

SAUL BELLOW

*The Adventures
of Augie March*

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Chicago born—
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freestyle...”

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THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

Saul Bellow

To my father

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Chapter 1

I AM AN AMERICAN, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. But a man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and in the end there isn't any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by acoustical work on the door or gloving the knuckles.

Everybody knows there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining.

My own parents were not much to me, though I cared for my mother. She was simple-minded, and what I learned from her was not what she taught, but on the order of object lessons. She didn't have much to teach, poor woman. My brothers and I loved her. I speak for them both; for the elder it is safe enough; for the younger one, Georgie, I have to answer—he was born an idiot—but I'm in no need to guess, for he had a song he sang as he ran dragfooted with his stiff idiot's trot, up and down along the curl-wired fence in the backyard:

Georgie Mahchy, Augie, Simey
Winnie Mahchy, evwy, evwy love Mama.

He was right about everyone save Winnie, Grandma Lausch's poodle, a pousy old overfed dog. Mama was Winnie's servant, as she was Grandma Lausch's. Loud-breathing and wind-breaking, she lay near the old lady's stool on a cushion embroidered with a Berber aiming a rifle at a lion. She was personally Grandma's, belonged to her suite; the rest of us were the governed, and especially Mama. Mama passed the dog's dish to Grandma, and Winnie received her food at the old lady's feet from the old lady's hands. These hands and feet were small; she wore a shriveled sort of lisle on her legs and her slippers were gray—ah, the gray of that felt, the gray despotic to souls—with pink ribbons. Mama, however, had large feet, and around the house she wore men's shoes, usually without strings, and a dusting or mobcap like somebody's fanciful cotton effigy of the form of the brain. She was meek and long, round-eyed like Georgie—gentle green round eyes and a gentle freshness of color in her long face. Her hands were work-reddened, she had very few of her teeth left—to heed the knocks as they come—and she and Simon wore the same ravelly coat-sweaters. Besides having round eyes, Mama had circular glasses that I went with her to the free dispensary on Harrison Street to get. Coached by Grandma Lausch, I went to do the lying. Now I know it wasn't so necessary to lie, but then everybody thought so, and Grandma Lausch especially, who was one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood that my young years were full of. So Grandma, who had it all ready before we left the house and must have put in hours plotting it out in thought and phrase, lying small in her chilly small room under the featherbed, gave it to me at breakfast. The idea was that Mama wasn't keen enough to do it right. That maybe one didn't need to be keen didn't occur to us; it was a contest. The dispensary would want to know why the Charities didn't pay for the glasses. So you must say nothing about the Charities, but that sometimes money from my father came and sometimes it didn't, and that Mama took boarders. This was, in a delicate and choosy way, by ignoring and omitting certain large facts true. It was true enough for *them*, and at the age of nine I could appreciate this perfectly. Better than my brother Simon, who was too blunt for this kind of maneuver and, anyway, from books, had gotten hold of some English schoolboy notions of honor. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* for many years had a

influence we were not in a position to afford.

Simon was a blond boy with big cheekbones and wide gray eyes and had the arms of a cricketer—go by the illustrations; we never played anything but softball. Opposed to his British style was his patriotic anger at George III. The mayor was at that time ordering the schoolboard to get history books that dealt more harshly with the king, and Simon was very hot at Cornwallis. I admired this patriotic flash, his terrific personal wrath at the general, and his satisfaction over his surrender at Yorktown, which would often come over him at lunch while we ate our bologna sandwiches. Grandma had a piece of boiled chicken at noon, and sometimes there was the gizzard for bristleheaded little Georgie, who loved it and blew at the ridgy thing more to cherish than to cool it. But this martial true-blood pride Simon's disqualified him for the crafty task to be done at the dispensary; he was too disdainful to listen and might denounce everybody instead. I could be counted on to do the job, because I enjoyed it. I loved a piece of strategy. I had enthusiasms too; I had Simon's, though there was never much meat in Cornwallis for me, and I had Grandma Lausch's as well. As for the truth of these statements I was instructed to make—well, it was a fact that we had a boarder. Grandma Lausch was our boarder, not in relation at all. She was supported by two sons, one from Cincinnati and one from Racine, Wisconsin. The daughters-in-law did not want her, and she, the widow of a powerful Odessa businessman—divinity over us, bald, whiskery, with a fat nose, greatly armored in a cutaway, a double-breasted vest powerfully buttoned (his blue photo, enlarged and retouched by Mr. Lulov, hung in the parlor, double back between the portico columns of the full-length mirror, the dome of the stove beginning where his trunk ended)—she preferred to live with us, because for so many years she was used to direct a household to command, to govern, to manage, scheme, devise, and intrigue in all her languages. She boasted French and German besides Russian, Polish, and Yiddish; and who but Mr. Lulov, the retouch artist from Division Street, could have tested her claim to French? And he was a serene bogus too, the triple-backed gallant tea-drinker. Except that he had been a hackie in Paris, once, and if he told the truth about that might have known French among other things, like playing tunes on his teeth with pencil or singing and keeping time with a handful of coins that he rattled by jiggling his thumb along the table, and how to play chess.

Grandma Lausch played like Timur, whether chess or klabyasch, with palatal catty harshness and sharp gold in her eyes. Klabyasch she played with Mr. Kreindl, a neighbor of ours who had taught her the game. A powerful stub-handed man with a large belly, he swatted the table with those hard hands of his, flinging down his cards and shouting "*Shtoch! Yasch! Menél! Klabyasch!*" Grandma looked sardonically at him. She often said, after he left, "If you've got a Hungarian friend you don't need an enemy." But there was nothing of the enemy about Mr. Kreindl. He merely, sometimes, sounded menacing because of his drill-sergeant's bark. He was an old-time Austro-Hungarian conscript, and there was something soldierly about him: a neck that had strained with pushing artillery wheels, a campaigner's red in the face, a powerful bite in his jaw and gold-crowned teeth, green cockeyes and soft short hair, altogether Napoleonic. His feet slanted out on the ideal of Frederick the Great, but he was about a foot under the required height for guardsmen. He had a masterly look of independence. He and his wife—a woman quiet and modest to the neighbors and violently quarrelsome at home—had a son, a dental student, lived in what was called the English basement at the front of the house. The son, Kotzie, worked evenings in the corner drugstore and went to school in the neighborhood of County Hospital, and it was he who told Grandma about the free dispensary. Or rather, the old woman sent for him to find out what one could get from those state and county places. She was always sending for people, the butcher, the grocer, the fruit peddler, and received them in the kitchen to explain that the Marches had to have discounts. Mama usually had to stand by. The old woman would tell them, "You see how it is—do I have to say more? There's no man in the house and children t

