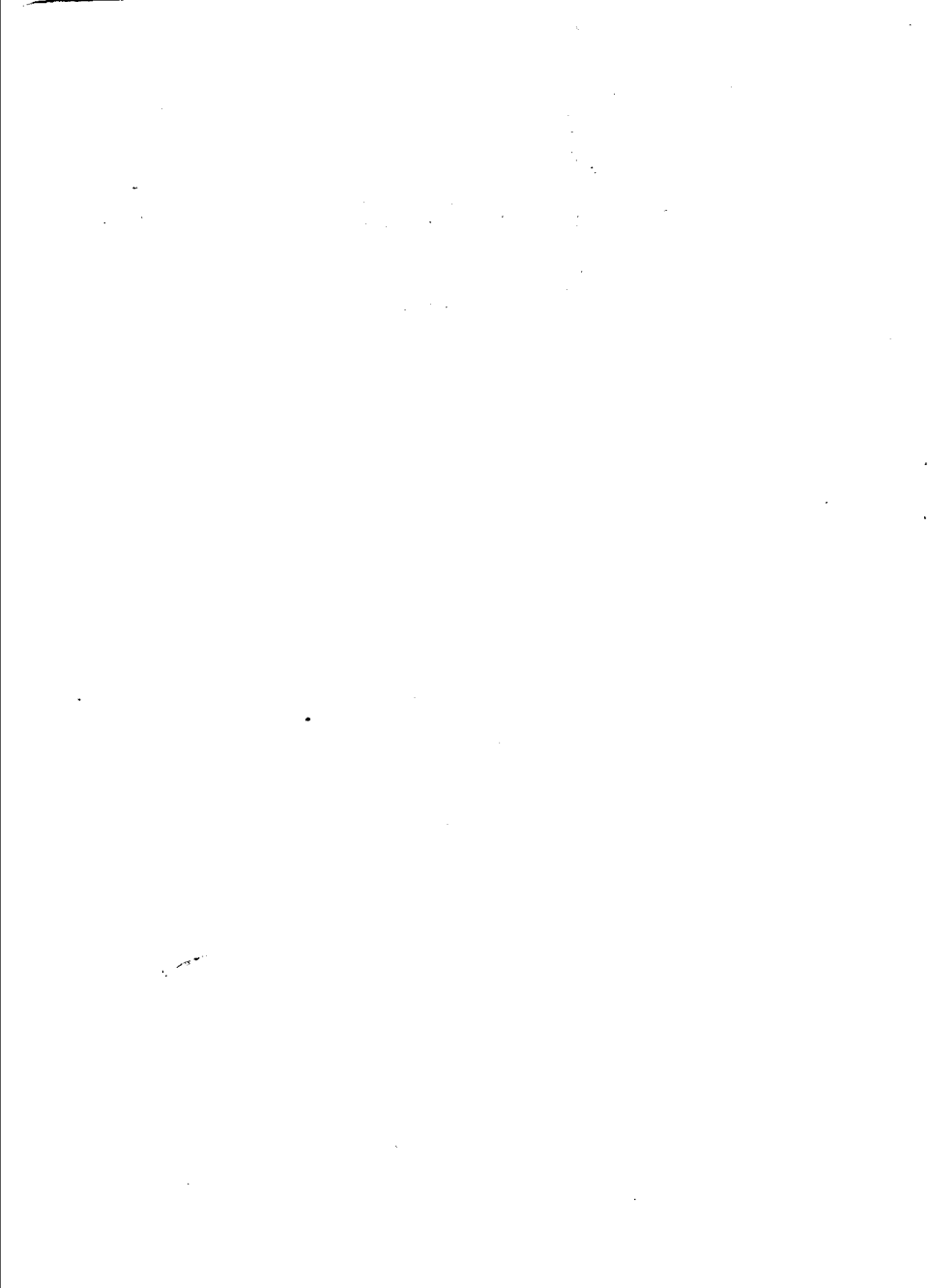


THE HEART
IS A LONELY
HUNTER

CARSON McCULLERS



Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ (Publishing and Editorial)
and Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England (Distribution and Warehouse)
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published in The Cresset Press, 1943

Published in Penguin Books 1961

Reprinted 1967 (twice), 1969 (twice), 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977,
1978, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987

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PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER

Carson McCullers was born at Columbus, Georgia, in 1917. Always a delicate person, as a young adult she began experiencing strokes, and at the age of thirty-one her entire left side was paralysed. For a while she could only use one finger to type, and for years before her death, as her sister informs us, she could not sit at a desk to work. In 1938 she married James Reeves McCullers, a corporal in the U.S. army. The marriage was not a success and they divorced. They continued to keep in touch and subsequently remarried, separating finally in 1953; he later committed suicide.

