

When she was good

Philip Roth.

When  
She Was  
Good

---

*Philip Roth*



PENGUIN BOOKS

Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street,  
New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.  
Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth,  
Middlesex, England

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood,  
Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Limited, 2801 John Street,  
Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4

Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road,  
Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published in the United States of America by  
Random House, Inc., 1967

First published in Great Britain by  
Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1967

Published in Penguin Books in  
Great Britain 1975

Reprinted 1986

Published in Penguin Books in the United States 1985

Copyright © Philip Roth, 1966, 1967

All rights reserved

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Roth, Philip.

When she was good.

Originally published: New York: Random House, 1967.

I. Title.

PS3568.O855W46 1985 813'.54 85-3487

ISBN 0 14 00.7676 X

Sections of this book have appeared, in slightly different form, in the  
*Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Lyrics from the following songs are used by permission:

"Nature Boy," by Eden Ahbez. Copyright 1948 by Crestview Music  
Corporation, New York. Sole Selling Agent: Ivan Mogull Music Corporation,  
New York, N.Y.

"Anniversary Song," by Al Jolson. Copyright 1946 by Mood Music Co., Inc.,  
N.Y.C. Sole Selling Agent: Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc.

"A Tree in the Meadow," by Billy Reid. Copyright 1947 by Campbell-  
Connelly Inc., New York. Sole Selling Agent: Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc.

"It's Magic," by Jules Stein. Copyright 1948 by M. Witmark & Sons.

Printed in the United States of America by  
R. R. Donnelley & Sons, Harrisonburg, Virginia  
Set in Janson

To my brother Sandy;  
to my friends Alison Bishop, Bob Brustein,  
George Elliott, Mary Emma Elliott,  
Howard Stein, and Mel Tumin;  
and to Ann Mudge:  
For words spoken and deeds done

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition  
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or  
otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of  
binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar  
condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

**When She Was Good**

# 1



Not to be rich, not to be famous, not to be mighty, not even to be happy, but to be civilized—that was the dream of his life. What the qualities of such a life were he could not have articulated when he left his father's house, or shack, in the northern woods of the state; his plan was to travel all the way down to Chicago to find out. He knew for sure what he didn't want, and that was to live like a savage. His own father was a fierce and ignorant man—a trapper, then a lumberman, and at the end of his life, a watchman at the iron mines. His mother was a hard-working woman with a slavish nature who could never conceive of wanting anything other than what she had; or if she did, if she was really other than she seemed, she felt it was not prudent to speak of her desires in front of her husband.

One of Willard's strongest boyhood recollections is of the time a full-blooded Chippewa squaw came to their cabin with a root for his sister to chew when Ginny was incandescent with scarlet fever. Willard was seven and Ginny was one and the squaw, as Willard tells it today, was over a hundred. The delirious little girl did not die of the disease, though Willard was later to understand his father to believe it would have been better if she had. In only a few years they were to discover that poor little Ginny could not learn to add two and

two, or to recite in their order the days of the week. Whether this was a consequence of the fever or she had been born that way, nobody was ever to know.

Willard never forgot the brutality of that occurrence, which for him lay in the fact that nothing was to be done, for all that what was happening was happening to a one-year-old child. What was happening—this was more his sense of it at the time—was even deeper than his eyes . . . In the process of discovering his personal attractiveness, the seven-year-old had lately discovered that what someone had at first denied him would sometimes be conceded if only he looked into the other's eyes long enough for the honesty and intensity of his desire to be appreciated—for it to be understood that it wasn't just something he wanted but something he *needed*. His success, though meager at home, was considerable at the school in Iron City, where the young lady teacher had taken a great liking to the effervescent, good-humored and bright little boy. The night Ginny lay moaning in her crib Willard did everything he could to catch his father's attention, but the man only continued spooning down his dinner. And when finally he spoke, it was to tell the child to stop shuffling and gaping and to eat his food. But Willard could not swallow a single mouthful. Again he concentrated, again he brought all his emotion up into his eyes, wished with all his heart—and a pure selfless wish too, nothing for himself; never would he wish anything for himself again—and fixed his plea on his mother. But all she did was to turn away and cry.

Later, when his father stepped out of the shack and his mother took the dishes to the tub, he moved across the darkened room to the corner where Ginny lay. He put his hand into the crib. The cheek he touched felt like a sack of hot water. Down by the baby's burning toes he found the root the Indian woman had brought to them that morning. Carefully he wrapped Ginny's fingers around it, but they unbent the moment he let go. He picked up the root and pressed it to her lips. "Here," he said, as though beckoning to an animal to eat from his hand. He was forcing it between her

gums when the door opened. "You—let her be, get away," and so, helpless, he went off to his bed, and had, at seven, his first terrifying inkling that there were in the universe forces even more immune to his charm, even more remote from his desires, even more estranged from human need and feeling, than his own father.

Ginny lived with her parents until the end of her mother's life. Then Willard's father, an old hulk of a thing by this time, moved into a room in Iron City, and Ginny was taken to Beckstown, off in the northwestern corner of the state, where the home for the feeble-minded used to be. It was nearly a month before the news of what his father had done reached Willard. Over his own wife's objections, he got into the car that very evening and drove most of the night. At noon the following day he returned home with Ginny—not to Chicago, but to the town of Liberty Center, which is a hundred and fifty miles down the river from Iron City, and as far south as Willard had gotten when at the age of eighteen he had decided to journey out into the civilized world.