bring up.” This was her most frequent argument. When Lubin, the caseworker, came around and sat at the kitchen table, familiar, bald-headed, in his gold glasses, his weight comfortable, his mouth patient, she shot it at him: “How do you expect children to be brought up?” While he listened, trying to remain comfortable but gradually becoming like a man determined not to let a grasshopper escape from his hand. “Well, my dear, Mrs. March could raise your rent,” he said. She must often have answered—for there were times when she sent us all out to be alone with him—“Do you know what things would be like without me? You ought to be grateful for the way I hold them together.” I’m sure she even said, “And when I die, Mr. Lubin, you’ll see what you’ve got on your hands.” I’m one hundred per cent sure of it. To us nothing was ever said that might weaken her rule by suggesting it would ever end. Besides, it would have shocked us to hear it, and she, in her miraculous knowledge of us, able to be extremely close to our thoughts—she was one sovereign who knew exactly the proportions of love, respect, and fear of power in her subjects—understood how we would have been shocked. But to Lubin, for reasons of policy and also because she had to express feelings she certainly had, she must have said it. He had a harassed patience with her of “deliver me from such clients,” though he tried to appear master of the situation. He held his derby between his thighs (his suits, always too scanty in the pants, exposed white socks and bulldog shoes, crinkled, black, and bulging with toes), and he looked into the hat though debating whether it was wise to release his grasshopper on the lining for a while.

“I pay as much as I can afford,” she would say.

She took her cigarette case out from under her shawl, she cut a Murad in half with her sewing scissors and picked up the holder. This was still at a time when women did not smoke. Save the intelligentsia—the term she applied to herself. With the holder in her dark little gums between which all her guile, malice, and command issued, she had her best inspirations of strategy. She was wrinkled as an old paper bag, an autocrat, hard-shelled and Jesuitical, a pouncy old hawk of a Bolshevik, her small ribboned gray feet immobile on the shoekit and stool Simon had made in the manual-training class, dingy old wool Winnie whose bad smell filled the flat on the cushion beside her. If wit and discontent don’t necessarily go together, it wasn’t from the old woman that I learned it. She was impossible to satisfy. Kreindl, for example, on whom we could depend, Kreindl who carried up the coal when Mama was sick and who instructed Kotzie to make up our prescriptions for nothing she called “that trashy Hungarian,” or “Hungarian pig.” She called Kotzie “the baked apple”; she called Mrs. Kreindl “the secret goose,” Lubin “the shoemaker’s son,” the dentist “the butcher,” the butcher “the timid swindler.” She detested the dentist, who had several times unsuccessfully tried to fit her with false teeth. She accused him of burning her gums when taking the impressions. But then she tried to pull his hands away from her mouth. I saw that happen: the stolid, square-framed Dr. Wernick, whose compact forearms could have held off a bear, painfully careful with her, determinedly concerned at her choked screams, and enduring her scratches. To see her struggle like that was no easy thing for me, and Dr. Wernick was sorry to see me there too, I know, but either Simon or I had to squire her wherever she went. Here particularly she needed a witness to Wernick’s cruelty and clumsiness as well as a shoulder to lean on when she went weakly home. Already at ten I was only a little shorter than she and big enough to hold her small weight.

“You saw how he put his paws over my face so I couldn’t breathe?” she said. “God made him to be a butcher. Why did he become a dentist? His hands are too heavy. The touch is everything to a dentist. If his hands aren’t right he shouldn’t be let practice. But his wife worked hard to send him through school and make a dentist of him. And I must go to him and be burned because of it.”

The rest of us had to go to the dispensary—which was like the dream of a multitude of dentist chairs, hundreds of them in a space as enormous as an armory, and green bowls with designs of glass grapes, drills lifted zigzag as insects’ legs, and gas flames on the porcelain swivel trays—a thunder

gloom in Harrison Street of limestone county buildings and cumbersome red streetcars with metal grillwork on their windows and monarchical iron whiskers of cowcatchers front and rear. The lumbered and clanged, and their brake tanks panted in the slushy brown of a winter afternoon or the bare stone brown of a summer's, salted with ash, smoke, and prairie dust, with long stops at the clinic to let off clumpers, cripples, hunchbacks, brace-legs, crutch-wielders, tooth and eye sufferers, and all the rest.

So before going with my mother for the glasses I was always instructed by the old woman and had to sit and listen with profound care. My mother too had to be present, for there must be no slip-up. She must be coached to say nothing. "Remember, Rebecca," Grandma would re-repeat, "let him answer everything." To which Mama was too obedient even to say yes, but only sat and kept her long hands folded on the bottle-fly iridescence of the dress the old woman had picked for her to wear. Very healthy and smooth, her color; none of us inherited this high a color from her, or the form of her nose with nostrils turned back and showing a little of the partition. "You keep out of it. If they ask you something, you look at Augie like this." And she illustrated how Mama was to turn to me, terribly exact, if she had only been able to drop her habitual grandeur. "Don't tell anything. Only answer questions," she said to me. My mother was anxious that I should be worthy and faithful. Simon and Georgie were her miracles or accidents; Georgie was her own true work in which she returned to her fate after a blessed and undeserved success. "Augie, listen to Grandma. Hear what she says," was all she ever dared when the old woman unfolded her plan.

"When they ask you, 'Where is your father?' you say, 'I don't know where, miss.' No matter how old she is, you shouldn't forget to say 'miss.' If she wants to know where he was the last time you heard from him, you must tell her that the last time he sent a money order was about two years ago from Buffalo, New York. Never say a word about the Charity. The Charity you should never mention. You hear that? Never. When she asks you how much the rent is, tell her eighteen dollars. When she asks where the money comes from, say you have boarders. How many? Two boarders. Now, say to me how much rent?"

"Eighteen dollars."

"And how many boarders?"

"Two."

"And how much do they pay?"

"How much should I say?"

"Eight dollars each a week."

"Eight dollars."

"So you can't go to a private doctor, if you get sixty-four dollars a month. The eyedrops alone cost me five when I went, and he scalded my eyes. And these specs"—she tapped the case—"cost ten dollars the frames and fifteen the glasses."

Never but at such times, by necessity, was my father mentioned. I claimed to remember him; Simon denied that I did, and Simon was right. I liked to imagine it.

"He wore a uniform," I said. "Sure I remember. He was a soldier."

"Like hell he was. You don't know anything about it."

"Maybe a sailor."