She was established as a writer by the time she reached her twenties but it was not until she published *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, when she was twenty-three, that she won widespread recognition. Her other works include *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), *The Member of the Wedding* (1946; this book won the New York Critics Award in 1950 and was staged as a play at the Royal Court Theatre, London), *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951), *The Square Root of Wonderful* (1958), a play, *Clock Without Hands* (1961) and *Sweet as a Pickle and Clean as a Pig* (1964). Many of her books have been published in Penguins, the latest of which is *The Mortgaged Heart*. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1942-3 and in 1946, and received an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1945; she was also a Fellow of the Academy. She lived in Nyack, New York, until her death in 1967.

Described by V. S. Pritchett as 'an incomparable storyteller', it was some time before she achieved recognition outside the United States. Graham Greene has written of her: 'Miss McCullers and perhaps Mr Faulkner are the only writers since the death of D. H. Lawrence with an original poetic sensibility. I prefer Miss McCullers to Mr Faulkner because she writes more clearly; I prefer her to D. H. Lawrence because she has no message.'

PART ONE

In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together. Early every morning they would come out from the house where they lived and walk arm in arm down the street to work. The two friends were very different. The one who always steered the way was an obese and dreamy Greek. In the summer he would come out wearing a yellow or green polo shirt stuffed sloppily into his trousers in front and (hanging loose behind.) When it was colder he wore over this a shapeless grey sweater. His face was round and oily, with half-closed eyelids and lips that curved in a gentle, stupid smile. The other mute was tall. His eyes had a quick, intelligent expression. He was always immaculate and very soberly dressed. 安定认真 -> 冷静

Every morning the two friends walked silently together until they reached the main street of the town. Then when they came to a certain fruit and candy store they paused for a moment on the sidewalk outside. The Greek, Spiros Antonapoulos, worked for his cousin, who owned this fruit store. His job was to make candies and sweets, uncrate the fruits, and to keep the place clean. The thin mute, John Singer, nearly always put his hand on his friend's arm and looked for a second into his face before leaving him. Then after this good-bye Singer crossed the street and walked on alone to the jewellery store where he worked as a silverware engraver.

In the late afternoon the friends would meet again. Singer came back to the fruit store and waited until Antonapoulos was ready to go home. The Greek would be lazily unpacking a case of peaches or melons, or perhaps looking at the funny paper in the kitchen behind the store where he cooked. Before their departure Antonapoulos always opened a paper sack he kept hidden during the day on one of the kitchen shelves. Inside were stored various bits of food he had collected - a piece of fruit, samples of candy, or the butt-end of a liverwurst. Usually before leaving Antonapoulos waddled gently to the glassed case in the front of the store where some meats and cheeses were kept. He

* glided open the back of the case and his fat hand groped lovingly for some particular dainty inside which he had wanted. Sometimes his cousin who owned the place did not see him. But if he noticed he stared at his cousin with a warning in his tight, pale face. Sadly Antonapoulos would shuffle the morsel from one corner of the case to the other. During these times Singer stood very straight with his hands in his pockets and looked in another direction. He did not like to watch this little scene between the two Greeks. For, excepting drinking and a certain solitary secret pleasure, Antonapoulos loved to eat more than anything else in the world.

In the dusk the two mutes walked slowly home together. At home Singer was always talking to Antonapoulos. His hands shaped the words in a swift series of designs. His face was eager and his grey-green eyes sparkled brightly. With his thin, strong hands he told Antonapoulos all that had happened during the day.

Antonapoulos sat back lazily and looked at Singer. It was seldom that he ever moved his hands to speak at all - and then it was to say that he wanted to eat or to sleep or to drink. These three things he always said with the same vague, fumbling signs. At night, if he were not too drunk, he would kneel down before his bed and pray awhile. Then his plump hands shaped the words 'Holy Jesus', or 'God', or 'Darling Mary'. These were the only words Antonapoulos ever said. Singer never knew just how much his friend understood of all the things he told him. But it did not matter.

They shared the upstairs of a small house near the business section of the town. There were two rooms. On the oil stove in the kitchen Antonapoulos cooked all of their meals. There were straight, plain kitchen chairs for Singer and an over-stuffed sofa for Antonapoulos. The bedroom was furnished mainly with a large double bed covered with and eiderdown comfort for the big Greek and a narrow iron cot for Singer.

