BOOK ONE

Mr. Coleridge, our Neighbor, drinks laudanum & neglects his Oats. He has written a Poem concerning a magical flying creature & a dream-like voyage in the Polar clime. Sarah, the Wife, is out of countenance as the Child is sickly & the cottage full of mice. In the Poem, the sea vessel is propelled by Spectres as Mr. Coleridge himself seems to be, though professing of Christ, & painfully pious in outward Manner.

From the diary of Andrew Felder
January 8, 1798
Nether Stowey, Somerset, England

apter one

was born in the town of Sandstorm, New Mexico in
that are now forgotten.
w people were ever born in Sandstorm, New
nd the few who were have passed on.
rm itself has passed on. It was one of those towns
great Southwest Storms of 1988–89 blew off the

me of Willie's birth, the population of Sandstorm
nd that included Willie.
wn did not have a car agency or a TV repair or a

school or even a grocery store. It was just a place where the wind blew.

The only public building in the village was the church where Willie and his father and mother and grandmother went to Mass.

All 261 residents of Sandstorm went to Mass, even the six or seven who were not Catholic. The church was the only place the people could meet under a roof, out of the storm that raged constantly across the desert.

This church was a shabby, sorry-looking affair that had been badly beaten by 100 years of wind.

Half-buried in the sand, it looked like a ship about to go under.

Inside, where the people knelt on hard wooden kneelers or sat on the dirt floor, it looked even shabbier and sorrier.

The windows were dingy and narrow and gave no light so that the people could not read even if they knew how to read.

On feast days the people would bring candles into the church and light them and hold them close to their faces. But the gloom still hung in the air like fog; there were not enough candles in Sandstorm to burn it away.

To Willie the church was a hiding place where many secrets were buried, some of them happy, some of them strange, and one of them sad beyond words.

Above the altar of the church, suspended from the rafters, was a great black cross and on the cross a man ten feet high.

This man was in the worst possible condition.

His eyes stared upward at the rafters; his arms stretched out painfully; real nails held him fast; dark red blood streamed down from his hands and feet and from a cut in his side.

The man strained forward on the cross as if asking someone to help him out.

About the time Willie turned four years old, he began to study this man most carefully, wondering who he was and how he got into such a fix.

He began to think of this man even on days when there wasn't a Mass.

orry for the man and tried to think of some way to

is that man?" Willie would ask his mother.

Theelord," his mother would answer. She was

teach Willie to speak in English.

did not know who Jesus Theelord was. There were

ys in Sandstorm named Jesus, but their last names

Gonzales and Sanchez. Willie had never heard of

with the strange name of Theelord.

summer afternoon Willie sneaked into the church

ladder that he had found in back of the shed near his

propped the ladder against the cross.

n he got a tin cup and filled it with water.

climbed up the ladder and looked into the red-rimmed

f Jesus Theelord.

wly he poured the water into the cracked plaster lips.

Jesus Theelord didn't drink the water. The water ran

the flaked plaster of the body and spilled on the floor.

en the padre came the next Sunday, he was angry

what had happened to the crucifix. The water had run

aint that had been applied to the wound in Jesus

rd's side.

ie's parents took him to see the padre after Mass, and

said he was sorry, just as his parents had told him to

padre, a kindly man, patted Willie on the head.

told Willie he understood why he tried to give Jesus

ord a drink.

u see though," said the padre, "that is just a figure.

al Lord Jesus is in heaven."

ie did not understand that.

he learned this at least, that no matter how sad statues

here isn't anything you can do about them.

ey will go on looking sad.

Chapter two

The people who lived in Sandstorm were Mexican-Americans. Most of them had light brown skin, brown eyes and black hair. Each looked different but still they looked a good deal alike, as if they might all be members of a large family.

Four people in Sandstorm looked different from the others: Willie's father, Willie's mother, Willie's grandmother, and Willie.

Willie's father had red hair and red-brown skin and blue eyes.

Willie's mother had black hair and black-gold skin and almond-shaped black eyes.

Willie's grandmother had red-brown skin and dark amber eyes.

Willie had red hair, red-black-brown-gold skin and blue eyes flecked with brown.

Willie's father was an Irish Indian. *His* father—Willie's grandfather—had come to the United States of America to find silver. From him came the red hair. He had come all the way from Ireland to find silver in the state of New Mexico, but all he found was sand. In a small town, though, he met a beautiful Indian girl named Cool Dawn.

Cool Dawn was from a tribe that had once lived in the state of Oklahoma. Cool Dawn's tribe had once been proud and rich, but it had been scattered and broken up back in the days nobody remembers. Some of the people of the tribe had gone to California. Some had gone to Mexico. Some few had come to the Sandstorm area where the red-haired Irishman was trying to find silver.

Cool Dawn and the Irishman married each other, and Willie's father was born, a red-haired Indian with blue eyes. Not long after that the Irishman died, or at least went away. Nobody could remember exactly what had happened to him. Willie never knew this grandfather, but Cool Dawn kept a picture of him. Willie thought he was a kind, happy, good

man who might be a king. Very handsome with his blue eyes and red hair, he looked like he could see to the end of the world.

Willie's mother was a black-gold lady from San Antonio, Texas. She was as beautiful as Willie's grandmother, Cool Dawn, but where Cool Dawn had red-brown skin the color of an October leaf and eyes that were brown and sparkling as rich maple syrup, she, Willie's mother, had an even more striking appearance.

She had the wonderful ebony skin of the people of West Africa, where on her father's side her family had once lived. And she had the golden tint and the soft almond eyes of the people of China where her mother's side of the family had once lived.

Her father's people had come to the United States of America on a U.S. slave ship called *Liberty*, back in the days that are forgotten. Her own father had drifted west and found a job as a garage mechanic in San Antonio.

Her mother's people had come from China long ago to settle in the Chinatown section of the city of San Francisco, California. A part of the family moved to Texas after a few years, and it was in the great city of Houston that Willie's grandmother was born.

This Chinese lady moved to San Antonio and there met the black garage mechanic. They married each other and had three children. Two of the children died. But Willie's mother managed to live.

She grew into a beautiful black-gold lady with a sweet voice and that wonderful black-gold skin drawn like satin across the high cheekbones and with almond eyes that seemed to say: The world is most beautiful.

One night in the dead summer of a long-gone year Willie's red-haired Indian father went to a dance in a magic building called The Alamo Round-up Bar and Grille and there, waiting table, serving food and drink to the people, was this beautiful black-gold lady.

Willie's father fell in love with her. Willie's mother fell in love with him. So they were married in the church of the sad

Lord in Sandstorm and there made a home for themselves in a school bus that no one had any use for.

It was in this school bus that Willie was born on a cold night in November.

Cool Dawn, Willie's grandmother, helped bring Willie into the world.

The villagers came to look at the new baby.

They took note of his marvelous appearance: the red hair, the red-gold-black-brown skin, the blue almond-shaped eyes that were spangled with brown. Much as they marveled, no one in Sandstorm, or anywhere else for that matter, had any way of knowing that Willie was the only Irish-Indian-Negro-Chinese boy born into this world on that unremarkable night.

Chapter three

When Willie was a baby, he used to look into the soft almond eyes of his black-gold mother and in those reflecting mirrors of life and the world, he saw that the earth was a splendid lovely planet.

Those eyes made the school bus seem a castle.

When the winds blew hard, rattling the rusty walls of the place where he slept, Willie, seeing those eyes, could believe that the sand beating against the bus was a sweet rain falling on magic fields.

Sometimes his grandmother, Cool Dawn, would hold him and sing to him.

She would croon songs about things that had happened many years ago. Songs about the desert and the wind and the pale gray mountains that appeared in the north on certain fine days. Songs of an enchanted garden beyond the mountains, a garden at the floor of a wild canyon no man had ever seen.

Sometimes, too, Willie's strong father would hold him.

He would hold him very close, especially when he came home from the long journey he made each summer.

Willie's father, like all the other grown-ups in Sandstorm was a migrant worker.

Each spring he would go to far unknown places in the north of the United States to pick berries and fruits and cabbages and pumpkins.

A truck would pull up to the church one day, and all the men and older boys and even some of the women would go aboard.

Then the truck would drive away, with everyone waving good-bye and shouting farewells that were often sad, shouting and waving as the truck got smaller and smaller and finally disappeared over the horizon.

For a few days after that, Willie would be sad. He would miss his father.

But each week a letter would come, and the priest who said Mass would read it to the people after the final blessing.

The letter was written in Spanish—that being the main language of the people of Sandstorm—and it told the news of each man and boy and woman who had made the trip north.

The people strained forward to listen to the letter, which the priest would read twice.

All through the following week the mothers and grandmothers and the old men and the children would repeat what they had heard in the letter. They continued to find it exciting and would repeat the stories the letter contained right up to the Sunday when the next letter would come.

Often the letters were funny in a simple way.

"Manuel endeavors to shave each day. By Christmas he will need to put a blade into the razor-holder."

"Today the grower made a serious speech about the need to be careful of peaches. He could not understand why his speech made us smile. Of course he does not know Peaches Gutierrez."

The people would roar at these stories, repeating them over and over again all through the summer.

When the letters were read in the sad church, Willie would listen with eager interest.

Every time his father's name was mentioned, his heart

would leap. He could picture his father standing very high in a tall tree, with shiny red fruit bobbing about his head and great blue mountains in the background. His father would be laughing in the clear sunlight.

At the end of each letter, Consuelo, the author of the letter, would say: This week we send you 218 dollars or 253 dollars or 184 dollars—or whatever the men had earned that week.

Then the priest would give the money to Pedro, Miguel and Fidel, the oldest men of Sandstorm.

It would be their job to take the village truck into Delphi, the nearest town with a regular store, and buy food and other supplies the people would need for the week.

In this way the people managed to live through the summer until the workers came home again.

When they came back to Sandstorm in the fall, after the last crops had been harvested, the people would have a fiesta.

There would be a pig roast—the workers would have bought the pig at the last city on their way south.

There would be wine and singing and dancing and sometimes a marriage in the church of Jesus Theelord.

When the feast ended, the families would settle in for the long winter.

The men would have many stories to tell of the places they had seen in the North: fantastic cities with glittering buildings stretching up to the sky, taller even than the mountains in the distance, amazing sights such as circuses and huge outdoor movie houses where people watched the movies while parked in their cars, and great airplanes that seemed to soar to the outer limits of the blue sky.

Willie would sit in his father's lap and listen to the tales of these wonderful sights of the northern country.

His father would hold him fast and sing to him.

One song he sang over and over again.

It was a simple song that was played on television in the North.

When the song played, Willie's father said there were beautiful things to be seen on the television: bands playing,

parades, wonderful black and white men working together on towering buildings, fathers and sons playing football together.

Neither Willie's father nor Willie knew what the English for the song meant, but this is what the song said:

You've got a lot to live,
And Pepsi's got a lot to give.

Then one spring the truck pulled away and the men waved at their families and the families waved back and some of the women and children cried a little and Willie ran after the truck, wanting to join his father.

The truck stopped and Willie's father jumped down.

He gave Willie a great warm hug.

"Willie, Willie, my son, my son," he cried. "I love you—but here now—don't you see? You must remain with your mother and grandmother. Who shall stay here to be brave for them while I am away? You must be strong now. You are almost six—practically a man. You must have courage. Go back now to your mother and pray that the Lord protect you while I am away."

Then he kissed his boy and got back on the truck.

Two weeks later the priest gathered all the people in the church.

He told them that the truck had plunged off a road near Pontiac, Illinois, and five of the men had been killed.

Willie's father was one of those men.

The bodies of the men were brought back in a strange truck. Painted on the side of the truck was a huge golden cat holding up a sign that had been lettered in red fruit.

The sign said, JERRY'S CHERRIES ARE THE BERRIES.

The cat smiled on all the people of Sandstorm.

Strange men carried the five pine casket-boxes to the door of the church. Then they went away.

During the funeral the women cried and the old men trembled.

Willie looked at the sad Lord who hung from his cross asking for a drink.

After the Mass the five caskets were carried to the ceme-

tery at the edge of town. There they were lowered into the sandy soil.

Willie and his mother and Cool Dawn went back to their bus-home without a word.

"Papa will never come back?" Willie asked.

"He is happy with the Lord," said Willie's mother.

Willie thought of the statue of the Lord in the church. He started to cry.

Cool Dawn put her arms around Willie.

"He has gone to the great Spirit of Love. We will see him again and be happy with him."

Cool Dawn said this with great conviction and Willie felt better immediately, though when he went back to the cemetery at sunset to see where his father was buried, he began to cry again.

Then he remembered how happy his father had been on the last day he had seen him.

He remembered that his father had told him to be strong and brave.

At the cemetery the sand had already half buried the white cross that marked his father's grave.

Soon the sand would shift again so that it would be impossible to say who was buried where.

Willie knelt by the grave and put his hand on the place where they had lowered his father's body into the soil.

Then he sang the song his father loved:

You've got a lot to live,
And Pepsi's got a lot to give.

The song whispered across the sand like a sad sigh and then was lost in the constant mourning of the wind.

Chapter four

The next spring Willie's mother and Cool Dawn decided to leave Sandstorm and seek employment in Houston, the great city of Texas.

It was a sad day for Willie.

It meant saying good-bye to all the people he had come to love in Sandstorm.

Good-bye to the old bus that had been home.

Good-bye to the sad Lord in the broken-down church.

Good-bye to the grave of his father.

Willie found that a person becomes attached to sad and painful things and that sometimes even sorrow is hard to give up.

But when the Greyhound bus came into sight of the slick black buildings of Houston, his heart pounded with excitement.

There was a shining busyness about the city—a great adventure was in the air.

There were glittering cars everywhere one turned, handsome stores and office buildings, bright signs that told of magic things people bought and sold to one another.

The two women found a small apartment in an old section of the city.

The apartment was in a five-story tenement of red brick that had been built in the unremembered times. The tenement was called the William McKinley Arms.

One hundred eighty-seven people lived in the William McKinley Arms, most of them black, most of them old, many of them damaged or broken in some way.

The rooms were small, evil-smelling and poorly cared for. They had flaking paint and rattling pipes and floors with holes in them. They were cold in the winter and steaming in the summer.

Many rats had made the William McKinley Arms their year-round residence. No one ever took a census of the rat population of the building, but there were at least two rats for every tenant and then some.

Willie hated and feared the rats, but it was through a rat that he became acquainted with the girl who lived in the flat on the second floor.

One afternoon as he was coming up the stairway from the cement courtyard in back of the tenement, he heard a scream and there was the girl, holding her skinny black arm,

bobbing back and forth on the stairs as if she were playing a strange game.

"It bit me!" she cried, and then Willie saw the rat loping down the stairs to the basement, in no particular hurry and certainly not afraid.

There was blood running down the girl's arm. Willie grabbed her arm and tied his handkerchief around it.

"Where's your mother?"

"Working," the girl said, still crying.

"Come with me," said Willie.

He took her upstairs where Cool Dawn cleaned the bite and gave the girl a glass of milk. Between Cool Dawn's assurances and Willie's vow to rid the William McKinley Arms of all rats, she calmed down.

Her name was Carolyn Sage, and her family—father, mother and seven children—had moved into the tenement only last year. She was a tiny girl with thick black hair and wide-set brown eyes, and she was Willie's exact age.

Carolyn was friendly and cheerful, and she and Willie took to playing together on the cement courtyard in back of the tenement. She was a girl friend rather than a boy friend, which Willie would have preferred then, but she was fun to be with and Willie thought that if he ever had a sister, he would like her to be like Carolyn.

Carolyn's family had a television set, and that first summer because Willie had never seen television before, he and Carolyn watched hours of television shows.

Willie was fascinated by all that he saw. He could not believe all that was going on in the world. For the first time he saw with his own eyes some of the sights his father had once told him about: the vast cities beyond Houston, the airplanes and the great sea vessels, the animals that lived in different parts of the world, the cars that people owned, the houses they lived in, the clothes they wore, the food they ate, the incredible things they did.

Sometimes the words used on television were hard to understand, and Carolyn would have to explain. Her mother was Mexican, and the Sage family had lived in a Mexican

town before moving to Houston, so that Carolyn understood Spanish quite well. Sometimes she and Willie would speak that language rather than English, though Willie's mother and Cool Dawn objected to this very much.

When they weren't watching television, Willie and Carolyn explored the tenement, visiting their neighbors.

There was Mrs. Sarto who lived in a room in the basement—a room with walls that were covered with pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She sat in her room all day long, with a cat whose name was Poppino, and prayed her rosary. Sometimes she got Carolyn and Willie to pray with her, but they preferred to play with Poppino.

"What is wrong with you, boy?" Mrs. Sarto asked Willie one day.

"Nothing, ma'am."

"You are colored wrong," the old woman said.

Afterwards Willie asked Carolyn what Mrs. Sarto meant.

Carolyn hesitated a little and then said, "You look different is all."

"Why?"

"Just different."

There was Mrs. Morgan who was ninety years old and very deaf and who had a phonograph on which she played a certain song over and over again. It was a song from the unremembered times sung by a singer of the older days named F. Sinatra.

The song was called *Come Fly with Me.*

Carolyn and Willie used to sing the song, stretching out their arms like the singers they had seen on old-time TV movies, until they shrieked with laughter. Mrs. Sarto said that the song Mrs. Morgan played was *Ave Maria*, a song of praise to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that it was not right to laugh at holy songs, and she blamed their laughing on Willie's color.

"They made you up," Mrs. Sarto said to him. "It is a trick to frighten me. To color someone that way—it isn't fair."

There was Mr. Pitt, a black man of about fifty, who had lost his hands in some war. He read *True Horror Comics* all

day, turning the pages with strange hook devices that he had for hands, and he would nod his head and mumble strange things that could not be understood.

Sometimes Willie and Carolyn would ask Mr. Pitt to show them the Purple Heart Medal he had won in combat.

With his hooks Mr. Pitt would pull the medal out of his shirt pocket—he carried it with him always—and dangle it before them.

"It's very pretty," Carolyn would say, or, "It is a nice thing to have."

"Proof," Mr. Pitt would reply. "Proof positive."

Willie and Carolyn did not know what proof it was Mr. Pitt was talking about and were afraid to ask.

But one afternoon Mr. Pitt, having shown them the medal, said, "Now this is justice and justification that the Lord has given me—in case I am questioned."

"What is the question?" Willie asked.

Mr. Pitt's eyes narrowed, the veins of his forehead stood out, his mouth opened and closed several times. Then he said, "If your hand scandalizeth thee, what do you do, boy?"

Willie did not know.

Mr. Pitt's eyes burned with a strange light; his voice became high and shaky.

"Cut it off!" he said.

"Let's go," said Carolyn.

"Good-bye, Mr. Pitt."

Mr. Pitt held up his hooks, looking at them as if they belonged to another person.

"Now there can be no scandal."

"Good-bye, Mr. Pitt."

"Good-bye—Good-bye, Mr. Pitt."

Outside in the courtyard Carolyn said that Mr. Pitt was crazy. But Willie believed that Mr. Pitt was a special person who understood secrets about the world that other people didn't know anything about.

* * *

Willie loved to get up early in the morning before anyone

else was out of bed and go out into the cement courtyard ar watch the sun come up.

Early one morning he came out to the courtyard and four a dead bird lying there.

He picked up the bird and studied it, feeling sorry for it ar wondering where it had come from.

It was a brown and black bird with a speckled gray brea and a white beak.

It did not seem to have a wound of any kind, but it wa dead all the same.

Willie tried to find a place to bury the light feathery thin which he thought to be most beautiful. But there was nothin but cement in the courtyard, and he could not make a grav in the cement.

He went around to the front of the William McKinley Arm where there were two narrow rectangles of grass between th walk and the street.

He got a soup spoon from the kitchen and dug a smal grave for the bird and was about to put the bird in the grav when he spotted another bird lying on the walk.

This bird had an orange breast and a black-hooded hea and was larger than the first bird and even more beautiful.

When he picked it up, the bird's head lolled back and there was no doubt he was dead too, without a wound or an visible damage.

He set to digging a second grave.

Just then the neighborhood police officer, whose name wa Harlowe Judge, came strolling by on his first round of the day.

"What you got there, boy?" Officer Judge asked.

"A bird. Two dead birds."

"What you doin' with two dead birds, boy?"

"I found them."

"Where is it you found them, boy?"

"In the back and one here on the walk."

"What is it you fixin' to do with two dead birds, boy?" said Officer Harlowe Judge, who wore thick goggles whenever he made his rounds.

"Bury them."

"Where you goin' to bury your two dead birds, boy?"

"Here, in the grass."

"That's where you are wrong, boy," said Officer Harlowe Judge. "Diggin' holes in city property is against the law. Give me your birds, boy."

Willie gently picked up the small light brown and black bird and then the larger orange-breasted bird and handed them to Officer Harlowe Judge.

Officer Judge studied the birds, turning them over and squeezing them in his huge hands.

Then he said, "Birds dyin' all over, boy. Which does not cut any ice. Understand, boy?"

"No sir."

"What I am sayin', boy, is that I catch you diggin' again, there'll be Jesus to answer to all over this zoo."

Then Officer Harlowe Judge said, "You take right good care of yourself, old redhead, and keep it straight," and walked away.

At the corner he stopped and put the dead birds in a rubbish bin that stood there with strange words painted on its sides in great red letters.

Willie could not make out the words, but Carolyn said that the words were, A FREE WORLD IS A CLEAN WORLD.

* * *

Willie and Carolyn watched the television shows and visited the people of the tenement, and Willie found more dead birds. He asked his mother and Cool Dawn and Carolyn and Mrs. Sarto and Mrs. Morgan what was happening to the birds. No one knew.

The summer was very hot and Houston was a strange place to be, but it was full of wonders too, and Willie was happy.

Then one night there was the sound of an ambulance and a great commotion in the hallway, and Willie awoke and Cool Dawn and Willie's mother were at the doorway, and there were many people in the hallway and Mrs. Sarto was crying, and then they were carrying someone out on a stretcher, and

Willie saw the red stain on a blanket and the hook dangling down from the blanket, and Mrs. Sarto was screaming, "He tore his eyes out! Out of his own head!" The women made Willie go back to bed, and he lay there a long time thinking about what he had seen. The next morning Cool Dawn told him Mr. Pitt had died, and Willie thought of Mr. Pitt often after that and wondered what he knew, the secrets he possessed, and he asked his mother and Cool Dawn why he died, but neither of them knew, and neither did Carolyn know.

Willie's mother found a job in the Rib N Rum Room, a magic place illuminated by green lights that stood near a highway where cars went whizzing along at ninety miles per hour.

Every night at 6:30 she took a bus to the Rib N Rum Room, and she did not get back to the apartment until sometime in the night when Willie was asleep.

With her first paycheck Willie's mother bought him some clothes and told him it was time to get ready for school.

And then the summer ended and Willie was seven years old and Carolyn and he went to be enrolled in the Saint Martin de Porres School five blocks from the William McKinley Arms and life changed again.

Willie still thought very often of Sandstorm and of his father, but sometimes at night he would fall asleep and wake up suddenly and see the silver hook dangling from under the white shroud, and he wondered when they would tell him the secrets.

Chapter five

The utter mystery of school began, and Willie went into it like a frail vessel going into a storm at sea, and the vessel was buffeted by many waves and nearly sank.

In the first place, in all of the population of Saint Martin de Porres school, Willie knew no one but Carolyn Sage.

In the second place, Willie could not even speak with most

of the boys and girls of his class or understand things they said to one another.

Then there was the matter of his strange looks. The students would ask him what had happened to him and where he came from and how he came to be the way he was. Even when he understood the question, Willie did not know how to answer.

Finally, Willie did not know anything the school taught, even simple things everyone else seemed to know before school began.

After school started most of the students of Martin de Porres could read at least a few words. They learned to look at the letters printed in books and make words out of them. They came to know something about numbers. They could write words on the blackboard or call them out when Sister wrote them there. They could print their names at the top of their papers. They could follow the tele-lessons on the miniature TV screens beside their desks.

Willie could do none of these things. He turned his papers in blank, with nothing written on them. He watched the tele-lessons carefully but couldn't understand what the TV teachers said.

When one of the Sisters would call on Willie in class, he would smile uncertainly and say in Spanish, "I don't know."

He said this in a soft little singsong voice that made the other students laugh.

For three whole months the only thing Willie ever said in his first classroom was, "I don't know."

On the playground the other children would tease Willie. Some of them called him "I-don't-know."

One day on the playground, an older boy from another class picked Willie up and held him above his shoulders.

"What'll you give for a red-headed nigger?" he shouted.

The children standing nearby laughed.

"Mama," said Willie that night, "what is a nigger?"

Willie's mother stood still at the stove for a moment. Then she put her hand on Willie's red hair and kissed him on the cheek.

"Grandmother," said Willie, "what does nigger mean?"

"It is only a word," Cool Dawn replied.

"But still it has a meaning," said Willie.

Willie's mother said it was a stupid name people sometimes gave to black people.

"Why?" Willie asked.

Neither the mother nor the grandmother had the answer to that.

The next day Sister Juanita was telling the class about God. She said that God was all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good. She said that God loved all people and was the father of everybody in the world. She said that God loved the world so much that he sent his son into it so that he might die on the cross for the sins of man.

When the class was over, Sister Juanita came down to Willie's desk and spoke to him in Spanish.

"Willie, do you understand what I have been saying?"

"No Sister," said Willie.

"What don't you understand?"

"I don't understand anything," Willie answered.

"Then let's begin to learn," said Sister Juanita. "After all, you will have to learn your catechism so that you can make your First Communion."

"Yes Sister," Willie said.

"Each day I will help you to learn the English. That is your problem. You do not understand the words in the books and on the TV."

"Yes Sister."

"Each day we shall take a new word and learn it. Soon you will catch up with the others and know what all the others know."

Willie could hear the other children out on the playground.

"Let's begin right now," said Sister Juanita, pushing a button on her tele-teacher. "Look at this picture and let us see how many things we can name."

The picture on the screen showed a boy named Dick and a girl named Jane with a dog called Spot.

Sister Juanita pointed to Dick.

"We just saw this story today, so I know you know who this is."

Willie looked at the white-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy.

"Dick," said Willie.

"Very good," said Sister Juanita. She wrote Dick's name on the blackboard.

"What did we say Dick was doing?"

Willie could not remember.

"We just had the story an hour ago," Sister Juanita said.

Willie looked at the screen and tried to remember. He wanted to please Sister Juanita, who was trying to help him learn. Then it came to him that he knew something about Dick, though he had forgotten whether it had been mentioned in the story or not.

"Well," he said, "Dick is not a nigger."

* * *

After school one night Willie found Mrs. Sarto sitting in the chair in the hallway. She looked like she had been waiting for him all day.

"You would deceive an old lady?" Mrs. Sarto asked.

"No Mrs. Sarto."

"Then why do you change so often?"

"I—"

"You used to be my little Colombo. Look at what they have done—changed my own son!"

"Missus—"

"It is what they planned in advance. To deceive me. An old lady like me!" And Mrs. Sarto wept.

Willie tried to think of something to say to make the old lady feel better.

"I am not little Colombo," he said finally. "Just Willie."

This made the old lady weep even more.

Cool Dawn, hearing the crying, came into the hallway.

"Don't come near me, pagan!" Mrs. Sarto cried.

Cool Dawn took Willie up to their own flat.

"She said strange things," said Willie.

"She is a very old lady."

After supper Willie told Carolyn what had happened.

"She is a witch," said Carolyn.

But Willie could only wonder what secrets Mrs. Sarto knew and if they were the same ones Mr. Pitt had known, and that night the hook was like a light shining in his room and he heard the name Colombo whispering in the shadows.

Then he was saying to Sister Juanita, "Colombo is not a nigger."

And Sister Juanita smiled.

* * *

The weather turned cold and there was frost on the cement courtyard behind the William McKinley Arms tenement and the grass on the narrow strip of front lawn had died and turned brown and was flecked with frost.

In the chill mornings Willie got up to see the sun and think things over, and every morning there were dead birds in the courtyard and sometimes on the front walk.

"Ain't diggin' are you, boy?" Police Officer Harlowe Judge would ask.

"No sir."

"That's good, boy," Officer Harlowe Judge would say. "We don't want Jesus comin' down, do we?"

The birds were of all colors and sizes and species.

Carolyn said that a bird plague had come and all the birds were dying everywhere.

Chapter six

One afternoon while Willie stood on the steps of Saint Martin de Porres school during the recess period, a black classmate named Clio Russell came along and said, "You are the dumbest person in the school."

"I know," Willie said.

"What's worse, you let people call you a nigger."

"What am I supposed to do about it?" Willie asked.

"Fight," said Clio Russell.

"I don't know how," said Willie.

"I'll show you," said Clio. "Put up your hands—like this."

Clio clenched his fists and began to dance in a circle around Willie, looking for a moment like the fabled Sugar Ray Robinson who had been middleweight champion of the world back in the unremembered times.

Willie tried to imitate Clio. But with his face set in that sad smile that was natural to it, he did not look like a serious prizefighter.

"Hit me!" Clio cried.

"I can't do that!" Willie laughed.

"Nigger!" Clio shouted.

Willie only smiled.

Suddenly, flicking out his black fist like a snake striking at a bird, Clio struck and Willie went down.

"Why did you do *that*?" Willie asked, rubbing his jaw, more amazed than angry.

"I'm teaching you how to fight. Are you going to stand there and let someone call you a nigger?"

Willie got back on his feet. His face hurt.

"Come on and hit," Clio pleaded.

Willie doubled up his fists and swung at Clio. But Clio blocked the punch with his left arm and a second later threw a right cross which landed on Willie's unprotected jaw. Willie hit the asphalt again.

"You're not defending," Clio told him.

"I don't know if I want to learn fighting," Willie said.

This time he got up more slowly. His jaw throbbed.

"You have to fight," Clio said. "You can't go around letting people call you a nigger."

"Why not?" Willie asked.

Clio said, "You are not only the dumbest person in this school, you are the dumbest person in the city of Houston."

Willie was still rubbing his jaw, which was beginning to swell.

"I'm going to have to teach you extra," said Clio. "You are

a hard case, maybe the worst I have ever seen."

Willie nodded.

"Meet me here after school," Clio said. He looked at Willie's jaw. "I didn't mean to hit that hard."

"It's all right," Willie said. Clio was the first boy at Saint Martin de Porres school to take an interest in him, and though his jaw hurt he was glad to have someone to talk to.

After school Willie and Clio went over to the tenement where Clio's family lived, a big gray building that looked like a silo that farmers used to build to store their surplus grain.

"We'll go down to the clubhouse," said Clio.

"What is the club?" Willie asked.

"The Apaches," said Clio. "It's only for black kids, and if you ever break the secret, you'll wish you had never been born."

"What secret?" said Willie.

"You'll find out when you get to be a member, *if* you get asked to be a member."

The clubroom was a place of cement walls and cement floors and many pipes running overhead. On the walls the members of the club had put up colored posters and sayings which Willie did not understand.

The club had a table, some folding chairs and two or three long benches which looked like they had once been in a church.

Some older boys were sitting on the benches smoking. One of the boys was George, Clio's older brother.

"What's that?" George asked Clio, pointing to Willie.

"A new kid in school."

"Are you black?" George asked.

"Partly," said Willie.

"His mother or somebody is a Mex," said Clio.

"Who is his father—Santa Claus?" George asked.

The other boys laughed. Willie, not understanding what George had said, laughed too.

"I'm teaching him how to fight," said Clio.

"He looks like he'll need it," said George.

Clio and Willie went back into a small room where a great

steel generator roared under a single very bright light. A dead rat lay in the center of this room. Clio tossed the rat into the corner.

"Now let's try to get down to the fundamentals," said Clio. And so the second fighting lesson began.

It went on for almost an hour. Clio showed Willie how to hold his left out and keep his right in, guarding his face. He showed him how to jab and counterpunch. He showed him how to move on his feet.

Willie was not a fast learner. He would hold his left out so far that Clio just pushed it aside. When Willie tried to bring his right in, he would move his body so far in advance of the punch that Clio said he could write a letter and mail it before the punch landed home.

Twice, three times, four times Clio knocked Willie down, but once Willie luckily landed a hard right that shook Clio and sent him against the wall.

"You're beginning to catch on," said Clio.

Without any warning he slapped Willie across the face with his open hand.

"Nigger!" he shouted.

Forgetting what Clio had just told him about leading with his left, Willie suddenly shot his right fist across Clio's jaw and Clio went down.

At that moment George and the other boys came into the generator room looking for something.

"Who's giving the lessons here?" said George.

Willie was helping Clio to his feet.

"See the way he threw that?" Clio crowed, happy at the progress Willie had made. "Can we make him a member, George?"

"He's too little," George said.

"He's as big as I am," said Clio.

George looked at Willie.

"You want to be an Apache?"

"I guess so," Willie replied. "What is an Apache?"

George's face became very serious and tense.

"An Apache," he said slowly and thoughtfully, "is some-

one who sticks up for black people. An Apache will never let a black person down or ever do anything to hurt a black person. At the same time an Apache will never do anything to help a white person. Apaches are united against white people." Here George faltered in his speech. He seemed to be trying to remember how it went.

"Anyway," he said, "that's all I can tell you now. After you become a member you can learn some of the secret rules we have."

Willie didn't know what to say.

Clio said, "He'll be a good member."

"Do you want to be a member?" George asked.

Willie just smiled.

"What does he have to do?" Clio asked.

"He has to go across the street," George said, looking at Willie but talking to Clio, "and go into that white man's store and lift a package of Tareyton filter-tip cigarettes and bring them back here to the clubroom."

"Simple," said Clio. "Come on, Willie."

But Willie stood as before, smiling.

"It's stealing," he said.

The other boys laughed.

"So?" said George.

"You can't steal," said Willie. His father had told him long ago that was one thing you couldn't do.

"The white man has always stolen from the black man," George said. "Even from Mexicans."

Willie thought this over. Finally he said, "It's still stealing."

George shrugged his shoulders.

Clio took Willie into the corner where the dead rat lay.

"It's just a pack of cigarettes," he said. "I'll help you."

George overheard this.

"He has to do it himself," he said.

"He's never even been in the store before," said Clio. "Come on, Willie."

"You can go with him, but he has to make the lift himself," George said.

So Willie and Clio crossed the street to Sprague's Drugstore. Inside, Mr. Sprague was busy with a customer. Willie walked up to the shelf where the cigarettes were neatly stacked. He had never seen so many different kinds of cigarettes.

"Go on," Clio whispered. He pointed to the Tareyton filters.

Willie looked at the stack of Tareytons with the red strip at the bottom of each pack and a little seal that made the cigarettes very official-looking. He knew he could slip one pack out easily. Still he stood there, just looking at the red strips and the little seals. Then he turned to Clio.

"It's no use," he said. "I can't do it."

Clio then reached for the bottom of the stack, but at that moment Mr. Sprague came out from behind the counter.

"You boys looking for something to buy?"

"No," said Clio.

"Then get out of here," Mr. Sprague said. Without a doubt he meant it.

Out on the street Clio said, "You had all the time in the world—a day and a half. Why didn't you do it?"

"I don't know," said Willie.

In the clubhouse George said, "I'll take the smoking tobacco."

"There isn't any," Clio said. "Sprague was on us like a hawk."

"I couldn't do it anyway," Willie said.

George turned around and looked at Willie with anger showing all over him.

"You must be a chicken," said George. "Chick-chick-chick."

"I can't steal," said Willie.

"You can't be an Apache then," George told him.

Clio said, "We can give him another chance."

"I don't want any chicken members in this club. Especially somebody whose mother is a . . . ." Here George used a word that Willie had heard before, and though he did not really know what it meant, he knew it was something bad.

He went up to George, who was a foot taller than he, and hit him as hard as he could in the stomach.

George fell back a little and Willie jumped on top of him. He got in one good punch before George pushed him off.

Then George clipped Willie twice behind the ear and went to work on his face. Willie started to bleed badly.

When the fight ended, Willie was thoroughly beaten up.

Clio helped him wash up and then walked him home.

"Why are you so dumb?" he asked Willie. "He is the toughest kid in this whole neighborhood."

"He shouldn't have called my mother that name," Willie said through his puffed lips.

"You are the dumbest kid anywhere," said Clio. "Man, you're hopeless."

Carolyn, skipping rope in front of the tenement, saw Willie when he came home.

"Fighting," she said. "That's brilliant."

"What do you know?"

"Look at your eye. It's all puffed up. Why do you do such a stupid thing?"

"Go back to your rope, little mama," Willie said, acting disgusted, but he was happy that Carolyn cared that his eye was puffed up.

After supper Willie and Carolyn watched a television program about a cowboy policeman of the unremembered times who was kind and good, except to men who did evil things. These men he killed. The cowboy did not want to kill them, but in every program it turned out that he had to kill them, usually by shooting them or sometimes by beating them up and taking them someplace where they would be hanged.

Willie always watched this program most attentively. He did not understand it but he was fascinated by it.

On this particular program the cowboy had been badgered into a fight by a man who had called him a yellow-bellied horse thief.

Regretfully, the cowboy drew out his gun, waiting a second or two for the badgerer to draw his gun first. Then he shot

the man between the eyes.

"It had to be done," a doctor friend assured the cowboy.

"I wish there were a better way," said the cowboy.

"It had to be done," the doctor said once more.

When the commercial came on, Willie said, "Why did it have to be done?"

"It's just a program," said Carolyn.

Carolyn's father, whom the people in the neighborhood called Flexer, said, "It's kill or be killed, boy." He cuffed Willie lightly on his red head.

Then, seeing Willie's swollen eye, he said, "And today it looks like it was be killed for you."

Willie went to bed that night thinking of fighting and killing and trying to understand it. He thought about it a very long time and was still thinking about it when he heard his mother come in.

"Twelve dollars. For that they get to tear your dress up."

"We should move."

"Where? Paris, France? We haven't got enough to get back to Sandstorm. How's the boy?"

"Fighting today."

"Oh God, why did we come?"

As he lay listening to them talking, he wished his mother did not sound so sad, and he wished he could understand things that happened that others seemed to understand and take for granted but to him had no purpose for happening, except that they happened and people did not seem to think anything about them.

His eye hurt, but it had been a good day because he had met Clio.

"What's the use?" his mother said in the next room.

"He is the use," Cool Dawn replied.

They were still talking when he fell asleep.

Chapter seven

When the news of the fight between Willie and the chief of the Apaches spread through the neighborhood and school, Willie became famous. And suddenly everybody wanted to be his friend.

Granted he was dumb, perhaps the dumbest boy in Saint Martin de Porres school, but still he had courage, as Clio kept telling everyone he knew.

And he was so good-natured and happy that the students could not help liking him—even though he looked funny with his red hair and slanty eyes and black-red-brown-gold skin, and even though he was such a bad student as to be a laughingstock.

Some of the students felt sorry for Willie.

Others were glad to have him in school because when grades were averaged in class, Willie could always be counted on to lower the average by several points.

With Willie at Saint Martin de Porres, the usual F students were D students. Willie was absorbing the F's of practically everybody in the class.

There was another thing that made Willie popular.

He turned out to be excellent at games.

Even though he was frail and still quite short, he was fast and surprisingly strong in football.

He could shoot the basketball well and could dribble the ball so fast that it made a solid blur of tan between his hand and the court.

But it was baseball where he really shone.

The first day he picked up a baseball and tossed it to Clio, he felt something wonderful happen. He could throw hard—harder than some boys in the sixth grade.

In the afternoon after school, the boys would choose up sides and play ball. And Willie, young as he was, would always be one of the first boys chosen because he could pitch, hit and field.

Sometimes older boys would come by, sometimes even

grown men, and they would say: "That funny-looking red-haired kid—where did he come from? Look at him throw."

In the classroom, though, it was a no-hit game with the teachers pitching and Willie batting.

Willie was technically held back in the first grade and technically held back in the second. (Only students who were classified educable by the school district's central computer were really and truly held back to repeat failed grades. Computer-certified noneducables, such as Willie, were technically advanced through all eight grades, on the grounds that repeating grades would produce no significant educational benefits and only cause administrative confusion).

Carolyn and Clio and many of Willie's other friends were also technical holdbacks, but Willie was in a class of failure all by himself. Sister Assumption, the oldest of the Sisters at Saint Martin de Porres and the one who kept the records, said that he was the worst student in the history of the school.

Willie was even held back from his First Communion. While all the other second graders had their golden day of First Communion—even though it was quite an ordinary day for many—Willie was held back, and his mother and Cool Dawn were very sad about it.

The Sister of the second grade, Sister Gabriela, said that Willie did not know his catechism well enough to go to Communion.

She sent a note home to Willie's mother, and in the note she said that if she let Willie receive Communion, her conscience would bother her because she was responsible for preparing the children for Communion and Willie didn't know the first thing about it.

"You are not trying hard enough," said Willie's mother, who had been coaching him in catechism for two years.

"I try," said Willie. "But it is no use."

"What is it you do not understand? Do you not believe Jesus the Lord is in the bread and wine?"

"I believe that, mama."

"Then what do you not understand?"

"Why God killed Jesus."

So Willie and his mother went to see Sister Gabriela to arrange for private lessons, even though there had been private lessons before.

Willie sat in a little room of the convent while his mother and Sister Gabriela talked in the hallway.

"He is a kind, sweet boy but he is the slowest learner I have ever seen," said Sister Gabriela softly but still loud enough for Willie to hear.

"Still he knows enough to make his Communion, Sister."

"He is all mixed up with his answers. When I ask him to give the answer, he smiles as if he were dreaming of something far away."

"But he has been held back twice now," said his mother. "His best friend, Clio, is making his First Communion."

"Clio is prepared."

"All the others who were held back last year?"

"They are prepared," Sister said gently. "They have learned the answers."

"Surely he knows enough of the answers," Willie's mother said.

"He does not even know who God is," said Sister Gabriela. "All the other children know who God is. How can he receive Communion when he does not even know such a simple thing as that?"

To prove her point, Sister Gabriela took Willie's mother by the arm, and they walked into the little room where Willie was sitting looking at a painting of the Agony of the Lord in the Garden.

"Willie," said Sister Gabriela, "who is God?"

Willie smiled as he always did when he did not know the answer.

"Willie," said Sister Gabriela, "do you remember what it said in the catechism?"

"No Sister," said Willie.

"Willie, you know the answer," his mother said encouragingly.

Willie shifted a little in the big chair. He looked at the picture of the Lord in the garden.

"He is the one who made his son die," said Willie.

Sister Gabriela turned to Willie's mother as if to say, I told you so.

Willie's mother bent down to her son and took his hands into her hands.

"Willie," she said, "say the Lord's Prayer."

Willie said the Lord's Prayer slowly and perfectly without missing a word.

Willie's mother turned to the Sister.

"There, you see, he does know."

"But that is only the Lord's Prayer," said Sister Gabriela. "That is not the catechism."

Willie's mother again turned to her son.

"Willie, who is Jesus?"

"The one who died on the cross."

"And why did he die on the cross?"

"Because his father made him."

"But why?" said Sister Gabriela.

"I don't know, Sister," said Willie.

"To atone for the sins of man," Sister Gabriela said. "Surely you can remember how often we went over that in class."

"I remember," Willie said, "but I do not understand." He squirmed in his chair, smiling.

"You don't have to understand, Willie," said Sister Gabriela, "you only have to believe."

What Willie said then shocked both the Sister and his mother.

"I do not believe it then," he said.

The next day Willie was sent to see Father Simpson, who sometimes taught religion to the older boys and girls.

"Well now," said Father Simpson, "what is this about not believing God sent his son into the world to atone for the sins of man?"

Willie smiled.

Father Simpson opened his catechism. "It is right here in

the catechism. Don't you believe in the catechism?"

Willie said, "I am a slow learner." He had heard Sister Gabriela use this expression the day before.

Father Simpson put his hand on Willie's shoulder.

"Ah well, my boy, that is all right. There are many slow learners in the world. Still, you can believe?"

"Yes," Willie said.

"But what is it you do not believe in the catechism?"

"About God killing his son."

"But God did not kill his son. Men killed Jesus. Men and their sins."

"But he could have stopped it," said Willie.

"That would have spoiled everything," the priest said, looking a little startled. "If he had stopped it, then the gates of heaven would have remained closed."

Willie smiled.

"You remember the story of Adam and Eve?"

Willie nodded.

"And how they sinned in the Garden of Eden?"

"Yes."

"Their sin was an infinite one—that is, a very large one. It was so big they couldn't make up for it. So God had pity on men. He sent his son, who was God, into the world to make up for it."

Willie looked blank.

"What is it you do not understand?" the priest asked, seeing the blank look.

"Why God did not take pity on Jesus."

"Jesus didn't want pity," the priest said quickly. "If you had learned your catechism you would know that."

"He wanted a drink on the cross."

"Ah," said the priest. "I see you remember your Scripture. But when the Lord said 'I thirst,' he wasn't talking about the way you and I thirst. He was thirsting for the souls of men."

The priest stopped for a moment. He bit his lip and looked at Willie in a curious way. There was something sad about his gaze.

"What then, my boy?"

"Why did not God give him the souls of men and a drink, too?"

"He gave him the souls of men, my son. When Jesus rose from the dead, he won the souls of all men."

"Still he did not get the drink."

"He was dying."

"But his father could have given him a drink."

The priest picked up the catechism.

"My son, you must learn what is in this little book. What you are saying has nothing to do with Holy Communion. Don't you want to receive our Lord in Communion? Do you want to wait another year?"

Willie said he did not want to wait.

"Then you must learn your catechism," Father Simpson said. "That is the rule."

When Willie went home, his mother and Cool Dawn were talking in the living room.

"It is the English. He does not understand what is told him," said Willie's mother.

"It is what they teach," Cool Dawn said.

Willie came in and kissed them both. He told them what had happened at Father Simpson's.

"Oh Willie, can't you just say what is in the book?" his mother said. She was almost crying, and it grieved Willie to see her this way.

