

THE • COLLECTED
• STORIES • OF •

JOHN
O'HARA

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Collected Stories of John O'Hara

Selected and with an Introduction by
FRANK MACSHANE

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Introduction

The Power of the Ear



To say that John O'Hara's stories stand up well, as they certainly do, is to use a physical term in an almost literal way. It means that they are as sturdy and fresh as they were when they were first created. This achievement—one of the most important in literature, since it earns the reader's trust—is due mainly to the way O'Hara used his ear to its best advantage. It was his greatest gift, and he relied on it from the start.

The ability of a writer to capture the speech of his character is often underestimated or even dismissed in favor of other qualities, but in fact it is far more important than subject matter or theme if the stories are to have life. Buffon said, "*Le style est l'homme même*," and it follows that the writer who has captured his character's voice has taken hold of the character himself, and the story starts from there.

The link between contemporary fiction and the oral tradition of epic and folk literature may seem remote, but in fact the two forms have much in common. When people gathered to hear the stories that were later attributed to Homer or collected in the Old Testament, they did so to find out what things were like in the past. They wanted to hear the voices of their ancestors; they wanted to know what people *said*. The bard or priest who told the stories was like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who took his listeners by the hand and recited his impassioned tale. He was memorable not for what he said but for how he said it; and for his special gifts, he sat at the right hand of the chieftain or king.

Then as now, authentic storytellers were those who had a good ear. They were able to report the very words that Achilles used when addressing his troops, or the actual lamentations of Job in the midst of his travails. Speech is not mere decoration. Its form and substance come from inner feelings and fundamental beliefs. It is the mark of human personality. Shaw's *Pygmalion* is a comedy about social distinctions, but it is also a commentary on the nature of truth. Professor Higgins and Liza use language in different ways not only because they were brought up in different

places but because they have their individual ambitions and needs, and these are reflected in the way they talk.

Because of their intimacy and lack of sociological detail, short stories are especially dependent on the voice. Reading the dialogue of a short story is like eavesdropping on a good conversation. The enduring popularity of Dickens, Poe and Maupassant is based to a considerable degree on our ability to hear the voices of Ebenezer Scrooge, Roderick Usher and the habitués of the Maison Tellier.

From his beginnings as a young reporter in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, John O'Hara developed his powers of observation and imitation. He began at a time when newspaper columnists were far more influential than they are today. The most famous column was "The Conning Tower," edited by F. P. Adams for the *New York World*, but newspapers everywhere ran regular features by such writers as H. L. Mencken, Ring Lardner, Robert Benchley and Alexander Woollcott. They were topical and generally relied on the rich resources of the American language for their flavor. O'Hara imitated his elders by writing satirical monologues and conversations, and he made his first national appearance in "The Conning Tower" in 1927 at the age of twenty-two. Within the year he moved to New York, where at the time nearly twenty daily newspapers were still being published. He got a job at the *Herald Tribune* and was soon part of the easy democracy of Bleeck's, Tony's, Jack and Charlie's 21 Club and other speakeasies. There he met all sorts of people—journalists, sports figures, politicians, actors, stockbrokers and playwrights—and he began to write sketches about them, several in the manner of Sinclair Lewis.

The New Yorker was then a young magazine, and soon O'Hara was writing for it. He extended his range and took his apprenticeship so seriously that he published forty-three stories in *The New Yorker* before he considered any of them worthy of inclusion in a book. O'Hara was not a satirist by nature; rather he had a fiction writer's interest in human character. For him, dialogue was a way of revealing human traits without spending much time on description and setting. He found that when he had a precinct cop pick up the telephone and say, "Wukkan I do fya?" he was able to depict the whole police station in those few words. When a teenage girl from Brearley or Chapin says, "Robert didn't come with she or I," she reveals in the grammatical error her breathless concern to appear grown-up.