"Like hell. He drove a truck for Hall Brothers laundry on Marsh-field, that's what he did. I said I used to wear a uniform. Monkey sees, monkey does; monkey hears, monkey says." Monkey was the

basis of much thought with us. On the sideboard, on the Turkestan runner, with their eyes, ears, and mouth covered, we had see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, hear-no-evil, a lower trinity of the house. The advantage of lesser gods is that you can take their names any way you like. "Silence in the courthouse; the monkey wants to speak; speak, monkey, speak." "The monkey and the bamboo were playing in the grass ..." Still the monkeys could be potent, and awesome besides, and deep social critics when the old woman, like a great lama—for she is Eastern to me, in the end—would point to the squatting brown three, whose mouths and nostrils were drawn in sharp blood-red, and with profound wit, her unkindness finally touching greatness, say, "Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be honest, *ehrlich*. Don't have a loud mouth. The more you love people the more they'll mix you up with a child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love. And that's respect, the middle monkey." It never occurred to us that she sinned mischievously herself against that convulsed speak-no-evil who hugged his lips with his hands; but no criticism of her came near our minds at any time, much less when the resonance of a great principle filled the whole kitchen.

She used to read us lessons off poor Georgie's head. He would kiss the dog. This bickering handmaiden of the old lady, at one time. Now a dozy, long-sighing crank and proper object of respect for her years of right-minded but not exactly lovable busyness. But Georgie loved her—and Grandma whom he would kiss on the sleeve, on the knee, taking knee or arm in both hands and putting his underlip forward, chaste, lummoxy, caressing, gentle and diligent when he bent his narrow back, his blouse bagging all over it, whitish hair pointy and close as a burr or sunflower when the seeds have been picked out of it. The old lady let him embrace her and spoke to him in the following way: "Hello you, boy, clever *junge*, you like the old Grandma, my minister, my *cavalier*? That's-a-boy. You know who's good to you, who gives you gizzards and necks? Who? Who makes noodles for you? Yes. Noodles are slippery, hard to pick up with a fork and hard to pick up with the fingers. You see how the little bird pulls the worm? The little worm wants to stay in the ground. The little worm doesn't want to come out. Enough, you're making my dress wet." And she'd sharply push his forehead off with her open prim hand, having fired off for Simon and me, mindful always of her duty to wise us up, one moment of animadversion on the trustful, loving, and simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough, the fighting nature of birds and worms, and a desperate mankind without feelings. Illustrated by Georgie. But the principal illustration was not Georgie but Mama, in her love-originated servitude, simple minded, abandoned with three children. This was what old lady Lausch was driving at, now, in the later wisdom of her life, that she had a second family to lead.

And what must Mama have thought when in any necessary connection my father was brought in during the conversation? She sat docile. I conceive that she thought of some detail about him—a dish he liked, perhaps meat and potatoes, perhaps cabbage or cranberry sauce; perhaps that he disliked starched collar, or a soft collar; that he brought home the *Evening American* or the *Journal*. She thought this because her thoughts were always simple; but she felt abandonment, and greater pain than conscious mental ones put a dark streak to her simplicity. I don't know how she made out before when we were alone after the desertion, but Grandma came and put a regulating hand on the family life. Mama surrendered powers to her that maybe she had never known she had and took her punishment in drudgery; occupied a place, I suppose, among women conquered by a superior force of love, like those women whom Zeus got the better of in animal form and who next had to take cover from his furious wife. Not that I can see my big, gentle, dilapidated, scrubbing, and lugging mother as a fugitive of immense beauty from such classy wrath, or our father as a marble-legged Olympian. She had sewed buttonholes in a coat factory in a Wells Street loft and he was a laundry driver—there wasn't even so much as a picture of him left when he blew. But she does have a place among such women by the deeper right of continual payment. And as for vengeance from a woman, Grandma

Lausch was there to administer the penalties under the standards of legitimacy, representing the ma-
body of married womankind.

Still the old lady had a heart. I don't mean to say she didn't. She was tyrannical and a snob about her Odessa luster and her servants and governesses, but though she had been a success herself she knew what it was to fall through susceptibility. I began to realize this when I afterward read some of the novels she used to send me to the library for. She taught me the Russian alphabet so that I could make out the titles. Once a year she read *Anna Karenina* and *Eugene Onegin*. Occasionally I got in hot water by bringing a book she didn't want. "How many times do I have to tell you if it doesn't suit *roman* I don't want it? You didn't look inside. Are your fingers too weak to open the book? Then they should be too weak to play ball or pick your nose. For that you've got strength! *Bozhe moy!* God in Heaven! You haven't got the brains of a cat, to walk two miles and bring me a book about religion because it says Tolstoi on the cover."

The old *grande dame*, I don't want to be misrepresenting her. She was suspicious of what could have been, given one wrong stitch of heredity, a family vice by which we could have been exploited. She didn't want to read Tolstoi on religion. She didn't trust him as a family man because the countess had had such trouble with him. But although she never went to the synagogue, ate bread on Passover, sent Mama to the pork butcher where meat was cheaper, loved canned lobster and other forbidden food, she was not an atheist and free-thinker. Mr. Anticol, the old junky she called (search me why "Rameses"—after the city named with Pithom in the Scriptures maybe; no telling what his inspirations were—was that. A real rebel to God. Icy and canny, she would listen to what he had to say and wouldn't declare herself. He was ruddy, and gloomy; his leathery serge cap made him flat-headed and his alley calls for rags, old iron—"recks aline," he sung it—made him gravel-voiced and gruff. He had tough hair and brows and despising brown eyes; he was a studious, shaggy, meaty old man. Grandma bought a set of the *Encyclopedia Americana*—edition of 1892, I think—from him and saw it that Simon and I read it; and he too, whenever he met us, asked, "How's the set?" believing, I reckon, that it taught irreverence to religion. What had made him an atheist was a massacre of Jews in his town. From the cellar where he was hidden he saw a laborer pissing on the body of his wife's younger brother, just killed. "So don't talk to me about God," he said. But it was he that talked about God, all the time. And while Mrs. Anticol stayed pious, it was his idea of grand apostasy to drive to the reform synagogue on the high holidays and park his pink-eye nag among the luxurious, white-wired touring cars of the rich Jews who bared their heads inside as if they were attending a theater, a kind of abjectness in them that gave him grim entertainment to the end of his life. He caught a cold in the rain and died of pneumonia.