He went down to the courtyard to talk with Carolyn.

She was sketching the back of the William McKinley Arms tenement on a square sheet of brown paper.

"It's good, Carolyn. It looks just like it."

"You going to make Communion?"

"No."

"Why are you so stubborn?"

"I don't understand it."

Her hair was thicker all the time now and she was taller, and he looked at the way her face set itself as she sketched.

"Nobody else understands it. Why don't you just say what they want?"

Her upturned nose made him smile.

He wanted to touch her hair—to put his hand on her hair.

"What good does it do to be so stubborn?"

She looked up at him, frowning. When she frowned, her overturned V eyebrows made her look pretty, he thought.

"You draw good, Carolyn."

"Why don't you just give the answers like everybody else? You act dumb but you're not."

When he went back up the stairs, Mrs. Sarto called out to him, "Colombo, I forgive you. Pray the rosary with me."

So he prayed the rosary with Mrs. Sarto until the third Sorrowful Mystery when Mrs. Sarto said he had tricked her once again. She threatened to call the police. Willie went back to the flat.

That night after his mother went off to work in the Rib N Rum Room, Cool Dawn told Willie a story. They sat together on the little sofa Willie's mother had bought at the Salvation Army store and looked down on the darkening city of Houston.

Across the street from their tenement building, there was a magic flashing sign, made up of red and blue and white lights, that fascinated Willie.

The sign was brand new. It had been put up outside a tavern that had been opened the day before in a building where the welfare office had once operated.

The lights would pop on in sequence, spelling out two words Willie could not understand. The lights would begin at the top of the long vertical sign and go downward until at the very end they would explode in a special light that looked like a starburst.

The words were NAGASAKI ZERO!

Willie never forgot the story Cool Dawn told him that night. And whenever he remembered it, he would think of the popping red, white and blue lights and the mysterious word Nagasaki.

Chapter eight, Cool Dawn's story

Once upon a time the Great Spirit said, "Now men have everything they want—trees, beautiful flowers, animals, rocks, waterfalls, mountains. Still they are unhappy. They do not love. They do not share with one another. So I will show them how to love."

Then the Great Spirit made a special man—a beautiful noble man—and sent him into the world with a great secret. No one knew what this secret meant, not even the special man who carried it in his heart.

Now, when the special man came into the world, there was great suffering everywhere.

The babies did not have enough food.

The tribes were at war.

A few people had cattle, fine harvests of great, delicious fruit, but most people were starving. Disease and pestilence were everywhere.

The man with the secret looked upon the world and said, "Why should men fight one another? Are not all men brothers? The village with cattle and crops should share with the village that has none. There is enough food in the land for each child."

The people had never heard this teaching before. They found it strange, even insane.

The man with the secret himself did not know why he felt as he did.

One day there was a great contest among the tribes. The men were jumping from high cliffs into a river that ran at the base of the great mountain.

The contest would determine who could jump from the highest point of the mountain and still survive. The brave man who could leap from the highest place would be the king of the nation for one year.

All day the people watched as the braves jumped from the cliffs. Many men died as they leaped from the mountain. There were jagged rocks sticking out from the side of the

mountain. There were boulders in the river. The higher one climbed, the harder it was to avoid hitting the rocks on the mountain and the great stones in the river.

At sunset the contest was nearly over. One brave had jumped from a place halfway up the mountain. Cut and bruised, he was yet alive. It appeared that this man would be king of the nation.

Then the man with the secret climbed to the top of the mountain. At first, no one noticed him standing there. He was a dot on the sky just at the place where the mountain went into the clouds.

Then someone in the crowd saw the man standing at the edge of a stone platform that jutted out from the very tip of the mountain.

No man had ever jumped from that place—no man had ever even climbed so high.

For a moment the man stood there and stretched out his arms. The people gasped. Many jeered and laughed. It was certain that this man would die.

But as the man stood there, glinting in the sun, a hush came over the people.

The man lifted up his arms in a strange way, then stepped forward and dived out into the air.

He seemed to hang there for a moment in the sun, like an eagle with its wings spread against the sky.

The people gasped at the wonderful sight.

Then swiftly the man fell down, down, down—diving like an arrow into the deepest part of the river.

In a moment he pushed up through the waves and swam to shore. He was not cut or bruised in any way.

The people were amazed. They fell upon their knees and immediately proclaimed this man their king.

Because of the way he soared through the sky, they gave him the name of Eagle King; some called him simply the Eagle.

The Eagle assembled all the people that night. He told them what he had earlier told the people of his native village. He told them that though he was their king, there was

another king still mightier who ruled all things, who ruled the world and the sun and the stars, who kept watch over the seasons, who caused the plants to grow.

"This great king," said the Eagle, "loves all the people of earth as a father loves his sons, as a mother loves her daughters.

"I speak of the Great Spirit," the Eagle told his people, "and it is he who is your true king, not the wind which some of you now worship, not the moon which others of you worship. The Great Spirit is above all the things we have worshipped all these years.

"I am glad to be your ruler, to look after the things a man can look after, but remember, it is the Great Spirit who is the real king, not I."

The people had never heard such talk from a man.

"What does the Great Spirit ask of us?" the people asked. "Shall we burn the oxen to him?"

"No," said the Eagle. "The Great Spirit doesn't care anything about burning oxen. What the Great Spirit wants is something that our tribes do not do very well. He wants us to love one another."

The Eagle paused just a moment here, a little surprised at his own words. Sometimes he said things that he really didn't know out of his own thoughts. He would say them because he felt he had to say them—only later figuring out what they meant.

Now came one of those moments. Before he really knew what he was saying, some instinct in the Eagle's heart caused him to say these words: "The Great Spirit wants us to love not just the members of our own tribe, but members of all tribes. He wants us to love even our enemies just as he loves all of us."

When the Eagle said this, the people were even more amazed, and the warriors of the tribe were the most amazed of all. Some of them were angry. They had spent so many years fighting and killing that they did not know any other occupation.

"How does a warrior love his enemy?" the general of the

tribal warriors asked.

"By going to the enemy and extending the hand of pea the Eagle answered. "We must stop all wars at once, we n feed the children of the enemies and all the people who hungry, and we must enter into peace with all the tribe earth."

The warriors scoffed at this. They were too proud to g an enemy and make peace.

Then the father of the tribe, a man who was one hunc years old and who had once been king himself, aske speak.

This old man was very feeble. He had to be carried younger men to the stone platform where the new k stood.

"This man," the old man said in his cracking voice, "is king. He has won the trial by his great dive into the river our ancient custom we must follow him and obey his la

Then with great effort the old man knelt at the E King's feet and kissed them.

The Eagle raised the old man up.

"Thank you, old father," he said. "But do not kneel at feet. One must kneel only for the Great Spirit."

"It is our custom," said the old king.

"But now we have a new custom: one worships the G Spirit and one loves all other men."

There was still much bickering among the people. T had never heard a man speak like this before. Besides, people were anxious to begin their feast, for it was the cus that on the night of the trial, the people had the greatest f of the year.

The Eagle himself did not understand the things he been saying. He only knew that his heart had asked hin say them.

"The feast will begin now," he said. "At the end of feast I myself will show you how to love an enemy."

The people cheered and ran wildly for the great ta laden with food and for the casks of wine that had been m ready for the feast.

At that moment the Eagle cried out again, surprising himself once more and once more acting only on the secret instinct of his heart.

"Wait!" he shouted. "By the custom of the tribe, I have the right to add one law which shall be eternal among our people."

The people knew this to be true. Each king had the right to set down one particular law that would bind the people forever. But this was the first king ever to make the new law the very first night of his reign.

"What is the law, great and wonderful king?" the general of the army shouted sarcastically. Already he had it in for the new king.

"It is this," said the Eagle. "All laws are unlawful but one, that we love one another."

At this the tribe jeered and laughed at the king. The warriors shouted angrily, "He's crazy!"

The teacher of the tribe stood up and said, "This man would destroy all the laws we have ever had. No one, not even the king, can do that."

The people shouted in agreement with the teacher.

They were angry now, excited and confused.

The Eagle knew he had tried to do the impossible, and he didn't know what he should do to quiet the people down. For just a second he doubted the secret in his heart.

Down he came from the stone platform and into the center of the crowd, his heart beating wildly. He sensed the danger and excitement in the air.

He stumbled on a cask of wine.

He stared at the keg and waited for his heart to tell him what to do.

Without a word he seized an ax that was lying on the ground and struck open the cask of wine.

He seized one of the copper goblets that had been set on the royal table and filled it with wine.

Then he turned to the people and raised the goblet as if to make a toast.

"You are right," he said. "My law was poorly thought out.

Then this shall be the law—The Law of the Eagle. Each year at this feast, from now until forever, the new king must take a goblet of wine as I am doing now. He shall hold it high above the people so that all can see. Then he must say these words: *We must try to love each other.* The people then must repeat these words after him. Then all shall drink from the cup."

The people clapped and shouted, and many laughed. This was the easiest law any king had ever passed—a mere gesture. All other kings had passed hard laws, asking for more taxes, grains, and so forth. This king, they thought, was a weak king to pass such an easy law.

The Eagle said, "I shall be the first to observe the new law and you shall join me. Teacher, write the law in the Book of the Tribe."

Then the Eagle solemnly held up the goblet full of wine. Slowly he said the words, *We must try to love each other.*

The people, half of them laughing, repeated the words after him.

Then all shared the cup.

Putting the whole thing out of their minds, the people began their feast which would last for three days and three nights.

At this point in the story, there was the sound of a siren in the street, and suddenly a police car, tires squealing, jerked to a stop in front of the Nagasaki Zero.

"What is it, grandmother?"

Cool Dawn said nothing.

Now men came running out of the tavern into the glare of the revolving light on top of the police car. There was shouting and scuffling. Men and women swarmed about the door of the Nagasaki Zero, milling under the popping red, white and blue lights.

The whirling light on the top of the police car flashed red into the room where Cool Dawn and Willie sat watching.

Another police car pulled up, its siren screaming.

There was more shouting. Officer Harlowe Judge, revolver in hand, came out of this second car and dashed into the

Nagasaki Zero.

Now two policemen dragged a black man from inside the Nagasaki and forced him into their car. Officer Judge's gun gleamed in the red light.

It was then that Willie spotted Clio on the edge of the crowd.

"Clio!" he shouted through the open window.

Clio waved back. There was something worried about the way he waved.

"Come on up, Clio," Willie shouted.

So Clio joined Willie and Cool Dawn in the living room of the apartment.

"What happened?" Willie asked.

"They got papa," said Clio. "They put him in jail."

Clio started to cry.

"It's okay," said Willie, feeling sorry for his friend. "It'll turn out okay, Clio," he said, though he was as frightened as Clio.

Cool Dawn got some cookies and gave them to Clio and Willie.

Willie said, "My grandmother is telling a story about an Indian King. Tell the rest of it, will you grandmother?"

Cool Dawn retold the first part of the story for Clio's benefit. He listened in a dreamy way. Willie knew he was thinking about his father.

Now the Nagasaki Zero was quiet. The people had gone home. But the lights were flashing as before, and the boys stared at the lights as Cool Dawn continued her story.

Willie listened so closely he could see the Eagle King and the people of long ago.

But with another part of his mind, he thought of his friend sitting next to him.

He tried to think of something to say that would cheer him up.

He looked down at the street. There was no one there but Officer Harlowe Judge. Under the red, white and blue lights he was fondling his gun and peering up at the dark Texas sky.

Chapter nine, Cool Dawn's story, continued

The last night of the great feast, the Eagle King went to the bank of the river. He prayed many hours to the Great Spirit, then fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning he awoke to find his warriors standing around him in a circle.

The general of the army came forward and spoke most seriously and urgently.

"We believe we should attack the enemy who has just encamped across the river. His warriors are still sleeping, and we shall take them by surprise."

"Go get one hundred bushels of grain, one hundred loaves of bread and ten casks of the new wine," the Eagle King said.

Messengers brought these things to the king.

"What do you plan to do?" asked the general of the army.

"This is the day I shall make peace with the enemy," replied the Eagle.

Then, taking a bow from one of the warriors, he sent a white-feathered arrow flying across the river into the camp-site of the enemy.

Scouts were awakened. When they saw the arrow, they looked out across the river. On the opposite shore the Eagle King stood in his chieftain's robes.

Alone and unarmed the Eagle paddled his canoe across the river, disembarked and walked into the camp of the enemy.

"It is a trick," said the enemy warriors. "Let us kill their chief."

But the enemy king spoke out.

"Bring the king to me," he said. "We shall see what he wants."

The Eagle walked up to the enemy king. He held out his hand in friendship and said, "Brother King, I come to you in gentle peace. Let us end our fighting, which has brought us nothing but suffering and hardship. The children of both our

tribes are hungry. The women weep for their dead husbands. Let us declare a new day of friendship between our people."

"How do I know you are telling the truth?" asked the enemy king.

Then the Eagle sent for the grain, the bread and the wine and set it before the enemy warriors.

It was food enough for many days.

"I give you this as a sign of peace," said the Eagle. "And now I must return to my people."

As the Eagle turned to go, a warrior thrust a spear against his chest and shouted, "This is a trick!"

The enemy king looked at the king curiously. He knew that the Eagle was unarmed and that it had taken great courage to come into the camp alone and unprotected. Then the enemy king spoke.

"Have the chieftain eat a piece of the bread and drink some of the wine and let him chew some of the grain he has brought," he said. "Then we shall see if the food is poisoned."

The Eagle ate and drank as the enemy king commanded.

"You see," said the Eagle, "the food is perfectly good."

Many of the warriors still insisted that the Eagle was deceiving them.

"Release him," said the enemy chief. "After all, we see his warriors standing idly on the opposite shore. They are not waging attack."

"One more thing remains to be done before we are at peace," said the Eagle. "Release to me the four warriors of our tribe you are holding as prisoners."

"Now it is clear why he has come," said the enemy general. "It is a trick after all."

"The warriors are but two young boys and two wounded men," said the enemy king. "They are of no use to anyone."

"Then you can't refuse to release them," said the Eagle.

The enemy chief said, "I cannot release them without the vote of the war council, and I know the members of the council well enough to assure you that they will not release them."

Then the Eagle, listening to something that was whispered in his heart, said, "Let the four men go and keep me in their stead."

This astonished the enemy chief and all his warriors.

"He is crazy," said the general of the army.

"Nevertheless," said the chief, "do as he says."

So the four men were released from the wooden cages where they had been imprisoned and were free to return to their tribe in the Eagle King's canoe.

As they filed past him on their way to the river, the Eagle King embraced each man and said, "Remember, you must try to love other people as your brothers and sisters."

These four men who had been condemned to die would never forget what the Eagle said.

When they returned to their own camp, the warriors wanted to know why the Eagle had remained with the enemy.

"He offered to take our place as a prisoner of war," they told them.

"He is a fool," said the general of the army.

That night, the enemy king went to the wooden cage where the Eagle was held prisoner.

"Why have you done this?" he asked.

Then the Eagle told the enemy king about the Great Spirit. He said that all the tribes of the world were in truth one great family, that all the people of earth were brothers and sisters and that through love they could learn to be happy together.

The enemy king had never heard such things before. That night he slept uneasily.

The next morning, the enemy scouts found ten bushels of golden apples sitting on the shore, a gift from the Eagle's tribe.

"This is his ransom," said one of the scouts, taking one of the apples. He bit into the golden fruit and immediately fell dead.

When the enemy king heard of this, he was furious.

"You lie to me," he shouted to the Eagle in his cage. "You

send my people poisoned fruit."

"My people have forgotten what I told them," the Eagle said sadly.

"He must die for this," said the general of the enemy tribe.

The king said, "I must consider this carefully." Then he went to his tent where he spent the day trying to decide what to do.

The king remembered all that the Eagle had told him the night before. He remembered the sincerity of his manner, the straightforward and simple way he said things. He knew in his heart that the Eagle had had nothing to do with the poisoned apples.

That night the king spoke to all his tribe.

"The Eagle himself is innocent. It is his people who have lied. They must make good for the suffering they have caused. Send word to them that they must give to our tribe 500 bushels of grain, 50 horses and 50 casks of wine. We will then release their king, and we shall have peace between our peoples."

Word was sent to the tribe of the Eagle, but the warriors refused to send the grain, the horses and the wine.

The enemy king then said, "Very well. Then tell them to send a healthy colt in exchange for the scout whom they poisoned."

This demand, too, was rejected.

The enemy king said, "Send this message. If by sunset tomorrow, the enemy does not give us at least one bushel of grain and one cask of wine, then the Eagle will be hurled from the top of the mountain into the river."

All that night and through the next day, the enemy king waited for the grain and the wine. He did not want to kill the Eagle, knowing him to be innocent. But he had given his royal command before the tribe, and now he could not go back on it without disgracing himself before the people.

He could not understand why the Eagle's tribe did not try to save him.

Late in the afternoon he went to the wooden cage.

"Your people do not love you," the king said.

"They have not yet learned how to love," said the Eagle.

"I shall have to give the order to kill you if the gifts do not come soon."

"I understand," said the Eagle.

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes."

The king said, "It is not right that you should die."

"Perhaps it will be necessary," said the Eagle.

An hour later, with the sun lowering little by little in the west, the enemy king, moved by pity for the first time in his life, sent the two guards away, took a knife, and cut the rope that held the door of the Eagle's cage.

"I shall speak to the guards for a while," said the king. "We shall walk over into that grove of trees. Then you can escape."

"You have a merciful heart," said the Eagle.

The king called the two guards and led them into the grove.

The Eagle looked at the door of his cage. He broke into a sweat and began to weep.

He wanted to escape and save his life. Yet the secret in his heart told him to stay.

"Why must I die?" he asked himself.

He cried to the Great Spirit, "You sent me to teach love and I have tried and failed. I can do no more. Am I not justified in escaping?"

His heart told him nothing at first. Then slowly these words came to him: *Stay here and destroy the cage for others.*

When the king and the guards returned, they found the Eagle still in his cage, weeping.

"Look!" said one of the guards. "He has cut the rope!"

"Then why is he still here?" the other guard asked.

The king drew near the cage.

"Why?" he whispered.

"I do not know the answer myself," the Eagle said. "Only the Great Spirit knows."

"I must give the order now. The sun is set in the western sky."

"I forgive you," said the Eagle.

The enemy king felt his heart turn at the sight of the Eagle as the guards led him away.

"Why did you not escape?" the guards asked.

"We must learn to love," the Eagle said.

He was in a daze.

"Don't you know that you must die?" the guards asked.

"The Great Spirit will protect me even in death," said the Eagle.

"Fear has made him crazy," said one of the guards.

Then the Eagle was led to the top of the mountain that towered over the river, just opposite the mountain from which he had made the great leap that made him king.

On both sides of the river, the people of the warring tribes stood watching.

At the top of the mountain, the Eagle was bound hand and foot by two braves. There was no hope now of escaping death.

When the sun touched the rim of the horizon in the west, the braves cast the Eagle off the cliff.

Down, down, down he fell, heavy as a stone.

His body fell upon the hardest rocks in the river, then slipped beneath the waves.

Some of the people on both sides of the river cheered as the body fell upon the rocks.

Some gasped in horror.

A few wept: the four prisoners, the enemy king, one of the guards who had thrown the Eagle from the cliff, and a handful of other persons of both tribes who had seen the goodness and innocence of the Eagle.

After a few minutes the people withdrew from the banks of the river.

It was just then that the strange thing occurred. (Cool Dawn now spoke more slowly; Willie and Clio leaned forward.)

In the water where the Eagle fell, there was a whirling and purling among the rocks. The people went back to see what this commotion was.

Suddenly, out of the water, a great golden bird appeared. A gigantic, marvelous creature no man had seen before, wit great wings and flashing dark eyes.

For a few seconds he seemed content to ride on the wave of the river, flapping his huge wings in the last rays of th sun.

Then slowly he lifted himself above the water, and slowl flew up out of the steep canyon above the upturned faces c the people.

Swiftly, more swiftly still, he flew straight into the pale a until he disappeared into the blue space.

"The Eagle King!" said Willie in a dreamy, yet excite voice.

"According to some," said Cool Dawn. "On the othe hand, many of the people who were there said they sa nothing."

"Who saw the bird?" Clio asked.

"Only the four prisoners, the enemy king, the one guar and the few tribespeople who had thought the Eagle in nocent."

Cool Dawn paused. She put one hand on Willie's red ha and the other on Clio's shoulder.

"So you like the story I have told you?" she asked.

"It's a wonderful story," said Willie.

Clio only nodded. He was looking at the red, white an blue sign of the Nagasaki Zero.

"Is there more?" Willie asked.

"A little," said Cool Dawn. "After the death of the Eagle the people fell back into warfare. But the four prisoners an the few others who had loved the Eagle went to the enem king and to the guard who also had seen the goodness of th Eagle and who had witnessed the miracle of the Eagle, an together they entered into friendship. This little group c people formed a special tribe.

"Each year, at the time of the feast of the Eagle, the trib would gather to make the toast and proclaim the words, *W must try to love one another.*

"Young people from other tribes would inquire about the meaning of this custom, and there was always a follower of the Eagle to tell the story of the Eagle's short reign. So little by little the tribe acquired new members.

"Even now," said Cool Dawn, "scattered across the face of the earth, this tribe still lives."

"Is this the tribe you come from, grandmother?" Willie asked.

"Yes," Cool Dawn replied.

"Then I am a member as well," said Willie. "And Clio, too, if he wants."

Clio said nothing. He was still looking down at the strange sign.

As Clio went down the stairway to go back to his own tenement, Willie called after him, "Have courage, Clio. It will be all right."

But Clio did not answer.

That night Willie dreamed of a golden bird floating in the thin blue air above the great city of Houston.

Early the next morning Cool Dawn awakened him.

"Are you prepared then?" she asked.

"Yes," said Willie.

Through still, dim streets they went to a strange church called The Church of Saint Stephen the Martyr, and there Willie made his First Communion.

When he came back from the table of Eucharist, having swallowed the body of the Lord, Cool Dawn whispered, "We must try to love."

Willie replied, "We must try to love."

Outside, the morning light had come to the earth. The city was blue and magical, like a town in a children's story or a dream.

Walking alongside his grandmother, Willie felt that he too might be in a dream.

BOOK TWO

Mr. Thoreau brought in a fugitive slave this night, gangrenous in both legs and advanced in tuberculosis. He asked me to deliver a letter to his mother in Mississippi. As Mr. Thoreau commenced to take his dictation, the man observed that his mother could not read. He then expired in my arms. I buried the body in the embankment near the Monument where, I fear, it will surface in the Spring. Mr. Thoreau in the meantime retired to his Pond.

From the diary of Thomas Felder, M.D.
November 24, 1845
Concord, Massachusetts

Chapter one

Now, as he grew older, Willie learned many things. He learned that the capital of the state of Maine is Augusta.

He learned that the great planet Earth has five oceans and seven seas.

He learned that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.

He learned that George Washington did not tell lies and that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves.

But for each thing he learned in his slow fashion, there were ten things, twelve things, twenty things he could not learn or understand.

In the world there were lovely things and there were terrors. But neither the lovely things nor the terrors were anything like what the teachers said in classrooms or what men wrote in books or what was shown on the desk-top TV screens.

In the city of Houston, in the neighborhood of the William McKinley Arms, there were strange and terrible things that people did to one another, and then there were even worse things that people did not do out of not caring or paying any attention to one another.

And in the great world beyond Houston, there were brutal, violent, ugly things that were happening, like the wars that were reported on the nightly telenews. Wars in Africa. Wars in India. Wars in the Philippines. Wars in the Middle East. Wars in Latin America.

"The sad wars of freedom," a TV man in a dark blue suit said one night, "where the brave men of JERCUS fight on for you and me."

"Who is that man, grandma?"

"The President."

"What is JERCUS?"

"An alliance, it is called."

"What is an alliance?"

"An agreement between nations."

"Why is it called JERCUS?"

"J is for Japan. E is for Europe. R is for Russia. C is for China. US is for United States."

"They are all fighting?"

"Yes."

"Who do they fight?"

"The others."

Besides the wars, there were what people called civil disturbances going on in certain cities of the United States.

These disturbances were strange happenings that took place at night, usually in the summertime, and the TV men were grave and sad-eyed when they spoke of them.

One summer there was even a civil disturbance in Houston, not far from the area of the William McKinley Arms, and a man named GoPaw North was killed.

The books did not speak of these matters, of the wars that were reported on the telenews or the civil disturbances that were going on, nor did the teachers.

When the tele-teachers on the desk-top screens talked of the lands where the wars were going on, it was to point out the minerals that were in the ground or what they called the natural resources or sometimes to tell what the annual rainfall was.

It was the same with the cities. The cities were important for having railroads or certain industries or for having large populations. The school cities were not connected with the civil disturbances or with anything else that was going on in the real cities.

Willie could not make sense of what the teachers said. He could not make sense of the books of the school. He could not make sense of the tele-lessons. So he continued to do poorly in his studies.

"He is a little retarded," said one of the Sisters to Willie's mother when he was in the sixth grade.

"His mind is not right?"

"According to the testing computer," the Sister said. "It is a birth accident perhaps. He is not abnormal but he will have trouble even technically passing his high school work."

Willie's mother, working at the Rib N Rum Room, would weep when she thought of her son's slowness. But Cool Dawn told her that though he was slow, he was learning many things all the same and that he was good, which was more important than being bright.

In the mornings Cool Dawn and Willie went to the Saint Martin de Porres church, and there Willie found those certain signs that made sense to him and heard readings from the one book he came to trust.

And when he was in the seventh grade, Cool Dawn took to reading this same book to him after supper in the evenings,

and Willie listened to the stories that were told. He did not understand all the things that were told in the stories but he trusted this book to be a true sign because of the things he believed. He learned especially the Book of Gospels and came to love the Book of Gospels and put his confidence in it.

Still, he wondered about the things he saw and heard and he wondered especially why people did not choose to be the way that the signs showed them to be and why people did not seem to care one way or the other and why so many preferred to be nothing.

One winter in Willie's last year at Martin de Porres, Cool Dawn came down with a bad cold and he had to go to Mass alone. That was the winter that he began to see the men lying in the streets, in certain doorways, where they had fallen—men who had preferred to be nothing rather than choose to be whatever they might have been.

Willie would try to speak to them, but usually they would only mumble and turn over on the pavement and go back to sleep. Sometimes they could not even mumble, and the police, responding to the phone call Willie would make, would come in their shiny black truck and cart them away like dead dogs.

"Dust to dust," Officer Harlowe Judge would say. Or sometimes, "In the father's house, Sam, there are many mansions," or "If at first you don't succeed, Sam. . . ." That Officer Harlowe Judge for no reason at all took to calling Willie Sam rather than Willie was one of those unfathomable things no book could teach but was all the same a true fact of the world.

In Willie's first year at George A. Custer Memorial High, a boy from his class took a powerful drug so that he could fly, as he told a friend, and the drug killed him, and the vision of the boy lying in his coffin haunted Willie's dreams and presented another fact that the book-school teachings did not present, yet it was a thing that had happened, and was a terror and truth that had to be reckoned, like the wars and the civil disturbances.

Once when he was sixteen he came across a copy of a news

photo magazine. In the magazine there were pictures of children, babies even, with swollen stomachs and enormous white eyes. They were starving in some small country in Africa.

Willie carried this magazine around with him for days, asking his teachers to look at the pictures.

"Something has to be done," he would say.

But his teachers told him there was nothing he, Willie, could do—the government was doing all it could.

"They are starving," Willie said to Clio.

"What did you expect?" Clio replied. "They're black. They're poor. Who gives a damn what happens to them?"

"You do and I do," said Willie.

But Clio said that rich people did not care anything about poor people, how it went with them or if they ate or starved.

Then Willie would tell Clio of certain priests and Sisters and ministers of the church who spent their lives bringing food to starving people and he would tell him of certain doctors who worked hard in strange places helping people get rid of diseases that were taking the lives of children. He had read of these ministers and doctors in a magazine called *Mission* that he found one day in a pew of Saint Martin de Porres.

Clio would say, "How can you believe that jive?" And then he would make a speech saying that the church was a lie and religion was a lie and Willie was crazy to believe what he did.

What Clio thought, the way he felt, saddened Willie. But still Clio was his best friend, and Willie knew that suffering and anger made him say the things he did.

Clio's brother George was in jail now and his father had died in prison and Clio spoke bitterly of the way things were arranged in the country.

"Look at their houses, their cars, their clothes," he would say, referring to white people. "Look at us. Where are *you*, man? In a dream world!"

It angered Clio that Willie was not angry, only puzzled. He did not know how much Willie got from the trusted signs of the book and from things that were not in the book but were

in the world because of what had happened and what was still happening.

What Clio saw and felt and heard, Willie too saw and felt and heard but he had the signs that he believed and he knew for sure that in the world there were more lovely things than terrors and that the terrors were not finally greater than people, and he knew too, because of what had happened according to the one trusted sign, that the world was holy even in its terrors.

Because he had that knowledge, Willie was joyful. That was what everyone remembered later, while they could still remember.

One day a sign went up over the Nagasaki Zero—a neon sign of pulsing green that said, REGENT WINE—AND THE WORLD IS FINE.

Willie thought this sign to be magically beautiful. The green pulse was like a code message coming through the night. He adopted the words of the ad as his motto.

Chapter two

His joy was natural to him and came from the deepest part of him.

It came from the trust he had in the signs, but of course the people of the neighborhood did not know that.

They saw only his joking and clowning and what they called his good nature.

He found many things funny and nothing funnier than himself.

Gangling and tall with his flaming red hair and his slanty eyes that he could do many funny things with, he loved to play the clown—especially for the children of the district.

Sometimes he would come to school in a black stovepipe hat and a long black coat that he had found somewhere and he looked on those occasions like a clown Abraham Lincoln.

He joked about the new low records he was establishing at

George A. Custer Memorial High and he openly declared himself King of the Stupids, a title no teacher ever challenged.

The joy was in him and of him and it drew others to him, like a magnet drawing filings, so that people loved to be with him, especially in times of trouble.

He drew the troubled at first because the people having troubles were cheered up by just being with him, his condition being so much worse than their own. He was not only stupid, as he admitted, but he was a mixture, a mongrel of races and nationalities, so that people pitied him as an outcast.

He was black, yet not black enough to be truly of the black people.

He was Chinese, yet too black and too Mexican to be considered a Chinaman.

He was Mexican and Indian, but too red-headed and too black to be called either a Mexican or an Indian.

He was Irish, but no Irishman in the world would call him Irish.

He was everything, which made him nothing; he was a mistake of some sort.

So, pity brought the troubled first. But when the troubled people came, they found the calmness and the joy, which brought them back a second time. And then they found the gift he had for listening.

He could listen to a person talk for hours without interrupting. He was as good at this with old people as he was with the students of the high school and the children around the William McKinley Arms tenement. He was even good at listening to Officer Harlowe Judge, who took one whole night telling Willie what he had done in a war and how he wished he had never left the army and how his wife had left him and what he wanted to do to the man who had taken his wife from him and many other things, all the while calling him Sam.

After the troubled people had told him all that was wrong with their lives, they would invariably start in on Willie,

trying to counsel him. It happened with them all. It was a pattern.

They would go on and on, repeating themselves five times over. And then coming to a stop, they would say, "Why don't you dress up a little?" or "If you transferred to the Tech School right now, you could apply for a job at. . . . "

There was always a mixture of exasperation and pity in this advice from the sorry. In the face of his ridiculous patience, even the most troubled people seemed to sense in him something that went beyond all normal limits—some intricate, abnormal piece of gear that would sooner or later get broken.

No one felt this more than Carolyn Sage and no one else, not even Clio, understood that slow as he was in books and studies, still there was something special inside that was a gift, and she tried to protect it and she did not like to see him clown so much and she resented it when others took him for granted.

When Willie finally succeeded in convincing Mrs. Sarto that he was Willie and not Colombo and when Willie found out that Colombo was a mutual funds salesman living in Boulder, Colorado and wrote and telephoned Mr. Colombo Sarto to come and see his mother, Carolyn resented it. And when the son came to the William McKinley Arms and treated Willie "like a shoeshine boy," as Carolyn put it, she resented it even more. But Willie was only grateful that Mrs. Sarto had seen her son again.

He prayed the rosary with Mrs. Sarto two or three times a week, even though the rosary was not his favorite method of praying, and Carolyn resented this also. When she found out that Mrs. Sarto used Willie as an errand boy to pick up her groceries, Carolyn's resentment turned to outrage.

"She's crippled," Willie would say.

"She's been paying the Brisson kid all these years. You she gets for nothing."

Willie would make a face and Carolyn would get even angrier.

Carolyn and Willie were often together now. They went

together as people said in those older days, though Carolyn sometimes went with others, especially when Willie seemed to ignore her or treat her like a sister.

Carolyn wanted to be serious but Willie was hardly ever serious, though in the spring of the year when everything changed, he came to be serious very quickly.

One night especially he wanted to be serious suddenly and completely and in a way he had never been serious before.

That was the night he knew for sure that he loved her and that he had always loved her and he felt totally and in every part of him different, and she was not the same and he was not the same.

It happened in the Richard M. Nixon Park, a short distance from the William McKinley Arms, on a spring night just before life speeded up and was different forever for both of them.

* * *

The Richard M. Nixon Park was a small affair, only two blocks long and very badly run down, though once it had been quite beautiful.

There was a little lake in the middle of the park and on it in the old days long-necked swans used to swim about in their wonderful aloof way.

But the swans had died long ago of the Pond Plague, that mysterious disease that had ravaged most of the ponds of the country, killing the fish and the water birds too.

There were no live birds of any kind in the park now, only the new mechanical birds that had become so popular in the cities of the United States and that flitted through the air swiftly and cleanly and were guaranteed to not reproduce or do other disorderly things.

Once there had been trees ringing the Richard M. Nixon Pond, cedars and maples and tender ash, but they too were dead now, replaced by the artificial trees that had been planted in most of the neighborhoods of the city.

The little red and yellow flowers that had once bloomed along the walkways had all died mysteriously in a single

summer and had been replaced with Plasti-Bloom, the new artificial flowers that had been the great American invention of two years ago.

Willie and Carolyn liked to go to the Richard M. Nixon Park when it was just getting dark and there was a little breeze in the air so that they could hear the water rippling in the pond and when there was just enough moonlight to cast a sheen of silver across the water surface and yet not so much as to show what the water looked like underneath.

Here one night, in the spring when everything changed and everything speeded up, they came and sat down on a bench that had a slogan painted across it—JERCUS OR ELSE—and the moonlight was just enough and the breeze was just enough and Carolyn asked Willie what he would do with his life.

"Some work," said Willie. "I don't know."

"You must like something?"

"Well—there is astronomy, is that what they call it? Then, to be a brain surgeon—"

"There are lots of jobs."

He laughed. "Garbage collector?"

"Why do you say that?" The wind shifted a little, perfumed and warm. He turned to her, to something in her voice.

"What?"

"Why do you always put yourself on the bottom rung and then make fun of being there?"

That was what she said, but Willie, looking at her and seeing her face so brown and beautiful in the faint, suddenly trembling light, could scarcely hear the words for the racket starting in his heart.

As she sat there, she seemed slowly at first, then quickly, magically, transfigured, a creature he had never seen before, yet had always known.

His mouth opened a little but he was dumb as a lamppost.

". . . of whatever you wanted to be."

What was she saying? He could see her eyes and her mouth and the soft shoulders and her arms. The definite lovely curve of her breasts. Her lips.

". . . what you think yourself. . . ."

I love you, he wanted to say. But she had numbed and stunned him, and he could only look at her with the wonder pumping and pouring in his heart.

". . . technical schools. . . ."

His mind raced through the riot of his feelings, looking for words. Insanely, the name of Isaia Corales came to him. Isaia Corales, who had come by the tenement that very afternoon to show her a camera he had bought. Isaia Corales, who was very handsome and had a wonderful singing voice and played the classical guitar and got straight A's without even reading the books. Carolyn and Isaia. Isaia and Carolyn.

Carolyn.

Overwhelmed, confused, somersaulted, he put his hand in his shirt like the emperor Bonaparte of long ago and said, "Maybe I'll be the President," clowning because he did not know how to say what he wanted to say more than anything else.

"Don't you think I know how you feel—about serious things?" Carolyn said, faltering a little herself, and feeling a somersault in her own heart—the one she had felt before and had not known how to handle.

They had been friends so long they were like brother and sister, and Carolyn did not understand the new bewildering, aching, sometimes frightening feeling she felt for him when she saw him at school, or coming up the stairs of the tenement.

She knew no way to break through the old intimacy to make room for the new one.

And on top of everything else, she feared that Willie loved Sara Miro, the beautiful girl who had every boy in the class crazy about her for one reason or another but mostly for the one reason.

Willie's wonder kept searching and groping, trying to ground itself on something definite.

"I don't know what—" he began. "I don't think much—of what I should do."

She felt the aching, frightening, wonderful feeling then more powerfully than ever.

Love me, she wanted to say, but Sara Miro and her own bewilderment would not let her.

"You will become the first lady President," Willie said, not paying attention to this tumble of words, "President Carolyn."

She loves Isaia Corales, his brain babbled.

The moon sailed up orange and huge before them.

Willie reached for her hand and that was his moment, his only moment, to be completely serious, and it was wrecked even as it was born, exploded by the blue-white light that hit them from the street where the police car had driven up under the gaudy moon.

Across the dead pond the voice of Officer Harlowe Judge came rasping through the beam of blue light:

"Curfew Sam, curfew Jane—ah mean, *na-ow*!"

The light was still on them as they left the Richard M. Nixon Park, taking their shattered moment with them, with Harlowe Judge's voice trailing after them, "Break curfew and it's Jesus comin' down."

So they went back to the William McKinley Arms, Willie joking and bending his tall, funny frame this way and that and Carolyn laughing, each of them caught in their incommunicable love, unable to speak to one another those simple words that are the best in the books of man.

If they had had one more night like that in the Richard M. Nixon Park, or only one more hour, or even twenty minutes, they might have managed to break through the things that were in the way.

But there were no more nights like that.

The next day Carolyn went with Isaia Corales to think things over, and that was the afternoon that everything changed with Willie, and the world itself seemed to speed up, and nothing was the same again.

Chapter three

Willie and Clio had long been the best athletes at George A. Custer Memorial High—Clio in football and baseball, Willie in basketball and baseball. They played first string on all the Custer teams, and people said that sooner or later one or the other of them would reach what they called the Big Time.

Still, no one was prepared to say in what sport or which boy. And no one was prepared for the events that took place that warm spring afternoon when the Custer baseball team opened its season against Sam Houston High.

Willie, by far the best pitcher on the team, had been picked to start the first game. Clio was his catcher.

They had been warming up on the regular diamond for about ten minutes when Willie threw a pitch that broke upward and hit Clio's mask.

"What was *that*?" Clio hollered.

"It slipped," Willie called back. "Sorry."

"Do it again."

"It was a mistake."

"Try it anyway."

So Willie gripped the ball between his thumb, index finger and middle finger and tried to repeat the pitch. This time the ball went over Clio's head and into the screen.

Clio came out to the mound.

"You sidearmed it too much. The first time you threw it slower, from the top."

"It was a curve that slipped," said Willie.

"Just try it, will you?"

Willie tried the pitch again. This time it came into the plate like a fast ball, then swerved up, tipping the edge of Clio's mitt.

"It's a new pitch!" Clio shouted.

Coach Moss Gideon, who had been watching all this on the sideline, came out to the mound.

"What you boys doing?"

"He's got a new ball," said Clio.

"Wait a minute," said Coach Moss Gideon. "We've got a game to win here. This isn't any time for new balls or experiments. Just throw the usual stuff, Willie, and keep away from anything screwy."

"We were just fooling around," said Willie. Coach Gideon went back to the batting cage.

Clio said, "What does he know? All he cares about is his record. You've got a new pitch, man!"

But Willie pitched the game Coach Moss Gideon had ordered—fast balls, change-ups, the fairly good curve he had mastered. At the end of five innings, the score was tied one to one.

In the sixth, Clio tripled, then stole home. When he got back to the bench, he said to Coach Gideon, "Why not let Willie try the new pitch? Just for an inning."

"He can't control it."

"Just a couple of pitches."

The coach sighed. "Will you get the runs back when he starts walking them?"

"If he walks them, we'll go back to the straight stuff."

So Willie went out for the sixth, and then and there for the first time in baseball, the eyes of men beheld what later became known as the Up Ball, the Loop Ball or, in some cities, the Bird.

In that first game, it is true, Willie walked two batters.

It is also true that Clio missed two third strikes and that in the first of the ninth Sam Houston nearly tied the score.

But what made the game remarkable was that from the sixth inning on, not a single batter even touched Willie's pitch, which the Houston coach called "pretty amazing—in fact damned amazing."

All twelve batters struck out, utterly baffled by the pitch. Some said the ball was an upcurve, though no one had ever heard tell of an upcurve.

Others said that the pitch was a fast ball that hopped when it got to the plate—though neither the coaches, nor the umpire, nor the players, nor any of the bystanders had ever seen a ball hop a foot and a half.

The ball would come zipping in to the batter exactly like a fast ball. About ten feet from the plate, perhaps twelve feet—at that point in space where the eye of the batter fixes a pitch and in that split second when his brain decides *swing*—the ball would skip up sharply, sailing up across the shoulders of the batter who was swinging underneath it.

The batters missed the pitch by a foot and a half, so swift was the upturn of the ball. Some missed it by two feet.

Clio, too, missed it. It was a most difficult pitch to handle. Of the sixty-three pitches Willie threw in those four innings, Clio dropped, muffed, tipped or otherwise mishandled forty-five. Only in the final inning did he succeed in guessing the approximate point where the pitch would cross the plate.

It was strange to see a catcher crouched down behind the plate holding his mitt above his head. The umpire complained he couldn't see the strike zone.

After the game, the players and coaches of both teams crowded around Willie.

"How do you throw it, boy?" the Houston coach asked.

Willie said, "It's simple. You just take the ball like this," and he began to demonstrate the pitch.

"Wait a minute," Clio broke in. "It's *his* pitch. He's not showing it to anyone."

"Take it easy, Clio," Coach Moss Gideon said. "We're all friends here."

"It's Willie's pitch," Clio said.

"It doesn't matter, Clio," said Willie gently.

And Willie was right; it didn't matter. After showing every pitcher on both clubs how to throw the pitch and after spending an hour demonstrating it for both coaches, Willie was still the only one who could throw the ball.

The others succeeded in throwing simple fast balls with nothing but spin on them, or else they couldn't throw the ball at all. Something in the release of the pitch, something Willie did with his wrist, hurt everybody else's arm.

Willie and Clio stayed on the field practicing until darkness fell. The more Willie threw the ball, the better his control. And the better Clio's control.

"It's a miracle!" Clio shouted to the empty bleachers.

Off the field, the coaches walked to their cars.

"Who is the kid?" asked the Sam Houston coach.

"Just some chink-nigger," said Coach Moss Gideon.

"Where did he come from?"

"He's been around. He beat you twice last year."

"I don't remember him."

"How could you forget him?" Coach Moss Gideon said. "Isn't he the craziest looking kid you ever saw?"

"I can't remember kids—only scores. What were the scores of those games?"

"Four to one, and six to two."

"Yeah," said the Sam Houston coach. "You mean that's the same kid?"

"Yup."

"Where'd he get the pitch?"

"God knows—just jacking around probably. Anyway, it'll be forgotten tomorrow. He's the dumbest kid in school. Buy you a beer?"

Chapter four

But Coach Moss Gideon was wrong.

Willie's pitch wasn't gone the next day or the day after that or the day after that when Custer played Thoreau, the strongest team in the city high school league.

Willie and Clio had spent the afternoons between the games practicing the pitch until Willie could throw it with true control and Clio, after a thousand catches, could hold it.

The Custer-Thoreau game became a legend in the history of baseball in the Southwest.

It was the first time in those parts anyone had ever struck out twenty-seven straight batters.

Willie's pitch bobbed, jumped, skipped, *bounced in the air,* as the Houston telenews said, *as if ten feet in front of the plate, it hit an invisible iron bar. The ball seems to move under*

its own mysterious power, which not even its affable young hurler can explain. Though he will demonstrate the pitch to anyone holding a scorecard, no one seems to be able to throw it but the young multinational Willie himself. And so far, no one catches it quite as well as Clio, the other half of the battery, who incidentally is one of the best switch-hitters this town has seen in many a moon.

So went the first of the stories about Willie's remarkable pitch.

In the next few weeks there were other stories, stories on TV and in the papers of other cities, stories that carried across the land, to the Midwest, to the East, and to the far West.

A week later, Willie pitched his second no-hit, no-run, all strikeout game and the stories multiplied and carried even farther across the land.

In the great city of New York, a TV sports show seen by five million persons carried a film about Willie. The film was titled "Young Texan Invents Miracle Pitch."

Seven thousand people showed up for the next game.

They thronged along the foul lines, they stood on the tops of automobiles, they crowded the diamond on every side and made such a roaring commotion that there was something frightening about their presence.

A simple game of ball, thought Willie, looking at the faces distorted by excitement, grotesque faces pinkening and reddening in the hot sun—a simple game of ball.

Then, as he started to throw, he had the first vague impression of the crowd as being something other than it was, a strange dusky animal with a life of its own.

His first pitch went flying in at the first batter.

Strike one.

When the roar went up, vaulting into the blue spaces, the animal image came again. He felt a little shiver of fear but he shook it off and looked down at Clio.

Strike two.

It's a game, he told himself feeling the fear again. *People need games. Games are good. People need*—but when he looked at the people once more, he saw this brutish being,

this gray-blue animal that stretched all around. The fear came up to his mouth.

Whiz! The batter missed the pitch by two feet and the crowd-beast coiled and twisted about the field, excited and somehow angry.

