geneva" gin. He made a face and told Shifty that he hated gin, especially straight.

"Here, Joe," Shifty said as he opened his old refrigerator. "Mix it with a bit of Seven-Up." Joe took a good swig and Shifty came closer to him with a pen and a piece of paper. "Now you're gonna listen--but good!"

He drew a sketch of the factory which they were going to hit later that night. It was ten storeys high. "The furs," Shifty began, "are on the seventh floor."

"How do we get into the building, Shift?" Joe asked innocently.

The other put his hand into his pocket and produced a small, brown key. "With this, Joe. We're gonna walk right in. Well, almost. My contact wasn't able to get the key I wanted. This one opens the door to the garage at the back. The problem is this. Once inside the garage we won't be able to get into the factory directly. There are locked doors inside which separate the garage from the factory itself. Do you follow so far?"

Joe nodded, "Yeah, yeah! I follow. Continue."

"Okay, Luckily for us, there's a small service elevator in there which goes all the way up to the roof. There are all kinds

of chimneys and machinery up there. You've seen them, eh?"

"Right. I've seen them."

"Good. Now this little elevator is for mechanics and other garbage who have to go up there once in a while. There's a lock on the door at the top, naturally. But tonight we'll find it unlocked."

Joe's eyes widened. He couldn't believe it! This guy Shifty was a real pro! He really knew what he was doing. "Okay, man, I'm with you. What's next?"

"You've seen the skylights on the roof, haven't you, Joey?"

"Sure!"

"Okay," Shifty smiled. He put his hand into a little bag that lay on the floor and pulled something out. "This, Joe is a glass-cutter!"

Joe giggled with excitement. He was into the big-time. There was not doubt about that. "Don't tell me anymore. Let me guess. Once we're on the roof, we go over to the skylight, cut a few panes of glass and jump down onto the floor. We then make our way down to the seventh and take the furs. We bring them back upstairs--" here he paused. "How do we get them up to the roof?"

"That's easy," Shifty replied. "We put a table or a chair on one of those long counters they have up there. I stand on top and you pass the stuff up to me. Then, from the roof we make

our way to the elevator and bring the stuff down to the garage. Joe, it's so easy I don't know why nobody's done it before."

"Sounds great, Shift! What about the truck?"

"Well, it would look kinda suspicious to drive up to a factory in the middle of the night. The plan goes like this. Once the coats are stacked and ready to be moved I make a little phone call. There's a phone in the garage. About ten minutes later the truck will arrive. The driver will leave the engine running but he won't stick around. I'm gonna drive. But at this point, Joey, we've gotta move. We're gonna pile that stuff into the back of the truck, but fast. Sixty seconds, two minutes at the most and we roll!" *

"Where are we taking the stuff, Shift?"

"That I can't tell you, Joey. Trust me. It won't be a long drive. One last detail." Here Shift again dipped into the brown paper bag lying on the floor. "We wear gloves. These are the type of gloves that doctors use when they poke their fingers here and there." Joey couldn't help laughing a little bit. "They're light," Shifty added, "and not cumbersome. You can pick up a dime if you want."

"Shift you're too much. You think of everything. I can't thank you enough for letting me on this job."

"Forget it, Kid. It's good experience for you. Besides, I needed someone I could count on. Now, you have another shot of gin

while I lie down and rest. You can take the couch and do the same.

At two o'clock we hit the road."

Shift threw himself on the bed and sighed heavily.

Joe finished off his drink, lay down on the couch, and turned off the light. A few minutes later he broke the silence.

"Shift, you awake?"

"What is it?"

"I was just thinking, Shift. We're going for furs but we could take some suede stuff if we find it, no?"

"Sure we can."

"And another thing, Shift. If I find a really cool suede jacket, could I keep it? I mean, we don't have to turn everything over to your fence, do we?"

"We'll see, Joey. We'll see." Shifty muttered his words so quietly that Joe decided to turn around and go to sleep.

By two-fifteen the two burglars were on Pine Avenue and looking at their victim--a grim, ten-storey building which seemed impregnable with its wire netting on all windows for three floors up. Shifty took out the little key and smiled. "This is it, Joey," he whispered. "An hour and a half from now you'll be five thousand richer."

Joe chuckled. "Let's go! Let's do it!" he gasped.

