

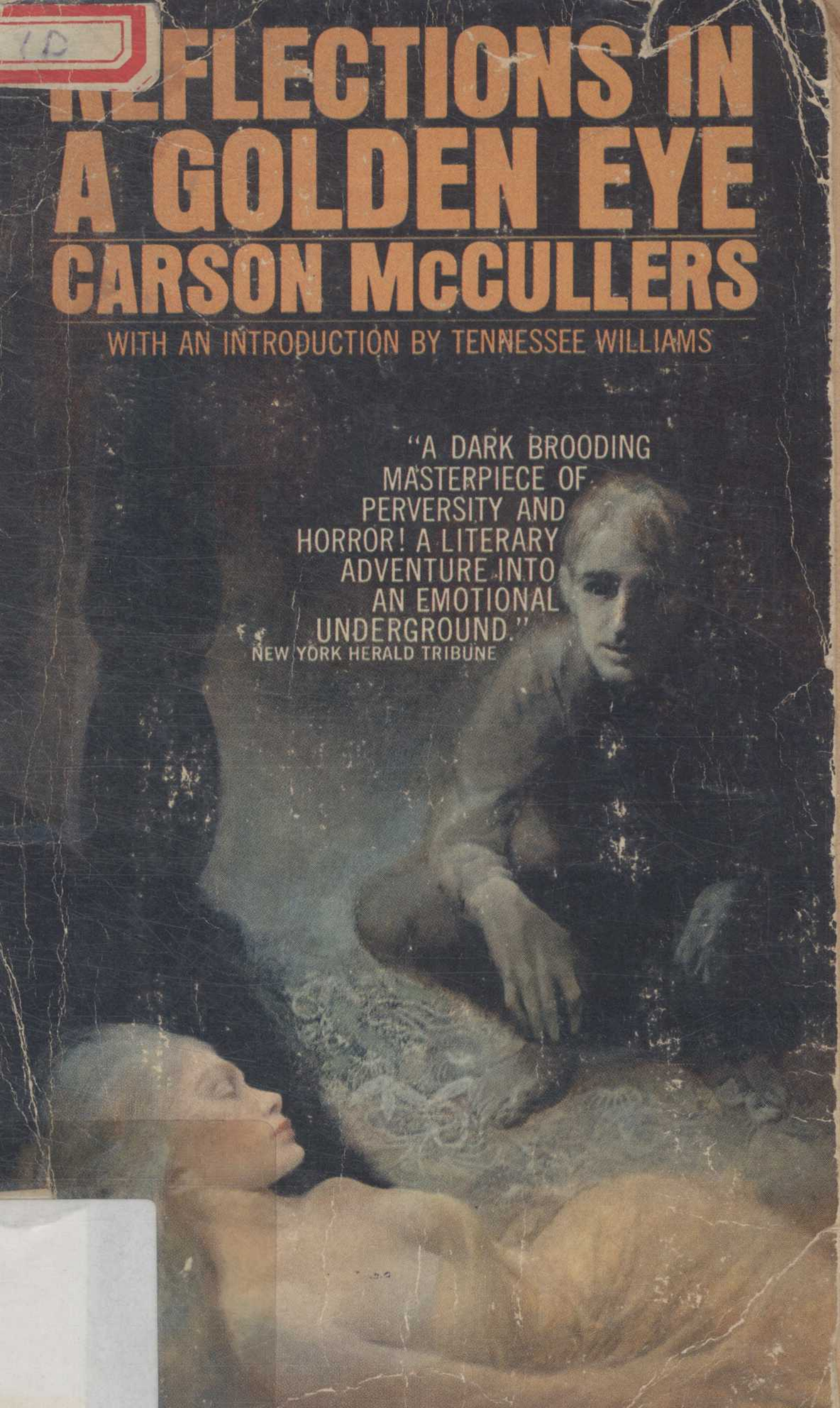
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REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE CARSON MCCULLERS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

"A DARK BROODING
MASTERPIECE OF
PERVERSITY AND
HORROR! A LITERARY
ADVENTURE INTO
AN EMOTIONAL
UNDERGROUND."