Since the war the country town that Liberty Center used to be has given way more and more to the suburb of Winnisaw it will eventually become. But when Willard first came to settle, there was not even a bridge across the Slade River connecting Liberty Center on the east shore to the county seat on the west; to get to Winnisaw, you had to take a ferry ride from the landing, or in deep winter, walk across the ice. Liberty Center was a town of small white houses shaded by big elms and maples, with a bandstand in the middle of Broadway, its main street. Bounded on the west by the pale flow of river, it opens out on the east to dairy country, which in the summer of 1903, when Willard arrived, was so deeply green it reminded him—a joke for the amusement of the young—of a fellow he once saw at a picnic who had eaten a pound of bad potato salad.

Until he came down from the north, "outside of town" had always meant to him the towering woods rolling up to Canada,



and the weather roaring down, waves of wind, of hail, of rain and snow. And "town" meant Iron City, where the logs were brought to be milled and the ore to be dumped into boxcars, the clanging, buzzing, swarming, dusty frontier town to which he walked each schoolday—or in winter, when he went off in a raw morning dimness, ran—through woods aswarm with bear and wolf. So at the sight of Liberty Center, its quiet beauty, its serene order, its gentle summery calm, all that had been held in check in him, all that tenderness of heart that had been for eighteen years his secret burden, even at times his shame, came streaming forth. If ever there was a place where life could be less bleak and harsh and cruel than the life he had known as a boy, if ever there was a place where a man did not have to live like a brute, where he did not have to be reminded at every turn that something in the world either did not like mankind, or did not even know of its existence, it was here. Liberty Center! Oh, sweet name! At least for him, for he was indeed free at last of that terrible tyranny of cruel men and cruel nature.

He found a room; then he found a job—he took an examination and scored high enough to become postal clerk; then he found a wife, a strong-minded and respectable girl from a proper family; and then he had a child; and then one day—the fulfillment, he discovered, of a very deep desire—he bought a house of his own, with a front porch and a backyard: downstairs a parlor, a dining room, a kitchen and a bedroom; upstairs two bedrooms more and the bath. A back bathroom was built downstairs in 1915, six years after the birth of his daughter, and following his promotion to assistant postmaster of the town. In 1962 the sidewalk out front had to be replaced, a whacking expense for a man now on a government pension, but one that had to be, for the pavement had buckled in half a dozen places and become a hazard to passers-by. Indeed, to this very day, when his famous agility, or jumpiness, has all but disappeared; when several times in an afternoon he finds himself in a chair which he cannot remember having settled into, awakening from a sleep he cannot remember needing;

when at night to undo his laces produces a groan he does not even hear; when in his bed he tries for minutes on end to roll his fingers into a fist, and sometimes must go off to sleep having failed in the attempt; when at the end of each month he looks at the fresh new calendar page and understands that there on the pantry door is the month and the year in which he will most assuredly die, that one of those big black numerals over which his eye is slowly moving is the date upon which he is to disappear forever from the world—he nevertheless continues to attend as quickly as he is able to a weak porch rail, or the dripping of a spigot in the bathroom, or a tack come loose from the runner in the hall—and all this to maintain not only the comfort of those who live with him yet, but the dignity of all too, such as it is.

One afternoon in November of 1954, a week before Thanksgiving, and just at dusk, Willard Carroll drove out to Clark's Hill, parked down by the fence, and on foot climbed the path until he reached the family plot. The wind was growing colder and stronger by the minute, so that by the time he had reached the top of the hill, the bare trees whose limbs had only been clicking together when he left the car were now giving off a deep groaning sound. The sky swirling overhead had a strange light to it, though below, it already appeared to be night. Of the town he was able to discern little more than the black line of the river, and the head lamps of the cars as they moved along Water Street toward the Winnisaw Bridge.

As though this of all places had been his destination, Willard sank down onto the cold block of bench that faced the two stones, raised the collar of his red hunting jacket, pulled on the flaps of his cap, and there, before the graves of his sister Ginny and his granddaughter Lucy, and the rectangles reserved for the rest of them, he waited. It began to snow.

Waiting for what? The stupidity of his behavior dawned quickly. The bus he had left the house to meet would be pulling up back of Van Harn's store in a few minutes; from it

Whitey was going to disembark, suitcase in hand, whether his father-in-law sat here in a freezing cemetery or not. Everything was in readiness for the homecoming, which Willard had himself helped to bring about. So what now? Back out? Change his mind? Let Whitey find himself another sponsor—or sucker? That's right, oh, that's it exactly—let it get dark, let it get cold, and just sit it out in the falling snow . . . And the bus will pull in and the fellow will get off and head into the waiting room, all brimming over with how he has taken someone in once again—only to find that this time no sucker named Willard is waiting in the waiting room.

But at home Berta was preparing a dinner for four; on the way out the kitchen door to the garage, Willard had kissed her on the cheek—"It's going to be all right, Mrs. Carroll," but he might have been talking to himself for all the response he received. As a matter of fact, that's who he *was* talking to. He had backed the car down the driveway and looked up to the second floor, where his daughter Myra was rushing around her room so as to be bathed and dressed when her father and her husband came through the door. But saddest of all, most confusing of all, a little light was on in Lucy's room. Only the week before, Myra had pushed the bed from one end of the room to the other, and taken down the curtains that had hung there all those years, and then gone out and bought a new bedspread, so that at least it no longer looked like the room in which Lucy had slept, or tried to sleep, the last night she had ever spent in the house. Of course, on the subject of how and where Whitey was to spend his nights, what could Willard do but be silent? Secretly it was a relief that Whitey was to be "on trial" in this way—if only it could have been in a bed other than that one.

