

"The war has begun. Our country is being invaded.
They have taken the first swimming pool."

IONESCO

[1]

It is a radiantly beautiful Sunday afternoon. A man is walking through a woods barefoot and in bathing trunks. His step is jaunty, and he is whistling. Dapples of yellow sunlight slant through the leafy boughs overhead onto his tanned, lean-muscled body. The man's name is Ned Merrill. He is in his mid-forties. Although his handsome, even-featured face shows the marks of his age more than his body does, it is at the moment a youthful face, boyishly exultant with a feeling of well-being. Now and then Ned leaps gracefully from rock to rock in his path -- with the coordination of a lifelong athlete. Everything about him -- his health, his physical beauty, his happiness -- seems to be a celebration of life on this lovely day.

[2]

The Westerhazys

Suddenly he bursts out of the woods onto a perfect suburban scene: the garden, swimming pool, and glistening white ridge-top house of Helen and Don Westerhazy. They are sitting on their colorful terrace. Helen's eyes are closed. Her body is inert. Don is sipping a drink. Both wear bathing suits.

When Ned sees them he lets out a whoop of greeting and breaks into a dog trot across the lawn.

At the sound of the shout Don and Helen lift their heads to squint at the approaching figure. As Ned comes closer, Don stands up and shades his eyes.

Ned has reached the edge of the garden. He runs past a female nude in marble, pauses for an instant to slap it sharply and sassily on the buttocks, laughs with pleasure at his action and continues toward the pool. By this time Don and Helen have recognized him and are waving.

Ned reaches the edge of the pool and without breaking his stride he leaps and arches into the high, flat trajectory of a racing dive.

He swims with a perfect crawl and a powerful kick. The blue water breaks up into the diamond-shine of splashes and bubbles as he cuts through it to the end of the pool. He kicks away with a well-

executed racing turn and swims another length. He does this again and again with untiring vigor and stops only when he sees Don sitting on the diving board offering him a martini. Ned bursts from the water, grinning, and reaches for the glass.

NED

Hey! Thanks!

He treads water, holds the glass up in a silent toast, and drinks the icy-cold delicious gin.

DON

So it's not because our service is bad?

NED

(laughs)

What do you mean?

DON

We haven't seen you for so damn long--

NED

(grins)

Oh, well -- you know how it is!

DON

Where've you been keeping yourself?

NED

Oh -- here and there, here and there -- what a day! Ever see such a glorious day?

He finishes the drink, hands the glass to Don, and heaves himself easily and gracefully over the side of the pool. They cross to the terrace.

DON

God, it's wonderful to see you! You look great!

NED

(enthusiastic)

So do you--

(Don gives him
a sour look)

Well, a little pale around the

edges--

DON

I drank too much last night.

They have reached Helen, stretched out on the chaise.

HELEN

(happily)

Neddy!

NED

(rests his hand
on her feet)

How beautiful are thy feet in
sandals, O Prince's daughter!

They burst into laughter. She holds out her arms. He bends down to kiss her; suddenly she drops her head back on the chaise and groans.

NED

(smiling at her)

Bet you drank too much last night!

Don has eased himself gingerly into a chair. He looks at Ned's dripping, glowing face.

DON

Isn't he a sight for sore eyes?

HELEN

Oh, Neddy, we've missed you!

DON

Come on now, sit down and tell us
everything.

HELEN

Where're you coming from?

NED

Oh, I was around -- thought I'd come
over and have a swim with you.

(he gestures)

Look at that water! Look at that sun!

DON

(squints and grimaces,

then gives up and closes
his eyes)
Know what I think? I think everybody
drank too much last night.

HELEN
It was that rum. I drank too much of
that rum.

NED
Whose party?

HELEN
Our own. Don't worry. You didn't
miss a thing.

DON
Usual Saturday night blowout.

HELEN
Same old jokes, same old faces.
We've all known each other so long
there's not even anyone to flirt
with.

NED
(teasing)
I'd have flirted with you.

HELEN
(affectionately)
You're practically a new face!

DON
How're things, Ned? Have a good
summer?

NED
(exuberant)
Oh sure! Just great!
(he bends over
Helen again)
Come on, love, how about a swim?

HELEN
(weakly)
Uh-uh.

NED

(takes her by
the hands)
Come on, puts oxygen in your blood.
Good for a hangover.

HELEN
(groans)
What in the world makes you think
I'm hung over?

NED
(tugs at her hands)
I'll race you!

HELEN
(pleads)
Neddy! Please! No!

He releases her. She settles back and closes her eyes.

NED
How about it, Don?

DON
Are you kidding?

HELEN
(with a vague wave
towards the bar tray)
Relax, Neddy -- have a drink.
(she opens her eyes)
Go on -- sit down and tell us what
you've been up to.

At this moment the screen door slams, and a man comes out of the house. It is Stu Forsburgh. He is Ned's age but, unlike Ned, shows it. He is overweight, with a paunch and thinning hair. He is dressed in trousers, shirt and tie, and a sports jacket.

NED
(astonished and delighted)
Stu Forsburgh!

Stu is equally delighted. They clasp each other warmly.

STU
How are you, Sport?

NED

Okay! Never better!

STU

I'm so glad to see you, you old monster!

NED

What the hell are you doing here?

STU

Just stopped over -- been up on the Cape for three weeks -- how's Lucinda?

NED

She's great!

STU

And the girls?

NED

All grown up -- and beautiful, Stu, just beautiful!

STU

(giving him a good look)

Don't know how you do it -- you haven't changed a bit!

NED

Hey, where'd you get this?
(he pats Stu's paunch)
Why've you got all those clothes on?

STU

We got to get into town and catch a plane. Peggy's packing.

NED

(appalled)

On a day like this -- you're going to take a plane? Don't give me that, man!

STU

Got to get back to the shop--

NED

(grabs his lapel)
Do you know how long it's been
since we had a swim together?

STU
Don't remind me--

DON
(at the drink bay)
What'll you have, Stu?

NED
(to Don and Helen)
We're old bunk mates. We went to the
same camp when we were kids!

STU
(to Don)
Gee, I don't know. I drank too much
last night.

DON
(lifts the pitcher)
A diluted martini?

STU
Okay.
(to Ned)
Boy, I'm out of practice for the
kind of party you throw around here.
We don't go in for that in Columbus
unless it's New Year's Eve--

NED
I told you not to accept that
transfer.

STU
What else could I do?

NED
(indignantly)
I'd have quit before I'd let anyone
send me to the provinces.

STU
Well -- it's healthy.

Stu's wife, Peggy, leans out of an upstairs window and calls:

PEGGY

Stu! Did you pack the pill case?

NED

(hoots at Stu)

Healthy!

STU

(calls to Peggy)

The vitamin case is on the night table, honey!

PEGGY

(with a big smile)

Don't tell me that's Ned Merrill down there?

NED

(waves)

How are you, honeybunch? Come on down!

PEGGY

Half a minute!

She disappears from the window.

NED

God, Stu, I didn't realize how much I missed that ugly old mug of yours! Listen, get out of those clothes -- we'll have one quick swim!

STU

Not up to it. Beginning to feel my age--

NED

You crazy? You're a year younger than I am!

STU

Yeah! You were always pulling seniority on me at camp--

NED

Remember how we used to take off our suits and swim for miles up that

river? We just never got tired--

STU

Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen -- we had nice new pink lungs in those days.

NED

The water up there, remember? That transparent, light green water! It -- it felt different!

(the memory of it
shows in his eyes)

What a beautiful feeling! We could have swum around the world in those days!

STU

That was before we ever touched a drink or a cigarette.

DON

Or a girl.

HELEN

(rouses herself)

That doesn't sap a man's strength!

NED

Or I'd be in a wheel chair today!

Peggy has come out of the house. She is lithe and attractive and only slightly tense under her badinage.

PEGGY

Ned Merrill -- still bragging!

Ned crosses to her and hugs her.

PEGGY

Oh I've heard those old schoolboy stories! You all made them up!

NED

Figured that out, have you?

(he hugs her again)

Now let's settle this nonsense about your taking a plane.

PEGGY

(indicates Stu)
Settle it with him. I like it here.
More and more.

NED
Lucinda will be disappointed as
hell--

PEGGY
Well I don't think that's exactly
true.

NED
(to Stu)
I can run you over to the house in
ten minutes--

There is a small uncomfortable pause. Don gives Helen a slightly
worried look.

NED
(urges)
Come for a minute -- just to say
hello--
(to Don)
Okay if I borrow your car?

DON
(confused)
Well, sure, but--

He looks at Helen.

HELEN
(quickly, to Ned)
Honestly they haven't time. We
promised to stop at the Grahams for
a quick goodbye drink. You come
with us.

PEGGY
(her eyes still on Ned)
Of course he'll come with us.

HELEN
(to Ned)
You haven't seen their new pool,
have you?

NED

Whose pool?

HELEN

The Grahams'.

NED

(puzzled)

Did the Grahams put in a pool?

He crosses to the balustrade along the outer edge of the pool terrace and looks down. From this hilltop can be seen the lush green valley below, crisscrossed by roads, dotted here and there with houses, a church spire.

DON

(laughs)

Uh huh! They nurse it like a baby!

NED

(peers over the valley
as if trying to find the
Grahams' house and pool)

When did the Grahams put in a pool?

DON

Last June.

NED

(still puzzled)

Last June?

HELEN

(to Peggy)

Did you get the suits off the line?

PEGGY

My God, I forgot all about them.

Ned stares over the valley. A faraway look has come into his eyes.

HELEN

If they're still damp, I have some plastic bags you can use.

STU

(to Peggy)

Better get them, honey, and finish packing.

PEGGY
(her eyes on Ned)
Oh there's time--

She crosses to get a drink.

NED
(suddenly)
Listen, the Biswangers have a pool,
haven't they?

DON
Biswangers?

HELEN
You know, those awful people on Red
Coat Road. They're always talking
about their Caribbean cruises or
their electric toothbrushes--
(to Ned)
Sure, they have a big pool.

NED
(almost to himself)
I could do it.

He frowns with concentration. He is thinking hard and hears none
of the following small talk.

STU
(to Peggy)
Go on, honey, finish packing.

PEGGY
(her eyes on Ned)
I will in a minute!

STU
If we miss that plane--

PEGGY
(irritated)
Columbus isn't going to fly away,
you know!

STU
I want to put the suitcases in the
car.

DON

Don't worry, I'll get you to the airport--

Suddenly Ned lets out a whoop of triumph.

NED

I could do it. I could really do it!

HELEN

Do what, Neddy?

NED

Now with the Grahams there's a string of pools that curves clear across the county to our house! Listen--

(he counts carefully
on his fingers)

The Grahams, the Lears, the Bunkers. Then a portage through the Pastern's riding ring to the Lindleys and the Hallorans and over the ridge to the Gilmartins and Eric Hammar's. Then up Alewives Lane to the Biswangers, then, uh, wait a minute -- who's next -- I can't think--

(he looks at them,
panicky)

I had it a minute ago, I-- who is it?

(his panic increases)

Who is it? Who's next to the Biswangers?

HELEN

(gently)

Shirley Abbott.

NED

(with great relief)

Shirley Abbott. Then cross Route 424 to the Recreation Center Pool, then the Clydes and that's it.

DON

Who are the Clydes?

NED

That little ranch house at the
bottom of our hill.

(stricken)

What if they don't have a pool?

(he looks at the
others with alarm)

Everyone has a pool these days,
don't they? God, if they don't have
a pool, that'll just ruin it!

HELEN

Ruin what?

NED

(excited)

Don't you see? I've just figured it
out. Look--

(he gestures over
the balustrade)

If I take a sort of dog-leg to the
southwest I can swim home!

STU

(laughs)

Ah, come on, Ned!

Helen and Don exchange the briefest of glances.

HELEN

Well but -- why would you want to
swim home?

DON

I don't get it.

NED

Pool by pool! They make a river all
the way to our house!

HELEN

Well I suppose you could put it
that way--

(firmly)

Now Neddy, why don't you sit down
and have a drink, and then we'll all
go to the Grahams--

NED

(hasn't heard a word)
I'll name it the Lucinda River after
my wife!

PEGGY
(an edge to her voice)
That's quite a tribute.

NED
(up, excited,
carried away)
This is the day Ned Merrill swims
across the county!

He dashes to the pool and dives in in one long unbroken movement.
The others watch him.

STU
(laughs)
Always threw himself into the water
like that. God, what energy!

PEGGY
He keeps himself in shape.

STU
Oh come on, he always ate like a
horse. Never put on an ounce.

Silently, they watch Ned for a moment. Stu and Peggy are smiling
-- each a different sort of smile. Helen and Don look anxious. Ned
has reached the far end of the pool and hoists himself happily
over the curb.

STU
Look at him. Wouldn't use the
ladder, not Ned!

Ned, without a backward glance, is striding hurriedly away in the
direction opposite to that from which he appeared.

DON
(calls)
Hey Ned!
(louder)
Hey Ned! Where you going?

NED
(calls back, not

breaking his stride)
I'm swimming home!

STU

Hey Ned!

Ned keeps on going.

