THE BURNING EARTH

by Robert Traver

PROLOGUE

The sprawling upper peninsula of Michigan is a historical museum, a geological freak and a political waif. During the course of the volcanic convulsions and rumbling growing pains of a continent, uncounted centuries ago, Nature, in a cynical mood, craftily contrived to bury huge deposits of rich iron and copper ore and many other minerals deep into the broad bosom of the Upper Peninsula. When the last of a series of great ice sheets reluctantly relaxed its iron grip on the Peninsula, and slowly withdrew to the North, Nature, with an innocent smirk, hid her handiwork under a lush growth of trees: cedars, hemlocks, tamaracks, giant white-pines, Norways, balsams, spruces, jack-pines; and hardwood maples, elms, birches, and oaks. Nature marked this huge glacial retreat with thousands of lakes and hills and plunging waterways. As a tail-lashing farewell, the last of the doomed glaciers completed the gouging out and final delineation of an inland sea, the largest in the world; one which ever since has been hurling itself at the rocky northern boundary of this secret treasure chest -- the Upper Peninsula. Men came to call this turbulent sea Lake Superior.

For centuries only the Indians -- mostly of the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes -- passed along this way, hugging the south shore of Lake Superior in its rare moods of quiet in their large bark canoes, or padding silently beneath the sighing cathedral roofs of shaded forest trails, on ancient carpets of pine needles. The Peninsula was a broken, wild and harsh land. There were swamps to be skirted, rapids to be ridden, falls to be portaged; fishing, trapping, hunting; feasting, ritual, dancing; camps to be built and torn down; children to be born, dead to be buried; all this as the Indians made their way to and from the lower Great Lakes and the swampy headwaters of the Mississippi, beyond which lay the wide buffalo plains. There were no clocks to

hurry their passage, and time was the period between dawn and dark, between birth and death. It did not matter.

So far and hidden were they that for many years the coming of Columbus and the white man was a forest legend, the campfire gossip of toothless old men, the rumor of an occasional tribal vagabond, all as fugitive and meaningless as the evening whisper of a rustling pine. But finally the white men did come, and the old men were right: Strange, restless, bearded men called Frenchmen, followed by Englishmen, from far across the Eastern sea, bringing the Indians God and whisky, bright baubles and disease, gunpowder and treaties; taking their game and fish and furs, their camp-sites and even their women. Their gentle priests could not contain them. It was not long before the members of a new white tribe, the Americans, came to add to the Indian's woes. Like maddened giants, consumed by some fatal inner lust, these strangers came, always pressing, crowding, pushing ever westward.

The British fought the French and Indians; the French fought the British and Indians; the Americans fought all three. Craftily these mad strangers pitted Indian against Indian, sowing dissension, tribal hatred and bloodlust. The American Indian was being brought the "new order" of his time.

The fierce resistance of these peninsula Indians was a stirring and now-forgotten forest saga, long since embalmed in the murky pages of history. Forgotten were the wild night raids, the shouting painted warriors in a thousand canoes, the feats of incredible bravery and dark treachery; the nights and days of fire, famine, and bitter cold. For a few Indians the love of homeland could not surpass the love of whisky. The rest, the vast majority, finally found that the silent arrow could not still the barking sting of the white man's musket...

The peninsula Indian was defeated. Indeed, he was nearly exterminated. There were no monuments to mark his passage. All he left behind was a few bleached bones and scattered arrowheads for the tourists to paw over. The gloss of history -- "historical perspective" is the phrase -- cast its soft

patina over these proceedings, and finally forgave the Indian his sin in fighting for his home and for his freedom. The conquest of this portion of the northern Middle-West was remembered merely as a series of skirmishes against a handful of reluctant barbarians, a pot-shot at a few ungrateful heathens -- a minor ~~footnote to~~ misdemeanor in the grand larceny of a continent.

All this time Nature smiled and fluttered a lidless eye. Save for the ancient copper workings of the Indians -- she did not worry about them -- her secret of buried treasure was still intact.

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When that phrase still possessed a quaint charm, Congress viewed these proceedings with alarm. It decided it must take a "firm stand." So Congress stepped in and flatly told Michigan she would not be admitted to statehood unless she would surrender her claims to the Ohio strip. Michigan still stoutly refused to concede Ohio's claims. Congress was equal to the occasion. For that august body had already adopted as its motto: When in doubt, compromise!

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But, alas! Congress discovered that Wisconsin was delighted to abandon its foundling on Michigan's doorstep. Michigan ruefully concluded that it wanted statehood more than the coveted Ohio strip, so when Michigan was finally admitted to the Union in 1837 she found that she possessed -- literally as a political afterthought -- a three-hundred-odd-mile-long appendage attached to the northern tip of her mitten -- the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The lusty young state of Michigan determined to make the best of a bad bargain. She would look and see what was on this damned Peninsula. What was there to these ancient rumors of copper and ~~iron~~ iron ore deposits? In 1841 a young state geologist called Douglass Houghton was sent North, following the old Indian trails, and during the next three years he discovered large deposits of copper in the Lake Superior region. In 1844 a surveyor called William Burt observed his compass making frantic gyrations as he and his party stood on a lofty peninsula hill near what later became Negaunee. Surveyor Burt nodded at his companions. Only the presence of iron could account for that phenomenon.

The following year another group of explorers came to the Lake Superior district to locate an iron mine on Burt's magnetic hill. After frantic search the party could find neither the hill nor the iron. A runner was then sent to L'Anse to get Marji Gesick, chief of the Chippewas living there. This old Indian was reputed to know every foot of the territory. Chief Gesick returned with the runner and, after a preliminary powwow and exchange of gifts at the explorers' camp at the mouth of the River du Mort on Lake Superior, he led

them inland to Teal Lake. Thence he turned south and climbed the remarkable iron bluff which William Burt had crossed the previous year. The party stood on a mountain of solid iron ore. "Here!" old Gesick said in Indian. Chief Gesick returned to his wives and the remnants of his tribe at L'Anse, bearing his gifts, and the white men founded the Jackson Mine, the earliest of the Peninsula's fabulous iron mines.

So after countless brooding centuries, the first of the Peninsula's rich copper and iron deposits had been found. More discoveries followed in quick succession. Michigan's fathers broached a cask of rum and congratulated themselves on their wisdom, their acute vision. That ancient Cinderella of the North, the Upper Peninsula, had at last been found by her dream prince!

Nature compressed her thin lips, smiled wryly, then shrugged and turned away. After all she had kept her secret a long, long time. How many million years was it? Ho hum. If worst came to worst she could always conjure up a new ice sheet or two. But first she really must go West and investigate the intriguing possibilities of these dust storms. That was a new wrinkle. The Peninsula could wait a bit. Nature could bide her time...

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CHAPTER 1.

The saloon stood on the west side of Main Street in Chippewa, Michigan. The entrance door was in the middle, and on either side of the door there loomed tall potted ferns supported by sticks, standing in the tall windows in front of the suspended cloth curtains. Just inside the door there was a broad standing mirror, framed in ornate mahogany and serving to screen the iniquities within. On this mirror, in gold leaf, was printed the following:

Oliver Biegler -- Saloon
Fine Wines and Choice Liquors
Beer -- Free Lunch

North of the saloon, on the corner next to the town square, stood the brick Miners' State Bank. There were fourteen saloons on the town's Main Street, and many more on the other streets. Today all of them were busy. For it was pay day at the town's iron mines, and hundreds of miners were downtown cashing their checks, paying bills, buying new boots and socks and heavy miner's underwear -- and most of them, to the dismay of the local temperance workers, "sneakin' a few dollars on the ol' woman for a bloody drink or two!"

Oliver Biegler stood at the front end of his bar, up near the cigar counter, playing smear for drinks with three miners. He was a tall, big-boned man, slightly over fifty. Occasionally he glanced up from his game, looking the length of the smoky bar at his three perspiring bartenders -- the two regular bartenders, French-Canadian Charlie LeRoy and Cornishman Will Tregembo -- and the relief bartender, who helped out on pay days and Saturday nights, George Douglass. The big Swiss music box, against the opposite wall, was working overtime, obedient to nickels, the shuddering metal discs creaking up and down between each selection. Some travelling saloon artist had filled the entire wall, opposite the bar, with his alcoholic visions: a sinister, dank, malarial woods scene at night, dripping gloom, of no forest which ever grew in Michigan, and relieved only by a troubled moon which peered from racing, troublous clouds.

The long, high room rang with the clink and buzz of drinking men. The worn mahogany bar ran nearly half the depth of the building. At the far end

of the bar stood the free lunch counter, covered by cheese cloth against the droning flies. This was flanked by the massive ice-box. Beyond that was the partitioned, green-tabled poker room. At the back of the saloon was a small kitchen and the "Sunday door," leading out into the alley at the rear.

Behind Oliver, against the bar wall, stood the square iron safe, with the dish of colored fruit painted on its door, which was slightly ajar. It was a warm afternoon in early August. Oliver had been cashing checks all day. He kept them in a smooth, worn "Green Seal" cigar box, in the safe. Each check cashed meant that he had to take at least one drink. The cuffs of his shirt were turned up once on his big wrists. Oliver's face was somewhat flushed; he was gently drunk.

Charlie LeRoy edged up along the bar and whispered to Oliver. He mopped his dark Indian face with his soiled bar apron. "Polly's here, Oliver -- says Mrs. B. wants you to come home an' not to forget the package -- it's the kid's birthday -- havin' a little doing. Go 'head, Oliver -- I can handle alone during the supper hour." Oliver's bartenders had a great deal of respect for Oliver's wife, Belle. "That Mrs. B. -- she's a real lady, I tell you." They always said this to each other with a sort of quiet belligerence, as though someone had challenged the proposition. Oliver slowly nodded at Charlie and glanced down the bar at his youngest son, Paul. Oliver smiled, tossed down a drink, and turned to finish his game of cards.

Paul had come in the alley door. He stood by the free lunch counter drinking a bottle of cream soda one of the bartenders had given him. His gray eyes rested on Old Man Dyson and "Gineral" Gaynor playing a timeless game of cribbage at one of the card tables next to the tall coal stove by the opposite wall. "Fifteen-two, fifteen-four," they droned. Paul drank slowly, out of the bottle, savoring the liquid's cool sweetness, enjoying the tingling sensation in his nose as he regurgigated. All the while he listened intently to the music box. To Paul its tinkling trills were compounded of the music of the spheres. The laboring machine was playing "The Eva Waltz" -- one of his favorites, by a composer whose name he could never learn. Paul swayed his

head ever so slightly, closing his eyes. He drank in the delicious, stale, boozy smell of the place, a combination of beer, mustard, cold ham, old cheese, brine of pickled herring, spilt whiskey, tobacco smoke, over-loaded spittoons, and sweating men. It was heavenly, rivalled only by the tantalizing smell of Tilford's Drug Store...

Oliver finished his card game in a crescendo of shouts and knuckle-rapping plays. "One more, Oliver. Jus' one more!" He grinned and shook his head. He turned and closed the safe door, spun the dial, took his battered Panama hat from the top of the safe, and nodded to Paul. Outside on Main Street Paul had to run to keep up with his father's long strides. He glanced up at his father. "Mom wants you to bring home the paper -- and a -- a package from Joachim's hardware, Pa."

The large frame Biegler house stood on a corner at the bottom of Blueberry Hill, just a block north of the Northwestern tracks, which ran through the center of the town. As Paul and Oliver approached the crossing, Paul clutching his birthday present, old Dan Kane hobbled out of his shanty on his wooden leg. He resolutely held his warning flag aloft in his one good arm, glaring at Paul and his father, as a long, slow, iron ore drag cut him from their view. The train had two locomotives in front and pusher behind, as it hissed and cursed its weight of raw red hematite ore towards distant Escanaba and the ore docks, there to be loaded into the waiting ore boats. Paul stood there beside his father, listening to the rhythmic rattle and din of the fleeing car trucks.

Old Dan Kane was one of the many fantastically injured industrial cripples in which the town abounded. He had got his on the railroad. One leg on one side; an arm on the other; a neat trick. Dan had an Irish brogue as rich as mulligan stew. He had the face of an old pirate, and he always shouted his most idle comment. He and Paul were good friends. Sometimes it

pleased old Dan to fancy himself a wounded Civil War veteran, and he held Paul enthralled as he recounted, always in great and colorful detail, the desperate campaign in which he was so gallantly wounded. Paul could hear the very rumble of artillery. Each engagement was different but was always concluded, with a wink and a nudge, with a shouted "We routed the divils!"

One day he told Paul he had got his injuries when he had yelled "To hell with Ireland! Down with the Pope!" in a Dublin whorehouse. "They almost assassinated me," he declared. Paul laughed uncertainly and ran home to ask Belle, his mother, what a whorehouse was. "Where did you hear that, son?" Belle asked, brushing back the hair on her high broad forehead in white Presbyterian horror. Paul told her Dan's story. She pursed her lips into a horrible grimace in her efforts to keep a sober face, but laughter welled up in her plump body in gusts and gales, and she had finally sat on the floor and Paul ran to get her a glass of water and her bottle of favorite red Vericolate pills. "Don't listen to that immoral old blatherskite!" she finally chortled. "What's 'immoral,' Mama? What's 'blatherskite'?" Paul asked, and Belle was away again. Paul had fled the house and reported back to Dan. Old Dan grinned, muttered 'Protestant pups' under his breath, dug in his long leather purse, winked at Paul, and had given him a dime. Another time -- --

Oliver prodded Paul in the ribs. "Are you going to stand there dreaming all day, son? The train is by."

"Hello, Oliver!" Dan shouted. "Who's that foine young bye ye got wit ye?"

Oliver winked broadly at Dan. "Hello, Dan. He's my new bartender -- just up from Green Bay. Yup. It's his birthday today. He's -- he's -- how old are you, son? Eleven? He's eleven years old today, Dan."

Dan's mirth was uncontrollable. He slapped his good leg with his flag and reeled and almost fell. "That shure is a good one, all right all right!

Oliver Biegler!" he shouted. Dan beseeched the neighbors to bear witness. "Bejaysus, he's got so many byes he can't keep thrack of them!"

Oliver and Paul turned into the Biegler back yard. Oliver expertly flipped a clove into his mouth and stalked into the house with the afternoon newspaper, "The Iron Ore," for Belle. Paul ran around to the fenced side yard with his birthday present. Gunnar Taleen was there waiting for him. Gunnar helped Paul claw open the bundle. There in a box lay a brand new baseball and bat and a black leather pitcher's glove.