And over in Winnisaw, Willard's old friend and lodge brother Bud Doremus was expecting Whitey to show up for work at his hardware supply house first thing Monday morning. The arrangements with Bud dated back to the summer, when Willard had agreed to accept his son-in-law once again

into his house, if only for a while. "Only for a while" was the guarantee he had made to Berta; because she was right, this just could not be a repetition of 1934, with someone in need coming for a short stay and managing somehow to stretch it out to sixteen years of living off the fat of another fellow's land, which wasn't so fat either. But of course, said Willard, that other fellow did happen to be the father of the man's wife— And just what does that mean, Berta asked, that it is going to be sixteen years again this time too? Because you are certainly still father to his wife; that hasn't changed any. Berta, I don't imagine for one thing that I have got sixteen years left to me, first of all. Well, said she, neither do I, which might be just another reason not even to begin. You mean just let them go off on their own? Before I even know whether the man really is changed over or not? asked Willard. And what if he really has reformed, once and for all? Oh sure, said Berta. Well, sneering at the idea may be your answer, Berta, but it just does not happen to be mine. You mean it does not happen to be Myra's, she said. I am open to opinion from all sides, he said, I will not deny that, why should I? Well then, maybe you ought to be open to mine, Berta said, before we start this tragedy one more time. Berta, he said, till January the first I am giving the man a place to get his bearings in. January the first, she said, but which year? The year two thousand?

Seated alone up in the cemetery, the tree limbs rising in the wind, and the dark of the town seemingly being drawn up into the sky as the first snow descended, Willard was remembering the days of the Depression, and those nights too, when sometimes he awoke in the pitch-black and did not know whether to tremble or be glad that someone in need of him was asleep in every bed of the house. It had been only six months after going off to Beckstown to rescue Ginny from her life among the feeble-minded that he had opened the door to Myra and Whitey and their little three-year-old daughter, Lucy. Oh, he can still remember the tiny, spirited, golden-haired child that



Lucy had been—how lively and bright and sweet. He can remember when she was first learning to care for herself, how she used to try to pass what she knew on to her Aunt Ginny, but how Ginny, the poor creature, was barely able to learn to perform the simplest body functions, let alone mastering the niceties of tea parties, or the mystery of rolling two little white socks together to make a ball.

Oh, yes, he can remember it all. Ginny, a fully grown, fully developed woman, looking down with that pale dopey face for Lucy to tell her what to do next—and little Lucy, who was then no bigger than a bird. Behind the happy child, Ginny would go running across the lawn, the toes of her high shoes pointing out, and taking quick little steps to keep up—a strangely beautiful scene, but a melancholy one, too, for it was proof not only of their love for each other, but of the fact that in Ginny's brain so many things were melted together that in real life are separate and distinct. She seemed always to think that Lucy was somehow herself—that is, more Ginny, or the rest of Ginny, or the Ginny people called Lucy. When Lucy ate an ice cream, Ginny's eyes would get all happy and content, as though she were eating it herself. Or if as a punishment Lucy was put to bed early, Ginny, too, would sob and go off to sleep like one doomed . . . a different kind of scene, which would leave the rest of the family subdued and unhappy.

When it was time for Lucy to start school, Ginny started too, only she wasn't supposed to. She would follow Lucy all the way there, and then stand outside the first floor where the kindergarten was and call for the child. At first the teacher changed Lucy's desk in the hope that if Ginny didn't see her she would grow tired, or bored, and go home. But Ginny's voice only grew louder, and as a result Willard had to give her a special talking-to, saying that if she didn't let Lucy alone he was going to have to lock a bad girl whose name was Virginia in her room for the whole day. But the punishment proved toothless, both in the threat and the execution: the moment they let her out of her room to go to the toilet, she

was running in her funny ducklike way down the stairs and off to the school. And he couldn't keep her locked up anyway. It wasn't to tie her to a tree in the backyard that he had brought his sister home to live in his house. She was his closest living relative, he told Berta, when she suggested some long kind of leash as a possible solution; she was his baby sister to whom something terrible had happened when she was only a one-year-old child. But Lucy, he was reminded—as if he had to be—was Myra's daughter and his grandchild, and how could she ever learn anything in school if Ginny was going to stand outside the classroom all day long, singing out in her flat foghorn of a voice, "*Loo-cy . . . Loo-cy . . .*"?

Finally the day came which made no sense whatsoever. Because Ginny wouldn't stop standing outside a grade-school classroom calling out a harmless name, Willard was driving her back to the state home in Beckstown. The night before, the principal had telephoned the house again, and for all his politeness, indicated that things had gone about as far as they could. It was Willard's contention that it was probably only a matter of a few weeks more before Ginny got the idea, but the principal made it clear to Mr. Carroll, as he had a moment earlier to the little girl's parents, that either Ginny had to be restrained once and for all, or Lucy would have to be kept away from the school, which of course would be in violation of state law.