"If people did not talk right, they were not real people," O'Hara observed when he was still a schoolboy, and it was as true of life as of art. "I do not believe," he later wrote, "that a writer who neglects or has not learned to write good dialog can be depended upon for accuracy in his understanding of character and his creation of characters."

Talk was, for O'Hara, the beginning of many of his stories. Often he would sit at his typewriter and start by thinking of a couple of faces he

had seen. He would put the people together in a restaurant or on an airplane, and they would begin to talk. "I let them do small talk for a page or two," O'Hara explained, "and pretty soon they begin to come to life. They do so entirely through dialog. I start by knowing nothing about them except what I remember of their faces. But as they chatter away, one of them, and then the other, will say something that is so revealing that I recognize the signs of created characters. From then on it is a question of how deeply I want to interest myself in the characters."

Dialogue was not the only device O'Hara used to get into his stories, but in general he relied on actual things. He was interested in the telling detail, the phrase or name that had some resonance. A Brooks Brothers suit or a Swaine and Adeney's umbrella, the Racquet Club or Palmer Stadium, Romanoff's or the Twentieth-Century Limited, all carry much more than their surface identities. When O'Hara writes about a woman "pounding her Delman heels on the Penn Station floor," he creates a whole person in the phrase, just as he does with the woman who, getting into her car in the parking lot of a suburban railway station, "kicked off her shoes and put on a pair of loafers that lay on the floor."

By using such details, O'Hara invented almost single-handedly what came to be known as the *New Yorker* story. Arranging a brief encounter between two or more people speaking a language appropriate to the setting, O'Hara gives an impression of reality in a few phrases. Often the point is not immediately plain, for O'Hara believed that truth was allusive. But his themes were consistent, and they depended on having real people express themselves in real places.

If Napoleon was right in calling the Piazza San Marco in Venice "the best drawing room in Europe," O'Hara's stories as a whole provide the best conversation in America. Although he was for years associated with the upper-class world of New York, Philadelphia and Long Island, he had a remarkable range of subjects, more so than Faulkner or Fitzgerald or even Hemingway, whose work influenced him in many ways. The central characters of his stories are not only club men and business executives; they are country doctors, movie stars, beauticians, bartenders, schoolgirls, nightclub singers, gas station attendants, telephone operators and bus drivers. America in the twentieth century is what he knew, and in 1960 he said, "It is my business to write about it to the best of my ability, with sometimes the special knowledge that I have. I want to record the way people talked and thought and felt, and to do it with complete honesty and variety."

Behind the modesty of this statement lies O'Hara's vision of America and, by extension, of humanity everywhere. He saw society as a structure that rarely succeeded in covering up the disorders that lay beneath the surface of human intercourse. He saw decency and hope routinely destroyed by selfishness and cruelty, leaving individuals with little solace to

face the essential solitude of life and death. Yet O'Hara's vision is not a cheerless one, for he also celebrated individual acts of kindness and imagination, and he does not pass judgment or apportion blame. His stories are peopled with such varied individuals—pretentious, gentle, deranged or simply pensive—that it seems clear that for all his doubts about humanity, O'Hara was in love with life itself. His testament as an artist is that his short stories, covering a period of over thirty-five years in the writing, are still extraordinarily alive.

This quality says a good deal about the short story in general and the reasons for O'Hara's pre-eminence in this form. It is sometimes fashionable to dismiss the short story and to attribute its apparent decline to the greater versatility of the novel and to the rise of nonfiction. But the trouble does not lie with the form but with its practitioners. A really good short-story writer will always find a popular audience. In recent times, J. D. Salinger, John Cheever and John Updike have been remarkably successful, and the reason is that they are all masters of the form. They all have a good ear and an eye for detail. These qualities give their work the same vitality that keeps collections of Chekhov and Poe on the paperback shelves in bookstores across the country.