"Bats!" Paul shouted, asserting the youthful prerogatives of ownership. "I borrow to pitch," blond Gunnar sensibly concluded. Paul lined up at home plate at the front of the yard, under the drooping box elder tree. He spat in his hands. Gunnar faced him halfway down the yard, scowling professionally as he elaborately wound up. Gunnar pitched. Paul swung. There was a clear wooden 'bonk' as the bat struck the ball. With a fatal premonition they watched in frozen horror as the ball sped in suspended, dream-like flight towards the house, under the open porch, and into the sitting-room window. The crash and rain of glass attracted Mrs. McGoorty who was taking down her washing across the street. Paul, in the clarity of his horror, saw her cross herself. She knew Oliver Biegler's temper. From long experience, all of the neighbors did.

Paul noticed that Gunnar had developed a greenish-white pallor as he turned and fled the premises. Paul saw that he himself was still holding his new bat out in front of him, at the end of its swing. Then he observed his father standing on the side porch, looking at him. Paul winced and waited for the tumult to start. His father was speaking. In a low voice. It was a miracle.

" -- she's laying on the sitting-room floor in a dead faint. An' not a drop of liquor in the house. Run up and get Doc Gourdeau. Run! Oh, for Christ's sake..."

* * *

Paul's mind raced with him as he ran up Blueberry Hill for Doctor Gourdeau. He was filled with terror. Had the baseball struck her? he thought. What if Mama should die? I killed her on my birthday with my little bat. Why wasn't there some whiskey in the house? Or at least some wine? But Paul knew why there wasn't. Belle had never permitted a drop of liquor in her house since Paul was four years old. On that fateful day brother Nicholas, aged eight, had found a tall bottle of port wine, "company" wine, hidden behind Belle's washstand. By this time she and Oliver occupied separate bedrooms.

Nicky had opened the bottle of port and craftily inserted his thumb in the neck. He pretended to toss off a manly portion. He then passed the bottle to little Paul, who still wore his yellow curls. They had sat on the floor near Belle's large wooden bed. Paul needed both hands to tilt the big bottle to his mouth -- whereupon, not to be outdone, he downed his first drink, a mighty draft. It also developed that it was his first drunk. For four days and nights friends and neighbors had come to view the tiny sot, lying unconscious on his mother's bed. They suggested all manner of "cures" for Belle to try. She was nearly frantic with remorse and fright. But Doc Gourdeau had shrugged his French shoulders and shaken his head. "Doan worry, Mis' Beeglair -- from dat dey always wake up."

As he was running by the Ridge Street school, Paul was suddenly caught and held in his tracks. With a throaty, preliminary jungle cough, the steam whistle at the Blueberry Mine had begun its evening Angelus. Then, as Paul stood there, another mine whistle growled its answer to this challenge, then another and another and still another, gathering volume, gradually swelling and filling the town with their mighty symphonic roar. Paul was always deeply stirred by the vast calliope chords of the mine whistles. Through this great wail of sound there always ran a surging, vibrant pulse, a throbbing overtone,

which prevailed until the last whistle had hurled its echo at the lonely, bald iron hills which surrounded the town. Paul exhaled sharply, and darted on towards Doctor Gourdeau's house.

Old Doctor Gourdeau had asthma, and he was puffing and wheezing dreadfully as he and Paul hurried into the Biegler sitting room. Belle was sitting by the broken window calmly reading The Iron Ore. The curtains billowed gently in the evening breeze. Paul was glad to observe that Oliver was nowhere in sight. One of his brothers and his half-brother Gregory were eating in the dining-room.

"Good evening, Doctor." Belle smiled pleasantly. "I'm sorry we had to bother you. I guess I must have fainted."

Doctor Gourdeau clutched at his moustache and earnestly shook his big, shaggy head. He had delivered Belle of her three sons -- and the little girl, the one that had died, who was born before Paul, her last child.

"W'as mattair, Mis' Beeglair," he said wrathfully in his hoarse, froggy bass, "'isteria, no? Was dat 'usband of yours boddering you again?"

Belle watched the plump doctor standing there clenching and unclenching his fists. With a little sigh, her gray eyes rolled up in her head, and her body began to shake. She snorted and vaguely waved one plump hand toward the broken window. Paul could see things were coming to no good. It always frightened him when Belle got one of her laughing spells. "Doctor," he said, "I batted a ball through the window glass. I -- I guess I knocked Mama out or frightened her." Paul turned to his mother. "What happened, Mama? Please tell us."

"War," Belle muttered helplessly, rocking in her chair as the newspaper fell from her lap. "Th-thought we were being sh-shot at."

The fallen newspaper lay open on the carpet. Paul and Doc Gourdeau stared at its headlines.

"FRANCE, ENGLAND, RUSSIA AND GERMANY AT WAR!"

Old Doctor Gourdeau continued to stare at the newspaper. Paul looked at him. As he looked, the doctor seemed to shrink and sag and to curiously age. He held out towards Belle his dry physician's hands, cupped and close to his body, one shoulder slightly hunched. She had stopped laughing and was watching him intently, her face white and drawn.

"God, God, God," he said wearily, closing his wet eyes. "De eart' -- it is burning once again." He turned and slowly went past the stares of Paul's brothers through the dining-room, out the side door -- the screen door slammed -- trudging along the wooden porch past the broken window and out of sight.

Paul was eleven years old on August 5, 1914.

CHAPTER 2.

Even at this age Paul was perplexed, as he was always to be, by the part that raw chance played in his life, in the lives of his parents, his brothers and friends and, as he gradually came to see it, in the lives of every person who ever lived upon the earth. Why, why, why? he would ask himself. Why am I here? Where am I bound? Where are all of us going? What strange destiny drew my mother and father together in this boisterous mining town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan? He pondered these things and found no answer.

Sometimes he would haltingly confide his troubled questionings to Belle, but she spoke sharply to him and told him a boy so young should not entertain such thoughts. "It isn't healthy to dwell upon yourself so much, son. Run out and play. Bounce your ball off the roof." Belle had a fixed notion that in physical action lay a panacea for all ills of the spirit. She had had to seek its solace often enough herself. Paul gradually grew secretive and kept his own counsel. But the strange thoughts still persisted.

Paul knew, from Belle's constant repetition, the surface story of how his mother and father had met; the manner of their courtship and marriage; of how his father, Oliver, had brought Belle to live in his big frame house with her three step-sons, Paul's half-brothers: young Oliver, Emmett and red-headed Gregory. They were the children of Oliver and his first wife, the sweet Irish girl who had died of "the consumption."

Ever since he could remember, back when Belle would give him his daily bath downstairs in the dining-room, in a large porcelain washbowl, by the soapy warmth of the surging wood stove, she had told him stories of her family, his father's family -- of his Uncle Karl, Oliver's brother, who was in a sanitarium for those who were sick in their minds. "That means," Paul slowly puzzled out, "that my uncle Karl is crazy, he's in the nuthouse." This intelligence made him feel vaguely proud and gleeful, somehow different from and

superior to his little playmates who could not lay valid claim to uncles languishing in insane asylums.

Paul had a shadowy, babyhood recollection of his uncle Karl -- a tall, slender, brooding man, younger than Oliver, with dark wavy hair, who would come and look intently down at Paul in his crib, with large staring blue eyes; who sometimes suddenly laughed in a high frightening falsetto, and made graceful wand-like gestures in the air with his arms. Paul did not know, then, that at these times Karl was leading a symphony orchestra.

The last memory Paul had of Uncle Karl was a bizarre scene on a boat. When Paul grew older, he asked Belle to confirm his childish recollection, but she laughed uncertainly and said he must have been dreaming, he was just a toddling baby, nothing as fastastic as that had ever happened. "It's just that imagination of yours, son. You read too much. You should play more. My, my -- what am I ever going to do with such a dreamer!" Paul knew she was lying to him -- "for your own good" -- and that it had really happened.

Oliver and Belle had taken Uncle Karl on a voyage on the Great Lakes for his "nervousness." They had taken Paul along. Grandma Fraleigh had come up to Chippewa from Detroit to take care of the other boys while they were gone. It was all very hazy in Paul's memory. Boat, water: this was about all he could remember.

But there was one part that was clear, with a deadly stereopticon brilliance: The boat was docked at a wharf. Paul and his parents were in their stateroom looking out of the portholes. He saw a sidewalk and water. The sidewalk was held up by tall wooden piles. There was a strange, fishy smell and the sound of lapping water. Oddly, there was water under the sidewalk. A large turtle, with raised, reptilian head, was slowly swimming under the sidewalk. Small boys were diving off the wharf into the water to recover coins tossed by the boat's passengers. They would climb, dripping, up on a ladder and dance and shout and then dive again. Suddenly there was shouting and sounds of wooden scuffling. A grown man had leaped off the boat into the

water. He was all dressed up and even wore a hat. There was a furious splashing...

"Oliver!" Belle had cried. "It's Karl -- he's in the water!" Oliver had said "Christ God" in a weary, low voice, and had run out of the stateroom, slamming the door. Belle had tried to get Paul away from the porthole, but he had clung there, howling, and would not leave until Oliver and some sailors had fished the dripping, shouting man out of the water. The diving boys and the turtle had gone away. The people had stopped throwing coins. Paul never saw his Uncle Karl again...

"Soap yourself, Paul," Belle would command, as she gave him his bath, wringing out the washcloth and pushing her graying hair back on her forehead with a damp hand. "It's 9:30 and I've got a piano lesson to give at ten." Shortly after Paul had been born, Belle had started giving piano and vocal lessons in the little music room just off the sitting room, on the old ebony Bechstein upright. Paul learned every piece in Czerny by heart -- and he never played a note. Even from upstairs he could detect some hapless child's error, and visualize Belle's impatient admonition and the occasional rapping of uninspired knuckles. "One and two and one and two," he would hear her droning and chanting hour on end to the disconsolate throng of aspiring little Rachmaninoffs and Paderewskis who filed in and out of the Biegler house with their black leather music rolls, haunting his boyhood with daily sounds of discord and a million sour notes.

"Tell me, Mom, how you and Oliver came to get married," he asked Belle one rainy day. All of the boys called their father Oliver or "the old man" when he was not around -- a practice which Belle vainly tried to halt. Paul must have been six or seven, which meant he had quite recovered from his epic

wine jag. Belle was in the kitchen ironing the last big washing while the Finnish hired girl was down in the cellar laundry, banging the wooden tubs about and muttering over the next washing. Paul sat on the high wood-box, next to the warm kitchen range, watching his mother iron. He loved the starched, burnt-cloth odor of ironing. "Tell me, Mom," he repeated, "how did you and Oliver meet?"

Belle smiled at him, coloring slightly. Her skin was usually white, almost waxen. She never used any powder or makeup. "Oh, I've told you that already, youngster -- a dozen times. Now you run along and play."

"No you haven't, Mama," Paul lied steadily. "Not all, you haven't. There was a snowstorm -- I remember that," Paul started, urging her on. "Let's see -- you were lost in a snowstorm, wasn't that it? And Oliver found you." This was violently incorrect and Paul knew it.

Belle got a hot iron off the kitchen range, tested it with a moist finger -- psst -- and started on one of Oliver's shirts. They were so large that Paul always aspired to use one of them as a tent.

"I had just finished my course at the Detroit Conservatory of Music" -- Belle began, smiling to herself, almost talking to herself -- "and your Grandpa Fraleigh" -- Belle's father -- "had just come in off the road and told me that they wanted a music teacher for the public schools, 'way up in the northern peninsula of Michigan -- in a place called Chippewa -- --"

"Chippewa!" Paul cried. "Why -- why that's where we live, Mama!" It was part of the formula; he said it every time, just at this juncture, like a veteran trouper.

"That's right, son," Belle ran on, as Paul settled back in the kitchen chair and smiled to himself. "Grandpa had just got back home from Chippewa, and Mr. Scribner had told Grandpa about it himself." Mr. Scribner was the superintendent of schools at Chippewa. "Grandpa was the out-of-town representative of the Ferris people, you know," Belle ran on. Paul always resented

Belle's efforts to make her father's employment sound genteel. Somehow it shamed him. "Grandpa was an underpaid travelling salesman for a tight-fisted seed company, more like it," Paul thought to himself, being something of a small realist at seven.

"So I sat down and wrote Mr. Scribner about myself -- and guess what happened?" Belle went on.

"They didn't take you," Paul quickly said. This was a variation of the theme, and was clearly not cricket, and Belle looked at him closely.

"They did too take me," Belle said, pursing her lips and folding the shirt and spanking it smartly with the hot iron. "Out of seventeen applicants, mind you, they accepted your mother." Paul wondered, as he had wondered scores of times, where he would have been if they hadn't; if his grandfather Fraleigh, "The out-of-town representative," had not run into a schoolman called Scribner. If -- --

"The beautiful maple leaves were tinted and falling when I arrived in Chippewa," Belle went on. The cycle of the northern seasons had always affected Belle deeply, and she rhapsodized a bit, falling into the easy conventional literary cliches of her girlhood. "The hills and woods were a veritable riot of color." Belle paused over her ironing, and her gray eyes grew unseeing. "Yes, the place was wildly beautiful, a strange, rugged, harsh land. I loved it at once -- and always have. It was like" -- she paused again -- "it was as though I were coming home..."

Paul drew in his breath sharply and hugged up his knees on the woodbox. She has never said that before, he thought. That was a beautiful thing she just said -- why, it's true, it's true!

"What happened after that, Mama?" Paul softly said.

"Oh yes, son." She was working on one of Oliver's nightshirts now. His dress shirts could contain only a side-show, but his nightgowns could house the entire main attraction, Paul thought.

"Well, I got a lovely front room at dear old Mrs. Donovan's -- and I started my new music work. That's all there was to it, son."

Belle glanced at the crazily ticking kitchen clock. One of those damned piano kids are coming, Paul thought. I just know they are. "No, Mama -- that isn't all there is to it. You haven't met Oliver yet," Paul said to his mother.

"Well, sir," Belle went on rapidly, "with my first November here came the first big blizzard I had ever seen. It was so big -- why, son, you know the kind of snowstorms we get up here," she concluded lamely.

"Yes, Mama, I know," Paul said.