HELEN

(on her feet now
and worried)
Neddy! Come back!
(he doesn't answer,
to Don)
Where'd he get that nutty idea?

DON

He's just joking.

HELEN

You sure?

DON

Sure. We'll find him waiting for us
down at the Grahams.

HELEN

Swim to his house! Why would he want
to do that?

STU

Listen, I know Ned-- always loved to
kid around. Hasn't changed a bit.

They watch as Ned leaps over the shrubbery way at the other end of
the grounds.

STU

Hasn't changed a bit!

[3]

The Grahams

A blinding silver image. A high-pitched feminine shriek. Ned is
pressing his lips lightly to Betty Graham's cheek. She sees his
face reflected in an aluminum foil sun-tan folder she is holding
under her chin.

She tosses the device down and leaps up to throw her arms around him. She is about forty, plump and tanned.

BETTY

Neddy! Neddy! It's been such a long time! You look wonderful!

NED

So do you, fatso!

BETTY

I'm going on a diet a week from Thursday. Where'd you come from?

NED

Don and Helen's.

BETTY

Where are they all? Why didn't they come with you?

NED

They're driving down.

The Grahams' house is white clapboard and expensive but not as expensive as the Westerhazys'. It is obvious that the Grahams have gone all-out with the landscaping and the outdoor accouterments. The velvet lawn is pierced by a flagpole flying the American flag. There is a good sized terrace and an elaborate brick barbecue. The pool is new, and prominent beside it is a wooden bulletin board on which the Grahams have posted rules for its use.

Betty takes Ned's hand and leads him to the edge of the pool. She watches his expression carefully as he looks at it.

NED

Terrific! Absolutely terrific!

BETTY

Cost a bundle but Howard's had a marvelous year!

(she points)

Look at how clear the water is!

NED

Wow!

BETTY

(proudly)

We've got the best filter money can buy. A Dia-something-or-other filter. It filters 99 point 99 point 99 per cent of all solid matter out of the water.

NED

Gee!

BETTY

(crosses to the
little outdoor bar)

We put in a six-inch lint filter, too. The way we take care of that pool the water is purer than drinking water. What'll you have, Neddy?

NED

(indicates the pool)

Scoop me up a glass of that.

BETTY

Don't be silly. Gin and tonic?

NED

Nothing, thanks. I'll have a swim and be on my way.

BETTY

Oh, Neddy, you will not! You just got here!

NED

Okay -- a light one.

BETTY

(mixes the drinks)

Next summer we're going to build a pool-house over there -- you know, with dressing rooms and a little playroom with a bar.

NED

Boy! That'll be some great lay-out!

BETTY

(hands him his drink)

Neddy, sit down for goodness sake.

They sip their drinks.

BETTY
(gazes around
triumphantly)
You never thought he'd make it, did
you?

NED
Who?

BETTY
When we were kids and I first
started going out with Howard, you
weren't very nice to him.

NED
I wasn't? Why?

BETTY
Remember, he kept track of every
penny he spent in a little note
book? You thought that was very
amusing.

NED
I was just jealous.

BETTY
Of Howard?

NED
I was crazy about you.

BETTY
(terribly pleased)
You never said -- I didn't know
that! Oh go on! You were having a
big affair with Lucinda!

NED
Why do you think I got smashed at
your wedding?

BETTY
Because Lucinda was dancing with
Buzzy Bunker, that's why!

NED

(laughs)

What a long memory you've got,
Grandma.

He senses that Betty is hurt because he's put her on and looks for a way to make amends.

NED

No kidding, though, you've got a
gorgeous pool.

BETTY

(snaps at him)

I've got everything I've ever
wanted.

(pause, she looks
at him, her face
wretched)

Funny, the way things turn out,
isn't it?

The sound of a motor has been getting louder, and now from around the house comes Howard, sitting on a midget tractor-mower. He is an ordinary-looking man, with little humor, literal-minded. At the moment he is having the time of his life. He drives the tractor toward the terrace. Ned and Betty cross to him.

HOWARD

(friendly but
not ecstatic)

Well of all people! How are you,
Ned?

They shake hands. Howard pats the tractor.

HOWARD

How d'you like my new, toy?

BETTY

(proudly)

Next year we're going to get the
luxury optionals. Padded seat and a
canopy.

NED

(frowns at
the tractor)

Sounds as if the timing is a bit off.

HOWARD
(somewhat deflated)
Timing?

NED
Let me take a look.

Howard gets off the tractor. Ned lifts the small hood and turns and twists something which guns up the motor loud and fast.

HOWARD
(irritated)
It's not supposed to be a racing car. What's he doing?

BETTY
(giving her husband a contemptuous glare)
He's fixing it.

NED
It'll be okay now.

He puts down the hood. The three of them cross to the pool.

BETTY
Ned's just crazy about our pool.

HOWARD
(smugly)
I didn't skimp on anything. I've got a Dia-Tomaceous Earth Filter in there.

NED
That's what Betty said--

HOWARD
It filters 99 point 99 per cent of all solid matter out of the water.

NED
Betty told me--

HOWARD
(mixing himself a drink)
How come you never put in a pool at your place?

NED
(shrugs)
Never got around to it.

HOWARD
Too bad. Helps the resale value.

NED
I don't have to worry about resale value.

HOWARD
Well, with the tennis court and all that planting you put in you'll get a hell of a lot more than you paid for it.

NED
If I ever sell it.

HOWARD
Right person has to come along.

NED
I want the girls to be married in that house--

HOWARD
But-- I thought--

He stops abruptly, frowns at Betty.

NED
Won't be long now. Boys all over the place. Our drive looked like a parking lot today.

Howard's eyes meet Betty's. She raises her eyebrows. There is an awkward pause although Ned is unaware of it.

BETTY
(to change the subject)
Gosh, it sure is a heavenly day!

HOWARD
(gestures)
Don't like the look of that cloud.

The three of them stare up at the blue sky where a strand of

cumulus cloud has appeared in the west.

NED

(exclaims)

It's beautiful! It's like a dream city! As if we're looking at it from the bow of a ship -- Lisbon, Naples, Istanbul --

HOWARD

Hackensack!

He laughs at his joke. Betty gives him an irritated glance.

NED

(dreamily)

I'd like to see all those glistening white domes and minarets against the sky. First chance I get away from the office that's what I'd do. Go sailing around the Golden Horn.

BETTY

(pouting at Howard)

Why don't we travel more?

HOWARD

What for? We've got everything we need right here at home--

He is interrupted by the sound of a car horn from the direction of the driveway. Betty leaps up, relieved. So does Howard.

BETTY

That must be Don and Helen with the Forsburghs!

She runs toward the driveway. Howard jogs after her. Immediately Ned dives into the pool, leaving a glistening trail of bubbles as the wake of his passage.

[4]

The Lears

Ned is walking rapidly across a spacious lawn toward a large and elaborate pool and pool-house set at its far end.

As he approaches the pool he sees a young girl leaping on the diving board. Her name is Muffie. She waves enthusiastically at Ned. Another girl is swimming in the pool. She doesn't notice Ned until she hears his voice.

MUFFIE

Hi, Mr. Merrill, how are you?

NED

Hi there, Muffie!

MUFFIE

Mother and Daddy are at the Club

NED

Mind if I have a swim?

MUFFIE

Of course not! Help yourself!

As Ned walks to the end of the pool the other girl swims to meet him. Her hands grasp the curb. Ned bends down and pulls her out and onto the terrace. Her name is Julie and she is arrestingly beautiful. Her long blonde hair is plastered to her head. Her eyelashes are stuck together in little points. Her perfect willowy figure is shown off by a brief bikini. Water is running in rivulets down her face and body.

NED

It isn't -- Julianne Hooper!

JULIE

(delighted)

Yes it is!

NED

(stares at her)

I can't believe it. You're all grown up.

There is another flashing smile from Julie.

NED

How come we never see you any more?

JULIE

I guess you don't need me any more--

NED

Of course we need you, Julie --
we're always looking for a baby-
sitter--

JULIE
(laughs reproachfully)
Oh, Mr. Merrill!

She picks up a towel and starts to dry her hair. Ned watches every
move she makes with intense pleasure.

NED
Hey! How about next Sunday night?
You busy?

JULIE
No but--

NED
Okay, you're hired. Still live in
the same place?

JULIE
Yes but--

NED
I'll pick you up at seven.

JULIE
You're putting me on! A baby-sitter!
Ellen and Aggie would have a fit if
they heard you!

She laughs with embarrassment.

At this point there is a shout from Muffie.

MUFFIE
At last! I'm parched!

A tall boy, about seventeen, in bathing trunks, is coming from the
direction of the drive carrying a carton of Cokes. He comes up to
them. Ned looks at him blankly.

JULIE
Mr. Merrill, this is my brother
Vernon.

Muffie has come out of the pool. She takes the carton from him and

puts it on the table.

NED
Your brother!

They shake hands.

NED
(gesturing the height
of a small boy)
But your brother was--

VERNON
(with a grin)
Boy, I sure liked that little red
Jaguar you used to have!

He crosses to Muffie, who is taking cold bottles of Coke out of
the carton.

NED
Julie, I can't get over you. How old
are you now?

JULIE
Twenty last month.

NED
Going to school?

JULIE
(shakes her head)
I've got a job.

MUFFIE
(calls)
Want a Coke, Mr. Merrill?

NED
Sure--

He and Julie join the other two. Vernon hands them each an opened
bottle.

MUFFIE
(to Ned)
Gee, I miss Ellen and Aggie. Where
are they?

NED

They're -- they're home playing tennis.

MUFFIE

(amazed)

They are? But when did they-- why didn't they call me?

JULIE

I'd just love to see them. Let's drive over!

NED

(rises suddenly and puts the Coke down)

Well, I've got to be on my way. I'm swimming home.

MUFFIE

(laughs)

You're swimming home?

NED

Figured out there's a river of pools all the way to my house!

VERNON

That's more hiking than swimming.

NED

Not hiking exactly. Portaging.

MUFFIE

It's okay, if you like exercise.

VERNON

(to Ned, with a laugh)

What a crazy idea!

JULIE

(with a withering glance at Vernon)

I think it's a brilliant idea.

NED

(his excitement returning)

From here I go to the Bunkers,

then a portage through the Pastern's riding ring, then the Hallorans and so on -- I've got it all mapped out in my mind.

MUFFIE

What are you doing it for?

Ned looks puzzled.

MUFFIE

Why do you want to do it?

JULIE

(quickly)

I think it's very original. As if he's an explorer or something.

NED

(approvingly)

Now you sound like a girl with imagination!

JULIE

I mean I think it's an adventure!

NED

Come with me!

JULIE

(taken aback)

Well, gee, I-- I--

NED

Come on, live a little!

JULIE

(hesitates)

Well, I don't know if--

NED

Come on! We'll explore the torrential headwaters of the Lucinda River!

Muffie and Vernon giggle at this.

JULIE

(with a cold glance at them)

All right -- I will!

She puts down her Coke and jumps up, smiling at Ned. He is overjoyed.

NED

Race you!

They take running dives into the pool and race to the other end. Ned wins. They hoist themselves over the curb, laughing and dripping. Julie's sandals are there. She slips her feet into them and they start off, running over the rest of the lawn and down a slope.

[5]

The Country Lane

Ned and Julie are walking along a narrow country lane, half overgrown with weeds and bushes, shaded by tall trees. A few black-eyed Susans are blooming along the side of the road. Ned stops.

NED

Funny--

JULIE

What?

NED

Black-eyed Susans now.

JULIE

They're all over the place.

NED

Usually bloom later--

He picks a half dozen and hands them to Julie, like a country boy to his girl. She smiles with pleasure. They walk a little farther in silence. Ned's eyes are on Julie, constantly admiring her. She catches him looking at her. He smiles.

JULIE

Mr. Merrill--

NED

Hmm?

JULIE

What did you mean before -- all that about my coming over to baby-sit?

NED

(puzzled)

Coming over to baby-sit?

(remembers)

Oh, I was just joking.

(smiles)

I was teasing you.

JULIE

Gee, I wondered.

NED

You used to be such a shy little kid. Always brought along a pile of school books, always dropping pencils and things. Never had a word to say.

JULIE

I thought plenty though.

NED

Thought what?

JULIE

Oh -- daydreamed --

NED

What about?

JULIE

(gives him a sidelong glance)

Oh -- lots of things.

NED

What sort of things?

JULIE

It's so silly. I mean it was such kid stuff.

NED

Come on -- tell me.

JULIE

(shyly)

I bet you never knew I had a big
crush on you.

NED

You did?

JULIE

Oh, I was mad about you. Out of my
head.

NED

(terribly pleased)

You were?

JULIE

If Mrs. Merrill called me to baby-
sit -- even at the last minute --
I'd cancel out whoever I'd promised
and come to your house instead.

NED

(laughs)

You must have lost a lot of
customers.

JULIE

And then I'd spend about an hour
getting myself fixed up. My mother
thought I was nuts. I mean, I was
just a kid to you but you were a --
god to me!

NED

(enormously pleased)

Now you're putting me on!