John O'Hara belongs to this small company of great short-story writers simply because of the quality of his work. His aesthetic purposes were a direct extension of his attitude toward life itself. "Life goes on," he wrote as a young man, "and for the sake of verisimilitude and realism, you cannot positively give the impression of an ending: you must let something hang. A cheap interpretation of that would be to say that you must always leave a chance for a sequel. People die, love dies, but life does not die, and so long as people live, stories must have life at the end."

It is at their endings that O'Hara's stories give their greatest pleasure. Just when the story ends, or perhaps a few moments afterward, when all the pieces fall into place, the reader grasps what it is really all about. A sort of epiphany occurs. It can produce chill or warmth, depending on the story, but it is an organic part of the story itself. It is not a surprise ending like one in a Saki or Ambrose Bierce story, which loses its force once it is expressed. Rather it deepens the feelings that come from beneath the surface of the story. Emerging from the skillful mixture of fact and feeling in the story, it lingers on, like a phrase of music, in the memory. At the end of "We're Friends Again," one of the novellas in *Sermons and Soda-water*, the narrator speaks of a theme that is paramount in O'Hara's work. "What really can any of us know about any of us, and why must we make such a thing of loneliness when it is the final condition of us all?" Then he adds, "And where would love be without it?"

During his lifetime, O'Hara published eleven collections of short stories and three volumes of novellas, making a total of over four hundred pieces

of short fiction. The present volume contains fewer than ten percent of these, but those reprinted here represent O'Hara's finest work. Although his first collection, *The Doctor's Son and Other Stories*, began with a novella as the title-story, the stories O'Hara published from 1935 to 1949 were for the most part short, some of them containing as few as a thousand words. Then in 1948 O'Hara decided to turn his attention to longer fiction. Not having published any novels since *Hope of Heaven* in 1938, despite the earlier successes of *Appointment in Samarra* and *Butterfield 8*, he began a new and ambitious novel called *A Rage to Live*. Although it sold well and received some favorable notices, it was also subjected to a number of highly critical reviews. One that particularly annoyed O'Hara was written by Brendan Gill, who accused O'Hara of being prolix and declared that the book was a "catastrophe." What angered O'Hara most was that it was published in *The New Yorker*, for which he had a warm feeling and which he considered home, since, up to that time, it had published no fewer than 197 of his stories. For him, the review was a piece of treachery, and he complained about it to the editor, Harold Ross. Since he had also been squabbling for some time with Ross over methods of payment, O'Hara finally decided to break his connection with the magazine.

A decade passed without a single work by O'Hara appearing in *The New Yorker*. Then in 1960, after Ross's death, O'Hara was approached by William Maxwell, acting on behalf of the new editor, William Shawn, and *The New Yorker* bought the novella *Imagine Kissing Pete* for \$10,000, a considerable sum at that time. In the final years of his life, O'Hara published frequently in *The New Yorker*, but now, living in isolation in Princeton, he became so prolific that no magazine could possibly keep up with his production. Between 1962 and 1968 he published five book-length collections of stories, in addition to four novels. Moreover, he was now writing much longer stories than he had formerly done, and many of them were too long for magazine publication. Reminiscent in tone, they were studies of characters and types he had known throughout his varied life in New York, Pennsylvania and especially in Hollywood, which was the setting of some of his most impressive later work. Writing in his Princeton study, surrounded by the memorabilia of a lifetime, he probed the nature of mortality and human character. These stories represent the best writing of his last years, more deeply felt and delicately told than his novels of the same period. Taken as a whole, his shorter work, starting from the sharp, incisive stories of his early years at *The New Yorker* and continuing into his more relaxed and expansive period in Princeton, represents the growth and maturity of one of the finest short-story writers of modern times.

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The Doctor's Son



My father came home at four o'clock one morning in the fall of 1918, and plumped down on a couch in the living room. He did not get awake until he heard the noise of us getting breakfast and getting ready to go to school, which had not yet closed down. When he got awake he went out front and shut off the engine of the car, which had been running while he slept, and then he went to bed and stayed, sleeping for nearly two days. Up to that morning he had been going for nearly three days with no more than two hours' sleep at a stretch.