On the long drive to Beckstown, Willard tried over and over again to somehow make Ginny understand the situation, but no matter how he explained, no matter how many examples he used—look, there's a cow, Ginny, and there's another cow; and there's a tree, and there's another tree—he could not get her to see that Ginny was one person and Lucy was someone else. Around dinnertime they arrived. Taking her by the hand, he led her up the overgrown path to the long one-story wooden building where she was to spend the rest of her days. And why? Because she could not understand the most basic fact of human life, the fact that I am me and you are you.

In the office the director welcomed Ginny back to the Beckstown Vocational School. An attendant piled a towel, a washrag and a blanket into her outstretched arms and steered her to the women's wing. Following the attendant's instructions, she unrolled the mattress and began to make the bed. "But this is what my father did!" thought Willard. "Sent her away!" . . . even as the director was saying to him, "That's the way it is, Mr. Carroll. People thinking they can take 'em home, and then coming to bring 'em back. Don't feel bad, sir, it's just what happens."

Among her own kind Ginny lived without incident for three years more; then an epidemic of influenza swept through the home one winter, and before her brother could even be notified of her illness, she was dead.

When Willard drove up to Iron City to tell his father the news, the old man listened, and received what he heard without so much as a sigh; not a single human thing to say; not a tear for this creature of his own flesh and blood, who had lived and died beyond the reaches of human society. To die alone, said Willard, without family, without friends, without a home . . . The old man only nodded, as though his heartsick son were reporting an everyday occurrence.

Within the year the old man himself fell over dead with a brain hemorrhage. At the small funeral he arranged for his father up in Iron City, Willard found himself at the graveside suddenly and inexplicably stricken with that sense of things that can descend upon the tender-hearted, even at the death of an enemy—that surely the spirit had been deeper, and the life more tragic, than he had ever imagined.

He brushed the snow off the shoulder of his jacket and stamped away a tingling that was beginning in his right foot. He looked at his watch. "Well, maybe the bus will be late. And if it's not, he can wait. It won't kill him."

He was remembering again: of all things, the Independence Day Fair held in Iron City—that Fourth of July almost sixty

years back when he had won eight of the twelve track events and so set a record that stands till today. Willard knows this because he always manages to get hold of an Iron City paper every fifth of July just so as to take a look and see. He can still remember running home through the woods when that glorious day was over, rushing up the dirt road and into the cabin, dropping onto the table all the medals he had been awarded; he remembers how his father hefted each one in his hand, then led him back outside to where some of the neighbors were gathered, and told Willard's mother to give them an "on your mark." In the race that followed, some two hundred yards, the father outdistanced the son by a good twenty feet. "But I've been running all day," thought Willard. "I ran the whole way home—"

"Well, who's the fastest?" one of the bystanders teased the boy as he started back to the cabin.

Inside, his father said, "Next time don't forget."

"I won't," said the child . . .

Well, there was the story. And the moral? What exactly were his memories trying to tell him?

Well, the moral, if there is one, came later, years later. He was sitting in the parlor one evening, across from his young son-in-law, who had stretched himself out with the paper and was about to munch down on an apple and so let the comfortable evening begin, when suddenly Willard couldn't bear the sight of him. Four years of free room and board! Four years of floundering and getting on his feet again! And there he was, on his back, in Willard's parlor, eating Willard's food! Suddenly Willard wanted to pull the apple out of Whitey's hand and tell him to pick up and get out. "The holiday is over! Scat! Go! Where, I don't care!" Instead he decided that it was a good night to give his mementos a look-through.

In the kitchen pantry he found a piece of soft cloth and Berta's silver polish. Then from beneath the wool shirts in his bureau he removed the cigar box full of keepsakes. Settling onto the bed, he opened the box and sorted through. He

pushed everything first to one side, then to the other; in the end he laid each item out on the bedspread: photos, newspaper clippings . . . The medals were gone.

When he came back into the living room, Whitey had fallen off to sleep. The snow drifts, Willard saw, were floating up to obscure the glass; across the street the houses looked to be going down into the rising white waves. "But it can't be," thought Willard. "It just can't. I am jumping to a rash conclusion. I am—"

During his lunch hour the next day, he decided to take a walk down to the river and back, stopping on the way at Rankin's pawnshop. Ha-haa-ing all the while, as though the whole affair had been a family prank, he recovered the medals.

After dinner that night he invited Whitey to come with him for a brisk walk downtown. What he said to the young fellow, once they were out of sight of the house, was that it was absolutely and positively beyond his understanding how a man could take the belongings of another man, go into a person's private belongings and just *take* something, particularly something of sentimental value; nevertheless, if he could receive from Whitey certain assurances about the future, he would be willing to chalk up this unfortunate incident to a combination of hard times and immature judgment. Pretty damn immature judgment too. But then, no one deserved to be discarded from the human race on the basis of one stupid act—a stupid act you might expect of a ten-year-old, by the way, and not a fellow who was twenty-eight, going to be twenty-nine. However, the medals were back where they belonged, and if he were given an ironclad promise that nothing like this would ever happen again, and furthermore, if Whitey promised to cut out immediately this new business of whiskey drinking, then he would consider the matter closed. Here he was, after all, a fellow who for three years running had been third baseman on the Selkirk High School baseball team; a young man with the build of a prizefighter, good-looking too—Willard said all this right out—and what was his intention, to wreck the healthy body the good Lord had blessed him with? Respect for his

body alone ought to make him stop; but if that didn't work, then there was respect for his family, and for his own human soul, damn it. It was up to Whitey entirely: all he had to do was turn over a new leaf, and as far as Willard was concerned, the incident, stupid, mean and silly as it was, beyond human comprehension as it was, would be completely forgotten. Otherwise, there were no two ways about it, something drastic was going to have to be done.