Willie stood still, looking at the spectacle, as the next batter waited for the pitch.

Clio, seeing his hesitation, came out to the mound.

"What's wrong?"

"The people. . . ."

"Some crowd!" said Clio. "Somebody said there's a scout here from Dallas."

Willie was staring at the people along the foul lines.

"Don't pay any attention to them," said Clio, following his gaze. "Just throw the ball."

So Willie threw and the fears went away but from time to time he felt the sinister energy of that strong sinewy creature coiling around the diamond, which seemed to be calling to him, demanding something other than a game.

The game was a repeat of the others—not a single batter even touched the ball.

As the last batter walked away, the crowd pressed inward, roaring and shouting.

Willie thought for a moment they were angry because the game was over and the game had not been enough, and again he felt the fear.

People moved and pushed against him, wanting to shake his hand or clap his shoulder.

A television film crew cut a path through the crowd, and a man in a bright red blazer held a microphone to Willie's dry lips.

"How's it feel to pitch a superperfect game?" the man asked, looking not at Willie but at the camera.

"Sir?" asked Willie, who had not heard the question.

"Wonderful," said the man, who then moved in front of Willie and made a little speech that Willie could not hear.

When he had finished his speech, he turned once more to Willie and said, "Isn't that right, young fella?"

"Sir?" asked Willie.

"And so, folks," the announcer said, turning back to the camera, "a legend is born—perhaps the greatest legend in Texas sports, right here on the Custer High School diamond," and the rest of his words were lost in the shouting of the crowd.

Coach Moss Gideon came now to rescue Willie from the pressing, perspiring mob.

The coach led Willie back to the school and into his office behind the locker room. Clio was there sitting by the coach's desk, listening to two strange men who wore shiny, expensive dark blue suits and great red rings marked with a strange insignia.

"These gentlemen," said Coach Gideon, "are scouts from the New York Hawks. They are here to offer you and Clio major league contracts."

"How do you do?" said one of the men, extending his hand. "I'm Mr. Ware and this is Mr. Cole."

Smiling the smile he could not help, Willie shook hands with the two men. He saw that the insignia on their rings showed a great silver hawk perched on crossed baseball bats made of platinum or silver. He could not take his eyes off the rings.

"You have a great career ahead of you, young fella," said Mr. Ware.

"Also a very lucrative one," said Mr. Cole.

"The gentlemen mean you'll be rich," Coach Gideon explained. "You'll make a lot of money."

Willie's eyes met Clio's. They both were dumbstruck.

"As I explained to you gentlemen earlier," Coach Gideon said, "Willie and Clio are minors. I do think they'll need some guidance and good advice."

"By all means," said Mr. Ware.

"Certainly," said Mr. Cole. Then the men left the office, leaving on the desk a stack of official looking papers.

"Boys," said Coach Gideon, "we've been friends a long time, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Willie.

Clio said nothing. He was studying the picture that hung on the wall of Coach Gideon's office. The picture was of Jefferson Davis, who had been president of the Confederate States of America back in the days no one remembers.

"Good friends," said Coach Gideon, "and loyal friends. I feel that I know you two fellows as though you were my own sons. That is what I said in explaining our relationship to Mr. Ware and Mr. Cole. Now boys," said Coach Gideon, looking a little like Jefferson Davis behind him, "now, I know you well enough to know that you won't take offense when I say that you are not experienced in the legals. And since I have had many years of experience in the legals, I feel an obligation as a friend to step in and act as an agent in your behalf—for say twenty percent of the bonus money. Both Mr. Ware and Mr. Cole agreed with that viewpoint completely. In fact, they thought it most generous."

Willie searched Clio's face.

"Why do we need an agent?" Clio asked.

"Well, Clio, as I told your mother this morning, there are so many legals in a thing like this, without an agent it is screwball time with them pitching, if you follow."

"You talked to my mother?"

"I wanted to be the first to congratulate her on having raised such a wonderful young American," Coach Gideon said.

"What did she say?"

"Clio, you have a wonderful mother—don't let anyone ever tell you different. And a very wise one. She said, 'Whatever you think, Mr. Gideon,' and that was that."

"She said that?" Clio asked, as if he didn't believe it.

"Her exact words, so help me God," said Coach Moss Gideon.

"Did you talk to my mother too?" Willie asked.

"Your mother and your grandmother, Willie. They couldn't be happier. Boys, neither of your families will ever be poor again."

Clio and Willie looked at each other, still finding it hard to believe.

"How much is the bonus?" Clio said.

"To answer that, Clio," said the coach, "I'll ask Willie to step outside a minute. After all, this is a personal matter—a contract between you and Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent."

"Who is that?" Clio asked.

"Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent is the owner of the New York Hawks and one of the richest men in the world," said Coach Gideon.

In the hallway Willie met Mr. Ware and Mr. Cole. Their red rings flashed even in the dark corridor.

"You have a marvelous future before you," said Mr. Ware.

"A superstar future," said Mr. Cole.

"And we knew, and Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent knew, you would be especially happy to know your pal Clio would share that future with you," said Mr. Ware.

"Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent said, 'Let us sign a contract with Willie's pal Clio, too.'"

"That's wonderful," said Willie. "Clio is the only one at Custer who can catch the pitch. He's a good hitter too."

"You betcha he is, fella," said Mr. Ware. "Your good friend and advisor Coach Gideon told us you probably wouldn't even sign the contract unless Clio was a part of the deal."

"Oh no," said Willie. "Clio is the only catcher I have."

"You betcha," said Mr. Ware.

"Fella," added Mr. Cole.

In a few minutes Clio came out of Coach Gideon's office.

"I signed," he said to Willie.

"I will too," said Willie. "Wait for me, Clio."

"Congratulations," the men said to Clio. "And welcome to the New York Hawks." Willie went into the office.

"Sit down here at the desk," said Coach Gideon. "Now Willie, this is the contract drawn up by the attorneys for Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent. The contract gives you a bonus of $100,000 and a starting salary of $25,000. Frankly, it is one of the most generous offers I have ever had the privilege of working with."

$100,000—Willie could not even imagine that amount of

money. It was like trying to count the stars.

All he could think about was the washer and dryer he would buy his mother and a better bed for Cool Dawn. He had seen a beautiful flowered sofa in the front window of the Vincent de Paul Salvage Store. Maybe he could buy that too.

"Just sign here," Coach Gideon said.

Willie signed.

"Congratulations, Willie," said the Coach. "You're in the big leagues now. May God go with you. More importantly, may you never forget the ideals that have been implanted here at George A. Custer Memorial High School."

That night a storm broke over Houston, lashing the tenements of Willie's neighborhood with the last cold rain of spring.

Out of the rain came Mr. Ware and Mr. Cole flashing their ruby baseball rings and glowing in their shiny dark blue suits.

"It's a pleasure," they said, meeting Willie's mother, who had stayed home from work that night.

"A pleasure," they said to Cool Dawn, who remained silent throughout their visit.

"On behalf of Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent and the entire New York Hawks organization," said Mr. Ware.

"May we present this check in the amount of $40,000?" said Mr. Cole.

Mr. Ware handed the check to Willie's mother.

"I thought it was $100,000," she said.

"Coach Gideon's very nominal fee was $20,000," said Mr. Ware.

"Making Willie's share $80,000," said Mr. Cole.

"Then, it is a policy of the New York Hawks that recruits be paid one half their bonus the day they sign the contract, the other half the day they report to camp."

"When is that?" said Willie's mother.

"Tomorrow," said Mr. Ware.

"Where?"

"Tucson," said Mr. Cole.

After the men left, Willie looked at the check. That was his name all right, and those figures said $40,000. He turned the

check over. He rubbed it. He fluttered it in the air.

Then he handed it to his mother.

"For you, mama," he said. "You have worked too hard too long."

Willie's mother started to cry. Willie put his arms around her.

"Don't cry, mama. I don't know whether this is good for us or not but anyway it has happened. And maybe this money will help not just our family but others."

Then Willie went downstairs to say good-bye to Carolyn.

He wanted to walk with her to the Richard M. Nixon Park, even if it was raining, to tell her what was in his heart, what had been growing there since the other night. But Flexer Sage was home that night and he detained Willie more than an hour talking about baseball.

They wound up with only a few minutes together on the landing and even there they weren't alone. Carolyn's youngest brother, Kiley, stood around, hero-worshipping the new big-leaguer.

"I guess now you know what you'll be," said Carolyn.

"I guess so."

"And rich. Some people certainly get to the top fast."

"Carolyn," Willie began, trying to phrase the splendid words.

"Strike three!" said Kiley from the top of the stairs.

Willie, trying to smile, waved at the boy.

"The hero," said Carolyn.

Silence.

In the shadows Willie could see her face, her black hair dark as the feather of a crow.

"Strike three!" Kiley cried.

"I—I'll write, Carolyn."

I'm going to lose him, thought Carolyn miserably. But still she could not declare her need for him. It wasn't awkwardness now or Sara Miro—he was going from them all, going away forever.

Tears suddenly came to her eyes.

"You do that," she said. "You write." She turned and ran

up the stairs to the Sage flat, knocking her little brother against the wall.

Willie went up to Kiley and picked him up and carried him to the door of the flat. Willie knocked and Carolyn opened the door but all he could say, with Flexer Sage once more wanting to talk baseball, was "I'll miss you."

And all she could reply, with her family in the background all talking at once, was "Me too."

Early the next morning a dark green Cadillac pulled up to the curb in front of the William McKinley Arms.

Willie, carrying all the clothes he possessed in a laundry bag, said good-bye to his mother and Cool Dawn.

They had just come back from Mass, and the peace of the trusted signs was with them still, giving them the courage for this farewell.

When he embraced his grandmother for the final time, he heard her whisper, "We must keep on learning," and he felt his heart beat faster.

Then into the cold, strange air of the Cadillac where Clio sat huddled in silence, taking a last look at the street where he and Willie had grown up.

Chapter five

Now came the days of the hard training and the difficult calisthenics under the hot Arizona sun, days of wearying sprint trials and push-ups, days of learning how to bunt, how to steal, how to slide; for Clio, days in the batting cage with the coaches showing him how to smooth his swing; for Willie, days of throwing and throwing and still more throwing as the manager, Mr. Thatcher Grayson, and the pitching coaches stood by, watching.

Mr. Grayson, a kindly man who took an immediate interest in the newcomers and who protected them against the sometimes rough kidding of their older teammates, worried that Willie would hurt his arm.

Mr. Grayson had once been a great pitcher himself. He had set many pitching records and might have set many more if he had not ruined his arm in a single season when he had been required to pitch too many games in too few days.

"Don't force it, son," he would call to Willie. "It is a natural pitch. Just let it be."

Some of Mr. Grayson's assistants were not as hopeful as the manager. They had seen many young, brilliant pitchers come along who had great renown in their hometowns, and they had seen those pitchers fail against the powerful hitters of the major leagues.

There was no denying Willie's pitch was remarkable. Still, the coaches said, Willie had never faced major league batters. And, they said, no one could get along with only one pitch, even if it was a great pitch.

When Willie and Clio joined the club, the spring season was well under way. The Hawks had played the Chicago Cougars, the San Francisco Bears, the Minneapolis Lions, and now they were embarked upon a series with the St. Louis Wolves.

Willie and Clio had expected to get into the lineup right away. Instead, there was only the practice and the drill.

Even so, the life that had been suddenly opened up to them was like a gorgeous dream. Each day brought a new wonder to their lives. They had never eaten food like this before. They had never been in a place like the Windjammer El Dorado Deluxe Silver Moonbeam Motel where the Hawks were staying.

The beds are so beeutifull, Willie wrote his mother and Cool Dawn. *Ther is ladies who come and make them up for you. Everything you need is rite here in the motell.*

TV in every room, Clio wrote his mother.

This is the place whar we staying, wrote Willie to Carolyn. *It is grate, but still I would rather be home. How are You? Rite, will you? Sinserely. I hope you are ok. I think about You all day.* These last words were printed very carefully. Willie had chosen them slowly, like a man taking jewels out of a display case.

At night the music from the cocktail lounge floated up to their windows on the warm spring air.

There were beautiful tanned people in the lobby, handsome silver-haired men and girls in bright dresses wearing sunglasses. These beautiful beings stared at the players and pointed at them.

Everyone seemed to want to make the Hawks happy.

Then came a magical evening when the sun dived down with an unexpected swiftness leaving streaks of gold in the western sky, and Willie and Clio and all the players and coaches were taken by bus to the airfield.

There, gleaming in the golden glow of that still burning sky, was the plane, *their* plane.

And then they were borne up into the darkness, leaving the dry Christmas tree of Tucson behind and sweeping out in a curve over the Gulf of Mexico.

"Look at it!" Willie gasped.

Mr. Grayson nodded. "It is splendid from up here," he said.

A little later the plane dropped down through the velvet darkness over Orlando, Florida and there the next afternoon, Willie pitched his first major league ball game.

* * *

The Orlando Telenews, in its lead story, reported the game as follows: ROOKIE FANS 27! MIRACLE BOY FROM TEXAS BAFFLES RAMS.

Orlando (April 1) *His name is Willie, and the fellow who catches for him is a high school classmate named Clio.*

They are 18 years old.

This afternoon at Memorial Park before a jaded spring crowd of 5,500, they did what they've been doing back in Texas.

They set down 27 batters in a row, doing it by the old-fashioned method of the strikeout.

The heralded young pitcher accomplished the feat in an atmosphere of general cynicism that greeted his arrival in the Hawks camp two weeks ago.

Even on the club itself, rumor has it that certain of the

coaches and some of the players consider the youngster's miracle pitch a fluke, and one was reported to have said, "He won't last out spring training."

Yesterday the smiling Chinese-Indian-Negro—and he is reputedly all of these races—proved them all wrong.

And here the story switched to a film of the game.

That night, after the telenews, Willie went to Mr. Grayson's room.

"Does the TV story mean some of the players don't believe I can do it?"

Mr. Grayson said, "Does it matter what they believe, son? You and I know what you are and what you can do."

Then Mr. Grayson reached into his jacket and held up a small battered black book that Willie had seen him reading in the dugout. Willie had supposed that this was Mr. Grayson's player book, where he kept the batting averages and other information about the lineup.

But now he saw the book was titled *Vest Pocket Ezee Bible: Good Words for Bad Times*. The book was published by the Old Cowpoke Bible Society.

"Do you read the Bible, my son?"

"My grandma used to read it to me," said Willie. "I don't read good."

"In this book," Mr. Grayson said, "you will find all that you need to know—words of strength and consolation for times of doubt and trouble. Every player needs these words."

Mr. Grayson opened the *Vest Pocket Ezee Bible* to the letter D, found *Doubt* and read a verse that said, "Cast thy care upon the Lord."

"Do you cast your care upon the Lord, my boy?"

"I—I guess so," said Willie. "When I have care to cast."

Mr. Grayson said, "If we depend upon God and prayer and if we set a good example, then we triumph off the field as well as on."

Then the old manager put his hand on Willie's shoulder.

"But you are a good boy, I know. I ask only that you remain so."

"Well, Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "I'll try. Good-night."

I never knew pawm trees were so beeutifull, Willie wrote home.

A week later in New Orleans, he pitched again. A great crowd had gathered for the game, and Willie and Clio were nervous, warming up.

"It's on TV," said Clio.

"Somebody said the owner is here."

"I just hope I get a hit," said Clio. He had failed to hit in the first game, and the batting coaches had been working with him all week.

"If the pitch is good, we won't need many hits," said Willie. "Besides only you can catch it."

The game went like all the others until the third inning. Then, after Willie fanned the first two batters, his record was broken. A batter named Marks fouled the ball into the seats behind first. The crowd gave him a standing ovation. They were still applauding when he walked back to the dugout after striking out.

"What happened?" Mr. Grayson asked Willie.

"I must have given it too little," Willie said.

"I was just joking, son," Mr. Grayson said. "You struck him out."

But again in the fifth, someone hit a ball—this time into the infield. It was easily handled, but now it had been proved Willie's pitch could be hit.

Willie wound up striking out twenty-six and again he had pitched a no-hit game but the charm had been broken and that night he and Clio were quiet in their hotel room. A doubt had entered their minds.

Clio had struck out twice and popped to the infield his other two times at the plate, which added to their gloom.

They were stretched out on their beds trying to get interested in a television show when there was a tapping at the door as if someone might be hitting it with a stick.

"Come in," said Willie.

In stepped the most magnificently dressed man they had ever seen—a man in a rich blue suit with flashes of a mysterious and elusive red, a handsome man with gray hair

and a smiling, wonderfully carefree face that seemed to announce, "You're wonderful, life is wonderful, everything is wonderful!"

He carried a cane of some dark red hue, this man, and he held it now with an upturned arm, like a magician on stage. His other hand swept out toward the boys.

"Willie—Clio," he called in a melodious baritone voice, making their names sound like a song. "Welcome to the Hawks! Welcome to New Orleans! I am Robert 'Bob' Regent, your owner!"

The boys sprang from their beds.

"Mr. Regent," Willie started to say, but Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent held out a forbidding hand.

"Bob," he sang, "Bobareebob!"

"Well," said Willie, "Well-er- I'm Willie—and this is Clio."

"Bobsolutely," cried Robert 'Bob' Regent. "Bob Regent knows the names. Bob Regent knows the score. Bob Regent sees what's up! And all Bob Regent can think is sensayshabob! And supersensayshabob!"

"He's drunk," Clio whispered under his breath.

"Not drunk, Cliobob, never drunk!" boomed Robert 'Bob' Regent like a singer in an opera house. "Clio, you old rascal, you got a lot to learn if you think Bob Regent goes the alkiebobway. Yosobobo!"

The strange talk of Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent, together with his even stranger manner, made the boys speechless for a moment.

Then Clio, realizing that he may have hurt Mr. Regent's feelings by saying he was drunk, opened his mouth to apologize.

But before he could form the words, Robert 'Bob' Regent said: "It's all rightabob, Cliobobalooie, case dismissed. Besides, Bob Regent didn't come here to talk about *his* habits but *yours*. Bobalmighty!"

Willie made a funny little gesture with his hands.

"I—or I mean, we," said Clio, "we don't drink."

"Not those habits," said Robert 'Bob' Regent, "but the *other* habits, like the ones you're wearing."

Clio looked at Willie's green T-shirt and faded wash pants. Willie looked at Clio's yellow T-shirt and equally faded wash pants. They looked at the shoes they were wearing, the shoes they had brought with them from Houston.

"No *white*," said Robert 'Bob' Regent, waving his finger like some old-fashioned schoolmarm scolding a first grader. "No, not a speck of white showing. No *blue*. No *red*. Not one of the team colors. And that's got to make Bob Regent ask some questions. Like for instance, where's the loyalty? Where's the devotion? Where's the old spirit?"

"We're supposed to dress some special way?" said Clio.

"Unity through obedience," said Robert 'Bob' Regent, holding a hand over his heart. "That's the Hawks motto."

The boys looked blank.

"'twould appear," said Robert 'Bob' Regent, "a little explainabob would help. Think back to the days of Houston, lads, back to the afternoon when you inked the old parchment."

The boys thought, or at least looked like they were thinking.

"What Bob Regent refers to is the third sentence of Section 1, Part 2, Paragraph E, which says and proclaims and avows as follows: 'The undersigned'—that's you—'agrees to observe in every particular the Club Regulations in conduct, attitude, personal habits and dress.' Remember?"

The boys nodded.

"Okabob, switch the scene to Tucson. You're in the Wonderful Wonderful Copenhagen Room of the Windjammer El Dorado Deluxe Silver Moonbeam Motel. It is 6:10 P.M. Rocky Mountain time and you are sitting at the corner table drinking Pepsi Cola, and Mr. Thatcher Grayson, the manager, is handing you each a copy of the Club Regulations."

"You were *there*?" asked Willie, his eyes opening very wide.

"Nevermindabob," said Robert 'Bob' Regent, dismissing the question with a wave of his cane. "Think of the Club Regulations—that little red, white and blue book."

The boys thought of the Club Regulations, which were

stuffed somewhere in the bottom of one or the other's suitcase.

"What do I see before me?" said Robert 'Bob' Regent, closing his eyes and holding his hands over them.

Neither boy knew.

"I see Club Regulation number 98. I see it in great big red, white and blue letters that are 1,000 feet tall. And what words do those letters form?"

The boys admitted they didn't know.

"These words: *Each player will dress both on and off the field in a manner befitting a member of the New York Hawks organization. Team colors should be worn as often as possible, and it is mandatory that at least two of the colors be worn on all occasions.*"

Clio looked at Willie and Willie looked at Clio.

"Mister—that is—Bob—sir?" said Willie.

"Speak, Williebob."

"We got those rule books all right but Mr. Grayson told us to concentrate on the hours and the diet and things like that."

"But did he tell you *not* to obey the other rules?" cried Robert 'Bob' Regent, thrusting out his cane like a sword.

"Why no, sir."

"Bob!"

"Bob."

"Well, then, what do we have here but disobedience? Do you have a better word for it, something more accurate? Can anyone think of a synonym?" Robert 'Bob' Regent here went to the window, raised it and shouted to the whole city of New Orleans, "What can Bob Regent call it but disobedience?"

There was a honking of horns but nothing more.

Now he turned back to the boys.

"And disobedience must be punished. Yesabob and bobsolutely! So therefore and wherefore!" and with these words, Robert 'Bob' Regent stepped backward and dramatically flung open the door.

As Willie and Clio shrank back a little, not knowing what to expect, four tailors entered the room in absolute silence pushing carts of the most beautiful clothes they had ever

seen: finished suits of blue silk, dinner jackets of scarlet hues, ties of vermilion with elegant rich blue hawks embroidered in the center, dozens of shirts striped in red and blue, blue-black shoes of luxurious leather, a silver box of clips and clasps and cuff links, some sparkling with strange stones of alternating blue and red brilliance.

Robert 'Bob' Regent snapped his fingers and began to hum a tuneless little melody.

The tailors went to work—or dressers really, for the clothes were already tailored to the exact measurements of each boy.

The dressers worked quickly. In ten minutes, Clio and Willie were uniformed in matching outfits of formal midnight blue tuxedos, wine red bow ties, stiff white shirts with French cuffs into which had been inserted huge ruby cuff links, with a tiny hawk mounted in diamonds.

"Now, Bobaloboboso!" cried Robert 'Bob' Regent. "You *look* like Hawks. And so to dinner."

The boys, mystified and also frightened, marched out to the corridor, which already echoed the chant of Robert 'Bob' Regent as he led the way to the elevator.

"Bobarooney, Bobaroy, Bobaglory and Amen!"

Chapter six

Down they went, down the swift elevator of the Royal Orleans Hotel, and into the soft, sweet night of the French Quarter.

A horse and carriage waited at the curb.

"The place, Gide!" sang Robert 'Bob' Regent.

"The place, Bob," the aged black driver replied.

So through curious, old and narrow streets with strange little shops on either side and balconies of intricate grille and narrow passages opening now and then on private pools of moonlight—through streets aflow with tourists streaming, tourists dreaming, tourists turning under green and blue and fire red signs, turning and returning from smoky caves where

trumpets wailed and saxophones moaned, went the clattering carriage.

And as it clicked and clopped through old, through curious streets, Robert 'Bob' Regent, resting between the boys, his arms thrown back across their shoulders, sang a funny little song.

Bob Regent's wine's for sale, my friends;
Come drink and fun and make amends.
The wine's a lovely, lulling brew.
The fire is lovely, too.

When song and sapphire startle night,
And casements gleam with candlelight,
Who cares of hour, day or year?
Bob Regent's wine is here.

The world's the toast, my carefree friends,
So smash the glass and burn both ends!
Come drink the lovely, lulling brew.
The fire is lovely, too.

Willie knew that Regent wines, made in New York and California, were the most famous wines in the United States, but not until that moment did it occur to him that *this* might be *that* Regent. He thought of the green sign that had been his boyhood motto.

As Regent sang the song a second time, a strange sensation took hold of Willie, not fear exactly, but a sort of confusion.

From the other side of the cab, he heard Clio's voice.

"You make that song up?"

"Not I, Cliobob, the agency."

"The agency?"

"The advertising agency. For our wines—and other products. And they've just signed the best new group in the country to record it, The Parousias. We're using it in all our advertising this summer."

"I—I think I've heard it before," said Willie.

Regent turned lightly to Willie. "Quite possibly, my boy.

After all, there's no such thing as a completely new song."

The carriage turned down a narrow lane, pulling up at a fortresslike mansion of many gables and spires, a huge affair that glowed with pale rose lights.

"The place!" shouted Robert 'Bob' Regent. "The finest restaurant in the world. Wait for us, Gide."

"Yes, Bob," came the voice of the driver.

Inside—darkness, deep, cavernlike, relieved only by tiny cups of light arranged upon the tables like votive lights.

Above those flickering lights dim expressionless faces hung like pink masks in the motionless air.

As they went to their table, the faces turned and low cries of "Bob, Bob, Bob," floated up on every side.

Robert 'Bob' Regent bowed and waved his cane, like a magician performing.

A slow music came murmuring through the darkness, throbbing indistinctly. It was an intricate pattern of rhythm that made Willie uncomfortable.

A turbaned Oriental seated them at a remote table.

"What'll it be, boys?" said Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent.

The boys didn't know.

"I'll order for all of us then," said Robert 'Bob' Regent and he rattled off a string of crisp commands in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Lutu, the tongue of the Orithi tribe in Taramynia.

Two men in glittering scarlet tuxedos wrote everything down as a pair of beautiful black waitresses, their eyes made huge and compelling with swirls of silver paint, poured wine.

"Go ahead," Robert 'Bob' Regent laughed. "It's our finest brand."

"The training rules—," Willie began.

"I make the rules," Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent said. "Never forget that."

There was ice in his voice, and again Willie felt uneasy and fearful.

But Regent only smiled and sang his song and made the strange, careful mannered talk that seemed an elaborate joke. The supper commenced.

Never had the boys seen food like it, even on TV—snails and oyster and lobster and caviar and tender beef and fowl and fruit. It was a feast out of a fable. And as the music throbbed and murmured and a second glass of wine was set before them, they felt a lightheaded joy, a wonderful sense of carefreeness, as if in the presence of Robert 'Bob' Regent nothing could go wrong.

They both became talkative.

They found themselves laughing over nothing.

When one of the waitresses tried to remove a dish, Willie took her hand and kissed it.

It was then, in the middle of their revelry, that Robert 'Bob' Regent said something that chilled Willie with the casual enormity of the thought behind it.

"Do you want her?" he said.

At first Willie did not know what he meant. Then in his slow way he came to understand—the girl could be ordered, like something from the menu.

"I didn't mean—," Willie stammered. Then he stood up.

He took the girl's hand and looked at her. Under the paint, the false eyelashes, the satin blue something or other she was wearing, he saw only a poor black girl, who probably lived in some tenement not very different from the one he had left in Houston.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"It's okay," the girl said.

"Sorry for what?" Clio said a little drunkenly. "What's the hassle?"

Robert 'Bob' Regent laughed at this, his laughter making the pink masks at the other tables revolve slowly toward him.

"I wanna dance," said Clio getting up and taking the girl by the hand.

The girl looked at Robert 'Bob' Regent. Willie saw a signal pass between them.

"Okay Bob?" said Clio.

"Certainly, Cliobob. Live it up. Enjoy! It's later than you think," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "But take this with you."

He handed Clio a small box.

"What is it?"

"A gift. Open it later."

"Okay," Clio mumbled. "Come on, Dolly, we're gonna tippy-toe."

Clio and the girl disappeared into the darkness where the music played. Willie stared after them.

"Sit down, Willie," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. Then with a little trace of regret in his voice, he said, "You don't want more wine, I suppose?"

"No."

They sat in silence for several moments with only the maddening music for company.

When he spoke again, Regent's tone had changed completely.

"I've wrecked it, haven't I? The whole silly thing has gone wrong. You're—displeased."

Willie was looking at the guttering candle set before him. For no reason at all he wondered what Mrs. Sarto was doing at this hour.

"All I wanted to do was make you happy, to show you a good time," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "But of course I had to overdo. Sometimes I think I'm the most stupid man in the world!"

Robert 'Bob' Regent pounded the table, but with more disappointment and sadness than anger.

"Sir—"

Robert 'Bob' Regent held up a hand. "Why deny what's so obviously true? I pull these crazy stunts—like hiring those tailors tonight and going over to the hotel, the get-up, the routine. I always think it's going to be a smash. And what happens? I wind up offending the very people I want to befriend."

The handsome face turned in the candlelight—the face of an ad from a good men's store, but an unhappy ad.

"Such a very young man—do you understand the loneliness of the rich man?"

"No," said Willie.

Regent opened his hands as if to let something go.

"It's like this, my boy. Rich people really don't have friends. Instead they have people who—follow them around, paying attention. You know?"

"No."

"Paying attention. That's all. Yet—and yet for the rich man, that isn't enough—unless he's a brute. But he gets used to the following around and the paying attention and do you know, my boy, soon he forgets how a man makes friends altogether. Do you understand? The whole process goes out of his mind and he resorts to—well, to outlandish things like tonight. Once a man forgets how it all goes—friendship and love, normal, natural things—then. . . ."

Willie tried to think of something to say, but the music floated around them and he felt himself in a sort of mist.

Out of his pocket Robert 'Bob' Regent brought a thick packet of printed clippings. He called for a candelabrum.

"Look here," he said sadly. "See what they write of me. That one, for instance." He pointed to a clipping from *The New York Sun.*

Under a garish caricature of Robert 'Bob' Regent, the caption said, FRANTIC FREAKISHNESS OF FRIENDLY BOB.

Willie's eyes fastened on a single paragraph.

Regent, whose properties include television and radio stations, wineries and publishing houses, theaters and nightclubs, plus the New York Hawks baseball team, throws parties that rival those of Jay Gatsby. But no one calls him friend.

"Who is Jay Gatsby?"

"A character in a book," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "And God knows, they're right. That's the way I often feel—like a character in a book, someone they made up but didn't make a friend for."

These last words were said so mournfully, Willie felt the stir of a profound pity. His host seemed utterly broken, bereft and alone. Willie tried to think of something kind to say. Finally he said, "I—I'll be your friend."

The candelabrum had been removed, so he couldn't be sure in the darkness, but Willie thought he saw Regent's

shoulders move. He wondered if the man might not actually be crying.

"Sir—"

Again that pathetic little wave of the hand.

Finally Regent lifted his face.

"My boy," he said huskily, "those are the happiest words I've heard—in years."

The music rose and fell from the darker room. Willie felt the fever of it, the insinuation of another world that he both knew and did not know.

Regent's voice dropped to a whisper.

"Take this."

He handed Willie a small box.

"Open it."

Willie opened it. There, gleaming in the light of the guttering candle, was the ruby ring of the New York Hawks.

"Put it on, my boy," said Robert 'Bob' Regent.

Willie slipped the ring on the third finger of his left hand. Its dark red stone flared and flashed, throwing a ray of red across the silver hawk perched above it, diamonds for its eyes.

"It feels—"

"The sign of our alliance."

"I didn't think a ring could. . . ."

Regent's voice went on in time with the odd drifting music, ". . . symbol . . . friendship . . . indestructible. . . "

Willie turned the ring on his finger, trying to account for the feeling it gave to his hand, his arm, indeed his whole body. As he looked at that red stone, he felt the pull of a solemn, alien strength. *There was a campfire, torches, the sound of a primitive chant. Faces gleaming in firelight, bodies moving in a circle. Someone had a knife.*

He stood up suddenly. He felt himself perspiring.

"I've got to get back," he said. "We've got a game tomorrow. Where's Clio?" It occurred to him that he was shouting.

"Clio's all right, my boy. Let us talk awhile."

"No, really, Mr. Regent—I mean, Bob. We have the

training rules and—"

"Ah," laughed Regent. "How refreshing to meet a mar who relishes the rules."

"What about Clio?"

"We'll take the carriage back to the hotel, then send it back for him."

On their way out, Willie looked for Clio on the dance floo where couples moved slowly, like mannequins set to music Clio was gone.

"Don't worry," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "Gide will finc him and bring him back safely."

In the night air Willie realized how drunk he was. He looked up at the stars swimming about the sky. Robert 'Bob Regent spoke of friendship and honor and devotion anc things Willie could not concentrate on.

At the hotel Regent took his hand.

"You cannot know how happy I am."

"Good night—Bob."

"Remember our motto: *Unity through obedience.*"

Then the carriage clattered off into the darkness.

In the lobby Willie met Mr. Grayson.

"I know I've broken the rules," Willie said. "We were with the owner."

"I know," said Mr. Grayson. "Did he give you the ring?"

"Yes."

"Where's Clio?"

"I don't know. At some restaurant."

"Go to bed, son. We go to Chicago after the game tomorrow to open the season."

"Yes sir."

"You got to pitch that opener."

"Yes, Mr. Grayson."

"So you need the rest," Mr. Grayson said, fumbling his words a little. In truth, it appeared that it was he who needed the rest.

"But don't let things worry you, son," he said. "And remember, be faithful to yourself."

Mr. Grayson hesitated. He gestured with his pipe as if he

wanted to say more but didn't know how.

"I'll be okay, Mr. Grayson," said Willie.

"That's what I been praying for," said Mr. Grayson.

Willie spied the *Vest Pocket Ezee Bible* in Mr. Grayson's jacket pocket.

"I been reading what the Lord Jesus told the players in his day," said Mr. Grayson. "Do not store treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven. I been praying in that vein tonight. Now, son, go to bed and you too try to pray."

Willie thanked Mr. Grayson and went to his room, promising to pray.

But that night his prayers were fretful. Clio did not return.

Willie lay awake listening to the tolling of a bell somewhere in the city. He kept thinking of all that had happened that night and once, after dozing off a little, he awoke with the feeling that it had not really happened, that Regent and the whole night on the town had been a dream. Then he felt the ring on his finger.

He tried to understand what had happened—*had* it happened?

He thought then of his mother and Cool Dawn and of the people of the William McKinley Arms. He thought of Carolyn. He called the desk—it was three in the morning, too late to phone her. So he lay awake and tried to make the shadows of the room go together to make a picture of her face. The bell tolled again.

At dawn the key turned in the door, and there in the gray light stood Clio. He looked wan and dazed. Willie got out of bed.

"Are you all right?"

"She works for him," Clio said from a long way off. "He owns that restaurant. Everybody there works for him."

"Where did you go?"

"To her place. Her name is Martha and she—she's—she works for him. He's got something on her father, and the manager of the restaurant says she has to work there. She

has to do all sorts of things because they have something on her father—it's terrible!"

"We'll help, Clio," said Willie. "Tomorrow we'll go see Mr. Regent and—"

"He's a crook!" cried Clio. "Why, he owns people all over. Martha says he owns the tenements where she lives."

"He doesn't own people."

"Yes he does. He controls them. Like Martha," and Clio's voice broke. "We've got to do something. We've got to help her."

But there wasn't time to help. After the game the next day, the team boarded an airplane for Chicago to start the season.

Earlier, a cab had brought Martha to the ball park, and for a little while before the game and a little while after it, she and Clio talked.

Willie watched them from his place in the dugout and tried to think of what to do.

Martha seemed very beautiful to Willie, much more beautiful in the sunlight than in the restaurant the night before. But there was a sadness about her; she looked tiny and helpless in the stands.

After the game, Clio nearly missed the bus. He stood holding Martha until the last minute on a little platform outside the ball park, under a sign that said, REGENT WINE—AND THE WORLD IS FINE.

Willie saw them there. Clio seemed to be reassuring her.

But there was no reassuring Clio on the plane hurrying up the great Mississippi Delta.

"I love her," he kept saying, "and he owns her."

"We'll work it out," Willie would say. "We'll work it out with Regent."

"It's impossible," said Clio. "He doesn't have a heart."

Chapter seven

The next day the baseball season opened in Chicago, Illinois.

The President of the United States opened the season by throwing the first ball to the catcher of the Chicago Cougars.

It took the President several throws to accomplish this feat. He was tired and worn and had a bad arm besides.

One of his pitches hit the Vice-President of the United States, who was dozing in a box seat under the presidential pavilion.

The Vice-President, dreaming that someone had nudged him at some banquet, stood up and said: "My fellow Americans, I believe in JERCUS, I believe in God, I believe in reason."

An aide told him he was at a ball game.

"Where?" said the Vice-President.

"Chicago," said the aide.

"I believe in Chicago," said the Vice-President.

The President, having finally got the ball to the Chicago catcher, moved to a bank of microphones.

"Fellow Americans," he said, "it is good for us to be here on this beautiful day to observe our national pastime.

"Today, with so much trouble in the world and with so many people trying to destroy our American way of life, it is particularly good for us to come together, to put aside our cares and at the same time, to remember who and what we are.

"As I look at this beautiful new stadium and the new miracle grass that is so much greener and so much neater than the old regular grass, and as I listen to the chirping of the new mechanical birds that fly through the air so much more gracefully than the old sparrows and starlings we used to have, I can only think that if we can apply the same imagination, hard work and sacrifice that have brought these wonders into our lives to the problems we face in other countries, then ours shall be the inevitable victory."

Here the people applauded.

"I have just returned from the battlefields of the six conflicts our nation, along with our JERCUS allies, is presently involved in. And though the news freeze, which I myself put into effect six months ago, prevents my speaking about those struggles in detail, I want to assure you today that our fighting men are representing you in the finest traditions of our country.

"I know they join me from the far corners of the world as I say, *play ball!*"

A great roar went up from the crowd.

As the President slumped back in his beribboned box seat Willie began to think of the wars. In Uruguay. In Uganda. In India. In the Arctic. In the Middle East. In the Philippines.

He wondered not how the wars were going, as most Americans wondered then, but *why* they were going on at all.

The reason for the wars was never discussed.

Since the news freeze had begun, only good news could be printed or televised, so there had been no news of the wars for more than eight months and there had been no news of the civil disturbances in the cities either, even though it was rumored that the civil disturbances this year were the worst in the history of the country.

There were rumors of civil disturbances in Chicago, and on the way to the ball park, the players had seen a burning building. There were barricades blocking off certain streets and the ball park itself was surrounded by troops of the National Guard.

Willie could see the soldiers patrolling through the stands and prowling about the top of the stadium, their rifles glinting in the sun, the mechanical birds whirling above them.

Mr. Grayson, seeing Willie lost in his thoughts, tapped him on the shoulder.

"You feel okay, son?"

"Yessir."

"You ready?"

"Yessir."

"So I pray," said Mr. Grayson.

But Willie was not ready in his heart.

He could not get his mind off the wars or the civil disturbances. Nor could he get his mind off the war that was going on in the heart of his friend Clio who sat now on the edge of the dugout, scanning the box seats for a glimpse of Robert 'Bob' Regent.

A few minutes earlier, as they were warming up, a brilliant red, white and blue helicopter had come swooping into the stadium and Clio had cried, "That's him!"

But a walkie-talkie in the dugout contacted the chopper, which proved to be carrying only Mr. Ware and Mr. Cole and other executives of the Hawks club.

And still earlier, that morning, Clio and Willie had phoned every hotel in the Chicago area, trying to find Robert 'Bob' Regent. He was nowhere to be found.

"Maybe he's here in disguise," Mr. Grayson told the boys. "He wears disguises so much I don't recognize him myself sometimes even though I've known him all these years."

"Why would he wear a disguise?" Willie asked.

A look of melancholy settled upon Mr. Grayson's leathery old face. "That," he said, "is a long story."

The Hawks went down in order in the first half of the first inning, and Willie took the mound to perhaps the most tumultuous ovation ever heard at a sports event in Chicago.

It was a strange ovation that came from the stands, a mixture of cheers and jeers.

Some people believed that Willie's miracle pitch was a hoax designed to sell more tickets and revive interest in the game of baseball. These people jeered Willie as he threw his first practice pitches to Clio.

Certain fans of baseball were set against the whole idea of a miracle pitch which destroyed so many records and memories of past events and upset things held in balance. These people also jeered.

Then there were those who could only be called enemies. Willie was too great a success not to have enemies.

There were enemies even on his own club—pitchers and other players who had once been superstars and who were now suddenly out of the spotlight. There were supporters of these other players in the Chicago ball park that day and they too were booing.

But most people had come to the opening game to see a marvel. It was a time of marvels, when people prized marvels more than anything else and would travel great distances to see some curiosity or freak of nature that would break the boredom of their lives and help them forget the civil disturbances and the wars.

The marvels of course were never marvelous enough, for the boredom the people felt was inside them, in what the people of the unremembered times had called the soul.

Even the great wonders of space travel bored and disappointed the people now. Only when some accident occurred would they take an interest in space explorations. They watched and hungered for disaster.

So as the first Cougar stepped to the plate, a sort of frenzied moan came from the crowd, that frightening sound Willie had heard before.

When he looked at the faces of the people and saw their anger and excitement, he knew that however he pitched, whether he succeeded or failed, that hungering and thirsting for marvels would go on. There was nothing he, or anyone else, could do about it.

But now he had to pitch—pitch before the President of the United States and the Vice-President of the United States and 51,000 fans and the twenty-six red eyes of television cameras that were beaming this game to every state in the country, to Canada, to six Latin American nations and by satellite to the armed forces of the United States that were fighting the six strange unexplained, undeclared wars.

High in the broadcasting booth, the famed sportscaster Jack Taylor described the action as follows:

So here he is, fans, the wonder boy from the Southwest, with the wonder pitch. STRIKE ONE!

Tall, about six feet one, on the slender side at 175, red hair,

Oriental eyes and a face that has been described as that of a happy Aztec warrior—though that isn't exactly right either because Willie is also a black American and supposedly there's an Irishman back in the fam—STRIKE TWO!

The ball, as you saw, really jumped that time. It looked to us like it jumped a yard as it swooshed up from the plate. There was absolutely no way for Al Freud to get near the ball as it seemed to swerve—and STRIKE THREE!

An amazing spectacle, ladies and gentlemen, absolutely amazing! We here in the booth—let's be honest—we've been somewhat skeptical of this youngster. Like others, we've had our doubts. But there was no doubt about those three pitches, and Al Freud has one of the best eyes in baseball.

Here now is big Bill Bultman, slugging outfielder of the Cougars. Last year the Bull hit .356 and drove in 115 runs. Let's see if young Willie can work his wonders on one of the real power hitters of the league.

Now, looking in from our center field camera, Willie goes into his motion and now—STRIKE ONE! He did it again.

On the replay: The ball leaves his hand, you'll notice, just a shade earlier than with most pitchers and with a sort of flutter of the wrist. It looks at that point like something in the curve family, but watch closely now. The ball does not break to either side. There! You see that? The ball actually breaks up, and not like a rising fast ball.

Back to live action and strike two! Bill Bultman's objecting to that call, but umpire Arn Toynbee is unmoved.

We started to say, fans, that while many pitchers throw a rising fast ball, this pitch jumps suddenly in the air, as if, in the words of the press, the young pitcher had strung a piano wire ten feet in front of the plate and had somehow mastered the knack of hitting it every time.

And called strike three!

And now Bultman's hopping mad—wait a minute—Bultman hit Toynbee! Toynbee is down!

Bill Bultman, angered by that last call and the one before it, has just slugged the dean of American umpires, Arn Toynbee, who appears to be out cold back of the plate.

So now, with this break in the action, how about opening a nice cold bottle of Regent Ale?

Remember, if it's happiness you're after, the magic word is Regent.

Willie pitched another perfect game, the crowd shrieking and screaming with every pitch, but never so excitedly as in the first inning when Bultman slugged the umpire or in the eighth inning when another batter, having struck out for the third time, started out to the mound waving his bat menacingly.

When his teammates pulled the batter back to the dugout the crowd groaned in disappointment.

After the game, the people spilled out onto the field to get close to Willie, to touch him or talk to him or perhaps only see him at close range.

But Willie, as he went to the dugout with Clio and Mr Grayson, was frightened. He sensed the anger that was in the air.

He had made a perfect thing and the perfect thing was not enough.

In the clubhouse, though the Hawks had won 5 to 0, there was no joy.

The players dressed quickly and filed out to the bus.

They too had had their fill of perfection. Nothing they could ever do could match what Willie had done. Willie had taken something from each of them—each man's golden dream of himself.

Only Clio and Mr. Grayson were happy, but their happiness could not survive against the gloom of the players.

Back at the hotel Willie phoned his mother and Cool Dawn in Houston.

They told him he was wonderful.

Willie said it was much more wonderful to hear their voices again.

Then he thought he heard a quavering in something his mother said.

"Is everything all right, mama?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Trouble," said Cool Dawn.

"What kind of trouble?" said Willie anxiously.

"In the streets," said Cool Dawn.

"Worse than last year?"

"No," said Willie's mother. "Anyway, we're safe and well. The police have controlled it. Don't worry."

But Willie could not help worrying. There had been talk in the lobby of a further civil disturbance in Chicago, and he feared what might be happening in Houston.

He called Carolyn.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"The trouble?"

"Just some of the Apaches fighting."

"Carolyn?"

"Yes."

"You won't—go out?"

"I can take care of myself."

The sound of her voice made him want to leave everything and go to her.

"I saw the game today. You must be the most famous person in the country."

"Carolyn, I miss you."

He waited for her voice again, but over the phone came the laugh of Flexer Sage.

"You was magnificent, boy," said Flexer, "sheer magnificent."

"Thanks, Mr. Sage."

Flexer Sage wanted to know about the game, the Bultman-Toynbee fight, what Thatcher Grayson was like and so on. Finally Willie asked if he could talk to Carolyn again.

"Sure, sure," said Flexer. "You just keep striking them out, hear? There isn't no record you can't bust now, boy."

There was so much talking and laughter in the background when Carolyn got back on the line that she could hardly be heard.

"I'll write you a letter," said Willie. "It's hard talking on the phone."

"I got your cards."

"I'm a terrible writer."