They made their way to the back of the building and walked

nonchalantly to the door.

"Here's your gloves," Shifty whispered. "Put your fingers in and roll the gloves up your hand, like this."

Joey's hands were shaking, but he managed the operation.

Suddenly he had a horrible thought. The plan was a great one.

He was going to make money. But, what if something went wrong?

Something small. Something ridiculous, like maybe the key wouldn't open the door. Imagine calling the whole thing off

because Shifty's contact had gotten the wrong key! He was

breathing heavily as Shifty placed the key up to the lock. Joe's eyes were glued to that goddam little key. It slid right in!

It turned! The door opened! Shifty lunged into the dark beyond the door and Joe followed him. With the door closed behind them they stopped and caught their breath.

"We're in, Shift! We're in," Joe squeaked with delight.

"We've got it made."

"For Christ's sake, calm down!" Shifty ordered. "We've got work to do. We gotta be calm, ya hear?"

"Okay, Shift. Okay. Everything's cool! I'll be all right. What do we do next?"

Shifty took out a cigarette lighter and turned it on.

"There's the elevator. Let's go! And watch your step. No noise!"

Shifty headed for the elevator and Joe followed him

closely. They got in and pressed the button which would take them to the roof. The machinery made so much noise once it was set in motion that both boys were startled. "I hoped to God nobody can hear it outside," Joey remarked.

"Don't worry," Shifty replied. "It sounds loud to us but I don't think anybody could hear it on the street. They wouldn't know what it was anyway. There's only one thing that could stop us now, Joe. You know what that is?"

Joe was too nervous to think at this point. "You just better hope that bloody door to the roof is open," Shifty told him. Again Joe found himself breathing hard. Another one of those "little" things which could blow the whole affair. The elevator came to a halt with a deafening chatter.

"Bloody whore!", exclaimed Joe. "Listen to that chatter!"

"Relax!" ordered Shifty. "There's no point in worrying about it. Let's move!"

They came out of the elevator and Shifty threw himself at the door which lead to the roof. He lifted the latch and pulled. Nothing happened.

"Goddam, bloody son of a filthy whore!" Joe cried.

"It doesn't open?"

"Come here and help me pull, you Bastard!" Shifty gasped.

"Maybe it's just stuck. How often do you think they open it?"

Joe wrapped his fingers around the latch and pulled. A few seconds later the door began to creak and slowly it opened. A beautiful, cool breeze from the rooftop hit the boys straight across their faces.

"Shift, that's it," Joe almost cried. "Nothing could go wrong now, could it? I mean, it's clear sailing now, right?"

"Right, Kiddo." Shift gave his partner a little slap across the head and said, "We're just about there. Now we head for that skylight. Keep low. Okay?"

"Okay, Shift. Let's go!"

Shifty bent low and walked out onto the roof. Joe followed him.

Drastic things can happen within a time-span of one second. Or perhaps a distance of a few feet. It was only fifteen feet from the door to the skylight. Not very far. Not very long to get there. But it was long enough for an alert cop in a patrol car three blocks away to realize that there was movement on a rooftop when there should not be any. As the two partners in crime slid down into the darkness of the tenth floor, a blue and white car glided noiselessly towards the dark building on Pine Avenue.

"Come on, Joe. Follow me," Shifty said. They were standing in front of the main elevator. "We'll take the stairs down to the seventh just in case this goddam thing is also a noisy

bastard."

Three floors later they found what they had come for. Joey gasped, "Look at these coats, Oh, Man! They're something else!"

Shifty was looking around for something. "Okay, listen! Dump all the stuff on this trolley. Maybe we'll risk the elevator after all. Two trips should do it. The faster we get outa here, the better," The two of them began to work like machines. Soon they were ready to make their first trip to the tenth floor. As they began to push their loot along they heard a sound coming from the direction of the stairs. They looked at each other and froze.

"Oh, my God," Joe gasped.

Shifty ran to the windows and looked down. Nothing. He ran to the other wall and there at the back of the building he saw what he didn't want to see. A patrol car in an alley.

"Cops!" he screamed under his breath. They heard footsteps on the stairs and saw the rays of a flashlight. Shifty jumped onto a radiator and kicked out one of the windows. There were three narrow stone ledges running all along the outside of the building. One of them was at the seventh floor. Shifty was going to make his way along that ledge and then jump in at some point on the other side of the building. Joey couldn't believe it. He stood there horrified as Shifty walked out into the cool night. He couldn't understand.

