

1st.
Mar. 6. '67.
(Uncle Jim's
Cabin)

Chapter 1.

And ^{all} ^{of} ^{them} ^{mercifully} ^{mercifully}

All hospitals smell ^{like} ^{they} ^{and} ^{dry} ^{to} ^{hide}
their ~~poor~~ ^{aroma} odor of corruption and death under an
cloak of health and life, ~~smells~~ like an unbathed
prostitute who ^{rightly} ^{clashes} herself with cheap perfumes.
The Chippewa General Hospital is no exception, and though
my room ^{generally} ^{is} ^{at} ^{the} ^{far} ^{end} ^{of} ^a ^{long} ^{hall} ^{on} ^{the} ^{third}
floor, ^{and} ^I ^{keep} ^{the} ^{window} ^{open}, ^{all}
it stinks like ~~the~~ ^{the} rest of the place: ^{of} ^{old}
food, ^{disinfectants}, ^{old} ^{medicine}, ^{old} ^{sweat}, ^{old} ^{urine}, ^{old} ^{bowel} ^{movements},
even ^{everything} ^{that} ^{is} ^{old} ^{and} ^{sick} ^{and} ^{dying}, like I guess I'm getting
myself.

I've been in this place nearly ^{two} ^{weeks}, now.
Eleven ^{eighteen} days to be exact. I ^{first} ^{came} ⁱⁿ here because of those
bad pains in my gut. My old friend and ^{trout} ^{fishing}
pal, Alfie -- that's Dr. Alfred McKnight -- took me over
the ^{initial} ^{primp}. "The only way to find out for sure, Pally,"
he told me ^{was} ^{to} ^{go} ^{to} ^{bed} ^{here} ^{after} ^{our} ^{long} ^{preliminary}
talk, "is to ~~recommend~~ ^{go} ^{to} ^{bed} ^{here} and will look
you over thoroughly and see what we can see."

"Aw, Alfie, you can't do that to me, ^{man}. It's the
last week of fishing season."

"It's the only way to find out, Pally." He
made some further notes on a ^{large} ^{pad} he had ^{occasionally}
written ^{been} ^{writing} ^{on} ^{during} ^{our} ^{talk} ^{and} ^{he} ^{looked} ^{up}.

"I think you'd better, Pally." ^{of} ^{mortality}
I felt the ^{first} ^{chill} ^{close} ^{over} ^{my} ^{spine}. ^I ^{tried} ^{to} ^{keep} ^{my} ^{eyelids} ^{open}.
"You don't think it's anything ^{really} ^{serious}, do you, Alf?"

He looked at me and ^{looked} ^{away}, ^{out} ^{the} ^{large}
^{screened} ^{hospital} window, toward ^{the} ^{direction} ^{of} ^{the}
Frenchman's Bluff. ^I ^{watched} ^{his} ^{eyelids} ^{blink} ^{up} ^{and} ^{down}.
"I think you'd better. Still looking, he
spoke: "I don't know, Pally. There are certain symptoms...
There could be something ^{there} and, then again, maybe not...
We'd better take a ^{good} look."

"Like what, Alf?" I said. He kept
looking away, out the window, and I ^{felt} ^a ^{crazy}

impulse to leap up and make him ^{face} ~~stare~~ at me. "Jesus Christ, Albie," I ^{blurted} ~~said~~ ^{instead}, "you can talk plainly to me, I can take it, ^{man,} we've known each other since we were kids, we've fished together, got drunk together, even got laid together. Give it to me straight, man."

He looked at me ^{with his long, mournful face} and took off his horn rim glasses and ^{put} them on his forehead and ^{then slowly} rubbed his eyes toward his nose with his thumb and forefinger. He smiled and spoke ^{a trifle} wearily. "Sometimes I think, Polly, ~~that~~ there ought to be a federal law against doctors doctoring their close friends. It shouldn't happen ^{to either of them, not even} to a dog. His voice rose ^{a little}. "Look, goddammit, ^{today,} you've told me enough about yourself and your symptoms ^{today} that if you were a ^{perfect} stranger I'd have ^{simply} ordered you to have a ^{or get the hell out --} thorough physical examination, ^{to} not asked you, ^{He signed.} There ought to be a federal law." ^{David. "Did}

"I'll write a letter to our Congressman ^{to} get it passed, too. I was my turn to sign and take a dip, brother. When do you want me to surrender?"

"Right now if you ^{can --} ~~would~~ -- but I suppose that's impossible. How about ^{coming in first thing} tomorrow? It shouldn't take more than ^{a couple} ~~two or three~~ days."

"I ^{got up} ~~came~~ and for the first time felt my legs trembling. ^{Badly.} "That'll let me fish the evening rise tonight, pal -- if there still is any ^{rise. How about} ~~can you give me?~~"

He made a wry face. "Not tonight, Polly. Echna's having some people over for dinner and steaks in the ^{and} ~~wood~~ ^{we} got to burn ~~the~~ steaks out in the patio. Sorry."

I had ^{somehow got myself} ~~made it~~ to the door. "Gracious living will get you nowhere," I said. "I'll see you tomorrow morning whenever you say. Me and my toothbrush."

"Make it nine, Polly, if you can. And good luck ^{fishing} tonight." "Thanks."

"Nine it is, Albie," I said ^{about} ~~gaily~~. "Nine it is."

I made it ^{out} to the parking lot ^{sort of} as in a dream. Then, ^{my} ~~when~~ I got in ^{quietly} ~~the~~ car I ^{fainted} ~~fainted~~. For the first time ^{when I came to I} ~~in~~ my life I knew I had ^{because} ~~because~~ ^{on the beach}

from then you and