So overcome was he with shame and gratitude that first all the young man could do was take hold of Willard's hand and pump it up and down, all the while with tears glistening in his eyes. Then he set out to explain. It had happened in the fall, when the circus had come to the armory down in Fort Kean. Right off Lucy had started talking a mile a minute about the elephants and the clowns, but when Whitey looked in his pocket he found only pennies, and not too many of them either. So he thought if he borrowed the medals, and then returned them a few weeks later . . . But here Willard remembered just who it was that had taken Lucy down to the circus, and Myra and Whitey and Berta too. None other than himself. When he pointed out this fact, Whitey said yes, yes, he was coming to that; he was, he admitted, saving the most shameful for the last. "I suppose I am just a coward, Willard, but it's just hard to say the worst first." "Say it anyway, boy. Make a clean breast of the whole thing."

Well, confessed Whitey, as they turned off Broadway and started back home, after having borrowed the medals he was so appalled and shocked with himself that instead of using the money as he had intended, he had gone straight over to Earl's Dugout and made himself numb on whiskey, hoping thereby to obliterate the memory of the stupid, vicious thing he had just done. He knew he was confessing to terrible selfishness, followed by plain idiocy, but that was exactly how it had happened; and to tell the truth, it was all as mysterious to him as it was to anyone else. It had been the last week of September, just after old man Tucker had had to lay off half the shop . . . No, no—removing a calendar from his wallet,

studying it under the front-porch light as they both stood stamping the snow off their boots—as a matter of fact it was the first week of October, he told Willard, who earlier in the day had had the date fixed for him by the clerk at Rankin's as just two weeks back.

But by this time they were already inside the door. Knitting by the fire was Berta; sitting on the couch, holding Lucy in her lap, was Myra—reading to the child from her poem book before sending her off to sleep. No sooner did Lucy see her Daddy than she slid from her mother's lap and came running to drag him off to the dining room, to play their nightly "yump" game. It had been going on for a year, ever since Whitey's old father had seen the tiny child go leaping from the dining-room window seat down to the rug. "Hey," the big farmer had called out to the others, "Lucy yumped!" That was how he pronounced it, for all that he had been a citizen of this country for forty years. After the old man's death it became Whitey's task to stand admiringly before his daughter, and after each leap, sing out those words she just adored to hear. "Hey, Lucy yumped! Yump again, Lucy-Goosie. Two more yumps and off to bed." "No! Three!" "Three yumps and off to bed!" "No, four!" "Come on, yump, yump, and stop complaining, you little yumping goose! Hey, Lucy is about to yump—Lucy is ready to yump—ladies and gentlemen, Lucy has just yumped once again!"

So what could he do? In the face of that scene, what on earth could he possibly do? If after the long deliberation of that afternoon he had decided to consider Whitey's theft forgivable, was he now going to bother to catch his son-in-law in a petty face-saving lie? Only why, why if Whitey felt so depraved after taking the medals, why in hell didn't he put them back? Wasn't that just about the easiest thing for him to do? Now why hadn't he thought to ask him that? Oh, but he was so busy trying to be rough and tough and talking nonsense and letting there be no two ways about it, and so on, that the question hadn't even passed through his mind. Hey, you, why didn't you put my medals back if you felt so awful about it?

But by this time Whitey was carrying Lucy up the stairs on his shoulders—"Yump, two, three, four"—and he himself was smiling at Myra, saying yes, yes, the men had had a good bracing walk.

Myra. Myra. Without a doubt she had been the most adorable child a parent could dream of having. Mention a thing girls do, and Myra was doing it while the other little girls were still taking from the bottle. Always she was practicing something feminine: crocheting, music, poetry . . . Once at a school program she recited a patriotic poem she had written all by herself, and when it was finished some of the men in the audience had stood up and applauded. And so beautifully behaved was she that when the ladies came to the house for a meeting of the Eastern Star—back when they were still a family of three and Berta had the time to be active—they used to say it was perfectly all right with them if little Myra sat in a chair and watched.

Oh, Myra! A pure delight to behold—always tall and slender, with her soft brown hair, and her skin like silk, and with Willard's gray eyes, which on her were really something; sometimes he imagined that his sister Ginny might have been much like Myra in appearance—fragile, soft-spoken, shy, with the bearing of a princess—if only it hadn't been for the scarlet fever. Back when she was a child the very frailty of his daughter's bones could bring Willard almost to tears with awe, especially in the evening when he sat looking over the top of his paper at her as she practiced her piano lesson. There were times when it seemed to him as though nothing in the world could so make a man want to do good in life as the sight of a daughter's thin little wrists and ankles.