But then he hadn't spent seven years in the pen.

As the officers came running in at the sound of the shattered glass he dropped lifelessly behind one of the counters. Meanwhile, Shifty was slowly making his way toward the corner of the building. He wasn't quick enough. One of the officers poked himself through the broken window and aimed the flashlight at him. "Police! Don't move!" was the order.

Shifty was no acrobat. As he turned his head towards the voice of authority he realized that he had lost his balance. He closed his eyes tightly and forced the air out of his lungs. He had not cried since he was a child. He did not want to start now.

From his place on the floor Joe heard a splatter outside. Instantly he remembered the time he was unloading watermelons from a truck when he was working at Steinberg's and someone dropped one of the melons. Strange! He could actually see the seeds and the cool red meat spread out all over the docking area.

SUNSET YEARNINGS: EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS FARAWAY

Tony had been looking forward to going out West for at least three years. All his life he had lived in the great land called Canada and the farthest he had travelled from his home in Montreal was to the exciting city of Toronto. We say "exciting" because it was the only other big city he had ever seen and so he talked about his three-day excursion as though he had been to the high plateaus of Tibet. His accounts exaggerated the beauty of "The Good", magnified the excitement found therein, and grossly overated the accessibility of certain young women who patrolled Yonge Street. His friends would look at one another very knowingly everytime Tony mentioned his "favorite" city and winks and sneers would abound. Our hero, you see, was a young man with a hunger for the world. He wanted to see it and taste it. When he spoke of his little trip he was not embellishing only for others. It was also for his own benefit. He wanted to believe he had done something exciting. It is perhaps for this reason that it took him a full two years to realize his comrades laughed at him whenever Toronto was mentioned. The whole thing upset him a little bit. At any rate, he determined that he would take a real trip once and for all. He would definitely have something to talk about when he returned. Where to start? Why, at the beginning, of course.

Canada! "See Canada First". He had seen an advertisement to that effect. Or was it a plug on television? Couldn't remember. Canada, a wonderful place to start--he thought to himself. Mountains, prairies, rivers, lakes. Such variety, such beauty! Well, knowing your goal means you're halfway there, Tony thought. It was the month of January so he had four or five months to prepare for his trek. Thank God he had one more year to do at Marymount. Imagine doing seven or eight thousand miles during the summer and then not being able to come back and tell everything to your classmates!

It wasn't easy finding people who were free for a month or more over the summer holidays. There were courses for some. Jobs for others. Then there was, "Sorry, Kid. Can't afford it." Poor Tony. He felt like a man who was on his way to church to get married and couldn't find a bride on his way over there.

"Tony, some guy called Albert wants to speak to you!"

"Aw, Ma! Why did you tell him I was in? He's such a pain."

Albert was OK. But he wasn't all there. He was a misfit, had a few chips on each shoulder and could really irritate you if he wanted to. Without trying. Or meaning to. You know what I mean? Anyway, Rick, a mutual friend, had analysed the phenomenon and come up with a diagnosis which few physicians could ever disapprove.

Albertitis. Albert had a peculiar disease called Albertitis.

End of discussion.

Albert had not been in touch for a while and Tony had been quite content with this state of affairs. There must be a reason for this unexpected call. There was.

Albert had bought himself a new car. He had been working, you see, for a couple of years. [PAUSE] A new car! Why, Albert, Old Buddy! Bosom pal! Tony's heart was really pounding now. Must remain cool. Can't seem too anxious.

"Ah, yes, Albert. I'm fine. You been OK? What kind of car did you get?"

Corolla. Well, it's not exactly a Mercedes. Still, it's enough to get you out West and back.

"Have any plans for the summer, Albert? No, eh? Me? I'm going out West. As soon as I find someone to go along with." [Pause]

You? You mean you're interested? THE THRILL OF THE ANGLER AS HE REELS IN HIS CATCH.

"Well, Albert! I hadn't realized you were interested in a trip of this sort. Otherwise, you're the first guy I would have called."

The two got together and began discussing their odyssey. What to bring along. Who to bring along. Duration of the trip. Four weeks? Perfect.