Dinner always took a long time, because Antonapoulos loved food and he was very slow. After they had eaten, the big Greek would lie back on his sofa and slowly lick over each one of his teeth with his tongue, either from a certain delicacy or because he did not wish to lose the savour of the meal - while Singer washed the dishes.

Sometimes in the evening the mutes would play chess. Singer had always greatly enjoyed this game, and years before he had tried to teach it to Antonapoulos. At first his friend could not be interested in the reasons for moving the various pieces about on the board. Then Singer began to keep a bottle of something good under the table to be taken out after each lesson. The Greek never got on to the erratic movements of the knights and the sweeping mobility of the queens, but he learned to make a few set, opening moves. He preferred the white pieces and would not play if the black men were given him. After the first moves Singer worked out the game by himself while his friend looked on drowsily. If Singer made brilliant attacks on his own men so that in the end the black king was killed, Antonapoulos was always very proud and pleased.

The two mutes had no other friends, and except when they worked they were alone together. Each day was very much like any other day, because they were alone so much that nothing ever disturbed them. Once a week they would go to the library for Singer to withdraw a mystery book and on Friday night they attended a movie. Then on payday they always went to the ten-cent photograph shop above the Army and Navy Store so that Antonapoulos could have his picture taken. These were the only places where they made customary visits. There were many parts in the town that they had never even seen.

The town was in the middle of the deep South. The summers were long and the months of winter cold were very few. Nearly always the sky was a glassy, brilliant azure and the sun burned down riotously bright. Then the light, chill rains of November would come, and perhaps later there would be frost and some short months of cold. The winters were changeable, but the summers always were burning hot. The town was a fairly large one. On the main street there were several blocks of two- and three-storey shops and business offices. But the largest buildings in the town were the factories, which employed a large percentage of the population. These cotton mills were big and flourishing and most of the workers in the town were very poor. Often in the faces along the streets there was the desperate look of hunger and of loneliness.

But the two mutes were not lonely at all. At home they were content to eat and drink, and Singer would talk with his hands eagerly to his friend about all that was in his mind. So the years passed in this quiet way until Singer reached the age of thirty-two and had been in the town with Antonapoulos for ten years.

Then one day the Greek became ill. He sat up in bed with his hands on his fat stomach and big, oily tears rolled down his cheeks. Singer went to see his friend's cousin who owned the fruit store, and also he arranged for leave from his own work. The doctor made out a diet for Antonapoulos and said that he could drink no more wine. Singer rigidly enforced the doctor's orders. All day he sat by his friend's bed and did what he could to make the time pass quickly, but Antonapoulos only looked at him angrily from the corners of his eyes and would not be amused.

The Greek was very fretful, and kept finding fault with the fruit drinks and food that Singer prepared for him. Constantly he made his friend help him out of bed so that he could pray. His huge buttocks would sag down over his plump little feet when he kneeled. He fumbled with his hands to say 'Darling Mary' and then held to the small brass cross tied to his neck with a dirty string. His big eyes would wall up to the ceiling with a look of fear in them, and afterwards he was very sulky and would not let his friend speak to him.

Singer was patient and did all that he could. He drew little pictures, and once he made a sketch of his friend to amuse him. This picture hurt the big Greek's feelings, and he refused to be reconciled until Singer had made his face very young and handsome and coloured his hair bright yellow and his eyes china blue. And then he tried not to show his pleasure.

Singer nursed his friend so carefully that after a week Antonapoulos was able to return to his work. But from that time on there was a difference in their way of life. Trouble came to the two friends.

Antonapoulos was not ill any more, but a change had come in him. He was irritable and no longer content to spend the evenings quietly in their home. When he would wish to go out Singer followed along close behind him. Antonapoulos would

go into a restaurant, and while they sat at the table he slyly put lumps of sugar, or a pepper-shaker, or pieces of silverware in his pocket. Singer always paid for what he took and there was no disturbance. At home he scolded Antonapoulos, but the big Greek only looked at him with a bland smile.

The months went on and these habits of Antonapoulos grew worse. One day at noon he walked calmly out of the fruit store of his cousin and urinated in public against the wall of the First National Bank Building across the street. At times he would meet people on the sidewalk whose faces did not please him, and he would bump into these persons and push at them with his elbows and stomach. He walked into a store one day and hauled out a floor lamp without paying for it, and another time he tried to take an electric train he had seen in a show-case.

For Singer this was a time of great distress. He was continually marching Antonapoulos down to the courthouse during lunch hour to settle these infringements of the law. Singer became very familiar with the procedure of the courts and he was in a constant state of agitation. The money he had saved in the bank was spent for bail and fines. All of his efforts and money were used to keep his friend out of jail because of such charges as theft, committing public indecencies, and assault and battery.