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REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

CARSON MCCULLERS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS



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has been completely reset in a type face
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from new plates. It contains the complete
text of the original hard-cover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.*



REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

*A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with
Houghton Mifflin Company*

PRINTING HISTORY

*Houghton Mifflin edition published February 1941
2nd printing.....September 1961*

New Directions edition published 1950

Bantam edition published September 1950

2nd printing January 1951

3rd printing February 1951

New Bantam edition published October 1953

2nd printing March 1958

3rd printing February 1961

4th printing July 1966

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*Houghton Mifflin Company, 2 Park Street,
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Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

There is a fort in the South where a few years ago a murder was committed. The participants of this tragedy were: two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse.

REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

"Will be talked about in whispers!"

Boston Transcript


"The Southern school at its most gothic,
but also at its best."

Time






"REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in that Sense of The Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art..."

Tennessee Williams, in the Introduction

暨南大学外语系资料室



Books by Carson McCullers

-  **THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING**
-  **THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER**
-  **REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE**
-  **THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFE**
-  **CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS**

 **Published by Bantam Books, Inc.**

FOR

ANNEMARIE CLARAC-SCHWARZENBACH

Introduction
by Tennessee Williams

This Book

THIS book, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, is a second novel, and although its appreciation has steadily risen during the years since its first appearance, it was then regarded as somewhat disappointing in the way that second novels usually are. When the book preceding a second novel has been very highly acclaimed, as was *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, there is an inclination on the part of critics to retrench their favor, so nearly automatic and invariable a tendency that it can almost be set down as a physical law. But the reasons for failure to justly evaluate this second novel go beyond the common, temporal disadvantage that all second novels must suffer, and I feel that an examination of these reasons may be of considerably greater pertinence to our aim of suggesting a fresh evaluation.

To quote directly from book-notices is virtually impossible, here in Rome where I am writing these comments, but I believe that I am safe in assuming that it was their identification of the author with a certain school of American writers, mostly of Southern origin, that made her subject to a particular and powerful line of attack.

Even in the preceding book some readers must undoubtedly have detected a warning predisposition toward certain elements which are popularly known as 'morbid.' Doubtless there were some critics, as well

as readers, who did not understand why Carson McCullers had elected to deal with a matter so unwholesome as the spiritual but passionate attachment that existed between a deaf-mute and a half-wit. But the tenderness of the book disarmed them. The depth and nobility of its compassion were so palpable that at least for the time being the charge of decadence had to be held in check. This forbearance was of short duration. In her second novel the veil of a subjective tenderness, which is the one quality of her talent which she has occasionally used to some excess, was drawn away. And the young writer suddenly flashed in their faces the cabalistic emblems of fellowship with a certain company of writers that the righteous 'Humanists' in the world of letters regarded as most abhorrent and most necessary to expose and attack.

Not being a follower of literary journals, I am not at all sure what title has been conferred upon this group of writers by their disparaging critics, but for my own convenience I will refer to them as the Gothic School. It has a very ancient lineage, this school, but our local inheritance of its tradition was first brought into prominence by the early novels of William Faulkner, who still remains a most notorious and unregenerate member. There is something in the region, something in the blood and culture, of the Southern state that has somehow made them the center of this Gothic school of writers. Certainly something more important than the influence of a single artist, Faulkner, is to be credited with its development, just as in France the Existentialist movement is surely attributable to forces more significant than the personal influence of Jean-Paul Sartre. There is actually a common link between the two schools, French and American, but characteristically the motor impulse of the French school is intellectual and

philosophic while that of the American is more of an emotional and romantic nature. What is this common link? In my opinion it is most simply definable as a sense, an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience.

The question one hears most frequently about writers of the Gothic school is this little classic:

"Why do they write about such *dreadful* things?"

This is a question that escapes not only from the astonished lips of summer matrons who have stumbled into the odd world of William Faulkner, through some inadvertence or mischief at the lending-library, but almost as frequently and certainly more importantly, from the pens of some of the most eminent book-critics. If it were a solely and typically philistine manifestation, there would be no sense or hope in trying to answer it, but the fact that it is used as a major line of attack by elements that the artist has to deal with, critics, publishers, distributors, not to mention the reading public, makes it a question that we should try seriously to answer or at least understand.

The great difficulty of understanding, and communication, lies in the fact that we who are asked this question and those who ask it do not really inhabit the same universe.

You do not need to tell me that this remark smacks of artistic snobbism which is about as unattractive as any other form that snobbism can take. (If artists are snobs, it is much in the same humble way that lunatics are: not because they wish to be different, and hope and believe that they are, but because they are forever painfully struck in the face with the inescapable fact of their difference which makes them hurt and lonely enough to want to undertake the vocation of artists.)