JULIE

Know what I'd do after the girls
were asleep? I'd go up to your room
and open your closet and touch your
suits. Then I'd go into your
bathroom and smell your shaving
lotion. Then one time -- oh this is
a terrible thing to admit--

NED

Tell me--

JULIE

I stole one of your shirts

She looks at him. He laughs happily.

JULIE

When I was doing my homework up in my room I'd put it on. It made me feel as if you were around me.

NED

(his spirits soaring)

Julie -- I -- I didn't know --

JULIE

When you'd drive me home late at night I'd pretend like mad--

NED

Pretend what?

(Julie doesn't answer)

What is it you used to pretend?

JULIE

(embarrassed)

I-- after all, I was just a child in those days--

NED

I want to know--

He takes her hand. Julie starts out reluctantly but gets caught up in her own recital.

JULIE

Oh -- that you were desperately in love with me -- but you were too honorable to say so because, well, I mean -- you were married.

She looks at him. He is listening seriously. Reassured, she goes on.

JULIE

So I had to go to Paris to, you know, put an ocean between us. And no matter how many divine Frenchmen begged me, I'd never marry. I'd just

live there all pale and mysterious
with huge tragic eyes. Then one night
I'd be in some club in a fabulous
Paris gown and I'd see you at the
door -- tall, distinguished, a
little gray at the temples--

Ned touches his temples where his hair is indeed turning gray.

JULIE

(nods solemnly)

--I pretended your eyes would burn
into me across this whole roomful of
people and suddenly there'd be a
hush and everyone would look at me.
And then I'd just stand up and float
towards you--

She stops abruptly.

NED

And then what?

JULIE

(disengages her hand)

That's all.

NED

(with a wild surge
of happiness)

I -- I don't know what to say!

JULIE

(laughs)

I told you. I was a real spooky kid!

During the last few exchanges they have been hearing the sound of
voices and laughter from the pool nearby. The voices have gradually
grown louder.

NED

The Bunkers must be having a party!

[6]

The Bunkers

The Bunkers' terrace is crowded with people, all of them

prosperous looking, chic, and deeply tanned. White-coated waiters are passing trays of drinks. There is a crowd around Ned and Julie, the women are kissing Ned, the men are shaking his hand. Ned is on the crest of the wave. His life seems to him as sunny and full of promise as this summer afternoon.

Buzz Bunker, a middle-aged man in trunks, is sprawled limply across a wild-looking inflated rubber animal which is floating in the Bunker's pool. His eyes are closed. His slack face indicates that he is loaded. When he hears the commotion and cries of "Neddy! Neddy!" he opens one eye and gazes toward the terrace.

A woman screams joyfully and breaks through the circle around Ned. She is Enid Bunker, a little under forty, sleek and handsome.

ENID

Look who's here! What a marvelous
surprise!

She flings her arms around Ned and kisses him. When she releases him, she looks appraisingly at Julie in her still damp bikini.

NED

This is Julianne Hooper, our baby-sitter. I lost her for a while but I found her again!

ENID

(with a slight
curl of the lip)
How fortunate for you, darling!

NED

(oblivious)
My God, that sun tan. You look ravishing!

Enid, all smiles again, gives him a playful push.

ENID

You know where the bar is -- go get a drink.

She rushes off to another approaching guest. For an instant Ned surveys the scene. Then he says, with glowing tenderness:

NED

How bonny are the banks of the Lucinda River.

JULIE

What?

NED

I knew we'd find friends all along
the way--

(leads her toward
the bar)

Let's have a quick one to appease
the natives--

As they push through the crowd Ned continues to be greeted enthusiastically. Everyone is friendly and warm and terribly pleased to see him. They eye Julie with various expressions, most of the men admiring her, the women amused or jealous. All of these encounters are en passant.

ONE MAN

(claps Ned on
the shoulder)

Hey Ned! Good to see you! How've you
been?

NED

Great! Just great!

A WOMAN

(exclaims)

Neddy!

(and kisses him)

NED

You look marvelous, honeybunch!

ANOTHER WOMAN

Darling!

(kisses him)

Is it undiplomatic to ask if
Lucinda's with you?

NED

She'll be along--

A MAN

(pumps Ned's hand)

My God! It's been a dog's age!

NED

Rusty! Say, we've got to get
together! Call me!

Yet another woman, an athletic-looking freckled blonde, kisses
Ned.

FRECKLED BLONDE
Aren't you a sight for sore eyes!

4TH WOMAN
(kisses him, exclaims)
Neddy dear!

FRECKLED BLONDE
How's Lucinda?

The fourth woman pokes her -- but too late.

NED
She's fine. We want to see you.
We'll call you--

When he has gone, the freckled blonde whispers to her friend.

One of the men shakes Ned's hand.

MAN
Good Lord! Where'd you pop up from?

NED
How you doing, chum?

MAN
(staring at Julie)
Not as well as you!

Ned laughs and pulls Julie on. At the bar, the Bunkers' Negro
butler extends the same hearty welcome.

THE BUTLER
Mr. Merrill!

NED
Hiya Stanley. How's Inez?

THE BUTLER
Will she be glad to see you, sir!

NED

Inez is my girl!

THE BUTLER

(beams)

Yes sir!

NED

(indicates a wine bottle
in a silver cooler)

Champagne?

THE BUTLER

Yes sir!

He takes the bottle out of the cooler. Ned examines the label.

NED

Dom Perignon! That's for us!

The butler gets out two champagne glasses and fills them.

NED

(to Julie)

Like champagne?

JULIE

I've only had it once -- at a
birthday party --

The butler hands them their glasses.

JULIE

(boasting)

A boy drank it out of my slipper!

NED

(as he touches
his glass to hers)

Here's to sugar on our strawberries!

Julie giggles. Ned drains his glass and, hardly allowing Julie to finish, pulls her along toward the pool. A man stops them and shakes Ned's hand with vigor.

MAN

Ned! My God!

NED

(turns)

Brian! How are you, Brian?

BRIAN

Listen, I feel rotten for not calling you. Been so damn busy -- don't know where the time goes --

NED

Let's have lunch this week -- for sure!

BRIAN

Okay, but I want to tell you right now I think it was a stinking thing to do -- what they pulled on you over at your place--

Ned's eyes are a little anxious, a little puzzled.

NED

What's that, Brian?

BRIAN

I don't care how big a firecracker that new guy was! Brother, that story really jolted me--

Ned's eyes flicker past Brian. He is not listening.

BRIAN

I kept thinking what if some young smart-ass comes in to our shop and does that to me!

Ned's attention is elsewhere.

NED

I'll hear from you, huh?

He is already pushing past Brian.

NED

Call me up at the office--

Ned's eyes are on an extremely good-looking woman of about thirty who is wearing a backless bathing suit; she is talking to a man. Ned sneaks up behind the woman and enfolds her in a bear hug.

NED

Beautiful Cynthia!

Cynthia spins around, delighted.

CYNTHIA
Neddy, darling!

NED
Where's Carter?

CYNTHIA
(happily)
Haven't you heard? We're separated!

Julie has joined them.

NED
This is Julianne Hooper, our baby-sitter.

CYNTHIA
(her eyes on Ned)
Run along to your babies, dear.

NED
She's with me. We're swimming across the county.

CYNTHIA
(gives Julie
an icy stare)
How healthy and young of you!

NED
(admiring Cynthia)
Who the hell else out here could wear a suit like that?

CYNTHIA
Why don't you come over tonight -- for dinner?

And she means more than dinner.

NED
Love to -- if Lucinda hasn't made a date.

CYNTHIA

(furious)
Lucinda! Well -- congratulations!

She turns her back abruptly.

Ned hasn't heard. He has already pushed past her, intent on getting to the pool. A man rushes determinedly over to him and blocks his way.

DAN
Why don't you leave some phone numbers around? Been trying to reach you.

NED
Danny-boy! How are you, chum?

DAN
Look, I've heard of an opening -- sounded perfect for you, your experience. Smaller place than you're used to, but these two guys are creative as hell and--

NED
(puts his arm around Julie)
Say hello to Julianne--

DAN
(briefly)
Hello Julianne--
(his attention turns immediately back to Ned)
This firm has a reputation for quality. I think if you approach them right, take a cut just at first--

NED
(puzzled)
A cut?

DAN
Now look here Ned -- you don't have to pretend with me.

But Ned has Julie by the hand and is running to the pool. She

slips out of her sandals, and Ned tosses them clear across the length of the pool to the grass at the other end. They dive in.

Buzz is still floating on the rubber raft. He doesn't move nor glance her way as Julie passes him. Ned stops alongside of the raft, treading water.

NED
(loudly)
Buzz! Hey, Buzz!

Buzz turns his head slowly and stares at him with glazed eyes.

NED
Know what day this is, Buzz?

Buzz looks infinitely bored.

NED
This is the day Ned Merrill swims
across the county!

Expressionless, Buzz turns his head away and closes his eyes.

NED
(shouts joyfully to
Buzz and the world)
This is the day!

[7]

The Pastern's Riding Ring

A standard size grassy riding ring, neatly enclosed by a low white fence. In the background is a well-cared-for stable. Inside the ring the jumps are set up for practice. Ned is hurdling one of the highest with graceful ease. After he lands he turns to Julie, who is watching him.

NED
(triumphant)
How about that?

JULIE
Fabulous!

NED
I'm in good shape, huh?

JULIE
(enthusiastic)
Oh yes! You're in much better shape
than my father, for example.

Ned reacts to this comparison. He gives her a look.

NED
Come on, try it.

Julie runs to him. He motions her down on one knee, fingertips to the ground, and takes the same position himself.

NED
All set? Go!

They dash together toward the next jump and hurdle it in unison. Julie sails over, her hair flowing out behind her. They land together, laughing delightedly. Ned reaches for her hand and together they continue to circle the ring, leaping over the jumps like two healthy and beautiful animals. For Ned it is a period of his youth returned, and his face is boyish with sheer uncomplicated joy in the perfect obedience of his body, in the girl beside him, in the sunny day.

Suddenly, as he lands, Ned makes a stunned grimace of pain. He gasps and holds his ankle.

JULIE
What's the matter?

NED
Twisted it--

JULIE
Oh! Does it hurt much?

NED
No, it's nothing -- let's sit down
for a minute--

Ned limps in real pain toward a place near the fence where the tree branches make a dappled patch of shade. Julie sits. Ned lies on his stomach, his chin propped on his hands, his eyes enjoying her.

NED
What kind of a job do you have,

Julie?

JULIE

Secretary. We're the biggest office supply company in New York.

NED

Funny -- I've never run into you on the train.

JULIE

I take the 7:22. I'm always the first one in -- so I make the coffee.

NED

Friendly office?

JULIE

(nods)

Two of the girls want me to get an apartment with them. Soon as we get our raises.

NED

Watch out! It's a big wicked city!

JULIE

I know. I've had some experiences.

NED

Like what?

JULIE

Well, one morning I was making the coffee and I happened to look out of the window. There's an apartment house across a court. A man was standing at his window looking at me.

(pauses, then
dramatically)

He was stark naked!

NED

(gravely)

That's terrible.

JULIE

I just stood there looking at him!

NED

You should report that to somebody--

JULIE

He's never been there again. I
check every morning.

NED

Lots of nuts around.

JULIE

(nods eagerly)

Once my boss sent me to deliver some
record books. I got into an empty
elevator and pressed twenty-six.
Then a man got in and pressed
twenty-seven. Then the door closed,
and the elevator started up. This
man came right over and kissed me.
On the mouth!

NED

(alarmed)

What'd you do?

JULIE

I dropped the record books.

NED

What'd he do?

JULIE

He picked them up.

NED

Then what?

JULIE

He gave them to me, and the door
opened on the twenty-sixth floor
and I got out.

(expels a breath)

Can you imagine! In a building on
Park Avenue!

Julie sighs at the quixotic behavior of the human male. She
stretches out in the grass. Ned puts his hand lightly on her
ankle.

NED

(softly)

How beautiful are thy feet in
sandals, O Prince's daughter--

He touches her leg.

JULIE

(moves her leg away)

That's from the Bible, isn't it?

NED

Song of Solomon.

JULIE

When I was a little girl in Sunday
School they never mentioned that
part of the Bible.

NED

(soberly)

You still are a little girl in
Sunday School. I've been thinking. I
could meet you on the train in the
morning and take you to your office
when you have to go out on an errand
you could call me and I'll go with
you and I'll pick you up at noon
every day and we'll have lunch
together--

(his enthusiasm grows)

That's what we'll do! I'll take
care of you, Julie!

JULIE

(inches away a little)

Gee I don't think that would work
out very well, Mr. Merrill. I mean
I--I need my lunch hour to get my
hair done -- and shop -- things like
that.

Ned hasn't really listened to her. He very tentatively and lightly
strokes her hair.

NED

That shirt of mine, Julie. Do you
still have it?

JULIE

(shakes her head)

After a while I decided it was --
well, it was just a shirt -- and I
threw it away--

Ned looks hurt.

JULIE

You had so many shirts I didn't
think you'd miss it or anything. Do
you mind?