"Terrible."

They hung up then in the old joking way, and Willie had failed once more to say the splendid words.

He sat on the edge of the bed and began to worry about the trouble again.

"Carolyn says the Apaches are fighting," he said to Clio.

But talking to Clio was like talking to a statue. His worries about Martha had locked him up, away from everything.

"I got to talk to her again," he said.

So Willie left the room while he made his call. When he came back, Clio was even worse off than before.

"Now she doesn't want us to find Regent," he said. "She says if we find him, it'll only be worse for her."

"Clio," said Willie, "Mr. Regent is a human being. I'm sure if we find him, we can get him to help Martha."

"She says he'd call it meddling."

"Why? How?"

"I don't know," said Clio miserably.

The boys discussed the matter at length, Willie finally convincing Clio that they should continue their search for Robert 'Bob' Regent.

So began another night of telephoning—hotels, motels, restaurants, nightclubs.

They phoned the New York offices of Regent Wines, and got a list of the TV and radio stations, the publishing houses and other properties of Robert 'Bob' Regent and phoned them all, one after the other, but no one anywhere was able to tell them where Robert 'Bob' Regent was.

At two in the morning they gave it up.

They had just settled in their beds when the phone rang.

"Western Union with a telegram from Mr. Robert 'Bob' Regent," the operator said.

"Please go ahead," said Willie, his voice shaking with excitement.

"The message is as follows: The Bird blinds the Cougars. Congratulations. Unity through obedience. Ever your friend.

Bob Regent."

"Is that all?" said Willie.

"That's all."

"What's the address?"

"There isn't any address."

"What's the city?"

"Montevideo, Uruguay."

That night there was a roaring in the streets of Chicago that was like the roaring of wild beasts.

Willie woke up and went to the window.

There was nothing in the streets but late cabs and somewhere out near Lake Michigan the mournful wail of an ambulance.

He had been dreaming, he supposed, of the crowd at the ball park.

Chapter eight

Cleveland, St. Louis, Kansas City, Washington—everywhere the Hawks played, the vast shouting crowds would pour into the ball parks, crowds so large that many would have to be turned away.

On days when Willie pitched, every seat in the stadium would be sold out by ten in the morning.

Even on his rest days, it was always a full house.

People wanted to see the Miracle Kid, as he was called now, wanted to get close to him, above all, wanted to touch him.

In St. Louis after another perfect game, two older men and a woman tore his shirt away.

In Kansas City, they got his shirt, undershirt and one of his shoes.

In the hotels where the Hawks stayed, in the restaurants where they dined, there were always the crowds, pressing and pushing, striving for a glimpse of Willie.

If they saw him, they would ask him for autographs, baseballs, pictures.

Willie always smilingly obliged.

It made him happy to make others happy even though he saw there was nothing he could do about the underlying wonder-lust that had taken many.

It was tiring work meeting people and signing baseballs and shaking hands and having to demonstrate his pitch.

And sometimes there was the fear.

He would spend a half hour throwing the ball before a group of spectators, inviting them to study his grip of the ball and so on, and after he had no more to show, the people would still stay on, their faces unhappy and resentful, as if he had cheated them somehow.

"It's just a pitch," he would laugh, trying to tell them that a miracle pitch was after all nothing but a baseball thrown a certain way.

But that was not explanation enough for everyone.

"Fake!" a man cried in Washington. "It's a hoax!"

"Part of the conspiracy!" another man shouted at the end of another demonstration.

Sometimes these incidents led to arguments among the fans, and once or twice, to violence.

When that happened, Willie would go to the hotel and lock himself in his room.

One night after a game in Boston, a delegation of players came to his room with a copy of *Now* magazine. Willie's picture was on the cover.

The story, after describing Willie as a "truly authentic folk hero" and a "needed reminder that a poor boy can still make it to the top in the United States," went on to quote a California psychiatrist who had written an article on Willie's pitch.

It was this article the players wanted Willie to read.

At times of stress, the psychiatrist had written, *man returns to a more primitive state. He looks for marvels and wonders and signs of the miraculous. The greater the stress, the greater his appetite for the preternatural. The tendency is manifested in all aspects of culture—in religion, music, dance and the games. Thus, at the present time, a young baseball pitcher is said to*

have the power of hurling a "miracle pitch."

From a scientific standpoint, this is absurd. The pitch is nothing more than a well-thrown rising fast ball which gives the illusion of sharply "skipping" at the plate. The illusion has nothing to do with the pitch itself; it is rather the product of the psychic needs of the players. Caught up in the general and public need for the miraculous and fantastic, they have convinced themselves the pitch is unhittable. They are the victims of a delusion, brought about by a powerful unconscious urge to believe in the mysterious and inexplicable.

"What's it mean?" said Willie. "I don't understand those words."

"It means," said Essinger, a renowned pitcher of the previous season, "that what you are doing is a trick."

"But that's silly."

"We're the silly ones," said Essinger. "You've made us look that way. Silly and useless. You're ruining the game."

"I don't understand, Mr. Essinger."

"This trick pitch of yours makes fools of batters. It also makes fools of all other pitchers. It reflects on everybody in baseball."

"Mr. Essinger, every pitcher tries to strike the batter out. That's the idea of the pitch, isn't it? Every pitcher tries to trick the batter."

"Not the way you're doing it."

"Mr. Essinger, I have shown you the pitch so many times."

"Without ever showing me the secret of it."

"There isn't any secret," said Willie earnestly.

The other players scoffed at this.

"You act as if you think I'd hold something back," Willie said, near tears suddenly. "As if I'd lie to my own teammates."

"What else can we think?" said Essinger. "You won't explain how you do it."

"How can I explain what I don't understand?"

"Okay, Essinger," said one of the other players, "make the offer."

Essinger drew an envelope from the pocket of his red, white and blue sports jacket.

"This is a check for 200,000 dollars. It's all the money we can raise right now. Tell us the secret of the pitch and it's yours."

"There isn't any secret!" Willie cried. "If I knew the secret, don't you trust me to share it with you, my own teammates?"

"We could borrow some money and make it 350,000," said Essinger, "but you'd have to wait till the end of the season."

"If you had all the money in the whole world, Mr. Essinger, it wouldn't do any good. I tell you the truth, I don't know why the pitch does what it does."

"I told you it would go like this," said Andrews, the shortstop.

"You make our position difficult," said Essinger. "If you won't accept our offer, then we have to ask you to stop throwing the pitch altogether."

"I can't do that!" Willie shouted.

"You'll have to," said Essinger. "For the good of the club. Look at the dissension you're causing. Unity is the first word in our club motto."

"A house divided against itself," said Andrews, "why—" He could not remember the rest of the quotation.

"The people in my neighborhood, my kids even, laugh at me," said Phillips, a Golden Glove infielder. "They say, 'You get paid for nothing. Who needs a glove with him around?'"

"And then articles like this," said Essinger, "articles which say we have illusions and delusions. Do you think it's fun going around having people say you have delusions?"

Peters, the oldest player on the club said, "Look, son, it isn't as if you had to give the pitch up. No, nothing like that. Just mix in a few straight ones."

"So they can hit it?" asked Willie astonished.

"That's it. To make a game of it."

"But the idea is to get them out," said Willie.

"Not the way you're doing it, not all the time," said Peters. "What sport is there in that?"

"What does Mr. Grayson think?" said Willie, perplexed and still near tears.

The players snickered.

"What does he know?" Essinger said.

"He's the manager," said Willie.

"He couldn't manage a box of matches," said Andrews.

"With the directions printed on the cover," said Phillips.

"No one on this club has listened to him in three years," said Essinger. "Him and his Ezee Good Words."

"Then it seems club unity is a little weak already," said Willie, surprised by his own argument.

"If you think sarcasm will help, you're badly mistaken, boy," said Essinger.

"I did not mean to be sarcastic, Mr. Essinger," Willie replied. "But I want to get the matter straight in my mind."

"You better get it straight fast," said Essinger. "We're opening at home Tuesday night and you're pitching. If I were you, I'd have it straight by then."

After they left, Willie tried to think things out.

He wished he could talk with Clio, but Clio, talking on the phone with Martha in the next room, had his own enormous worry.

He wished he could go out and walk in the streets, but the hotel lobby was jammed with people, people who wanted to stare at him, take his picture, touch him, question him.

In the corridor outside, the players talked among themselves, their voices sometimes rising in anger.

He thought it would cheer him to call home, not to discuss his troubles but just to chat with his mother and Cool Dawn. But the operator said the circuits were out of order, that he should try the call later.

He opened the window and crawled out on the fire escape. He climbed to the top of the hotel and sat down on a parapet and looked out at the old city of Boston.

He could see the red and white lights of the ships swinging in the harbor, the harbor, he remembered, where Englishmen dressed as Indians threw tea in the ocean and set America going. He tried to think of the many things that had

happened here in the long ago.

But it was no use.

The loneliness came over his heart like the fog that came rolling in from the sea. He had never felt so alone before.

He went back to the room and wrote to Carolyn on a postcard that showed a picture of the house of the famous American philosopher of the unremembered times, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I love you. That what I alwas wanted to tell you.
I didn't know how and was afrade you wd laugh.
Did you know even back in the school I loved you?
Only never knew how to say it. Anyway, I love U.
Dear one, with trew heart.

Chapter nine

The ball parks or stadiums where the Hawks played their road games were stunning creations, by far the most magnificent structures ever built in American cities.

They were more beautiful and graceful than cathedrals.

They were more stately than insurance company buildings.

They were more comfortable than schools and far more habitable than most of the housing in the country.

The cities competed with one another in building bigger and more luxurious ball parks.

They were all enclosed now, like the old Houston Astrodome, and conditioned with the only pure air in the city.

Their playing fields could be converted to ice rinks for hockey, plastic courts for basketball or shiny Road-Pak, as it was called, for jet auto racing.

Sometimes conventions of one kind or another were held in the stadiums. They were so comfortable and had such pure air that people delighted to visit them for any reason.

Often, especially in the winter months, the people of the

tenements would break into the playdomes to try to find a warm place to sleep.

This had become a common crime in the United States. It was called dome-passing and was punishable by a fine and 100 days imprisonment in one of the new underground prisons. The President of the United States had recently called dome-passing one of the most disgusting of all crimes because it directly invaded the right of every American citizen to enjoy sports in peace and freedom.

The ball parks of Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago, Boston, Kansas City and Washington had all been spectacular, but none of those parks prepared Willie and Clio for the Regent Complex of New York City.

The Regent Complex, a many-sided affair of glass and steel and alumibronze, was the largest structure in New York City.

It occupied what had once been Central Park in Manhattan.

It soared 294 stories into the air and was the tallest building in the country.

It was so vast and overpowering to the eye that it appeared to be not only the hub of the city but the reason for its existence, as in a sense it was.

The Complex housed some 3,000 business offices, representing the nation's leading industries.

Many foreign governments had their embassies and consulates there.

The United Nations occupied a part of the 126th floor.

The stadium dome, set on top of the complex, covered the largest ball park in the world with a seating capacity of 150,000.

Three hundred gigantic elevators whisked the fans to the Park at the Top of the World, as it was called, where they were then borne by a system of conveyor belts—like the old escalators—to the bleachers, or to private box seats, or to one of the elegant restaurants ringing the top of the dome.

The night the Hawks opened their season, the stands were filled to capacity. Every table in every restaurant was taken.

The size of the park, the magnificence of the setting, the vast crowd had a numbing effect on Willie and Clio.

Warming up, they were unnaturally calm as if tranquilized or half awake.

Only an hour before, boarding the monorail that brought them to the park, they had been nervous, filled with anxiety, each lost in his own worries.

But here it seemed impossible to worry.

Nothing seemed important but the game, and even the game seemed a remote happening that did not really involve them.

But when they had warmed up and worked up a sweat, their ordinary feelings returned, their concerns and their fears.

Now Willie saw the stone faces of Essinger and Phillips and the other players as they watched him from the dugout.

He had not told Clio of his encounter with the players in Boston—Clio's worries were already too great.

Clio shaded his eyes against the powerful floodlights of the stadium and peered at the distant restaurants and faintly luminous offices at the top of the park.

"If he's anywhere, he's here," he said to Willie. "He wouldn't miss his home opening."

Willie, looking at the enormous crowd, said, "We'd never find him anyway."

In the dugout they asked Mr. Grayson where Robert 'Bob' Regent usually sat at the park.

"He's apt to be anywhere," said Mr. Grayson. "Anywhere in the stands or in his office."

"His office is here?" said Clio.

"There," said Mr. Grayson, pointing to a row of oblong panels, lit by red and blue lights, at the very top of the dome, above the center field fence.

"How can we get there?" Clio asked. "Maybe he's up there right now."

"You wouldn't go to the office," said Mr. Grayson quickly.

"Why not?"

"No one goes to the office unless summoned."

"How do we get there?"

"Don't go," Mr. Grayson pleaded. He reached into his red, white and blue jacket and opened the *Vest Pocket Ezee Bible.* "Listen: *When ye see the abomination of desolation. . . .*"

"How do we get there?" shouted Clio angrily.

"The M elevator on this level," Mr. Grayson said with a sigh. "But, boys, please. . . ."

The boys didn't wait to hear what Mr. Grayson had to say. They raced into the clubhouse and down the corridor to the M elevator.

Inside the elevator there were eight numbered push buttons; the ninth was a plain bar, like a military decoration, of red, white and blue.

"That's it," said Clio.

Willie pushed it.

In a moment they were standing in a dark thickly carpeted room that was absolutely bare, without window or doorway, with only a little light coming from an aperture at the top of one wall.

"There has to be a door someplace," Clio said, plunging off to the left.

"Look over there," Willie said, pointing to the opposite wall.

As their eyes adjusted to the darkness, the boys saw quite faintly at first, and then more clearly, a blue glow radiating from the wall and outlining a panel of darker blue numbers and buttons.

The boys studied the panel trying to decipher the figures written on the tiny luminous circles and squares.

Suddenly a voice sounded in their midst, so close and so unexpectedly they both jumped.

"The last one on the left, boys."

"Who was that?" Willie whispered.

Clio pushed the last button on the left.

Behind them there was a whirling sound. A panel of the opposite wall ascended with a soft buzz, then snapped to a stop.

As the boys turned at this sight, a figure appeared in the

space opened by the panel, an indistinct figure swaying a little in the blue glow.

In the same voice they had heard before, the figure said, "Clio, you first."

"Who are you?" Willie said with a shaking voice.

"*You* ask me that?" the figure asked sadly and Willie thought he caught the tone of Robert 'Bob' Regent's voice.

The boys strained to see the face before them.

"Come, Clio," the voice said.

"I'm coming with him," Willie protested.

"This is between Clio and myself," said the figure.

Both boys now guessed, though they could not be sure, that this was indeed Robert 'Bob' Regent.

"It's all right," said Clio. "Just wait for me."

Willie waited—a minute, five minutes, fifteen minutes—waited in darkness, his blood pounding in his veins, fear pounding and pulsing in his veins.

At one point he thought of storming the panel, convinced that Clio was in danger.

But there was no sound from beyond the wall, and he told himself to be calm.

He waited.

At last the panel lifted again, again revealing that eerie blue radiance.

Through that curious light came Clio, walking stiffly, head down.

"Clio," Willie whispered.

Clio didn't answer.

"What is it, Clio?"

Clio, head lowered so that his face was invisible, said nothing. The elevator door closed noiselessly and he was gone.

Willie turned about and there in the haze of blue stood the figure, ghostly, almost a shadow, gesturing with one arm in a serious and sinister way.

"Now, Willie, we shall have our talk," said the sad voice.

Willie went forward, under the panel, into a larger space, a wide curving space, glassed on either side.

On one side Willie could see the bright flag of the playing field, the fantastic crowd, noiseless from this space, and unreal, looking not like people but painted images of people, man-made things like the mechanical birds that darted through the night air.

On the other side the green lights of the city shone mournfully through a dripping mist.

The office was full of dim, oddly shaped furniture, grotesque designs that seemed to float in the uncertain gleam of the stadium on the one side and the smoky green haze of the city on the other.

It was still difficult to make out the face of the figure that had moved now behind a desk.

"You are Mr. Regent?" Willie asked.

"Sit down."

"Where has Clio gone?"

"We are not here to discuss Clio, but you."

"You must first tell me if you are Robert Regent."

There was a pause now, and Willie thought he saw the man put his hand to his face.

"Willie," the man said, "Willie—I thought you were my friend."

"You *are* Mr. Regent!"

"Does it matter who I am? Does it matter where I am? Does loyalty to your owner depend on place or time?"

"What can that mean, Mr. Regent?"

"*Bob.*"

"Bob."

"You have forgotten New Orleans?" Robert 'Bob' Regent said in the saddest of tones. "Our friendship means nothing?"

Willie, more bewildered now than before, blurted, "What does our friendship have to do with it—with Clio or—with my, my other worries?"

"That I should have offered my friendship so easily," sighed Robert 'Bob' Regent. "To someone who doesn't care."

"I don't understand," said Willie. "Not anything you say."

Slowly the figure rose from the desk and went to the windows overlooking the ball field.

Willie approached from the other side of the desk.

There was no doubt now: the light shining from the field clearly showed the face of Robert 'Bob' Regent, looking older somehow and quite tired.

He was dressed in a somber blue suit. He looked as if he had just completed a long journey.

"How happy the people," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "See how they sit without care, without fear. At peace."

"Mr. Regent, I—"

"Peace. A lovely word. And you, my boy, have brought that peace to the people of the country. Your pitch has returned millions to the great game of baseball—a game that had nearly died. Does it mean so little to you, this miraculous gift, that gives delight and release to a troubled nation?"

Here Robert 'Bob' Regent turned his lined face to Willie.

"And would you give that up, all of it, just for the sake of meddling?"

"Meddling?"

"Mixing in my affairs."

"Mr. Regent—"

"Bob, my boy, *Bob*," said Robert 'Bob' Regent with an air of infinite patience.

"Bob, we—I haven't meddled. That girl we met in New Orleans. Clio wants to help her—and so do I. That's all we wanted to do, not meddle."

"How can you help, pitiful child," said Robert 'Bob' Regent in his melancholy way. "What can you do but throw a baseball? What are you after all but a property of the New York Hawks Ball Club?"

Willie said nothing. He did not know how to begin to answer that question. It was too big to answer.

Now Robert 'Bob' Regent moved to the other side of the office and Willie followed.

Before them lay the city, a tangle of shapes with a million green eyes staring up through the mist.

"The world needs to forget," said Robert 'Bob' Regent.

"And you could help it to forget if only you would. But instead you choose to meddle."

"We can clear this up, Mr. Reg—that is, Bob. If you'll help Martha in her trouble, then—"

"See?" said Regent. "You meddle right now without even noticing it."

"She is from a poor family. She is unhappy in her work. Why can't you help her?"

"The poor you shall always have with you," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "But if you would serve the great team of which you are a part, the Marthas of the world would be taken care of."

"Is that what you told Clio?"

"It is what I *tried* to tell him."

"What did he say?"

"He was a fool. He would not obey."

"What did you want him to do?"

"What I shall ask—indeed demand—that you do. As a member of the team I own."

"Tell me," Willie whispered, afraid of the words that would come now.

"Throw the straight pitches as Mr. Essinger and Mr. Peters suggested in Boston."

"How did you know that? I didn't tell that to anyone."

"Who are you to ask that I should explain my ways?" said Regent, his voice suddenly loud.

"They must have told you."

Regent's hand moved to the underside of a small table; he pressed a switch.

Instantly a six-foot television screen came to life at a corner of the room.

There was the Hawks dugout—voices perfectly audible.

"Where's Willie?" Mr. Grayson was asking. "Anybody seen the boys?"

Regent pushed another switch, and a far more startling picture appeared on the screen.

It was Clio packing his suitcase. He was still wearing his Hawks uniform.

"What's he doing? How—"

"He's left," Regent snapped. "He preferred meddling to playing ball. I offered him all the candied yams in the world and he preferred to meddle. So. . . ."

Willie's mouth fell wide open.

"But it does not matter," said Robert 'Bob' Regent. "After all, you're the prince of the diamond, not Clio. I am sure we can settle this unpleasantness, that our friendship is strong enough to survive this little storm."

Willie stood there on heavy legs as Regent came toward him, holding out his hand.

"For a few interesting games, then some perfect ones, I offer you—everything."

Willie finally moved.

It was hard getting his legs to work.

It was even harder getting his mind to think—to decide where to go and what to do.

But he did move finally, just as Robert 'Bob' Regent's hand fell on his arm.

"Where are you going, my boy?"

"To Clio."

"Oh no you're not," Regent said. "You're pitching this game."

"I'm going," said Willie, pulling away.

"You have a contract. I demand that you pitch. I absolutely forbid you to leave the Complex!"

"I'm leaving," said Willie, at the panel now and pushing the "open" button.

"You can't!" shouted Regent, lunging towards him. "Who do you think you are?"

That stopped Willie.

He turned back once more and said, "I don't know—a person."

"I'll tell you what you are," Regent shrieked. "You're a nigger! A filthy little nigger!"

The words hit Willie like rocks.

A bolt of lightning flashed across Regent's face. The rage and madness Willie saw there terrified him. The eyes pro-

truded from the skull-like mask, the veins stood out, the mouth twisted horribly as that ancient, acceptable obscenity formed on it once more.

"Nigger!"

Willie was in the hallway.

"A *retarded* nigger! With a whore for a mother!"

Willie froze. Then quickly, like a swung stick, he moved back into the office.

"A whore," said Regent distinctly, slowly.

Willie slapped him across the face. Regent fell back. He slapped him again, harder.

Regent fell down on one knee, moaning something.

Willie stood over him for a moment, then went back to the hallway.

"Nigger!" Regent called.

Willie was boarding the elevator.

"You'll never play ball again. Anywhere. Filthy chink wetback nigger!"

Those were the last words Willie heard as the elevator door closed.

The words brought tears to his eyes, stirring feelings and memories he could not name.

The horror followed him into the street, making him tremble as he hailed a taxi.

But the real horror was yet to come.

Chapter ten

Clio had checked out of the hotel. Willie found a note on his bed.

Maybe you can live that way. Not me. I've gone to New Orleans. Maybe we could play in South America. Hope you're OK. Your pal. Clio.

Willie changed his clothes, packed his suitcase and took a cab to Kennedy Airport.

The cab driver, recognizing him, turned on the radio, which was broadcasting the game.

"How come you left?" the cabbie asked.

"A fight."

"You going back?"

"No."

"You must be crazy," the cabbie said. "Why, all that *money. . . .*"

We're in the third inning, the announcer was saying, *and Essinger is struggling. Chicago has four runs, and we can only wonder what the Hawks must be thinking at this moment with the young miracle pitcher disappearing just before game time along with his catcher. No word from the Hawks management. . . .*

At the airport the cabbie said, "Tell me one thing, will you?"

"If I can," said Willie.

"What do you really want?"

"Sir?"

"You coloreds. What do you want? Here we give you everything. All my life we been bending over backwards and still—still it isn't enough. Don't you have any gratitude? I mean, look at this money that has been offered you. What are you eighteen, twenty years old? I mean, what is it you want?"

Willie had had too many hard questions that night so he said good-bye and good luck to the cabbie and hurried into the airport to find Clio.

But the New Orleans flight had just taken off, and there wouldn't be another for two hours.

As he idled at the counter, trying to decide what to do, a figure robed in white approached from behind, a tall man, haggard and red of eye. He wore a trench coat of bright white cloth and carried a strange device of blue metal and iridescent glass.

Willie turned around, lost in his thoughts.

He looked up then and saw the man, the blue device wriggling in his hands, opening itself up and exposing something like the barrel of a gun.

"Don't!" Willie cried and held up his hands.

Laughter from the man. "Only a camera. . . ."

The glittering device purred softly.

Willie froze, then ran.

A crowd began to gather. Half the people were staring at the camera. The others peered at the figure retreating down the crowded corridor.

"That's the camera," someone said. "The world's most expensive camera."

The man in white drifted away.

Willie found a novelty shop at the end of the corridor. He went into the shop and bought a fishing cap. He pulled the cap down over his red hair. He bought dark glasses and put them on. Then he went to the men's room to check his disguise.

It was hard to tell who he was now, but as he looked at himself in the mirror, he had the feeling he was being watched, hunted. Under the fishing cap, under the red hair, the hideous voice went on: *Never play again. . . . Never. . . .*

He waited a half hour before heading back to the ticket counter. Then he thought of his family in Houston.

They would have heard the news of his leaving on the radio, and he didn't want them to worry. He went to a booth to place a long distance call.

"The circuits are out," said the operator.

This was the fourth straight night the circuits had been out.

"What's the trouble?" Willie asked.

The operator hesitated. Then she said, "We are not permitted to talk about the situation."

"What situation?"

"In Houston."

"What is the situation you can't talk about?"

"I'm sorry. The news freeze does not permit us to discuss the situation with anyone other than an official of the Justice Department."

Willie ran to the Texas Airlines counter.

"I'm sorry," said the clerk. "No flights to Houston."

"Why not?"

"The flights are canceled for emergency reasons that we are not permitted to discuss."

Willie's head hummed and buzzed; his legs went weak.

"What's the nearest city in Texas you can get me to?"

"Waynesville."

"I'll take a ticket."

"There's a plane leaving in fifty minutes."

Willie spent the fifty minutes in a daze.

Five hours later the plane landed in Waynesville, and Willie rented a car and began the four-hour drive to Houston.

Dear Father. . . . Dear Father. . . , he prayed over and over and over and over—until he saw the smoke, the hideous yellow smoke, hanging in a cloud over Houston in the dawn.

There were policemen at the outskirts of the city, directing the traffic away from the fires.

"Where are the fires?" Willie asked one of the troopers.

"All over. What area you interested in, boy?"

"South—in the Custer district."

In a sickening, quick and automatic way, the trooper said, "That went a week ago."

"That can't be true!"

The trooper looked at him.

"Boy," he said, "you better get some sleep. You look like a beer truck run over you."

Willie drove his car to a barricade on the north edge of the Custer district.

Then he set out on foot through the rubble, much of it still burning, toward his old neighborhood.

Along the way people sat on piles of rocks, studying bits and pieces of their previous lives.

There were policemen and firemen everywhere, but the riots here had ended.

The fires seemed under control, most of them burned out.

There was nothing now but desolation and ruin.

Willie knew that when he turned the corner to Boone Avenue, he would come into view of the William McKinley Arms and would know the truth one way or the other.

He had been walking fast, with unseeing eyes, through the dust and smoke, with ears that were deaf to the great demolition machines that had already begun to clear away some of the rubble.

But he slowed now as he approached the Boone corner, dreading to look at his old home.

He turned the corner and looked.

Total ruin.

Where the William McKinley Arms had stood, the demolition crews had already cleared the rubble away. The ground was bare.

It was as if everything had been wiped off the face of the earth by the hand of a giant.

Willie, moving like a blind man, walked unsteadily to the place where the old tenement had stood.

There, an hour later, two workmen found him, moaning like an animal.

"He's flipped," one of the workmen said. "He's disarranged."

"Leave him alone," the other workman said. "He might have a gun."

Then a policeman came by.

"What's the matter, boy?" Officer Harlowe Judge asked.

Willie could not speak. Indeed he did not even hear or see Officer Harlowe Judge.

"Aren't you—why it's Sam!"

Willie stared at the policeman.

"You better come along," Officer Judge said. "They're blasting in the next block. There'll be stuff flying all over here."

Willie allowed Officer Judge to lead him away.

They met a little girl.

She had a drawing she wanted them to look at—a crayon sketch in red and black of some fantastic creature.

"It's a condor," she said. "I seen one on TV."

They went on.

A block later, they met a priest.

Willie looked at the eyes and nose and mouth of the priest

and came to his senses a little.

It was Father Simpson.

"My dear son," the priest said, and held out his hands to Willie.

"My mother and grandmother?"

"Gone," the priest said. "Lost with the others."

"Carolyn Sage?"

"Gone, lost and gone with all the rest. We buried them in a mass grave the day after the explosions."

Willie opened his mouth as if to cry, but nothing came out.

The priest said, "It is God's will, son. We must accept God's will."

Willie stepped back quickly from the priest.

Officer Judge said, "Let's go to the Red Cross, Sam."

Willie turned and ran.

"Sam!" Officer Judge shouted.

"Son!" Father Simpson called.

But Willie was already a half block away.

He ran as fast as he knew, and somehow even faster, through the wrecked buildings, down the blasted streets, faster and faster, and faster still.

He crossed a shopping plaza and bounded up a ramp of oncoming cars, all honking and swerving to avoid hitting him.

"Get out of the way!" a man yelled.

"Stop him!" shouted another.

He tumbled down an embankment, landed on his feet and took up his race again.

He headed down a gravel road, passing a subdivision, and then ran on into open country.

He ran without any sense of where he was going and without any sense of tiring either.

He had the vague idea that if he could keep running, the world and its certainties would go on floating and bobbing like this, smearing before his eyes—nothing had to be final.

The road narrowed and curved into a grove of trees.

It went up and down a hill and into a denser growth of trees.

He was well out of Houston now, though for all he knew he was still downtown.

He came into a remote, almost deserted area with strange vine growths appearing from time to time at the side of the road.

He ran on, pumping his legs harder and harder.

He thought that he was running faster all the while but in truth he was moving slower now, his body gradually wearing out.

When he came to the top of a little rise, he saw the great sun bursting before him, so close it seemed he could plunge into its fiery heart.

He pumped his legs faster but he tripped on something and went flying into the gravel face down.

The fall dazed him.

He got to his feet slowly and started to run again but his legs refused to work and down he fell again, this time a few feet off the road in a patch of wild blue flowers.

There he lay until dusk when an old beat-up panel truck came down the hill, its yellow headlights gleaming like cat eyes in the gray-green air.

The truck passed Willie, then stopped and backed up.

Two bearded men wearing faded work clothes got out of the truck and walked to the place where Willie lay on the side of the road.

They spoke not a word, but after making several rapid movements with their hands and fingers, they picked Willie up and put him on an old sofa in the back of the truck.

One of the men climbed in the back of the truck and sat down next to the sofa where Willie lay while the other got into the cab and started the engine.

Then the old truck chugged off into the darkness, heading toward a cluster of broken-down buildings that were only blurred shapes in the moonless night.

Chapter eleven

For a month Willie lay in a bed in a strange, bare room that overlooked a vegetable garden, a row of spindly pines and beyond the pines, a winding stream that was muddy and ugly most of the time, except in the early morning.

At dawn, when the world struggled up for another day, the stream was blue and lovely.

Beyond the stream, beyond the bare fields, the city of Houston sprawled out under the blank gray sky.

Little by little, day by day, the smoke over the city had cleared away, and Willie knew the riots were over, though most of the time he did not think of the matter that clearly.

He was aware only of some awful happening that had cut him off from all that he knew and loved, and he knew that this happening had occurred in the city and that the smoke was related to it.

Sometimes he knew the city was Houston and he remembered having spoken to Father Simpson, and once at night he dreamed that he stood in the bare place where the William McKinley Arms had stood.

At all times he knew that his loved ones were lost.

But sometimes he would look at the city and imagine it was Chicago or Boston or New Orleans.

Several times a day strange, bearded men would come to his room, offering food which he could not eat.

The men would examine the bottle that stood at the head of Willie's cot, replacing it sometimes with another bottle. They would examine the tube that led from the bottle to Willie's arm. Sometimes they would feel his pulse.

Now and then a man who seemed to be a doctor came to call. He would listen to Willie's heart and peer into his eyes with a penlike flashlight.

Once or twice he gave Willie an injection that put him to sleep.

Willie gazed out over the gardens and the muddy, sluggish stream, at the city of Houston.

He spoke to no one and no one spoke to him.

He felt nothing, only an emptiness.

He wondered from time to time if he were really alive.

One night he heard men singing.

He thought he must be dreaming.

But then the melody of the song came more clearly to him and it seemed somehow familiar.

He thought he would ask about it the next day.

But the next day he remembered nothing.

Two nights later he heard the singing again.

He got out of bed and started down the corridor toward the room where the singing seemed loudest.

But he was too weak to reach the door.

His knees gave way beneath him and he fainted.

A little later he had the vague memory of silent men carrying him through the corridor and placing him on his bed.

The next morning an old man with a long white beard, not one of the regular visitors, came to Willie's room.

He wore a strange tunic, made of gunnysack and other rags patched together.

He put a little card on the stand beside Willie's bed.

When the old man left, Willie reached for the card.

It said, THE SILENT SERVANTS OF THE USED, ABUSED AND UTTERLY SCREWED UP ARE WITH YOU.

Willie tried to make sense of these words, but it was too much work.

He fell asleep for another week.

Then one night the singing woke him again.

He got out of bed very carefully and tried his legs while supporting himself on the edge of the bed.

When he was satisfied he could walk, he started down the shadowy corridor once more.

He came to a broad wooden door that looked like the door to a barn.

He tried to open it, but it was no use. He was too weak.

He was about to try it again when the door gave way and there stood a bearded man wearing a ragtag garment,

motioning Willie to come forward—a slow gentle motion that seemed to say *Welcome.*

Willie entered an open courtyard where eighteen or twenty men, similarly garbed in gunnysack tunics, stood about a bare wooden table, singing.

In the center of the table stood the old white-bearded man who had given Willie the strange card.

He was holding a cup and a loaf of bread.

The man who had met Willie at the door led him to the old man at the table.

The old man broke the bread and gave a chunk of it to Willie.

"Body of Christ," he said in a cracked old voice.

"Body of Christ," said Willie, and he ate the bread.

Then the old man gave Willie the cup—a tin cup it was, such as crippled beggars used to hold out for the pennies of the rich.

"Blood of Christ," said the old man in his cracked, wavering voice.

"Blood of Christ," said Willie, and he sipped from the cup. It was the first food he had eaten in six weeks.

BOOK THREE

Any one of us can prepare a body. But the cosmetizing of the corpse in such a way as to suggest peaceful and blessed repose —that is the great and merciful art we must now devise.

Dr. Ambrose Felder
In an address before
The American Mortuary Association
July 4, 1891
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Chapter one

The war-horse of the world galloped once more about the
n.

The leaves curled and grew brittle on the trees.

One night a little snow fell, then more snow, then a record
ount.

Christmas came twinkling and glistening—a muffled tu-
lt of bells—and then the long pull of January, gray as
ath under the chill, white sky.

Willie stayed on at the house of the Silent Servants of the
ed, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up.

At first it was a case of having nowhere to go, but as the weeks wore on, he came to like the life for itself.

He donned the ragtag tunic that was the uniform of the Servants.

He worked in the gardens and in the barns.

He milked the cows and fed the chickens.

Every afternoon from 4:00 to 5:30 he read the Scripture in his bare cell.

In the mornings he joined the Servants for the silent hour of praise.

In the evenings he joined them for Mass.

It was only at Mass that the servants used their voices. The rest of the time they used sign language similar to that used by the deaf and dumb.

It took Willie a long time to get the hang of the sign tongue, but at the end of his first six months, he could say such simple things as *Please open the door, I'll plant that, Where's the hammer?*

The reason for using sign language was set forth in the Guidebook which had been left by the founders of the Society: *Men have created a false world with words, which they use to cover up their sin. Better the language of deeds, of loving and serving those who have been crushed by the words of the world.*

All words are lies, someone had added in red ink.

And someone else had added an entry in purple crayon: *Even these words.*

To the Servants, all books, except the Scripture, were treacherous, and even the Guidebook was looked on as a changing list of suggestions, trustworthy only to the degree that they might inspire a deed of love.

When Willie first told the white-bearded Father Benjamin, who was more or less the head of the community, that he wanted to stay with the Servants, Father Benjamin gave him the Guidebook and a Bible.

Then the old man took two slips of blue paper, wrote a crayon word on each and inserted them into the books.

In the Bible the blue slip said: HINTS.

In the Guidebook, the slip said: LESSER HINTS.

Willie sat up all that night reading the Guidebook. It was a collection of history, sayings, news clippings, recommendations, bits of poetry, occasional jokes.

Of the foundation and beginning of the Society, the Guidebook provided only a little information:

The Society traces its origin to Second Isaiah and is represented in the figure of the Suffering Servant, prefiguring J. (Five lines of Greek followed here.)

In the early Christian ages Origen refers to certain "asininities of the Roman pontiff" and offers views on diverse subjects which, according to Bl. Peter the Mad (1228–1264), give evidence to his (Origen's) founding of the Society. In modern times the title of founder is variously ascribed to:

Claude of Liverpool, *burned at the stake for destroying the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Albert the Great and more than half the theological library of the University of Oxford;*

Henri de Grote, *imprisoned (1721) for inscribing certain unseemly words on the rose window of Chartres;*

George L. Cross *(1799–1851), English convert poet and proponent of the theory of personal papacy;*

Milton "Gunner" Felder, *American pacifist Air Force general executed in 1986 by joint court martial of the armies of India, China, Russia and the U.S.A. for multilateral treason and author of the book* Kamikaze Kristianity.

Since the Society considers its history trifling and since no exact records exist, no one knows who the founder is.

And no one cares, someone had added in orange ink.

The final entry on this page was a question lettered boldly in green poster paint: BUT WHO IS THE REAL FOUNDER?

Underneath, written twenty-eight times in twenty-eight different ways—penned, penciled, typed, scrawled, scrolled—were the words JESUS, CHRIST, J, HIM, THE LORD and in one case THE SPIRIT.

Willie turned to a further chapter called "Purposes of the Society."

Under this heading there was a list of words and phrases,

all crossed out:

Matthew 25:31–46
Identifying
Being with filthy men
Befriending fools and victims of fools
Serving uselessly the used
Compassioning
Listening to JERCUS adherents and other asses
Listening to JERCUS enemies and other asses
Filling emptiness

The only word remaining in the list that had not been crossed out was *substituting.*

A little farther on in the book, Willie came across a collection of yellowed press clippings.

The first of these, from an undated New York paper, bore this banner headline: **AIR ACE TO GHANDIVILLE IN EXCHANGE FOR CONDEMNED PILOT.**

Gunner Felder, Renowned Flier, Presumed Dead
Affiliation with Religious Sect Revealed

(New York) *Milton N. "Gunner" Felder, famed U.S. pilot and holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor, was reportedly executed in Ghandiville on Friday of last week according to a Reuters dispatch filed late yesterday in Hong Kong.*

Felder, 56, the millionaire flying ace of several Asian conflicts, was last seen alive at an airstrip outside Manila on Wednesday of last week. According to Philippine authorities, Felder announced his intention of flying his private plane to the revolutionary capital to offer his life in ransom for Navy Lt. Samuel R. Bleeder, shot down by rebel forces in an air strike against Calcutta last May.

Bleeder, convicted of "crimes against the Peoples' Republic of India," had been sentenced to death last week.

Felder's widow, the Washington socialite Nancy Waterfield, was unavailable for comment.

Felder's son, Herman Felder, a 22-year-old filmmaker living in Hollywood, disclosed that the air ace had been "greatly agitated by world events over the past year and a half" and had

recently become a member of a Roman Catholic religious order called the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up.

When pressed for details of the nature of the society, the younger Felder declined comment.

The Felders are the heirs of Frost R. Felder, founder of Agape, Inc., the cosmetic manufacturing firm which was sold ten years ago for a reported $175 million.

In Washington, a spokesman for the Apostolic Delegate said that the Silent Servants were not an official religious congregation of the Catholic Church but that the activities of the sect had been reported to Rome.

In Rome, Giuseppe Cardinal Agadio, Vatican Secretary of State, said that as far as the Vatican was concerned, the society did not exist.

"Canonically speaking, they are nowhere," the prelate said.

Attached to this press clipping was a huge headline taken from another paper that said, BLEEDER FREED! A page later, Willie found still more headlines.

FELDER TURNS UP IN NORTH KOREA! HELD AS SPY!
State Department Says Felder a Traitor!
Leaked JERCUS Military Secrets in India

Hero Denounced by Russia, China, U.S., Euro-Group, Canada, Japan and United Arab Republic! Execution Predicted

Underneath these headlines was a news report from Hong Kong: (Hong Kong, June 10) *Radio Ghandiville today accused Air Force General Milton "Gunner" Felder of having pilfered microfilmed military documents during his recent stay in the capital. The official government radio denounced Felder as "a despicable enemy of the human race" and joined the nations of the newly formed JERCUS Alliance in sentencing Felder to death.*

Farther on in the Guidebook amidst various sayings and quotations from Scripture, Willie found another press clipping, this one of apparently more recent times.

SECRET SECT MEETS IN MIAMI—OR DOES IT?

Son of American Traitor
Conducts 2-Man Convention

(Miami, Florida) *Is there such an organization as the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up?*

That's what some 200 newsmen from around the world are asking themselves today as the first U.S. convention of the society opened, listened to a brief address, conducted a business session, and closed in Veteran's Auditorium yesterday—all in less than 20 minutes.

The only two registrants to the convention were Herman V. Felder, 28, a filmmaker and heir of the Felder cosmetic fortune, and a minor league baseball manager named Thatcher Grayson.

Hands trembling, Willie brought the book up to the lamp.

There was a picture of the two registrants, and one of them was Mr. Grayson of the New York Hawks. It was a very young Mr. Grayson, hatless and smiling, but it was the Hawks manager without a doubt.

Willie read on.

Felder, the son of famed U.S. flying ace Milton Felder, executed for treason several years ago, said, "the convention was a success in that no one showed up."

When quizzed about the objectives of the sect, Felder said, "One of the objectives is to not attend any meeting held in this insolent city."

(The mayor of Miami in a news conference later in the afternoon said that Felder was welcome to leave Miami anytime he wished.)

The press was barred from attending the sessions of the convention, but it is believed Felder read a poem titled, "Now I Got Nobody but the Man Upstairs, and He Gone Downstairs, Baby Mine."

Felder declined to answer a question about his own membership in the society but he invited the 200 newsmen to attend a demonstration of what he called the world's greatest camera, which he said would revolutionize film-making.

When the reporters asked to see the camera, Felder said he would not show it within the city limits of Miami and asked the reporters to join him in a field outside town.

None of the newsmen took him up on the invitation.

Felder was in the news last year when his feature length cartoon film, "Up the Roundup," was banned throughout the United States by the Supreme Court, which called the picture a "traitorous philosophical obscenity." The film featured the illustrations of famed Japanese artist Joto Toshima, currently serving a dome-passing sentence in Trenton, New Jersey.

Thatcher Grayson, the other conventioneer, is the 45-year-old manager of the Sweetwater Cowpokes, a farm club under the ownership of the New York Hawks.

He said that he had come to the meeting because he was "interested in spiritual things."

The Silent Servants have been in the news over the past several years in various parts of the world, usually in crisis areas, where their services are alternately described as humanitarian and useless.

The society has reportedly been under the surveillance of the CIA for eight years.

Chapter two

When Willie came to the community, the Silent Servants numbered twenty-four, but this figure fluctuated from week to week with the comings and goings of visitors.

The visitors puzzled Willie until Father Benjamin explained that these were brother and sister Servants enroute to a mission or temporarily without assignment and in need of retreat.

One day two sister Servants arrived, wearing dresses so tattered and soiled that they resembled the slave women Willie could remember from the TV history lessons he had seen at Custer High.

Benjamin gave a sign with an earthen pitcher, filling it,

then shaking it until it was empty. Then he gave the sign for love.

These women, Willie learned that night, had just been released from prison, where they had served three years for crimes of arson committed by others.

The visitors were of many colors and ages. Sometimes a man and wife, a Servant couple, would appear at the camp. Once a family of five came and stayed a week. All the visitors wore the shabby ragtag habit of the Society.

At Eucharist, seeing these strange ragpicker men and women, and sometimes children, Willie felt a rush of tenderness and solidarity. He began to think of them as his own brothers and sisters.

In the bare common room where the community celebrated Eucharist, the Servants would hold occasional listening services.

In these services Father Benjamin would read a passage of Scripture or a portion of the Guidebook. Then all would listen in silence for twenty minutes, a half hour, a longer time.

Sometimes, instead of a Scripture reading, a brother or sister would tell a story, perhaps a story of personal conversion, in sign tongue. The community would consider this story in silence, contemplating its meaning, "letting it enter" as the Guidebook phrased it.

After the listening period, the Servants would share the fruits, or *dona,* of their contemplation—sometimes in words but more often in sign.

"To give each other ideas?" Willie asked Father Benjamin.

"Not ideas," said Benjamin. "Pictures, dreams, visions."

Father Benjamin called the *dona* "visualizations," and before each listening service he made slow counterclockwise motions with his left hand. It was as if he were trying to take the cap off a bottle.

Willie marveled at the pictures and stories the brothers and sisters shared with one another—wonderful visions of beautiful and joyful happenings and places and conditions that love had created or would soon create.

But sometimes the *dona* were hard to understand, and

sometimes they were not happy but sad.

One night, especially, the *dona* brought Willie to tears.

That was the night the Man of Sorrows appeared at the ranch of the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up.

They were at evening meal when the Man of Sorrows arrived. The sun had run off after a hard day's burning, leaving behind a feverish sky, a sweat of fire.

The man rose out of that scarlet expanse like a creature thrown up suddenly by a wild red ocean.

He stood in the doorway, motionless as a tree, casting his shadow over the table where they ate.

He was a huge man, a giant, with shaggy black hair and a tangled beard, and he wore an expression of such abject melancholy that the room itself seemed to darken in his presence.

With a little cry of welcome, Father Benjamin went to him immediately and embraced him.

Now all the Servants were up from their places, circling the Man of Sorrows, pounding him on the back, embracing him.

He returned these attentions with the most gentle and beautiful sign gestures Willie had ever seen, but all the while the dark eyes were full of unspeakable sadness.

Benjamin led the visitor to the place where Willie sat, moved and faintly frightened by the giant's appearance.

"Brother Truman," Father Benjamin said.

Standing up, Willie held out his hand.