Grandma, all the same, burned a candle on the anniversary of Mr. Lausch's death, threw a lump of dough on the coals when she was baking, as a kind of offering, had incantations over baby teeth and stunts against the evil eye. It was kitchen religion and had nothing to do with the giant God of the Creation who turned back the waters and exploded Gomorrah, but it was on the side of religion at that. And while we're on that side I'll mention the Poles—we were just a handful of Jews among them in the neighborhood—and the swollen, bleeding hearts on every kitchen wall, the pictures of saints in baskets of death flowers tied at the door, communions, Easters, and Christmases. And sometimes we were chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers, all of us, even Georgie, articulated, whether we liked it or not, to this mysterious trade. But I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being big and large too larky and boisterous to take it to heart, and looked at it as needing no more special explanation than the stone-and-bat wars of the street gangs or the swarming on a fall evening of Parisian punks to rip up fences, screech and bawl at girls, and beat up strangers. It wasn't in my nature to fatigue myself with worry over being born to this occult work, even though some of my friends and

playmates would turn up in the middle of these mobs to trap you between houses from both ends of passageway. Simon had less truck with them. School absorbed him more, and he had his sentiments anyway, a mixed extract from Natty Bumppo, Quentin Durward, Tom Brown, Clark at Kaskaskia, the messenger who brought the good news from Ratisbon, and so on, that kept him more to himself. I was just a slow understudy to this, just as he never got me to put in hours on his Sandow muscle build and the gimmick for developing the sinews of the wrist. I was an easy touch for friendships, and most of the time they were cut short by older loyalties. I was pals longest with Stashu Kopecs, whose mother was a midwife graduated from the Aesculapian School of Midwifery on Milwaukee Avenue. Well to do, the Kopecses had an electric player piano and linoleums in all the rooms, but Stashu was a thief, and to run with him I stole too: coal off the cars, clothes from the lines, rubber balls from the dime store, and pennies off the newsstands. Mostly for the satisfaction of dexterity, though Stashu invented the game of stripping in the cellar and putting on girl's things swiped from the clothesline. Then he too showed up in a gang that caught me one cold afternoon of very little snow while I was sitting on a crate frozen into the mud, eating Nabisco wafers, my throat full of the sweet dust. Foremost, there was a thug of a kid, about thirteen but undersized, hard and grieved-looking. He came up to accuse me, and big Moonya Staplanski, just out of the St. Charles Reformatory and headed north for the one at Pontiac, backed him up.

"You little Jew bastard, you hit my brother," Moonya said.

"I never did. I never even saw him before."

"You took away a nickel from him. How did you buy them biscuits else, you?"

"I got them at home."

Then I caught sight of Stashu, hayheaded and jeering, pleased to sickness with his deceit and his new-revealed brotherhood with the others, and I said, "Hey, you lousy bed-wetter, Stashu, you know Moon ain't even got a brother."

Here the kid hit me and the gang jumped me, Stashu with the rest, tearing the buckles from my sheepskin coat and bloodying my nose.

"Who is to blame?" said Grandma Lausch when I came home. "You know who? You are, Augie, because that's all the brains you have to go with that piss-in-bed *accoucherka's* son. Does Simon hang around with them? Not Simon. He has too much sense." I thanked God she didn't know about the stealing. And in a way, because that was her schooling temperament, I suspect she was pleased that she should see where it led to give your affections too easily. But Mama, the prime example of that weakness, was horrified. Against the old lady's authority she didn't dare to introduce her feelings during the hearing, but when she took me into the kitchen to put a compress on me she nearsighted peered over my scratches, whispering and sighing to me, while Georgie tottered around behind her long and white, and Winnie lapped water under the sink.

Chapter 2

AFTER THE AGE of twelve we were farmed out in the summer by the old woman to get a taste of life and the rudiments of earning. Even before, she had found something for me to do. There was a morning class for feeble-minded children, and when I had left Georgie in school I reported to Sylvester's Star Theatre to distribute handbills. Grandma had arranged this with Sylvester's father, whom she knew from the old people's arbor in the park.

If it got to our rear flat that the weather was excellent—warm and still, she liked it—she would go to her room and put on her corset, relic of when she was fuller, and her black dress. Mama would find her a bottle of tea. Then in a chapeau of flowers and a furpiece of tails locked on her shoulder with badger claws she went to the park. With a book she never intended to read. There was too much talk in the arbor for that. It was a place where marriages were made. A year or so after the old atheist's death Mrs. Anticol found herself a second husband there. This widower traveled down from Iowa City for just the purpose of marriage, and after they were married the news came back that he kept her locked prisoner in his house and made her sign away all rights of legacy. Grandma did not pretend to be sorry; she said, "Poor Bertha," but she said it with the humor she was a crackerjack at, as thin and full of play as fiddle wire, and she took much credit for not going in for that kind of second marriage. I quit thinking long ago that all old people came to rest from the things they were out for in their younger years. But that was what she wanted us to believe—"an old *baba* like me"—and according to her we took her at her word to be old disinterested wisdom who had put by her vanity. But if she never gave up a marriage offer, I'm not prepared to say it made no difference to her. She couldn't have been so soothed on *Anna Karenina* for nothing, or another favorite of hers I ought to mention, *Manon Lescaut*, and when she was feeling right she bragged about her waist and hips, so, since she never gave up any glamour or influence that I know of, I can see it wasn't only from settled habit that she went into her bedroom to lace on her corset and wind up her hair but to take the eye of a septuagenarian Vronsky or Dr. Grioux. I sometimes induced myself to see, beyond her spotty yellowness and her wrinkles and dandruff bangs, a younger and resentful woman in her eyes.

But whatever she was after for herself, in the arbor, she wasn't forgetting us, and she got me the handbill job through old Sylvester, called "the Baker" because he wore white ducks and white golfer's cap. He had palsy, this the joke of his making rolls, but he was clean, brief-spoken, serious in the air. He had bloodshot eyes, reconciled, with an effort of nerve that was copied straight into the curve of his white horseshoe of mustache, to the shortness of his days. I suppose her pitch with him was as usual about the family she was protecting, and Sylvester took me to see his son, a young fellow who had money or family anxiety always seemed to keep in a sweat. Something, his shadow business and the emptiness of the seats at two o'clock, the violinist playing just for him and the operator in the projection box, made it awful for him and misery to come across with my two bits. It made him a tough. He said, "I've had kids who shoved the bills down the sewer. Too bad if I ever find out about it and I have ways to check up." So I knew that he might follow me along a block of the route, and I kept watch in the streets for his head with the weak hair of baldness and his worry-wounded eyes, as brown as a bear's. "I've got a couple of tricks myself for any punk who thinks he's going to pull a fast one on me," he warned me. But when he believed I was trustworthy, and at first I was, following his directions about rolling the bills and sticking them into the brass mouthpieces over the bells, not fouling up the mailboxes and getting him in dutch with the post office, he treated me to seltzer and Turkish Delight.

and said he was going to make a ticket-taker of me when I grew a little taller, or put me in charge of the popcorn machine he was thinking of getting; and one of these years he was going to hire a manager while he went back to Armour Institute to finish his engineering degree. He had only a couple of years to go, and his wife was after him to do it. He took me for my senior, I suppose, to tell me this, as the people at the dispensary did, and as often happened. I didn't understand all that he told me.