"I was coming home from school. It was during the noon-hour. The blinding snow was streaming out of the northwest. I was holding an umbrella out in front of me, like this." Belle motioned and laughed. "You know, son, no one up here ever uses an umbrella in a snowstorm -- I was that green. I was on my way to Mrs. Donovan's, passing the backyard of our house -- where we live now -- and I bumped right into a tall man coming out of the backyard." Belle was talking rapidly now. "I stumbled. He caught me in his arms. He held me tightly. It was snowing. We looked at each other. He said he was sorry. He let me go." Belle paused and sighed.

"When I got to Mrs. Donovan's, I asked her who lived there -- where we live now -- and the dear old lady crossed herself and told me it was a widower with three little sons. She told me his name. Now who do you think it was?" Belle asked.

"Oliver Biegler -- my old man," Paul responded loyally, curiously regarding his mother, who had become strangely beautiful and young again as she stood bending over her ironing.

By the time he was eleven, Paul had heard the story of Belle's romance many times, and had grown somewhat weary of it. Sometimes he became irked with

Belle, thinking to himself: Why on earth did Mama ever marry such a crabby, vile-tempered man as Oliver? Why couldn't my father have been a gentle, considerate, generous man? One who played games with his children, like other fathers? Paul had another thought too, one that colored his entire boyhood: Why couldn't my father have been almost anything but a saloon-keeper?

Paul knew, with quiet dismay, that his playmates' parents must have discussed his low estate at home, because when he would have one of the fierce, fleeting childish quarrels with one of them, the worst they could seem to think to say was: "You're nothing but a dirty saloon-keeper's son!" Or: "Polly's old man keeps a saloon! Red-nose Polly, red-nose Polly!" No one ever thought to shout at his playmates: You're a dirty miner's son -- or a vile minister's son -- or even a street-cleaner's son. Saloon-keepers were the lowest of the low.

Even the very school books of the time taught Paul that there was little hope for him. Anyone that dabbled in alcohol inevitably became a social pariah as well as a mental and moral degenerate. His spawn was doomed to be naught but gobbling idiots and lurching, shambling imbeciles. Why, it was printed right there in the book. Some of the school books would even show startling pictures of yards and yards of human intestines, every inch a glowing, healthy red. These were the guts of the righteous, unsullied by the demon rum. On the next page would be an illustration of a sorry gray mess, looking something like a platter of deflated liver sausages. These were the dreary bowels of the boozers. Paul smarted over these experiences as though he had been struck with a lash. He never told Belle about them. His older brother Frederic had done so once. Paul had witnessed the scene...

So insistently was the conviction of his inevitable mediocrity borne upon him, that Paul felt that he annually became a sort of embarrassing curiosity to his teachers and classmates each time he perversely managed to move from one grade to the other. The fact that he found his school work easy, and

that he was always among the leaders of his class gave him little comfort. He supposed that he and his brothers were merely the exceptions to prove the rule. At times Paul felt like a Kallikak who had made good.

Paul, then, knew all too well how his parents had met and married. But he still did not know why. Why, why, why? Belle loved to sit and talk with her boys, and time on end, as she talked, Paul pondered the fickle destiny that had mated the son of an immigrant German brewer -- his grandfather Biegler -- with the daughter of a New York Dutchman -- his grandfather Fraleigh -- whose family had settled on the Hudson River long before the American revolution. And why did this German brewer meet and marry the tall, imperious German woman, Katrina Zien, whom he had met on the ship, coming to America in 1845? What sly play of fate had brought the budding young seed salesman to meet and marry a young Scotch girl, Margaret Broun, and bring her from New York out to Detroit? Was he hurrying West so that he could be in Chippewa in time to hear of a teaching job for a daughter yet unborn? No, Paul decided, that would be at once too comforting a thought and too monstrously egotistic.

When Belle first came to Chippewa, she "had an understanding" with Will Lamoree, a rising young Detroit photographer. In her affections he seemed to be the most successful of her cluster of deserted Detroit swains. Paul had seen his picture in Belle's album -- a hirsute, be-moustached, wing-collared young man standing in an attitude of heroic self-abnegation, who looked exactly like all of the pictures of all of the young men in all of the albums he had ever seen. There seemed to have been a separate race of album-men. Paul would wince when Belle would say, "That's the young man ~~that~~ who might have been your father, son." Sometimes she would musingly say: "Will was very much in love with me. He was so sweet -- I -- I wonder what it would have been like if I had married him?" Paul often wondered, too.

* * *

Belle Biegler was the family historian, recorder, recollector, and arbiter in all things intellectual. She was the court of last resort on all questions pertaining to grammar and usage. She really had an amazing recollection. Her mind was a patchwork of things remembered. And she could parse a sentence so that it bristled like a battleship on war maneuvers. It was more than Paul could ever learn to do. In the language department the boys early found that Oliver rated A in emphasis but was deplorable in pronunciation, spelling and syntax. "Ask Mom, she knows."

Belle, as was her way, had saved all of Oliver's few love letters. She had carefully stowed them away in a shoe box tied with traditional blue. Then she couldn't find them. "Tsk, tsk, tsk -- now where did I put those letters?" It took the combined efforts of Paul and two older boys to unearth them -- under a mattress in his discarded crib in the dusty attic. Nestling with them they had found a cracked old hot-water bottle. Love must not cool, Paul thought. When the family spirits were at a low ebb (and Oliver was safely out at camp), Belle would occasionally read some of the love letters at the dinner table. They never failed to start a wild Bieglerian hooting.

Oliver had once taken a six-week bookkeeping course in Milwaukee, the intellectual advantages of which he never tired of expounding. Oliver's beautifully written double-entry love letters were gems of cloying copybook sentiment, tiny hymns to unsullied womanhood, as warm and pulsating as a notice of overdue box rent. Belle had even found in the tall bookcase in the music-room the book out of which he had copied them. "Professor Cuyler's 'Letters For All Occasions.'" A pretty tome it was, with shameless little cupids swimming naked all over the cover. In all of these letters Woman was a shrine, the lofty keeper of the stork, to which evil Man tremulously addressed his abject petitions.

Belle would sit at her end of the table, near the pantry door, endlessly smoothing the tablecloth, brushing away imaginary bread crumbs, adjusting her

nose-glasses, drinking her steaming Bulgarian tea -- one of the endless assortment of dreary health brews and formulas which she consumed with a touching, child-like faith -- and reading Oliver's old love letters. Most of the time she would laugh heartily, but sometimes her gray eyes would grow misty. Again, she would read from Professor Cuyler's book -- excerpts of letters which she really thought Oliver should have sent her. One of Oliver's classics ran as follows:

"The grave beauty of your mien, your sweetly solemn smile, distracts me so that I cannot properly attend to my duties as (here state business or profession)." Oliver had gone the whole hog and copied everything, directions and all. Perhaps, Paul thought, he shied at the word 'saloon-keeper.' The only original note that had crept into this one was in the salutation. "Dear Angle," it ran.

But "Dear Angle" had married her Oliver. He had proposed to her on a Sunday drive around beautiful wooded Iron Cliffs Drive. "He looked so big and strong, driving his fast horses," Belle told her children. She had forsaken Will Lamoree and her orderly little regiment of suitors in Detroit. The advice of all her new Chippewa friends had gone unheeded. "I tell you, Belle, he's nothing but the keeper of a low dive. He cheats at cards, he chases fast women -- and he beats them, too. And he -- he'snot even your own religion!" Oliver was nominally a Roman Catholic.

Kate Donovan, who ran the Donovan House where Belle lived in Chippewa, was chief among Belle's self-appointed saviors. She was a wispy, good-hearted, hank-haired little widow of sixty, with the thin, busy wet lips which seem peculiar to certain Irishwomen. When Kate was excited she had a slight brogue, which was to say that she always spoke with a slight brogue. "Don't marry that man, Belle! No good can come out of it. Those there Bieglers is all crazy. He's a pup, he is! (Kate's pups always rhymed with 'hoop'.)

"I tell you he kilt his first wife, that he did. A fine Irish girl she was. Three sons in four years! God help ye, lass." Belle had pursed her lips and quietly nodded.

Belle married Oliver on Midsummer's Day in St. Xavier's church. The ceremony was blessed by Father Keul, and Oliver took his music-teacher to his big frame house on Hematite Street and told his three young sons, "Here is your new mother." They had stood and stared at her. Red-headed Gregory had burst out crying. The following March Belle presented Oliver with their first son, Frederic. In less than two years Nicholas was born. Then had followed Katherine, the little girl who had died of "convulsions" while teething. Then Belle had gone to Chicago where Doctor Murphy removed her left breast; a cancer of the breast, he said it was. On her return Doctor Gourdeau insisted that she have a separate bedroom and not to have, under any circumstances, another child. When Paul came along, Doctor Gourdeau was beside himself with rage.

"Dat 'ulking brute -- dat 'uge German beast -- I tol' you 'e should 'ave wan beeg t'rashin'!" he said, flashing his dark French eyes.

It was a sentiment which Paul was to warmly share with him many times.

Please return.

CHAPTER 8.

That fall Gunnar and Fritz and Paul were reunited in the Grammar School. Gunnar was now in eighth grade; Fritz and Paul were in seventh. Miss Lindquist was their teacher. Bernie Redmond still attended the "Irish" school, but every afternoon the four would meet after school, usually in Fritz's basement, but sometimes at the old Pearl Street cigar factory of Bernie's dad. A weathered sign swung out over the door: "Dennis J. Redmond -- Fine Havana Cigars." The place reeked of tobacco, and hung with waving cobwebs and old leaf-tobacco calendars. It had once been a Finnish bagnio and the flamboyant flowered wall paper still shown through the dust. It was a great hangout for the local Irish of all ages. Most of them were railroad men, and lodge brothers of Bernie's father in the Hibernians. For some obscure reason nearly all these Irishmen wore soft dented black Stetson hats. Some of them would smoke cigarettes to tease "Dinny," who would glare malevolently at them and mumble over his bench. "Smokin' those goddam coffin-nails..." The boys would help Bernie strip the stems from the dampened tobacco leaves and spread the leaves on the drying racks in the back room so that Bernie could get away early and play. Paul had entered the world of commerce: he had started banding cigars for Dinny, for which he received five cents for each hundred cigars from Bernie's easy-going father. Fifteen cents an afternoon -- sitting down, mind you -- was making Paul view Carnegie in a new light.

Sometimes when Paul had caught up on his banding he would watch Dinny make cigars. Dinny would sit hunched over his square work block, his faded greenish-black derby pushed back on his bald head. He wore this hat only when he worked. First Dinny would cut out a double binder leaf, then reach into his stock box for the filler leaves -- this was where the "Havana" came in -- expertly shaping them in his nimble fingers and then roll them with his palm into the binder leaves. Quickly this "bunch" would be fitted into the propped wooden cigar mold, until the mold was filled with twenty-five bunches. Then Dinny would suddenly kick back his chair, which always fell clattering to the

floor, and clamp the wooden cover on the mold, and then squeeze it in the large iron press. At the same time he would remove another mold, right his chair and glare at his watchful Irish compatriots -- "who the hell knocked that there chair over!" -- and then sit and roll these pressed bunches up into finished cigars in the fine-veined, delicate wrapper leaves which came from distant Sumatra. All the time that he worked Dinny hummed and chanted a mysterious song, a song without words, without meaning, without tune, without end. "Yanh, yanh, yanh...di di dum...col sor roll de ol..." This song would occasionally be punctuated with an occasional chanted oath if a bunch broke or a wrapper tip tore while he was pasting the end of a finished cigar. "Yanh,yanh, yanh...goddam, goddam...rum si razza rol..."

Paul would sit and watch and often wonder why it was that the fathers of all his playmates were always so disgustingly good-natured. Unlike Oliver, Dinny's bite was unequal to his bark. Paul's heart was gnawed by envy. Could his schoolbooks be right? Was whiskey the seat of Oliver's canker? Yet there were lots of good-natured saloonkeepers on town. Paul and the other boys had sold crates of salvaged whiskey bottles to these great, chuckling, purple-veined men. When the cause was just and the necessity was grave, they had even stolen bottles from Oliver's saloon and resold them to his competitors.

During the past summer there had been a number of changes made at the old frame house on Hematite Street. Paul's half brother, Greg, had married his sweetheart, Eileen Deasy, the Irish girl he had gone through school with, and they had a little house of their own on Bluff Street, on the north end of town. Red-headed Greg had left high school in the eleventh grade and had started to work as an electrician for the Chippewa Ore Company, which operated the large Blueberry mine. That summer the company had made Greg a foreman of one of the electrical crews, so he had celebrated his good fortune by getting married.

Paul's brothers, Link and Nicky, moved into Greg's bedroom, leaving Paul to occupy their double bed in the calsomined back bedroom. Paul's cot was stored in the dusty attic. Paul missed the companionship of short, quick, laughing brother Greg. Greg had really paid more attention to Paul than either Link and Nicky did. Nearly every evening after supper Paul would follow Greg up to his room and watch him get "spruced up" for his date with Eileen. "What'll we sing tonight, kid?" Greg would say. Paul sat on the edge of Greg's bed and sang in a piping tenor as Greg carried the air. "Now some people say that a darky won't steal..." Greg would begin. They went through all the verses, piling up the damning evidence to negative this charitable assumption, Greg adjusting his colored elastic armbands, getting into his blue serge suit, prying his necktie into his hard collar, currying his swooping red cowlick with stiff military brushes. "But I caught two in my corn field!"

Paul hoped that some day he would have a room like Greg's. Pennants on the walls: "Cornell," "Michigan," "Ferris Institute," "Chippewa High School" -- beautiful pictures of Maude Adams and Geraldine Farrar, of Lillian Russell and Pearl White; kewpie dolls and crossed bamboo canes and ticklers from a host of forgotten carnivals; a pair of pearl-handled hunting knives and a Navajo blanket he had won on a punchboard at Gill's candy store -- --

"Diggin' up potatoes row on row..."

Greg always kept mint candies and Yucatan or square-shaped Bloodbury gum in his top dresser drawer or in his best suits hanging in the little clothes closet. During the day while Greg was working Paul often very casually reviewed the contents of this exciting room. He pretended he was just sort of helping Belle to keep the room clean. Sometimes Paul suspected that Greg did not always go out with Eileen when he said he was. Once Paul found a nearly empty pint of whiskey and some toy baloons in a small box which read "Sold for the prevention of disease only." Another time Paul found an envelope containing an exciting series of photographs of women without any clothes, including one of a man and a woman in a most curious attitude...