The Man of Sorrows embraced Willie, folding him into the rags of his wretched clothing.

"This is Willie, our visitor and possibly our novice," Benjamin said.

The giant's sad face seemed to brighten at this news. He patted Willie's shoulder, then seated himself at the table.

He ate in silence while the Servants scurried about to bring him food, occasionally replying in sign to various questions asked of him.

After he had finished his meal, Father Benjamin asked Truman to lead a listening service.

"We have our novice here," Father Benjamin said, "and we have other visitors who do not know Brother Truman's story."

The Man of Sorrows moved slowly, painfully to the center of the common room where the brothers and sisters sat in a circle.

He paused a moment. Then with those same beautiful signs, Brother Truman began the story of his life.

His first signs portrayed childhood—growing up in a large city.

Happy father. Happy mother. The father goes away. A uniform of some sort. The father flying. The mother and son together.

Then sadness. Something happening to the father. Hurt. In jail.

Joy. Great unexpected happiness. Father comes back.

But not joy after all. Something has happened to father.

Now moving away. Father and mother and boy going somewhere. Many somewheres.

Flying.

The Man of Sorrows made airplane movements with his hands—strange, dangerous, wild movements.

"Stunt flying—for a carnival," Father Benjamin whispered.

The strange dangerous flight gestures continued. Then—smack! The airplane had plunged into the ground. Father dead.

Pause.

Now the mother and son moving again. Something about a name. Something has changed.

Willie strained to see the signs the Man of Sorrows made.

The mother has gone now. More flying.

This time, he, the Man of Sorrows, is flying.

Stunt flying.

Pictures. Something to do with movies.

Then more flying. Flying to other countries. Some kind of flying mission. Flying food—no, blood—somewhere.

A place of war.

The plane flying, suddenly hit, falling—Truman coming

down in parachute.

Bars. Great steel bars. Darkness. Years of darkness, stretching on.

The common room was still. Willie could feel the coldness and darkness of the dungeon where Truman had been held.

Now Brother Truman slowly made the seed sign that meant hope. But the seed fell from his hand.

The sign for love—it, too, dropped.

Faith signs—the signs for all that faith promised—one by one fell from his hand like grains of sand.

Now Truman made a long find-and-open sign—the Guidebook, somewhere in the prison he had found the Guidebook.

An even more profound stillness came over the Servants as the Man of Sorrows stood before them. He was like a tree that had been beaten and stripped and sapped of life. A minute passed, five minutes; then came the saddest sign of all.

The Guidebook opening, and then closing.

The sign of signs—the sign of the Loving One—cut, gone.

He believes in nothing, Willie thought.

The great hands opened and moved out—*except in us.*

Now a sign that meant all Truman had was here—this moment, these people, this room.

Fingers, hand holding something: *But it is enough.*

Father Benjamin went to Truman and slowly embraced him. Each Servant did the same. When Willie put his arms up to the great shoulders, he looked into Truman's eyes and saw how all the pitiful human lights had died, and he burst into tears.

Truman held him fast. He made a sort of soft moan, then went out of the common room, to his cell.

Willie sat down, still weeping.

Father Benjamin sat down beside him. He asked what pictures Willie had seen.

Willie said, "I don't know—wounds."

Benjamin gave Willie the sign of the open hand, which in the Guidebook meant *thrive.*

Willie returned the sign, but without feeling.

They sat together for a while; then Willie said, "I didn't understand that part in the middle, about his name."

"His mother changed the name, out of imagined guilt or shame," Father Benjamin said slowly. "She wanted to give him the name of a distinguished person, like a past president of the country."

"Why?"

"Brother Truman's real name was Ernest Bleeder, and it was his father who was saved by the sacrifice of our beloved Brother, Gunner Felder, considered the traitor of his age."

The next day out in the fields the sun cast a mist of gold over the Man of Sorrows.

Willie worked by his side.

Tentatively, as they dug in the soil where they would plant beans, Willie gave Truman the sign of God's love for man.

Truman opened his hands, palms down.

Willie took his hands and turned them up.

Truman looked at his hands; they both looked at the hands as if they expected to see something growing there.

Truman then took Willie's hands and put them in his own as if to say, *Thank you anyway.*

"It doesn't matter so much," said Willie. "You love others."

Truman gazed at Willie strangely. Then gently he put his great hands on the flaming hair.

Willie felt an intense commotion of the spirit.

Later he would think back to that afternoon as being the time he truly entered the society of the Servants.

* * *

One morning there was a parcel at the gate, a package addressed to Truman.

Willie saw Truman take the package to the common room and place it on the shelf above the fireplace. The Servants went to work in the vegetable garden, but Truman did not join them. He stayed behind in the common room where Father Benjamin joined him from time to time.

That night Father Benjamin asked the community to reflect upon the words of Sister Mary Julia Zipp of the twentieth century, who had written in the Guidebook: *Now art glorifies the artist, affirming the part above the whole. That is why art too serves death.*

The community listened in silence for twenty minutes. Willie listened with the others, trying to understand what Sister Mary Julia had meant.

At the end of the listening, Truman brought forth the package that had arrived that morning. He carefully removed the wrapping and held up what appeared to be a blurred, overexposed photograph measuring two feet by three feet.

Solemnly, Truman held this strange, whitish image before the assembly of Servants.

Father Benjamin, standing by Truman's side, gave the sign that meant *search,* then said, "This is the last work of Brother Joto, now in prison with Brother Herman Felder. Brother Joto has sent this work to us for meditation and then destruction."

Father Benjamin looked at Willie as he continued. "Brother Joto has repudiated all artistic endeavor, but he has given us to understand that this final painting may convey a message to our community. Let us then contemplate this abominable painting, as Brother Joto has called his work, and if it contains a message for us, then let our hearts receive it with love."

Truman set the art piece on the mantel. The Servants gazed at it in silence.

Looking at the picture, Willie at first saw only blurred shapes and shades of white—a confusion of planes and angles and circles, all of white.

Then he saw a sort of pattern—white suns, white stars, white planets, all seen through a series of vertical white bars.

As he looked longer at this strange design, he saw the faint outline of another shape. It seemed at first the upper part, the head, of an animal—the head and shoulders of a gorilla or monkey, a white beast, half man, half ape, caught in a storm of white.

Then the figure moved.

Willie stood up. The other Servants looked up at him.

He could not take his eyes off the painting now.

The ape face was changing—turning into human faces, faces he could not bear to look upon.

He saw his father.

He saw the face of his mother.

Now Cool Dawn.

Carolyn.

Clio.

Thatcher Grayson.

The face of Robert Regent smiled before him.

A brilliant light shone from the center of the picture. He began to see color in the painting—green, blue, gold, red—and something more. He saw first a face, then a figure robed in fire, coming toward him.

He cried out, then fell.

When he came to, Truman and Father Benjamin were cradling him, giving him red wine to drink. The other Servants had left the common room.

"What is it you saw?" Father Benjamin asked softly.

"I don't know," said Willie. "Faces." He tried to remember. "Where is the painting?"

Truman pointed to the fireplace. The fire had consumed all but the frame of the painting.

Truman made a sign that meant *sameness;* then a sign that meant *winter, snow.*

"The *dona* of the others," said Benjamin, "were pictures of beasts in need of care. A frozen gorilla, one brother said. Another said that the painting showed the coming of an ice age."

"The faces?" said Willie.

"No one saw faces," said Father Benjamin, and Willie saw that his eyes were bright with tears.

* * *

The next day Truman was gone.

Where? Willie asked in sign.

Benjamin indicated prison bars.

"A substitution?" Willie said in regular speech.

"Brother Truman has gone to join Brother Joto and Brother Herman Felder in the East for a time."

Willie felt sad that the Man of Sorrows had gone.

"He made the best signs," he said.

Then Father Benjamin told Willie that when Truman had been shot down on his mercy flight, he had fallen into the hands of an army fighting for great ideals in Asia.

Officers of the army believed Truman knew secret plans of the enemy army and that the plane he had been flying and that they had destroyed had carried not blood, as Truman contended, but a new type of liquid bomb.

"That is how he came to make beautiful signs," said Father Benjamin.

Willie said he didn't understand.

"To encourage him to tell the secrets," said Benjamin, "they removed his tongue."

Willie started to cry, but Benjamin stopped him with a sign that meant *great gift.*

"He is stronger than we are," Father Benjamin said. "Since he is protected against all lying, he is the knight of impenetrable armor."

Chapter three

A deeper peace came to the desert retreat.

Willie worked in the fields and in the barn. He prayed with his brothers and sisters. He came to learn all the ways and customs of the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up.

He read the sayings and recommendations of the Guidebook, praying over them and searching out their often difficult meanings.

He decided to read the Scripture all the way through from Genesis of the Old Testament to Revelations in the New.

This proved to be difficult because he was a slow reader and could not make sense out of many happenings in the Old Testament.

He asked Father Benjamin to help him read the Scripture. So Father Benjamin waived the silence rule for an hour each day so that Willie might be instructed in the Scripture and in the more difficult sections of the Guidebook.

With Father Benjamin's help Willie began to see the pattern of the Old Testament happenings, though there were still many stories and events he found strange and complicated.

For the first time since the days when Cool Dawn used to read the Gospels to him, Willie went through the books of Matthew and Mark and Luke. He relished what he read, copying the sayings of the Lord in the back of his Guidebook and committing them to memory.

Father Benjamin helped him to understand the letters of Paul, with their thunder and sunshine, their anger and their love.

With Benjamin's help he came to know and love the strange, beautiful Gospel of John.

The sixteenth chapter of the Gospel moved him to tears.

"When will all men be one?" he asked Father Benjamin.

"When divisions are no longer worshipped."

"In our time?"

"If we learn to put away our fears."

Willie puzzled over a special group of Guidebook notes dealing with social and political matters, and in particular the sayings of Sister Cor, who had died in 1993.

"The sayings of Sister Cor about Marxism and capitalism and monism—I understand none of those things."

Little by little Father Benjamin explained.

Capitalism was a system where each person owned things and the right to own things was held to be sacred and being one individual person was held to be the most sacred fact or truth of life.

Marxism was many different systems but fundamentally it was a system that made the state the owner of property

instead of individual persons, and the national state was held to be supreme.

Monism was the new movement in the world toward one universal government and source of ownership, a world state that aimed to erase all national and racial boundaries.

Willie tried to understand.

"Sister Cor writes that all these systems are lies and follies because they are substitutes for God. And worse, she says here, they are substitutes for man."

"It is a most complicated subject, but Sister Cor says many true things."

"Does our Society believe in a system?"

"The Servants believe only in the peopling of people."

One afternoon, happening upon an entry by one Furlong Dog, Willie found these paragraphs:

JERCUS is an alliance of the Northern people of the world, the possessors, against the Southern people, the non-possessors. Nothing unites the Northern people—Russia, Europe, the U.S., Japan and China—not religion, not culture, inheritance, nothing. Nothing that is, but GREED. For years many of the Northern countries fought against each other, but now they are united in the common cause of avarice.

This sinful greed has cemented over all the past differences and made the rich nations into a family. The JERCUS alliance is the most evil fact of the present day world and the Society must do all within its peaceful power to bring it to ruin. I am to be hanged on the morrow for spying on JERCUS military operations in Canada. Peace to all.

"What Brother Furlong says of JERCUS—is it true?"

"Largely," said Benjamin.

"What do we do about it?"

"Pursue a more radical politics."

"What politics?"

"The politics of the Kingdom of God."

After a few months Father Benjamin said he had taught Willie all that he could teach of the Scripture and that it would be better for Willie to continue his Scripture study in silence.

So Willie went on with his reading and praying of the Scripture and the Guidebook, but in the silence commanded by the Servants.

Soon he learned to listen in the manner the Guidebook prescribed and soon began to live what in former times men called the mystical life, though in truth he had been living the mystical life since childhood, and Benjamin had seen this and given way to it, rejoicing and marveling over it.

The mysterious, unseen things had always been real to Willie but the longer he stayed with the Servants, the more truly he knew them and felt them.

He experienced the unseen realities, such as God's presence and God's love, as other men taste and smell and hear and have sex. It was as if he had a second set of senses that allowed him to sense the unseen, the unheard, the unfelt. He was filled with a peace and joy that he neither understood nor thought to question.

Sometimes, it is true, he would look back with grief upon his previous life.

But all that, he felt, was in the care of God.

In fact, only God made it bearable.

So for a year, and more than a year, he lived in a sort of daze. He wanted nothing but to go on living just this way, with his brothers, with the routine of the day, his prayers, the Scripture and the Guidebook.

But one spring afternoon as he scraped his hoe across the still hard ground, he lifted his eyes to the horizon, and there he saw, really saw for the first time in months, the city of Houston.

And the daze ended.

As he looked at the city, he felt strangely troubled.

He tried to work but his eyes kept drifting back to the outline of the city.

It was not the past that troubled him at that moment, not the loss of his loved ones, but the city itself—the way it shone there in the hazy sun.

For a second he had the odd and frightening sensation that Houston had somehow moved toward him in the last hour,

or perhaps during the night. It seemed to be asking him a question.

He fell then to thinking of things he had not thought of in months, odd things that come to people in quiet moments, those unimportant things that for some reason or other stick in the memory: the forlorn statue of Richard M. Nixon in the little park near the William McKinley Arms, the bird Mrs. Sarto used to own, how it sang only at seven in the evening, the way Clio said *onions*—Clio!

Suddenly a hundred faces floated before him, the poor and black and young and old, the clear and wrinkled faces of the people of the old neighborhood, Mr. Branch and Officer Judge and José and Louie and Sally and Mac and Charlotte and old Mr. Sprague, the druggist.

Surely not all the people had been killed in the riots.

Where were they? How were they getting on? What had happened to them? What had happened to Clio?

The hoe fell from his hand, and he was stricken with feelings of guilt.

Here at the place of the Servants he had been living in peace and serenity, while just a few miles away, who knew what sufferings people might be enduring?

What right did he have to possess peace and serenity when others, his brothers and sisters, lived in hardship and pain and misery?

And they *were,* these others, his brothers and sisters. There was no doubt of that. In the Scripture of that afternoon he had read those remarkable words in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, which begin with verse 31.

Willie went to his room and knelt in prayer, listening. He prayed through the night, missing the evening meal. The next morning he went to Father Benjamin's room.

In sign language, which at that moment was very difficult for him, Willie asked: *Should we not go to the city?*

Father Benjamin gave a sign that Willie did not understand.

Willie saw the Guidebook on Father Benjamin's desk.

He opened it to a page he had often read and pointed to a

recommendation that was one of the earliest entries in the book.

The Servants will always choose the way of serving the poor, the lonely, the despised, the outcast, the miserable and the misfit. The mission of the Servants is to prove to the unloved that they are not abandoned, not finally left alone. Hence, the natural home of the Servants is strife, misfortune, crisis, the falling apart of things. The Society cherishes failure for it is in failure, in trouble, in the general breaking up of classes, stations, usual conditions, normal routines that human hearts are open to the light of God's mercy.

Father Benjamin read the recommendation and nodded.

Willie, taking a piece of blue paper, wrote his question again: *Then shouldn't we go to Houston?*

Father Benjamin read the question, turned the paper over and wrote his answer: *We have a message for Houston and also a mission. The time is coming.*

Willie puzzled over this answer.

He took another sheet of paper and wrote, *There must be much work to be done right now. Why do we wait?*

Father Benjamin smiled at this. He took the paper, turned it over and wrote, *The time is very near. The mission is not what you think. Pray at Eucharist tonight for illumination.*

Willie took the last note back to his room.

He opened up the Gospel of Mark and began reading the first passage his eyes fell upon.

The passage told of Jesus calling his apostles, choosing his first priests, Peter, James, John and the others.

When he came to the end of this passage, he felt the hair on the back of his head tingling and prickling as it used to do in the days when he pitched baseball.

That night at Eucharist, surrounded by his brothers, he thought about the Gospel text again.

As he watched Father Benjamin consecrate the bread and wine, he felt an urging and a longing he had never felt before, though when he thought about it later, it seemed to

him that he had always had the longing in his heart in some way; he wept.

All that night he knelt by his cot in prayer, listening.

After the morning hour of silent praise he went to Father Benjamin's room again.

He wrote a note and handed it to the old priest.

The note said, *I would like to be a priest and work among poor people.*

Father Benjamin's face showed no feeling one way or the other.

He wrote his reply on the back of Willie's note: *In the morning go to the chancery office in Houston. Tell Father Horgan what you have told me.*

Willie nodded.

Then he knelt at Father Benjamin's feet, but Father Benjamin lifted him up. Then he gave him the thrive sign.

That night Willie fell into a dreamless sleep and woke to a fine sunny day.

He got out of bed and knelt by his cot for a moment to thank God for the marvelous gift of life.

Then, intending to go to the common room for his last hour of silent praise, he reached around absently for his tunic, which he had dropped over his chair the night before.

It was gone. In its place he found a pair of slacks, a shirt, shoes and stockings.

As he stood wondering about this, he became aware that the building was silent.

It was always free of the human voice except at Mass, but at this hour there were usually the sounds of men rising from sleep, taps turning, footsteps in the corridors and so forth.

There was nothing this morning. Only silence.

He dressed quickly and went down to the common room. It was empty.

He glanced into the dining hall. Empty.

The kitchen was bare. Even the barn was deserted.

The Servants were gone.

He went back to his room a final time and as he opened the door, a scrap of paper fluttered off the desk by the window.

It was a message from Father Benjamin.

I told you yesterday that we had a mission for Houston and also a message. The mission, by the time you read this, will have begun. Speak of its beginnings to no one. Do not stand in its way or attempt to explain it to others. The message is another matter and it is much farther reaching and the key to it is a person and you are the person. This will become clear to you along the way. Peace, courage, love, joy, and all else that you may require.

Benjamin

Slowly Willie went down the lane to the open road and started the long walk to the city.

An hour later a truck farmer picked him up.

"Hell in town today," the farmer said. "And they goin' to get it too!"

"Who is that, sir?"

"Them fellas that started the riots summer before last. They got the whole lot of them now and they going to pay."

Willie said apprehensively: "When did this happen?"

"This morning. Don't you listen to the news?" The farmer switched on the radio.

And so the riots of eighteen months ago, an announcer was saying, *take on an entirely new look. Only yesterday the grand jury had returned guilty verdicts against twenty-eight members of Houston's Apache Club, the militant black organization which in the words of the presidential investigator, General E. Sam Houston Dallas Johnson, "deliberately touched off the riots to make the city of Houston look bad." At five o'clock this morning, an individual calling himself The Reverend Benjamin Victor and twenty-seven members of a religious group known as the Silent Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly Screwed Up, appeared at the home of Magistrate Harlowe Judge claiming that they, not the Apaches, should serve the 15- to 35-year sentences handed down by the court yesterday.*

Our reporter in the field Frank Yardley has an update on the story: Frank?

Yardley: *Yes, George. We're now in the office of Police Chief E. Barrington Davis, who reportedly took statements from Father Benjamin and the twenty-seven brothers. Chief Davis, would you call these signed statements confessions?*

Davis: *I wouldn't call them poems.*

Yardley: *But we have a report that this group—the Brothers of the Screwed Up or whatever their name is—weren't even in Houston at the time of the riots.*

Davis: *You don't have to be somewhere to commit a crime. I mean anywhere will be fine if you're going to tread the path of infamy. These foul balls say that they are to blame—that's the main point.*

Yardley: *Does this mean that the Apaches will be released from your custody?*

Davis: *I'm not King Solomon. I'm a cop. The Apaches are still convicted for the riots, and until some court tells me different they are going to remain behind the vertical steel.*

Yardley: *Where are Father Benjamin and the brothers right at this moment?*

Davis: *They are behind the vertical steel also. Do you think we turn known criminals out on the street any more than a zookeeper would turn his wild beasts loose on the hopeless public?*

Yardley: *Have they asked for legal aid?*

Davis: *No they have not, sir. That is one reason they rank high up on the suspicion list because no citizen in his right gourd will deny hisself the opportunity of legal assistance when he gets caught with his pants down.*

Yardley: *But isn't it true, chief, that one of the brothers said, "All the white people of Houston are guilty. We are simply here to acknowledge their guilt"?*

Davis: *Maybe one of them said that, I don't know. They was saying many crazy and traitorous things. One of them said, "Not a stone will be left upon a stone," too, and pointed right at the residence of Judge Harlowe Judge, which is one of the best old boys this*

state ever seen. They made many dangerous and radical statements which I do not wish to go into here on the air lest somebody thinks the Police Department passed judgment on traitors before they get a fair trial.

Yardley: *Other than their signed confessions, did the brothers give any other evidence of their guilt?*

Davis: *They had some pictures which we have sent to the lab to make sure they are pictures.*

Yardley: *What sort of pictures?*

Davis: *Of these scum taking part in the rioting and burning.*

"That's impossible!" cried Willie, startling the farmer so much the car swerved on the road.

"What the Jesus Christ do you know about it?" he demanded.

Then Willie remembered Father Benjamin's words about the mission.

"Nothing," he said.

"They just some crackpot bunch of niggerlovers, who ought to be hanged," the farmer said and pushed his foot down harder on the gas feed.

When Willie reached the chancery office an hour later, he found the place mobbed with reporters.

The reporters wanted a statement from the bishop or another official concerning the church's attitude toward the brothers.

As Willie went up a winding stairway that led to the main entrance to the chancery, powerful lights off to one side caught his eye.

Below him, standing in a little porch or breezeway that led from the chancery to the bishop's private office, was a tall, handsome monsignor with wavy hair and a splendid smile.

A television reporter was interviewing him. Because the monsignor was smiling so heartily, the interviewer too was smiling, though his smile, breaking once in a while, looked like more work.

Willie thought that the handsome monsignor standing there in the strong lights looked like a movie actor. His face

and his body and his purple silk robes seemed to say that everything was okay, that everything had always been okay and that from now on things were going to be even more okay than ever.

The interviewer asked his first question.

"Monsignor McCool, as chancellor of the diocese, do you have any comment at all on the activities this morning at the home of Magistrate Harlowe Judge?"

"Gol-lee Tommy," the monsignor said, smiling even more handsomely than before, "I'm afraid we know little more about this matter than you fellows."

"This order or congregation or whatever it is called in the church—the Servants—is this an official order of the church?"

"Not that we know of, Tommy," said the monsignor, turning his handsome face directly into the eye of the camera. "They're not in the official directory that we have here in the office. Of course, these are strange days for our church," chuckled the monsignor, "and you run into some, heh-heh-heh, strange situations once in a while. Still I doubt that any good practicing Catholic who is in good standing with Holy Mother Church would have anything to do with an organization of this kind, getting mixed up in riots and so forth."

"Most Catholics would disapprove?"

"Gee whiz, I would think so. Tommy, we have wonderful people in Holy Mother Church and ninety-nine percent of them are law-abiding citizens who love their country and respect their flag. They obey the commandments of God and they live by the rules of the country. Above all, they have this wonderful level-headedness about their religion which keeps them from, you know, going over the edge."

"Thank you, Monsignor McCool."

"Thank *you,* Tommy."

Willie turned away.

He went up to the great door of the chancery office and rang the bell.

A harried-looking priest appeared at the door.

"If it's about the crazies," he began, but Willie handed him

the note on which Father Benjamin had written Father Horgan's name.

"You want to see Father Horgan?"

"Yes."

"This way."

The priest led Willie down a dark, cool corridor, past many offices where electric typewriters clicked out the answers to many complicated questions.

At the end of the corridor the priest knocked on a door.

"Father Horgan?"

A feeble voice answered "Yes."

"Someone to see you."

The priest swung the door open.

Willie saw a shriveled old man sitting at a desk piled high with books and papers. The old man had hurriedly put something aside. Willie saw that it was a crucifix. The young priest left.

"Is it me you really want?" the old man asked in a thin, raspy voice. "No one has come to see me for eight and a half years."

"I want to be a priest," said Willie.

The old man squinted at Willie. Then he said, "Tell me why?"

"To serve the poor."

The old man squinted at Willie an even longer time, his face relaxing little by little, until finally there was a smile there, all wrinkled and cracked.

He struggled from his chair slowly, limped around the desk and then, to Willie's astonishment, he embraced him.

"God be praised!" he said. "The Spirit sends us a lover of the poor."

He held Willie back a bit and looked into his face.

"Poor lad!" he cried suddenly. "Poor lad!"

Chapter four

Willie was sent to Albert Einstein Seminary in the center of what was called the New Houston. The seminary, a tall cylinder of glass and steel that resembled a space rocket, was attached to Morganfeller University, considered the most advanced university in the Southwest.

Albert Einstein Seminary was considered to be even more advanced than the rest of the university. Its catalog was an advertisement not only for the most recent theories of religion but also for theories that had not yet been theorized.

To Willie, sitting in the classroom, the theories were all a haze of words that were unpronounceable and unspellable—existentialist, monophysite, demythologize—a foreign language.

The course work, much of it, was programmed by computer. There were fifty or more computers in use throughout the Einstein-Morganfeller complex, but the central computer for the seminary was a unit called Chi-Mon, which, according to the seminary prospectus, "served as a model for the stylization of the future ministry of the church."

Once a week each student at Einstein was required to pose and solve a problem using the facilities of Chi-Mon under the supervision of Father Pomeroy, the leading theological physicist in the United States.

In his first visit to the Chi-Mon room, Willie approached the computer cautiously. He sat down at the console and thought a moment. Then he said, "What is the thirst of God?"

Chi-Mon, which had been whirring and buzzing for four years without interruption, stopped suddenly. The entire faculty and student body heard it stop. It was as if the power to the building had been shut off. There was a moment of suspenseful silence, then a sizzling sound that was like bacon frying. Chi-Mon began popping its red warning lights until, in two minutes' time, all its 106 lights were blazing, indicating that vital electronic parts had been ruined.

Father Pomeroy, in a rage, said that Willie had tampered with Chi-Mon and forbade him to go near it again. It took six weeks to get the computer back into operating order, and Father Catwall, the rector, told Willie that his recklessness with the equipment had cost Einstein $40,000.

The unmarried seminarians, numbering about ninety, lived in an apartment building near the spaceship theologate, where the theories were taught by the frighteningly brilliant professors.

Another twenty-five or thirty married seminarians lived in various sections of the city.

Some of the married seminarians were ordained priests who had left the priesthood for one reason or another in the past and who had decided to come back to the ministry. They were undergoing a retraining period now.

The single seminarians were permitted to come and go as they pleased, though they were expected to spend their nights at their apartments and to come together for Mass at least once a week.

The seminarians were a congenial crowd, for the most part, most of them bright, most of them about the same age as Willie, though he, with his red hair already flecked with gray and with little lines beginning to appear around his slanty almond eyes, looked older.

Willie's kindness and good cheer and his habit of laughing at himself endeared him to his fellow students, who talked often of his "simplicity" and his scandalous unseriousness.

"Good old Willie," they would say after he had made a wrong guess in one of the classes where he sat taking in practically nothing.

At night the students would go up to the roof of their apartment building. There, with the city of Houston spread out before them, they would relax and joke and talk over the things that had happened during the day.

Sometimes they spoke of what they had learned on Chi-Mon—where a certain scriptural myth came from, what the Logos meant to Duns Scotus, the relationship between

Immanuel Kant's Categories and the Ideas of the philosopher Plato.

Willie would sit very quietly on the coping of the building, smiling his sad, lopsided smile, listening and nodding as his fellow seminarians talked, understanding nothing.

Sometimes, late at night, the students would follow Willie down to his bare cell of a room and continue the one-sided talk.

Willie would listen, nodding, not understanding.

Then, more often than not, the students would begin talking about other things—about themselves, their worries, their fears, certain doubts. Willie would listen carefully as in the old days at the William McKinley Arms.

Sometimes, late at night, the theories and arrangements did not seem enough for those who still had their plain senses. After a few months even the very brightest students found themselves coming to Willie's room to talk away the night. They came like patients seeking a cure for that disease there is no name for, the sickness that overtakes those who know that knowing is not enough.

One night there appeared on the rooftop the haggard figure of Charles Hurdon, the most brilliant student in the whole seminary. Tall, pale, wearing thick glasses, he looked like an exhausted basketball player engaged in a lost contest.

There were three other students on the rooftop. They had been talking of a point in philosophy, which Willie not only did not understand but could not remember having heard discussed that afternoon in Father Rickaby's class.

Charles Hurdon, listening for awhile, laughed suddenly.

"All that's beside the point," he said with a slight stammer. Then Charles Hurdon told Willie and the three others that, using Chi-Mon, he had proved that the world had reached the Y point.

"What's the Y point?" one of the students asked.

"The end of usable resources."

Then Charles Hurdon explained that the resources of the earth had been used so mindlessly for 200 years that the progress of decline was irreversible and that man's enterprise

was doomed.

The other students scoffed at this, but Charles Hurdon calmly argued his position.

One of the students said to Willie, "What about it, Willie? We going down for the count?"

"Only if we want," said Willie.

"Sentimental *merde* doesn't solve anything," Hurdon snapped. He glared at Willie, then went down to his room.

Very late that night Charles Hurdon came to Willie's room.

"I didn't mean what I said."

"It's okay," said Willie.

Then Willie saw how Charles Hurdon's hands twitched and how his face was blotched. He seemed an advance man for the used-up world he had predicted.

"Can I help, Charley?"

Charley went away without a word. Willie knelt down and prayed in the listening fashion. He had seen the wound in Charles Hurdon's spirit and he asked for instructions.

* * *

Many of the students at the seminary remembered Willie as a baseball star, and in the early days at Albert Einstein they would ask him to pitch in the games they played among themselves.

But Willie would not pick up a baseball. Sometimes he would play other sports, always unseriously and carelessly but trying hard not to give offense to those who played earnestly.

In his first term the students would ask specific questions about his baseball days, but he was hesitant to say much, politely answering with a yes or no or maybe. After awhile the students got the idea he did not really care to talk about it, so they stopped pressing him on the subject.

Several times newsmen came to the seminary apartment building, hoping to interview Willie for radio or TV or the newspapers.

Willie politely refused to see them.

Even so, a story appeared in the Houston paper one day

about "The Miracle Pitcher Who Had Decided to Hurl for God."

Thoughtfully, the seminarians kept that edition of the paper out of the common room so that Willie never saw it.

But from that day on, Willie began to get mail from all parts of the country, from people who had remembered him as the greatest pitcher in baseball.

The letters were often kind but sometimes they were full of hate.

It's niggers like you who are ruining the country and the national game, said an unsigned card from Iowa. *You think you can turn down a lot of money and get away with it!*

Another person wrote, *Do you think people want to be preached to by a chink-wetback who didn't have enough sense to make a million dollars?*

But making up for the bad notes were two letters Willie got one day from Clio and Mr. Grayson.

It had been almost two years since the night of horror in New York, and Willie could not wait to find out how Clio was, and where, and what he was doing.

The letter was postmarked San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Dear Willie: Don't know what to say—just glad you're OK. After NYC I tried everywhere to find you. I was afraid you got caught in the trouble in Houston. I heard your family got it—and Carolyn. All my people went too.

Martha and me got married after I left NYC and I been playing ball steady down here, in P.R. and also other places, Mexico, etc. Willie, you would not believe how poor people are in some of these places—people without houses or places to sleep, babies sick and hungry all the time, families living off the garbage of the rich. Terrible and I mean Terrible. Playing ball and making pretty good money but feel like I ought to be doing something, what I don't know. Write will you? Martha is the best wife in the world.

Love. Clio

P.S. Guess you really want to be a priest. OK. Good luck in it. But if you ever want to play ball, come on down here. Your pal.

Tucked in the letter was a color print of a black child. On the back Clio had written: *Here's my boy. I named him after you. Some cat isn't he?*

The baby in a yellow blanket looked like Clio.

Willie, feeling silly, cried over the picture, which he pinned up over his desk.

Mr. Grayson's note was briefer. It had come from Chicago.

Son, you chose the right road, the God road. More and more I too am interested in the spiritual side. I been going to the Church of the Holy Spirit Who Blows Men's Minds. We pray in all languages. I'm still with the team. We are losing.
Your friend, T. Grayson.

Willie answered both letters that very day, and from then on, he kept in regular touch with Clio and Mr. Grayson.

He also kept in touch with the Servants, who were awaiting trial in the Houston jail.

He went to the jail three or four afternoons a week, but even in jail the Servants kept to their rule of silence.

Once Willie passed a note to Father Benjamin saying, *Surely here we can talk. I can get aid for you maybe.*

But Father Benjamin's written reply was, *We are one now with all the unvisited abandoned prisoners of the world. Should we be better off than they?*

So Willie's visits were strange occasions. He would sit outside the cell of Father Benjamin or one of the other brothers.

Sometimes they would pray together, but more often they would sit or kneel in silence.

The guards took note of the frequency of Willie's visits and thought that it was most suspicious that Willie and the Servants did not speak to one another.

In their reports they said, *Undoubtedly, they are conspiring in a code,* or *The red-haired Chinese Negro subject is communicating certain messages to the prisoners in sign language, obviously an attempt to conceal the nature of the plot being planned. Recommend getting an expert to tell us what they are hatching, preferably someone who understands sign language*

and the way a traitor's mind works.

One afternoon on his return from the jail, Willie got word that Father Catwall wanted to see him in the office.

Father Catwall had heard about the visits Willie had been making to the jail.

"We can't stop you going down there," the rector said. "In fact visiting people in the pokey is a Christian act. Still, the people you are visiting are definitely oddball types and it's rumored you spend a lot of time with them."

"What's wrong with that?" asked Willie.

"Nothing, except that, you know, you're a celebrity. People watch you more than they do the other fellows. You can't project a bad image without it reflecting on the seminary and on the diocese and on our most reverend bishop."

Willie said nothing. There was nothing he could think of to answer Father Catwall's argument.

"Then there is the matter of your studies," Father Catwall said. "Your semester grades are, well, what would be a good word for them—miserable?"

"Miserable would be a good word," said Willie cheerfully.

Father Catwall said without smiling, "What I am telling you is cut down on the visiting of the oddballs and put in more time on the books. After all, as a priest, you'll have to know the answers. You do grasp that, don't you?"

That night Willie went to see old Father Horgan, who had become his confessor and his spiritual director.

Willie told Father Horgan, as he had told him before, of his troubles with the studies.

"And now Father Catwall has asked me to cut down on visiting my brothers in the jail and spend that time studying the books, which won't do any good, seeing as how I don't understand what is in the books."

"Do as they say," said Father Horgan. "Besides, it will not be so difficult now. Just a while ago I heard on the radio that the Servants were being transferred to a high security prison in Atlanta, Georgia."

Willie went to his room, full of sad thoughts of his brothers, whom he had loved and whom he thought he

would never see again.

That day he had received a postcard from Clio. The card showed a cathedral in Brazil.

Clio had written: *Willie, when you get up there and become a priest, you aren't going to build churches like this are you? People in this town sleep in the streets. No one should have to do that, not with churches like this one. Someday the people will take over maybe, just take charge. Why they don't right now is what I can't understand anymore than I can understand this church.*

Willie scotch-taped the card to his wall with the cathedral facing inward so that he could see only the handwriting of his friend.

Then he picked up the book of theology that he had been reading for two months without the slightest comprehension.

* * *

The progressive theories of the Albert Einstein Seminary regularly brought investigators from Rome.

When the investigators appeared on the campus, the seminarians reacted with undisguised glee.

"Pomeroy's getting sacked!"

"Rickaby's resigning!"

There would be a missing professor in the classroom, an overheard row in the faculty lounge; the atmosphere of a criminal trial came into the spaceship. The investigation would last a week, then one day the severe-looking Romans, with their black attaché cases, would be gone.

The theories would recommence—new ones, variants of the old ones or sometimes very old ones that had been so long forgotten that, resurrected, they seemed *avant-garde.*

There was a row at the beginning of Willie's second term at Einstein, and a new old system was introduced to the curriculum. It was called Thomism.

Willie tried diligently to understand Thomism, but it was as mysterious to him as the abandoned system of mathematico-theologism.

* * *

Charles Hurdon, of the thick glasses and the stammering manner, came to Willie's room at three in the morning.

"Can we walk?" he said.

"Sure," said Willie.

So they walked, Willie and Charles Hurdon, through the dark streets of Houston while Charles told a rambling story of his life.

He began by saying he was unintended. Willie asked what this meant, but Charles Hurdon did not explain.

He spoke first of his father, who worked for a corporation that made Plasti-Bloom and on his desk kept a sign that said, *Try a Nice Warm Bath.*

Then he spoke of how, when he was a boy, he lived in a room by himself without companionship and how he invented a cat named Foro, who later changed into a person.

His mother used morphine because, Charles Hurdon said, "She could not stand the sound of the human voice—my voice."

Then Foro had died.

"I grew up and I went to school—I got good grades. There was a girl named Marilyn. I think I loved her."

They were walking now near the ball park of Houston, the old Astrodome. As Charles talked, Willie could almost see the face of the mother going in and out of the hospital.

One day Charley's father came home from the Plasti-Bloom Corporation and slashed his throat, and he, Charley, had found him in the shower, and there at his feet was the sign he had kept on his desk.

Suddenly Charles Hurdon began to cry.

Willie put his arm on his shoulder.

"It's okay, Charley. It's okay, Charley. It's okay, Charley," he kept saying over and over again.

They walked through the night, and when the sun came up over Houston, Charley was still going on, pouring out a torrent of disconnected words—names of people, streets, dates, times he had tried to connect with someone.

When they got back to the seminary apartment building, Charley fell asleep in a chair. Then Willie knelt by his side and prayed the listening prayer as faithfully and sincerely as he could because he knew now that Charley's spirit was nearly dead.

He had come to this place of ideas to manufacture a god out of such material as could be found there—words, books, theses, wonderful arrangements.

Willie determined to work very hard at being Charley's friend, not knowing then how late it was for Charley and believing in his simple-minded way that love could repair anything.

* * *

On Thursdays the seminarians of Albert Einstein went into the city of the poor, the new slum of Houston that had been built on the ruins of the old.

There they tried to learn the ways of attending to the failures of the nation—old people, blind people, black people, people who could not learn, unmotivated people who had always been on public welfare and always would.

It was the happiest day of the week for Willie and the hardest for everyone else.

It was called Christian Witness Day in the curriculum of the theological school and was marked down in the prospectus as a lab in pastoral theology.

But it was just a day to Willie, a short day at that, nine hours, not enough time to solve great or complicated problems, but still enough time to listen to an old man trying to explain his life to himself.

Time for an errand or two.

Time for painting a room.

Time for taking a seventeen-year-old black boy to look for a job and then to console him when he failed to get it.

If Willie was the worst specimen in the glass compartments of the theology space rocket, he was the finest of the species in the ash and cinder world of the very poor.

Within a month the families in what was called the core

area knew Willie well, and when he appeared in the streets, there would be a chorus of children to follow him along.

Willie chose Charley Hurdon as his companion on these excursions, and Charley tried in his stiff and awkward way to learn what Willie could teach.

He would watch Willie as he met people, listen to him as he called to the children, tried to see how he did it—the way he had of listening to people who had nothing to say except that everything was going to pieces, as always.

Charley was a fish out of water here, but Willie kept encouraging him, and when Charley sometimes succeeded in sitting still for a moment to listen to an old woman curse the welfare system, he was quick to congratulate him.

"We are here—that's what matters," said Willie. "The only way to learn is to do it."

Willie believed that Charley could catch on to the Gospel like a man can catch on to playing golf just by going to the links.

One night as they boarded the monorail that would take them out of that dismal garden of struggling human plants, Willie said, "That's the real seminary, Charley—not Albert Einstein. Everything we learn has to help these people."

Charley wiped his thick glasses inside and out.

"What if you're not cut out for it?" he said.

"Nobody's cut out for it," said Willie. "You just do it. And there aren't any teachers for doing it except the Lord in the Scripture."

"No, you have to be cut out," said Charley with a sigh. "You are cut out and I am not."

"Why do you talk that way? Half your trouble comes from telling yourself you can't do things ahead of time."

"I know myself," said Charley.

They rode on for a while under a blaze of deodorant signs.

"The awful thing," said Charley, "is that to me ideas are more important."

Willie joked this off but he caught a new and deeper sadness in Charley's tone.

Late in the afternoon of the next Thursday, Willie and

Charley were repairing a radiator in the apartment of a black lady named Mrs. Spenser, whose grandmother could remember *her* grandmother speaking of the slave times.

"The good old days," said Willie.

Mrs. Spenser could not hear anything, so Willie turned to repeat his joke in a sign.

Then he noticed that Charley had left the room.

He went to the hallway and called, but Charley was gone. He was nowhere on the street either.

Willie ran to the monorail and ran from the station to the residence hall.

He dashed up the steps to Charley's room.

When he opened the door, he saw a shadow swing across the scholarly journals piled high on the desk.

He saw books stacked to make a platform, the body hanging from the pipe overhead.

At the funeral two days later, Father Catwall said that men should never try to judge the deeds of others and that mental illness was a disease like cancer or diabetes and that, anyway, Jesus Christ had defeated death.

But Willie, sitting in the last row of the chapel, knew that Charley had died of that worldwide plague of the century, the cold lovelessness that had gathered over the planet of man and that choked and smothered life in so many places that it was like a poisonous gas slowly being exhaled from an oven in a crowded cottage. No one knew that the oven was on—everybody was so busy talking and persuading one another—and the cottage was so crowded and so thick with the gas that when people fell they weren't even noticed, and upstairs the babies were breathing, breathing.

But Willie had seen the oven, had seen the wound in Charley, and he knew he had not loved in time. He had made some ghastly mistake, perhaps of talking, of making noises, when something else was called for—what, he didn't know.

So he wept hard and bitterly, so hard and so bitterly that Father Pomeroy asked him to leave and get control of himself and show some faith.

* * *

The years passed slowly, painfully.

Each new year brought changes in the course work.

In the middle of Willie's fifth year the whole curriculum of the seminary changed. Now everything was taught from films. Into the theater of the spaceship the students trooped every morning at 8:15. They watched movies all morning long and in the afternoon discussed them.

Father Glanz, the Scripture professor, translated what he called the "filmic imperatives" into "their scriptural correlatives" and fed the results into Chi-Mon.

Chi-Mon wrote a paper which was circulated throughout the seminary under the title, "The Mythological Elements in Posttheistic Theology."

The publication of this paper brought about another Roman investigation, and the film courses were stopped.

The theology of St. Augustine became the new staple of the Albert Einstein diet.

In his room Willie fed on Scripture and the sayings of the Guidebook. He spent whole nights in the listening prayer, and often he thought of Charles Hurdon, whose unintended sojourn became his only lasting impression of the nine years he spent at the Albert Einstein theologate.

Chapter five

In the books of man the world is charted and the world is arranged and all is carefully placed in boxes.

The brain of man ceaselessly erects cages for the confinement of all that would run and flow.

And since all of life is a running and flowing, man can never hope to capture it all. Nor will he ever stop trying to trap as much as he can.

Willie loved the running and the flowing and did not feel, as others do, the need to trap and cage.

When he came upon the books of man, he felt sorry for the running, leaping things that had been snared.

Something there was in his spirit that moved him to

unleash all that he found.

So he seemed a misfit to the guardians and hunters, trappers and planners, who operated the Albert Einstein Seminary.

Each semester those serious men gathered in an airless place of artificial light and urged the rector of the seminary to dismiss him.

Father Catwall, the rector, believed in cages also, but he knew of cages never dreamt of by those theorists of God and the heart of man.

"You have got to understand the position of the diocese," Father Catwall would say. "How can we take a popular man like this, a folk hero practically, and say he isn't good enough to be a priest? That is an insult to the common man."

"Many would applaud the dismissal," said the professor of moral theology. "After all, your common man knows he threw away a fortune in baseball."

"What of the reputation of the diocese when he begins to teach and preach?" said Father Pomeroy. "What, when he tells people that what they believe and what they do are the same thing?" Father Pomeroy was referring to something Willie had written on an exam.

"Or when he says the postmodern Scripture is just another myth, except not as beautiful as the old?" said Father Glanz, quoting from another exam.

"Still he is a good-hearted young fellow," said Father Catwall, "and there is always the example of the Cure of Ars."

"For God's sake, spare us that," said the professor of moral theology.

And for God's sake, and Willie's, they were spared that. The case was referred to Monsignor McCool, the handsome chancellor, who called Willie in for a chat.

"Gosh, Willie," Monsignor McCool said, flashing his toothy smile, "the profs have got me on quite a spot. They want me to flunk you out."

"I know," said Willie, feeling he had been through all this before.

"Do you really try? Some of the men say you don't show any interest in the studies. Why, you're scheduled for ordination next year. You'll be a priest. And as a priest you'll have to give instructions, you'll have to teach and preach. People will expect you to answer their questions. So you have to know theology."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, to answer the questions people have. People have great problems of faith today. No belief in God or Christ or the sacraments."

"But if you don't believe," Willie said, holding up his hands, "how can theology help?" The monsignor appeared not to hear the question.

"I think of Doctor Phelps of the atomic research division," the monsignor said. "He does not think there is a God, so we have these talks every Tuesday evening. We're reading many books together. I believe we're getting somewhere."

"Does he not believe in a false god, or does he positively reject love?" Willie asked.

"I beg your pardon?" said Monsignor McCool.

"Doctor Phelps. Is it that he cannot accept the false god that is often preached, or is it rather that he cannot love?"

"Why—we—that—you—what's that got to do with it?"

"With what?"

"What has not—loving—got to do with not believing?"

"Everything," said Willie.

That is some heresy whose name I have forgotten, thought the monsignor.

He decided to try another tack.

"You will grant that there are some theological problems."

"Well," said Willie, "everybody has problems."

"But suppose a person came to you with a definite problem in theology. What would you do?"

"Send him to a theologian."

"Suppose a theologian weren't available."

"Well then, I would ask him to be patient."