Anyway, he was just a little deceived in me, for when he said his other boys had dumped bills down the sewer I felt I couldn't do less either and watched for my chance. Or gave out wads to the kids. George's dummy-room when I came at noon to fetch him at the penal-looking school built in the identical brick with the icehouse and the casket factory which were its biggest neighbors. It had the great gloom inside of clinks the world over, with ceilings the eye had to try for and wood floors trailed with marching. Summers, one corner of it was kept open for the feeble-minded, and, coming in, you traded the spray of the icehouse for the snipping, cooing hubbub of paper-chain making and the commands of teachers. I sat on the stairs and divided the remaining bills, and when class let out Georgie helped me get rid of them. Then I took him by the hand and led him home.

Much as he loved Winnie, he was scared of strange dogs, and as he carried her scent he drew them. They were always sniffing his legs, and I carried stones to pitch at them.

This was the last idle summer. The next, as soon as the term was over, Simon was sent to work as a bellhop in a resort hotel in Michigan, and I went to the Coblins' on the North Side to help Coblin with his newspaper route. I had to move there, for the papers came into the shed at four in the morning and we lived better than half an hour away on the streetcar. But it wasn't exactly as though I were passing into strange hands, for Anna Coblin was my mother's cousin and I was accordingly treated as a relative. Hyman Coblin came for me in his Ford; George howled when I left the house; he had a way of demonstrating the feelings Mama could not show under ban of the old woman. George had to be shut up in the parlor. I sat him down by the stove and left. Cousin Anna wept enough for everybody and plastered me with kisses at the door of her house, seeing me dog-dumb with the heartbreak of leaving home—a very temporary kind of emotion for me and almost, as it were, borrowed from Mama, who saw her sons drafted untimely into hardships. But Anna Coblin, who had led the negotiations for me, cried the most. Her feet were bare, her hair enormous, and her black dress misbuttoned. "I'll treat you like my own boy," she promised, "my own Howard." She took my canvas laundry bag from me and put me in Howard's room, between the kitchen and the toilet.

Howard had run away. Together with Joe Kinsman, the undertaker's son, he had lied about his age and enlisted in the Marine Corps. Their families were trying to get them out, but in the meantime they had been shipped to Nicaragua and were fighting Sandino and the rebels. She grieved terribly, as if they were dead already. And as she had great size and terrific energy of constitution she produced all kinds of excesses. Even physical ones: moles, blebs, hairs, bumps in her forehead, huge concentration in her neck; she had spiraling reddish hair springing with no negligible beauty and definiteness from her scalp, tangling as it widened up and out, cut duck-tail fashion in the back and scrawled out high above her ears. Originally strong, her voice was crippled by weeping and asthma, and the whites of her eyes coppery from the same causes, a burning, morose face, piteous, and her spirit untamed by thoughts of the remote considerations that can reconcile people to awfuller luck than she had. Because, said Grandma Lausch, cutting her case down to scale with her usual satisfaction in the essential, what did she want, a woman like that? Her brothers found her a husband, bought him a business, she had two children in her own house and a few pieces of real-estate besides. She might still be in the millinery factory where she started out, over the Loop on Wabash Avenue. That was the observation we heard after Cousin Anna had come to talk to her—as one comes to a wise woman—amassed herself into a suit, hat, shoes, and sat at the kitchen table looking at herself in the mirror as she spoke, not casually

but steadily, sternly, with wrathful comment; even at the bitterest, even when her mouth was at the widest stretch of tears, she went on watching. Mama, her head wrapped in a bandanna, was singeing chicken at the gas plate.

“*Daragaya*, nothing will happen to your son; he’ll come back,” said the old woman while Anna sobbed. “Other mothers have their sons there.”

“I *told* him to stop going with the undertaker’s. What kind of friend was that for him? He dragged him into it.”

She had the Kinsmans down for death-breeders, and I found out that she made a detour of block when shopping to avoid Kinsman’s parlors, though she had always boasted before that Mrs. Kinsman was a big, fresh, leery-looking woman, was a lodge sister and friend of hers—the rich Kinsmans. Coblin’s uncle, a bank officer, was buried out of Kinsman’s, and Friedl Coblin and Kinsman’s daughter went to the same elocution teacher. She had the impediment of Moses whose hand the watching angel guided to the coal, Friedl, and she carried her stuttering into fluency later. Years after, at a football game where I was selling hotdogs, I heard her; she didn’t recognize me in the white hat of the day, but remembered coaching her in “When the Frost Is on the Punkin’.” And recalled also Cousin Anna’s oath that I should marry Friedl when I was grown. It was in her tears of welcome when she pressed me, on the porch of the house that day. “Hear, Owgie, you’ll be my son, my daughter’s husband, *me kind!*” At this moment she had once more given Howard up for dead.

She kept this project of marriage going all the time. When I cut my hand while sharpening the lawnmower she said, “It’ll heal before your wedding day,” and then, “It’s better to marry somebody you’ve known all your life, I swear. Nothing worse than strangers. You hear me? Hear!” So she had the future mapped because little Friedl so resembled her that she lived with foreknowledge of her difficulty; she herself had had to be swept over it by the rude Providence of her brother. No mother to help her. Anna probably she felt that if a husband had not been found for her she would have been destroyed by the choked power of her instincts, deprived of children. And the tears to shed for them would have drowned her as sure as the water of Ophelia’s brook. The sooner married the better. Where Anna came from there was no encouragement of childhood anyhow. Her own mother had been married at thirteen or fourteen, and Friedl therefore had only four or five years to go. Anna herself had exceeded this age limit by fifteen years at least, the last few, I imagine, of fearful grief, before Coblin married her. Accordingly she was already on campaign, every young boy a prospect, for I assume I was not the only one but, for the time being, the most available. And Friedl was being groomed with music and dancing lessons as well as elocution and going into the best society in the neighborhood. No reason but this would have made Anna belong to a lodge; she was too gloomy and house-haunting a woman and it needed a great purpose to send her out to benefits and bazaars.

To anybody who snubbed her child she was a bad enemy and spread damaging rumors. “The pianist teacher told me herself. Every Saturday it was the same story. When she went to give Minnie Carson her lesson, Mister tried to pull her behind the door with him.” Whether true or not, it soon became her conviction. It made no difference who confronted her or whether the teacher came to plead with her to stop. But the Carsons had not invited Friedl to a birthday party and got themselves an enemy of Corsican rigor and pure absorption.