NED

No, but I wish you'd told me how you
felt.

JULIE

Oh I couldn't! I would've died!

NED

(soberly)

There's so little love in the world.
If it's kept a secret then it's
wasted, don't you see?

He lets a long strand of her hair slip through his fingers. She
moves away the least bit.

NED

I won't let you ever be scared or
hurt.

He runs his finger along her arm.

NED

And if you want anything -- whatever
it is -- you just come to me.

He puts his arm across her breast and around her, protectively.

NED

I'll -- I'll be your guardian angel--

The hug is meant to be the most delicate and tender embrace, but
Julie misinterprets it and tries to release herself. She makes
only a slight move but Ned's grip tightens.

NED
(softly)
Julie -- Julie -- Julie--

Julie panics and breaks away from him. She jumps to her feet and dashes off through the high grass.

NED
(leaps up)
Julie!

She doesn't look back. She is running away. Devastated, Ned watches her until she is out of sight.

[8]

The Lindleys

Two suburban matrons in their late thirties, good-looking, well-dressed in the ubiquitous suburban uniform of madras shorts and round collared blouses, are seated under a tree in a small woods. The woods border a large clearing of mowed lawn, at the end of which is a swimming pool and an elaborate Tudor house.

The two women, whose names are Harriet and Jane, have bird-watcher manuals and notebooks in their laps. They scan the branches of nearby trees through binoculars.

HARRIET
It's a Chestnut Sided Warbler! See
there! It has a yellow cap!

JANE
No, no, it's a Myrtle Warbler. Just
the crown is yellow and it has a
yellow rump--

She lowers her binoculars to rifle through the pages of the manual.

Harriet continues to look through her binoculars. Suddenly she gasps, swings them in another direction and peers intently.

JANE
What is it?

HARRIET
I don't know--

JANE

What's it look like?

HARRIET

Bronze-crested, tawny-chested, flat-bellied, with a blue rump--

After a glance at Harriet, Jane lifts her own binoculars. They suddenly frame the figure of Ned, limping through the woods.

JANE

Oh-oh, I haven't spotted that one in a long time.

HARRIET

Who is he?

JANE

Common species. Found everywhere except home in the nest.

HARRIET

Oh? What's the female like?

JANE

Small, brown, gray crest.

Ned has come out of the woods and is crossing the lawn toward the house. The two women follow him with their binoculars.

HARRIET

Like birds! The gorgeous ones always mate with the drab ones!

JANE

She is not drab. And she's very nice.

Ned has now arrived at the terrace at the back of the house. The windows are open. The place is silent.

NED

(shouts)

Eliot! Nancy! Hey, Eliot!

There is no answer.

NED

Hello! Hello! Anybody home?

The house is deserted. Ned's look of bright anticipation fades. His shoulders slump. His disappointment is obvious. He sits down in a chair, all the lines of his body slack.

JANE

(sarcastically)

Too bad. No reception committee. No drums and banners.

HARRIET

I'd have stayed home if he was coming.

After a moment Ned pulls himself together and, his steps dragging, crosses to the pool. The family has only recently left it. There are remains of drinks, half-filled dishes of peanuts. Children's toys are scattered around. On a chair is a beach bag and a man's jacket. On the grass near the pool a croquet game is set up, mallets and balls lying about. Ned surveys the scene with a lack of enthusiasm. He wanders restlessly over to the ice-bucket, digs out some ice and pours himself a short drink. He eats a peanut. There is a portable radio on the table. He switches it on, listens for a moment to the broadcast of a Sunday baseball game.

JANE

(sourly)

What's the name of that bird? A crow? Takes whatever he wants from the other fellow's nest--

Ned switches off the radio, puts down the barely tasted drink, rummages in the beach bag and finds a pack of cigarettes. He puts a cigarette in his mouth and looks around for a match. There are none in the bag. He looks on the tables near the pool but finds only an empty packet which he tosses away in frustration.

HARRIET

God, I know just how he feels!

Ned's search for a match has become more frantic. He picks up the man's jacket and goes through the pockets without success. He dumps the beach bag upside down and sorts through the pile of contents.

HARRIET

Would I love to give him a light!

JANE

I wouldn't give him the time of day.

HARRIET

What's the matter? Why've you got it
in for him?

JANE

I happen to have heard the story and
I'm on her side.

HARRIET

(promptly)

I haven't heard the story and I'm on
his side.

Ned takes the cigarette out of his mouth and tosses it away. He starts for the end of the pool, passing the croquet game. He pauses and picks up a mallet, then places a ball. His first stroke is perfect -- the ball rolls directly through the wicket. His second stroke is successful but comes to rest in a position from which it is impossible to make a good third stroke. He scowls at the ball. He bends down and moves the wicket to a favorable position. He strokes the ball through it. Then, obviously feeling much better, he jauntily continues towards the pool.

JANE

(triumphantly)

See that? He's got the ethics of a
magpie!

HARRIET

Oh come on! We all cheat if we think
we can get away with it!
(glances at Jane)
Don't you?

Jane's lips tighten. She lowers her binoculars and starts looking through her bird manual. By this time Ned is swimming across the pool. He reaches the far end and leaps over the curb.

HARRIET

Bravo! Beautiful!

She watches Ned, favoring his bad ankle, stride happily away. Jane is still consulting the bird manual.

JANE

By the way, you were wrong. That
bird we saw before was a Myrtle
Warbler.

Harriet glances at the manual with bored indifference.

HARRIET

I don't give a damn if it was a
solid gold warbler.

She stretches out lazily on the ground, still thinking about Ned.
After a moment she turns her head towards Jane and demands:

HARRIET

What are we doing here in the prime
of our lives -- watching birds?

[9]

The Hallorans

Ned limps up to the impressive entrance gate to the Halloran estate. The huge house is set well back from the road. As he is about to start up the drive a limousine turns in after him. It is driven by a dignified Negro. Ned signals him to stop. He approaches the car, smiling.

NED

Hi there, Steve!

He crosses to the car door.

NED

How are you, Steve?
(frowns)
Oh, you're not Steve.

THE CHAUFFEUR

(politely)
No. How are you, Mr. Merrill?

NED

I'm a friend of the Hallorans.

THE CHAUFFEUR

Yes, I know.

NED

Mind if I ride up to the house with
you?

THE CHAUFFEUR

Not at all.

He is about to get out of the car to open the back door.

NED

Don't bother.

He opens the front door and gets in beside the chauffeur. The Sunday New York Times is lying on the seat. Ned moves it over. The car starts off.

NED

(with an anxious glance
at the chauffeur)

How long have you been working for
the Hallorans?

THE CHAUFFEUR

Going on two years now.

NED

What happened to Steve?

THE CHAUFFEUR

(pleasantly)

I'm afraid I don't know.

NED

(chummy)

What a character! Did he mangle the
English language!

The chauffeur doesn't answer.

NED

We told him he ought to be on
television.

Again no answer.

NED

Big bass voice. You should have
heard that guy sing!

THE CHAUFFEUR

(evenly)

A natural sense of rhythm?

THE CHAUFFEUR
(enthusiastically)
You bet!

Suddenly something about the Negro's question bothers him. Ned glances at him. The chauffeur is gazing straight ahead, his profile pleasant and impassive.

The car pulls up in front of the entrance to the house. Ned opens the door and gets out.

NED
I'll take them the paper.

THE CHAUFFEUR
(hands it to him)
Thank you.

NED
Thank you for the lift. My apologies
-- I don't know why I thought you
were Steve.

THE CHAUFFEUR
(casually, very
courteous)
That's okay. Sometimes you all look
alike to us too.

Ned gives him a look and turns away. He limps slightly as he walks off around the house. The Hallorans' pool, which is several hundred yards away in back of the house, is set at the end of a wide rolling lawn. Everything about the estate says "lots of old money." Mr. and Mrs. Halloran are sitting at a table beside the pool. They are both gray-haired, handsome, distinguished-looking, elegant in manner and totally naked. It becomes apparent at once that Mrs. Halloran is the Commanding General of this couple and Mr. Halloran her lieutenant. She has set up what looks like an outdoor office at the pool. On the table is a typewriter, piles of papers, pencils, envelopes, etc., and a telephone.

At the moment Mrs. Halloran is busily stapling tickets to form letters and stuffing them into envelopes. From time to time she consults a long list of names and addresses in front of her. Mr. Halloran is in the midst of a conversation on the phone.

MR. HALLORAN
(obviously speaking
to a young child)

You want me to say hello to the
teddy bear? Hello teddy bear--

MRS. HALLORAN
(impatiently)
Tell him to call his mother!

MR. HALLORAN
(into phone)
Will you call your mummy, please?
Oh, you want me to say hello to your
little brother? Hello little--

MRS. HALLORAN
(snatches the phone
from Mr. Halloran)
Young man, I want to speak to your
mother at once!

She hands the phone back to Mr. Halloran and immediately continues
her stapling.

MR. HALLORAN
(into phone)
Mrs. McCauley, this is Chester
Halloran ... oh yes, they're
adorable --

He sees the sour look on his wife's face and continues quickly.

MR. HALLORAN
I'm calling about the Safari Ball, a
benefit for the Preserve Our Wild
Life Foundation ... Oh? ... of
course, out of the question -- bon
voyage --

There is a feeling that Mrs. McCauley has hung up before the bon
voyage. Mr. Halloran hangs up.

MR. HALLORAN
She's leaving tomorrow for a cruise
around the world--

MRS. HALLORAN
(grimly)
The hell she is!

Ned has come around the corner of the house and, favoring his

ankle, is limping towards the Hallorans. They have not yet noticed him.

Mr. Halloran sighs, consults a list of names, and is about to dial again when the phone rings.

MR. HALLORAN
(into phone)
Hello. Oh, hello honey--

MRS. HALLORAN
(impatiently)
Tell her to hurry -- they'll miss the sun.

MR. HALLORAN
(who has been listening on the phone)
She absolutely refuses to bring the children unless we put on our suits.

MRS. HALLORAN
After the way we brought her up?
What's the matter with her?

MR. HALLORAN
(into phone)
After the way we brought you up?
What's the matter with you, honey?
(listens, then to Mrs. Halloran)
She says they're her children and she's going to bring them up her way.

MRS. HALLORAN
They'll end up repressed!

MR. HALLORAN
(into phone)
Mummy says they'll end up repressed.

He listens a second and hangs up.

MR. HALLORAN
(sadly)
She's not going to bring the children.

Ned is coming toward them when suddenly he remembers something. He

retraces his steps a few feet toward a convenient bush, puts the newspaper, down on the ground, and removes his trunks.

Mrs. Halloran is peering toward the now nude figure coming toward them, holding the trunks and the newspaper as a modest cover.

MRS. HALLORAN
Good heavens! It's Ned Merrill!

MR. HALLORAN
(squinting at Ned)
I wonder if he's come to ask us again.

MRS. HALLORAN
(firmly)
He'll get the same answer.

MR. HALLORAN
Oh dear, it seems a little mean--

MRS. HALLORAN
(shaking her head)
He's not going to get a penny.

MR. HALLORAN
(wheedling)
Couldn't we help him out a little?
For old times sake? After all, he's
a friend--

MRS. HALLORAN
Friends are not deductible.

Ned is closer and waving.

MRS. HALLORAN
(calls sweetly)
Hello Neddy dear!

MR. HALLORAN
How are you, my boy?

Ned reaches them and places the New York Times on the table. Mrs. Halloran flips through it hurriedly and selects a section.

NED
I'm swimming across the county!

MRS. HALLORAN

(abstracted, her
head in the paper)
Why I didn't know one could--

NED
Met your chauffeur on the way in.

MR. HALLORAN
Nice boy. Real sense of personal
worth.

NED
Always got a lot of laughs out of
old Steve--

MRS. HALLORAN
(still scanning the paper)
Steve had no sense of personal
worth--

Suddenly she folds back a page of the paper, excited.

MRS. HALLORAN
It's in here!

MR. HALLORAN
What does it say, dear?

MRS. HALLORAN
(reads)
At a meeting of the Zoning Board,
local property owners objected to
the Halloran proposal on the basis
that it would overcrowd the public
schools--

MR. HALLORAN
(to Ned)
We've petitioned to have the Driscoll
Estate cut up into two-acre lots
instead of five-acre lots.

Ned is staring at a nearby tree, its branches bare.

MRS. HALLORAN
(triumphantly, her
eyes on the paper)
They're practically calling us
Communists!

MR. HALLORAN
(airily)
Sticks and stones! Sticks and stones!
Sticks and stones!

Mrs. Halloran puts the paper down. Her jaw is set.

MRS. HALLORAN
It's going to be a tough fight,
Chester!

She takes up her stapling with renewed vigor. Ned has not been listening to the last exchanges. His attention has been totally focused on the tree.

NED
(suddenly)
Why is that tree bare?

MR. HALLORAN
That's an ash.

NED
That tree must be blighted.

MR. HALLORAN
No, ashes are the last to get leaves
and the first to lose them.

Ned continues to eye the tree in puzzlement for a moment.

MRS. HALLORAN
(to Mr. Halloran)
Overcrowding the public schools! As
if people with two acres give birth
to more children than people with
five acres!