"But this man is in anguish, in great doubt and suffering."

"Over theology?"

"His faith is giving way," said the monsignor.

"But that is not what you said, monsignor. You said he had a theological problem."

"All right, all right," the monsignor said, his smile not quite so good-willed, "then let's start over again. Let's say a person comes to you in spiritual distress. He has begun doubting certain things. He asks you to help him. This is an intelligent person, a bright person, someone who reads theology. He asks you for help."

"I would try to be his friend," Willie said.

"You would restore his faith through friendship?"

"I would hope to show him love."

The monsignor, doodling with a pencil, traced a little cross on the calendar of the Silver Swallow Mortuary, which lay open on his desk and was his appointment book.

"Tell me—ah—how that would work?"

"I do not know how it works," said Willie, "only that it does. We learn to know the Loving One through some experience of loving."

"Surely," said the monsignor, "you have tested your—should we say theory?"

"To some degree," said Willie. "And I have learned from my failures."

"Tell me of a failure."

"Charley Hurdon."

"But he was mentally ill," said the monsignor, drawing a circle around the cross on his calendar.

"He was unloved," Willie said sadly. "We did not show him love."

"We cannot be blamed for his illness," the monsignor said firmly.

"I can be," said Willie. "I was his friend."

"What could you have done for him?"

"I have not learned that," Willie replied. "I have only learned what not to do, the endless talking and all the rest."

The monsignor, biting his lip, remembered an old dream he once had of being a White Father missioner. It was a long time ago, before he had a career.

"You think you could have saved him?"

"Not I—God. Charley and God could have worked it out," said Willie.

The monsignor chuckled and drew a second circle around the encircled cross. He saw that it was no use trying to talk to Willie.

"You are confusing many, many things in that line of reasoning," said the monsignor.

"Possibly," said Willie.

Once the monsignor had wanted to serve the poor, but he had come into another world and now from the other world, Willie seemed to him like a retarded child, one of those crippled persons who makes little things society needs that a machine does not have the patience or endurance for, or else the machines are put to more important service.

Still, thought the monsignor with that part of him that had once wanted to serve the lepers of Africa, *there is a ministry in the church for such people.*

The monsignor, circling the cross, was thinking of the simple chores every priest must do, visiting the hospital, talking to the old people, comforting the bereaved.

He was also thinking of the letter he had received only yesterday from the Bishop of Santa Fe, asking for the loan of a priest or two to serve in certain border towns where priests were badly needed.

His eyes fell on the motto of the Silver Swallow Mortuary: A Refined Setting for a Time of Mutual Understanding and Support.

The handsome monsignor thought of the illiterate poor of the border towns. This young man, he reasoned, might never meet a sophisticated person with a theological problem. In fact, steps could be taken to make sure he did not.

So he'll always be with his own kind anyway, thought the monsignor, looking at Willie's frayed shirt and paint-spattered work pants.

He circled the cross a third time and put his pencil down.

"Well," he smiled brightly. "Well, Willie, we're going to take a chance on you. Maybe the world has enough theolo-

gians. But one thing—if ever you do run into someone who needs to know the ans—"

"I'll call you!" Willie said, laughing with relief and delight, for he had feared the outcome of this interview.

And the monsignor laughed too, though it was just a reflex, for he was already thinking of his appointment that night with Doctor Phelps.

The professors of the seminary did not like it when the word came down to pass Willie in all his courses, and the professor of Canon Law threatened to resign.

But soon the whole matter was forgotten because Monsignor McCool was appointed auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Houston, and no one wished to bother him with petty personal problems in the seminary.

* * *

And so on a hot Saturday morning in June, in the twenty-eighth year of his life, Willie was ordained a priest of God.

The next day in the church of Saint Martin de Porres, which had been badly burned in the riots ten years before and had never been fully repaired, Willie celebrated his first Mass.

Only a few people came to the Mass, residents of the neighborhood who had come to know Willie on the Christian Witness Days and a few newsmen looking for a story about the Athlete Who Had Discovered the Great Sport of Religion.

The newsmen were disappointed by the simple proceedings at the church.

Old Father Horgan preached a homily about how only the poor of the earth could possibly grasp the Christian message since they alone were free. All middle class people and all rich people had too many things to keep them happy and confused and asleep, and few of them knew what was going on.

But they were not as bad off as the explainers of the world, Father Horgan said, the people who had everything figured out. They were in a truly sad way and *they,* especially, did not

know what was going on.

Father Horgan here mentioned churchmen, politicians, and the writers of the world.

These remarks did not set well with the newsmen, who were convinced Father Horgan was speaking of them. They concluded the priest was senile.

But Willie himself was the main disappointment. He had no star quality.

Someone had brought a baseball around to the sacristy before Mass and asked Willie to throw just one pitch for a picture.

But Willie would not so much as touch the ball.

At the Mass there was no drama the newsmen could see.

One of the reporters, a Catholic, thought that Willie looked a trifle odd.

Standing at the altar, gazing at the congregation with his slanty eyes and strange smile, he held out his arms wider than most other priests, and the Catholic reporter told the others about this peculiarity.

"What difference does it make?" the other reporters said.

The Catholic reporter could not explain it, but it was strange, he said.

When Willie held up the sacraments of the Lord and asked the people to look upon the signs and try to see in them the Lamb of God, his voice broke into a little cry, and the Catholic reporter said that was odd, too.

But not odd enough for the reporters to make a story out of it.

"He *is* a weird man," the Catholic reporter said.

His companion said that was hardly news—ten years ago he had thrown away a million dollars.

The bored newsmen left before Mass ended. So they missed Mr. Grayson's little speech.

Mr. Grayson, to the great surprise and delight of Willie, had flown in from New York for the Mass, arriving just at the moment Willie came down the aisle in the entrance procession.

Willie and Mr. Grayson embraced each other joyously, and

Willie greeted him by name when he asked for prayer. He greeted all the people he knew by name.

Mr. Grayson, though not a Catholic, stood and sat and knelt with the others and even took Communion with them.

At the final blessing Willie scooped up what appeared to be a splendid wedge of the solar system with his long thin arms and sent a shower of love across his friends.

Mr. Grayson held out his arms to catch whatever it was Willie was pitching and immediately began to speak in tongues.

Father Horgan and Willie listened respectfully to Mr. Grayson's six-minute outpouring of language, which no one could understand.

When it was over, Willie went down to where Mr. Grayson was standing, perspiring greatly.

He put his arm around his old coach and said, "My dear old friend, that is right and good to talk that way, but we have to talk as men do, too, don't we? Because we have all got to be people someway?"

"In the spirit," Mr. Grayson said, "people reach up out of their skins."

Then all went to the parish hall which had forty-six broken windows out of a total of forty-six windows and where once the Sisters of Saint Francis told the children that there were three, no more and no less, persons in one God. There, in a one-time classroom, drinking coffee from paper cups and eating day-old doughnuts a poor man named Zacho had brought instead of a bottle of Boston Old Port Wine, the poor of Saint Martin parish celebrated Willie's priesthood.

A telegram came over from the rectory. It had been sent from Brazil.

GOOD LUCK. WISH WE COULD BE THERE. JOINED THE GREEN CANARIES AS A RESERVE CAPTAIN LAST MONTH BUT STILL PLAYING BALL TOO. POWER TO YOU AND ALL THE PEOPLE. LOVE. CLIO.

Willie asked everybody at the party what the Green

Canaries were, but no one knew.

The reception lasted an hour or so, and at the end only Mr. Grayson remained.

Willie and Mr. Grayson sat down under a statue of Saint Anthony, who had once preached the word of God to the fish of the sea because the people who lived in his hometown weren't interested.

"I visited friends of yours in Atlanta," said Mr. Grayson. "In prison. I never knew you were with Father Benjamin and the others."

"You saw Father Benjamin!"

"He asked me to bring his love."

"Truman—the large man who cannot talk?"

"Truman, too."

"What wonderful news, Mr. Grayson! They are well, Father Benjamin and the others?"

"Very well. I chatted with Joto also—Joto Toshima, the artist."

"I have not met Brother Joto," said Willie slowly, remembering the strange white picture of nine years ago.

"Joto is the dear friend of my friend Herman Felder."

"Herman Felder! Why—I thought he was dead."

"You are confusing him with his father, Gunner, who went to the Lord some years ago."

"And they are truly all right, after all these years?"

"Doing the work of the Spirit and praying for the bettering of the world. They speak of you so lovingly. They know, as I know, you will do the work of the Spirit like nobody."

"Oh, Mr. Grayson. To have this news of the brothers—it cheers me up so much. And to see you again. Won't you stay with me in Houston until I get my assignment?"

"I have to go back to the club, son. The players are sinning daily. The whole world is sinning. I got to do something for the Spirit, like you."

"Your time will come, Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "And even now there is something you can do."

"Only tell me. I want to work for the Spirit."

"It is about Mr. Regent," said Willie.

Mr. Grayson gave him a long frightened look.

"Why do you speak of that man?"

"I have something to tell him," Willie said, "something that has to do with the past and must be set in order."

Mr. Grayson said, "You should have nothing to say to that man."

"But I do, Mr. Grayson. You see, we had an awful row when I left. He called me terrible names and I lost control of myself. I want him to know all that is past and that I ask his forgiveness and that I forgive him."

"My poor boy," said Mr. Grayson, "he would simply laugh at that idea—forgiving."

"Perhaps. But I must not laugh at it. How can I ask a man to forgive an enemy if I cannot do the same myself?"

"That man hates the Spirit," Mr. Grayson said. "I would have left him long ago were it not for this." He drew from his jacket the battered *Vest Pocket Ezee Bible* that Willie remembered from the old days. "This shields me from him and helps me guide the players through temptations. Without this I would be lost against that great hatred!"

"Hatred—can you or I really know who hates the Spirit?"

"You don't know who he is," Mr. Grayson said sadly. "He is truly one of the great foes."

"Is it possible that through us the Spirit can break through his hatred, if it really is hatred?"

"I will deliver the message," said Mr. Grayson, "though *when* I cannot say. I almost never see the man anymore. He is all over the world conducting his business."

"You will see him one day and you will deliver the message," said Willie. "Until you do, Mr. Grayson, I will not be completely free."

"Free of what, my son?"

"The weight of all that has gone before," said Willie.

Mr. Grayson sighed. "I'll do what I can, son," he said. "But now I must go back to the club."

Mr. Grayson wept a little. Then, looking very worried, he got into a cab and went back to the airport.

* * *

That night, having no place to stay, Willie went back to his old room in the seminary.

Across the street a civic organization had put up a new sign that flashed off and on: THE SWELLEST TOWN IN THE SWELLEST STATE IN THE SWELLEST COUNTRY IN THE SWELLEST WORLD.

Willie began thinking of Clio. He read the telegram again. Who were the Green Canaries?

He called *The Houston Clarion* looking for information.

The reporters did not know. They told him to ask the night editor.

"It's just some Marxist outfit," the editor said, "a small revolutionary army."

"Do they practice violence?"

"What?" the editor asked.

"Is it an army that practices violence?"

"No, it practices ballet, for God's sake." The editor sounded angry and busy.

"Sir, where could I get some further information about this army?"

"No idea," the editor said. Then he laughed. "Of course our publisher, Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade, might know a thing or two about them—seeing as how they just stole his plantation."

"Why did they do that?"

"They—what do you mean *why*? I said they're *revolutionaries*."

"Is Mr. Goldenblade there?" Willie asked.

"For Christ's sake, man, this is Sunday night," the editor said. "Besides, he's the publisher. He doesn't talk on the phone."

"Why not?" asked Willie.

"Why not? Oh, I don't know. Why don't you call the White House and ask to talk to the President?"

"Could I call Mr. Goldenblade at his home?"

"This is a funny little joke isn't it?" said the editor. "A little party game."

"No sir," said Willie. "I would very much like to talk with

Mr. Goldenblade."

"Are you a kid or something?"

"No sir, I'm twenty-eight years old."

The editor made a little whistling noise on the phone. "Let me impart a little practical advice, mister. You don't call Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade at his home. That's a no-no."

"Why?"

"He's an important busy man," said the editor. "Understand? You don't call a man like that at his home."

"I have to talk to him."

"It *is* a put-on, isn't it?"

"No sir, I have a friend in that army. He might be in danger."

"Really? Why don't you call *him*. Maybe he'll have some information."

"How could I do that?" asked Willie.

The editor hung up.

Willie looked up Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade's number and dialed it.

A butler answered.

"This is an emergency," said Willie.

"Mr. Goldenblade is entertaining at the moment."

"It's about the Green Canary Army of Brazil."

Silence. Then, a voice raspy and raw with much recently swilled whiskey.

"This better be important; otherwise, I'll sue."

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Goldenblade," said Willie, "but this is about the Green Canary Army of Brazil."

Upon hearing this, Mr. G. D. Goldenblade took the Lord's name in vain twenty-one different ways, then shouted: "Those creepy monist Marxist swine are going to get it for what they're doing to me!"

"What is it they are doing, Mr. Goldenblade?"

"Oh nothing, nothing at all," said Mr. Goldenblade, making his voice soft and purry. "Just a little bombing, a little looting, a little burning, a little pillaging. And then," here Mr. Goldenblade's voice got louder, "then stealing my 29,000-acre plantation—the Priscilla-Lucy-Ducky-Billy-

Candy Ranch, which is named after my five lovely daughters and has been earning me a steady mill and a half per annum since the day I bought it for fifty cents on the acre twenty-four years ago tomorrow. Stealing it like the flag-hating traitors they are, bombing the Alamo and burning our nation's capital and spitting on the graves of our mothers!"

"But surely they haven't burned the capital!" cried Willie. "Or the Alamo!"

"Don't think they wouldn't if they could!" roared Mr. Goldenblade, and he took the name of the Lord in vain another sixteen times.

"Sir," said Willie, "the only reason I called was to ask about a friend."

"Is he somebody of mine?"

"Sir?"

"Does he work for me—W-O-R-K?" Mr. Goldenblade shouted.

"Oh no sir," said Willie, "he's a ball player. But I got a telegram from him today saying he had joined this Green Canary Army and—"

"Wait a minute, *wait* a minute, hold it right there," Mr. Goldenblade said. "Let's see if I have this straight or if maybe I have been taken drunk. I *am* talking on the phone right now, am I not?"

"Yes sir."

"Would you mind telling me where you are?"

"No sir," said Willie, "I'm at the—"

"Because I'm going to call the chief of police, the sheriff, the governor, the FBI and the Houston Old America Club and we're going to come over there and we're going to arrest you as a conspirator against the government of the United States of America and a lousy creep who has insulted my five daughters and a supporter and agitator who goes around spitting on the graves of innocent American mothers."

"Sir!"

"Who are you?" Goldenblade said hoarsely.

"A priest."

"I *am* drunk," said Mr. Goldenblade, and mumbled some-

thing about God which Willie could not understand.

"Mr. Goldenblade? Mr. Goldenblade?"

There was a shuffling sound on the line, then the voice of the butler:

"I'm afraid Mr. Goldenblade must disconnect."

"I'm sorry. I guess he got too excited."

"He has many worries of late, being one of the most important men in the state of Texas, the United States and the world."

"Well, good night," said Willie.

"You're welcome," said the butler.

The next day Willie went down to the chancery office and Bishop McCool gave him a letter signed by the archbishop, which said he was being loaned to the diocese of Santa Fe, to serve Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in the town of Delphi, New Mexico, where many tragic conditions prevailed and the bishop certainly wished him Godspeed in carrying the many crosses that could be expected.

Chapter six

Out of the dim memories of his boyhood, Willie knew Delphi as a poor border town where Mexican people and a few black people lived in a cluster of shacks around an adobe church and where nothing ever happened—people were only poor together under the vast, hot sky.

But in the years since Willie was a boy, Doveblade Communications had come to town and Delphi had changed. People had jobs now, money in their pockets, TV antennas on their rooftops. Doveblade Communications had tripled the population of Delphi in less than five years.

For many years Doveblade Communications had conducted its operations at two large factories—one in Philadelphia, the other in Chicago.

The Philadelphia operation, employing 40,000 workers, had been described as a model American industrial plant by *Midas* magazine. But the Chicago facility, almost from its

beginning, had been plagued by strikes, shortages, theft, sabotage, delayed deliveries and overruns—all of which sins the chairman of the board, George Doveland Goldenblade, attributed to the "immoral greed and monist tendencies of the Chicago laboring force."

When the workers struck the Chicago plant at the beginning of the unending war in the Middle East, causing a two-month shutdown, Goldenblade and the members of the board determined to move the operation to what Goldenblade called a "free enterprise climate."

Whereupon the Doveblade management began a long and extensive survey of what Goldenblade described as "your free opportunity American town—that is, a town where there have never been any jobs and where any wage is better than no wage. This is what we are looking for."

Many free opportunity towns were scrutinized—Macabre, Kentucky; Yush, Nevada; Hole, Georgia.

Delphi, New Mexico was the town the officers selected.

It seemed a splendid choice: few citizens here had ever had a job.

Here the citizens were happy and uncomplicated and religious. As one of the company officers wrote to Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade, *The people of Delphi are so religious, they see poverty as a cross to be carried through life. They fear riches and some of them think rich people will lose their eternal souls, or the equivalent. Even the minimum wage would be dangerous to these people—a temptation of the world, the flesh and the devil. Recommend we play up this angle by erecting religious statuary about the plant and maybe a cross at the factory gate.*

When the company built its new plant in Delphi, the Doveblade authorities took out an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* which was as beautiful as a poem by the famous American poet of the unremembered days, James Whitcomb Riley. The theme of the poem was how Doveblade, the company that cares about people, was bringing prosperity to some colorful poor folk who lived in a tiny border town in New Mexico.

The message warmed the hearts of many citizens, and the company received numerous requests to have the ad made into Christmas cards.

The President of the United States said it just showed what could be done "within the system, when good sound businessmen put their heads together and get to work on the problem of poverty."

For some years the Delphi Plan succeeded wonderfully.

Profits were higher than ever.

The poor Mexican and black people of Delphi had jobs for the first time in their lives.

Even the wives of the Doveblade management thought the town had charming possibilities. One of the more enterprising wives opened a mail-order store which sold the beautiful blankets made by the Indian women to families all over the United States. In a year's time the Delphi Den Blanket became a wonderful gift for a birthday, confirmation, bar mitzvah, wedding or any happy occasion.

When the United States entered the period of the Six Wars—or pacifications, as they were called by Doveblade management—the Delphi Plan had to be modified. The plant could not hire people fast enough to keep up with the demand for weapons.

So the officers of the company took out help-wanted ads in the newspapers of the Southwest. The ads brought many white people to Delphi. These people, too, became workers in the busy plant and settled in the town.

These were the first white people who had ever lived in Delphi. No one could predict how the races would get along with one another.

As long as the Six Pacifications kept up, there was no problem of any kind. It was when the conflicts began to wear down, run out or, in other words, end in peace with honor, that the tranquillity of Delphi came unglued and the Doveblade Delphi Plan headed for trouble.

As the pacifications wound down, the orders for weapons began to decline. There were still four pacifications going on—enough to keep the demand for weapons very high—

and one could count on many future conflicts waged in the interest of liberty, honor and self determination, but still the ending of just one pacification made it unprofitable to keep all the workers on the payroll.

And so, in the same June of Willie's ordination, it became clear to the officers of Doveblade that it was absolutely necessary to let 800 workers go.

Which 800? That was the question.

Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade himself summarized the problem to his board of directors at a secret meeting in the executive lounge of the company headquarters, an elegant room called Bimini Lounge, which had a luxurious bar decorated with photos of historic atomic cloudbursts.

"If we fire the whites, there's going to be talk we prefer the nigras and the wetbacks to the whites, and the whites are going to cause a tumult, even though the nigras and the wetbacks were here first and even though we can pay them low and they put up with it. On the other hand, there is the justice of the situation. With the pay they been gettin', the nigras and the wetbacks have been getting fancy and high-hat, which is getting very offensive to Mrs. Goldenblade and my five lovely daughters, who frequently buy their lousy blankets, which are going up and up in price and which is a case of outright swindling and exploitation which ought to be reported to the Bureau of Indian Affairs or some other agency of the government that has got some shred of moral horse sense. If we do fire the blacks and the wetbacks, though, because of this new high-hat mentality they been acquiring, they too could touch off a tumult. Which brings us a twofold course of action. . . ."

At moments of great stress Goldenblade had a habit of humming the melody of a tune from the unremembered ages. The tune was an ancient hymn that bore the title *Tantum ergo Sacramentum.* Few knew the meaning of this title or even that the humming had a title until a former Catholic, who had once studied Latin and now worked in Doveblade public relations, related that the word *tantum* meant *only* and *ergo* meant *therefore*—an explanation that

satisfied no one but at least gave the humming a name.

Throughout Doveblade Communications, every employee knew that when the *Only-Therefore* humming commenced, the anger of the chief executive had entered the most dangerous zone of all.

Now, in the executive lounge, the ominous sound took up.

Hum hum hum hummmm.

There was a stir around the great table.

Hum hummmmm.

The third vice-president nudged the second vice-president. The second vice-president nudged the first vice-president. Automatically the first vice-president nudged the man next to him—Goldenblade himself.

Goldenblade glowered at the first vice-president.

"Well?"

"What—what is the twofold course, chief?"

Slowly, quietly, calmly, smiling horribly, Goldenblade explained.

"Either we get ourselves a pacification somewhere in the next three weeks or else we find the communist-inspired, dope-addicted, grave-defiling, flag-burning fruit who talked the President out of Pakistan and nail him to the cross in front of the plant!"

The board members broke from the executive lounge like reporters from the unremembered times running to report a scoop.

The next day the board agreed that it would probably be easier to find a pacification than whoever it was who had encouraged the President to stop the fighting in Pakistan, so a special committee began studying the more promising conflicts around the world with a bonus to be awarded to the man who found the best new pacification in the shortest time.

* * *

The church of Our Lady of Guadalupe stood in the middle of the poorest and oldest section of Delphi and was a sign of desperate last chances.

It was a good-sized old mission church built in the adobe style, very dark inside, with many large sad-looking statues of forgotten saints who had made their way through the world in strange European lands before the United States had started operating.

Over the altar there hung a murky painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe, very similar to the original at the shrine in Mexico.

The stations in the church were of the realistic kind—Jesus taking a beating every step of the way—and there was no reminder anywhere that he had made the trip to the end and had managed to come out the tunnel on the other side with the light shining through his wounds.

When he looked at the church the first time, Willie wanted to do something to make it happier, but maybe, he thought, the church was a reflection of how the people felt.

Many of the townspeople, after taking jobs at Doveblade, had moved away from the neighborhood of the church, and the pastor Willie was replacing had planned to build a new church among the spanking new houses growing up around the plant.

Still there were many people left behind in the old neighborhood: old people, sick people, people who could not get the hang of even the simplest job.

These poor lived in rows of drab adobe sheds, though a few of the more resourceful had taken over old houses abandoned by the suburbanites.

When Willie saw the well-made stucco house that was the parish rectory, he knew he could not live in it and be with the poor too.

So on his first Sunday, after reading the Gospel where Christ sends his disciples out to preach and warns them about staying too long in any one place, Willie told the people how happy he was to be with them, as indeed he was, and then spoke of the house.

"We must have a family in the parish who needs a house and since I have no need of one, the rectory is open to anyone who needs it."

Not until that moment, as he stood looking at the brown and black and white faces that were turned up toward him, stood thinking how wonderfully fine they seemed, gathered together as they were in order to say some words that would help them be brother and sister to one another and say praise-words and thank-words to the Loving One—not until that moment had he given thought to where he might live.

Then it came to him what to do.

"If there would be no objection, I could live with you," he said, looking for all the world like a clown, with his red-gray hair and red-brown-gold-black skin making a funny contrast with the Pentecostal green of the Sunday vestments.

"Would it be such a bad idea, brothers and sisters?

"It is true I cannot do many skilled things among you, around your houses I mean. But then I know how to do certain chores that would permit me to earn my keep.

"If I could stay with each family a night or so, running errands, watching the babies while you went away for a time, helping with something about the house, then we could get to know each other, true?"

He stopped with that because he saw the people were turning to talk to one another and his heart filled with love for them. They seemed so wonderful to him that first morning, exactly like a good family, all scrubbed and shiny as if turned out for a party.

"You certainly look fine," he found himself saying." And I know God loves us all. We ought to love each other more and more, because we are, all together, just one thing, true?

"How wonderful to be alive and to be here and to think that we can always be together!"

And suddenly he walked down the aisle towards them, passing into their midst.

He went up and down the center aisle and then the left aisle and then the right aisle shaking hands and listening to names until he had met every person in the parish, surprising them all and surprising even himself, for he had not planned to do this.

This meeting took twenty minutes and was his first

sermon as a priest.

After the Mass, José and Isabel Delgado and their eight children came to the sacristy and asked if Willie was serious about the rectory, and he said yes, of course, he was serious. And so the Delgado family moved into the parish house that day, and Willie went to live with the people.

At first the Catholic people of Delphi did not know what to make of their funny priest, and there was awkwardness in the first few homes where he stayed.

Always in the past experience of the people, the priest was a different, isolated man—a stranger by mutual consent, agent of a huge and sacred affair that went alongside life without ever touching it.

Priests were to be treated with respect but always kept at a safe remove, their natural business, so people thought, having nothing to do with the grind of living.

Now came this gangling grinning black-red-brown-gold man with the eyes of an Oriental, who seemed never to be serious and who loved nothing so much as rolling on the floor with three-year-old children and who shrieked even more loudly than they as he held them in the air with his long arms.

And it was really those children—Manolo and Sam and Juanita and Carla and Señera and May and Fidel—who paved the way for Willie, imploring parents to ask the priest to stay at their house.

So through the five-year-olds and the seven-year-olds and through a legion of toddlers, Willie came to know the parents, and through the eyes of their children, the parents came to love Willie.

After one night, sometimes after only one hour, people found themselves saying things to Willie they had never said to a priest before, or for that matter to anyone else.

There were no distancing things with this priest, the people found to their surprise.

He looked like them, he talked like them, he dressed like them.

Some of the better-paid workers at the Doveblade plant felt

he did not dress well enough, and in the new homes in the suburbs he was not often invited to stay the night.

A thing that bothered many people was that Willie did not want to be called Father.

One night Juan Velez asked him why he did not like the title of Father.

"You are a father, Juan."

"But are you not the father of the parish? We have always called the priest Father."

"That makes me the papa and everybody else the children. How can we be brothers and sisters if one of us is always papa?"

"My brother Carlos—he is a priest," said Juan. "We of the family call him Father Carlos, even our mama."

Willie laughed. "Each to his own way. But I prefer to be Willie. In the church the only titles I like are brother and sister. 'Father' throws everything out of focus."

"Willie," said Juan Velez's eight-year-old son, "can we make the kite now?"

Willie said that that was the perfect time to make the great eighteen-foot kite that he had promised to build with the children of the neighborhood.

He had already told them stories of great kites men had built in the past, and he had made up a story about a kite that had once taken a man nearly to the moon in the days before space travel.

He loved to talk of flying things and flying men.

* * *

The more he came to know the people, the more he loved them.

He saw their deep, unconscious kindness to one another, their good humor, their quickness to forgive, the love they had for their children, their sympathy for those whom life had crushed.

The poor people of that parish had the usual quirks of selfishness and aggression and pettiness and the rest, those things in man which, Willie imagined, dated from ten million

years ago when men were not yet men.

But among these poor workers, the quirks were not considered virtues. Civilization had not yet made them prized qualities of the spirit. The people were not yet in the cage.

But the cage was coming. Willie saw it in the factory that sat at the edge of town.

Willie did not know what was made in the factory because he was not interested in a man's job or position, but in the man and in what men and women truly loved outside of their jobs.

But one day, walking past the factory, he saw the company sign, DOVEBLADE COMMUNICATIONS, and the company symbol, a dove that had been designed to look like a jet plane carrying a missile in its beak.

As he stood studying this strange ensign, Willie recognized a black man named Sureness Jack standing at the front gate, dressed in a red, white and blue uniform.

"Sureness? Is this where you work?"

"I am the guard here, Brother Willie."

"What is made inside?"

"Bombs, grenades, mortars, guns."

"O Sureness! Poor Sureness!" Willie cried.

The sun blazed down on them.

"Are you all right?" said Sureness, for Willie had begun to tremble in the hot light.

"All right, all right," said Willie, his voice working wrong. "But the people—what of them, Sureness? Do they work here, our people?"

"All, Willie. It is our work now. It has brought us many good things—colored television, dishwashing machines—good things."

Willie began to weep. He could not help it, even though he knew it was embarrassing to Sureness.

"Sit here with me, Willie," said Sureness trying to comfort him.

"No," said Willie backing away, "I—I have an errand."

"It would be wise to rest."

"I am all right," said Willie, still crying. "You take care of

yourself and have—have a safe afternoon."

"I will do that, Willie Brother," said Sureness, looking at Willie with concern.

Willie turned then and walked quickly down the road.

Along the way he met a sleek black limousine driven by a chauffeur.

In the limousine were Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade and his brother-in-law, General Maxwell Harrison.

Goldenblade, his eyes flashing restlessly about the Delphi landscape, had been listening to a cassette report on the ruinous peace that had come to Pakistan.

It seemed clear now that there was little possibility of reopening the pacification there for at least another two years.

Goldenblade was thinking of the 800 Delphi workers who would have to be discharged. He turned to speak to General Harrison when the red-black-brown-gold figure of Willie flashed at the edge of the road.

"What was that?" he cried.

"That?" the chauffeur said. "That was a person."

"Is he one of ours? Stop the car, idiot!"

The chauffeur, whose name was Fred Sprocker, stopped the car.

"Sir," he said, "that is Willie, the new priest."

"Willie what?"

"Willie Brother," said Sprocker.

"He's a *priest*?" Goldenblade exclaimed. "Where's his clothes?"

"Yes, and I don't know," said Fred Sprocker.

"Drive back and don't get smart," Goldenblade said. "I've got to talk to that man."

Sprocker reversed the car, bringing it alongside Willie, who, lost in his thoughts, did not even see the car drifting back.

Goldenblade pressed a button and the window descended.

"Ah, Father Brother," he purred. "Taking a little constitutional, I see."

"Sir?"

"I'm G. Doveland Goldenblade, K.S.G., publisher of *The Houston Clarion* and beloved founder and president of Doveblade Communications. Perhaps you have heard of my brother, Earl, the Cardinal Archbishop of New Orleans? Uncle Eminence Earl, as we call him in the family?"

Goldenblade handed Willie a card which displayed an embossed version of the bird-jet carrying a golden missile in its beak.

"Uncle Eminence Earl's internals been bothering him lately, Father Brother."

"We have got to do something," said Willie.

"He's *been* to the best doctors in the world," said Goldenblade.

"I mean about the weapons, the guns, the awful things they make there in your factory," said Willie, tears streaking his face. He pointed back to the plant. "It's all got to stop."

G. Doveland Goldenblade thought of the many ways he wanted to take the name of the Lord in vain. Instead of doing that, he said, "I pray daily to the Lady of Fatima that communism and monism will be destroyed along with all their adherents."

He handed Willie a thousand-dollar bill.

"For the soul of my dear mother," he said. "Five hundred low Masses, please. Oh, and here's another hundred: Uncle Eminence Earl's internals."

The limousine swooshed forward, covering Willie with dust and making him look like a sad statue of a saint holding in his hand the instruments of his martyrdom.

* * *

That night on the porch of the family of Hank and Morla Gotted, Willie listened carefully.

He needed a way to tell the people to stop making weapons.

Even more than that he needed a way to convince them to stop *liking* making weapons.

He knew what he was up against there: color television, automatic dishwashers, cassette stereo.

The Gotted house stood across the street from the Delphi bus station, and the 1:02 bus from Houston was discharging passengers into a pool of green light reflected by a sign that said, REGENT WINE AND THE WORLD IS FINE.

Willie was listening and watching the sleepy passengers, too.

But one passenger, not sleepy, broke the listening.

The one passenger was a tall limber shape, nothing more, but something in the way that shadow moved made Willie stand up.

He leaned forward on the railing of the porch, straining to see, not yet trusting what his heart had guessed.

Then the shape bent over quickly, an arm swung low to pick up a handbag, and Willie knew it was Clio.

He bounded off the porch, raced across the street and lunged at Clio like a linebacker.

"Clio! Clio!"

Clio's mouth fell open—as if he had seen a dead man.

They babbled incoherently for two minutes, pounding each other on the shoulders and poking one another in the ribs in the old manner of their boyhood, too excited to speak.

"What—when—how did you get here?" said Willie finally.

"That bus," said Clio. "You still are stupid. *That* bus." Clio slapped the bus on its side.

"But why? How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't. I'm here on business. I knew you were in some town somewhere, but man, this is a big state."

Clio looked magnificent, tall and black and strong.

"You look like a—president, a great leader," said Willie.

He asked about Martha and the baby.

In the green glow of the Regent sign, Clio showed Willie pictures.

"We're in Brazil more or less always now," said Clio. "Maybe it's home for good."

Willie kept marveling at him, the fact of his being there.

"Let's go in here and have a beer. I'm staying with a family across the street, and they're all asleep."

So they sat down at the counter of the bus depot and talked

the night away, catching up on all that had happened to them both.

"So you have joined this army, the Green Canary Army?"

"Yes," said Clio quietly.

"But you're not fighting surely?"

Seventy-two hours ago Clio had led an assault on the town of Sao Pietro, where forty-three of his own men and sixty-five of the government soldiers had been killed.

He did not have to close his eyes to bring it back again, the way the government men finally had run to the church and how they had rung the bell of the church and how they had blown the bell tower off the church and what had happened later to the soldiers as they tried to reach the foothills running fast from the church.

He looked at his oldest friend and he knew then, as he had known always, there would never be a way to make him understand.

"It is a small army of the people," Clio said at length. "It is the people trying to get power."

"What is power?"

"Arms, might, control."

"You believe in those things?"

"I have to believe in them," said Clio. "And if you saw the way things are with people down there, you'd understand why we do what we do. The people have never had the power, never the control of their lives. We're the symbol of the power they can have."

"Do you fight, yourself?"

The men had come running out of the back sacristy of the church, trying to reach a grove of trees one hundred yards distant but they did not see how Clio and his company had nested their machine guns between the church and the trees.

"Very little."

"A little would be too much, Clio."

"Don't preach, man. Not if you don't know what it's all about."

"But, Clio, who wins in war, in killing?"

"The people, if we win. It's better than the way things are

now."

"There is a better way," said Willie.

"Willie, if the rich men—the plantation owners and the others who have the power and the bread—would share, would *give* just a little, we wouldn't fight. We hate the fighting. But the people are beaten down, understand? They don't have any kind of life. There is a war that has been going on for centuries against them, the day-in, day-out war of being used and thrown away."

"So you kill them and that is the solution?"

"It is the beginning of the solution," said Clio. "Don't you think they're killing us? Starvation is killing. In the village where we live, three out of five kids die before they're eight years old. And what does the government do? It sends doctors into the villages to show the women how not to have babies and how the men can become sterile. It's called the program for life."

"Still, to kill a man . . . ," said Willie.

Clio had become a hero of the army that day, and who was it, he wondered, who had made him a hero? Was it the fat one who fell and rolled as the bullets popping along after his slow run finally caught up with him and spun him crazy to the ground or was it the lean major who had come from Germany and who had command of the troop and who had come out with two guns drawn at his side like an old-time cowboy from the movies or was it one of the young ones who had just reached the trees only to find that a wall of metal hung there unseen in the air?

"The people only get what they take by fighting," Clio said, and they opened more beer.

And so through the night it went until the sun spread a soft gold haze over the dusty main road of Delphi.

"You can sleep over with the Gotteds," said Willie, picking up Clio's bag. "Come on. They both work and I'm building a kite with the kids. You look tired."

Going across the street, Clio wanted to ask about the munitions firm but just then Willie said, "We talk of these things, of war and killing, and just today, or yesterday now, I

learned that our people here all work at a gun plant out at the edge of town. I was trying to find some way to help them want to do something different."

"They probably need the jobs," said Clio, looking at Delphi in the dawn light.

"Nobody needs jobs that bad."

Clio laughed.

"The beautiful dreamer," he said fondly.

Chapter seven

At 3:00 that afternoon the directors of Doveblade Communications, unable to find a pacification on short notice, gathered in the executive offices of the Delphi plant and voted unanimously to suspend the employment of 800 local workers.

The vote took fourteen seconds, since Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade, being the majority stockholder, had reached a decision about the firing three days earlier.

But it made the directors of the company feel good to know that they thought as Mr. Goldenblade did. After the vote, cocktails were served to the directors and to the sole guest, General Maxwell Harrison, USA.

A list of the discharged employees had been carefully prepared the day before and the list had been distributed to the foremen.

Of the 800 workers, 524 were Mexican, 274 were black, 2 were white, one of them a sixty-nine-year-old veteran of fourteen wars who had the job of sealing the Doveblade symbol on hand grenades.

Copies of the notice of discharge, prepared by G. D. Goldenblade himself, were to be distributed to the workers along with final paychecks at the regular closing time of five o'clock.

The notice of discharge blamed the firings on the United Nations, pornographic films, monism, and the lack of family prayer.

In a world racked by sin, corruption, cruddery and the like, the notice concluded, *we of the Doveblade management will never stop praying for the salvation of each and every one of you who are being released for the good of the country. In the words of the Divine Foreman himself, "Well Done, Good and Faithful Servants!"*

"It's one of the best firing notices I ever wrote," Goldenblade said to General Harrison. "I just hope it does the job."

The two men were sitting in the Bimini Lounge of the executive suite, discussing the possibility of a riot.

"I take it the troops are ready to move?"

"Ready and willing," said the general. "Ninety-six hundred of them in full battle gear just in case these people don't choose to see reason."

"Half the workers can't read," said Goldenblade, "and the other half don't care whether they work or not. All we have to worry about is the small minority who can both read and want to work. It's people like that who always make the trouble about discriminating against spics and nigras."

"You let two white men go."

"True, but there is a minority of men in there who talk that monist equality rot. In any crowd of 800 you are going to find bright-boy types like that. If they got the crowd worked up, it could be bad."

"We like to handle the bright-boy types," said the general.

"With what we got in that plant, if they ever started burning, this town and this plant and you and I and everybody would get blown right off the top of the world."

"I'm going to fix myself another martini," said the general.

"Go right ahead, Maxie," said Goldenblade, "we might as well have a drink while this thing transpires. Morgan, though, our regular bartender who once wrote a book about the African slave trade, will fix you up. Morgan, make the general a drink."

Morgan, an old black man, said, "Yessuh," as in the days no one remembers.

At 5:00 the whistle blew and the men were handed their paychecks—in 800 cases, paychecks enfolded in a personal

letter from Mr. George Doveland Goldenblade.

At 5:05, having stumbled into the hot sunshine, the men were milling around the front gate, under the cross that had been erected there.

The readers were telling the nonreaders what the notices said.

"The moment of truth," said Goldenblade, craning with his binoculars. "We have our own men in there, of course, planted employees, who have been instructed to urge the unemployed toward town. So if they do start plundering, it will be the town and not the plant that bears the brunt."

"Excellent thinking," said the general. "What's that noise I hear?"

"We have mikes planted from the end of the gate all the way to town—down there all the way to the church, do you see? We can listen to what they say."

"Excellent," said the general.

Goldenblade said, "Morgan, get the engineer."

A young white engineer appeared presently.

"All we're getting is this buzzing," Goldenblade complained. The engineer studied the control panel of the sound pick-up.

"They're just murmuring, Mr. Goldenblade," said the engineer.

"Turn it up," said Goldenblade.

So the engineer put on his earphones and turned a dial, immediately filling the Bimini Lounge with an ear-splitting roar.

"We don't need to hear it *that* much!" Goldenblade snarled.

"If they start toward town," the engineer said, "they'll string out. Our mikes can then be cut in and out and we'll be able to pick up the individual voices of the men as they file along."

The general ordered another drink and looked down at the workers through the wrong end of his binoculars.

"How far up are we?" he asked.

"This is the fourth floor," Goldenblade said absently.

"They have absolutely *got* to move to town."

"How like an insect is man," said the general. "How infinitesimal his toil."

"They're starting for town!" Goldenblade said suddenly.

And he was right.

As if cued by a stage director, the workers began straggling toward the center of Delphi.

Now through the speaker in the Bimini Lounge came clear and distinct voices, many of them in Spanish.

A translator was summoned.

"What are they talking about?" Goldenblade demanded.

The translator, cocking his ear, passed on the comments.

"He says he's going to get drunk for three days. That one says he knew the job wouldn't last forever. That man says we should be grateful we had the jobs in the first place."

"Wonderful," said Goldenblade. "They're taking it fine."

"Sir, all those were company men planted in the mob," said the translator. "I know their voices."

Goldenblade cursed the translator's father, mother, brothers, sisters and wife.

"Do you have any children?" he asked the translator.

"No sir."

"Nor will you ever have any," said Goldenblade, "if you don't tell me what the *fired* ones are saying!"

"Yes sir," said the translator. "Well, that one, he said we ought to burn the plant down."

"That man should be arrested!" Goldenblade cried, jerking his hand violently downward and knocking over General Harrison's drink. "Sorry, general."

"S'all right," the general said, "I think I'll just get another."

"This one," said the translator, responding to a single highly pitched voice, "this one says the men should find the managers of the company and—and—"

"And what?" Goldenblade snapped.

"Mr. Goldenblade," said the translator, "it is very bad what he said."

Goldenblade cursed all the relatives of the translator's

family who had ever lived and all future generations of the family.

The translator breathed a deep breath and said, "He said, that man, that we, that is the fired men, should get the officers of the company and tie them to stakes. Then they—that is the officers of the plant, not the men who were fired but rather the superior, how you say, executives—they, not the fired men, but rather—"

Goldenblade, burying his head in his hands, muttered something.

"Sir?" said the translator.

Goldenblade, head in hands, said nothing. But suddenly a low hum was heard in the room—the first few bars of the *Only-Therefore* hymn.

All the words came quickly to the terrified translator: "He said that the workers should get the plant officers, tie them up to stakes, pour Regent sweet wine upon their bodies and leave them to the flies."

"That man should be executed immediately, General!" cried Goldenblade.

The general, having gulped down his new drink, turned on his shortwave.

"Send the execution squad over here," he said in a slurred voice.

"For God's sake!" Goldenblade shrieked. "Not now! You want to start a riot? We use those men of yours only as a last resort."

"But who's going to do the executing?" the general said.

At that moment a new voice came over the speaker.

"Goldenblade's a fruit!"

Goldenblade, hearing this, pounded his fist on the table, knocking over the general's glass a second time.

The general turned the radio on.

"Delay the last order."

"Yessir," said the voice on the radio.

The general felt uncertain about things, so he turned the radio on again and said, "Colonel?"

"Yessir."

"Find the man who called me a fruit!" Goldenblade shouted.

"No one called you a fruit," said the voice on the shortwave.

"This is General Maxwell Harrison speaking," said the general, "United States Army regular, get that?"

"Yessir."

"Have the men stand at attention until further notice. I'm not tolerating insubordination from you or anyone else."

"Yessir. Sir?"

"Just obey the simple order as given," said the general, "or I'll get your eagle."

The general snapped the radio off, reached over the bar, seized the gin bottle and began to drink freely.

"What are they saying?" Goldenblade asked the translator, for now the voices were most distinct and most angry.

"Different things. That one says for instance you are not just a fruit, but a fruit such as has grown rotten at the core."

At this, Goldenblade hit the table again. The general grabbed his bottle just in time.

"And this one says the men should get guns. This one speaks of fire. One man, the last voice, says all should gather together and have a meeting."

Goldenblade groaned.

"That's bad, that's bad, bad, bad. They have meetings and the fires start. Turn the cameras on."

"That man says they will meet in front of the church," said the translator.

"Should I ball for the cazookas?" said the general, rising uncertainly to his feet.

"Cazookas?" Goldenblade exclaimed.

"Bazookas," said the general. "Case they get smart and blow church. We could blow church before they had chance to meet in it."

"Max, sit down over there. Have a drink. Watch the television," said Goldenblade. "Bazookas is what we don't need. Not yet anyway."

"It's matter of infinity to me," said the general. "Absolutely infinitesimal. Practically on the insect scale."

Above the bar of the Bimini Lounge, four television sets snapped on at once, showing four different pictures of the town square.

As the men streamed into view, waving clenched fists, shouting and cursing, it seemed for a moment they might actually begin fighting among themselves.

A brick went flying through the air and the crowd roared.

"Get the gas!" came a voice from nowhere.

A fist loomed before one of the cameras, then fell away.

All four screens went black for a second or two, then presented close-up the picture of two men standing on the steps of the church.

One of the men held out his arms in a curious way, his face turned up to the sky.

He appeared to be speaking to the men, but a mike could not pick up his words because the crowd now had created a storm of sound.

"*What* is that?" Goldenblade asked no one in particular.

"The priest," said the translator. "Willie Brother."

"Who's the nigra?" asked Goldenblade.

No one knew.

All four cameras caught a tight shot of Willie now, his lips moving, plainly exhorting the crowd.

"If a microphone is not put close to that man's mouth within the next thirty seconds," Goldenblade told the engineer, "you and your whole monist crew are through."

"Yessir," said the engineer and began to speak rapidly into the walkie-talkie.

"Going into church," mumbled the general from the end of the bar. "Maybe burn church themselves. No need for nazookas then. Burn church—infinity—man's toil."

The doors of the church had opened and the men began to move inside.

Little by little the angry moan of the men began to subside.

"What sort of man is this Father Brother or whatever the hell his name is?" Goldenblade said, not without admiration. "He's got the whole shabby lot of them eating out of his

hand!"

One of the planted company men came into view and waved a cameraman forward.

The camera followed him into the church.