And now that Howard had run away all her enemies were somehow implicated as hell’s agents and deputies, and she lay in bed, crying and cursing them: “O God, Master of the Universe, may their hands and feet wither and their heads dry out,” and other grandiose things, everyday language to her. As she lay in the summer light, tempered by the shades and the catalpa of the front yard, flat on her back with compresses, towels, rags, she had a considerable altitude of trunk, the soles of her feet

shining from the sheets like graphite rubbings, feet of war disasters in the ruined villages Napoleon's Spanish campaign; flies riding in echelon on the long string of the light switch. While she panted and butchered on herself with pains and fears. She had the will of a martyr to carry a mangled head in Paradise till doomsday, in the suffering mothers' band led by Eve and Hannah. For Anna was terribly religious and had her own ideas of time and place, so that Heaven and eternity were not too far; she had things segmented, flattened down, and telescoped like the stages and floors of the Leaning Tower, while Nicaragua was at a distance double the circumference of the world, where the bantam Sandino—and who *he* was to her is outside my power to imagine—was killing her son.

The filth of the house, meantime, and particularly of the kitchen, was stupendous. Nevertheless swollen and fire-eyed, slow on her feet, shouting incomprehensibly on the telephone, and her face as lit by that gorgeous hair which finally advanced her into royalty, she somehow kept up with her duties. She had meals on time for the men, she saw to it that Friedl practiced and rehearsed, that the money collected was checked, counted, sorted and the coins rolled when Coblin wasn't on hand to do it himself, that the new orders were attended to.

“*Der ... jener ... Owgie*, the telephone ringt. Hear! Don't forget to tell them it's now extra for the Saturday afternoon paper!”

And when I tried to blow on Howard's saxophone I learned how quickly she could get out of bed and cover the house. She tore into the room and snatched it from me, yelling, “Already they're taking his things away from him!” in a way that made the skin gather down my head and the whole length of my neck. And I saw where a son-in-law—granted, only a prospective one—ranked with respect to her son. She did not forgive me that day, though she knew she had scared me. But I guess I looked less wounded than I felt, and she assumed I had no sense of penitence. What really is more like it is that I had no grudge-bearing power, unlike Simon with his Old South honor and his *cododuello* dangerous easiness that was his specialty of the time. Besides, how could you keep a grudge against anyone so terrific? And even while she pulled the saxophone out of my hands she was hunting her reflection in the small mirror on top of the long chest of drawers. I went down to the cellar where the storeroom windows and the tools were, and there, after I decided I couldn't cut out for home just yet only to be sent back by Grandma Lausch, I became interested in why the toilet trickled, took the lid off the waterbox, and passed my time below there, tinkering while the floor of the kitchen bowed and crunched.

That would be Five Properties shambling through the cottage, Anna's immense brother, long armed and humped, his head grown off the thick band of muscle as original as a bole on his back, hair tending to greenish brown, eyes completely green, clear, estimating, primitive, and sardonic, an Eskimo smile of primitive simplicity opening on Eskimo teeth buried in high gums, kidding, gleeful, and unfrank; a big-footed contender for wealth. He drove a dairy truck, one of those electric jobs where the driver stood up like a helmsman, the bottles and wood-and-wire cases clashing like mad. He took me around his route a few times and paid me half a buck for helping him hustle empties. When I tried to handle a full case he felt me up, ribs, thighs, and arms—this was something he loved to do—and said “Not yet, you got to wait yet,” lugging it off himself and crashing it down beside the icebox. He was the life of the quiet little lard-smelly Polish groceries that were his stops, punching it out or grappling in fun with the owners, head to head, or swearing in Italian at the Italians, “*Fungoo!*” and measuring off a chunk of stiff arm at them. He gave himself an awful lot of delight. And he was very shrewd, his sister said. It wasn't so long ago he had done a small part in the ruin of empires, driving wagons of Russian and German corpses to burial on Polish farms; and now he had money in the bank, he had stock in the dairy, and he had picked up in the Yiddish theater the fat swagger of the suitor everybody hated: “Five prope'ties. Plente money.”

Of a Sunday morning, when the balloon peddlers were tootling in the sweetness and calm of the leafy street and blue sky, he came down to breakfast in a white suit, picking his teeth finely, Scythian hair stroked down under a straw katie. Nonetheless he had not cast off his weekday milk smell. But how fine he was this morning, windburned and hearty-blooded, teeth, gums, and cheeks involved in a bursting grin. He pinched his copper-eyed sister who was sullen with tears.

“Annitchka.”

“Go, breakfast is ready.”

“Five prope’ties, plente money.”

A smile stole over her face which she moresely resisted. But she loved her brother.

“Annitchka.”

“Go! My child is missing. The world is chaos.”

“Five prope’ties.”

“Don’t be a fool. You’ll have a child yourself, and then you’ll know what *wehtig* is.”

Five Properties cared absolutely nothing about the absent or the dead and freely said so. Hell with them. He had worn their boots and caps while the stiffies were bouncing in his wagon through shot and explosion. What he had to say was usually on the Spartan or proconsular model, quick and hard. “You can’t go to war without smelling powder.” “If granny had wheels she’d be a cart.” “Sleep with dogs and wake with fleas.” “Don’t shit where you eat.” One simple moral in all, amounting to, “You have no one to blame but yourself” or, Frenchwise—for I have put in my time in the capital of the world—“*Tu l’as voulu, Georges Dandin.*”

Thus you see what views Five Properties must have had on his nephew’s enlistment. But he partly spared his sister.

“What do you want? He wrote you last week.”

“Last week!” said Anna. “And what about meanwhile?”

“Meanwhile he’s got a little Indian girl to tickle and squeeze him.”

“Not *my* son,” she said, turning her eyes to the kitchen mirror.

But in fact it appeared the boys had found someone to shack up with. Joe Kinsman sent his dad a snapshot of two straight-haired native girls in short skirts and hand in hand, without comment. Kinsman had shown it to Coblin. The fathers weren’t exactly displeased; at least they didn’t see fit to show displeasure to each other. On the contrary. But Cousin Anna didn’t hear of the picture.

Coblin had fatherly fears of his own, but not Anna’s rage against Kinsman, and he kept up the necessary liaison with him at his office, for of course the undertaker couldn’t enter the house. Generally speaking, Coblin’s main lines were outside anyway, and he led a life of movement, steady and square-paced. By comparison with Anna and her brother he appeared small, but he was really good size himself, sturdy, and bald in a clean sweep of all his hair, his features also big, rounded and flattened, puffy at the eyes which were given to blinking just about to the point of caricature. If you took this tic of his with the standard interpretation of meekness—well, there are types and habits that develop to beguile the experience of mankind. He was not beaten down by Anna or Five Properties or other members of the family. He was something of a sport, he had his own motives and he had established his own right of way with the determination of a man who is liable to be dangerous when he makes a fight. And Anna gave in. Therefore his shirts were always laid away in the drawer with strips of whalebone in the collar, and the second breakfast he took when he came back from mornin

deliveries had to include cornflakes and hard-boiled eggs.