A sixteen-year-old friend of Albert's, Hector, was the only person who could make it.

"Can he drive?" asked Tony nervously.

"Oh, he plans to get his learner's permit next week. If he doesn't go for his test on time he'll drive with that."

"I see, Albert." [COUGH] "And what about you? You've only had the car for a couple of weeks. Are you up to a trip like this?"

Fifteen minutes later they were on the autoroute testing the driving prowess of little old Albert. As the Corolla took sharp turns at eighty-five, Tony was sure that the hair on the back of his neck was standing on end. His toes were curling inside his shoes. "Fine, Albert. You're a good driver. I can see that very well. Could you slow down a bit. There's too much wind coming in here." (PAUSE. TOES UNCURL).

"So, how does Albert drive, Son?"

"He's good, Dad. He doesn't go too fast. He's very careful. We'll have a good trip."

"Well, all right, Tony. But he hasn't been driving long, you know. And you're out of practice too. You haven't driven for at least two years, ever since our car was stolen."

Tony's father had refused to buy another car and the poor kid found out the hard way that dates prefer the automobile

to the autobus.

"Don't worry, Dad. It's going to be OK."

One day Tony came home from a few games of snooker and was greeted at the door by his mother. Albert had brought Hector to the house. To introduce him. His mother looked worried.

"Tony, think it over. It's not too late to back out of this trip."

As Tony walked into the living room he immediately appreciated his mother's concern. Albert did the introduction. [LONG PAUSE] "Ah, yes, Hector. I'm dreadfully pleased to meet you. So you want to come out West with us?"

Hector gurgled excitedly and rolled his eyes around a couple of times.

"Well, he is enthusiastic," Tony told his parents when the guests had left.

"He's also a retard!" yelled his father. "That guy looks like an escapee from a home of the hopelessly insane, for Christ's sake!"

Well, I can't back out now was the position Tony took. He knew that his parents preached common sense. Hector was one weirdo-o-o-o. God! And then there was Albert. Two weeks of driving experience. Lucky his parents didn't know that Albert was a speed freak on the streets of Montreal. And as far as casting

stones were concerned, Tony had to admit that he wasn't exactly a great driver himself. Two years since he had touched a steering wheel!

The two weeks that followed were hectic ones. Buying a tent, for instance. They were going to camp mostly, and go to a motel maybe once a week just to clean up properly and rest their sore backs. It's not easy buying a good tent for a handful of dollars.

"'Fistful of Dollars' would have sounded better," said Tony, thinking of Clint Eastwood, and quickly added, "'For a Few Dollars More', Albert, we could get a better tent."

"Anything you say, Tony."

Pearls to swine, thought our hero.

Then there was a first aid kit, a machete in case of grizzlies. (Hector was really proud of having thought of this), a good Coleman cooler for the beer and other beverages. Sleeping bags! God, they almost forgot those! Very handy when you're camping. What else? Bathing suits, jeans, tough boots. Sunglasses. You really need them driving out West. 'Cause the sun shines straight into your eyes as it sets. Tony mused *You know, Albert is not as stupid as he looks. But then again he did get a parking ticket when he went to pick up the highway maps. Why didn't he go to the no-charge parking lot at the back of the tourist bureau? Never mind. It's his five bucks.*

"Incidentally, Albert. Don't lose your shades when we reach the Coast. We have to drive back and the sun shines straight into your eyes when it rises in the morning too."

Albert looked at Tony in amazement. "Holy Cow! That's true. You're a genius, Tony."

Hector gurgled approvingly. Tony looked at him and couldn't help wondering. About many things. Especially Hector's driving. Albert suggested immediate lessons for his gurgling friend. Tony had things to do. "You two go along, Albert. See you tomorrow."

He was anxious for the report on the next day. One garbage can crushed out of existence. A cat nearly run over, but not quite. A fairly large number of startled pedestrians and more than likely a few phone calls to local police stations. Tony couldn't help gulping. For some strange reason Albert thought it was all very funny. Tony's mother overheard the account of the day's proceedings and there was great pressure on him that evening to call the whole thing off. But everyone knows that youth and life and energy never but never listen to age and reason. Give Hector another chance was his only defense.

Day after day for a fortnight Hector and Albert spread havoc over the streets of la ville de Montreal and they were lucky enough to pick up only two tickets for traffic violations.