There were two ways to get sleep. At first he would get it by going to his office, locking the rear office door, and stretching out on the floor or the operating table. He would put a revolver on the floor beside him or in the tray that was bracketed to the operating table. He had to have the revolver, because here and there among the people who would come to his office, there would be a wild man or woman, threatening him, shouting that they would not leave until he left with them, and that if their baby died they would come back and kill him. The revolver, lying on the desk, kept the more violent patients from becoming too violent, but it really did no good so far as my father's sleep was concerned; not even a doctor who had kept going for days on coffee and quinine would use a revolver on an Italian who had just come from a bedroom where the last of five children was being strangled by influenza. So my father, with a great deal of profanity, would make it plain to the Italian that he was not being intimidated, but would go, and go without sleep.

There was one other way of getting sleep. We owned the building in which he had his office, so my father made an arrangement with one of the tenants, a painter and paperhanger, so he could sleep in the room where the man stored rolls of wallpaper. This was a good arrangement, but by the time he had thought of it, my father's strength temporarily gave out and he had to come home and go to bed.

Meanwhile there was his practice, which normally was about forty patients a day, including office calls and operations, but which he had lost count of since the epidemic had become really bad. Ordinarily if he had been ill his practice would have been taken over by one of the young physicians; but now every young doctor was as busy as the older men. Italians who knew me would even ask me to prescribe for their children, simply because I was the son of Mister Doctor Malloy. Young general practitioners who would have had to depend upon friends of their families and fraternal orders and accidents and gonorrhea for their start, were seeing—hardly more than seeing—more patients in a day than in normal times they could have hoped to see in a month.

The mines closed down almost with the first whiff of influenza. Men who for years had been drilling rock and had chronic miner's asthma never had a chance against the mysterious new disease; and even younger men were keeling over, so the coal companies had to shut down the mines, leaving only maintenance men, such as pump men, in charge. Then the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania closed down the schools and churches, and forbade all congregating. If you wanted an ice cream soda you had to have it put in a cardboard container; you couldn't have it at the fountain in a glass. We were glad when school closed, because it meant a holiday, and the epidemic had touched very few of us. We lived in Gibbstville; it was in the tiny mining villages—"patches"—that the epidemic was felt immediately.

The State stepped in, and when a doctor got sick or exhausted so he literally couldn't hold his head up any longer, they would send a young man from the graduating class of one of the Philadelphia medical schools to take over the older man's practice. This was how Doctor Myers came to our town. I was looking at the pictures of the war in the *Review of Reviews*, my father's favorite magazine, when the doorbell rang and I answered it. The young man looked like the young men who came to our door during the summer selling magazines. He was wearing a short coat with a sheepskin collar, which I recognized as an S. A. T. C. issue coat.

"Is this Doctor Malloy's residence?" he said.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Mr. Myers from the University."

"Oh," I said. "My father's expecting you." I told my father, and he said: "Well, why didn't you bring him right up?"

Doctor Myers went to my father's bedroom and they talked, and then the maid told me my father wanted to speak to me. When I went to the bedroom I could see my father and Doctor Myers were getting along nicely. That was natural: my father and Doctor Myers were University men, which meant the University of Pennsylvania; and University men shared a contempt for men who had studied at Hahnemann or Jefferson or Medico-Chi. Myers was not an M.D., but my father called him Doctor,

and as I had been brought up to tip my hat to a doctor as I did to a priest, I called him Doctor too, although Doctor Myers made me feel like a lumberjack; I was so much bigger and obviously stronger than he. I was fifteen years old.