Earl's Dugout of Buddies. If only they had knocked that place down years and years ago! If only it had never even been . . . At Willard's request they had agreed to stop letting Whitey drink himself into a stupor at the Elks, and at Stanley's Tavern too (now under new management—the thought occurred to him as the streetlights went on down in

town), but for every human or even semi-human bartender, another (named Earl) was actually *amused* to take the pay check of a husband and a father and cash it for him. And the ironic part was that in that whole so-called Dugout of Buddies there was probably never a man who was one-tenth the worker, or the husband, or the father that Whitey was—that is, when things weren't overwhelming him. Unfortunately, however, circumstances seemed always to conspire against him at just those times, rarely more than a month at a stretch, when he was suffering through a bad siege of what you finally had to call by its rightful name—lack of character. Probably that Friday night he would at worst have weaved up the walk, thrown open the door, made some insane declaration, and dropped into bed with his clothes on—that and no more if circumstances, or fate, or whatever you wanted to call it, hadn't arranged for his first vision upon entering the house to be his wife Myra, soaking those fragile little feet of hers in a pan of water. Then he must have seen Lucy bent over the dining table, and understood (as he could understand, down in that alcoholic fog, if he believed an insult was involved) that she had pushed back the lace luncheon cloth and was doing her homework downstairs so that her mother wouldn't have to face the dragon alone when he returned.

Willard and Berta had gone off to play their Friday rummy. Driving to the Erwins' that night, he agreed that this time they were staying clear through to coffee and cake, like normal people, no matter what. If Willard wanted to go home early, said Berta, that was his business. She herself worked hard all week, and had few pleasures, and she simply would not cut short her night out because her son-in-law had come to prefer drinking whiskey in a musty bar at the end of the day to eating a home-cooked dinner with his family. There was a solution to the problem, and Willard knew very well what it was. But she would tell him one thing—it wasn't giving up the Friday night rummy game and the company of her old friends.

But Myra soaking her feet . . . Something told him he shouldn't go off leaving her that way. Not that she was

suffering so from the pain, not as she did in later years with her migraines. It was just the *picture* that he didn't like somehow. "You should sit down, Myra. I don't see why you have to stand so much." "I do sit, Daddy. Of course I sit." "Then how come you're having this feet trouble." "It's not trouble." "It's from giving them lessons all afternoon long, Myra, standing over that piano." "Daddy, no one stands over a piano." "Then where did this feet business come from . . . ?" "Daddy, please." What more could he do? He called into the dining room, "Good night, Lucy." When she failed to respond, he walked over to where she sat writing in her notebook and touched her hair. "What's got your tongue, young lady? No good night?" "Good night," she mumbled, without bothering to look up.

Oh, he knew he ought not to leave. But Berta was already sitting out in the car. No, he just did not like the look of this scene. "You don't want to soak them too long, Myra." "Oh, Daddy, have a nice time," she said, and so at last he went out the door and down to the car to be told that it had taken him five full minutes to say a simple thing like good night.

Well, it was just as he had expected: when Whitey got home, he didn't like the scene either. The first suggestion he had for Myra was that she might at least pull the shades down so that everybody who walked by didn't have to see what a suffering martyr she was. When in her panic she didn't move, he pulled on one to show her how and it came clear off the fixture. She had only taken on all those piano students (seven years earlier, he neglected to add) so as to turn herself into a hag anyway, to cause him, if she could manage it—this, waving the shade in his hand—to start running around with other women, and then have that to cry over as well as her poor crippled toesies. Why she taught piano was the same damn reason she wouldn't go down with him to Florida and let him start a brand-new life down there. Out of disrespect for what he was!

She tried to tell him what she had told her father—that she believed there was no essential connection between her feet

and her job—but he would not hear of it. No, she would rather sit up here with her poor toesies, and listen while everybody told her what a no-good rotten s.o.b. she had for a husband, just because he liked to have a drink once in a while.

There was apparently nothing that a man shouldn't say to a woman—even to one he hates, and the fact was that Whitey loved her, adored her, worshiped her—that he didn't say to Myra. Then, as if a torn shade and a broken fixture and all those garbled insults weren't enough for one night, he picked up the dishpan full of warm water and Epsom salts, and for no rational reason in the world, poured it out on the rug.

Most of what happened subsequently Willard learned from a sympathetic lodge brother who was on duty in the squad car that night. Apparently the police tried as best they could to make it look friendly and not like an out-and-out arrest: they drove up without the siren blowing, parked out of the glow of the street lamp, and stood patiently in the hallway while Whitey worked at buttoning up his jacket. Then they led him down the front steps and along the path to the patrol car so that to the neighbors in the windows it might appear that the three men were just off for one of those bracing strolls, two of them wearing pistols and cartridge belts. They were not so much holding him down as up, and trying to joke him along some too, when Whitey, using all his physical strength, broke from between them. In the first moment no one watching could figure out what he was doing. His body folded once in half, so that for a moment he seemed to be eating the snow; then with a jerk he straightened up, and swaying as if in a wind, heaved an armful of snow toward the house.

The powder fell upon her hair and her face and the shoulders of her sweater; but for all that she was only fifteen, and with her upturned nose and her straight blond hair looked to be no more than ten, she did not so much as flinch; she stood as she was, one loafer on the bottom step and one on the walk, and a finger in her schoolbook—all ready, it seemed, to return to her studies which she had interrupted only to dial the station house. "Stone!" Whitey shouted. "Pure stone!" And here he made his lunge. Willard's lodge brother, frozen till

then by the scene—by Lucy, he said, more than by Whitey, whose kind he'd seen before—leaped to his duty. "Nelson, it's your own kid!" Whereupon the drunk, either remembering that he was father to the girl, or hoping to forget that connection for good, evaded the policeman's grasp and went ahead and did apparently all it was he had intended to do in the first place: he pitched himself face-down into the snow.