I wonder, Tony would say to himself whenever he happened to stare at the setting sun.

The days went by slowly but they did pass nevertheless. Three more weeks and Tony would write his last exam. After that, it was all systems go.

One day he decided to go down to Consumers Distributing to see whether he could buy a good suitcase. He had one--a very big one that could easily handle all the clothes he was planning to bring along. But goddam it! it was so heavy, even when empty. It was strong but much too heavy. He needed a light one. He found just what he was looking for. A black, compact suitcase with sort of pockets sown on the sides for extra things like a shaving kit and maybe cameras. You know, stuff like that. He was really proud of himself and came home whistling. He ran straight up to his room and began packing as a sort of trial run.

His mother came in so quietly that he jumped when he saw her. No need to pack. Albert had called. From the Royal Vic. Her and Hector had been in an accident and the car was badly damaged. God! Were they both hospitalized? Hector dead? Jesus Murphy!

On his way down to the hospital Tony saw his trip evaporate like an early morning mist. Why wasn't he more concerned

with the poor idiot who had really gone on a trip? A one-way deal. He's probably better off this way. He didn't really belong with normal people anyway. But me! I'm OK and I've got things to do and see and that bloody fool wrecks the car.

"We ran into the back of a bus, Tony." Albert sighed and touched his neck.

"A whiplash and a wrecked car. Consider yourself lucky, Albert. That retard could have gotten you KILT!"

Albert looked around uncomfortably and tried to speak. He could only cough. Tony's eyes widened and his jaw opened slightly.

"You don't mean to say you were driving? Oh, my God! Then YOU killed HIM!"

Albert looked up and Tony decided it was high time to leave. As he walked through the parking lot outside he wondered whether it were possible to figure out statistically what his chances would have been of coming back. If he had left on his trip, that is. He decided to postpone his excursion into the sunset. He would do it in his own car when he could afford to buy it. And he would wait until he had enough driving experience under his seat.

No doubt we will hear all about his adventures across the Continent. At a future date.

THE CONNECTION

Margaret and Verena had been instant friends. They met in Grade Five at St. Aloysius and it was obvious from the start that the two were absolutely compatible. Verena came waltzing in to school sometime in November. She had been living in Boston and her parents had not been able to sell their home in time for the beginning of the school year. So Verena's little oddities were even more apparent because she had been not able to mingle with the crowds of youngsters coming in on September 5. When we say "oddities" we are not referring to any abnormalities. No. They were just little things. She had the unnerving habit of staring off into space somewhere. She was always exploring some far-away galaxy. And when she spoke you could not help wondering whether the words were directed at you or to the clouds passing overhead. Well, everyone called her "Zombie". It was not very nice but kids are like that.

Another unfortunate little thing about her was the fact that she was pigeon-toed. Not just a little, but a lot. And so the children would refer to her as "the pigeon" and "the penguin" and so on. Margaret would become enormously upset

when she heard these remarks and she was forever fighting with her classmates. She had to. Verena certainly didn't. She seemed not to mind the taunting. She was either very stoical or very stupid. Margaret was never able to understand which. Anyway, she was Verena's defender and champion. The two of them would always find a small corner in the playground and discuss Hayden and Bach and other musicians. Verena, you see, played the piano. She had been studying music for two years.

At lunch time they would sit at a table by themselves and talk about Boston, and Switzerland and Iceland and other places to which Verena had been. Every summer and even during the Christmas holidays her parents would be off somewhere and they always took their little girl along.

It was a very pleasant relationship. They would spend hours on the phone every night even though they had been together all day at school. They were constantly visiting each other's home on weekends. In short, there was very little time during which they were not either together or communicating.

When summer arrived they even went to camp together. Verena was to have gone to Barbados for two weeks. But her parents had to go alone. Their daughter preferred to go to camp with her friend. Nothing could have pleased Margaret more.

The time they spent in the Laurentians was glorious.

It was a beautiful summer with lots of warm, dry days and the splashing in the lake never ceased. There was always someone in that blue, inviting water. The hikes in the woods were superb. So many things to see and touch and smell. The bonfires at night! The marshmallows! Oh, God! It was the kind of summer which comes only once every thousand years. It was the kind of summer that everyone remembers as being the best one he ever had.