The Greek cousin for whom Antonapoulos worked did not enter into these troubles at all. Charles Parker (for that was the name this cousin had taken) let Antonapoulos stay on at the store, but he watched him always with his pale, tight face and he made no effort to help him. Singer had a strange feeling about Charles Parker. He began to dislike him.

Singer lived in continual turmoil and worry. But Antonapoulos was always bland, and no matter what happened the gentle, flaccid smile was still on his face. In all the years before it had seemed to Singer that there was something very subtle and wise in this smile of his friend. He had never known just how much Antonapoulos understood and what he was thinking. Now in the big Greek's expression Singer thought that he could detect something sly and joking. He would shake his friend by the shoulders until he was very tired and explain

things over and over with his hands. But nothing did any good.

All of Singer's money was gone and he had to borrow from the jeweller for whom he worked. On one occasion he was unable to pay bail for his friend and Antonapoulos spent the night in jail. When Singer came to get him out the next day he was very sulky. He did not want to leave. He had enjoyed his dinner of sowbelly and cornbread with syrup poured over it. And the new sleeping arrangements and his cellmates pleased him.

They had lived so much alone that Singer had no one to help him in his distress. Antonapoulos let nothing disturb him or cure him of his habits. At home he sometimes cooked the new dish he had eaten in the jail, and on the streets there was never any knowing just what he would do.

And then the final trouble came to Singer.

One afternoon he had come to meet Antonapoulos at the fruit store when Charles Parker handed him a letter. The letter explained that Charles Parker had made arrangements for his cousin to be taken to the state insane asylum two hundred miles away. Charles Parker had used his influence in the town and the details were already settled. Antonapoulos was to leave and to be admitted into the asylum the next week.

Singer read the letter several times, and for a while he could not think. Charles Parker was talking to him across the counter, but he did not even try to read his lips and understand. At last Singer wrote on the little pad he always carried in his pocket:

You cannot do this. Antonapoulos must stay with me.

Charles Parker shook his head excitedly. He did not know much American. 'None of your business,' he kept saying over and over.

Singer knew that everything was finished. The Greek was afraid that some day he might be responsible for his cousin. Charles Parker did not know much about the American language - but he understood the American dollar very well, and he had used his money and influence to admit his cousin to the asylum without delay.

There was nothing Singer could do.

The next week was full of feverish activity. He talked and

talked. And although his hands never paused to rest he could not tell all that he had to say. He wanted to talk to Antonapoulos of all the thoughts that had ever been in his mind and heart, but there was not time. His grey eyes glittered and his quick, intelligent face expressed great strain. Antonapoulos watched him drowsily, and his friend did not know just what he really understood.

Then came the day when Antonapoulos must leave. Singer brought out his own suitcase and very carefully packed the best of their joint possessions. Antonapoulos made himself a lunch to eat during the journey. In the late afternoon they walked arm in arm down the street for the last time together. It was a chilly afternoon in late November, and little huffs of breath showed in the air before them.

Charles Parker was to travel with his cousin, but he stood apart from them at the station. Antonapoulos crowded into the bus and settled himself with elaborate preparations on one of the front seats. Singer watched him from the window and his hands began desperately to talk for the last time with his friend. But Antonapoulos was so busy checking over the various items in his lunch box that for a while he paid no attention. Just before the bus pulled away from the kerb he turned to Singer and his smile was very bland and remote - as though already they were many miles apart.

The weeks that followed did not seem real at all. All day Singer worked over his bench in the back of the jewellery store, and then at night he returned to the house alone. More than anything he wanted to sleep. As soon as he came home from work he would lie on his cot and try to doze awhile. Dreams came to him when he lay there half-asleep. And in all of them Antonapoulos was there. His hands would jerk nervously, for in his dreams he was talking to his friend and Antonapoulos was watching him.

Singer tried to think of the time before he had ever known his friend. He tried to recount to himself certain things that had happened when he was young. But none of these things he tried to remember seemed real.

There was one particular fact that he remembered, but it was not at all important to him. Singer recalled that, although he

had been deaf since he was an infant, he had not always been a real mute. He was left an orphan very young and placed in an institution for the deaf. He had learned to talk with his hands and to read. Before he was nine years old he could talk with one hand in the American way - and also could employ both of his hands after the method of Europeans. He had learned to follow the movements of people's lips and to understand what they said. Then finally he had been taught to speak.