"Doctor Myers, this is my boy James," my father said, and without waiting for either of us to acknowledge the introduction, he went on: "Doctor Myers will be taking over my practice for the time being and you're to help him. Take him down to Hendricks' drug store and introduce him to Mr. Hendricks. Go over the names of our patients and help him arrange some kind of a schedule. Doctor Myers doesn't drive a car, you'll drive for him. Now your mother and I think the rest of the children ought to be on the farm, so you take them there in the big Buick and then bring it back and have it overhauled. Leave the little Buick where it is, and you use the Ford. You'll understand, Doctor, when you see our roads. If you want any money your mother'll give it to you. And no cigarettes, d'you understand?" Then he handed Doctor Myers a batch of prescription blanks, upon which were lists of patients to be seen, and said goodbye and lay back on his pillow for more sleep.

Doctor Myers was almost tiny, and that was the reason I could forgive him for not being in the Army. His hair was so light that you could hardly see his little meusrache. In conversation between sentences his nostrils would twitch and like all doctors he had acquired a posed gesture which was becoming habitual. His was to stroke the skin in front of his right ear with his forefinger. He did that now downstairs in the hall. "Well . . . I'll just take a walk back to the hotel and wait till you get back from the farm. That suit you, James?" It did, and he left and I performed the various chores my father had ordered, and then I went to the hotel in the Ford and picked up Doctor Myers.

He was catlike and dignified when he jumped in the car. "Well, here's a list of names. Where do you think we ought to go first? Here's a couple of prescription blanks with only four names apiece. Let's clean them up first."

"Well, I don't know about that, Doctor. Each one of those names means at least twenty patients. For instance Kelly's. That's a saloon, and there'll be a lot of people waiting. They all meet there and wait for my father. Maybe we'd better go to some single calls first."

"O.K., James. Here's a list." He handed it to me. "Oh, your father told something about going to Collieryville to see a family named Evans."

I laughed. "Which Evans? There's seventy-five thousand Evanses in Collieryville. Evan Evans. William W. Evans. Davis W. Evans. Davis W. Evans, Junior. David Evans?"

"David Evans seems to be it. The way your father spoke they were particular friends."

"David Evans?" "Well, he didn't say who's sick there, did he?"

"No. I don't think anybody. He just suggested we drop in to see if they're all well."

I was relieved, because I was in love with Edith Evans. She was nearly two years older than I, but I liked girls a little older. I looked at his list and said: "I think the best idea is to go there first and then go around and see some of the single cases in Collieryville." He was ready to do anything I suggested. He was affable and trying to make me feel that we were pals, but I could tell he was nervous, and I had sense enough to know that he had better look at some flu before tackling one of those groups at the saloons.

We drove to Collieryville to the David Evans home. Mr. Evans was district superintendent of one of the largest mining corporations, and therefore Collieryville's third citizen. He would not be there all the time, because he was a good man and due for promotion to a bigger district, but so long as he was there he was ranked with the leading doctor and the leading lawyer. After him came the Irish priest, the cashier of the larger bank (of which the doctor or the lawyer or the superintendent of the mines is president), the brewer, and the leading merchant. David Evans had been born in Collieryville, the son of a superintendent, and was popular, a thirty-second degree Mason, a graduate of Lehigh, and a friend of my father's. They would see each other less than ten times a year, but they would go hunting rabbit and quail and pheasant together every autumn and always exchanged Christmas gifts. When my mother had large parties she would invite Mrs. Evans, but the two women were not close friends. Mrs. Evans was a Collieryville girl, half Polish, and my mother had gone to an expensive school and spoke French, and played bridge long before Mrs. Evans had learned to play "500." The Evanses had two children: Edith, my girl, and Rebecca, who was about five.

The Evans Cadillac, which was owned by the coal company, was standing in front of the Evans house, which also was owned by the coal company. I called to the driver, who was sitting behind the steering wheel, hunched up in a sheepskin coat and with a checkered cap pulled down over his eyes. "What's the matter, Pete?" I called. "Can't the company get rid of that old Caddy?"

"Go on wid you," said Pete. "What's the wrong wid the doctorin' business? I notice Mike Malloy ain't got nothin' better than Buicks."