The following morning Willard sat Lucy down first thing and gave her a talking-to.

"Honey, I know you have been through a lot in the last twenty-four hours. I know you have been through a lot in your whole life that would have been better for you never to have seen. But, Lucy, I have got to ask you something. I have got to make something very clear. Now, I want to ask why, when you saw what was happening here last night—Lucy, look at me—why didn't you phone me out at the Erwins?"

She shook her head.

"Well, you knew we were out there, didn't you?"

To the floor she nodded.

"And the number is right there in the book. Well, isn't that so, Lucy?"

"I didn't think of it."

"But what you did think of, young lady—*look at me!*"

"I wanted him to *stop!*"

"But calling the jail, Lucy—"

"I called for somebody to make him stop!"

"But why didn't you call *me*? I want you to answer that question."

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Because you can't."

"I *what?*"

"Well," she said, backing away, "you don't . . ."

"Now sit down, now come back here, and listen to me. First thing—that's it, sit!—whether you know it or not, I am not God. I am just me, that's the first thing."

"You don't have to be God."



"No backtalk, you hear me? You are just a schoolchild, and maybe, just maybe, you know, you don't know the whole story of life yet. You may think you do, but I happen to think different, and who I am is your grandfather whose house this is."

"I didn't ask to live here."

"But you do, you see! So quiet! You are never to call the jail again. They are not needed here! Is that clear?"

"The police," she whispered.

"Or the police! Is that clear or not?"

She did not answer.

"We are civilized people in this house and there are some things we do not do, and that is number one. We are not riffraff, and you remember that. We are able to settle our own arguments, and conduct our own affairs, and we don't require the police to do it for us. I happen to be the assistant postmaster of this town, young lady, in case you've forgotten. I happen to be a member in good standing of this community—and so are you."

"And what about my father? Is he in good standing too, whatever that even *means*?"

"I am not talking about him right this minute! I will get to him, all right, and without your help too. Right now I am talking about you and a few things you may not know at fifteen years of age. The way we do it in this house, Lucy, is we talk to a person. We show him the right."

"And if he doesn't know it?"

"Lucy, we do not send him to jail! That's the only point. Is it clear?"

"No!"

"Lucy, I ain't the one who is married to him, Lucy. I don't live in the same room with him, Lucy."

"So *what*?"

"So what I am saying to you is that a lot of things, a great many things, you do not know the slightest thing about."

"I know it's your house. I know you give him a home, no matter what he does to her, or says to her—"

"I give my daughter a home, that's what I do. I give you a home. I am in a situation, Lucy, and I do what I can for the people I happen to love around here."

"Well," she said, beginning to cry, "you're not the only one who does, maybe, you know."

"Oh, I know that, I know that, sweetheart. But, honey, don't you see, they're your parents."

"Then why don't they act like parents!" she cried, rushing out of the room.

Then Berta started in.

"I heard what she said to you, Willard. I heard that tone. It's what I get all the time."

"Well, I get it too, Berta. We all get it."

"Then what are you going to do about it? Where will it stop with her? I thought becoming a Catholic at the age of fifteen was going to be the last thing up her sleeve. Running off to a Catholic church, going up to visit nuns for a whole weekend. And now this."

"Berta, I can only say what I can say. I only got so many words, and so many different ways to say them, and after that—"

"After that," said Berta, "a good swat! Whoever in their life heard of such a thing? Making a whole household into a public scandal—"

"Berta, she lost her head. She got scared. *He* made the scandal, the damn idiot, doing what he did."

"Well, any fool could have seen it coming a mile away. Any fool can see the next thing coming too—probably involving the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Berta, I'll take care of it. Exaggerating don't help things at all."

"How are you going to start taking care of it, Willard? By going down to the jail and letting him out?"

"I am deciding about that right now, what I'm going to do."

"I want to remind you, Willard, while you are deciding, that Higgles were among the founders of this town. Higgles

were amongst the first settlers who built this town from the ground. My grandfather Higgle built the jail, Willard—I am glad he is not alive to see who it was he built it for.”

“Oh, I know all that, Berta. I appreciate all that.”

Don’t you make light of my pride, Mr. Carroll. I am a person too!”

“Berta, she won’t do it again.”

“Won’t she? Beads and saints and every kind of Catholic gimcrack she has got up in that room of hers. And now this! She’s taking over here, as far as I can see.”

“Berta, I have explained to you: *she got frightened*.”

“And who isn’t when that barbarian goes on the warpath? In the olden days a man like that, they would put him on a rail and run him out of town.”

“Well, maybe this ain’t the olden days any more,” he said.

“Well, more’s the pity!”

Lastly Myra. His Myra.

“Myra, I am sitting here debating what to do. And I am really of two minds, I’ll tell you that. What has happened here, I never thought I would ever live to see. I have spoken to Lucy. I have gotten her to promise that nothing like this is ever going to happen again.”

“She promised?”

“More or less, I would say, yes. And I have just finished talking with your mother. She is at the end of her tether, Myra. I can’t say that I blame her. But I believe I have made her see the light. Because her feeling, to put it blunt, is to let him sit in that jail and rot.”

Myra closed her eyes, so deep, so deep in purple rings from all her secret weeping.