At the school he was thought very intelligent. He learned the lessons before the rest of the pupils. But he could never become used to speaking with his lips. It was not natural to him, and his tongue felt like a whale in his mouth. From the blank expression on people's faces to whom he talked in this way he felt that his voice must be like the sound of some animal or that there was something disgusting in his speech. It was painful for him to try to talk with his mouth, but his hands were always ready to shape the words he wished to say. When he was twenty-two he had come South to this town from Chicago and he met Antonapoulos immediately. Since that time he had never spoken with his mouth again, because with his friend there was no need for this.

Nothing seemed real except the ten years with Antonapoulos. In his half-dreams he saw his friend very vividly, and when he awakened a great aching loneliness would be in him. Occasionally he would pack up a box for Antonapoulos, but he never received any reply. And so the months passed in this empty, dreaming way.

In the spring a change came over Singer. He could not sleep and his body was very restless. At evening he would walk monotonously around the room, unable to work off a new feeling of energy. If he rested at all it was only during a few hours before dawn - then he would drop bluntly into a sleep that lasted until the morning light struck suddenly beneath his opening eyelids like a scimitar.

He began spending his evenings walking around the town. He could no longer stand the rooms where Antonapoulos had lived, and he rented a place in a shambling boarding-house not far from the centre of the town.

He ate his meals at a restaurant only two blocks away. This

restaurant was at the very end of the long main street, and the name of the place was the New York Café. The first day he glanced over the menu quickly and wrote a short note and handed it to the proprietor.

Each morning for breakfast I want an egg, toast, and coffee - \$0.15
For lunch I want soup (any kind), a meat sandwich, and

milk - \$0.25

Please bring me at dinner three vegetables (any kind but
cabbage), fish or meat, and a glass of beer - \$0.35

Thank you.

The proprietor read the note and gave him an alert, tactful glance. He was a hard man of middle height, with a beard so dark and heavy that the lower part of his face looked as though it were moulded of iron. He usually stood in the corner by the cash register, his arms folded over his chest, quietly observing all that went on around him. Singer came to know this man's face very well, for he ate at one of his tables three times a day.

Each evening the mute walked alone for hours in the street. Sometimes the nights were cold with the sharp, wet winds of March and it would be raining heavily. But to him this did not matter. His gait was agitated and he always kept his hands stuffed tight into the pockets of his trousers. Then as the weeks passed the days grew warm and languorous. His agitation gave way gradually to exhaustion and there was a look about him of deep calm. In his face there came to be a brooding peace that is seen most often in the faces of the very sorrowful or the very wise. But still he wandered through the streets of the town, always silent and alone.

2

On a black, sultry night in early summer Biff Brannon stood behind the cash register of the New York Café. It was twelve o'clock. Outside the street lights had already been turned off, so that the light from the café made a sharp, yellow rectangle on the sidewalk. The street was deserted, but inside the café there were half a dozen customers drinking beer or Santa Lucia wine

or whisky. Biff waited stolidly, his elbow resting on the counter and his thumb mashing the tip of his long nose. His eyes were intent. He watched especially a short, squat man in overalls who had become drunk and boisterous. Now and then his gaze passed on to the mute who sat by himself at one of the middle tables, or to others of the customers before the counter. But he always turned back to the drunk in overalls. The hour grew later and Biff continued to wait silently behind the counter. Then at last he gave the restaurant a final survey and went towards the door at the back which led upstairs.

Quietly he entered the room at the top of the stairs. It was dark inside and he walked with caution. After he had gone a few paces his toe struck something hard and he reached down and felt for the handle of a suitcase on the floor. He had only been in the room a few seconds and was about to leave when the light was turned on.

Alice sat up in the rumpled bed and looked at him. 'What you doing with that suitcase?' she asked. 'Can't you get rid of that lunatic without giving him back what he's already drunk up?'

'Wake up and go down yourself. Call the cop and let him get soused on the chain gang with cornbread and peas. Go to it, Misses Brannon.'

'I will all right if he's down there tomorrow. But you leave that bag alone. It don't belong to that sponger any more.'

'I know spongers, and Blount's not one,' Biff said. 'Myself - I don't know so well. But I'm not that kind of a thief.'

Calmly Biff put down the suitcase on the steps outside. The air was not so stale and sultry in the room as it was downstairs. He decided to stay for a short while and douse his face with cold water before going back.

'I told you already what I'll do if you don't get rid of that fellow for good tonight. In the daytime he takes them naps at the back, and then at night you feed him dinners and beer. For a week now he hasn't paid one cent. And all his wild talking and carrying-on will ruin any decent trade.'

'You don't know people and you don't know real business,' Biff said. 'The fellow in question first came in here twelve days ago and he was a stranger in the town. The first week he gave