"Now if that ain't stealin' Ah doan know!"

Greg had finally adjusted his tie, carefully inserted his stickpin, brushed a flake of dandruff off his shoulder -- "Listen Polly, do you know the best way to stop falling dandruff? I'll give you a nickel if you can tell me." Greg rattled the loose coins in his trousers. Paul pursed his lips and wrinkled his brow. Greg was ready to go. This was always the pay-off. Greg was at the bedroom door. "Wear a blue serge coat!" Paul blurted, poised on the bed to catch the nickel which Greg tossed to him.

"'Way down yonder in the cor-r-r-n-n field..."

Before he had left the old house Greg had installed electric lights throughout, dangling magic bulbs that glowed instantly when one snapped the buttons on the wall marked "On" and "Off." Gone were the gas lights and the tall old kerosene lamp which stood for so many years on the chiffonier in the back hall to light Oliver into his bedroom when he came home from the saloon late at night and creaked heavily up the back stairs. Discarded was the long-handled lighter that had a paraffin wick and a notched metal end so that the gas lights could be turned on and off without standing on a chair.

That fall Oliver installed a secondhand furnace; an asbestos-clad hot water furnace bristling with doors and dials, whose long fingers probed into every room of the house. Belle raised Paul's allowance to a quarter a week for taking care of it, although it was much easier than ministering to the old coal stoves. Paul eased his conscience by putting it down to war profiteering, a gently growing social phenomenon of the time. The two tall Michigan Garland coal stoves -- "The finest bloody stoves in America, I tell you!" -- were finally sold to old Moses Schwartzberger for junk, and in November Oliver carted the dining-room woodstove, under which a generation of mittens and socks had been dried, up to the Silver Lake hunting camp and oblivion...

But the advent of a furnace and electric lights was as nothing compared to the purchase Oliver had made just after school opened that fall. Oliver -- the lover of horses, who'd always said automobiles were a "goddam

crazy fad" -- Oliver had bought a Model T Ford touring car! It was second-hand, of course, and belonged to Ed Schwemin, the local distributor of Schlitz beer. "Whistling" Ed Schwemin had got it new the summer the War broke out. Then he found he could not learn to drive it. So it had stood in his barn until Elmer Lessard had opened his new garage in Oliver's warehouse. Elmer had given blonde Emma, Ed's buxom daughter, two lessons on how to drive the thing. That was enough for capable Emma. All summer long Emma had been careening around the hilly streets of Chippewa in Ed's Ford, leaving a string of startled citizens and rearing horses in her wake. She lived on Ridge Street, the street north of Paul's house. Paul's brothers called Emma their "Great Big Beautiful Doll" after the song.

The day Oliver bought the car flaxen-haired Emma came racing up Hematite Street, honking the bulbous rubber horn at Paul and Fritz, who were playing in the street. When Emma saw Paul she applied the brakes and almost stood the car upon its brass-nosed radiator. "Want to come for a spin, Polly?" she smiled at him, showing her even, milky-white teeth. "You and your friend there?" She was a good-natured big girl, who always seemed to be blushing. Oliver and Emma's father were good friends. Oliver bought beer from Whistling Ed and occasionally took him to the woods when Ed's tall wife would let him go.

Paul and Fritz huddled on the edge of the cool leather seat in the back. They clutched the robe rack on the rear of the front seat, grinning at each other, as Emma whirled around Jaeger's corner, bounced down across the tracks, past the firehall, out South Pine Street and onto the curving hematite red dirt road that led past Old Frenchtown. "With a squealing of brakes like a stallion in May, She scattered the peasantry out of the way..."

On a sunny afternoon in September 1915 several small boys and some miners' wives in their backyards taking down clothing in Frenchtown Location

were interested to remark the progress of a woman and two boys in a Ford automobile as they watched it leave the road at the abrupt turn into the Trembath mine, careen through a barbed-wire fence, sway crazily across an open field with a portion of the fence, and finally plunge over the yawning crater of an abandoned mine pit.

This was in the days before the people of Chippewa and all America had grown surfeited with the curious pageantry of automobiles careening off highways, ramps and bridges; climbing trees and lamp posts; running against or in front of fast trains; plunging into, through and sometimes out of houses, outbuildings and various public and private structures. So quite a crowd gathered around the rim of the mine pit. The next evening even the Iron Ore recorded the event on the front page, rivalling the news of the startling German defeat of the Russians in Galicia and the Zeppelin raid over England.

> "Miss Emma Schwemin, aged nineteen, daughter of Edward Schwemin, local merchant, and Paul Biegler and Frederic Bellows, both aged twelve, miraculously escaped death and serious injury yesterday when Miss Emma lost control of her father's new Ford touring automobile and plunged down a two-hundred-foot embankment into an abandoned mine pit in Frenchtown Location. Miss Emma was taken to the Chippewa Hospital and treated for bruises but was released this morning. The two boys were none the worse for their harrowing experience. The automobile was badly damaged and was reported purchased by Oliver Biegler, local merchant, for an undisclosed figure."

Belle kept Paul in bed all the next day. She had given up her piano lessons and spent the day hovering over Paul, wavering between anger and solicitude. It appeared that castor oil was a new specific for plunges into mine pits. Towards supper time she brought the newspaper up to his darkened room along with a steaming bowl of barley broth. Paul heard her quick steps on the back stairs. He lay back and closed his eyes and held his thin body rigidly still. Belle came into the room and stood watching him. Paul cautiously raised one slotted eyelid. Belle stood anxiously peering down at him with her gray eyes. She hastily put down the soup bowl and held her head close to his chest.

Paul held his breath. "O my God!" Belle whispered, clutching at his hand. "Wah-wah-what's the matter, Mom," Paul said, blinking his eyes, " -- huh? -- supper time already?" "That stupid, criminal girl," Belle said, referring to Emma. "I never want to see her evil German face again as long as I live!"

Paul sat up in bed and proudly read of his exploit while Belle spooned the scalding soup into him as though he were a baby. "How's Fritz?" Paul asked between mouthfuls. Fritz was going to live. "He was over here before breakfast this morning," Belle said. "I sent him packing -- here, take this broth, you -- you adventurer!"

Oliver had bought Ed Schwemin's wrecked car. Oliver and Whistling Ed had arrived at the mine pit together in Doctor Gourdeau's lather-flecked buggy. Miss Emma, the great big beautiful doll, lay crying on a man's coat, holding her thumb, her blonde hair awry, her great breasts heaving with her sobs. "Papa -- papa," she kept saying. "Oh papa -- papa -- papa..." Some perspiring men were just leading Paul and Fritz out of the pit, from which they had just finished carrying Emma. Whistling Ed looked down at his weeping daughter. He held out his hands and bowed his head in anguish. "I never want to see that hateful contraption again -- oh, my poor baby -- I -- I'll sell the goddam thing for twenty-five dollars -- I'll -- --"

"I'll take it, Ed," Oliver said, walking to the edge of the pit, squinting through narrowed eyes, figuring out the best way to hoist his new car to the surface.

Oliver's elegant carriage, the rubber tired vehicle with the long elliptical springs and fringed top, the one in which he had proposed to Belle, finally went the way of the gas fixtures and the old stoves. In his stormy affections it was promptly replaced by the Ford. The boys were glad to be rid of the carriage and its hateful memories of bleak and wasted Saturdays spent dressing the harnesses, washing and polishing the carriage, greasing the axles, filling the lamps with kerosene and burnishing the reflectors. Then there was the grim ceremony of the Sunday drives.

On summer Sunday afternoons following dinner Oliver would go down to the barn and harness the lively bays, yellow fly netting and all, and drive around to the front of the house under the shade of the rows of tall elms he had planted when he was a young man. If Belle and the boys were not ready and waiting for him he would lean over the side of the sagging carriage and shout for them until they arrived. Belle would sit in the back. "Scrape your feet before you get in," Oliver would darkly warn the boys, who did everything but genuflect before they boarded their father's pride and joy. Then Oliver would touch the quivering rumps of the bays with the tall whip, and whirl all of them around the Iron Cliffs Drive or the Cooper and Deer Lake Drive, or sometimes out to August Schmidt's farm.

Old Schmidt had known Oliver's parents, and he and Oliver would sit and smoke and drink beer and reminisce for hours in Oliver's halting, rusty German, while the boys played in the big barn or tested the progress of old August's apple orchard. Sometimes Belle would play and sing old German airs on the parlor organ. When the sun began to wane and the nighthawks began to swoop they would return home, in stiff and rigid silence. The boys would gleefully wheel the carriage up the ramp into the dusky barn and reverently cover it in its shroud for another gala Sunday, while Oliver unharnessed and fed the bays and bedded them down for the night. That night, if the boys were really unlucky, Belle might initiate another of her Sunday evening musicales...

Elmer Lessard and two of his mechanics helped Oliver tug the stricken Ford out of the mine pit. Brother Link was helping Elmer in the garage that summer but he was not allowed to assist in raising the Ford, much to his relief, because Oliver always maintained that none of his boys "had enough brains to come in out of the rain." Elmer sent to Detroit for parts, and in the interim gave Oliver driving lessons in another Ford. Then one Sunday afternoon before Halloween Oliver was sitting out in front of the house in the rehabilitated Model T, hunched over the tiny wheel, wearing, of all things, a pair of goggles,

owlishly leaning and roaring to Belle and the boys to hurry -- "in the name of a patient and merciful God!" When Belle came out and saw Oliver she had another of her laughing spells, right out on the street, and Paul had to run back and get her Vericolate pills.

This was Sunday.

Yes, Sunday, the day of the spirit, was to Paul the dreariest day of the week, the time of spiritual drought, when dull ritual and empty form took the place of fun and joy and living. He could never forget these dragging, colorless Sundays: Sunday school on Sunday mornings in the damp basement of the Presbyterian church with its stale cupboard smell of a thousand forgotten church suppers; the nasal, wet-lipped evangelistic whine of old Mr. Veale, the Sunday school superintendent, so implacably firm in the conviction of his own salvation, so fanatic in his zeal to confer it on others; the shiny tinny-sounding upright mahogany piano, always out of tune, which accompanied the children's tiny chants -- "Jesus loves me, this I know..." -- the twin bulletin boards on the peeling calsomined walls which recorded last week's attendance and collection, and the 'oh's' and 'ah's' the children were supposed to emit, always with intemperate enthusiasm, when this week's gate receipts were larger; the interminable lessons concerning long-dead people of a far land who had queer, difficult Hebrew names, and who were forever shamelessly 'begatting' one another; the weekly copy of the "Forward" which the children were supposed to read with wild relish and report on the following Sunday.

Sunday: The time of going to church with Belle and sitting for an endless dreary hour or more listening to Mr. Hayward, the minister, shouting and droning through his sermon like a tired actor, discharging his neatly prepared syllogisms of unassailable theology, in winter to the accompaniment of clanking steam pipes and hissing radiators, in summer to the noisy chirpings and mating cries and rich throat warblings of the sparrows and robins in the lacy vines and rustling trees just outside the tilted open stained glass windows.

The minister always began his sermons with a matter-of-fact quotation of Biblical verse. Paul was never fooled by this. Then Mr. Hayward would pause and stare at the congregation. He would hold this staring thyroid pause so long that Paul would wildly fear that the man had taken a fit, a fainting spell, or had fallen into a sudden cataleptic trance. Then, when Paul had abandoned all prospect of the man's going forward, and waited hopefully for Mr. Veale to pad up and take him away, Mr. Hayward would repeat the verse, this time in an entirely changed accent and in a lowered, sepulchral tone of voice. It was a deceit which always made Paul flush with shame. In this false, assumed, unnatural accent and voice, which sometimes rose to a petulant quaver, he would proceed through the entire sermon, while Paul slowly counted the light bulbs in the three sprouting brass chandeliers -- they always came to thirty-seven -- retallied the pipes in the organ, the number of bald heads present, his consciousness occasionally swimming up to the sermon when he thought that surely all the sin in the world must now be cleansed, all doubt finally resolved. "Now he's going to quit," Paul would think to himself. "-- this time he's surely going to stop -- here's a peachy place for him to end!" -- but the near town clock would heavily bong the noon hour and Mr. Hayward would drone on and on, and Paul would dully wonder if Mr. Hayward ever washed his ears.

Paul might then desperately fall to reading the memorials on the stained glass windows -- "In memory of Minnie Grew Tucker, wife, 1854-1907"" -- that made the poor lady fifty-three when she croaked -- and then Belle would be miraculously plucking him to his feet for the final hymn. Mr. Hayward then gave the benediction to the bowed congregation and would ~~hurriedly~~ creak on elaborate tiptoe, like a stage footpad, to the back of the church, Paul peeking sideways at him in head-hanging fascination. During his adagio down the patched red-carpeted aisle the choir put a brief musical seal upon the minister's words. Then Mrs. Vivian would boom out wild music on the organ, much to

Paul's delight. When it was time to go, this was the one time he wanted to stay and listen. The released congregation suddenly resumed life once again, just as though nothing had happened, and shook hands and chatted with one another and gradually sifted out past poor tired Mr. Hayward, haggard and spent from his spiritual labors, shaking his limp moist hand, congratulating him on his sermon, enquiring after Mrs. Hayward and the endless brood of little Haywards who lived in the little mortgaged manse at the top of Blueberry Hill.

"My, how you've grown, Lincoln," Mr. Hayward would say to Paul, confusing him with his brother Link, taking his small hand and gently passing him toward the exit. "Mrs. Biegler, it's so good to see you with us again this Sunday. Oh, thank you -- yes -- why Mrs. Davis -- --" and Paul would suddenly be out in the clean open air, free once again, fighting the goatish impulse to shout and yell and whistle and leap high into the air...

Sometimes the usual Sunday tedium of church would be relieved by a visiting missionary, usually a gaunt, hungry man, with blazing, visionary eyes, who had spent years in the Far East. Generally there was a tired little wife who hovered and smiled in the background, patiently herding their children, who were dressed in the habits of the distant place from which they had come. The missionary would invariably have lantern slides showing "our missionary headquarters in Canton" or some exotic place, and the throngs of converts: graceful Indians, wound in yards of cloth, thin, staring Chinese, and doll-like, hobbling, innocent-faced little Japanese -- all so quaint and harmless -- who had flocked to enlist under the banner of the Lord. To Paul there was magic in these pictures.