It appears to me, sometimes, that there are only two

kinds of people who live outside what E. E. Cummings has defined as "this socalled world of ours"—the artists and the insane. Of course there are those who are not practising artists and those who have not been committed to asylums, but who have enough of one or both magical elements, lunacy and vision, to permit them also to slip sufficiently apart from "this socalled world of ours" to undertake or accept an exterior view of it. But I feel that Mr. Cummings established a highly defensible point when he stated, at least by implication, that "the everyday humdrum world, which includes me and you and millions upon millions of men and women" is pretty largely something done with mirrors, and the mirrors are the millions of eyes that look at each other and things no more penetratingly than the physical senses allow. If they are conscious of there being anything to explore beyond this *soi-disant* universe, they comfortably suppose it to be represented by the mellow tones of the pipe-organ on Sundays.

In expositions of this sort it is sometimes very convenient to invent an opposite party to an argument, as Mr. Cummings did in making the remarks I have quoted. Such an invented adversary might say to me at this point:

"I have read some of these books, like this one here, and I think they're sickening and crazy. I don't know why anybody should want to write about such diseased and perverted and fantastic creatures and try to pass them off as representative members of the human race! That's how I feel about it. But I do have this sense you talk about, as much as you do or anybody else, this sense of fearfulness or dreadfulness or whatever you want to call it. I read the newspapers and I think it's all pretty awful. I think the atom bomb is awful and I think that the confusion of the

world is awful. I think that cancer is fearful, and I certainly don't look forward to the idea of dying, which I think is dreadful. I could go on forever, or at least indefinitely, giving you a list of things that I think are dreadful. And isn't that having what you call the Sense of Dreadfulness or something?"

My hesitant answer would be—"Yes, and no. Mostly no."

And then I would explain a little further, with my usual awkwardness at exposition:

"All of these things that you list as dreadful are parts of the visible, sensible phenomena of every man's experience or knowledge, but the true sense of dread is not a reaction to anything sensible or visible or even, strictly, materially, *knowable*. But rather it's a kind of spiritual intuition of something almost too incredible and shocking to talk about, which underlies the whole so-called thing. It is the incommunicable something that we shall have to call *mystery* which is so inspiring of dread among these modern artists that we have been talking about. . . ."

Then I pause, looking into the eyes of my interlocutor which I hope are beginning to betray some desire to believe me, and I say to him, "Am I making any better sense?"

"Maybe. But I can see it's an effort!"

"My friend, you have me where the hair is short."

"But you know, you still haven't explained why these writers have to write about crazy people doing terrible things!"

"You mean the externals they use?"

"'Externals?'"

"You are objecting to their choice of symbols."

"Symbols, are they?"

"Of course. Art is made out of symbols the way your body is made out of vital tissue."

"Then why have they got to use—?"

"Symbols of the grotesque and the violent? Because a book is short and a man's life is long."

"That I don't understand."

"Think it over."

"You mean it's got to be more concentrated?"

"Exactly. The awfulness has to be compressed."

"But can't a writer ever get the same effect without using such God damn awful subjects?"

"I believe one writer did. The greatest of modern times, James Joyce. He managed to get the whole sense of awfulness without resorting to externals that departed on the surface from the ordinary and the familiar. But he wrote very long books, when he accomplished this incredibly difficult thing, and also he used a device that is known as the interior monologue which only he and one other great modern writer could employ without being excessively tiresome."

"What other?"

"Marcel Proust. But Proust did not ever quite dare to deliver the message of Absolute Dread. He was too much of a physical coward. The atmosphere of his work is rather womb-like. The flight into protection is very apparent."

"I guess we've talked long enough. Don't you have to get back to your subject now?"

"I have just about finished with my subject, thanks to you."

"Aren't you going to make a sort of statement that adds it up?"

"Neatly? Yes. Maybe I'd better try: here it is: *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in that Sense of The Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art, from the

Guernica of Picasso to the cartoons of Charles Addams. Is that all right?"

"I have quit arguing with you. So long."

It is true that this book lacks somewhat the thematic magnitude of the *Chasseur Solitaire*, but there is an equally important respect in which it is superior.