It was mid-August when Margaret found out that Verena was going back to Boston. Her father had been wooed back to the law firm which had taken him for granted and he accepted their offer. Margaret was stunned. Even when the station wagon pulled away down the street and Verena's face peered through the back window Margaret could not believe it. For two weeks she was in such a depression that she was unable to go and register at school. Only with the passage of time did she mend the cracks in her mind and even then it was only because she finally heard from Verena. It was in mid-October that the letter arrived. Margaret could not help uttering a little scream as she saw her friend's return address.

Verena's father was doing well in his new post. They had bought a new house and a dog. They would be going to Miami

for Christmas and would Margaret like to come to Boston for Easter weekend.

Would Margaret like to come? What a silly question! The bags were ready in November. Her parents protested, of course, but to no avail. Verena was a "best friend ever" and that was that. With much misgivings they put their prize possession onto a bus bound for Boston and wished her a happy Easter and don't talk to strangers and if Verena doesn't show up at the station phone her. Don't wander around.

Well, the thrill of a twelve-year-old going to Boston for a weekend to see her best friend ever, you probably can't imagine. Another one of those once in-a-lifetime things. But it did not last long enough and Margaret was quite unhappy for a long while after she got back. She began to perk up when she thought of inviting Verena to Montreal for the summer. She picked up the phone and dialed long-distance. Verena's mother answered. Yes, she was fine. No, it was no trouble at all when Margaret had been over. It had been a pleasure to see her. She would ask Verena whether she wanted to return the visit. Naturally she did, and to Margaret the remainder of the school year seemed too long to bear. But the eighth of July arrived and Margaret was at the station with her mother waiting for her friend. She never arrived.

When the last of the passengers had descended Margaret felt despair running through every cell of her body. Her mother tried to reassure her that Verena would be on the next bus. So they waited. The bus came and emptied itself. Verena did not show. They returned home and tried to phone Verena's parents in Boston. A Mrs. Boyle answered and claimed not to know anyone called Verena. Thinking they had misdialled they tried again. Mrs. Boyle sounded annoyed this time. Margaret was beginning to cry and her father told her he'd check into this whole business tomorrow. Don't worry about it. We'll get to the bottom of things.

The next morning he went down to the RCMP offices and explained the situation. Could they locate Mr. and Mrs. Djokich and their daughter Verena. Highly irregular, of course, but they would see what they could do.

Later that day the phone rang and luckily Margaret was out buying some milk. There was obviously some sort of misunderstanding. The Djokich's did not reside in Boston. They had done so the previous year but they had moved to Montreal. Yes, yes! But they had gone back to Boston. No, they hadn't. They were coming back, but they never made it. The car they were driving left the road on a Massachusetts highway. All three occupants of the automobile were killed.

Margaret's mother was trembling. Her husband was pale. The letters from Verena! The phone calls to and from Boston! Where had Margaret been during the Easter holidays? Can we ask her? It is safe?

Margaret came sauntering in with the carton of milk. No news yet? Don't worry, Verena will come; I feel it. I know it. Her parents horrified at this confidence and then the phone rang. That must be her. Let me answer.

No! Her father picked up the receiver. His eyes glared and his mouth opened as he listened.

Margaret was jumping for joy. It's Verena isn't it? Give me the phone. Verena? Where are you? At the station? Don't move! We'll be there in fifteen minutes. Daddy, come on, get your keys!

Daddy's legs were rubbery as he walked towards the car. His wife was sobbing as she followed. As they pulled up to the bus terminal at Berri-Demontigny, Margaret tried to jump out. Her mother seized her. We'll go in together!

Margaret dragged her mother into the station. Her father didn't even close the door of his car. He jumped in after them. The three were huddled together inside while Margaret tried desperately to break away. Let go! I'll find her.

Suddenly, a familiar voice. A faraway, melancholy voice.

Margaret! Here I am. And there she was. Verena. With her pig-tails and pigeon-toes. Waving. Margaret's mother collapsed. Her husband, horrified, locked his daughter in a bear-hug and ran out into the street.

He could still be seen all the way down on St. Catherine rushing toward Dorchester and Old Montreal beyond. And the young arms and legs fighting him, clawing at his face, trying to break loose.