The showing of the slides would be embellished with a running comment of tenderous antiseptic humor by the missionary. "That's little Fang and his mother going to Sunday School! How would you like to come to church on your mama's back? Heh, heh, heh..." Paul would glance at Belle and try to picture her toting him

up Blueberry Hill, his skinny legs dragging on the ground. Then the shutter would finally click, the church chandeliers give out their coppery glow. There would be a special prayer, then, followed by a special offering -- taken up by the missionary's scampering children -- to carry on the work of those who brought His word to the lost and benighted of those far and distant lands. Paul was once more back in Chippewa...

There was a dry and dusty poverty about these Sundays that filled Paul with dismay and stirred in his young heart a growing doubt that in this dead and joyless ritual lay the way to celebrate the stirring, awful, tragic legend of Jesus, the gentle son of God. These church men were professionals, he felt, who had helped to annotate the Lord and all his works, and who quietly created the impression that they had an "in" with Him, that they had known Him man and boy, that He was a sort of spiritual Santa Claus who would remember the good little boys and girls... Yes, that somehow they were practically lodge brothers, and if you paid your dues regularly and didn't miss too many meetings mind you, why, they would "fix it up" to reveal Him to you. It was all very comfy and cozy and, Paul felt even then, just a little obscene. He never expressed these views to Belle. He sensed how necessary to her was her faith, and how cruelly his misgivings would have hurt her.

3/14/44

CHAPTER 10.

Oliver's warehouse on Canada Street was one of those fated structures which abound in the small towns of America, in which no enterprise ever succeeded. There was a "hant" on the place, and insolvency and despair was the portion of any optimistic soul who sought to dispute it. For years Oliver had been trying vainly to get a tenant in the place who could continue to pay his rent after the first month. Oliver enjoyed the heady feeling of being a landlord. And it gave him an opportunity to use the jealous knowledge of higher education he had gained in Milwaukee years before: his course in double-entry bookkeeping. Oliver kept an elaborate set of books, recording the minutest transactions in his beautiful copperplate handwriting. "To Martin Hallgren -- one seccond hand slay for farm.....$4.75."

The old two-story frame building had been built by Paul's grandfather Biegler years before as a storage place for his beer. Grandpa Biegler had lived but a year or so after it was completed. He was the first of a long procession of occupants. The warehouse had a damp and moldy stone-walled basement with a stone floor. The ground floor had a large work room in front, and in the rear there was a series of flimsily partitioned rooms, more like cages or coops. The front work room was lighted by a rippling expanse of pigeon-stained windows covering the entire front from the ceiling to the floor and broken only by tall narrow double-doors in the middle. There was a sliding side door in the alleyway and wide double-doors in the rear opening out into the barnyard beyond which stood Oliver's horsebarn. The upstairs was a storage room, which Oliver never rented with the rest of the buildings, and which he kept fanatically barred and locked from prying tenants. This loft was a place of creaking pine rafters and fluttering pigeons. The three floors were joined by a partitioned great-wheeled elevator which ran through the center of the building and was operated by hand with an endless rope.

This jealously guarded upstairs was packed to the rafters with a most curious assortment of articles. There were piles of used lumber: planks and

laths and old flooring with the nails still in them; old carpets and mattresses and bed-springs; scores of cigar boxes of rusty nails and screws, old keys and washers and broken locks, each duly labelled by Oliver in blue crayon; old furniture and heaping barrels of dusty dishes and pewter from the home of Oliver's parents; battered and bulging trunks full of old clothing and letters in faded handwriting; a packing-case of Uncle Karl's photographic equipment; an old clamped and leather-bound German Bible which weighed almost as much as Paul. There were odds and ends from the brewery and obsolete saloon fixtures: various tanks, meters and valves, copper vats and an old pool table, a rack of tipless cues, beer pumps, miscellaneous tables and chairs, chandeliers...

From the cobwebbed rafters dangled a dozen or more large Alaskan kerosene lamps which formerly adorned the brewery and saloon, and pails partly filled with hardened paint left by a former tenant. There was a rusty weight-lifting machine from the saloon -- Oliver could once ring its bell with one arm -- and also a kerosene-lighted early slot machine of picture views of "Paris at Night." Paul's brothers had long since pilfered the pictures of the fine plump ladies. There was a row of old wooden wall telephones each a yard high, and a pile of tombstones, both left by former tenants. The list was endless. There was even a dust-covered racing sulky with hard-rubber tires, a memento of the days when Oliver used to race at the County Fair. Over all of this silent museum lay a thick covering of dust mingled with pigeon droppings. This was the building for which Oliver endlessly stove to find a paying tenant...

"This here place is centrally located," Oliver would say to some hapless prospective tenant, as they prowled about the warehouse, roping themselves up and down the elevator, poking about the smelly damp basement. Paul hung in the background to watch the familiar ritual. "An' it's nice and close to the railroad tracks, too," Oliver would add. And indeed it was. If it were any

closer to the railroad tracks Paul was sure it would have been run over. The building shuddered to the foundations with every passing train.

When he was trying to rent the place Oliver became as gentle and full of guile as an artful woman. He would grow falsely pensive, drawing the palm of his big hand under his chin, dubiously shaking his head, drawing down his lower lip, blinking his eyes. Paul was held in a kind of thrall. "But I sorta hate to let the place go again." Chuckling. "You see -- hAh! -- I got all my tools and woods paraphernalia here." Serious again, shaking his head. "No-o-o- I guess I can't..." Paul brightened. It looked like the deal was off. Then there would be a sudden note of firm resolution, a square and manly lift of the head. Oliver would look the prospective tenant straight in the eye. Enough of this childish indecision. "I'll tell you what, man -- I shouldn't do it, but I'll let you have it! Hell, I'll move my things again -- just to help you out, friend. Here -- I got a little lease all drawn up." Softly. "What do you say?" It seemed almost a shame for a tenant to take advantage of Oliver. Yet no gentleman could resist this generous sacrifice. It had become a point of honor. "What do you say, man?"

At this juncture Oliver would produce a ninety-nine-year lease which he had painfully typed out with one finger at his desk down at the saloon on an ancient machine which was the residuary legacy of a former tenant of the warehouse. This typewriter stammered, automatically repeating each letter in an engaging lavendar ink. But Oliver did not seem to mind. Paul thought that perhaps Oliver hoped the document would thereby be doubly binding. "You sign on that there line there," Oliver would say, professionally pointing at the lease he had copied out of Maitland's "Every Man His Own Lawyer." Oliver had a deep distrust of all attorneys -- "bloody connivers" he called them -- and would pit his Maitland against the Supreme Court itself, any day in the week. Paul once estimated that if all of the ninety-nine-year leases which had been put on the place were laid end for end that the millenium could not be far behind. It was a ghastly thought...

Paul waited in quiet awe, watching the master at work. The helpless prospect would stand staring down at Oliver's lavendar lease. Paul held his breath, whispering over and over to himself, "Don't sign, don't sign, you poor fool... Don't you know you'll go broke... The place is bewitched... It'll mean we got to move all this bloody junk around again -- -- Oh, there, he's signing it... Oh Lord, there goes another one..." Oliver would triumphantly fold the lease and put it away and shake hands with his new tenant. "I'm tellin' you -- you're gettin' a real bargain, mister. Nice an' close to the tracks an' ever'thin'..." Paul thought it was unfair, it was no match, that somehow a black form of hypnosis entered in these transactions. This ceremony of the ninety-nine-year lease was virtually a semi-annual affair.

The old warehouse mutely bore the evidences of the host of tenants who had briefly roosted there. Wistfully hopeful plumbers, blacksmiths, fuel dealers, feed merchants, horse traders -- once even a local telephone company and a travelling evangelist had paused there. Their number was legion. The place still stank from the rotten apples abandoned by a disconsolate fruit merchant who had finally fled Chippewa with his pretty blonde bookkeeper. Since he was a married man with a large brood of children, the authorities had been obliged to bring him back. Oliver appeared as a witness down at Circuit Court and joyously testified against the unhappy man. Paul wondered if the blonde bookkeeper might not have had something to do with it. Oliver was ever a solicitous landlord... The walls of the warehouse were bedizened with great gobs of paint left by a partnership of bankrupt decorators. They had also left a large farewell sign painted on the wall inviting their landlord to go to hell. "O. Biegler can go plumb to Hell!" Oliver, in a wild rage, had in turn painted this over in a mottled robin's egg blue. The upstairs floor groaned with the weight of the brownstone tombstones left by a defunct monument company. One of these drab red stones, a little marker with a child's head carved on it, read simply "Paul." In bed at night Paul indulged in dark speculations on the reasons why Oliver kept it...

When the desperate tenants would finally abandon the warehouse, jumping the lease, leaving ninety-eight or more years of the term dangling in midair, they were usually so deep in Oliver's debt, so eager to get hence from the damp and malodorous building, so filled with black despair, that they usually left all manner of their belongings behind them -- like dazed war refugees fleeing before an advancing enemy. By some uncanny instinct Oliver had these wild flights timed to the day, often to the very hour.

As Oliver sensed that another beautiful landlord and tenant relationship was drawing to a close, he would employ various diabolical shifts and ruses to hasten the evacuation. In this way more loot was apt to be left behind. One of his favorite strategems, as the zero hour approached, was to dispatch some sad-eyed barfly from the saloon up to the warehouse to casually drop the word that Oliver had left that morning to spend the day at camp. "But he belongs to be gettin' back now most anytime before dark," he would add. This last bit of intelligence was vital to create confusion and the need for haste. After planting these sinister seeds the barfly would leave. His departure would invariably be followed by a wild and hurried final exit from the premises, the frantic tenant usually trying to remove all of his possessions in one groaning drayload on Cornishman Benny Gobb's dray.

In the meantime Oliver would be waiting down at the saloon, pacing up and down, peering out the alley door, getting periodic bulletins on the course of the retreat from his boozy accomplice. Almost before the harried tenant had rounded the corner of Tilford's Drug Store on Main and Canada Streets, precariously hanging from Benny Gobb's dray,
Oliver would descend on the place, invoking some mysterious provision of his lease, putting new secondhand locks on all the doors, and gleefully appropriating everything that had been left behind. Paul felt certain that Oliver enjoyed gathering in this miscellaneous swag infinitely more than he ever did receiving his regular rent payments. Oliver would stride about the littered and deserted place, poking into boxes, peering in drawers and cubbyholes, grunting

and ahing over each new surprise. "My, my -- a nice new cribbage board an' a deck of cards! An' poker chips! No wonder that there lazy bastard failed -- settin' around on his fat prat all day playin' cards! Ah -- look what we have here..."

There was always this thrill of discovery, of unexpected treasure, like the time the Chippewa Monument Works had left behind the ghastly row of tombstones. Oliver had gloated over them like a ghoul. It was this same establishment that had forsaken the stuttering typewriter, along with boxes full of unused pads of gummed order blanks for tombstones, all in triplicate, first on white paper, then pale green, then pink. All through the lower grades in school Paul had been obliged to use the backs of these hateful order blanks in place of tablets. Oliver had put an inventory value on each pad and doled them out to Paul, six at a time, scrupulously crediting the transaction to this ancient rent account in his double-entry books. Oliver was not going to be hoisted on the petard of his own lease, despite the fact that the poor flown monument men were probably long since sleeping under their last tombstone. There were still a few of the pads left -- but one afternoon just the fall before in seventh grade Paul had finally foresworn using them ever again.

It had come about this way: Paul was sitting at his desk in school. It was a late study period, and nearly time for school to let out. He had been drawing pictures on one of his pads, as he often did. This time it was a picture of the South Camp. He turned the pad over and examined the printing on the blanks as he had done scores of times. Musing over the blank he idly fell to filling out one of the tomstone order blanks to fit his school teacher, sweet, tired Miss Lindquist, of whom he was very fond. He had subconsciously chosen her, simply because she was standing up there in front of him. It helped to pass the time and was more fun than studying. Paul warmed to his task, filling in each blank space. "NAME: 'Karen Lindquist'; DATE OF DEATH: 'October 2nd'; DATE OF BIRTH: 'The Lord knows, being her childhood contemporary, but He won't tell'; TYPE OF MONUMENT: 'Consult my old man, the

used-magnate monument of Chippewa'; SIZE OF MONUMENT: 'One that will be sure to hold the old girl down'; INSCRIPTION: 'Here lies a maiden lass, She never had a pi-- -- -- '"

So much Paul had written, absorbed in his idle composition, oblivious that Miss Lindquist had silently padded around the room and stood behind him, reading the glowing specifications of her own tomstone over his shoulder. There was a strangled moan, and Paul wheeled about to see Miss Lindquist, grown deathly pale, supporting herself between two desks. She stared down at Paul with bright horrified eyes, as though he were a reptile, a feeling about himself which he quickly shared with her. She tottered and seemed about to collapse.

"Oh, Miss Lindquist -- --" Paul began, rising and reaching out to assist her. He wildly feared that the tombstone order might not be in vain. "Don't touch me!" Miss Lindquist shrilled, shrinking away from him as from a leper. "You -- you monstrous youth... Oh, how could you do this to me... And -- and such a sweet good m-mother, too..." The stricken woman had finally found relief in tears. Paul's misery was boundless. The dismissal bell sounded in the corridor, and Miss Lindquist vaguely waved the bewildered children out of the room. She still stood weeping by Paul's desk. Paul hung back, burning with shame, and then hurried from the classroom. Fritz was waiting for him in the hall, his pale blue eyes round and staring with curiosity. "Hully gee, Polly, what did you do? -- goose her with your jack-knife?"

Paul fought a hysterical impulse to shout and whinny and leap and swear -- and even to go back in the room and do just what Fritz had feared he might have done. This was the end -- why hold back now... He thrust the fateful tombstone order at Fritz. Fritz's eyes bulged as he read on. "Oh my gawd, Polly," he whispered, "she didn't read this! Oh my gawd..." Paul nodded his head, pursing his lips tightly, seeking to control himself. Little gusts and blurts of laughter constricted his bowels and welled up his throat and

beat against his pressed lips. Paul feared he was going to get one of Belle's helpless laughing spells, and this very fear seemed to add a sort of macabre comedy to the situation.