The picture wavered and tore, went to black, focused fleetingly on a statue of Saint Theresa the Great, then found a bronze icon—until the mouth opened.

"You are angry," Willie began, his voice carrying clearly now over the mike the planted employee had brought into the church.

"They took our jobs!" a man shouted from the congregation.

"They took your jobs," Willie repeated, holding out his arms, "and so you are angry. Yes, you are very angry. And it is natural to be angry—anger is correct.

"Because what is it that you think? You think, How will I feed my family? How will I make the payments on my house? What about the car and the television and the automatic dishwashing machine?

"And it seems—it must seem—to many of you that you have lost everything this day, everything that you have struggled to buy and own and have.

"But I say this to you: there is more to do in this good town of Delphi than to make weapons.

"Yes, there are many things to do, so many great and fine things to do that I say this to you as your friend—your friend, Juan; your friend, Carlos; your friend, Manuel—that instead of being the end of something, this day and this event of your getting fired is the beginning of something."

A true hush had fallen over the crowd, an uncanny stillness.

Even Goldenblade and the others in the Bimini Lounge were part of it.

The camera, backing away, caught Willie at the medium distance, close enough to see his face but not close enough to show that his eyes were closed.

And while the microphone in the third pew had no trouble relaying his words to the men in the Bimini Lounge, there

was no microphone in that church or in that city or indeed anywhere on earth to pick up the strange language that was spoken in his heart.

With a slow, calm but decisive step, he went to the edge of the sanctuary area and jumped up on the communion rail.

The westering sun fell on his face and illuminated a bright banner that hung beside him.

It was a blanket that the Delgado children had given Willie for his personal use, but he had found it so beautiful, with its bright stripes and its intricate pattern of moons and suns and stars, he had hung it in the church as a sign of hope and joy and Eucharist.

"Look at this, men," he said, placing a hand on the blanket. "Look and see how fine and beautiful this blanket-banner is. Do you think I bought this in Houston or New York or that it was given to us by a rich man? No. You know very well that some of your own children and wives made this wonderful thing, for you all have blankets and other such woven things just like it in your own homes."

Willie unhooked the green-blue-tan-orange banner from its stand and tossed it over his shoulders, holding out a portion of it to the crowd.

"You have lived with these beautiful blankets so long, you do not know how truly fine they are. And only recently has it occurred to you that others appreciate their fineness and are willing to pay money for them.

"Men and women and children will always need warm blankets, and it is better to have beautiful blankets because people can never have enough beautiful things to look at to remind them of the goodness and beauty of life, especially when there are many ugly things happening to make people sad and angry.

"So you have already made a start in the blanket business. You know how to make the blankets and you have begun to sell them to the world outside Delphi.

"Now, because of what happened today, you have the chance to make the blankets full-time. You have the opportunity to go into this good and useful work as your regular

occupation—and leave the job of making weapons to others."

"The man's a genius!" cried Goldenblade gleefully. "Why didn't *we* think of this blanket angle? Why he's got them tamed like little fuzzy kittens."

General Harrison said: "Still they might burn, blow to the insect infinity total field range of the—"

"Not now, Maxie," said Goldenblade, genially patting the general on the shoulder, "not with this bird around. I remembered a minute ago that I met this man yesterday walking around the plant. Maybe he was hatching his program even then. By God, he's marvelous. I'm going to start attending Mass here once in a while."

On the screen a weathered old Mexican worker had risen in the crowd and the microphone carried the thin cry of his used-up voice.

"We have no experience at this, *padre*. We have no place to work. And besides, how would we sell what we made to the outside people who do not even know that Delphi exists?"

"Together we will solve those problems, Samuel. Among so many men, there are many different gifts. Some will be good at organizing the work, some will be good at selling the goods, some will be good at keeping the records. As for the factory—" Willie made a circle with his arms, "our church will be fine for that purpose until we all have the money to build a regular plant."

A buzzing in the congregation, then another man stood up.

"Surely, this is not correct," said Pedro, the sacristan of the parish, who went to Mass every morning and said fifteen decades of the rosary before he went to bed at night.

"This is God's house, not a factory. The Lord Jesus drove out money-makers from the temple in his day. What then do you plan to do? Bring the money-makers into the church of Jesus and thus mock his teaching?"

"Ah, Pedro, it is right to think of certain places as holy," said Willie kindly. "On the other hand, since Jesus broke up the standard arrangements of the entire world and made everything holy and made man himself holy, every single place man goes is holy. And man can do many holy things,

such as making warm blankets for babies and old people and married folk to lie beneath. This is a splendid work for men and women to do because it is something that helps other people, especially those who know what it is to try to sleep on a cold night when there is only a thin blanket at hand."

Willie gestured, poking the air with his pitching hand.

"The making of a good and beautiful thing by a good person is itself a prayer, so that when our people come together to make their beautiful blankets, they will be praying, they will be worshiping in spirit and in truth. In the new arrangement of the Lord, all the old arrangements are put aside, everything is loosened up, all the walls come down, and we are on the open plains in the fresh wind, and every place is holy and every place is church.

"And I see now how wonderful it will be on Sundays when all of us rest a bit and come back here to the place where we have spent our week, to idle a bit, to break the bread and drink the wine, to thank the Loving One. If in every business people worshiped where they worked, then perhaps the making of unholy things would end."

"Wha's that sounding mean?" said the general fuzzily. "Unholy and all that? Burning beginning?"

"He's talking about dirty books, Maxie," said Goldenblade. "He's talking about crud. By God, we could well take example from what he is saying. If we had the rosary recited over the loudspeaker system every day, you wouldn't see so many of those filthy magazines around the plant. Happier families would result."

Caught up in the idea, he turned wildly upon the translator.

"Your family happy?" he asked.

"I have no family but a wife," said the translator.

"What's wrong?" Goldenblade asked.

"Nothing," said the translator.

Goldenblade decided that the man was lying and made a note to have him discharged for habitual immorality.

"S'ere any more gin?" the general asked.

"Certainly, Maxie," said Goldenblade handing the general

a fresh bottle. "You might as well head back to Houston now. We've got peace in Delphi and this chink-nigra is the one we owe it to. I'm gonna buy him a steak tonight and see if we can't get some prayer into the plant which is, God knows, smoldering with corrupt morals, rotten families, and homosexual monists."

Chapter eight

When the crowd had gone, Willie and Clio sat down in the last pew of the church.

The yellow westerly light of the sun had thickened and darkened, and where it met the blue haze that always gathered above the sanctuary, it made a sort of green glow that drifted over the sad statues.

At that hour the church spoke of dead things, and the old Latin words that had been written above the altar in the unremembered times looked forlorn and pathetic, like a letter from a dead person that no one would ever read and that could not be answered: MEMENTO, DOMINE, FAMULORUM FAMULARUMQUE TUARUM ET OMNIUM CIRCUMSTANTIUM.

"What's it mean?" said Clio.

"It means, Don't forget anybody," said Willie.

"Nice. That's nice."

Willie's eyes were closed. He was exhausted; a part of himself had been lost.

"That was a mean mob, man," said Clio. "You handled it great."

"They're great people."

"But I don't blame them for the way they felt."

"Me either, Clio."

"And you know something? I don't know if what you did was the answer."

"Me either."

"The Mexicans and the blacks had the jobs before the whites. One of them told me that. But look who got fired."

Willie sighed. He could have slept, but he did not want to sleep.

He had lost some inner thing. What was it? He did not know.

It was all right, he thought, it did not hurt. In fact, he had the feeling that it was right to let it go.

He felt as if he had gone up to a high place, then come down too suddenly.

"They'll make it work, Clio," he said. "They can do whatever they want."

"People have to fight for justice," said Clio. "It isn't handed to them."

"Who handed them anything?"

"You did."

"I made some words. Is that so much? They will make the justice when they make the blankets. Or they won't."

He yawned, then yawned again. He stood up.

"Would you let me go away for a little while, Clio?"

"Sure, man. Why don't you sack out for a while? I'll mess around town and we'll get together later."

"Fine," said Willie, and he turned to go.

When he got to the door, he turned back and said, "You're okay, aren't you, Clio? You're not in trouble?"

Clio laughed.

"What you wanna do, make me go to confession? Get outta here."

Willie waved and went away, leaving Clio in the green-blue shadows.

Clio went to the door and watched him walk away, his shoulders bent a little.

He knew after last night that there was no use talking to him about the thing that had brought him here.

There was no hope for him; he was a child and always would be a child.

Still, watching him disappear around the corner of the Aztec Tap, he felt the tug of their old friendship and he went out on the steps and nearly called out to him.

But he did not call. His reason prevented it. There would

never be a way to make him understand the simplest thing about the world.

He sat down on the steps of the church and tried to think.

It was going to be difficult, and he did not know how to proceed. He had to act very quickly now because it was Friday evening and the sales people would be gone.

He had to find the right man, the absolutely right man, and then get away as soon as possible.

Through the quick-falling, green-turning dusk came the great limousine.

It stopped noiselessly at the curb and out of it stepped the silver-maned George Doveland Goldenblade, his mottled face relaxed and smiling as it had not been since the day before his wedding thirty-seven years before.

"You are an usher here, young man?" he said to Clio in a most polite way.

"A friend of the good father," said Clio, eyeing Goldenblade curiously. "A visitor from a distant place."

"A friend of the good father—well, isn't that fine? I'm G. Doveland Goldenblade, K.S.G., beloved founder and president of Doveblade Communications."

Mr. Goldenblade and Clio shook hands.

"My name is Talazar," said Clio, "Hector Talazar. And I must say that this is a most happy coincidence. I just been reflecting here on the vagaries and the vicissitudes of life."

Clio was speaking with an English accent he had been working on for more than two weeks and he was using words he had picked up in several all-night sessions with a special team in the city of Recife, Brazil.

"I happen to be in the area on business, Mr. Goldenblade, and I was just coagulating on the events of the day—the discharge of the employees and the near tumult among the people. A most interesting event from a sociological standpoint."

"Fascinating," Goldenblade agreed. "And your friend, the good father, played a key role—one might even say a saving role."

"Indubitably and forthwith," said Clio. "But even as that

conundrum was happily being resolved, my own dilemma put on the beef, as it were."

"I beg your pardon?"

"My English is most uneven," said Clio. "I have been out of practice for no little time. The fact is that this very afternoon I had planned to come to your plant to accomplish an important bit of business. My time being mitigated, I was wondering how I should ever find the correct person or persons with whom to coalesce, what with the weekend contravening as is its wont. My sole hope lay in catching an important personage late this afternoon, but at that time this urgent matter had gripped the attention of the local habitants."

"You are in the blanket industry, Mr. Talazar?"

"I am with the government of Brazil," said Clio.

Goldenblade's smile vanished.

"You're not a monist!"

"I am with the true government of Brazil," said Clio, clicking both his heels together, "not the rodents who have visited such pestilence upon our land these past months. My garb, you will notice, is casual. My business here is urgent and confidential. I am definitely incognito. You see, even in your great land of freedom, equality and brotherhood, not a few citizens would desire my demise if my true identity were divulged. I hope it will not offend you, sir," said Clio, lowering his voice a little and selecting the phrases taught him by his coaches, "I hope you will not take it as a criticism of your nation or its people, if I say that at the present time there are many so-called citizens of the republic who are in fact flag-burning, traitorous wretches who have no respect for the spirit of 1776 and who in fact do not even honor their mothers."

Goldenblade seized Clio's hand.

"By God, Mr. Talazar, you make a point there I have been harping on myself for any number of years. But come, let's go into the church here and see what we can do. I take it you wish to purchase arms?"

"You take it absolutely correct," said Clio. "Arms for

freedom, for patriotism, for better families."

"Senor Talazar," said Goldenblade, genuflecting before the altar, "I have been waiting, I have been praying, I have been sacrificing daily that Our Lady of Fatima would send me a man of strength such as yourself to deal with this sorry state of affairs. You may or may not know it, but I lost one of the most beautiful ranches in all Latin America at the time this uprising began."

"I have heard that," said Clio, whose army command now occupied what was formerly Goldenblade's hacienda, "and my sympathies are sincerely nugatory."

"I have tried earnestly as a patriotic American to encourage the President of the United States to declare pacification against those monist-Marxist pigs—"

"Hogs," said Clio.

"Hogs, Mr. Talazar," said Goldenblade nodding vigorously, "but do you think I can get action?"

"Not from those traitors," said Clio. "They serve your great people so poorly they ought to be extinguished. But no, that is not good enough for the louses, or lice if you prefer. They should be obviated as soon as possible, toute suite."

"You and I talk the same language," said Goldenblade. "What is it you need?"

So, under the statue of John the Baptist, Clio, showing papers declaring him to be the deputy defense minister of the government of Brazil, and George Doveland Goldenblade negotiated the sale of 100,000 machine guns, 50,000 mortars, 250,000 grenades, 300,000 carbine rifles, and 2 million rounds of ammunition—the entire shipment to be dispatched immediately to Recife, to the personal attention of Senor Talazar himself, and not to subordinates whose loyalty and patriotism were suspect.

The sale was secured on a cash basis, to the astonishment and delight of Goldenblade, with Clio counting out four and a half million dollars in American money, which he had exchanged in Mexico City the day before for the equivalent amount in Brazilian cruzeiros which the Green Army had removed from nine banks in the city of Recife only seventy-

two hours earlier.

"Cash is still a beautiful way to operate," said Goldenblade in awe, stuffing the money into a suitcase brought into the church by the chauffeur.

"You understand," said Clio, "this shipment is urgently needed. The enemy is very close—as close as that angel there."

Goldenblade looked up at the statue.

"That's Saint John the Baptist. The one who was beheaded."

"But of course," said Clio. "In the shadows I thought it was another denizen of the heavenly realms. The head perhaps also fooled me."

The men stood silently for a moment looking up at the statue which seemed to be blessing their transaction.

"I promise that I shall arrange the shipment myself," said Goldenblade. "I'll contact our Philadelphia facility this very night."

"The swine have got to be put to rout," said Clio. "And if the governments of the JERCUS alliance refuse to act, then we must purchase our strength from courageous and patriotic heroes of business such as yourself—good men who understand the menace of the times and the value of the dollar and the inflating spiral of the economy which is corrupting the youth of all nations."

"Young man," said Goldenblade, "if you weren't such a patriot for your country, I would be tempted to offer you a vice-presidency in our firm here."

"My country first," said Clio. "Liberty or death, take your choice."

They walked out into the last gray light.

"You are the darkest Spaniard I ever saw," said Goldenblade, "and yet one of the finest."

"Portuguese, sir."

"Of course. Another great country, Portugal."

"One of the best."

"May God fructify your every effort," said Goldenblade.

"And may you likewise be fructified," said Clio.

When the black limo pulled away, Clio sat down on the steps once more.

He knew now he had to leave. Goldenblade had come to the church looking for Willie, and if he found them together, the bargain would be ruined.

So he wrote a note and left it in the last pew of the church.

Will: Sorry I can't stay. Even sorrier I can't tell you why I got to go. I made a deal this afternoon with the munitions people which you wouldn't like. I ask you not to talk about it to anybody or even let on like you know me. I gave them an alias name. You wouldn't like that either. Please believe I am working for peace and justice just as you are but in a different way. Ever your friend. Clio.

It was just after nine when Willie found the note.

Clio, Clio, he thought, *so you will shoot your way to justice. Take care of him.*

Take care of everybody.

And he knelt down to listen.

Chapter nine

Sunday morning after Mass, George Doveland Goldenblade went to the private office that he kept on the fourth floor of his Houston mansion, sat down in a leather chair so that he could gaze upon the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima that rose like a golden mountain on the west lawn of his spacious grounds, opened a file that had arrived by messenger just an hour earlier, and dictated a cassette letter to his brother, Earl Cardinal Goldenblade, Archbishop of New Orleans, and one of the most important men in the Catholic church in the United States.

Eminence Earl, Goldenblade began, *we had something happen at our Delphi plant on Friday that was like a miracle. To make a long story short, we had to fire a lot of blacks and wetbacks owing to the stupid ending of the Pakistan affair and came very close to having a riot on our hands. These people*

never had jobs till we came along and you know how it goes with such types once they get into the quick green. We were sure they were going to burn us bad and I had even called H. B. to get Maxie in there with some troops in case the roof went, which we thought it might.

What saved the situation for us was a young black priest, known in Delphi as Father Willie Brother, who appears also to have some chink and even Indian blood running through him and who gave a remarkable speech to the people, which not only calmed the troublemakers down but even paved the way for new work for them, getting us out of a real messy situation and giving the troublemakers something to take their minds off arson.

What impressed me most about this young nigra was not what he said but his ability to get through to the people, his own people, and to keep them from taking the violent step. With all the rabble-rousing priests you and I have seen these past twenty years, here's one that is dead against violence and other extreme measures and seems to have the knack of calming the troubled waters. And the reason I am writing you is this: Why not give this young fellow a special job as a sort of trouble-shooter for the church, if you follow. I mean, give him some title or other and send him around to places where blacks and spics or anybody else are acting up?

Now what makes this such an interesting idea to me, and I hope to you, is a couple of facts about this man which one of our investigation teams has discovered in the past forty-eight hours.

Number One, this priest used to be a famous pitcher for Bob Regent's ball club in New York. You remember the night of your elevation to archbishop going out on Bob's yacht and how excited he was about this new player he had signed? This is that same boy, which just goes to show you it is a short world after all. And right now as I dictate this, I am paging through a small bible of press clippings on this spade, which recount his feats on the baseball diamond. You and I never cared for the game, but apparently this bird was some kind of miracle pitcher, a great favorite with the fans, very big at the gate, and so on. In

other words he has, or at least once had, a name.

Number Two, his family was wiped out in the riots here in the city eleven-twelve years ago. In fact, as far as we know, that is why he left the club. And that's why he is so opposed to extremist violence—seeing as how it cost him his family. Our people have been trying to get more information on his folks and general background, but it appears just about everybody who knew him when young got smoked in the riot. The diocesan chancery seems to know little about him either, except that he was a bad student and we have checked this out with several classmates who confirm. Bob Regent could probably give us further information but as you have undoubtedly read in the papers, that man is practically cut off from the world now. No one knows where he is from one day to the next, and his business operations are so screwy and so secret and he makes himself so scarce, refusing to see people or meet with people, I wonder if Bob hasn't burned a circuit. We should surely remember Bob in our prayers.

I am taking the trouble to tell you all this because we are getting into another rough summer here, in many ways very much like the summer of eleven years ago. And I understand things aren't so sweet in N. O. either. Our field people are sending in various reports from Chicago, L. A., Cleveland and D. C., which are also bad. Wouldn't we be able to render a great service to the country and to the church if we had somebody to send into these areas just before flash point to cool things down?

As I dictate this I am looking at the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, which you will recall dedicating for us five years ago. Every morning I pray to Our Lady that she will show us some way out of our troubles. I honestly think maybe she has sent us this spade as an answer. I would be passing all this on to the local arch here, but as you know better than I, he is so out of it these days all he does is go around asking people what ever happened to the pagan babies he ransomed as a kid. He should be put in a home without doubt. As for the new dude, young McCool, well, you remember the trouble Dad had with that s.o.b. who called himself his father. It is not charitable of me to

say so, but I do not like a man to smile that much. He knows how I feel, and if I were to recommend the advancement of this Afro to McCool, it would probably be the one sure way to get him sent to the South Pole. But if trouble broke out here, you could talk to the man in Dallas and recommend this boy and there is always the Delegate as you once told me about.

Irene and the girls are fine and outside the lousy ending in Pakistan we are not doing too bad. I hope you are over whatever it was that was tying up your internals.

A week after George Doveland Goldenblade sent this cassette letter to his brother, a white policeman shot and killed a seventeen-year-old drug addict named Martin King Kennedy, who was attempting to rob a grocery store at the corner of 63rd and Halsted in Chicago, Illinois, and the first great riot of the summer began.

Within two hours of the incident, Cardinal Goldenblade of New Orleans had called Cardinal Powers of Chicago and Cardinal Powers had called Archbishop Tooler of Houston who wanted to know what ever happened to the pagan babies Cardinal Powers had ransomed in his youth. The handsome Bishop McCool took the phone.

Bishop McCool did not understand anything about riots but he did understand that it was Cardinal Powers who was making the phone call and if Cardinal Powers wanted the pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Delphi to come to Chicago, then he would certainly be happy to arrange it—and Cardinal Powers was welcome, no trouble at all, any time really, it was nice to be able to help a fellow bishop.

The telegram reached Willie in the old church, where 341 Mexican and black people were busily engaged in making, sorting, pricing and boxing blankets.

The telegram said, *A private plane will land shortly at the airport of the Doveblade plant. You are to board this craft and proceed to Chicago, Illinois to assist his eminence Clarence Cardinal Powers in putting down a riot. May God bless you in this good work. Bishop Francis McCool.*

Willie looked at the happy, busy, boisterous people in the church, their beautiful skin colors even more beautiful than the blankets they were making.

He looked at the children running about the sanctuary.

The old church had never felt life like this even on the happiest feast days.

The people had taken hold of a moment and made it their own, and the excitement of that choice was in the air, making everything different.

How could he leave them?

Sureness Jack saw the sadness come to Willie's face.

"Everything all right, Willie?"

"I have to go away, Sureness," said Willie. "Remember this, won't you: you can make this work succeed if you stay on together and work as a family. You can be happy and you do not have to make weapons in order to eat."

"You are not going away for good?"

"No," said Willie, "I don't think so. But matters are uncertain. I will try to come back as soon as possible."

"You cannot leave, Willie," said Sureness, frightened suddenly.

"The work is yours not mine. You must learn to do it without me."

"I will tell the people."

Willie took his hand.

"Not now, Sureness," he said. "Wait until I am gone. I cannot say good-bye to them."

Then Willie went out to the airport, where a jet was waiting to fly him to Chicago.

He was wearing a torn sweatshirt and blue Levis, and the pilot of the aircraft said to the priest who was the only other passenger, "That is the man?"

"They told us he was odd," said the priest, who was the secretary to Cardinal Powers and who knew what he would be doing every half hour for the next six months.

When the plane curved up over the town, Willie looked down on the people.

They had come out of the church and were standing in a

ragged circle waving their bright blankets in farewell.

"Good-bye, my loved ones," he said. "My beautiful brothers and sisters, good-bye."

"How little people look from the air," said the priest-secretary. "Flying certainly puts things in perspective, doesn't it, Father? Would you like a drink?"

And so began Willie's second public career—queller of riots, messenger of calm, cooler of the hot towns, which were that summer hotter than ever because the fires had burned on steadily from the inside without anyone paying attention and were out of control in ways that men could not measure.

Chapter ten

In Chicago, twelve square blocks were under siege.

The city police, the county police, the state police and the National Guard had moved around the area, arms at the ready.

So far, no one but Martin King Kennedy had been killed in the strife, but the black people in the riot district were on the rampage.

They had set fires to many tenement buildings and loan offices and shiny new buildings in the neighborhood that had the word *opportunity* written on their windows.

The fire trucks could not get into the area; the black people had sealed it off.

Any minute now the mayor and governor were expected to give the order to invade the district, firing on those who tried to obstruct their efforts to bring peace.

"What's the priest supposed to do?" the mayor asked Cardinal Powers as they surveyed the scene from the top of the Entirely New Life Insurance Company building.

"He has some way with them, Frank," the cardinal replied, fondling his shamrock-shaped pectoral cross. "He sings, I believe, or performs in some way."

"Sings?" said the governor. "The *South Side* is about to blow."

The Kerry blue eyes of Cardinal Powers twinkled behind gold-rimmed spectacles. "Now, now, Governor. We must have faith. This humble black man speaks their language—has these little ways they understand."

"Jesus," the mayor whispered to no one in particular.

Willie was shown into the office.

The cardinal, his rich red silk robes rustling, started, almost jumped at the sight of him.

"Who's this?" the governor asked.

Willie went to the window.

"*This* is the priest?" the mayor asked dumfounded.

The cardinal, whose episcopal motto was *Dignitas in Omnibus,* asked for a glass of water.

"Wait a minute, wait," the governor said, snapping his fingers. "You're the ball player. The *pitcher.*"

"Father?" said the cardinal. "You *are* a priest?"

Willie looked down at the fires, which were sending a continuous cloud of black smoke into the dusky orange sky.

"You have a plan, Father?" the mayor asked.

"Maybe you could go on TV," the governor said. "Why, with your name. . . ."

Willie could see people in the streets running between the burning buildings.

"You could pitch!" the governor said. "That pitch you had!"

Willie said, "If you had a truck—with a loudspeaker—maybe we could go in."

The cardinal held his water glass with shaking hand.

"You're going to sing, Father? In clothes of that type?"

Willie started for the door.

"We have good singers here," the mayor said. "Right here in Chicago—lots of them. All due respect, Father."

"This is that pitcher," the governor said once more to the cardinal.

Suddenly, just as Willie got to the door, the cardinal cried out. "Keep them away from the Lady!"

Willie stopped.

"Old parish—first mass—Lady of Angels," the cardinal said, suddenly a small, old altar boy.

Willie plunged down the tall building in a fast elevator and climbed into the back of an open truck that had been commandeered by the police.

The truck belonged to the Jerry Cherry Fruit Company. There was a huge cat's face on the door of the truck, and under the cat's face, the slogan, JERRY'S CHERRIES ARE THE BERRIES.

"Go right into the middle of it," Willie told the driver.

"Your circuits are blown," said the driver, and he got out of the cab.

A crowd had gathered around the truck.

Willie, taking the microphone, said, "I need a driver to help me go and try to stop the riot. Will someone volunteer?"

The crowd fell silent. People turned away.

"Please," said Willie, "just one man."

A young girl edged through the crowd, a black girl of about twenty, whose face with its high cheekbones stopped Willie, froze him and held him as if something had hit him, driving a shaft through his body.

To the glossy hair, the liquid brown eyes, the sad mouth turning away, she was identical to Carolyn.

"I can't—I can't let you go," he said, his lips scarcely moving.

He was bending down to her from the panel of the truck.

Where, out of so much death?

"I can make it," the girl said.

Even the voice—out of death, long ago.

He stared at her, trying to make words.

"I can't let you take the chance," he said at last.

The girl said, "I know the neighborhood. I grew up there."

She turned then and got into the cab. They were pulling away.

He could see only the back of her head now.

Why do you always put yourself on the bottom rung?

The fires came up to them, the shouts were closer, they

were going into the storm.

They came to a police barricade.

The mayor had radioed ahead to let the truck pass and the barricades were opened by the sullen guardsmen. A police captain waved them through with a *Good Luck!* that was just a noise.

Put all that back, he told himself. *It is gone. Now only this, since all the rest is—all right then.*

The girl pulled over to a curb at the edge of the riot area.

"There's a public library about three blocks in. There's a sort of park next to it. If we could get there, you could probably get them together."

He put it back once more.

"Okay," he said, "but why not let me take it from here?"

Without answering, she shifted the gears of the truck with a little difficulty, and then they were within the smoke and roar of the hurricane.

Something hit the roof of the cab—a thrown brick or something falling from a building.

Confused shouts rose on every side.

People were running, carrying things, looting the stores.

The truck swung into a narrow street and headed toward a knot of black youngsters who were blocking the way.

"Go home children!" Willie called into the microphone. "If your homes are burning, then go to the edge of South Shore Drive."

Astonished at the fact of the moving vehicle, the children fell back and the truck went on.

At the corner a gasoline station blazed away, its skeleton alone still standing. It seemed to scream.

The truck turned, crawling through the smoke toward the library building.

There were many people in the street. It looked like moving day for the entire neighborhood, with some people carrying things out of tenements and others carrying things in.

The girl tapped on the window and made a rectangular motion with her hand. Willie understood.

Standing at his full height, he began to talk into the mike.

"Please, please come to the other side of the library. We will have a meeting in the park. Please come to the park. Please. . . ."

The faces swirled past, showing only occasional, slight surprise.

The truck reached the end of the block and turned again. No one paid any attention to it.

"Please," Willie called, "please come to the library." His voice carried up and down the streets. People turned momentarily to trace it, then went back to the business at hand.

When the truck had completed its rectangular route, the girl drove it into the middle of the playground and parked it near a sliding board which had rusted and worn through years ago.

Willie said *Please come to the library* a few more times, but no one took notice.

"It's no use," Willie called to the girl.

She pointed now to some red bulk on the other side of the library. Through the smoke Willie could see the outline of a fire truck. It had been summoned into the tenement area when the riot began and had then been abandoned.

Taking the microphone and sound equipment, Willie and the girl advanced to the truck. There were children playing on it.

"Come down," Willie called.

The girl entered the cab of the truck and began pushing buttons on the dashboard.

Suddenly, as the last child scampered off, a ladder, making a great creaking noise, began to unfold on top of the truck.

Willie grabbed it, holding onto the mike with his free hand.

"Keep off!" he shouted to the children.

Stunned at first, they began to clap and shout as the ladder rose.

As he went up, rising above the blackened library, above the smoke, above the clustered children, the people going in and out of the tenements caught sight of him.

Arms reached out. There were cries of surprise. Jeers.

Laughter.

Willie could see the girl's brown face, upturned, getting smaller as he ascended.

Now she seemed to wave.

"What?" he called—just as the ladder, reaching its fullest extension, snapped and shuddered, causing the whole truck to tremble.

He slipped.

A gasp came from the people as he struggled on the tip of the ladder, trying to hold on.

For the first time, the people in the library area stood still and looked.

Hanging on with one hand, holding the microphone in the other, he strained to pull himself up.

His groaning could be heard over the treetops. Windows opened. People began to move toward the truck.

As he struggled to swing his body back to the ladder, his breathing, powered by the microphone, came like a wind through the district of the riot.

For a moment he was going to fall.

An old woman screamed.

Then, delicately, he swung his body forward, then back. His foot caught a ladder rung, and held.

He hung there for a moment, his red hair flaming in the light. He looked like a hobo trapeze artist.

Someone started clapping; others took it up.

His breathing came in short gasps.

As he finally righted himself on the ladder, the crowd cheered. But then a sort of moan came from his lips. Its sound froze them.

Suddenly, between pants, his words came like slow summer thunder over the multitudes.

". . . how you feel."

He held the mike farther away and looked down and saw them coming together, looking up, and he began talking in words he had never used before and that later he would not remember saying.

"I have seen all this before—I tell you—brothers and

sisters—there is no way—to come out of this—on the good side. Violence and burning never succeed."

The crowd, swelling to a thousand or more, simply looked at him as if he had come from a star.

His voice, as he spoke, was calm, slow, patient, earnest. Some of the people said afterwards that at first they could not connect the voice with the man on the ladder.

As he spoke, he began to descend the ladder, rung by rung.

"What do you see around you?" he asked. "The destruction of evil? The end of injustice and cruelty and uncaring? No. Only the end of your homes, your neighborhood, the place where you make your community."

"Who sent you?" someone shouted, a man of thirty at the edge of the crowd.

"What difference does that make, my brother?" Willie replied. "If I speak the truth, does it matter where I come from?"

He stood four or five steps up the ladder now.

"You're not from the neighborhood," cried a woman. "You don't know what things are like down here!"

"My own neighborhood is the same," said Willie. "And where I used to live, it was worse. So the people one day couldn't stand it any longer. They decided to be done with injustice. But they did it violently—fighting injustice with murder and fire. So they perished, all. They died, my family, and everyone I loved."

"We known nothing but violence since the day we was born," a one-eyed man said in a firm voice. "The violence of the police, the violence of the landlords, the violence of the cold winters. We replyin' to that violence now. The violent bear it away!"

The crowd shouted and cheered in encouragement of what the one-eyed man had said.

"The violent bear *what* away?" Willie shouted back. "I will tell you: the dead, their own dead among them. It is a dying people who practice violence—the violence is their death rattle!"

"They dyin'?" the same man said, pointing toward the skyscrapers of downtown Chicago.

"They are the walking dead," said Willie. "Gray men, sepulchers full of decay, who walk in death."

"They have the *power*—they have the *bread!*" the one-eyed man cried.

"And you shall take these from them by burning your homes? My black brother, you have life. You have not yet wedded their death, entered the arrangements and the pacts they have formed. Your poverty is a sin upon the others, but it is not your sin. No!

"You have life yet, you have community, you have the blessed and holy freedom which cannot enter those cagelike suburbs I saw from the plane, cannot enter those great cylinder apartments I saw by the lake.

"You are together in your need, depending one upon another. You can unite as the brothers and sisters you are.

"They do not have this chance, the others. They are still in combat with each other, struggling against themselves in unseen war, which goes on continually and which kills them even as they seem to live."

"They killed that boy for no reason," said a youth near the truck.

"And that was a terrible wrong," said Willie. "That calls for true justice. But don't you see, my brother, that what you are now doing—this burning and rioting—will only bring more evil about? Soon they will move in with guns. What chance of justice do you have when that happens?"

"What chance we have anyway?" the one-eyed man shouted. "Nothin' gonna change here."

"And why is that?" said Willie. "Because you still think of yourselves as powerless victims, because you will not put your unity to work, because you go on telling yourselves another generation will have to do the job."

"We are doin' the job now! We are demandin' justice at this moment!" a woman called.

"My sister, you are doing nothing but destroying. You are not demanding anything but tear gas, guns, tanks and

death."

The crowd had swelled now, the roaring and the shouting were dying away.

The people pressed in close to the truck, looking with curious eyes at the strange man who spoke to them.

"What are we supposed to do?" someone called.

Willie knew that he had to break things down into simple steps, though he really wanted to speak of a wild, unknown dream that flashed in his mind.

He saw the whole neighborhood as a great green place full of children. There were animals walking about. There was music. Men and women were carrying brilliant banners, singing.

"First, we must let the fire trucks in and we must see to it ourselves that there is peace throughout the area.

"If the police come, we must tolerate them, but the real peacekeeping must be our job. We must show them that we do not really believe in violence as a solution to the problems of this neighborhood or of the great sinful city itself.

"Then, from each block, a person should be elected to go to see the authorities about the housing, the conditions—"

"All that has been tried before!" a man shouted in disgust.

"With the power," Willie went on, "with the power you have of bringing about results nonviolently, you can have the neighborhood you want."

"It has been tried before, all of that," the man called again.

"It has never been tried with faith. It has never been tried with any sense of hoping for a better result. A man must believe he can be free before he can act to make freedom possible."

"Those are just words," the same man said. "And what power do we have to back them up?"

"If they want to see the power, if they cannot change without a show of power," said Willie, "then there is the power of unified numbers acting in nonviolent protest. Look at it this way. If a million black people of this city were to lie down on the thoroughfares of Chicago bringing to a halt all its so-called business and making it impossible for men to go

on as usual, then you would see a change.

"Consider what I tell you. If a million black people were to suddenly place their bodies in the way of all commerce and business, they would not be able to cope with it. Not be able to build enough prisons. Not be able to handle the numbers and the persistence of it. They would exhaust themselves trying to deal with the peaceful presence of so many black bodies getting in the way of things and breaking up the arrangements.

"In the end, out of regard for themselves and for the sake of their precious life-styles, as they call them, they would choose justice as the easier course of action."

The crowd was silent, doubting what he said but still captivated by the picture.

"If you cannot act as one, then you will never have justice. Your power comes from your unity and your unity comes from your acceptance of one another. This is all you have but it is a lot. It is enough to break up the mold that keeps you captive.

"Once you get justice here," he said lowering his voice a bit, "who knows? Perhaps you can teach them something about the greater justice—what is beyond justice. Perhaps some of those dead men might come back to life."

He had them now. The crowd was in the thousands, stretching out as far as the eye could see.

The shouting was gone. There was only the low roar of the fires.

"We must begin with the fires," said Willie. "I am going back now in this truck, going back to the access streets. I am going to ask the officials to come here and put out the fires. I will ask you to cooperate with the people who come here, the firemen and the policemen, working with them as if this had been a natural disaster, like a great storm.

"When the peace has come, form into a body and march to the office of the mayor. Make the demands that need to be made. Make them particular and specific, not just so many angry words.

"Tell the mayor and the city council that finally you are fed

up and that if the demands are not met, then you will nonviolently interrupt the city of Chicago, causing it to stop operations, until it does something about human living.

"You must believe you can choose to have better living, more living. If you do not believe this in your hearts, you will never be able to convince the powers.

"If you believe, they will believe."

At that moment a nine-year-old boy, playing on the roof of a tenement across the street from the park, picked up the rifle his older brother had set against the chimney.

He sighted down the barrel as he had seen men do on TV.

For a moment he thought he was a soldier fighting for freedom in a far-off land.

He took careful aim at the figure standing on the ladder of the truck.

He pulled the trigger.

The shot entered the cab of the truck and struck the girl in the shoulder.

The bullet passed through her heart.

She fell over dead.

The crowd broke and panicked, shrieking.

Then the people saw the child. Arms swung upward.

A profound hush fell over them.

Willie held the dead girl in his arms.

She appeared to be sleeping but she was dead.

He stood stone-still; the horror had made him a statue. Then he looked up.

With a voice that was already breaking, he spoke his final words into the microphone: "Go now to your homes."

Where had she come from?

She appeared to be sleeping so then the Lord touched her and she awoke.

Willie brushed a lock of hair from her eye, and she was dead and she would always be dead and she had chosen it or taken it in marriage, preferring the old professor to—

Do you Carolyn take Professor Death to be your lawful husband?

And now as he turned to go, with the people clearing a

way for him, in awe of the dead burden in his arms, Willie felt the old lesson-master proceeding before him, making the poor words he had spoken just so many currents in the air.

He began to make his slow march back through the streets.

The streets were calm, filled with people, speechlessly watching his slow funeral procession, overcome by the truth of the ancient lesson, that tired argument that had no answer.

Willie wept as he walked, but with that weeping that is without tears.

So you have your bride this night, and so your family grows, and ah, how proud you must be, Willie said to Death.

Professor of the world that isn't, master of the final arrangement.

The mouth, the eyes, exactly like hers.

We have that card we hold back,

Why don't we play it? I don't know, I don't know.

Christ.

"Christ!" he said aloud.

But Death did not take notice.

Willie walked up to the police and firemen at the barricades.

"Go in peacefully," he told them. "And do what you must do."

He walked on with the girl limp in his arms.

Soon she would be stiff, he thought, stuck firm in the last arrangement.

At the great thoroughfare of Michigan Avenue the TV cameras picked him up.

The traffic stopped.

For twenty minutes Chicago watched that lone figure walking up the center of Michigan Avenue, his red hair blowing in the wind, her black hair whipping in the wind. The eyes of people were riveted on the final humorless arrangement.

It was that picture, that strange slow-treading figure, more than any words that had been spoken in the park, that broke the riot.

And it was that picture, carried on national television that night, emblazoned on the nation's magazine covers that weekend, that imprinted itself on the starved imagination of the death-marveling people and made Willie for a magical moment the fleshly sign of what man had once wanted in his best dream, before all had been known and tagged and put into plastic containers.

But now there was only the long, long march.

And as he walked, carrying the girl, Willie felt he had made the journey before.

And these people watching and staring and placing the whole effort of their shocked and overloaded brains into the act of marveling at the old lesson—had he not seen them before, caught in this very trance?

Where?

At the Entirely New Life Insurance Company building, they were waiting for him like frightened acolytes—the mayor and the governor and the cardinal.

Willie approached the cardinal.

"The victim, Your Excellency or Eminence or whatever they use instead of your name," he said, holding the girl out from his body. "A little victim of the joke and lesson plan."

"He's wigged," whispered the governor.

The cardinal's face went white.

"Glory be to God," he said. "What is it you want, Father?"

"See how light she is," said Willie, and he thrust the body of the dead girl into the arms of the cardinal.

The cardinal, aghast, looked down at the girl's face.

Immediately her red blood ran in a streak down his red silk robes.

"So light," said Willie, "like the feather of a bird. Something for the great beast of power to wear in his hunting hat."

The cardinal's gold-rimmed glasses fell down on the girl's breast, teetered and then fell to the floor.

Everybody scrambled to retrieve them.

"Your Eminence," said the mayor, and he directed a policeman to relieve the cardinal of his burden.

Willie went out of their midst, taking the elevator into its

deep plunge, and then he went into the city to pray, alone.

Alone but for that solitary figure, fantastic and white, moving slowly along the thoroughfares and carrying in his arms the world's most expensive camera.

Chapter eleven

They flew him to St. Louis then. They flew him to Los Angeles. They flew him to Memphis in Tennessee.

To put out the fires.

To end the violent striving.

A witches' Pentecost had begun—a fury of flame and madness.

Who could explain it? No one. Everyone.

A swarm of pictures and choices had come as a plague upon the people.

Too many pictures for the eye to behold, too many choices for the mind to consider.

Like locusts swarming, the million-pictured choices came in the hot July night.

America could not stand it.

America said, Let us have the quick and the simple.

A clear resolving of intricate difficulties.

A clean release from the intolerable tension.

A way of saying yes. A way of saying no.

Something silver-certain. Now.

The poor had waited too long.

The black-skinned had waited too long.

The old and the blind and the hungry too long.

So in their ragged clothes they rose up with a slogan of stone and a message of fire.

After so much progress, people said.

After all we have done, people said.

But with stone and flame and shotgun fired from nighttime rooftop, the poor said no to all that had been attempted.

They struck at the cages of the great cities, driven on by the intolerable pictures that had come to them in the night.

And the tall avuncular silver-haired nation, old-healthy color drained quickly from fixed-smiling face, trembled and shook.

Click went the key in the door latch.

Handsome, healthy men cleaned their hundred million guns in their polished colonial kitchens while video cassettes retold the history of their forefathers on huge screens that encircled the tables where they ate.

The authorities gathered in dim rooms of faint oak gleamings and old pictures of heroes who had created the honored arrangements of unremembered ages.

Let us have law, they said.

Let us have reason, they said.

Let us be fair, they said.

Revised editions of old versions of unexplained arrangements.

Death.

The authorities with their shocked, benumbed brains could not think new things.

Too many pictures, too many choices for the frail, electing heart.

The authorities made excellent speeches that said, Death.

Under the limp flags they talked until they knew they too would die.

Let us survive, they said at last.

Low cheers. General agreement.

So they clutched the available stop sign.

Eagerly, gratefully, fumbling over one another to secure their homes, their cities, they seized the willing stop sign.

The stop sign that could be moved by fast jet from flash point to flash point and bring the blessed trance.

The stop sign of Willie.

The stop sign that was the red blood of Ella Monterey that stained his tattered sweatshirt.

When the black and the poor and the desperate and the crazy saw that red flag, they would turn from the burning of their life-binding cages.

For a time.

For how long no man could tell.

* * *

In gray gunpowder dawns, in tiny late-night rooms that were temporary TV stations, from trucks that swerved through streets where every building was a pillar of fire, Willie prayed and wept and showed his stop sign flag of peace.

He had no more speeches or suggestions to make.

Chicago was the end of suggestions.

He did not know what to think of what he saw—except that it had to be stopped.

Sometimes he thought an old order was being burned away, as Clio said.

Just as often it seemed to him the nation was committing suicide.

He knew an answer but he had no words for it.

Everywhere he went, there were the great image-crazed crowds, and with the crowds, the feeders and leaders: reporters, televisioners, politicians, churchmen.

Everywhere he heard his name, as in those few days so long ago when he had been a pitching great.

Across the nation, the legend of his baseball feats was everywhere being revived.

People wanted his autograph—a mile from a burning neighborhood.

In Boston, while people died, a promoter insisted that he pitch a benefit game.

"Think of what it would mean to the poor," the promoter said. "A spectacular now would save everything."

But Willie knew no spectacular would save the cities that were exploding one by one.

There was one answer, he knew.

Still he had no way to put the answer into words.

For the moment he was the word, he and the red sign.

The answer was a secret he carried in his heart, and if he could not reduce it to suggestions, he knew it was there.

It gave him hope in the worst of troubles.

In spite of everything he still smiled, he still laughed, he still marveled at the goodness of people, even at their unfinest.

"We will win through," he kept telling the crowds.

When they shouted back happily, he thought they felt as he did, believing the secret he believed.

* * *

To Philadelphia, where the bewhiskered men in the old pictures had once tried to think a brand new thing and had faltered in the middle of their thoughts, came Clio seeking to buy more arms.

He arrived in that venerable city just as Willie succeeded in putting down its worst riot in 150 years.

The fires had destroyed many splendid historic buildings, including the building called Independence Hall, where the heroic thinkers had gotten halfway through a new idea and given up.

That building now was a charred ruin and the great cracked bell that symbolized liberty for some of the people some of the time had melted away.

The President of the United States wept, live, on nationwide television and called the melting of the bell a tragic loss.

Many millions of Americans wept with him.

Other losses in the city of fraternal devotion were the seventeen people who had been killed in the tumult, but the President did not call them tragic, since they were not symbolic reminders of splendid thoughts.

Clio and Willie were together in an old motel that had once been elegant and handsome but had been pillaged and burned and turned into a hovel.

"You have good intentions, you are sincere," Clio told him, "but you are wrong. If you had the final good of the people in sight, you would encourage them to finish the job, burn everything in sight, the whole rotten business."

"And kill themselves in the process?"

"For the future," said Clio, now a general of the Revolu-

tionary Army of Brazil. "Don't you care about the future?"

"What is the future?" said Willie. "Another cage. You want to kill people for the future good of society? What's that but murder?"

"You are a sentimentalist," Clio answered.

"What shall we call you who want to make people slaves of the future?"

"Nothing gets better without violence," Clio said. "Violence is the vocation of our generation—to make things better, we have to be violent."

Willie looked at him in the dim light of their ruined motel. It had been a long day on the sound truck and the city was quiet for the first night in a month.

"Old Clio," he said fondly. "What ever happened to my friend Clio? He has become a great general. A hero."

"Look at yourself," said Clio. "Do you know, people call you a saint?"

Willie laughed.

But when the silence fell between them, they knew that the courses they were following made them enemies in an unfathomable way.