The first novel had a tendency to overflow in places as if the virtuosity of the young writer had not yet fallen under her entire control. But in the second there is an absolute mastery of design. There is a lapidary precision about the structure of this second book. Furthermore I think it succeeds more perfectly in establishing its own reality, in creating a world of its own, and this is something that primarily distinguishes the work of a great artist from that of a professional writer. In this book there is perhaps no single passage that assaults the heart so mercilessly as that scene in the earlier novel where the deaf-mute Singer stands at night outside the squalid flat that he had formerly occupied with the crazed and now dying Antonapoulos. The acute tragic sensibility of scenes like that occurred more frequently in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Here the artistic climate is more austere. The tragedy is more distilled: a Grecian purity cools it, the eventually overwhelming impact is of a more reflective order. The key to this deliberate difference is implicit in the very title of the book. Discerning critics should have found it the opposite of a disappointment since it exhibited the one attribute which had yet to be shown in Carson McCullers' stunning array of gifts: the gift of mastery over a youthful lyricism.

I will add, however, that this second novel is still not her greatest; it is surpassed by *The Member of the Wedding*, her third novel, which combined the

heart-breaking tenderness of the first with the sculptural quality of the second. But this book is in turn surpassed by a somewhat shorter work. I am speaking of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, which is assuredly among the masterpieces of our language in the form of the novella.

During the two years that I have spent mostly abroad I have been impressed by the disparity that exists between Carson McCullers' reputation at home and in Europe. Translation serves as a winnowing process. The lesser and more derivative talents that have boisterously flooded our literary scene, with reputations inflated by professional politics and by shrewd commercial promotion, have somewhat obscured at home the position of more authentic talents. But in Europe the name of Carson McCullers is where it belongs, among the four or five preeminent figures in contemporary American writing.

Carson McCullers does not work rapidly. She is not coerced by the ridiculous popular idea that a good novelist turns out a book once a year. As long as five years elapsed between her second full-length novel and her third. I understand now that she has begun to work upon another. There could be no better literary news for any of us who have found, as I have found in her work, such intensity and nobility of spirit as we have not had in our prose-writing since Herman Melville. In the meantime she should be reassured by the constantly more abundant evidence that the work she has already accomplished, such as this work, is not eclipsed by time but further illumined.

—Tennessee Williams

I

AN ARMY POST in peacetime is a dull place. Things happen, but then they happen over and over again. The general plan of a fort in itself adds to the monotony—the huge concrete barracks, the neat rows of officers' homes built one precisely like the other, the gym, the chapel, the golf course and the swimming pools—all is designed according to a certain rigid pattern. But perhaps the dullness of a post is caused most of all by insularity and by a surfeit of leisure and safety, for once a man enters the army he is expected only to follow the heels ahead of him. At the same time things do occasionally happen on an army post that are not likely to re-occur. There is a fort in the South where a few years ago a murder was committed. The participants of this tragedy were: two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse.

The soldier in this affair was Private Ellgee Williams. Often in the late afternoon he could be seen sitting alone on one of the benches that lined the sidewalk before the barracks. This was a pleasant place, as here there was a long double row of young maple trees that patterned the lawn and the walk with cool, delicate, windblown shadows. In the spring the leaves of the trees were a lucent green that as the hot months came took on a darker, restful hue. In late autumn they were flaming gold. Here Private Williams would sit and wait for the call to evening

mess. He was a silent young soldier and in the barracks he had neither an enemy nor a friend. His round sunburned face was marked by a certain watchful innocence. His full lips were red and the bangs of his hair lay brown and matted on his forehead. In his eyes, which were of a curious blend of amber and brown, there was a mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals. At first glance Private Williams seemed a bit heavy and awkward in his bearing. But this was a deceptive impression; he moved with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief. Often soldiers who had thought themselves alone were startled to see him appear as from nowhere by their sides. His hands were small, delicately boned, and very strong.

Private Williams did not smoke, drink, fornicate, or gamble. In the barracks he kept to himself and was something of a mystery to the other men. Most of his leisure time Private Williams spent out in the woods surrounding the post. The reservation, fifteen miles square, was wild unspoiled country. Here were to be found giant virgin pines, many varieties of flowers, and even such shy animals as deer, wild pig, and foxes. Except for riding, Private Williams cared for none of the sports available to enlisted men. No one had ever seen him in the gym or at the swimming pool. Nor had he ever been known to laugh, to become angry, or to suffer in any way. He ate three wholesome, bounteous meals a day and never grumbled about the food as did the other soldiers. He slept in a room accommodating a long double row of about three dozen cots. This was not a peaceful room. At night when the lights were out there was often the sound of snores, of curses, and of strangled nightmare groans. But Private Williams rested tranquilly. Only