MR. HALLORAN
(indignantly)
That's not even a biological fact!

During the foregoing Ned has crossed to the table. He picks up one of the tickets.

NED
Safari Ball -- put me down for a
table.

MRS. HALLORAN

Oh Neddy!

NED

What's wrong? Don't I always support
your benefits?

MRS. HALLORAN

(firmly)

A table costs one thousand dollars!

NED

Okay, put me down.

She hesitates. He picks up the pen and holds it out to her. She is about to protest, but something in his eyes changes her mind. She writes his name on the list. This makes him feel much better. His spirits lift visibly. Mr. Halloran beams and nods smugly at his wife.

MR. HALLORAN

By the way, my boy, I was awfully
sorry we couldn't be of help.

NED

I don't recall asking you for help.

MR. HALLORAN

Oh, dear, I thought-- how're Lucinda
and the girls?

NED

Lucinda's fine and the girls are
home playing tennis. Now if you
don't mind I think I'll get wet.

He crosses to the pool.

MR. HALLORAN

(sotto voce)

Well! He didn't ask for any money
after all!

MRS. HALLORAN

Just wait.

Ned is swimming across the pool, mostly using one arm, his trunks held above the water in the other hand. He reaches the end of the

pool, hoists himself easily over the curb and puts on his trunks. He turns, salutes the Hallorans, and hurries off.

MR. HALLORAN

There, you see! He must be back on his feet. He bought a whole table, didn't he?

With a knowingly skeptical smile, Mrs. Halloran picks up a pencil and definitely crosses Ned's signature off the list.

[10]

The Gilmartins

A boy of about eleven, dressed in shorts, is sitting on a stool behind the wooden crate counter of a home-made lemonade stand on a country road. He is playing a recorder. Nearby is the entrance to a drive up to a large house. It is obvious that few cars come up this road and probably no pedestrians.

The sky has darkened by this time. The frail, half-naked boy and the plaintive sound of the recorder convey a sense of aching loneliness. The boy sees Ned approaching. He continues to play the recorder until Ned is at the stand.

NED

Hi.

THE BOY

(puts the recorder down)

Hi.

NED

Your name's Gilmartin, isn't it?

THE BOY

Kevin Gilmartin, Jr., after my father. My mother says I've got a lot to live down.

NED

(indicating the lemonade)

How about pouring me a cup?

KEVIN

(eyeing Ned in

his wet trunks)
It's ten cents.

NED
I'll owe it to you.

KEVIN
(cynically)
How do I know I'll ever collect?

NED
I'll drop around tomorrow and pay
you.

The boy looks dubious.

NED
Scout's honor!

The boy hesitates.

NED
(urgently -- it matters)
I look honest don't I?

The boy doesn't answer. He fills the cup and hands it to Ned. Ned's hand is shaking as he takes it.

KEVIN
You're shivering.

NED
(ignoring this)
Is your mother at home?

KEVIN
She's in Europe. It's a honeymoon so
she couldn't take me.

NED
How's your father?

KEVIN
He's in love with a manicurist.
That's what my mother says. I have
to depend on her for information.

NED
You all alone here?

KEVIN

There's a maid.

NED

Know what? I'm going to invite you over to our house. I've got two girls you can play with.

KEVIN

How big?

NED

A little bigger than you.

KEVIN

Do you play with them?

NED

Sure, we play catch and tennis. We go bike riding together--

KEVIN

(matter-of-factly)

I have an English racing bike.

NED

You bring it over. We'll race you.

He puts down his empty cup.

KEVIN

Want another? You'll owe me twenty cents.

NED

Haven't time. I'm swimming home.

The boy eyes him suspiciously.

NED

Mind if I use your pool?

KEVIN

Well, I don't mind, but--

Without waiting to hear what he has to say, Ned has already started up the drive. The boy picks up his recorder and follows him.

NED

You know those girls of mine are like a couple of wild cats. When I get home from the office they pounce on me. They nearly hug the breath out of me.

KEVIN

What games do they play?

NED

Cops and robbers, touch football--

KEVIN

They play chess?

NED

We haven't tried that.

KEVIN

Chess is a brainy game.

As they come close to the pool Ned is stunned to see that it is drained.

NED

(dismayed)

It's empty!

He crosses to the edge and stares disconsolately down at the empty concrete rectangle.

NED

God this does it! This really does it.

He sits wearily, the boy beside him.

NED

My whole project's ruined.

The boy looks at his forlorn face. He senses Ned's vulnerability and for the first time is drawn to him.

KEVIN

(unhappily)

They took the water out because I'm not a good swimmer. I'm bad at

sports. At school nobody wants me on their team.

NED

It's a lot better that way -- take it from me. At first you think it's the end of the world because you're not on the team and then--

KEVIN

(eagerly)

Then what?

NED

You realize you're free. You're your own man. You don't have to worry about getting to be the captain and all that status-stuff.

KEVIN

They'd never elect me captain in a million years.

NED

You're the captain of your soul. That's what counts. Know what I mean?

The boy nods gravely. They sit in silence for a moment.

NED

There's one thing I could do. I could get down there and make believe I'm swimming across the pool.

KEVIN

That's kind of cheating, isn't it?

NED

Not if I did all the strokes exactly as if I were in the water.

KEVIN

(happily)

That's a good idea.

NED

(rises)

Okay, let's do it.

Delighted, the boy follows him to the shallow end of the pool. They jump down to the concrete bottom.

NED

All set? Let's start off with a crawl.

Walking side by side and stroking as if they are really in the water, they begin.

NED

That's right. Relax. Reach out. Say, you've got very good form.

KEVIN

I've had lots of lessons. It's just that I'm afraid of the water.

They continue about a third of the way.

NED

Okay now, change to the side stroke.

They do so.

NED

Know what we do in the winter? We flood our tennis court, and we ice skate on it. Those kids of mine look so damn cute. Like a couple of elves in those little red caps -- stocking caps.

KEVIN

I don't know how to skate.

NED

You come over next winter, and I'll teach you. Then we'll have a hockey game.

KEVIN

(joyfully)

Okay!

They have gone another third of the way.

NED

Breast stroke!

They pantomime the breast stroke.

NED

Yes sir. My kids think I've got all
the answers! My kids think I'm just
about it!

They arrive at the end of the pool.

KEVIN

(jubilantly)

I've done it! It's the first time
I've ever swum the whole length.

NED

Congratulations.

KEVIN

(suddenly crestfallen)

I suppose it doesn't count because
there's no water.

NED

For us, there was.

KEVIN

(looks at him curiously)

Well -- that's a lie, isn't it?

NED

No. You see if you make believe hard
enough that something's true -- then
it is true -- for you.

They climb up the ladder.

KEVIN

Let's do it again!

NED

I've got to be going.

KEVIN

Oh come on! Please!

NED

(shakes his head)
It's getting late--

KEVIN
(coldly)
Okay, goodbye.

NED
I'm sorry. I'd like to but--

Kevin is unforgiving; he's been failed again.

KEVIN
Okay. If you're going to leave, then
leave.

He turns away.

NED
I'll give you a ring tomorrow --
about coming over --

The boy doesn't answer.

Ned starts off down the driveway. He has gone only a few yards when he hears the unmistakable sound of someone jumping up and down on the diving board. At first it doesn't register. Then he stops in his tracks, a look of intense alarm on his face. Ned turns and dashes back. The boy is leaping hard up and down on the board. Ned sprints up on to the board and throws his arms around the boy from behind. The force of this action almost tumbles both of them into the empty pool. They regain their balance. The boy looks at Ned, stunned and bewildered.

NED
It's okay -- it's okay!

KEVIN
What's the matter?

NED
I thought you were going to dive--

KEVIN
(amazed)
You thought I was going to dive?

Ned releases the boy who turns and stares at him.

KEVIN
(as if explaining
to a child)
There's no water in the pool!

Ned gives him a long, thoughtful look.

NED
Well -- so long, again.

He walks away, turning once to look back at the boy, who is sitting alone on the curb of the empty pool. When Ned is part way down the drive he hears the sound of the recorder playing the same tune as before.

[11]

Mrs. Hammar's

This is a contemporary house surrounded by a lovely garden. The pool is a free-form shape. Mrs. Hammar, an old lady, is bending over to cut some flowers. She has a basket on one arm in which she lays them. She is over seventy, with snow white hair, a majestic figure. She wears pearls and a soft print dress -- very much the grande dame.

She hears a splash in the pool and straightens up, surprised. She cannot tell who it is from this distance so she walks slowly toward the pool. By the time she is close, Ned is three quarters of the way toward the opposite end, but she recognizes him. She stops, rigid with anger. As Ned leaps out of the pool she hurries to confront him.

NED
(very warm
and friendly)
Good afternoon Mrs. Hammar. How are you?

MRS. HAMMAR
(coldly)
May I ask what you're doing here?

NED
On my way home -- thought I'd cool off in the pool--

MRS. HAMMAR

(icily)
Who gave you permission to use the
pool?

Ned is completely baffled at her tone and attitude.

NED
I'm Ned Merrill!
(indicates the
basket on her arm)
Flowers are beautiful -- I see
Eric's put in a rock garden--

MRS. HAMMAR
You're not welcome here, Mr. Merrill.

NED
(amazed)
You know me, don't you? I'm a friend
of Eric's!

MRS. HAMMAR
Friend? How dare you use that word?
(her voice breaks)
You never came to see him -- you
never even called him--

There is a flicker in Ned's eyes as if he has suddenly remembered something unpleasant and long buried.

NED
How is Eric? Is he better?

The woman gives him a horrified stare. Ned's eyes widen with a sudden realization. He backs away slowly, then faster.

MRS. HAMMAR
Just one minute, Mr. Merrill.

Ned stops.

MRS. HAMMAR
This is my house now. Don't you ever
set foot on my property again.

Ned draws in a breath, turns and runs.

MRS. HAMMAR
(a frail shout

after him)
Don't you ever come here again!

She stands where he has left her, her face crumpled with grief.

[12]

The Biswangers

An extremely noisy and frantic party is going on around the pool and on a huge terrace covered by a plastic dome. (The plastic dome is used to cover the pool in winter.) A loudspeaker is blaring raucous music.

This is the Biswangers' party, and everything about it is louder and faster than at the Bunkers -- the clothes are brighter and further out, the women wear more jewels. No one at all is in a bathing suit. It is apparent, too, that the party is being given to celebrate Henry Biswanger's hole-in-one. A huge banner is strung from one side of the dome to the other. It reads:

CONGRATULATIONS HENRY HOLE-IN-ONE
TWELFTH HOLE MEADOWLARK CLUB

Attached to a float bobbing in the pool is a number 12 flag from a golf green. All the other decorations are in the shape of "12s." The centerpiece of the buffet table is a huge 12 molded out of ice. Embedded in its ice base is an enormous bowl of caviar. No one notices Ned's arrival. He stands forlornly at the edge of the party.

Henry Biswsanger and two other men are examining the plastic dome. Henry is a bull, muscular and in tip-top physical shape, a blustering rough diamond who has made it the hard way and is perfectly honest about enjoying it. He slaps the dome proudly as he talks.

HENRY
--ain't it a bitch! Did you ever see
anything like it? Fifteen tons --
thirty thousand pounds of structured
aluminum and clear plastic!
(strokes the dome
affectionately)
And she rolls! She rolls on these
tracks here -- slides right back
like a goddam toy!

ONE OF THE MEN

Batteries?

HENRY

Hell no! Machinery to drive this thing takes up half the space down there--

He gestures.

THE OTHER MAN

What kinda temperature can you keep it in the winter?

HENRY

Like a goddam hothouse. Up to 90 if I want. It can be 20 below and a blizzard outside and I can be in there bakin'!

Two other men, drinks in hand, are standing out of Henry's earshot, looking at the flag bobbing in the pool.

MAN

--Club gave it to him. You make a hole in one at Meadowlark -- they give you the flag.

HIS FRIEND

Guess they don't lose many flags that way!

MAN

Maybe they shouldn't of lost this one.

The friend raises his eyebrows.

MAN

He was playing alone. Just him and the caddy.

They both glance at Henry, who is still chatting away about his pool dome.

HENRY

How much use you get outta your pools? Three months? Three and a half if you're lucky? With this rig

I'm guaranteed the use of my pool
all year around.

THE MAN NEXT TO HIM
Sure, and swimming's good for the
ticker at our age--

HENRY
So what do you guys do in the
winter? I tried them health clubs in
the City. Bunch of pansies runnin'
around droppin' soap! Right? Right!

They all laugh heartily.

A blonde and a red-head, both with elaborately lacquered hair-dos
appropriate for a formal ball, are sitting at a small table
playing gin rummy and drinking martinis.

BLONDE
(indicating the pool)
A pool's to get wet in. Who needs an
olympic-size pool to get wet in?

RED-HEAD
Wet!
(pats her hair)
After what I pay Pablo every week?

BLONDE
Romeo does me. All the girls are
going to Romeo now.

RED-HEAD
(worried)
Do you think Romeo's better than
Pablo?