The meals were of amazing character altogether and of huge quantity—Anna was a strong believer in eating. Bowls of macaroni without salt or pepper or butter or sauce, brain stews and lung stew, calves'-foot jelly with bits of calves' hair and sliced egg, cold pickled fish, crumb-stuffed tripe, canned corn chowder, and big bottles of orange pop. All this went well with Five Properties, who spread the butter on his bread with his fingers. Coblin, who ate with better manners, didn't complain either and seemed to consider it natural. But I know that when he went downtown to a carrier meeting he fed differently.

To begin with, he changed from the old check suit in which he did his route with a bagful of papers like Millet's "Sower," for a new check suit. In his snap-brim detective's felt and large-toed shoes carrying accounts and a copy of the *Tribune* for the Gumps, the sports results, and the stock quotations—he was speculating—and also for the gangwar news, keeping up with what was happening around Colossimo and Capone in Cicero and the North Side O'Bannions, that being about the time when O'Bannion was knocked off among his flowers by somebody who kept his gun-hand in a friendly grip—with this, Coblin got on the Ashland car. For lunch he went to a good restaurant, or to Reicke's for Boston beans and brown bread. Then to the meeting, where the circulation manager gave his talk. Afterward, pie à la mode and coffee at the south end of the Loop, followed by a burlesque show at the Haymarket or Rialto, or one of the cheaper places where farm or Negro girls did the grinds, the most single-purposed, less playful houses.

Again, it's impossible to know what Anna's idea was of his downtown program. She was, you might say, in a desert, pastoral condition of development and not up to the fancy stage of Belshazzar's Feast of barbaric later days. For that matter, Coblin wasn't really up to it either. He was a solid man of relatively low current in his thoughts; he took the best care of his business and wouldn't overstate downtown to an hour that would make it difficult for him to get up at his regular time, four o'clock. He played the stock market, but that was business. He played poker, but never for more than he carried in his change-heavy pockets. He didn't have the long-distance burrowing vices of people who take you in by mildness and then turn out to have been digging and tunneling all the while—as skeptical judges are proud to point out when they see well-thought-of heads breaking through the earth in dark places. He was by and large okay with me, although he had his sullen times when he would badger me to get on faster with filling in the Sunday supplement. That was usually Anna's effect, when she obtained the widest influence on him and got him on war-footing with her in the smoke of her trenches. But on his own he had an entirely different spirit of private gayness, as exemplified by the time I walked in on him when he was in the bathtub, lying in the manly state, erect, and dripping himself with the sponge in the steamy, cramped steerage space of the small windowless bathroom. It might have been more troublesome to ponder that the father of a Marine and of a young daughter, and the husband of Cousin Anna, should be found in so little dignity—much more troublesome, I see now, than it actually was. But my thoughts on this topic were never of any great severity; I could not see a debauchee where I had always seen Cousin Hyman, largely a considerate and merciful man, generous to me.

In fact they were all generous. Cousin Anna was a saving woman, she sang poor and did not spend much on herself, but she bought me a pair of winter hightops with a jack-knife on the side. And Five Properties loved to bring treats, cases of chocolate milk and flouncy giant boxes of candy, bricks of ice-cream and layer cakes. Both Coblin and he were hipped on superabundance. Whether it was striped silk shirts or sleeve garters or stockings with clocks, dixies in the movies or crackerjacks in the park when they took Friedl and me rowing, they seldom bought less than a dozen, Five Properties with bills, Cousin Hyman with his heaps of coins, just as flush. There was always much money in sight, cups, glasses, and jars and spread on Coblin's desk. They seemed sure I wouldn't take any, and

probably because everything was so lavish I never did. I was easily appealed to in this way, provided that I was given credit for understanding what the setup was, as when Grandma sent me on a mission could put my heart into a counterfeit too, just as easily. So don't think I'm trying to put over that, handled right, a Cato could have been made of me, or a young Lincoln who tramped four miles in frontier zero gale to refund three cents to a customer. I don't want to pass for having such legendary presidential stuff. Only those four miles wouldn't have been a hindrance if the right feelings were kindled. It depended on which way I was drawn.

Home made a neat and polished contrast on my half-days off. At Anna's the floors were washed on Friday afternoon, when she got down from bed and waded barefoot after the strokes of the mop, going forward, and afterward spread clean papers that soaked and dried and weren't taken up again till the week was over. Here you smelled the daily cleaning wax, and everything was in place on a studio plan—veneer shining, doilies spread, dime-store cut-glass, elkhorn, clock set in place—as regular as a convent parlor or any place where the love of God is made ready for on a base of domestic neatness and things kept well separated from the sea-composition of brutal and noisy trouble that heaves over every undefended wall. The bed that Simon and I slept in bulged up in full dress with pieces of embroidery on the pillow; books (Simon's hero's library) stacked; college pennants nailed in line; the women knitting by the clear, wall-browned summer air of the kitchen window; Georgie among the sunflowers and green washline poles of the yard, stumbling after slow Winnie, who went to smooch where sparrows had lighted.

I guess it troubled me to see how absent Simon and I could be from the house and how smoothly it went without us. Mama must have felt this and fussed over me as much as was allowable; she'd bake a cake, and I was something of a guest, with the table spread and jam dishes filled. That way my wage earning was recognized, and it gave me pride to dig the folded dollars out of my watch pocket. Yet when any joke of the old woman's made me laugh harder than usual a noise came out of me which was the echo of the whooping cough—I was only that much ahead of childhood, and although I was already getting rangy and my head was as big as it would ever grow, I was still kept in short pants and an Eton collar.

“Well, they must be teaching you great things over there,” said Grandma. “This is your chance to learn culture and refinement.” She meant to boast that she had already formed me and we had nothing to fear from common influences. But a little ridicule was indicated, just in case there should be any danger.

“Is Anna still crying?”

“Yes.”

“All day long. And what does he do?—he looks at her and blinks with his eyes. And the kids stammers. It must be lively. And Five Properties, that Apollo—still looking for an American girl to marry?”

That was her deft, scuttling way. With the small yellow bone of her hand, the hand that had been truly married in Odessa to a man of real weight, she threw the switch, the water rushed in and the clumsy sank—money, strength, fat, silks, and candy boxes, and all—and left the witty and supercilious smiling to contemplate the ripples. You had to know, to get this as I did, that on Armistice Day of 1922, when Grandma turned her ankle coming down the stairs at eleven o'clock while the factory boys brewed up their solemn celebrating noise and she should have been standing still, Five Properties picked her up while she was spitting and wincing and rushed her to the kitchen. But her memory specialized in misdemeanors and offenses, which were as ineradicable from her brain as the patrician wrinkle was between her eyes, and her dissatisfaction was an element and a part of nature.