Miss Lindquist slowly came out of her room, wearing her wraps and dabbing her red eyes with a knotted wet handkerchief. Fritz silently faded down the hallway. Paul's teacher stood in the dusky corridor, staring dully at Paul, sniffling, fighting back her tears. A wisp of damp gray hair hung down his forehead. All the laughter drained from Paul in an instant. Miss Lindquist looked so lost and forlorn that he wanted to throw his arms about her and cry with her. In a flash of perception he saw her as one of the brave procession of unselfish women, the school teachers of the world: loveless, lonely, misunderstood; sensitive, patient, intelligent; often blamed for faults which inhered in a creaking educational system and not in them; constantly paying the price of spinsterhood, not despite but <u>because</u> of their very pride and superior endowments; patiently guiding and developing the children of lesser women who happened to be more adroit after dark; lavishing on the ungrateful brats of these other women their starved and thwarted affections... All of these things swept over Paul in a wave of understanding. He had never before in his life felt such sympathy and humility -- and such abject shame...

"Oh Miss Lindquist," Paul heard himself saying in a croaking voice that didn't sound like his own, "from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for what I did... Please believe me that it was entirely thoughtless -- I -- I didn't realize..." Paul stopped, the words clogging in his throat. He knew what he wanted to say but he could not say it. He impulsively clutched at her hand and held it. "Next to my mother, Miss Lindquist -- I think you're one of the finest ladies I ever knew. Honest cross my heart, Miss Lindquist..." Then Paul turned and blindly ran out of the school, Fritz falling in beside him. Paul did not stop running. The two boys ran all the way downtown to the cigar

shop. Paul wanted to laugh and he wanted to cry. On the way to Bernie's shop Paul pledged Fritz to black secrecy. The next day Miss Lindquist acted as though nothing had ever happened. She even nodded and smiled brightly at Paul when she saw him come in the next morning with his new writing tablet.

THE BURNING EARTH

A Novel By

ROBERT TRAVER

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

-- George Santayana.

The politicians in Congress huffed and puffed and blew through their whiskers -- and offered Michigan the U. P. as a compromise. Michigan was cut to the quick. The Upper Peninsula! That howling wilderness of snow and cold! Why, it wasn't even physically attached to Michigan -- look at the Straits of Mackinac which separated the two! Anyway, gentlemen, our fine neighbor, Wisconsin, already owns the U. P. Perish the sordid thought.

But, alas! Congress discovered that Wisconsin was delighted to abandon its foundling on Michigan's doorstep. Michigan ruefully concluded that it wanted statehood more than the coveted Ohio strip, so when Michigan was finally admitted to the Union in 1837 she found that she possessed -- literally as a political afterthought -- a three-hundred-odd-mile-long appendage attached to the northern tip of her mitten -- the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The lusty young state of Michigan determined to make the best of a bad bargain. She would look and see what was on this damned Peninsula. What was there to these ancient rumors of copper and iron deposits? In 1841 a young state geologist called Douglass Houghton was sent North, following the old Indian trails, and during the next three years he discovered large deposits of copper in the Lake Superior region. In 1844 a surveyor called William Burt observed his compass making frantic gyrations as he and his party stood on a lofty peninsula hill near what later became Negaunee. Surveyor Burt nodded at his companions. Only the presence of iron could account for that phenomenon.

The following year another group of explorers came to the Lake Superior district to locate an iron mine on Burt's magnetic hill. After frantic search the party could find neither the hill nor the iron. A runner was then sent to L'Anse to get Marji Gesick, chief of the Chippewas living there. This old Indian, sometimes called Chief Kobogum, was reputed to know every foot of the territory. Kobogum returned with the runner and, after a preliminary powwow and exchange of gifts at the explorers' camp at the mouth of the River du Mort on Lake Superior, Kobogum led them inland to Teal Lake. Thence he turned south

Chap 3 – P. 6 – add "go" – bottom

Chap 4 – P. 4 – add "in his sandpile – bottom

and climbed the remarkable iron bluff which William Burt had crossed the previous year. The party stood on a mountain of solid iron ore. "Here!" old Kobogum said in Indian. Chief Kobogum returned to his tribe and his three wives at L'Anse, bearing his gifts, and the white men founded the Jackson Mine, the earliest of the Peninsula's fabulous iron mines.

So after countless brooding centuries, the first of the Peninsula's rich copper and iron deposits had been found. More discoveries followed in quick succession. Michigan's fathers broached a cask of rum and congratulated themselves on their wisdom, their acute vision. That ancient Cinderella of the North, the Upper Peninsula, had at last been found by her dream prince!

Nature compressed her thin lips, smiled wryly, then shrugged and turned away. After all she had kept her secret a long, long time. How many million years was it? Ho hum. If worst came to worst she could always conjure up a new ice sheet or two. But first she really must go West and investigate the intriguing possibilities of these dust storms. That was a new wrinkle. The Peninsula could wait a bit. Nature could bide her time...

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* * *

It was supper time. Outside it was dark, a windy fall night. Oliver and five of the boys were seated around the long dining-room table. There was one empty place -- the chair of Lincoln, the quiet one; he was late. Paul sat in his junior high chair, as usual on his father's left, next to the chimney-sighing dining-room stove. Paul could smell cloves on his father's breath. With her bounding grace, red-faced Amanda had brought in the boiled dinner, and Oliver and the boys were eating in stony silence. Devoutly all of the boys wished that Lincoln would stay away until Oliver had finished supper and returned to the saloon. Then there was the familiar click of the kitchen door, the rattle of the loose pane, the whish of clothing carefully hung on the rack over the woodbox, and Lincoln slipped into his seat at the table, his gray eyes fixed on his empty plate.

With terrible calm Oliver turned and glanced up at the old Seth Thomas clock. His lower lip began to pout, the blister on it turned a mottled dark purple. The boys had given up any pretense of eating. Their food gagged them. They simply sat and waited. Biegler-wise Amanda had quietly locked herself in her bedroom off the kitchen. "Ay vill marry Axel nex' veek!" Paul heard the inside door lock of her bedroom softly click. The tenseness had whipped his perceptions to an uncanny acuteness. The boys waited for Oliver to speak. Or was this to be one of those awful silent scenes? Paul sat in an agony of awareness of impending disaster. <u>Here</u> -- it was coming...

Oliver had put down his knife and fork so that they slanted off the edge of his plate. With his big hands he pushed his chair back and circled the table. He stood over abject, numbed Lincoln. Paul held his breath, his throat was dry and constricted, he wanted to swallow. Then Oliver raised his hand and struck Lincoln flush on the face with the back of his hand. Lincoln reeled from the blow, then recovered and looked up swiftly, briefly, at Paul. Their eyes flickered in mute misery -- there had always been an inarticulate bond between them. Lincoln's cheek had turned a patchy greenish-white pallor

Belle married Oliver on Midsummer's Day in St. Xavier's church. The ceremony was blessed by Father Keul, and Oliver took his music-teacher to his big frame house on Hematite Street and told his three young sons, "Here is your new mother." They had stood and stared at her. Red-headed Gregory had burst out crying. The following March Belle presented Oliver with their first son. Grandpa Fraleigh, the seed salesman, had fought in the Civil War, and had been a prisoner in notorious Andersonville prison. So the first child was Lincoln. In less than two years Nicholas was born. That appropriately took care of the memory of Grandpa Nicholas Biegler, the brewer. Then had followed Katherine, the little girl who had died of "convulsions" while teething. Then Belle had gone to Chicago where Doctor Murphy removed her left breast; a cancer of the breast, he said it was. On her return Doctor Gourdeau insisted that she have a separate bedroom and not to have, under any circumstances, another child. When Paul came along, Doctor Gourdeau was beside himself with rage.

"Dat 'ulking brute -- dat 'uge German beast -- I tol' you 'e should 'ave wan beeg t'rashin'!" he said, flashing his dark French eyes.

It was a sentiment which Paul was to warmly share with him many times.

CHAPTER 3.

The summer that Paul was eleven he was as usual shocked and surprised to discover that he had been admitted into sixth grade, into the room of Miss Eddy, the principal of Ridge Street School. "I passed, Mom, I passed!" he shouted, waving his "promotion card" that fine June day. But he was even more gratified at this evidence of advancing manhood. Paul was anxious to grow up for three reasons: He wanted to be able to play with his older brothers; he wanted to be a big, strong man like Oliver; and he wanted to be a great writer like James Oliver Curwood.

There seemed little prospect that any of these ambitions would soon be realized. Paul was a gangling, big-eyed youngster, small-boned like Belle, and his thin arms and spindly legs, in their corduroy knickerbockers, looked like the stems of old Pat Lyons' clay pipes. He also had weak kidneys, and still occasionally wet the bed at night, a condition which Belle ruefully lay, like the indictments in his school books, to his early bout with alcohol. Belle sought to use him as a walking laboratory for her latest health concoctions -- "Mother's got to put some flesh on your poor little bones, son" -- and she once even tried to persuade Oliver to buy a goat. She had just read an illustrated newspaper account in "The Iron Ore" of a 115-year-old Turk who had got that way from drinking and eating vast quantities of goat's milk and cheese. After studying the picture of the venerable Turk, Paul was for once humbly grateful to hear his father's thunderous no.

"You read too much, son," Belle would say to him constantly, and it was probably true. Too much, that is, but not always too well. Long ago Paul had read all of the Brownie Books, the Billy Whiskers series, and every book of fairy tales in the Chippewa Carnegie Library. "Andrew Carnegie's library!" Oliver would roll his eyes and shout, being a slavish admirer of Teddy Roosevelt and his big stick. "Out of all the millions of tons of ore he took out of this bloody town, that's the only goddam thing he ever sent back!"

Paul had romped through Horatio Alger until he thought that some special destiny lay ahead for his little schoolmates who wore a certain kind of clothes -- clothes that were "threadbare but clean and neatly patched." Poverty became the golden spring from which all ambition flowed... His shabby schoolmates, Paul concluded, were all hellbent for marrying the boss's daughter and getting elected to Congress -- a prospect which even then left Paul quite cold. Then had come the saga of Tom Swift and his adventures with miscellaneous giants, fantastic inventions and infernal machines, which ran into many volumes. Nor did the groaning library shelves devoted to the checkered boyhood of the Rover Boys escape him -- Dick, Tom and Sam Rover. Serious-minded Dick was the oldest, and timelessly in love -- in a pure, Eagle Scout sort of way -- with a curiously sexless creature named Dora Stanhope. The brothers Rover and little Dora were constantly being harried and badgered by the diabolical machinations of a bully called Dan Baxter, ably assisted by a "toady" whose name had finally escaped Paul. There were so many...

Paul waded through the opium dreams of Jules Verne and a gelded version of "The Arabian Nights." Then came the thralldom of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer! Belle couldn't even get Paul to his meals during that magic time. More lately he had discovered, much to Belle's approval, the Great Out-of-doors -- "Run out and play, son -- don't read so much" -- and by turns Paul became Hopalong Cassidy, who could whirl and shoot the eye out of a gopher at seventy paces; a big game hunter on the South African veldt; then the slugging hero of "The Spoilers." He soon became a vicarious authority on all manner of cattle brands, breeds of Alaskan sled dogs, and the manifold forms of successful placer mining. Tarzan had not yet emitted his first curdling jungle shriek to a startled and expectant world.

As he read these floods of books, and many more, Paul yearned to see these far places -- and then to write about them like the gifted authors he had read. It seemed to him the ideal life: to see; to experience; and then to tell. It was easy. All one needed was a stub pencil and a Big Chief writing

tablet... James Oliver Curwood was his latest literary idol. Paul shivered with Curwood's stalwart heroes as they mushed out of the frozen North, their frosty dragon breaths trailing after them as they shouted to their faithful dogs -- racing, ever racing to get across the big Mackenzie before the spring breakup... The closest Paul had yet got to achieving the burning thrill of literary expression was a story he had written the year before in fifth grade. After considerable pencil biting he had finally entitled this effort, "Lost All Night In a Swamp With a Bear." Following that there had seemed but little to add, except possibly "gr-r-r," but Miss Welch had liked it and had even read it aloud to the class. After all, it was a start...

Paul felt that Belle was partly to blame for these incipient literary yearnings. Just two summers before she had written a scenario for the moving pictures. There was little that Paul doubted his mother could not do -- she could make the best orange sherbet in the world, run a big house full of boys, give scores and hundreds of music lessons, not to mention two recitals a year -- and even live with Oliver. And now she had added authorship to her accomplishments. It was true. Paul had actually seen her in the desperate throes of literary creation, had even hefted the heavy finished manuscript tied with blue ribbons which had been typed at night by Miss Casey, Lawyer Belden's stenographer. There was one thick copy for a breathless Hollywood, another copy for Belle, and the third for Orville.

"Orville" was Orville Trembath -- "my collaborator," Belle called him -- the son of spry, deaf little Mrs. Trembath, one of Belle's old friends and neighbors. Mrs. Trembath dyed her hair and wore the only ear trumpet Paul had ever seen. Her son Orville was an actor. He had been "in stock" and was home "resting between engagements." He was a pallid, languid young man, with dark patches under his eyes, who reminded Paul of a picture of the man who shot Lincoln which he had seen in Leslie's Magazine Yearbook. Paul never warmed up very much to Orville. And he had finally been insulted by him.

* * *

Paul had been swimming all afternoon out at distant Cooper Lake. The walk home had been hot and dusty. He was late for supper and he was hungry. His brothers were even later than he. Of course they all knew that Oliver was out at the South Camp on another of his endless fishing trips. Paul ran in on the side porch into the dining-room. There was no supper on the table. It was Thursday, the hired girl's afternoon out. "Mom must be having one of her sick spells," Paul thought. It was quiet in the big house and smelled of freshly baked cookies. Paul peered anxiously into the front rooms. There were Belle and Orville. Belle sat at her high secretary in the parlor writing furiously. Sheets of paper lay scattered on the parlor rug. A slanting shaft of light from the sinking sun poured upon the parlor floor. Orville had maneuvered himself into this glow of dusty light, holding the precious script in his hands. He cleared his throat. Belle stopped writing and removed her nose glasses. She sat looking dreamily out the side window at Lindstroms' woodpile. Orville's hands were trembling, he began to speak, his voice was low and vibrant, like Reverend Hayward's at the Presbyterian Church. On and on he read. Paul was held, fascinated, caught in a fiend's clutch. He was witnessing the birth of Literature. Orville paused, glanced down, and shifted with the sun. He had come to <u>the part</u>:

> "(Old Doctor Simpson removes his stethoscope and gently pulls the white sheet over little Ella's still, white face. He turns to Ella's weeping mother, throws out one hand and bows his head.)
>
> "(Caption) 'Mrs. Worthington -- this is the end -- little Ella's suffering is finally -- --'"

At this point Paul shouted, "Ma, I'm awful hungry -- please give me something to eat!" As a matter of fact Paul had quite lost his appetite, but some irresistible impulse had compelled him to speak.