BLONDE
(touching her hair)
Sweetie! Look at the difference!

A waiter comes with a tray. They help themselves to two more
martinis.

Henry has a larger audience now.

HENRY
Last New Year's Eve for instance.

Big bash all night. Grace and I got home at dawn loaded -- not too loaded to get our clothes off--

(laughs)

--so there we are bare-ass and we jump in the pool, and it's all steamy and warm and the snow flakes are floatin' down and the hi-fi system is playin' and I says to Grace--

He whispers to one of his friends. The man throws his head back with a loud, obscene laugh.

At the edge of the terrace, Ned is tapping a woman on the shoulder.

NED

Hello Grace--

She turns. Grace Biswanger is about forty. She is dressed in wild-colored hostess pajamas, wears false eyelashes and a huge diamond ring. Her automatically wide smile fades the instant she sees Ned.

GRACE

(loudly)

Why this party has everything!
Including a gate-crasher!

Several nearby guests turn around to stare. Ned tries his usual charm.

NED

I thought you'd be glad to see me.

GRACE

(bellicosely)

You never came when I invited you.
Why should I be glad to see you now?

NED

I thought better late than--

GRACE

You thought wrong, buster.

NED

(politely)

As a gatecrasher, do I rate a drink?

GRACE

Suit yourself.

She turns her back on him and walks away. Ned crosses to the bar. He is terribly conspicuous and naked among all these overdressed people. Some eye him curiously. A few who know him nod coldly or glance at him with dislike. The bartender is mixing some drinks for a waiter who stands ready with a small tray.

NED

(leans on the
bar, friendly)

You're new here, aren't you?

BARTENDER

(rudely)

What d'ya mean, new?

NED

Oh just -- that I haven't seen you
around at parties.

BARTENDER

(with a nasty look
at his nakedness)

I ain't seen you either.

Ned, who has always been instant pals with bartenders, is mystified by this reception.

NED

I'll have a gin on the rocks please--

The bartender gives him a sullen look.

NED

--when you have a chance.

The bartender continues to mix the other drinks. Ned is joined at the bar by a young, sexy-looking blonde in a tight sailor suit. Her name is Joan. She puts an empty glass down on the bar.

JOAN

(to the bartender)

Here I am again, Leroy! Fill 'er up!

She gives Ned a dazzling smile and leaps on the bar next to him.

JOAN
Some big deal, huh?
(indicates the
pool, the dome, etc.)
Boy you sure got to like swimming to
go in for this kind of expenditure.
(eyes his body
with approval)
You're the type who goes in for
swimming, huh?

NED
(gravely)
Why not -- when the world is so
generously supplied with water?

JOAN
(hasn't quite got it)
I'm not a maniac about pools. To
tell you the truth it's murder on my
hair.

NED
Lovely hair.

The bartender has put their drinks in front of them. They clink
glasses and drink.

JOAN
(flirtatiously)
You a neighbor from around here?

Ned shakes his head.

JOAN
Oh, you're a friend of the
Biswangers--

NED
(shakes his head)
They're not even on our Christmas
card list.

JOAN
Then what are you?

NED
I'm an explorer.

JOAN
(giggles)
I mean, what are you doing here?

NED
I'm swimming home.

JOAN
(giggles again)
You married?

NED
What's that got to do with it?

Joan gives him a long sizing-up look.

JOAN
You divorced or what?

NED
Want to come with me?

JOAN
Where?

NED
Along a river of sapphire pools!

JOAN
I've never heard anyone talk like
you.

NED
Come with me and be my love--

JOAN
Oh-oh, I've heard that before!

NED
Not from me.

JOAN
You're no different from any other
guy--

NED
Oh but I am! I am a very special
human being, noble and splendid--

At this moment a stocky young man thrusts himself between them, takes a firm grip on Joan's upper arm and propels her quickly away. Ned sees the man talking furiously to the girl. He watches her bottom in tight slacks without emotion, empties his glass, puts it on the bar, and suddenly takes a running dive into the pool. The splash distresses various people along its edge who leap backwards and scowl at the swimmer.

A waiter is carefully pushing a hot dog wagon across the terrace in front of the pool house. The wagon is gaily painted and shaded with a little striped umbrella. The waiter parks it and is about to begin serving hot dogs and buns just as Ned emerges from the pool.

Ned's eyes are immediately fastened on the hot dog wagon. Suddenly his expression changes to one of astonishment and alarm. He runs over to it.

NED

My God, this looks like my wagon!
(examines the
painted sides)
I'm sure this is my wagon!

He opens it and peers inside, hastily pushing the hot dogs into an untidy pile. The waiter looks pained, a few onlookers gather around. Ned bends closer to examine the bottom of the wagon.

NED

(excited)
Hey, this is mine!

He straightens up and addresses the waiter.

NED

How'd this thing get here?

The waiter shrugs.

NED

I wheel my kids around in it. See that?
(points to something
at the bottom)
That's where Ellen put her foot through and I mended it with plywood.
This is my wagon, man!

By this time Grace and Henry Biswanger have noticed what's going

on and approach along with several of the guests. The guests are clearly supporters of the Biswangers.

GRACE

What's the trouble here?

NED

This is my hot dog wagon!

GRACE

Well -- we bought it.

NED

Bought it!

GRACE

At a white elephant sale.

NED

How the hell did it get to a white elephant sale?

GRACE

Your wife must have donated it--

NED

(trying to be patient)
She hadn't any right to do that!
She knows I'm crazy about this thing--

HENRY

Take it up with her.

NED

Listen, I'll buy it back from you.

HENRY

Not interested.

NED

(in desperation)
I'll give you twice what you paid for it. I'll give you a hundred dollars!

HENRY

(laughs)
A hundred dollars! For that piece of

junk?

NED

(slowly and distinctly)
I want to buy this wagon back. Name
a price. I'll send you a check.

HENRY

Oh yeah?
(winking at the others)
He'll send me a check.

NED

I'm taking this thing home with me.

He gets a firm hold on the handles.

HENRY

Hands off, you!

He steps very close to Ned. His face is menacing.

HENRY

You crashed in -- now crash the hell
out!

Ned glances at the ring of unfriendly faces around him.

HENRY

Go on -- beat it!

He gives Ned a push which knocks him off balance; he stumbles,
his ankle turns, and he falls to the ground.

Ned's first impulse is to get up and punch Henry. In an instant he
realizes that this would be beneath his dignity. He rises slowly
to his feet.

NED

(quietly)
I'll have my lawyers get in touch
with you tomorrow.

HENRY

(laughing loudly)
Yeah, you do that!

Ned turns and, hobbling a bit on his weak ankle, he walks off
slowly, his back straight, his head high.

The other guests stand silent and hostile, watching him.

[13]

Shirley Abbott

This is the most modest pool along Ned's way -- small, beautifully planted, and with an informal atmosphere -- as if all the decor and the gardening had been done by the owner, which indeed it has. The house looks more like a weekend hideaway than a conventional suburban establishment.

There are colorful chairs and tables and a large chaise longue on the small terrace. Scattered about are Shirley's possessions -- playscripts, magazines, sun tan oil, dark glasses, beach bag, terry cloth robe, etc. Also on a table is a well-stocked drink tray.

Shirley Abbott is an actress in her early thirties. She has a striking face, handsome, with interesting mobile features. She is unlike all the suburban women Ned has met along the way -- distinctly "other." She is wearing a dramatically cut bathing suit. At the moment she is sitting on the chaise, a magnifying glass in one hand, a tweezers in the other, and is apparently trying to get a splinter out of her foot.

Nearby is a flat of bulbs and some tools. She has been working in a garden bed close to the pool.

Ned appears out of the trees at the opposite end of the pool. Shirley is not aware of his presence. He watches her with an expression of infinite yearning. In a moment this changes to uncertainty and anxiety. He is totally unsure of what kind of welcome he will get.

As he comes forward Shirley looks up. She is obviously astonished, anguished, and angry in that order. Then quickly she puts on a look of total indifference, relaxes back onto the chaise, and waits for him.

SHIRLEY

(calmly)

What the hell are you doing here?

NED

Wow! New suit?

SHIRLEY
(shrugs)
It's not new.

NED
I don't remember that suit.

SHIRLEY
Will you tell me what you're doing
here?

NED
I'm swimming home. Pool by pool
across the county.

SHIRLEY
(disgusted)
Good Christ will you ever grow up?

She turns her attention back to the splinter. She is unsuccessful.
Ned kneels in front of her.

NED
Let me try.

SHIRLEY
Go away--

NED
Oh come on, let me--

Gently he takes the tweezers from her and probes for the splinter.

NED
I passed a first aid test when I was
a Scout -- got it!
(looks at the tweezers)
Nope!
(continues to probe)
Wasn't much in it about splinters.
If you broke something I could make
you a beautiful splint!

She winces.

NED
Sorry--
(probes once more)
There we are!

(examines the splinter)
A regular redwood. You could cut a
hole in it and drive a car through.

Shirley smiles in spite of herself. Ned smiles back at her.
Suddenly he presses his lips to her foot. She jerks it away with
such vehemence that he loses his balance and is sent sprawling.

NED
(puzzled)
What'd you do that for?

SHIRLEY
Keep away from me.

He sits up, puzzled.

NED
You must be crazy. Everybody's gone
crazy today. I've just come from the
Biswangers. They snubbed me.
Everyone at their party snubbed me--
(indignant)
--they've even got my hot dog wagon
and they won't give it back!

SHIRLEY
Your what?

NED
I painted it myself and put the
little umbrella up. Always kept it
down in the playroom where the
ping-pong table is, remember?

SHIRLEY
I've never been in your house,
remember?

NED
(oblivious)
Lucinda gave it to a white elephant
sale.

SHIRLEY
(sarcastically)
I'm sure it was for a good cause.

NED

She hadn't any right. I ought to go straight home and give her hell.

SHIRLEY
What's keeping you?

She turns over on the chaise, her back to him.

Ned is hurt. His shoulders droop.

NED
I'm tired. Must have come six miles.
Mind if I have a drink?

SHIRLEY
(impatiently)
All right -- but hurry up about it.

NED
(crosses to
the drink tray)
How about you? Want a Bullshot?

SHIRLEY
No thanks.

NED
Oh come on -- you love the way I
make them.
(holds up a
small bottle)
Hey, we're running out of Tabasco!

SHIRLEY
We? Aren't you a little confused
this afternoon?

Ned is behind her, fixing the drinks. Partly because he is concentrating on what he is doing and partly deliberately, he doesn't really listen to what she is saying.

SHIRLEY
(stretching out on
the chaise, not
looking at him)
Well, how goes it in Never-Never Land?

NED
What?

SHIRLEY

Has the ideal all-American family found happiness in the big stone house with the tennis court?

NED

What?

SHIRLEY

I heard a rumor that you had changed your place of residence. Moved out of town.

NED

Of course not. That's ridiculous. Where's the pepper grinder? It's not here.

SHIRLEY

Use the shaker. I didn't think it was true.

NED

Should have freshly ground pepper. That's what makes the difference.

SHIRLEY

Well how is the President of the League of Women Voters?

NED

Who?

SHIRLEY

How is your wife?

NED

Oh, she's fine.

SHIRLEY

I've been away so long I haven't kept up with the news. Are all the waitresses in town certified non-venereal now?

NED

What?

SHIRLEY

Last I heard that was your wife's project. Physical checkups for food handlers.

NED

Yes. Oh yes.

SHIRLEY

Mrs. Edward Merrill, guardian of our hamburgers! Patron Saint of our pizza pie!

Ned, oblivious of her sarcasm, crosses to her with the two drinks.

NED

Lucinda's always done a lot of good in this town.

Shirley's eyes meet his.

SHIRLEY

She just didn't do so good at home, huh?

She takes her drink.

NED

Well, here's to sugar on our strawberries!

She holds her glass without drinking and glares at him.

NED

(chastened)

Well -- cheers.

They drink. Shirley's face is blank. Ned gives her a worried glance. The vodka revives his energy a bit. He makes a visible effort to get through to her.

NED

Remember last winter in Toronto? We called Room Service and asked for Bullshots, and they said--

SHIRLEY

I wasn't in Toronto last winter.

NED

Sure! I came up for the opening of your show. Don't you remember how it snowed? And I hired a horse and sleigh to take us from the hotel to the theater?

SHIRLEY

That was the winter before last.

NED

(with a slight
frown of anxiety)

Was it in Boston? What was the name of that play in Boston?

(all charm)

I came up on a Saturday, remember? You faked a slipped disc, and your stand-by went on for the matinee. I cured your aching back, didn't I?

Shirley stares at him, her eyes narrowed. She presses her lips together.

NED

Acapulco was the best. We tasted of salt all over, and the phone never rang. And all the nights were silver--

SHIRLEY

(firmly)

Listen, Ned, I want you to go now. I mean it.

NED

Why?

SHIRLEY

I'm expecting someone.

NED

Who?

SHIRLEY

None of your business who. I don't want you to be here when he comes.

NED

A man?

SHIRLEY

Naturally a man. Do you think I've been in a deep freeze while you're been playing house up on the hill?