Five Properties was keen on getting married. He took the question up with everybody and naturally had been to see Grandma Lausch about it, and she masked herself up as usual and looked considerably and polite while in secret she checked off and collected what she wanted for her file. But also she saw a piece of change in it for her, a matchmaker's fee. She watched for business opportunities. Once she had masterminded the smuggling of some immigrants from Canada. And I happen to know that she had made an agreement with Kreindl about a niece of his wife, that Kreindl was to act as go-between while the old woman encouraged Five Properties from her side. The scheme fell through, although Five Properties went into it eagerly at first, arriving to present himself brushed and burnished, flaming from his shave up to the Eskimo angle of his eyes, at Kreindl's basement where the meeting was to be. But the girl was thin and pale and didn't satisfy him. He had in mind a bouncing, black-haired, large-lipped, party-going peach. He was gentlemanly about his refusal and took the thin girl out once or twice; she got a kewpie doll from him and one of those cartwheel crimson Bunte candy boxes, and he was done. The old woman then said she gave him up. However, I believe her arrangement with Kreindl stood for some time after, and Kreindl didn't quit. He still went to the Coblins' on Sundays, and he did a double errand, as he had Hebrew New Year's cards to sell on commission for a printer. It was one of his regular lines, like buying job-lots and auction goods and taking people from the neighborhood to the Halsted Street furniture stores when he got wind of their needing a suite.

He worked on Five Properties craftily, and I would see them confabbing in the shed, Kreindl with his rolled legs and his conscript's history pasted on his eager, humiliated back, his beef-eater's face inflated to the height of his forehead with the fine points of the young lady of that day: of good family, nourished from her mother's hand with the purest and whitest food, brought up without rudeness or collision, producing breasts on time, no evil thoughts as yet, giving nothing but the clearest broth, you might say—and I can put myself in Five Properties' thoughts as he listened, crossed his arms, grinned, and appeared to scoff. Was she really so gentle, swell, and white? And if she over-flowered into coarseness and grossness, after a little marriage, and lay in the luxury of bed eating fig newton, corrupt and lazy, sending messages by window shade to sleek young boys? Or if her father was a grafter, her brothers bums and cardsharks, her mother loose or a spendthrift? Five Properties wanted to be awfully careful, and he didn't lack warnings and cautions from his sister, who, by ten years of seniority, could tip him off to American dangers and those of American women for green, old-country boys especially. She was comical when she did it, but grimly comical, for it was time taken from mourning.

"It'll be something different than with me, somebody that understands life. If she wants a fur coat like her swell friends, you'll have to buy a fur coat, and she won't care if it takes your last drop of blood to do it, a fresh young thing."

"Not me," said Five Properties, in somewhat the way Anna had said, "Not *my* son." He was rolling bread pills in his broad fingers and smoking a cigar, his green eyes awake and cold.

Busy at his accounts in his BVDs—the afternoon was hot—Coblin blinked me an extra smile observing how I neglected my book to listen to this conversation. He never had it in for me because he broke in on his privacy in the bathroom; just the contrary.

As for the book, it was Simon's copy of the *Iliad*, and I had been reading how the fair Briseis was dragged around from tent to tent and Achilles racked up his spear and hung away his mail.

Early risers, the Coblins went to bed soon after supper, like a farm family. Five Properties was the first up, at half-past three, and waked Coblin. Coblin took me out with him to have breakfast at a joint on Belmont Avenue, a night-crowd hangout of truckers, conductors, postal clerks, and scrubwomen from Loop offices. Bismarcks and coffee for him, flapjacks and milk for me. He was in a big mood

sociability here, with the other steady patrons and with the Greek, Christopher, and the waitresses. I had no repartee but laughed at everything. At the convict hour between four and five when even those with the least to fear are darkened and sober, and back away from waking. It wasn't so for him; in the summer, at least, he loved to get out of the house and have the coffee before him and the bulldozer edition under his arm.

We would go back to the shed to meet the paper trucks that came booming down the alley, tearing off leaves, with punks on the tail gate (to be on newspaper trucks was as sure a stage in the advancement to hoodlums as a hitch in Bridewell or joy-riding in stolen cars), booting off bundles of *Tribunes* or *Examiners*. Then the crew of delivery boys showed up with bicycles and coasters, and the route was covered by eight o'clock, Coblin and his older hands taking the steep back porches where you needed the knack of pitching the paper up to the third floor over the beams and clothesline. Meanwhile Cousin Anna was awake and back at her specialties—as if the charge of them in the cottage had run down overnight—tears, speeches, lamentations, and bothering the morning mirror with her looks. But also second breakfast was on the table, and Coblin ate before setting out collections and the light banging of screen doors, in polite panama hat, blinking rapid-fire. He had morning gossamers on his trousers from being the first one through the yards, and he was ready for any conversation with up-to-the-minute gang news of the bloody nights of the beer barons and the late curb quotations—everybody was playing the stock market, led by Insull.

And I was at home with Anna and the kid. Usually Anna went to Northern Wisconsin to escape the pollen in August, but this year, because of Howard's running away, Friedl was deprived of her vacation. Anna often signed off with the complaint that Friedl was the only one of the better-class children to have no holiday. To make up for it she fed her more than ever, and the child had the color of too much nourishment in her face, a hectic, touchy, barbarous face. She couldn't be got to close the door when she went to the can, as even Georgie had been taught to do.

I hadn't forgotten that Friedl had been promised to me when I kept out of sight at the football game that day—the players bucking and thudding on the white lines of the frozen field. She was a young lady then, corrected of all such habits, I'm sure, grown big like her mother, and with her uncle's winesap complexion, and wearing a raccoon coat, eagerly laughing and flagging a Michigan banner. She was studying to be a dietitian at Ann Arbor. This was about ten years removed from the Saturday when I was given the money by Coblin to take her to the movies.

Anna did not object to our going, but she herself wouldn't touch money on holy days. She observed them all, including the new moons, from a little Hebrew calendar, covering her head, lighting candles, and whispering prayers, with her eyes dilated and determined, going after religious terrors with the fear and nerve of a Jonah driven to enter frightful Nineveh. She thought it was her duty while I was in her house to give me some religious instruction, and it was a queer account I got from her of the Creation and Fall, the building of Babel, the Flood, the visit of the angels to Lot, the punishment of his wife and the lewdness of his daughters, in a spout of Hebrew, Yiddish, and English, powered by pietism and anger, little flowers and bloody fires supplied from her own memory and fancy. She didn't abridge much in stories like the one about Isaac sporting with Rebecca in Abimelech's gardens, or the rape of Dinah by Shechem.

"He tortured her," she said.

"How?"

"*Tortured!*"

She didn't think more was necessary and she was right. I have to hand it to her that she knew her listener. There wasn't going to be any fooling about it. She was directing me out of her deep chest

the great eternal things.

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