"I'll have you fired, you round-headed son of a bitch," I said. "Where's the big lad?"

"Up Mike's. Where'd you t'ink he is?"

I parked the Ford and Doctor Myers and I went to the door and were let in by the pretty Polish maid. Mr. Evans came out of his den, wearing a raccoon coat and carrying his hat. I introduced Doctor Myers. "How do you do, sir," he said. "Doctor Malloy just asked me to stop in and see if everything was all right with your family."

"Oh, fine," said Mr. Evans. "Tell the dad that was very thoughtful, James, and thank you too, Doctor. We're all O.K. here, thank the Lord, but while you're here I'd like to have you meet Mrs. Evans. Adele!"

Mrs. Evans called from upstairs that she would be right down. While we waited in the den Mr. Evans offered Doctor Myers a cigar, which was declined. Doctor Myers, I could see, preferred to sit, because Mr. Evans was so large that he had to look up to him. While Mr. Evans questioned him about his knowledge of the anthracite region, Doctor Myers spoke with a barely discernible pleasant hostility which was lost on Mr. Evans, the simplest of men. Mrs. Evans appeared in a house dress. She looked at me shyly, as she always did. She always embarrassed me, because when I went in a room where she was sitting she would rise to shake hands, and I would feel like telling her to sit down. She was in her middle thirties and still pretty, with rosy cheeks and pale blue eyes and nothing "foreign" looking about her except her high cheek bones and the lines of her eyebrows, which looked as though they had been drawn with crayon. She shook hands with Doctor Myers and then clasped her hands in front of her and looked at Mr. Evans when he spoke, and then at Doctor Myers and then at me, smiling and hanging on Mr. Evans' words. He was used to that. He gave her a half smile without looking at her and suggested we come back for dinner, which in Collieryville was at noon. Doctor Myers asked me if we would be in Collieryville at that time, and I said we would, so we accepted his invitation. Mr. Evans said: "That's fine. Sorry I won't be here, but I have to go to Wilkes-Barre right away." He looked at his watch. "By George! By now I ought to be half way there." He grabbed his hat and kissed his wife and left.

When he had gone Mrs. Evans glanced at me and smiled and then said: "Edith will be glad to see you, James."

"Oh, I'll bet she will," I said. "Where's she been keeping herself anyway?"

"Oh, around the house. She's my eldest," she said to Doctor Myers. "Seventeen."

"Seventeen?" he repeated. "You have a daughter seventeen? I can hardly believe it, Mrs. Evans. Nobody would ever think you had a daughter seventeen." His voice was a polite protest, but there was nothing protesting in what he saw in Mrs. Evans. I looked at her myself now, thinking of her for the first time as someone besides Edith's mother. . . . No, I couldn't see her. We left to make some calls, promising to be back at twelve-thirty.

Our first call was on a family named Loughran, who lived in a neat two-story house near the Collieryville railroad station. Doctor Myers went in. He came out in less than two minutes, followed by Mr. Loughran. Loughran walked over to me. "You," he said. "Ain't we good enough for your dad no more? What for kind of a thing is this he does be sending us?"

"My father is sick in bed, just like everybody else, Mr. Loughran. This is the doctor that is taking all his calls till he gets better."

"It is, is it? So that's what we get, and doctorin' with Mike Malloy since he come from college, and always paid the day after payday. Well, young man, take this back to Mike Malloy. You tell him for me if my woman pulls through it'll be no thanks to him. And if she don't pull through, and dies, I'll come right down to your old man's office and kill him wid a rock. Now you and this one get the hell outa here before I lose me patience."

We drove away. The other calls we made were less difficult, although I noticed that when he was leaving one or two houses the people, who were accustomed to my father's quick, brusque calls, would stare at Doctor Myers' back. He stayed too long, and probably was too sympathetic. We returned to the Evans home.