THE CHEESE ON THE MOON

Very few people know what career they will follow when they grow up until after they have grown up. Then they often find themselves in the wrong business anyway and become very miserable. Rising up morning after morning they crawl to their jobs. The fortunate ones climb out of the rut and try something different. If luck is on their side they will find what they are superbly fitted to do by the time they are forty-five or fifty years of age. Poor souls! I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I was a mere child of fourteen. That's right. And I don't care whether you believe me or not. I really had made up my mind to be a schoolteacher.

I always did enjoy school. I read voraciously throughout elementary. I wrote a great deal of what I called poetry ever since grade five. I was ecstatic when browsing through the library at dear old St. Patrick's Academy. Yet strangely enough I was surrounded by drones of students who thoroughly detested school. Detested books. Imagine! They handled those containers of knowledge and wisdom as though they were contaminated objects of some sort. They detested teachers. Well, my God, nobody's perfect but our instructors were as decent as you could expect them to be. How could anybody dislike

them! How many hours I spent wondering why this phenomenon was so. I would daydream at breakfast. At lunch and at supper. Even while watching television. I would stare at an antenna or a "contrast" button and quite literally exhaust my brains by concerning myself too much on the problem. I would have nightmares in which I imagined myself to be a world-renowned scientist who had been commissioned by the prime minister to look into the problem of apathy amongst students and to please set things right as soon as possible. I would usually toss and turn so much that I often fell out of bed. It was a narrow bed, you see, but luckily it was not too high from the floor. Nevertheless, I always had bruises on the elbows and knees and friends constantly questioned me on my activities after school. They knew I was not very athletic. They were never quite satisfied with the explanation that I collided with swinging doors.

The only respite I ever got was the time I spent in the classroom. I was much too busy and interested in the process of learning to worry about the boredom of others. I really do think that if it had not been for the time I spent in school I would have been distracted to the point where somebody would have garted me off to an institution or some such place.

Time marched on. And eventually I began to formulate some definitive ideas on the puzzle that had plagued me for so

long. The teachers and administrators are all adults, are they not? Quite so. They are educated and wise, no? Well, usually. Good. Now on to the students. They are children. They are all young, uneducated, inexperienced and not very wise. It follows that if they are apathetic, if they are troublesome and naughty, that the fault cannot lie with them. They know not what they do. The problem must lie with the teachers who are supposed to know and are supposed to guide and instruct. Oh, heaven's no! I am not contradicting what I said earlier about the teachers at the Academy. My opinion of them remained as constant as the northern star. They were of fine stock. For me. And for a few others like me who had a natural inclination towards musty tomes. We would have remained in school even if there had been no teachers. But for the masses, now that was something else. Our instructors did not properly understand those little darlings with button-noses and pigtails. And so they could not reach those little brains, which were nothing more than clay just waiting to be molded into something beautiful and extraordinary. At the self-same moment that I realized all of this--at the very moment that I had this insight--I was fourteen, remember--I determined to set things right.

I was not vain enough to think I would start a revolution from scratch. There was material right there before

me and it must be used. Miss Black was a great disciplinarian but no one with a problem could approach her. She was too aloof.

Miss Green, on the other hand, was a cheerful body and was always ready to listen and help. But her classes were such that cages were necessary to contain the activity within them. All right. I would be the best of Black and Green. Strict, yet compassionate.

Then there was Miss Brown. She was strict and she was also willing to go out of her way to help you. If you would bow down before her and kiss everyone of her toes individually. But woe to the pupil who slipped up in one way or another and then refused to prostrate herself before Brown's authority! A few tears, a dozen or so "I'm sorry"'s, and five or six "I promise never to do it again"'s, and Miss Brown was quite forgiving. But if you were bold or insolent, there was no end to the torments she was capable of inflicting. The unfortunate child would stay in every day after school. At least for a week. There were lots of lines to write. The parents would be called and notified of their child's errant behaviour. And more, much more. She was such a terrible machine of punishment when she wanted to be that if you kept your ears opened you would hear at least two or three times a day that Miss Brown was a piece of -----! Naturally, each student would end the statement with his own noun. Sometimes

the noun would be preceded by an adjective. Well, I vowed to myself that no one would call me a piece of anything! I would punish when necessary, of course. But always with moderation. My students would not even resent being punished. I would let them understand that it was for their own good. That I was not a beast. That it *did* actually hurt me more than it hurt them.