There is a pause. They look at each other. Ned begins to shiver slightly. He rubs his upper arms with his hands. He coughs.

NED

I'm cold. What's happened to that sun? No heat in it.

(coughs again)

Throat's sore. Don't know when I've been so cold.

(almost to himself)

Not since those winters in Hanover, that's when. Except I had my martini coat.

Shirley is ignoring him.

NED

Hey Shirley, did I ever tell you about that coat?

He crosses to sit beside her.

NED

Did I, Shirley?

There is no answer.

NED

I've got to tell you about that raccoon coat I had when I was at Dartmouth--

SHIRLEY

Please!

(with exasperation)

Spare me the tales of your glorious youth!

NED

(his enthusiasm growing)

But this is a great story.

SHIRLEY

I don't want to hear it!

NED

(plunging on)

When my father was in college, it was Prohibition see? So he bought this raccoon coat, and he took it to a shoemaker. He had the guy sew leather pockets in the lining -- one for gin, one for vermouth, a big one for a thermos of ice, and a little one for olives. He designed himself a martini coat!

There is a disgusted reaction from Shirley.

NED

Oh yes, he had straps put in to hold a shaker!

(laughs)

Some guy, my old man. He didn't forget a thing!

Shirley leaps up and crosses to the flat of bulbs. She picks up a tool and starts digging in the flower bed.

NED

(turns to face her)

Twenty-five years later when I was a freshman he gave it to me. Brother! Was I a sensation! I didn't carry any stuff around except to football games, but I wore it all the time. I'll have to bring that coat over here and show it to you.

(his eyes lighting)

You know something, Shirley, that coat was the damndest, most wonderful thing I ever owned. If Lucinda gave that coat to a white elephant sale I'll kill her -- I swear I'll kill her--

He looks off into the distance. A long pause. His voice softens.

NED

Shirley, what happened?

SHIRLEY

What happened to what?

NED

Nothing's turned out the way I
thought it would--

(haltingly)

--when I was a kid I believed in
things -- people used to be happier
when I was a kid -- it -- it seemed
as if everybody loved each other--

SHIRLEY

Excuse me while I swallow the lump
in my throat.

NED

(with genuine
puzzlement)

What happened?

SHIRLEY

You got pushed out of your golden
play pen, that's what.

NED

I used to mow the lawn around our
house -- my mother paid me twenty-
five cents -- I can smell that
grass--

(suddenly)

--it's so fast! People grow up, and
then they die--

SHIRLEY

Ned, for the last time, will you
please go away?

NED

Tell me who's coming over.

SHIRLEY

I told you -- it's none of your
business!

NED

On a scale of one to ten how would
you rate him in bed?

Shirley picks up her drink and tosses the contents into Ned's face. Their eyes meet and hold in a long stare.

NED

(his voice breaking)

Shirley -- I'm sorry -- for whatever
I did--

SHIRLEY

(pulling herself
together, all
brittle again)

You only did the usual red-blooded
married-man thing. Took me out to
lunch, and gave me that lecture on
the duties and obligations of a
husband and father.

(smiles)

It's become a classic hasn't it?
Republished every year in the
Reader's Digest?

Ned frowns with effort, trying to follow her.

SHIRLEY

It was the first time we'd been to a
really chic restaurant in New York
-- right out in the open in front of
the people who count.

NED

(suddenly recalling
it all)

You cried!

SHIRLEY

I also raised my voice.

NED

It tore me apart to see you crying--

SHIRLEY

Especially when everyone stared.

(bitterly)

I figured it out later. You chose
that place because you thought I
wouldn't dare make a fuss in front
of all those mink hats and stylish

fags and snotty waiters.

NED

No--

SHIRLEY

Did you really think you could smash my world with no more noise than the tinkle of finger bowls?

NED

I loved you -- I didn't know what to do--

SHIRLEY

So you went back to your wife. Well, that figures. The real estate is in her name. She owns the pots and pans. She knows where the lost shirt button is. Why give up all those comforts?

(a thin smile)

I had my comforts too. While you were still on the train back to Connecticut -- that groovy young bellhop in my hotel -- a real primitive. No hang-ups.

NED

(quietly)

You're lying.

SHIRLEY

When you got in and called me from the station I put the phone down on the pillow so he could listen too. All that sniveling about not hurting your innocent wife and your innocent children. We had hysterics. We had to stuff the sheet in our mouths--

NED

You're lying.

SHIRLEY

You'll never know, will you?

Ned begins to shiver uncontrollably. He coughs louder. His face is ashen. He winds his arms about himself. Shirley rises. She is

truly concerned. Her tone changes to one of compassion:

SHIRLEY

Ned, what's the matter with you?

NED

(hardly able
to speak)

I'm so cold. I'm just so cold.

SHIRLEY

I'd better go in and get you a sweater.

NED

No.

SHIRLEY

Don't be a fool -- you must be catching something--

She makes a move as if to go into the house.

NED

No! How can I swim in a sweater?

SHIRLEY

You'll get pneumonia--
(puts her hand
on his arm)

Listen, I'll drive you home.

NED

No!

SHIRLEY

(her anxiety
increasing)

Ned, what is it? You're being ridiculous.

NED

I've got to swim home.

SHIRLEY

For the love of God, why?

NED

I've just got to. I've got to.

SHIRLEY

I'm going to get the car.

NED

I can't go in the car. It's
impossible. How can I?

SHIRLEY

My God what's happened to you?
Something's wrong with you.

NED

Lucinda's waiting -- the girls are
home playing tennis-- I'm swimming
home--

Ned's whole body is shaking spasmodically.

Alarmed, Shirley keeps watching him. She picks up her terry cloth robe and puts it over his shoulders. This act is the first really tender gesture he has experienced all afternoon. He turns to her with gratitude as if her gesture has been a proof that she still loves him. Shirley understands the extent of her revelation. In an attempt to negate the moment she turns away and picks up a bottle of sun tan oil. She crosses to the chaise longue and sits down.

Ned's shivering gradually subsides. He has control of himself again.

NED

There -- that's better--

Shirley is rubbing the oil on her arms. Ned crosses to her and sits beside her.

NED

Let me do your back.

SHIRLEY

No--

NED

(reaches for the bottle)

Please let me.

Reluctantly Shirley turns over on her stomach. Gently Ned begins to stroke the oil into her back. His touch, the feel of his hand on her flesh, brings memories flooding. Her eyes begin to fill

with tears.

NED

Shirley, listen, let's go off together for a couple of weeks -- I could manage it right after the fourth--

SHIRLEY

The fourth? Do you mean the fourth of July?

NED

(rubbing her back
and shoulders)

I read about a great old castle in Ireland. A real one with a moat and a drawbridge. Some king built it hundreds of years ago. It's an inn now, with crazy old four-posters--

SHIRLEY

Ned please -- please go away--

NED

Big soft beds with canopies--
(bends over her)
Come with me, Shirley?

SHIRLEY

Do you think you can just reappear and move in again? Do you think it's that easy?

She whirls around to give him a long, appraising look.

SHIRLEY

Everything's always been easy for you, hasn't it?
(her voice breaks)
God knows I was easy enough to get!

NED

You wore a blue slip with a safety pin holding up the shoulder strap.
(presses his mouth
to her shoulder)
I kissed your safety pin.

SHIRLEY
(moves away,
close to tears)
Don't do that--

NED
(puts his arms
around her)
I only want you to love me--

SHIRLEY
(thrusts herself
away and leaps up)
That's your hang-up, Neddy-boy.
You're afraid the sky will fall down
if everybody doesn't love you. You'll
lose the popularity contest, you
won't be elected Head Boy -- as if
the whole world's a prep school!

This truth reaches Ned. He grasps at her blindly, desperate for the only pain-killer he knows. He locks his arms around her and pushes her back on the chaise, his body almost on top of her, his mouth searching for hers.

SHIRLEY
Don't! Don't do that! Leave me
alone!

She struggles to push him away.

NED
(holding her tighter)
You don't want me to. You know you
don't.

She struggles furiously to get away from him. Finally she wrests herself free and leaps to her feet.

SHIRLEY
Don't touch me!

He leaps up after her, and they struggle. She gets away from him, runs to the pool, and plunges in. He jumps in after her. She swims only a few strokes before he has caught her.

SHIRLEY
Stop it! Stop! Let go!

He is holding her close, his hand tangled in her hair to pull her face back, to make her look at him.

NED

We made love in this pool, remember?
You loved it!

SHIRLEY

I lied!

He is trying to pull down the straps of her bathing suit. She is kicking and hitting at him.

NED

You loved it in the pool!

He has the straps of her bathing suit down. She is half naked. She continues to fight him desperately.

They wrestle in the water. The bathing suit rips. Finally she pulls away from him and swims a few feet. She rushes, sobbing and outraged, up the steps of the pool. Ned is standing waist-high in the water. Holding her tattered suit up to cover herself, Shirley screams at him.

SHIRLEY

I lied! I lied all the time. Telling
you I loved it anywhere with you!
You bored me to death! Boasting
about your deals and your golf
scores and your old girls and your
old war and your old bloody duty to
your wife and kids!

NED

(quietly)
You loved it.

SHIRLEY

I played a scene with you!

NED

(urgently)
You loved it!

SHIRLEY

It was a fake! I was fooling you!
You met your match in me, you
suburban stud! I'm an actress!

Her words are like a fist smashed into Ned's face. His eyes are wild, his mouth slack. He throws back his head and bellows to the sky.

NED
YOU LOVED IT!

Crying hysterically, Shirley turns and runs toward the house. She disappears inside. Ned's expression is stony and vacant. After a moment he swims automatically to the end of the pool. He grasps the curb to hoist himself out, but he has difficulty. The strength is drained out of him. He struggles. His face is contorted with the effort.

Finally, wearily, hand over hand, grasping the curb, he moves to the ladder and, totally defeated, he climbs up it. When he steps off onto the ground his whole body seems limp and fragile. His eyes are sunken. His face is a ruin.

[14]

The Thruway

The sun is clouded over. Rain is imminent. Ned is on the side of the road, limp, shivering, his arms wrapped around himself. The Sunday traffic is heavy. Cars of all descriptions whiz by. Ned looks pitiful as he waits on the shoulder of the road. Every time he thinks he might have a chance to dash for the grass divider in the middle of the road a car comes hurtling toward him and he jumps back.

He is the object of all kinds of scorn and ridicule from the occupants of the cars. Some peer at him as if he is crazy, some point and laugh, a beer can is thrown at him. He dodges it. Several people shout at him but he can't decipher the words. From the backs of station wagons little children make faces, thumbs in their ears, wagging their fingers. No one makes the least attempt to slow up to let him cross. In fact, some drivers, seeing his intention, speed up gleefully as they approach him.

Ned feels the indignity of his position and appearance. He looks tense and miserable. He coughs. He hops up and down to warm himself.

Finally an old man tooling down the highway at fifteen miles an hour gives him a chance to cross. He dashes for the grass divider and makes it safely. Now he has to buck the long lines of traffic

speeding in the other direction.

The same ridicule from this traffic is heaped upon him. He watches alertly for a chance to cross. Finally there is a gap in the traffic and he sprints to the other side of the highway.

[15]

Recreation Center Pool

A sign above the ticket booth window says "Adults 50 cents, children 25 cents." The ticket seller is a young man, stocky and muscular. He wears a T-shirt. Ned is arguing with him.

NED

--but I'll pay you back. I swear to God I will!

THE YOUNG MAN

(shakes his head)

Against the rules

NED

I'll do whatever you want -- I'll sign an IOU.

THE YOUNG MAN

(shakes his head)

Can't do it.

NED

I'll get my wallet -- I promise -- the minute I get home, I'll get my wallet and drive right back here--

THE YOUNG MAN

Look, I didn't make the rules, mister.

NED

Just one length! I want to swim one length. You don't understand--

THE YOUNG MAN

I understand you ain't got half a buck. That's all I'm supposed to understand.

NED

Can't you make an exception this
once? My house is right up the hill
over there--

(gestures)

I'll come straight back with the
money! Believe me, I will!

He grasps the ticket cage and shakes it, his urgency growing.

NED

I swear! I promise!

THE YOUNG MAN

Get your hands off there!

Ned's eyes begin to tear. His tone changes.

NED

Listen, will you please, please lend
me fifty cents?

THE YOUNG MAN

What for? Why the hell should I?

NED

I'll pay you back--

His body sags against the booth.

NED

Don't you realize I'll pay you
back?

THE YOUNG MAN

Beat it!

At this point a middle-aged man and woman walk up to the booth carrying bathing suit bags. The man is bald and wears a loud sport shirt. The woman is plump and wears slacks. Their names are Howie and Lillian Hunsacker. Ned smiles with relief and recognition.

NED

Howie!

HOWIE

Hello, Mr. Merrill.

NED

Howie, for Christ sake, will you
lend me fifty cents?

LILLIAN
(angrily)
Don't you do it, Howie!

HOWIE
What's fifty cents more or less,
considering?

He digs in his pocket and gives Ned the money.