Mrs. Evans had changed her dress to one that I thought was a little too dressy for the occasion. She asked us if we wanted "a little wine," which we didn't, and Doctor Myers was walking around with his hands in his trousers pockets, telling Mrs. Evans what a comfortable place this was, when Edith appeared. I loved Edith, but the only times I ever saw her were at dancing school, to which she would come every Saturday afternoon. She was quite small, but long since her legs had begun to take shape and she had breasts. It was her father, I guess, who would not let her put her hair up; she often told me he was very strict and I knew that he was making her stay in Collieryville High School a year longer than was necessary because he thought her too young to go away. Edith called me Jimmy—one of the few who did. When we danced together at dancing school she scarcely spoke at all. I suspected her of regarding me as very young. All the little kids at dancing school called me James, and the oldest girls called me sarcastic. "James Malloy," they would say, "you think you're sarcastic. You think you're clever, but you're not. I consider the source of that remark." The remark might be that I had heard that Wallace Reid was waiting for that girl to grow up—and so was I. But I never said things like that to Edith. I would say: "How's everything out in the metropolis of Collieryville?" and she would say they were all right. It was no use trying to be sarcastic or clever with Edith, and no use trying to be romantic. One time I offered her the suggestion that we had to wear at dancing school, and she refused it because the pin might tear her dress. It was useless to try to be dirty with her; there was no novelty in it for a girl who had gone to Collieryville High. I told her a few stories, and she said her grandmother told her of the girls laughing at that one.

When Edith came in from dancing school her father always which made me slightly jealous. He would ask me how I was, and his smile began to twitch. Mrs. Evans called her in to get her a sandwich, and it was plain to see that she was not sure how to answer. I never knew before

she had a chance to make any mistakes I shook hands with Edith and she said, "Oh, hello, Jimmy," in a very offhand way, and I said: "Edith, this is Doctor Myers."

"How do you do?" said Edith.

"How are you?" said the doctor.

"Oh, very well, thank you," Edith said, and realized that it wasn't quite the thing to say.

"Well," said Mrs. Evans. "I don't know if you gentlemen want to wash up. Jimmy, you know where the bathroom is." It was the first time she had called me Jimmy. I glanced at her curiously and then the doctor and I went to wash our hands. Upstairs he said: "That your girl, James?"

"Oh, no," I said. "We're good friends. She isn't that kind."

"What kind? I didn't mean anything." He was amused.

"Well, I didn't know what you meant."

"Edith certainly looks like her mother," he said.

"Oh, I don't think so," I said, not really giving it a thought, but I was annoyed by the idea of talking about Edith in the bathroom. We came downstairs.

Dinner was a typical meal of that part of the country: sauerkraut and pork and some stuff called *nep*, which was nothing but dough, and mashed potatoes and lima beans, coffee, tea, and two kinds of pie, and you were expected to take both kinds. It was a meal I liked, and I ate a lot. Mrs. Evans got some courage from somewhere and was now talkative, now quiet, addressing most of her remarks to Doctor Myers and then turning to me. Edith kept looking at her and then turning to the doctor. She paid no attention to me except when I had something to say. Rebecca, whose table manners were being neglected, had nothing to contribute except to stick out her plate and say: "More mash potatoes with butter on."

"Say please," said Edith, but Rebecca only looked at her with the scornful blankness of five.

After dinner we went to the den and Doctor Myers and I smoked. I noticed he did not sit down; he was actually a little taller than Edith, and just about the same height as her mother. He walked around the room, standing in front of enlarged snapshots of long-deceased setter dogs, one of which my father had given Mr. Evans. Edith watched him and her mother and said nothing, but just before we were getting ready to leave Mrs. Evans caught Edith staring at her and they exchanged mysterious glances. Edith looked defiant and Mrs. Evans seemed puzzled and somehow alarmed. I could not figure it out.

II

In the afternoon Doctor Myers decided he would like to go to one of the patches where the practice of medicine was wholesale, so I suggested