Then there was Miss Violet. She was almost perfect. She had great control of her classes. She was extremely compassionate when the case warranted it. She punished frequently but made it pleasant. I reiterate. She was almost perfect. But she did have one glaring flaw. She was utterly and completely a fully-fledged dunce. She knew absolutely nothing about English Literature. Nor did she know Latin, History, Physics, Geometry, Algebra and everything else on the curriculum were as foreign to her as Aramaic was to me. Whenever she was asked a question on anything she would refer us to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. A great collection of reference books! The only questions she would answer with interest and authority were those on personal hygiene. She really did know everything about make-up, nail polish and the number of times one should comb one's hair. She would often tell the girls to take their brushes out of their purses and to brush their hair along with her. Sometimes for twenty minutes at a time. The girls in our class were the best

groomed in the school. Really. Anyway, though she was well-liked I could see right through her and I knew that academically she was wasting our time. I realized that to be a perfect teacher I needed to be very well-educated too.

And so I analysed all the instructors I had throughout high school and noted their good points, discarded their bad ones. I went to college and studied diligently and came out of there with a funny hat and gown and a magna cum laude in English. On to teacher's college for some professional preparation and then I felt absolutely ready to go into the schools. Here I was the perfect schoolteacher ready and eager to set things straight.

It became apparent after a short while that perfect schoolteachers were not really in demand. Application forms with my humble requests for employment were strewn in all school commissions from here to the CUSO offices in Guatemala.

It took a full three years before I could be assigned to a regular teaching post. For three long bloody years the perfect teacher had been tossed around here and there, substituting for absent or sick colleagues. She taught summer school to make some extra money. How she would have loved to go to Cavendish Beach in Prince Edward Island during those hot, sticky months! Instead our dedicated teacher found herself engaged in her favorite task. The instruction of the young. How wonderful!--

Wonderful? BULL!

I began to realize that in spite of the nobility of my vocation, I was entitled to a vacation. But some kids need summer school, you say. That's fine, I say. But I see no need to sacrifice myself twelve months of the year for all those ungrateful little brats who don't pay attention anyway.

But that's another story. I was talking about my being posted as a regular teacher. In spite of the three wasted summers. In spite of the three years of substituting--with all the headaches that this entails. In spite of it all, I was determined to do my job well. I spent three hours every night--three hours of my own time--preparing my lessons so that the little darlings would not be bored. But to no avail. The only things which interested them were topics such as sex, drugs, hotrods, and assault with a deadly weapon. And even these they found boring the second time around. I tried standing on my head but the principal happened to be passing by. He called me into his office and told me it was not a very dignified thing for a young lady to do.

I tried another approach. I stopped teaching for a few days. I surmised that the pupils would soon realize what they were missing. All that valuable information which I had to pass on to

them. After four days it occurred to me that they were unaware of any change in the classroom. Nobody came to me begging for an education. Again, I had a fireside chat with the principal. I say "fireside chat" as a figure of speech, you understand. There actually was no fireplace in his office. Moreover, I did not chat with him. He chatted with me. He reminded me that I was being paid to teach and not to babysit my classes. I clicked my heels, saluted and stomped into the classroom.

They knew that something was in the air. "Perhaps it was because I slammed the door so hard behind me that the pane of glass in it shattered into a few thousand pieces. Perhaps it was because I picked up the thirty-inch ruler and brought it crashing down onto my desk. For the remainder of the year we had to make do with two fifteen-inch rulers. Whatever it was that gave me away, they realized that Miss Baker was ready and willing to cook somebody's goose.

Things changed considerably from that day on. I must confess it was a bit demoralizing to have to put my educational theories aside. Not to mention my professional preparation at teacher's college. I found that peculiarly useless. But in a war of survival you must not let morals blind you to what you must do. Absolutely not. So I survived in education. My classes repented to me the way sled-dogs respond to the whip. But at least I was

not fired for incompetence. I never went home deflated and fatigued from the war of nerves which the "little darlings" can play so well.

But there is one thing that jars my nerves from time to time. Whenever I happen to overhear students talking among themselves. Especially when someone says, "Miss Baker is a piece of _____."

The Cheese on the Moon: A Collection of Short Stories