Orville wheeled on Paul -- Orville never executed mere turns -- and looked at him, slowly, scornfully, up and down. There was a pregnant pause.

"Listen, kiddo," he finally said, " -- go peddle your papers!" Then he turned abruptly on his heel. Paul waited for a curtain to drop. Instead Belle had dropped everything and rushed out to the kitchen. Paul saw that her fingers were stained with ink. She had a smudge on her cheek. She had given Paul a fine supper, one of her magical suppers, with not a single one of her health recipes in it -- a supper topped off by fresh cookies and toast and tea and her own grape marmalade. As he lazily ate, Paul reflected disloyally that perhaps Belle might be a better cook than she was a writer.

The death of little Ella had had to wait... In fact as far as Hollywood seemed concerned this particular Ella seemed destined to live to a ripe old age. In despair over repeated rejections Orville had finally gone back on the road. Hollywood! Hollywood was the home of the morally warped, the intellectually blighted, the artistically dead. Belle was convinced that the crafty moving picture people, full of envy and low cunning, had stolen her brain-child. After that every time she went to a picture in McNulty's Opera House in which a small child departed this life -- and the infant mortality rate in the movies of the time had reached epidemic proportions -- she would indignantly whisper "Plagiarism!" and take Paul's reluctant small hand and hurry from the place. Once she even went to see Lawyer Belden about it...

Yet these dreams of virile manhood and literary fame were fleeting and seemed far off. They could wait. Most of all Paul wanted to grow a little and be able to play with his brothers Link and Nicky and their jolly companions. His brothers and their friends always did such wonderful things: Building shacks in the woods for the "gang"; or making big, greenish, foul-smelling wet-cell batteries to run their telegraph sets; or selling magazines to all their parents' friends to win some big prize, just as illustrated: a new bat and catcher's glove or an erector set or a magic lantern; or giving carnivals

and circuses at which they sold lemonade; or perhaps gathering and selling empty whiskey bottles back to the saloons -- four cents for quarts, two cents for pints... But grow as he might (and Paul was nearly as tall as Nicky, who was fifteen), his brothers always kept ahead of him. And they didn't seem to want him around. Nicky was the worst. Link was rarely gruff with Paul, and sometimes tolerantly let him tag along when the gang went swimming. But Nicky, two years younger than Link, was jealous of his seniority over Paul. Nicky used all sorts of clever ruses to get rid of Paul. All of them did. Paul had lately guessed that the gang did not really want him. "That's it," Paul bitterly thought, "they don't want me." It was always the same.

School was to open in just a few weeks. Link and Nicky and the Cooley boys and Dick Crabbe were going out to Fire Center near the Big Dead river to tent for a week and pick blueberries. Paul wanted to go. Belle had finally said he could if it was all right with Oliver. It was all right with Oliver -- "I'll be glad to get the lazy whelps out of my sight!" -- but Paul didn't go berrying at Fire Center.

"Listen, Mom," Paul had come in and overheard Nicky pleading with Belle. They were in the sitting room. Belle was sitting in her rocker by the window to the left of the tall mirror. Paul quietly breathed through his mouth and stood by the dining-room stove and listened. "Listen, Mom, please don't make us take Polly along. Please!" Nicky was saying. "He'll spoil it all. Mrs. Cooley don't make us lug Edgerton all over. Dick Crabbe's Ma don't make us nursemaids for Donny. Why don't he play with the kids his own age?"

"The word is 'doesn't'," Belle said. Paul could hear her rocker creaking.

"Anyway, Mom," Nicky ran on hopefully, shrewdly trading on Belle's concern for "her baby," "there's bears out there -- big, black bears!"

Paul quietly leaned and peered and saw Belle purse her lips to keep from smiling. "Well, Nicholas, if that's the case maybe it's too dangerous to let any of you -- don't you think?"

"No, no, Mom -- they ain't that bad -- the bears, I mean," Nicky said. "It's just -- you know he's scared of the dark -- it's just that Polly will get lonesome at night and bawl. And he'll -- he'll pee all over the bedding -- oh, can't you see, Mom!"

Paul tiptoed out to the kitchen, and slipped out the back door, letting the screen door gently close. His ears were hot, his cheeks were flaming. He walked over and sat on the clothesreel platform, dangling his legs, back and forth. His corduroy trousers made a noise as they rubbed at the knees. His thoughts were racing, his heart was filled with bitterness. "They don't want me. They don't like me. Nobody likes me. I'm a stranger in this house. I'm not even their child... They found me one morning when I was a baby -- lying on the back porch... Maybe my father was a famous author passing through Chippewa on his way to Alaska. But they won't tell me -- they're keeping it from me. I might as well run away... Nobody wants me... I don't belong here -- --"

"Why don't you run and skip and play, son?"

It was Belle; she had come out and was standing on the back porch smiling at him. She was forever trying to make a bounding little faun out of him. "Go bounce your ball off the roof. Don't sit there dreaming to yourself."

Paul sat watching his mother. She was smiling at him, making eager little nods. She was wearing a house dress -- it was cleaning day -- and had neglected to put on the false corset thing she usually wore after her first operation -- when her breast had been removed. The left side of her chest was flat like a man's. Paul looked away. He saw an ant rapidly carrying a dead fly towards the clothesreel. The fly was twice as big as the ant.

"I was just thinking, Mom," Paul slowly said. "I was just thinking that I don't want to go berry picking." Paul watched his thin legs as they kicked back and forth. "I was just thinking it was a lot more fun staying at home."

Paul looked up at his mother. Belle stood on the back porch smiling brightly and still nodding at him, with her head slightly tilted. A long dimple showed in her right cheek. "I've got the same dimple in my cheek," Paul thought. "Everybody says I look like Mom. I'm really her son. They didn't find me on the back porch."

"Listen, son, your father's out at camp -- he won't know," Belle said. "Do you want to take his field glasses and go out on Pilot Knob?"

Paul leapt off the clothesreel and ran towards his mother. "Oh, Mama, can I really take Oliver's field glasses?" Oliver's imported, German-made binoculars were among his most cherished possessions -- like all of his fishing and hunting equipment -- and high on the long list of the Biegler boys' taboos. Mama must be in a fine mood today. He and Mama were conspirators. The old man's field glasses! Who the hell wanted to go picking blueberries, anyway?

Belle, thinking to himself: Why on earth did Mama ever marry such a crabby, vile-tempered man as Oliver? Why couldn't my father have been a gentle, considerate, generous man? One who played games with his children, like other fathers? Paul had another thought too, one that colored his entire boyhood: Why couldn't my father have been almost anything but a saloon-keeper?

Paul knew, with quiet dismay, that his playmates' parents must have discussed his low estate at home, because when he would have one of the fierce, fleeting childish quarrels with one of them, the worst they could seem to think to say was: "You're nothing but a dirty saloon-keeper's son!" Or: "Polly's old man keeps a saloon! Red-nose Polly, red-nose Polly!" No one ever thought to shout at his playmates: You're a dirty miner's son -- or a vile minister's son -- or even a street-cleaner's son. Saloon-keepers were the lowest of the low.

Even the very school books of the time taught Paul that there was little hope for him. Anyone that dabbled in alcohol inevitably became a social pariah as well as a mental and moral degenerate. His spawn was doomed to be naught but gobbling idiots and lurching, shambling imbeciles. Why, it was printed right there in the book. Some of the school books would even show startling pictures of yards and yards of human intestines, every inch a glowing, healthy red. These were the guts of the righteous, unsullied by the demon rum. On the next page would be an illustration of a sorry gray mess, looking something like a platter of deflated liver sausages. These were the dreary bowels of the boozers. Paul smarted over these experiences as though he had been struck with a lash. He never told Belle about them. His older brother Frederic had done so once. Paul had witnessed the scene...

So insistently was the conviction of his inevitable mediocrity borne upon him, that Paul felt that he annually became a sort of embarrassing curiosity to his teachers and classmates each time he perversely managed to move from one grade to the other. The fact that he found his school work easy, and

The politicians in Congress huffed and puffed and blew through their whiskers -- and offered Michigan the U. P. as a compromise. Michigan was cut to the quick. The Upper Peninsula! That howling wilderness of snow and cold! Why, it wasn't even physically attached to Michigan -- look at the Straits of Mackinac which separated the two! Anyway, gentlemen, our fine neighbor, Wisconsin, already owns the U. P. Perish the sordid thought.

But, alas! Congress discovered that Wisconsin was delighted to abandon its foundling on Michigan's doorstep. Michigan ruefully concluded that it wanted statehood more than the coveted Ohio strip, so when Michigan was finally admitted to the Union in 1837 she found that she possessed -- literally as a political afterthought -- a three-hundred-odd-mile-long appendage attached to the northern tip of her mitten -- the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The lusty young state of Michigan determined to make the best of a bad bargain. She would look and see what was on this damned Peninsula. What was there to these ancient rumors of copper and iron deposits? In 1841 a young state geologist called Douglass Houghton was sent North, following the old Indian trails, and during the next three years he discovered large deposits of copper in the Lake Superior region. In 1844 a surveyor called William Burt observed his compass making frantic gyrations as he and his party stood on a lofty peninsula hill near what later became Negaunee. Surveyor Burt nodded at his companions. Only the presence of iron could account for that phenomenon.

So after countless brooding centuries, the first of the Peninsula's rich copper and iron deposits had been found. More discoveries followed in quick succession. Michigan's father broached a cask of rum and congratulated themselves on their wisdom, their acute vision. That ancient Cinderella in disguise, the Upper Peninsula, had at last found her dream prince!

Nature compressed her thin lips, smiled wryly, then shrugged and turned away. After all she had kept her secret a long, long time. How many million years was it? Ho hum. If worst came to worst she could always conjure up a

CHAPTER 3.

At the time the war flamed over Europe there were but four of the six Biegler boys at home. The two oldest boys, Paul's half-brothers Oliver and Emmett, were working in distant Butte, Montana. Paul must have been about six or seven when his half-brothers had left Chippewa. As time went on they became, like his Detroit relatives, little more than names to him -- serious-faced young strangers (each marked with the typical Biegler cowlick, as were all of the boys) who stood gazing so mutely at Paul from the family group picture which hung obscurely on the wall next to Belle's writing desk, "the secretary," in the front parlor.

This photograph had been taken at Childs Art Gallery shortly before Belle had her second and last operation -- this time for the removal of a tumor. It was while she was away in Chicago for this operation that the two boys had fled, run away. Belle kept the family picture in the little used parlor so that Oliver would not destroy it in one of his fits of temper. She dared not actually hide it; she knew he would have raged at that, too. It was one of the many things about the Biegler home that required a nice but wearing calculation. After young Oliver and Emmett -- young men then -- had run away their names were never mentioned when Oliver was about the house. They were gone. They might have been dead. All they had left behind was Emmett's name, which he had scratched with Oliver's diamond stickpin on the glass of the kitchen door. "Welcome to the home of Emmett Biegler, age 12, Chippewa, Michigan." At the time Emmett was roundly thrashed by Oliver for this gesture of errant sentiment.

When Belle had married Oliver she had developed a deep affection for the three quiet, motherless boys. She not only washed and baked and ironed and mended for them, and nursed them when they were sick; she saw to it that they regularly attended their mother's church, the Catholic church. Swallowing her girlhood Presbyterian suspicions of the Church of Rome, she helped the boys with their catechism and with their lessons at the Convent school --

"Their poor mother would want it so" -- and later in the high school. But most of all she acted as a buffer between them and Oliver's frequent rages.

All during Paul's boyhood there hung over the Biegler home a constant pall, a dark cloud -- Oliver Biegler's temper. No one could predict when the storm would break, how long it would last, or how destructive its fury might be before it spent itself. There was but one sure storm signal: When the little blood blister on Oliver's lower lip would begin to pout and grow purple, it was time for all good mariners at 205 West Hematite Street to scurry for cover.

Paul would grow chill with terror at Oliver's outbursts. And his very insides would shudder convulsively as he watched his mother at these times. Belle's features would seem to take on a waxen pallor, a mask-like expression, to grow sharper, sort of pinched and frozen, as she tried to placate her ranting husband. Her efforts were always in vain. "Oliver, please, please, Oliver, the children -- think of the dear, innocent children!" Belle's earnest calm, her very stillness, seemed only to goad Oliver to further heights of ecstatic fury. The initial cause of the outburst would be abruptly forgotten, lost. Belle would now become the red banner that had come to torture him.

"Don't 'Oliver' me!" he would roar, turning on her, his face working and livid with rage. Belle would face him with her clear unblinking gray eyes. She was all of a foot shorter than he. "O woman, take your hateful false Dutch face out of my sight, I say!" he would howl. Then he would roll his blazing eyes up to the ceiling, the nearest Paul ever saw him approach an attitude of prayer. "Why in the name of merciful God was she -- <u>she</u>! -- ever blown into my arms during that fatal Christly storm!" This bitter allusion to their first meeting always made Belle wince, her bloodless lips would tremble ever so slightly, and Paul's heart would turn to solid stone. Paul knew -- and he sensed with dismay that his father in his rages also craftily knew -- how deep was her hurt, this trampling of her cherished romantic dream.

"This madman is my father, this madman is my father, this madman is..." Paul would murmur to himself, over and over, like a litany, as Oliver would lash himself into a purple frenzy over some trivial domestic mishap. A whole complex series of household taboos had grown up in the Biegler home to avoid and appease Oliver's wrath. Don't be late for your meals! Don't leave your sleds or coaster wagons about the yard -- put them carefully away in the woodshed or under the back stoop! Don't leave your coats and caps lying about the house! Don't disturb the old man when he is taking his nap after lunch! Don't breathe! Don't! But all these ruses and careful avoidances were of no avail; like the picture of the geyser in Paul's school geography, Oliver's temper would periodically erupt and foam over, nothing could ever seem to stop it, and that boy was fortunate who was not around... Perhaps the soup was too cold, or too hot and had scalded Oliver's sensitive tongue; or the woodbox was empty, the taxes were due; or the boys had used one of his many shotguns (reason enough), and had -- "O merciful God!" -- neglected to clean it. Or perhaps, as was most usual, one of his "worthless whelps" had done something wrong at the farm.