“But I have calmed her down,” he said.

“Yes?”

“More or less, I think so. She is going to accept my judgment of the thing. Myra,” he said, “it has been a long twelve-year haul. For everybody living here it has been a long struggle.”

“Daddy, we’re going to move, so it’s over. The struggle is over.”

“*What?*”

“We’re going to Florida.”

“Florida!”

“Where Duane can start fresh—”

“Myra, there ain’t a morning of his life he can’t start fresh, and right here.”

“But here someone else’s roof, Daddy, is over his head.”

“And how come? Well, what’s the answer, Myra? Where is it he is going to get the stick-to-it-iveness in Florida that he is not able to have up here? I’d like to know.”

“He has relatives in Florida.”

“You mean now he’s going to go down and live off them?”

“Not live *off* them—”

“And suppose last night had happened in Florida. Or Oklahoma. Or wherever!”

“But it wouldn’t!”

“And why not? The nice climate? The beautiful color of the sky?”

“Because he could be on his own. That’s all he wants.”

“Honey, it’s all I want too. It’s what we all want. But where is the evidence, Myra, that on his own, with a daughter, with a wife, with all the thousand responsibilities—”

“But he’s such a good man.” Here she began to sob. “I wake up in the night—oh, Daddy, I wake up, and ‘Myra,’ he says to me, ‘you are the best thing I have, Myra—Myra, don’t hate me.’ Oh, if only we could *go*—”

In the middle of her very first semester, when Lucy came home at Thanksgiving time to say that she was getting married, Whitey sat himself down on the edge of the sofa in the parlor and just caved in. “But I wanted her to be a college graduate,” he said, lowering his head into his hands, and the sounds that emerged from his mouth might have softened in you everything that had hardened against him, if you didn’t have to wonder if that wasn’t why he was making the sounds in the first place. For the first hour he wept steadily like a woman, then gaspingly like a child for another, until even though he wanted you to forgive him, you almost had to anyway,

watching him have to perform that way within plain view of his own family.

And then the miracle happened. At first he looked to be sick, or maybe even about to do something to himself. It was actually frightening to see. For days on end he hardly ate, though he was there at every dinner hour; in the evening he would sit out on the front porch, refusing to speak or to come in out of the cold. Once in the middle of the night Willard heard moving in the house and came into the kitchen in his robe to see Whitey looming over a cup of coffee. "What's the trouble, Whitey, can't you sleep?" ". . . don't want to sleep." "What is it, Whitey? Why are you all dressed?" Here Whitey turned to the wall, so that all Willard could see, as his son-in-law's whole big body began to tremble, was the back of his broad shoulders and his wide powerful neck. "What is it, Whitey, what is it you are thinking of doing? Now tell me."

The day after Lucy's wedding Whitey came down to breakfast wearing a tie with his workshirt, and went off to the shop that way; at home in the evening he took out the box of brushes, rags and polish and gave his shoes a shine that looked to be professional. To Willard he said, "Want one, while I'm at it?" And so Willard handed over his shoes and sat there in his stockinged feet while the incredible happened before his very eyes.

When the weekend came Whitey whitewashed the basement and chopped practically a whole cord of wood; Willard stood at the kitchen window watching him bring down the ax in violent, regular whacks.

So that month passed, and the next, and though eventually he came out of the silent morbid mood and took up a little more his old teasing and kidding ways, there could no longer be any doubt that at long last something had happened to penetrate his heart.

That winter he grew his mustache. Apparently in the first weeks he got the usual jokes from the boys at the shop, but he just kept on with it, and by March you actually forgot how he used to look, and began to believe that the big strapping

healthy misdirected boy had, at the age of forty-two, decided to become a man. More and more Willard heard himself calling him, as Berta and Myra always had, by his given name, Duane.

He actually began to behave now as Willard had had every reason to expect he would, given the eager young fellow he had been back in 1930. At that time he was already a first-rate electrician, and a pretty good carpenter too, and he had plans, ambitions, dreams. One of them was to build a house for himself and Myra, if only she would be his bride: a Cape Cod-style house with a fenced-in yard, to be built with his own hands . . . And that wasn't so far-fetched a dream either. At the age of twenty-two he seemed to have the strength and the vigor for it, and the know-how too. The way he figured it, with the exception of the plumbing (and a friend over in Winnisaw had already agreed to install the piping at cost), he could put up a whole two-story house in six months of nights and weekends. He even went ahead and plunked down a one-hundred-dollar deposit on a tract of land up at the north end, a wise move too, for what was only woods then was now Liberty Grove, the fanciest section of the town. He had plunked down a deposit, he had begun to draw up his own building plans, he was halfway into his first year of marriage, when along came national calamity—followed quickly by the birth of a daughter.

As it turned out, Whitey took the Great Depression very personally. It was as though a little baby, ready to try its first step, stands up, smiles, puts out one foot, and one of those huge iron balls such as they used to knock down whole buildings comes swinging out of nowhere and wallops him right between the eyes. In Whitey's case it took nearly ten years for him to get the nerve to stand up and even try walking again. On Monday, December 8, 1941, he took the bus down to Fort Kean to enlist in the United States Coast Guard, and was rejected for heart murmur. The following week he tried the Navy, and then his last choice, the Army. He told them how he had played three years of ball up at the old Selkirk High, but to no avail. He wound up working over in the fire-