"And did the arms that you bought from Mr. Goldenblade make everybody happy?"

"It won us half the country."

"What will you do now?"

"Win the other half."

"What does winning mean?"

"Justice. Power to the people. A sharing of the resources of the country. The taking away of the big plantations from the few and the giving of those lands to the people."

"If only all that could come about without killing."

"If only the mountains were gold," said Clio.

Afterwards, after Clio had gone to bed, Willie prayed and then read his mail.

The blanket industry in Delphi was flourishing. The people had written a long and loving letter, sending a dozen pictures of the church-factory. *When will you come back, Willie*? wrote the son of Sureness Jack.

This made Willie sad, for he had been gone a month now, and an official church agency in Washington had scheduled a tour that would take him to fourteen cities in the next six weeks.

Perhaps he would never go back to Delphi.

He lay down on his bed, placing his hand where the scarlet message had been written, and fell immediately into a deep sleep.

He had been having a dream lately—a wonderful dream where he seemed to float high above some dark, unknown terrain, and he began to dream this dream now in the motel that had halfway burned down in the middle of the poorest section of the city of brotherly caring.

In the dream he circled about in the air making no strong effort, but rather moving about as he wished with a sense of playfulness and freedom that was pure joy and that relieved all those vague, sad feelings that afflicted him during his waking hours when he saw the suffering.

The sad daytime pains were on the surface and could be borne. The old diamond of his hope shone through them always. And pain, he knew, came with the equipment and was always there, a difficult traveling mate.

But the pains hurt him more than he knew and wore him down, so that when he rested, the dream came quickly, and though he welcomed it, he attached no importance to it, thinking of it only as a drain for the tensions of the day.

When he slept these nights, he looked forward to the dream and came to love the few hours he could live in it.

Sometimes, with one part of his mind, he was fully conscious of the effect of the dreaming and he found himself standing away from his flying self, giving thanks to the Loving One for this nighttime journey, thinking how wonderful it was to fly, to go beyond the limits and play in the unmeasured spaces where there were no charts or maps, where nothing had been planned and thinking was always discovering and the natural mood of one's mind was a joyous wonder.

At other times he dreamed more purely and perfectly and

there was no difference between the sleeping, half-thinking Willie and the soaring Willie, and those dreams took him far, far into the boundless, clockless places where even the beating of his heart came more slowly between long pauses.

And sometimes, caught up in the rapture of the flight, he did not want to come back, though he knew he must come back.

And he found that when he told himself, *Go back now,* at that moment he woke up, refreshed and ready for the day but with a lingering regret that he had left a lovely place, and that regret became the first sad pain of the day.

He had flown far out in his dreaming flight that night in the city of Philadelphia when the dull thudding began, some repeated sound that finally became loud and insistent, and he knew that he must go back.

It was a man knocking on the door, a very old black man bearing a telegram.

"I didn't know there was anyone working in the motel tonight," said Willie sleepily.

"They got me to come in around nine o'clock. I would have come in and worked free if I knew you was among us."

"I'm afraid to look at the telegram," said Willie. "It means some other city is in trouble."

"But you're givin' rout to the trouble," said the old man. "The Spirit is workin' through you in a powerful way."

"You are very good to say that, my brother," said Willie. "What can I give you?"

"Nothin'. It is me who should give. But I got nothin'. The fire consumed everything I owned, though it wasn't a good deal to begin with."

"My poor brother," said Willie.

"Don't feel sorry. Many others lost their health and the Baker family lost their son."

"I met Mrs. Baker last night."

"It's all the work of the evil spirits," the old man said. "You are drivin' the evil spirits away and I am pleased to be near you. When I heered you was comin' to the town I knew then that the evil spirits would be leavin'."

"If men work together and learn to love each other," said Willie, "no evil spirits can enter their cities."

"Amen to that," said the old man. "But hardly nobody give the matter any attention. Each man shine his own shoes, bendin' over without lookin' at the distance to the place where the brother sits. There's a dark valley gets made there. That where the evil spirit walks without gettin' seen."

"There is truth in what you say, my brother. With what you know of these matters, you should be able to do much in the neighborhood where you live."

"If we had a neighborhood," said the old man.

"You will build a new one, I know," said Willie.

"If you say that, I can believe it."

"You have to believe it for yourself, my brother."

"I will try," said the old man. "But when you get to be seventy-nine it's hard to believe in new things."

"You believe in the Lord."

"I do. He is all I believe."

"Well, the Lord is the one who throws a strong light on those dark spaces between men that you spoke of. It is in the Lord that each man can see the other as his brother."

"But oftentimes men want only to save they own skin—polishin' the shoe again."

"It is a struggle for every one of us," said Willie, and he embraced the old man.

"God go with you always."

"Feel like I'm with God right now," said the old man.

Willie opened the telegram, expecting the worst, and the telegram was in certain ways worse than the worst.

The telegram said that he had been appointed a bishop of the Roman Catholic church, an auxiliary to the bishop of Houston, with special assignment outside the diocese.

The telegram said that he had the right to refuse the appointment and then advised him to go to the office of the archbishop of Philadelphia the following morning and make his decision known to such representatives of the church as he would find there.

The telegram was signed by the apostolic delegate in Washington and by Archbishop Tooler of Houston.

At first Willie considered the telegram a joke, but he knew officials of the church did not do joking things.

Then certainly it must be a mistake. But when he read the telegram again he knew it was not a mistake.

A bishop. The thought of it appalled him, then made him laugh.

He had no way of knowing of the various telegrams that had been sent back and forth between other people during the past three weeks, none of whom considered it a funny or joking matter.

He is mentally simple enough, George Doveland Goldenblade had written to his brother, Cardinal Goldenblade of New Orleans, *so it wouldn't swell up his head. And making him a bishop would prove to the nigras and the radicals that the church is not a racist organization as so many monist traitors have alleged. He is young and simpleminded and will be a miserable businessman. On the other hand, if we are to stop the spread of these riots, the church will have to do some extraordinary strange things. I believe that making this cloud a bishop would help cool things down. I think of him going into those ghettos in his colorful garb and knowing the nigras, I know a tactic like this would succeed. If the delegate can see it as a public relations gesture. . . .*

Willie read the telegram a third time.

How could he talk to people as a bishop? That high, noble office would take him away from everybody.

He wondered if Clio might still be awake.

He walked down the corridor to his room.

There was a slit of light under the door, so he rapped quietly.

A dark face appeared in the opening crack: glasses, a moustache.

"What do you want?"

"Is Clio there?"

"What do you want with him?"

"Who is it?" came Clio's voice from the background.

The door swung open, disclosing a dozen young men sitting in a ragged circle on the floor. Clio was in the midst of them.

The faces of the young men were black, most of them, but several were Latin, possibly Brazilian.

The young men were of Clio's age, or a little younger.

They said nothing, only looked at Willie coldly, their faces sending signals of contempt.

Then one of the youngest said, "The great peacemaker, who plays into the hands of the—"

"Shut up," Clio said sharply.

He came to the door.

"Can I talk to you?" said Willie.

Clio closed the door behind him. When Willie showed him the telegram, Clio laughed.

"That's the way I feel too," said Willie.

"Take it, man, take it," Clio said. "What the hell? Think of all the things you'll be able to do as a superpriest."

"I won't be able to do anything. How can I be with the poor as a bishop?"

"There's something to be said for it," said Clio. "Who's going to tell you what kind of a bishop you have to be?"

"There are rules that they have."

"Who cares about rules? You should absolutely take it, even though they only want to use you—your name."

Willie shook his head slowly. There was a red fire-escape light at one end of the hallway, and in its glow the face of his friend was tired and unhappy. He wished suddenly that they were boys again and that life could be turned back.

"You might as well be a big shot," Clio said.

Willie felt the presence of some alien thing in the hallway, as if a third person had opened a door behind them. He turned around to look, but there was no one there.

"Clio," he began, and then didn't know what to say.

Clio felt the same confusion.

"Take it," he said once more. "What difference does it make—I mean, nothing changes."

Willie felt tears coming into his eyes. He had the panicky

sense that something was being lost forever. There was this bright, beautiful world that he knew, but then he thought, *He has his own world.* He had a picture of Clio with a gun then.

He took Clio's hand impulsively.

"Don't kill, Clio!" he blurted out.

Clio gripped his hand, looking at him steadily. Then they were shaking hands and the moment passed and they were making a promise to have dinner together that night.

But that night Clio was on a plane to Mexico City and Willie was on a plane to Houston.

They had meant to keep their appointment but the choices they had made were set, and from now on, the choices would break all the appointments they would ever make between themselves.

* * *

In the morning Willie went to the chancery office in Philadelphia.

Newsmen followed him.

"Willie! Willie! Hey, Reverend."

They wanted to ask many questions but he said nothing. His face was fixed in the set, sad smile.

In the night he had made up his mind, or rather his mind had been made up for him by the secret that he carried with him, that told him, *Let them do what they will do.*

"Where's the next riot?" a newsman shouted.

Willie kept walking.

As he reached the stone steps to the chancery, a man stepped out of the crowd—a tall, thin man with an ashen face and red-rimmed eyes, wearing a white trench coat.

Without a word he handed Willie a note then fell back into the brood of newsmen and disappeared.

Going up the steps, Willie opened the note.

The Servants of the Used, Abused and Utterly
Screwed Up are with you. Your larger mission begins.
We will be with you when it becomes impossible.

Benjamin

Willie whirled about, trying to catch sight of the man who had brought him the note, but he was gone.

A week later he stood on another stone stairway, the great steps of the cathedral of Houston, with a jubilant crowd spread before him.

It was like a crowd from the baseball days, pressing and swaying like something with a life of its own, a beast, but not a mad beast—a happy circus beast.

"They respond to you," said Bishop McCool. "Gol-lee, how they respond."

"They have come back to see me," said old Archbishop Tooler, "all my pagan babies."

He was pointing to the crowd from Delphi, the people who had come up for the celebration from Willie's old parish.

"Bless them, bless them," McCool kept saying. "That is what they want."

So Willie blessed them, moving slowly and awkwardly in his glittering, heavy attire.

With the miter on his head and the crosier in his hand, he looked like a gawky, unhappy child dressed up to look like a bishop.

He blessed them again and again with the amethyst ring they had put on his finger weighing down his hand.

He felt burdened as never before and distanced from the people, and the sad, aching pains began in his heart.

At the reception hall, his splendid clothes made him feel stiff and he found it hard to reach people, to take their hands.

"Your Excellency," they said.

"Please, no."

"Let me kiss your ring."

"Please, dear brother, stand up and let us tell each other our names."

At the dinner he sat dazed as the speeches went on—the old archbishop welcoming home his many children from far-off pagan lands, the mayor observing that a local, poor black boy had risen to the top, Bishop McCool telling amusing anecdotes about Willie's school days, which seemed

like only yesterday and, as he thought of it, *were* only yesterday.

Willie could not speak—there were so many things hanging about him, weighing him down. He could hardly breathe.

So he blessed everyone and everything in sight.

Then someone handed him a telegram from Thatcher Grayson.

MORE AND MORE THE SPIRIT RAISES YOU UP UNTIL FINALLY YOU WILL BE OUT OF THE SINFUL WORLD ENTIRELY. SEE YOU IN BALTIMORE.

Mr. Grayson must have seen the shape of the trouble in the neighborhood where Edgar Allan Poe had written a story called "A Descent into the Maelstrom," because the very next day the archbishop of Baltimore summoned Willie to come immediately, since one of America's most venerable and beautiful cities was about to burn to the ground.

Chapter twelve

In Baltimore the fire had already consumed a thousand 150-year-old row houses and was advancing steadily on the most elegant new motel in the United States.

The row houses, the town officials said, were expendable, but the Edgar Allan Poe Motor Lodge, Condominium and Adventure in Living, which had been erected to encourage confidence in the downtown of Baltimore, had to be saved.

"You can't expect people to live in slums like this and not riot," Willie told the governor of Maryland, Wilson Lee Beauregard VII, descendant of four Presidents of the United States and the nation's leading connoisseur of the African violet.

Governor Beauregard and Willie were watching the riots from the top of the Civic Center four blocks from the Poe motel.

"Ah don't care where they live, or how, suh," said Governor Beauregard, "Ah don't see what that has to do with

tearin' and smashin' and burnin'. That motel is the most beautiful example of modern livin' in the world, and they surely goin' to try and destroy it, like that." The governor clapped his hands together, making a small thunder burst.

"They don't plan to destroy the motel," said Willie, who had talked to the leader of the black rebels early that morning. "But the fires may get out of hand."

"They *started* the fires, reverend suh," said Beauregard. "Aren't they responsible for what they started or am ah a lunatic?"

"What do you want me to do?" said Willie.

"Go on television and tell them the militia is goin' in with orders to shoot to kill anybody interferin' with the fahr-fightin'."

"I can't do that."

"You condone their violence?"

"Who am I to condone or not condone?" said Willie, looking at the smoke rising from the tenements.

"That's the sort of pussy-footin' talk that just placates the sav—" the governor, seeing the color of Willie's skin, broke off. He thunder-clapped his pink hands once more.

Willie said, "Maybe you should go on television. If you know how to stop it, why do you send for me?"

Shakily, Governor Beauregard lit a cigar. His mind was sore distracted. He had neglected his violets for nine days running, and it was the season they needed tenderness. He had left his plants in the care of Hilaire, his Jamaican manservant, whose clothes had smelled of smoke this morning and who was carrying on an affair with the wife of the lieutenant governor besides. The plants needed a kindly father; he was the kindly father—yet here he was, standing on top of the Civic Center with a weird priest whose color was confusing and abnormal, watching Baltimore burn.

"You give them love and they grow," said the governor. "Give them indifference and they withah."

Willie turned to the mayor of Baltimore, who had been praying from Simon de Montfort's *Perfect Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* for three days and nights and who had

promised not to utter a word to his fellow man that he did not know to be the truth—this in reparation for past sins of the tongue.

"You are the mayor. What do you suggest?" Willie said.

The man held his finger to his mouth.

Willie turned to the city controller.

"What's wrong with the mayor?"

"He won't answer any question unless he is sure he can give the absolutely true answer."

"Where is the nearest television station?" said Willie.

The city controller started to answer but the mayor interjected an excited and even jubilant wave of the hand. He grabbed a telephone directory, opened it to the yellow pages, studied a column of addresses and then said clearly and distinctly, "I can tell you, Excellency, that the nearest television station from the place we are now standing, which is at the top of the Civic Center, is at the corner of Montgomery and Park, which is not less than five blocks and not more than eight, in a northwesterly direction, assuming you leave the center by the south exit and travel by cab on Ocean Avenue which is one-way, then turn onto. . . ."

When Willie got to the television station, the county sheriff, Archbishop Looshagger and a black civic leader named Gleason were already there.

"Those who perish by the sword will reap the wages of death, which are sin," said Archbishop Looshagger, who had trouble remembering things and whose car at this very moment was burning in the cathedral parking lot, and the car he thought was his was being towed out of a no-parking zone by the police who, when they got the car to the station, discovered it to be a stolen vehicle.

"I don't even know you, man," said Gleason, "but you gotta do better than Tom-talk."

"The dynamic of social change is dynamite," said the sheriff of Baltimore County, a noted epigrammatist and wit.

Willie went on the air.

He asked the rioters to go home or, if their homes were burned down, to come to the Civic Center, where they could

be assigned temporary lodging.

He asked the rioters to let the fire fighters come into the riot area to bring the fires under control.

He said he understood why people wanted to break things up but that it always wound up that people got broken in the process.

He asked the people doing the rioting what they won that was more precious than the fourteen lives that had been lost.

In the middle of his speech he broke down and wept because he didn't know what to say and because he knew his words weren't any good anyway and because on the monitor he could see the red flag on his breast and he remembered how light she had been in his arms as he carried her.

"Ah thought he was a great speakah!" snorted Governor Beauregard. "Mah God, he's snivelin'! What you gonna ahcomplish with a snivelin' nigra, ah ask you?"

The mayor, watching TV with the governor, put his finger to his mouth.

But the sound of Willie's crying, which was the strangest sound that had been heard in Baltimore in many years, carried into the riot areas, and when they heard that sound, men stopped what they were doing, hands froze in the air, people carrying things out of stores stopped in their tracks as if this voice was one they had heard before, sometime in their childhood, from their mothers maybe or some preacher telling a story in a tent long ago. They stopped. And the riot too began to stop.

There was an hour or two of confusion. Then in the middle of the afternoon an explosion rent the air.

Willie went back on television, and this time he found himself unable to say anything. He was simply on camera, and some people said he was praying and some said he was weeping.

Gleason took the air.

"This man is nothing but a tool of the racist structure of this city," he said.

Willie was still visible on camera, still silent, eyes down, weeping or praying—or was he sleeping?

"What has he been able to guarantee us? Nothing!" said Gleason.

But the people in the riot area and all over the city were watching the sad figure behind Gleason, the figure who in some way seemed not the healer of the riot but its principal victim.

By nightfall, people were beginning to show up at the Civic Center. The firemen had entered the burning areas. The riot was ending.

Four hundred twenty-six arrests were made.

Among those arrested was Archbishop Looshagger, who had come to claim his stolen car, which he said he remembered buying at the H. L. Mencken Used Car Bonanza six weeks earlier. The police found no record of this transaction and the archbishop was charged with theft.

"Father, forgive them, for I shall pass this way but once," the archbishop said. "And if the light loses its flavor, what shall it be salted with—a reed blowing in the wind?"

The state and local officials went on television to assure the populace that the riot was over.

"Once more, we have proved that Maryland is the cradle of liberty, forbearance, peace and love," said Governor Beauregard. "People, like African violets, need love. That is why ah am here. That is why the bishop is here. That is why the militia is here. That is why the Edgar Allan Poe Motor Lodge, Condominium and Adventure in Living is here."

"Speaking only for myself," said the sheriff, "I'd rather be merry than burn."

"In exactly one hour and twenty-two minutes it will be Friday," said the mayor.

* * *

Willie stayed in Baltimore the next day and the next, helping people find the things they had lost in the riots, helping people get out of jail, helping people find food and clothing.

By the end of the second day, the Red Cross arrived with many supplies, and an emergency clean-up force set to work.

Everyone seemed happy to be cleaning up the riot area but no one talked about the things that had started the riot.

Willie had been staying in a rooming house in the riot area. His phone rang often but he was never there to take the messages. He was at the Civic Center where the emergency services had been headquartered.

On his fourth night in the city he got back to his room very late. There was a note on his bed from Thatcher Grayson.

We have a day game with the Orioles tomorrow. Can you be at the park? Been trying to reach you since you been in town doing God's work.

The next afternoon Willie took a cab to the ball park. The cabbie recognized him.

"I remember you from the old days," he said, squinting at Willie through the mirror.

"Ah."

"I seen you pitch many times. I seen with my own eyes."

Willie was looking at the ruined buildings where Professor Death had been giving his lessons. People were carrying mattresses and television sets and odd bits of furniture in and out of the tenements.

"And after I seen it, it wasn't glory no more."

"I beg your pardon, brother?"

"What you did—it spoilt the glory. It overthrew it."

The cabbie, stopping for a light, turned around.

"What gave you the right?"

"What right is that, brother?"

"To capsize it completely. Why—why, once I knew the averages. All of them. The ERAs. The RBIs. I seen and studied and mastered the greats. From when I was seven years old, which is now near fifty-four!"

There was a honking of horns. The car shot forward.

They drove for a block in silence through many charred instructions.

Willie tried to comprehend what the cabbie had said.

Waving his arm, the cabbie turned around again. "Overthrowing it—just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Like it

was—lies!"

"Brother, I—"

"I could recite them all. Ruth. Foxx. Williams. Aaron. The hurlers. The great moundmasters. Johnson. Matthewson. Grove. Until you!"

"I—"

"You sank it all. America's pastime. Why?"

"Bro—"

"I'll tell you why!" the cabbie was shouting and the car was weaving. "Because the monist conspirators put you up to it! Don't think I don't know."

The cabbie braked the car and swerved to avoid hitting a parked truck. The ball park loomed ahead.

"My brother-in-law—Lawson Cudd, the podiatrist out of L. A.? He can prove it. He got the literature—how everything was faked. To wreck our traditions and tear down the country! He gave me a pamphlet—*How They Are Worming Their Way In*—and it is there in black and white!"

There was more honking. The cabbie was driving on the left side of the road.

"By God, the Iwo Jima Society get hold of you, you'd *know,* preacher, you'd know!"

Raving, the cabbie lost control of the car, which went careening into a post anchoring the main gate of the park.

A policeman approached.

"Think you can move this park with that thing?" he asked.

"Filthy monist pigs!" the cabbie shouted, and then burst into song. *From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli. . . .*

Willie tried to mollify the man but the policeman said, "You better go, Father. He's disarranged, maybe even disqualified."

The cabbie got out of the car, and Willie went up to him, and then the cabbie clipped Willie on the side of the face.

The policeman staggered the cabbie with a swing of his peace club. "He'll be all right now, Father. Enjoy the game!" As the man was led away to the squad car, Willie, dazed, could still hear him singing. *We will fight our country's*

battles, in the air, on land and sea.

Shaken, Willie went down to the dark cellar passageway that led to the Hawks dressing room. A rivulet of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. He found a men's room and tried to wash the bleeding away. His jaw was starting to swell. He could taste the salty blood taste in his mouth.

He went back to the passageway. It was a dark tunnel that he only faintly remembered from his playing days. As he headed uncertainly for the dressing room, he began to get the feeling someone was following him. He stopped, looked back—no one.

As he turned to go on, he heard someone cough.

"Who's there?"

Silence.

He went on until he found an usher.

"You don't look good, sir," the usher said. "You want first aid?"

"No, I just want to see Mr. Grayson. He sent for me."

The usher led him back along the same stretch of passageway to the dressing room.

When Mr. Grayson saw Willie, he cried out in the Spirit tongue.

Willie embraced him.

"Orithi turi enotho miga gula so e mizu dozon!"

"Mr. Grayson, dear friend."

"Mer moli inga sororie orz tu pey loa laanga," replied Mr. Grayson.

"Mr. Grayson, let's talk in regular talk."

"Ah, but the Spirit tongue!" said Mr. Grayson, "Surely you understand the Spirit tongue."

Willie shook his head. "I have a hard enough time with English."

"You're doing the Spirit work. The Spirit is in you crying to be let out."

The players, dressing slowly, were all looking at Willie. No one remained now from his old team.

"You have brought the Spirit to Baltimore," said Mr.

Grayson. "How the Spirit has been hungering to take up abode in this sinful town!"

"The riot is ended," said Willie, "but the trouble underneath is still there."

"The Spirit can give rout to the trouble," said Mr. Grayson. His hair, completely white now, gave him the appearance of an old cherub.

"I hope I can sit in the dugout with you, Mr. Grayson."

"There would be no other place in this stadium, dear son. And afterward, we'll go to the prayer meeting. There are active Spirit folk here in the city."

So Willie sat on the dugout bench and watched his old team lose to the Orioles.

Mr. Grayson paid little attention to the game, preferring to hear of Willie's doings.

"Clio, I see, has gone in for revolution," said Mr. Grayson.

"He is seeking justice the best way he knows," said Willie.

"If only we had reached him in time."

"He is doing what he thinks is right, and maybe—"

Mr. Grayson began to speak in tongues again. He had not noticed Willie had been hurt and did not notice it when Willie left the bench to find an ice pack for his jaw.

The dressing room was dark, full of green shadows, with only a small sunlamp burning at the end of a training table.

Willie found a medicine cabinet. As he pulled open the door, he became aware of a figure, enveloped, it seemed, in a shroud, sitting on a rubdown table in the darkest corner of the locker room.

The sight of the figure startled him. He stepped forward, straining to see. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw the outline of a tall man, gaunt and disheveled, dressed in a white raincoat.

"Sir?" said Willie.

The man turned his face into the glow of the sunlamp, and Willie saw a mask of such sadness, with its dead white pallor and downturned mouth, that it looked like one of those faces of tragedy that were painted on the stage curtains of theaters.

"Can I help you?" Willie said, drawing nearer.

"No," came the hollow reply.

"Who are you? You—seem in distress."

"I am a friend," the voice said. "I have been following you about, observing the progression of events."

Then it came to Willie that he had seen the man before—on the steps of the chancery in Philadelphia. This was the man who had delivered the note from Benjamin.

"You are a member of the Society?"

"I am," the man said mournfully. "I am Brother Herman, known to the world as Herman Felder."

"Herman Felder!" cried Willie. "Why—that's wonderful. I thought—well, I supposed—forgive me, Brother Herman, but I thought you were dead."

"Many have supposed that same thing."

"I heard from a friend or read someplace—"

"It is a common mistake," the man said. "You are mixing me up with my father, Gunner Felder, who passed into another arrangement some time ago."

Felder struck a match—the mask flared briefly in the dark green shadows.

"What brings you to Baltimore, Brother Herman?"

"I follow the trouble about."

"You are practicing Recommendation 33?"

Felder sighed. "Ah no, I am not to that stage as yet. It is a different matter." He got off the table now and Willie caught the scent of roses—that scent that he would come to know so well and that was sweeter than any of the flowers that men grew or had ever grown anywhere.

"You are the reason I am here," said Felder slowly, as if it pained him to talk.

"You are all right, Mr. Felder? You are weaving a little."

With a wave of his hand, Felder moved into the light of the lamp and Willie saw the face clearly for the first time. It was a face he had seen before. Not just in Philadelphia—*where*?

There was a touch of strength in the lines about the mouth, of brutality even. There were traces of humor and irony, and something else Willie could not name.

This strength of the face was not real but was more like the

afterimage of a vanished power, and as he studied him, the more it occurred to Willie that everything about Herman Felder was like that. It was like seeing a character out of an old-time movie, but the print was in bad shape or else the projection lamp had dimmed. The delicate lines that made the character definite and fixed in place seemed on the point of disappearing.

Struck by his sheer immateriality, Willie peered at him a moment more. Then he saw that gleaming blue device—the great camera-gun that seemed an extension of the man's arm. He squinted uncertainly.

"You are a photographer, Brother Herman?"

"In the old days, I used to—used to fool with those things," came the voice.

Now Felder moved, or rather the camera moved.

Willie again had the feeling of watching a movie. Cigarette twitching in the hand, trench coat whitening, then dissolving in shadows as he swayed in the lamplight, the man was less a person than a filmic ghost with all the life played out and only the flickering images of some earlier life shining through, giving him such a thin reality that if the sunlamp were snapped off, he would cease to exist.

"You are why I am here," said Felder. "I have a message to give you." (Was not even the voice something spoken on a sound track?)

"From the Servants?"

Felder nodded.

"Benjamin and the others will be released soon from the jail in Atlanta. Another group—is taking their place." Felder seemed to grope for words. "You are to get ready—prepare yourself in the spirit of the Servants for a larger mission that—" and the voice trailed off.

"I do not understand, Mr. Felder, but I am ready to do what the Servants think best."

"It will be something—it will be similar to what you are doing now but in other—territories."

"I see."

"Most important to prepare." These last words were barely

audible. Now the odor of roses became stronger. Felder groped in his coat. He seemed to take something into his mouth from a flask in his coat pocket. He coughed, cleared his throat and straightened up a little. In a stronger voice he said, "You will have to prepare."

"I will listen most carefully."

"Absolutely essential," said Felder in an even brisker tone. "Especially now with so many arrangements breaking up and the temptation being so strong to clear out as Thatcher has done and so many others."

"Mr. Grayson is still a very good Christian."

"Oh, don't misunderstand. I love Thatcher like a brother," said Felder in a voice that seemed the voice of a new man. "I truly do. But let's face facts, Brother William. Thatcher has checked out and there is no way to reach him."

Felder began to pace back and forth in an animated way. It was as if he had been stricken by some awful disease, then having taken the medicine, had come back to perfect health. Willie saw black hair, a smiling, almost handsome face.

"I'm going to a prayer meeting tonight with Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "Maybe you would like to come with us?"

"Oh no," said Felder decisively. "Many things to do. Many, many errands and—things to mind. Besides, I don't go in for that sort of thing. Too much the earthly, worldly Servant."

"Of course."

"Don't let temptation drag you under."

"Under what?" said Willie.

Then the players came in, cursing over their lost game even while Thatcher Grayson praised the Lord, and when Willie turned to speak to Herman Felder again, he was gone. On the training table was a book, which Willie recognized as the Guidebook of the Society. He picked it up. There was Felder's name on the inside cover.

But as he glanced at the title page, he saw that it was not the Guidebook after all but a tract called *The Decline of the Hero* by J. Armstrong Manbult.

* * *

The prayer meeting that night was held at the home of Howard Arthur Amboy, a seller of Martha Washington dolls.

About fifty people gathered, most of them long-time charismatics or Pentecostals, or, as they preferred to be called, Spirit people.

"I want you to meet one of my dearest friends," Mr. Grayson told the group, "Bishop Willie, whose great works in the Spirit are known throughout the country."

Willie smiled uncomfortably as the people applauded.

The meeting began with the testimonial of Howard Arthur Amboy, the host, who said that since he had received the Spirit four years ago, he had sold more than 150,000 of "what we in the trade call the top doll, the one that says more than a thousand different things, some funny, some sad, some stupid, just as in real life."

Mr. Amboy, a balding man of about fifty, with thick black brows, produced one of the dolls, a perfect miniature of the wife of the first president of the United States. He squeezed it gently.

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, the doll piped.

"The patriotic first lady," Mr. Amboy explained. He squeezed again.

George, you know that girl Patrick Henry's chasing? Her name is Liberty.

"The comedic, human Martha." Another squeeze.

Before you came along, George, what was I? Just another girl trying to find some meaning in life out there on Pennsylvania Avenue.

"The loving, dependent Martha," Mr. Amboy said, wiping his black brows. He held the doll up for all to see.

"And people, do you know that when this doll first came on the market, I'd go up and ring a doorbell and think, They're going to laugh, they're going to throw up, they're going to slam the door on my face. The doll is too tricky, it costs too much, it's not relevant. I talked myself into failure, my brothers and sisters in the Spirit. I was a hopeless man, a figure of despair. Then one day, over on R Street, I heard a voice saying, I believe in you Howard Arthur Amboy—the

doll believes in you. Why don't you believe in us?

"Right then, right there," Mr. Amboy said, "I got on my knees for the first time since my childhood. I felt the Spirit coming into me, I began to pray. I don't remember what I said, but I remember crying. Really blabbering. My partner, Fred Groove, who since unfortunately blew his brains out, came across the street and said, Howard Arthur Amboy, what are you doing? I said, I'm praising the Lord, Fred Groove. I'm going to turn Martha Washington over to the Holy Spirit. Then, though I don't remember this, I guess I started squeezing all the dolls I had with me, maybe fifteen or twenty of them with the amps turned up on each one, so that all these sayings came out in a jumble and a crowd started to gather. That day I sold 300 dolls alone."

"Alleluia!" someone shouted.

"Praise to Jesus!" came another voice.

Amboy raised up the doll once more. "Since that day, brothers and sisters in the Spirit, I sold enough dolls to bring me in more than $400,000 net, and that is just the beginning. Our district manager, Mr. C. A. Chrisser, is putting me in charge of our new Nathan Hale Firing Squad Program next month. That job, which I owe to the Holy Spirit of God, is sixty big ones per annum and a percent of the flow besides."

"Alleluia!"

"Amen, and praise to the Lord!"

"Maybe," said Mr. Amboy, looking angry all of a sudden, "maybe it *is* crazy, a grown man selling dolls. But I would rather sell dolls than guns! And there are people making their livings today in less honorable ways than I am, and all I can say is, God forgive them and show them the light of the world before it's too late!" He looked at the doll, fondling it for a moment before he went on. "So I'm a slob. Does that matter so much? Doesn't God love slobs? Is there anyone in this whole world who is not a slob?"

A few halfhearted alleluias answered this question. Then Mr. Amboy sat down, and an old man with turkey lines running down from his quivering chin stood up.

"I am Horace, age eighty-one. I did not know the Spirit

until four months ago. I am Greek and always have been. It is better to be a Greek than many things. One could be Italian, for instance. Or Irish. One could have syphilis. My wife is dead. My children are gone from me. I voted all my life after I become citizen. My life was given over to sin and wrongdoing. Much drinking. Many messings with women, even though my own woman was good and worked like a crazy person. My wife died, perhaps I forgot to tell you. I fell into riotous living. Then one night in the bad district, I was hit by a flying bottle. My head became unfastened almost. I walked around for five days trying to find home. There was buzzing in my head. Then the buzzing stop and this voice say to me, Horace you are unholy, impure man who is going to burn forever for fooling around all your life. I think first maybe I am losing my reasoning. But the voice say, This God talking and you better hark to what I say. The voice says, Since nothing you ever done is good, do everything different—do exact opposite of everything you did. I go see man of the church who is believing in Spirit. He lays his hands on my head. Like a lightning flash I get Spirit. Since then, I pray in tongue and do not mess. Many women try to drag Horace into sin but Horace say, Foolish virgin, turn your ass around or Spirit will condemn you to hell. Women laugh at Horace, men too, but time will tell. Praise to Jesus and the Spirit!"

"Alleluia!" the group shouted.

"Orithi mega lui migosa!" a frail young man cried.

Then a young woman, very beautiful, with blonde hair cascading down her shoulders, rose in a corner of the room. Very quietly she began to speak in tongues, then to sing in a sweet, clear voice.

The group fell silent to listen to her song.

Willie thought that the girl looked like a maiden princess out of a childhood storybook. Her eyes, very blue with the blueness of Sweet William, seemed to see a lovely vision somewhere in the distance.

When she had finished, the frail young man who had cried out just before she started to sing, came before the group to explain her song.

"Helen has given us a special message from the Spirit. The Spirit says that more riots and violence and troubles will come to America if people do not come back to God and to the ways of virtue. The riot in Baltimore, the Spirit says, is a punishment for sin such as is predicted in Revelations. Many more bad things will happen if America does not pray. Helen says that the Spirit is mostly discouraged by the lack of faith people have shown in the old principles. The Spirit says people now think whatever they want, seldom praying or even thinking about God. The Spirit mourns that many men and women today think they are gods themselves. The Spirit says that if we wish to have an end to our troubles we must all be reborn—rebaptized in Him. The Spirit says that unless we are baptized in Him, then nothing will go right—no matter how much money we spend on welfare, no matter how hard we fight to make things better. It is the heart that needs to be purified, not just cities. This is what the Spirit has told us tonight in Helen's song."

"Alleluia! Alleluia!"

"Praise to Jesus!"

"Praise to the Spirit!"

Thatcher Grayson turned to Willie. "Spiritual truth such as this is seldom heard, eh? It is worth all the sayings wise men ever uttered and much more than that. I rejoice you and I are here together to listen to it."

Willie closed his eyes and tried to think of something to say.

He had seen the Spirit phenomenon before and he was seeing more of it all the time—people going back to a religion that had no truck with the world.

Some of them had turned to it out of boredom.

Some of them had turned to it because they needed some hookup with the sacred and could not find the hookup in their churches.

But many of them, he thought, maybe even most of them, had been shocked and wounded and numbed by the happenings of life.

Their nervous systems could not hold under the storm of so many new and dangerous signals; so they chose to leave the world, closing their eyes to all but the invisible.

The world to these people was a hideous dream, getting more hideous all the time, and it was getting more hideous because of something called Sin.

The wars, the riots, the suffering and the hunger and the tiredness of those millions of faces they had seen at night before the news blackouts and saw even now from time to time in documentary films—the few that circulated in what were called the revolutionary cinema houses—or in the occasional news clips broadcast by guerilla TV, all these were but signs of justice at work. God was laying it on man for the mischief of Sin.

If you wanted to end the punishment, the people said, then get rid of Sin. But no one could define what Sin was.

So when Willie looked at the faces of the people gathered about the living room of Howard Arthur Amboy, he could not laugh, he could not cry, he could only feel the welling up of that emotion that had become the permanent and dominating feeling of this past month—a pervasive pity, for all of them, a pity even for God.

Then he realized they wanted him to talk, to say something about "the workings of the Spirit in your own life," as Howard Arthur Amboy put it.

As he got to his feet a single thought burned itself into his brain, *He buried himself in all this.*

He wanted to speak of whatever this last was—for all he knew, it was an idea. But at the precise moment he opened his mouth, there was a crashing sound at the end of the living room, the French doors flew open, and there stood the forlorn figure of Herman Felder, more ghostlike than ever and obviously in trouble.

"Peace," said Felder thickly. "Joy—benediction—happiness."

He extended his arms with a sort of amazed grin. The world's most expensive camera dangled from his shoulders.

"Brother Herman!" cried Willie.

"Lord God," said Thatcher Grayson, going to Felder immediately.

Felder glided unsteadily into the room, the Spirit folk falling back at his approach. There was something frightening about his every movement.

"It's all right, Herman," said Thatcher Grayson.

Felder raised his voice. "Thatcher, by Jesus Lord, how are you? How's the Spirit treating you these days?"

There was an embarrassed silence for a minute, then an elderly black man rose and began to pray for sinners, in tongues.

"The music!" Felder said. Then he spied Willie. "The bishop, ah, the tragic bishop! Does the bishop fly out of the world or does the bishop swim with the rest of us?"

"Help me get him to the kitchen," Thatcher Grayson whispered to Willie. The black man prayed in a louder voice.

As they half carried him into the kitchen, the scent of roses nearly gagged Willie.

"What—"

"Tell you in a minute," said Grayson.

"Tell many things," Felder muttered. "Inner mystery *lex eterna.*"

They found some coffee in the kitchen. Felder sipped from a cup, staring at Willie. He leaned back against a refrigerator, closing his eyes. Slowly he began to slide down the refrigerator. Willie tried to prop him up.

Grayson grabbed his arm. "Let him be. Maybe he'll sleep."

"He is very ill," said Willie. "We should take him to the hospital."

"Ah, my boy, no hospital in Baltimore or anywhere in the world can cure Herman when he is this way. His soul is diseased."

"I saw him only this afternoon, Mr. Grayson. He seemed tired but—"

Grayson reached inside the trench coat, dirty now—it was obvious Felder had fallen repeatedly—and found the flask that he knew would be there. He uncapped it. The rose smell filled the kitchen. Grayson poured a bluish liquid out of the

flask into the sink.

"What is it he has been drinking?"

"The curse of his life—or one of them," said Thatcher Grayson. "The morphini."

"Morphini?"

"One part liquefied cocaine, one part liquefied morphine —and the rest gin and flavoring agents."

"That rose smell—"

"Extract of tuberose," said Mr. Grayson sadly, "the perfume they use in funeral homes. He thinks it takes away the smell of liquor. Lord! Think of his *soul.*"

Willie looked down at the prone figure of Herman Felder. He felt the pity very strongly. He felt something else, a twinge of fear he would remember later and try to explain to himself, without success.

"He is so much older than this afternoon, Mr. Grayson. Are you sure we shouldn't call a doctor?"

"We have tried all those things before," said Mr. Grayson. "The doctors give him different shots which do not help."

"Is he this way often?"

"He had been sober three years until quite recently, until he went to Chicago a few weeks ago. He showed up at the ball park and the demon was upon him."

"What is the cause?"

"Who knows, dear son? The riots, the sadness of his family life, the troubles with his movies."

"He has a family?"

"A wife—Maybella. I met her once, a lovely woman indeed."

"And they are having trouble?"

"She went into a monastery in India. Then entered the space program."

"He has work? Friends?"

"He has many millions of dollars, inherited mostly, but he made many more millions with his movies. Friends? In the Society only."

"Poor Scott," Felder moaned.

"What did he say?" Willie asked.

"That is one of his movies—unfinished, I believe," said Grayson. He bent down. "Herman, can you walk?"

Felder groaned. Slowly he got to his feet. His eyes narrowed, then fixed themselves on Willie. He spoke in a rapid, confidential whisper.

"Maybe give writers only five, six minutes. Show the great bullfighter mouthing that line about armed men—joy of armed men hunting armed men. Then cut to the Nobel Prize ceremony. They're giving him a trophy with a guy's head on it."

Willie turned to Mr. Grayson, but Felder grabbed him by the shirt, laughing.

"Then, for the oracle of the South, we have a guy walking in an' out of scenes talking backwards. At Nobel ceremony, says, Prevail but survive only not will man—however—see?"

Still laughing, Felder slid to the floor a second time.

"What—he said—" Willie stammered.

"Lord God—a film—who knows?" said Thatcher Grayson.

At that moment Howard Arthur Amboy came into the kitchen, his face a boiling sun.

"The camera—for God's sake, the camera!" Amboy said.

The straps had slipped from Felder's shoulders and the world's most expensive camera had fallen by his side.

Howard Arthur Amboy reached out with trembling hands and touched the iridescent photo-gun.

"World's greatest—read about it in *Now*—takes and develops simultaneous." Amboy's words were like a litany. "No light—10,000 to 1 scope—freeze action—a mill, a mill and more."

Willie, moving to put his hand on Felder's brow, kicked the camera.

"My God, you'll crack it!" Amboy shouted. "World's most—"

Felder squinted. "The manner remains after the morale has cracked."

"It cost a mill, didn't it?" Amboy said, bending down. "More than a mill—"

"Brother Herman," said Willie, "let's go on."

"Can't—impossible. People already made it—in their heads—" Felder gasped.

"What is he talking about?" said Willie.

"A movie," said Thatcher Grayson. "Lord—"

"No more explainers—no more, ever!" said Felder solemnly.

Suddenly he grabbed his hat and sat up a little. He jammed the hat on his head, snapping the brim rakishly. He gathered up his camera and got to his feet.

"Herman, you're not—"

"Loo goo woo moo," said Felder.

Grayson's eyes opened wide. "Why, he's praying."

"Surely it's the morph—whatever—," Willie stammered. "Let's call the doctor."

So quickly that neither of them could stop him, Felder barged into the living room where the black man was now singing in bluesy tongue. Amboy followed.

"Moo soo too roo," Felder crooned. "Xanadu too la roo, fu manchu."

"Alleluia!" the frail man shouted.

"Alleluia!" said the group.

"Praise to the Lord!" the blonde girl sang.

A man wearing fuschia-tinted glasses put his hands on Herman Felder's shoulders.

"You have received the baptism of the Spirit?"

"Kootchie-coo," said Felder.

"That is tongue?"

"A tongue's a tongue," said Felder.

"It is tongue slang," said the frail young man. "That expression means sinners cause riots."

Felder reached into his trench coat and failed to find what he was looking for.

"Who took the morph?"

The fuschia-tinted man turned to the frail man.

"What is the morph he speaks of, Brother Cal?"

"The morph is sleep, death," Brother Cal replied. "He is quizzing us to see if we really believe. Let us answer his question, brothers and sisters. Who took death away?"

"JESUS," the crowd answered.

"Jee-sus," said Felder, rummaging through his pockets.

Grayson and Willie were trying to get him to the door now.

"Who blew doo boo, *my* boo?" Felder asked the fuschia-tints, who turned immediately to the interpreter.

This time the crowd did not wait for a paraphrase of the question.

"THE SPIRIT!" they cried.

Coming through the door very quietly was a majestic figure, an Oriental with gleaming head and enormous biceps. He looked, Willie thought, like a world champion wrestler.

"Joto," said Grayson with relief.

Without a word, as if he had practiced it a hundred times before, the Oriental calmly pressed three fingers at the neck and then the temple of Herman Felder, who seemed to faint. The Oriental caught him as he fell, buckled him over his shoulder and carried him out into the night.

"His close friend and helper," Grayson said to Willie as they followed along. "Joto is also a Servant."

"Joto Toshima?"

"The artist."

"This way to the car, brothers," said Joto over his shoulder. "I am happy to see you again, Brother Thatcher. I am happy to meet you in the flesh, Brother Willie."

"Brother Joto, it is good to see *you*," said Willie. "We didn't know what to do back there. He is very sick."

"Common occurrence," said Joto. "Go now to hotel where we stay. We all stay with him this night. Possible?"

"Yes," they both said.

"Please?" said Joto, holding out the camera. Willie took it from him.

Then they were moving through the old streets of Baltimore, and the police were walking the streets with dogs, and there were fires, like campfires of old, burning in trash cans, and they could see the faces around the fires, and silhouetted against the dark sky, the crude terrible lessons that had been made out of buildings.

At the corner the pale green light of a sign brought Willie to the point of that question he had been wanting to ask Thatcher Grayson all day.

He looked at the face of the sleeping Herman Felder and then at the tired, drawn face of Thatcher Grayson, who also looked at the blasted buildings but did not see what Willie saw.

Another sign, and Willie could not help himself.

"Did you give him my message, Mr. Grayson?"

Without looking at him, Grayson said, "Why do you have to know that, my son?"

"You saw him, then."

"In Florida, during spring training, Regent Industries had a convention."

"Tell me, Mr. Grayson, the exact words."

"He waved it off, son, he dismissed it."

"Please, Mr. Grayson."

Thatcher Grayson leaned forward. "Is it far, Joto?"

"Very close, Brother Thatcher."

"Please, Mr. Grayson."

Grayson turned away and spoke to a ruined tenement.

"He said, News of niggers doesn't interest me."

"Thank you, Mr. Grayson," said Willie. "I know that was hard to say."

"That man must not concern you ever again!" said Thatcher Grayson angrily. "With your power of the Spirit why should you bother about such a man!"

Willie could see the policemen with their dogs.

Grayson said, "The meeting was pure truth wasn't it, son?"

Willie could think of nothing to say. His hands were sweating on the world's most expensive camera.

"We are coming to the point at last where men know they are worthless to tackle it by themselves. You agree with that surely."

Felder moaned, twitched, then fell asleep again.

"The testimonies—didn't you hear the Spirit in them?" Grayson said.

"It takes me so long to understand things," said Willie. "Many people are unhappy."

"The Spirit will care for them."

The dogs were barking, straining at their leashes, pulling their trainers after them.