The Biegler farm was several miles out of town, beyond Chippewa River. This broad river had once carried Indians to Lake Superior but now it exclusively conducted the town's sewage to that restless sea. The farm lay in a broad mucky valley at the foot of the second range of rocky bluffs north of town. Oliver had purchased the land from one of the mining companies when he was a young man, and Paul suspected it pleased his father to regard himself as a gentleman farmer. Oliver had cleared and drained but a relatively small part of the land, which he planted each year in hay and oats and potatoes and truck vegetables. He cut the ice for the saloon and the house off of Cranberry pond; the firewood for the house came off the uncleared land. In her darkest hours Belle would always say: "You must give him credit, boys -- your father is always a good provider." This oft-repeated plea would be greeted with cynical snorts. "That's right -- give the devil his due, Mom!" Belle was ever generous

in extending credit to Oliver. With pathetic eagerness she seized upon anything which she thought might put him in a better light with his sons.

In the course of the years Oliver had acquired quite a complete farm, as farms went in and around Chippewa. The long, bitter winters, the short growing seasons, discouraged all but the most hardy farmers. "How many bushels of icicles did you grow on the farm last winter, Oliver?" some brave soul might ask Oliver, in the saloon. Oliver would give the foolhardy wag a brief, cold-blue stare, and that would be the end of that brief exchange of conversational punts. Oliver always had several Jersey milk cows, from whose yellow cream Belle made rich butter and heavenly orange sherbet. Paul had served his apprenticeship turning the big ice- and salt-packed freezer on the back stoop. Oliver kept at least one work team and a team of fast-stepping driving horses, and a single horse which was used for the daily trips to and from the farm and for Oliver's shorter camping trips. (Even the old house itself seemed to join in the general sigh of relief that went up when Oliver went to the woods.) Then there was the inevitable herd of drooping, nondescript nags and plugs which Oliver maintained solely, as far as Belle and the boys could see, so that he might trade them for still other nags.

Paul had never forgotten the time he had stood by the Miners' Bank waiting for his father to come home from the saloon for lunch. Oliver stood on the curb deep in a conversation with old one-eyed LeMay, trumpeting in his ear, extolling the virtues of some spavined nag he was trying to sell the crafty old Frenchman. At this inopportune moment Matti Kauppila, a Finn farmer who lived out by the Big Dead river, came down the busy Main Street in a lurching buckboard drawn by a shaggy beast called Charlie. The poor horse was obviously suffering from the "heaves," the horseman's picturesque name for consumption. Even Paul could see that. Matti had got the horse in a trade with Oliver the week before.

Matti spied Oliver talking to old LeMay. He pulled up the tottering horse -- "Whoa, Sarlie!" -- and pointed a gnarled, work-soiled finger accusingly at Oliver.

"Oleever," he shouted, " -- dat horse you sell for me las' veek -- he's to be dat heevy horse!" The benighted animal stood there in front of Oliver and old LeMay, swaying and wheezing horribly. But Oliver knew old LeMay's hearing and eyesight were not what they used to be.

"Oh, hello Matti," Oliver said pleasantly, smiling and nodding and stepping off the curb. Oliver's delight was unbounded. He raised one big hand as though in greeting -- then brought it down smartly on the beast's sagging rump, genially shouting, "Yes, Matti -- he's a nice, big heavy horse. I'm glad you like him so well -- Say, what's your hurry! Well solong, Matti..."

Whenever Paul would awaken in the night to the sound of galloping hooves, and hear his father's muffled curses as he lit the breathing gas lamp in his bedroom to route the older boys, he knew that the neighbors were resentfully awake, whispering, "That Oliver Biegler's horses have broken loose and come to town again. There ought to be a law!" As regularly as Oliver's fits of temper, the horses would break out and race wildly into town, past the house, and on to Oliver's town barn. They always followed the same route. Oliver's barn stood in the block east of the house, next to the Taleen House. The horses would be led there by oat-craving Fred or Chief, one or the other of the big white work horses.

Milling and neighing and biting each other, all the horses would gather in the barnyard, between the barn at the rear and Oliver's "warehouse" which faced on Canada Street. The two-story warehouse had been built by Paul's grandfather for beer storage. It now housed Oliver's fringed, rubber-tired carriage and buggy and cutters and sleighs, and his boats and canoes and

tools -- even an old racing sulky... By and by one or two of the older boys would come down to the barnyard and light a lantern. Oblivious to Gust Taleen's awakened and cursing boarders, they would sleepily round up one of the leaders with a pail of oats. Then they would leap upon Fred or Chief, bareback, and thunder all of them back to the farm and lock them in the big farm barn until the broken fence could be found and mended the next day.

When his older boys were smaller, Oliver used to keep a hired man or two on the farm to do the chores. But as young Oliver and Emmett and Greg graduated into their teens, they also found that they had graduated into hired men on the farm -- hired, that is, but never paid. Oliver even tried to take them out of school. "When I was a boy of twelve I was through school and could load a beer car alone in one day!" This was a familiar refrain, this harking back to the days when Grandpa Nicholas Biegler had run the brewery. Men seemed to have worked regularly twenty-five hours a day in those days, Paul concluded. Belle, in her quiet way, fiercely fought Oliver's efforts to take the boys out of school.

The second year young Oliver had worked on the farm, he was just fifteen. He was a silent, short, broad, thick-wristed boy, with curly, bushy black Irish hair, but which had the usual Biegler cowlick. Even then he was as strong as the average grown man. His playmates had already nicknamed him "Rajah" for Barnum's successor to Jumbo. "Ladees and gentlemen: Rajah -- the biggest elephant in the world -- four inches taller than Jumbo!" Except for his age and lack of whiskers Paul concluded that young Oliver was the exact duplicate of Paul's short, barrel-bodied German grandfather, mild Nicholas, whose large velvet-framed picture hung so squarely and uncompromisingly from the sitting-room wall. His brothers and playmates called him "Roge" for short.

This second summer on the farm for young Roge was one of the high points in his father's epic rages. The farm was so low and swampy that it had to be ditched to drain it. One summer day one of the driving horses had gone to the main ditch to get a drink. Maude, a spanking, high-spirited bay. Her trim

forelegs had sunk in the treacherous peat, and the doomed animal had evidently leapt to free herself and had only managed to land in the deepest hole in the ditch. Young Roge was alone on the farm, milking the cows. He had run out of the barn when he had heard the frantic screams of the drowning animal. He raced across the lumpy damp fields but when he got up to the ditch only the tail of the stricken animal, like Ophelia's hair, could be seen floating on top of the turgid water.

Paul must have been so young that he was in his crib when Roge reported the loss of Maude to Oliver at the hushed supper table. Paul was awakened and lay cowering, listening to the frightful noises and shouts downstairs, and his mother's mingled screams, "You've killed him! O, you've killed him!" Oliver had beaten the boy nearly into unconsciousness and had pushed him down the cellar stairs. Later that night Belle had come and tearfully gathered Paul into her arms and taken him, and all the boys, to the Taleen House. This old schoolhouse-red brick hotel faced the Northwestern tracks and was run by Gustav and Sophia Taleen, the parents of Paul's boyhood playmate, Gunnar Taleen. There Belle and the boys had remained for a week. Belle went to see a lawyer about a divorce. He was drawing the necessary papers...

Oliver was full of contrition and self-abasement. He haunted the Taleen House, sending sheaves and sprays of flowers to Belle, and bringing extravagant gifts for all the boys. Paul got a crying teddy bear as his share of the loot, and wistfully thought Belle should do this more often. Paul had a shadowy picture of his father, on his knees before Belle, in a strange high bedroom, denouncing himself as roundly as he usually denounced others; pleading, promising, cajoling. Belle sat in a creaking rocking-chair. "Think of the children, the poor children," Oliver had mistakenly said. Waxen-faced, Belle had turned on him a look of infinite scorn. "I am, Oliver -- my God, I'm doing just that..."

But Belle had gone back, and there was a period of strange calm in the Biegler house. This creaking stillness reminded Paul of the time Belle had

carried him up Blueberry Hill to the Donovan House to look at Kate Donovan lying so white and still on a high couch, surrounded by tall lighted candles and flowers... Paul almost missed the shouted curses and wild tumult. Then by and by it had all started again, and the old frame house resumed the uneven tenor of its ways -- rang once again with the familiar shouts and mingled cries and wild curses. "O merciful God! O false-faced woman!"

Belle was in Chicago again recovering from her second operation. "I have been blessed with another fine doctor," she had written, "a poet with a medical degree -- young Doctor Max Thorek." This time Grandma Fraleigh was unable to come up from Detroit, and the boys, being older, had been left to the indifferent attentions of Amanda, the large Swedish hired girl. Amanda had her hands full, trying to take care of the big house as well as the amorous attentions of a big miner called Axel.

Paul was now regularly attending the Ridge Street school and had written Belle in his childish rounded scrawl:

"Dear Mama:

I am a good little boy. I am glad you are well again. Come home soon. Don't forget my button shoes and the popgun -- the kind with a cork in it. There was a big fite and Roge and Emmett have gone away. Hurry home. I am a good little boy.

Your son,
Paul.

I love you, Mama. Don't forget the button shoes and the popgun."

Belle had sent a frantic telegram to Oliver. What had happened? "I kicked the ungrateful whelps out," he had replied. His account was not strictly accurate.

* * *

It was supper time. Outside it was dark, a windy fall night. Oliver and five of the boys were seated around the long dining-room table. There was one empty place -- the chair of Frederic, the quiet one; he was late. Paul sat in his junior high chair, as usual on his father's left, next to the chimney-sighing dining-room stove. Paul could smell cloves on his father's breath. With her bounding grace, red-faced Amanda had brought in the boiled dinner, and Oliver and the boys were eating in stony silence. Devoutly all of the boys wished that Frederic would stay away until Oliver had finished supper and returned to the saloon. Then there was the familiar click of the kitchen door, the rattle of the loose pane, the whish of clothing carefully hung on the rack over the woodbox, and Frederic slipped into his seat at the table, his gray eyes fixed on his empty plate.

With terrible calm Oliver turned and glanced up at the old Seth Thomas clock. His lower lip began to pout, the blister on it turned a mottled dark purple. The boys had given up any pretense of eating. Their food gagged them. They simply sat and waited. Biegler-wise Amanda had quietly locked herself in her bedroom off the kitchen. "Ay vill marry Axel nex' veek!" Paul heard the inside door lock of her bedroom softly click. The tenseness had whipped his perceptions to an uncanny acuteness. The boys waited for Oliver to speak. Or was this to be one of those awful silent scenes? Paul sat in an agony of awareness of impending disaster. Here -- it was coming...

Oliver had put down his knife and fork so that they slanted off the edge of his plate. With his big hands he pushed his chair back and circled the table. He stood over abject, numbed Frederic. Paul held his breath, his throat was dry and constricted, he wanted to swallow. Then Oliver raised his hand and struck Frederic flush on the face with the back of his hand. Frederic reeled from the blow, then recovered and looked up swiftly, briefly, at Paul. Their eyes flickered in mute misery -- there had always been an inarticulate bond between them. Frederic's cheek had turned a patchy greenish-white pallor

where he had been struck. Oliver raised his hand to strike the boy again. Frederic hunched himself, waiting for the blow. Paul closed his wet eyes. The blow did not fall.

"Don't do that, Pa." It was Roge, young Oliver, speaking in his low, nasal voice. He was over twenty, now, a grown man. He had his own mug and shaved regularly.

"Who's going to stop me!" Oliver turned on Roge with a deadly calm.

"I am." Roge had risen and moved quickly before his father. "I am, Pa," he repeated.

Oliver's mouth twitched loosely with incredulous rage. He raised the great beam of his arm to brush this rebellious vision from his maddened sight. Young Oliver reached out his short right arm, his thick blunt fist gathered in the lapels of Oliver's coat, twisting, high up at the throat. Slowly, implacably he pushed and lifted his father back against the stair wall, next to the stove, holding him out with one knotted, straining arm. The other boys slowly turned and watched as in a dream. Oliver's long arms flailed wildly at his son, he kicked with his legs, his eyes rolled up in his head, glaring insanely; he grated his teeth, he gurgled and foamed, he muttered horrible, guttural curses...

But there was the miracle, the immutable fact: young Oliver held his father nailed against the wall. "Cool off, Pa," he said in his low voice, occasionally relaxing his grip so that Oliver could take a rasping breath. "Calm down, Pa. Freddy didn't do nothing." Thus spake Rajah, "the biggest elephant in the world -- four inches taller than Jumbo!" Paul knew at that time, in that frozen instant, that young Oliver could easily have killed his father.

Paul sat in his high chair chilled with ripples of goose pimples, gripped in an icy trance. The scene, in all its nightmare reality, was being irrevocably scarred upon his memory with hissing irons. His mind and heart surged with a shuttling rush of wild thoughts and emotions... His father, the

man who regularly pitched drunken miners and lumberjacks into the middle of Main Street -- his father, the strongest man in the world, had been vanquished! The tiger and the bear... Good for you, Roge old boy -- give it to him, give it to him! Why don't you knock his bloody block off, Roge? Why don't you? Now's your chance, boy! Have you forgotten all the times he used to beat you? Have you? Don't you remember when he threw you down the cellar stairs? You can't forget! You can't, you can't, you can't forget! Give it to him! Don't -- you're killing him! Good! I'll wear my new button shoes at his funeral -- I'm glad poor Mama isn't here -- I wish I had my popgun -- I'd shoot him! -- Where are the heroes of yesteryear? -- O God, I never thought anyone could do the old man...

The next day Amanda had found a scribbled note on Emmett's and young Oliver's undisturbed bed:

"Goodbye, kids. We're heading West. Give
our love to Mom -- she was sure swell to us.

Emmett
Roge."

new ice sheet or two. But first she really must go West and investigate the intriguing possibilities of these dust storms. That was a new wrinkle. The Peninsula could wait a bit. Nature could bide her time...