NED
(with enormous relief)
Thanks, Howie! You're a lifesaver!
(thrusts the money at
the young man, then
again to Howie)
Thanks a lot, chum. Thanks an awful
lot.

He rushes through the turnstile and disappears into the locker room. There are a couple of people ahead of him at the counter where baskets for clothes and dog tags are given out. He gets into line until he realizes that he has no need for a basket. He starts to cross to the open door to the pool area.

ATTENDANT
(shouting)
Hey! Hey you! Hey you in the trunks!

Ned turns.

ATTENDANT
You take a shower?

Ned shakes his head.

ATTENDANT
Can'tcha read, buddy?

He points to a large sign. Ned looks at it.

ALL SWIMMERS MUST TAKE A SHOWER BEFORE USING THE POOL.

ALL SWIMMERS MUST USE THE FOOT BATH.

ALL SWIMMERS MUST WEAR THEIR IDENTIFICATION DISCS.

Ned crosses to a shower booth, enters, closes the door, turns the water on full force, stands under it a split-second, turns off the water, and leaves the booth. He crosses to the open door again. An attendant beside the foot bath glares at his feet, battered, scratched, and still filthy.

ATTENDANT

You take a shower?

Ned nods.

ATTENDANT

Go back and wash those feet.

Wearily Ned crosses back to the shower. The booths are all occupied now. He feels dizzy. The room reels before his eyes. He closes his eyes and leans against a shower door for support. The door opens suddenly, and Ned falls in upon the man coming out.

The man grabs him by the shoulders and pushes him back. He gives him a dirty look and walks out. Ned enters the shower. This time he soaps his feet and rinses them under the water, wincing as he does so. They are bruised and sore. The soap hurts the cuts. Gently his hands rub them again and again to get the dirt off. His dizziness returns for a moment. He supports himself against the side of the booth. He comes out of the shower and crosses again to the attendant beside the door. The attendant gives him a surly look and then gazes at his feet with distaste.

ATTENDANT

(rudely)

Spread your toes.

Ned balances on one foot while he spreads his toes with his hands. The attendant peers into the crevices between them. Ned repeats this business with the other foot.

ATTENDANT

Bottoms.

Ned holds up the sole of each foot in turn. The attendant waves him on. He steps into the foot bath and through the door. The rain clouds hang even lower now. There is thunder in the distance.

The pool area is surrounded by a high wire mesh fence. It is jammed with people of all ages and all sizes, shouting, splashing. The lifeguards sit on high wooden platforms, at intervals blowing their whistles or bellowing through a public address system

various warnings and instructions to the swimmers. The pool has been constructed at the bottom of a high slanting hill -- almost a wall of irregular rocks.

The shrill sound of voices, the activity, confuse Ned at first. He looks about, uncertain at which end of the pool to begin his swim. He finally figures out which is the deep end and crosses toward it. A couple of children run into him and almost knock him down.

LIFEGUARD

(through the public
address system)

Cut out the running, you two kids!
No running in the pool area!

Ned finds an empty place in the pool and plunges in. It is an awkward, tired dive, his body is bent, his legs fly apart. He comes up sputtering with disgust at the taste of the chlorine in the water. With difficulty he continues his way toward the other end of the pool, keeping his head above water to avoid collisions but even so he is bumped into, splashed and jostled.

At one point a young boy dives from the side of the pool, lands on top of Ned, and submerges him. Ned comes up spitting out water, breathing hard, half-drowned. A girl practicing an awkward crawl slaps her hand across his face.

As Ned makes his way across the pool he is watched grimly by Howie and Lillian, now in their bathing suits, and another couple whom they have joined. The other couple are a few years younger than the Hunsackers but the expressions on their faces are equally sour. They are Jack and Sylvia Finney.

As Ned reaches the shallow end all four of them rise and approach the place where he will be getting out. Ned has to stand and walk through the last few feet of the pool since the water is barely higher than his knees. He is bumped into at every step, splashed, pushed. A whistle blows shrilly and a guard's megaphone is pointed at him.

LIFEGUARD

(bellowing)

Hey you! You without the
identification disk. Get outta the
water!

Ned is not aware that he is being shouted at. He stumbles on, dizzy, half-blinded, and weak. Finally he grasps the ladder and painfully, gasping, pulls himself up.

The two couples have placed themselves so that they block his way.
They make no attempt to move.

JACK

Whatsa matter, Mr. Merrill, your
friends' pools run outta water?

NED

What?

JACK

So how do you like our water, Mr.
Merrill?

NED

Oh, hi Jack! Sure is a lot of
chlorine in it.

LILLIAN

Stings your eyes a little, huh?
That's too bad.

HOWIE

(the one friendly voice)
Ain't seen you in a dog's age, Mr.
Merrill. Too bad you don't get into
town any more.

NED

(warmly, with relief)
We had a lot of laughs together,
didn't we, Howie?

HOWIE

Used to count on seeing ya maybe
four, five times a week in my place
-- few drinks, hamburger maybe --

NED

(suddenly)
Say, how was the Series?

LILLIAN

(loudly to Howie)
What you waitin' for? Go on and ask
him!

HOWIE

(ignoring her)
Series?

NED
The World Series. Didn't you use
those tickets I gave you?

HOWIE
Oh! Last year! Sure -- those were
great seats! Right over third
base--

LILLIAN
(louder than before)
Are you gonna ask him or not?

HOWIE
(softly)
Hold it down, Lil--

JACK
I got somethin' to ask you,
Mr. Merrill. When you gonna pay your
bill?

SYLVIA
We're decent people tryin' to make a
living. We gotta eat too, you know.

LILLIAN
Tell 'im Howie. Tell 'im he's the
first deadbeat we ever got in our
place.

HOWIE
(firmly)
Cut it out, will you, Lil--

NED
I--I'm going to send you a check
tomorrow both of you--

LILLIAN
That's a laugh all right!

HOWIE
(warning her)
Now Lil--

LILLIAN

(loudly)

Whatsa matter? He's no friend of yours! What kinda friend sends a check ain't worth the paper it's written on?

The altercation has attracted attention. Several onlookers have moved nearer.

HOWIE

(to Lil, Jack,
and Sylvia)

Let's break it up. Come on, let's not have a fuss in public--

Nobody moves. Jack is aware of the audience and plays up to them.

JACK

You shoulda seen the orders I sent up to his house! French strawberry jam, his wife made me stock for her. American strawberries ain't good enough for her!

SYLVIA

Plain mustard ain't good enough for Mrs. Merrill. She had to have Dee John mustard!

The onlookers snicker.

JACK

(to Ned)

Heartsa palm. Heartsa artichoke, heartsa this, heartsa that! Some rich diet you had up there!

The onlookers laugh. Ned looks around, confused.

SYLVIA

Heartsa Jack Finney, that's what you got!

The onlookers laugh again. Ned has hardly understood the words, only the attack. He backs away a a bit.

JACK

You used our market to feed your

kids. We all got kids to feed too--

SYLVIA

What's more we bring up our kids to behave themselves. Our kids don't go around drunk, our kids don't wreck cars--

JACK

(more or less to the onlookers)
He kept his daughters' names outta the paper that time!

LILLIAN

Bet that check didn't bounce!

Ned stares dizzily around at the curious, amused, or grim faces. He feels cornered, humiliated. He begins to shiver again.

NED

You leave my daughters out of this!

SYLVIA

Why didn't ya teach 'em some manners?

LILLIAN

(to Sylvia)

Those girls never paid no attention to him. Why should they?

(to Ned)

Always runnin' around, chummin' with their friends -- always tryin' to be one of the gang, weren't ya?

NED

(his voice shaking)

My daughters worship me -- they love me and -- and they obey me and -- and what I say is the law to those girls because I'm their father and they respect me--

(close to tears)

--they respect me--

LILLIAN

Yeah?

NED

My daughters love me--

LILLIAN

(to the others)

Plenty of times we used to hear
those girls talkin' in our place.
We heard his kids givin' him the
razzberry!

NED

You're a goddamn liar!

HOWIE

(angry)

Now look here, Mr. Merrill -- you
don't get away with that! You don't
call my wife names!

NED

She's a liar!

HOWIE

(giving him a good,
long, hard look)

Wanna know what your girls really
thoughta you? Your girls laughed at
you--

Ned stares at him -- he won't believe it.

HOWIE

I heard them! Your girls thought you
were a great big joke!

This last wound triggers Ned's panic. He feels suffocated by the ring of strange faces and bodies. All he can think of is that he must get out, get away. He thrusts blindly at Howie with enough force to throw him to the ground. Women scream. The guards blow their ear-splitting whistles. The crowd increases in an instant.

Ned dashes through them -- pushing at anyone in his way -- straight for the wire fence. He climbs it nimbly, given a new spurt of strength by his consuming desire to escape. As he goes over the top he tears his flesh in several places on the sharp wires.

He leaps to the rocks and scrambles frantically up the hill like a wild animal -- clinging to clumps of grass, slipping and sliding

on the slippery surface, intent only on fleeing his tormentors. A few drops of rain are falling.

[16]

The Clydes

The back yard of a modest ranch house on a small lot. A half dozen adults -- men in loud sport shirts and shorts, women bulgy in pedal pushers, and several small children are hurriedly dismantling what was to have been a picnic supper.

Apparently they have waited, hoping it was not going to rain, but now the sky is slate-colored and the rumble of thunder frequent. A charcoal grill is already blazing but unused, and they are taking plates of frankfurters, hamburgers, potato salad and trays of beer into the kitchen. In the center of the back yard is a very large, round, plastic wading pool, the kind used by children.

Ned comes around the side of the house, cold, exhausted, walking with the greatest effort. The people in the yard stop what they are doing and stare at him.

Ned is transfixed at the sight of the pool. He stumbles toward it. With visible effort he swings one leg over the rim of the pool and then the other. The water barely reaches to the middle of his thigh. He crouches down in the water and begins to paddle across like a little child. The adults exchange glances. The children watch with mouths agape.

MAN

(low voice)

What the hell's going on?

MR. CLYDE

Soused.

MAN

You know him?

MR. CLYDE

(gesturing up the hill)

That's his house up there.

Ned is half way across. A large inflated rubber duck is floating in his path. He rests his cheek on it.

WOMAN

(laughing)
Look at that!

ANOTHER WOMAN
(laughing)
Makes himself right at home!

MAN
(laughing)
Soused out of his skull.

The children take their cue from the adults and laugh too. A little boy tosses a soft rubber beach ball at Ned. It bounces crazily off his head. They scream with glee.

Ned climbs out of the pool. Mrs. Clyde is standing in his path. He stops, takes her hand, bows and kisses it briefly. He drops her hand and staggers toward the road. The sound of laughter follows him.

[17]

The Merrills

Ned is coming up a narrow winding road. He is weaving a bit from side to side. His chest is heaving as if every breath takes all his strength. From time to time he coughs. Raindrops are splattering down on him.

His foot slips and he falls to his knees. The raindrops increase. He wipes them away, leaving the dirt of the road on his face. He struggles to his feet.

Ned comes to the gatepost of his own driveway, stops and clings to it for support. There is a streak of lightning overhead and thunder very loud and close. By now the rain is falling steadily. It seems to rouse him a bit. He leaves the gatepost and plods up the curving driveway.

Ahead of him is his house -- large, grand, rather formal. It is set on a spacious lawn. A tennis court is visible at one side and to the back. Once in a while lightning illuminates the entire scene.

The raindrops are more frequent now. With a last spurt of energy, Ned quickens his step. The crescent-shaped drive curves up to the front door. He manages a limping run the last few yards to the house.

He turns the knob and pushes at the door in his hurry to get inside. The door is locked. He is astounded and tries the knob again. The door will not budge. He frowns with confusion and turns the knob frantically back and forth.

Now the rain is coming in a downpour. He pounds on the door. He tries to force it open with his shoulder. The rain is flooding down upon him. In desperation he beats his fists against the door. Lightning flashes over the house. Thunder crashes above. Ned shouts -- not words but deep bellows of anguish.

The door is solid. By contrast, Ned's flailing fists seem puny and fragile. He beats continuously at the impervious oak. The veins stand out in his neck as he shouts convulsively. There is terror in his eyes. His fists pound and pound.

The windows of the house are dark. Behind them is the unlit and dimly visible living room. It is totally empty -- rectangles of pale paint on the wall where pictures once hung, a fireplace with tarnished andirons in it. Some cardboard cartons filled with cast-offs -- wire hangers, broken tennis racket, a worn broom -- are against the wall.

In the library the shelves are empty except for a tattered telephone book. In the small mirrored bar there is nothing but a corkscrew on the counter.

The kitchen is large and well-equipped but dusty. An old calendar and a bulletin board hang on one wall. A scrap of paper thumbtacked to the board reads, "Slip covers -- CA 7-4333."

In the spacious, paneled dining room one of the wall sconces has come loose and is hanging by its cord.

At the end of the entrance hall is the heavy front door. The knob is moving back and forth, back and forth.

Outdoors it is darker. The downpour has lessened to a light rain. Ned's exhausted hand is turning the knob. He no longer pounds. His body is slumped against the door. He is uttering small gasping sounds. His eyes are streaming with tears.