

WILLIAM
FAULKNER



PYLON

HARPERPERENNIAL  CLASSICS

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William Faulkner

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DEDICATION OF AN AIRPORT

FOR A FULL MINUTE Jiggs stood before the window in a light spatter of last night's confetti lying against the window base like spent dirty foam, light-poised on the balls of his grease-stained tennis shoes, looking at the boots. Slant-shimmered by the intervening plate they sat upon their wooden pedestal in unblemished and inviolate implication of horse and spur, of the posed country-life photographs in the magazine advertisements, beside the easel-wise cardboard placard with which the town had bloomed overnight as it had with the purple-and-gold tissue bunting and the trodden confetti and broken serpentine . . . the same lettering, the same photographs of the trim vicious fragile aeroplanes and the pilots leaning upon them in gargantuan irrelation as if the aeroplanes were a species of esoteric and fatal animals not trained or tamed but just for the instant inert, above the neat brief legend of name and accomplishment or perhaps just hope.

He entered the store, his rubber soles falling in quick hissing thuds on pavement and iron sill and then upon the tile floor of that museum of glass cases lighted by an unearthly day-colored substance . . . which the hats and ties and shirts, the belt buckles and cuff links and handkerchiefs, the pipes shaped like golf clubs and the drinking tools shaped like boots and barnyard fowls and the minute impedimenta for wear on ties and vest-chains shaped like bits and spurs, resembled biologic specimens put into the inviolate preservative before they had ever been breathed into. "Boots?" the clerk said. "The pair in the window?"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "How much?" But the clerk did not even move. He leaned back on the counter looking down at the hard tough short-chinned face, blue-shaven, with a long threadlike and recently stanced razor cut on it and in which the hot brown eyes seemed to snap and glare like a boy's approaching for the first time the aerial wheels and stars and serpents of a nighttime carnival; at the filthy raked swaggering peaked cap, the short thick muscle-bound body like the photographs of the one who two years before was lightmiddleweight champion of the army or Marine Corps or navy; the cheap breeches overcut to begin with and now skintight as if both they and their wearer had been recently and hopelessly rained on and enclosing a pair of short stocky thick fast legs like a polo pony's, which descended into the tops of a pair of boots footless now and secured by two riveted straps beneath the insteps of the tennis shoes.

"They are twenty-two and a half," the clerk said.

"All right. I'll take them. How late do you keep open at night?"

"Until six."

"Hell. I'll be out at the airport then. I won't get back to town until seven. How about getting them then?" Another clerk came up: the manager, the floorwalker.

“You mean you dont want them now?” the first said.

“No,” Jiggs said. “How about getting them at seven?”

“What is it?” the second clerk said.

“Says he wants a pair of boots. Says he can’t get back from the airport before seven oclock.”

The second looked at Jiggs. “You a flyer?”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Listen. Leave a guy here. I’ll be back by seven. I’ll need them tonight.”

The second also looked down at Jiggs’ feet. “Why not take them now?”

Jiggs didn’t answer at all. He just said, “So I’ll have to wait until tomorrow.”

“Unless you can get back before six,” the second said.

“O.K.,” Jiggs said. “All right, mister. How much do you want down?” Now they both looked at him: at the face, the hot eyes: the entire appearance articulate and complete, badge regalia and passport, of an oblivious and incorrigible insolvency. “To keep them for me. That pair in the window

The second looked at the first. “Do you know his size?”

“That’s all right about that,” Jiggs said. “How much?”

The second looked at Jiggs. “You pay ten dollars and we will hold them for you until tomorrow.”

“Ten dollars? Jesus, mister. You mean ten per cent. I could pay ten per cent down and buy an airplane.”

“You want to pay ten per cent down?”

“Yair. Ten per cent. Call for them this afternoon if I can get back from the airport in time.”

“That will be two and a quarter,” the second said. When Jiggs put his hand into his pocket they could follow it, fingernail and knuckle, the entire length of the pocket like watching the ostrich in the movie cartoon swallow the alarm clock. It emerged a fist and opened upon a wadded dollar bill and coins of all sizes. He put the bill into the first clerk’s hand and began to count the coins onto the bill.

“There’s fifty,” he said. “Seventy-five. And fifteen’s ninety, and twenty-five is . . .” His voice stopped; he became motionless, with the twenty-five cent piece in his left hand and a half dollar and four nickels on his right palm. The clerks watched him put the quarter back into his right hand and take up the four nickels. “Let’s see,” he said. “We had ninety, and twenty will be . . .”

“Two dollars and ten cents,” the second said. “Take back two nickels and give him the quarter.”

“Two and a dime,” Jiggs said. “How about taking that down?”

“You were the one who suggested ten per cent.”

“I can’t help that. How about two and a dime?”

“Take it,” the second said. The first took the money and went away. Again the second watched Jiggs’ hand move downward along his leg, and then he could even see the two coins at the end of the pocket, through the soiled cloth.

“Where do you get this bus to the airport?” Jiggs said. The other told him. Now the first returned, with the cryptic scribbled duplicate of the sale; and now they both looked into the hot interrogation of the eyes.

“They will be ready for you when you call,” the second said.

“Yair; sure,” Jiggs said. “But get them out of the window.”

“You want to examine them?”

“No. I just want to see them come out of that window.” So again outside the window, his rubber soles resting upon that light confetti-spatter more forlorn than spattered paint since it had neither inherent weight nor cohesiveness to hold it anywhere, which even during the time that Jiggs was in the store had decreased, thinned, vanishing particle by particle into nothing like foam, he stood until the hand came into the window and drew the boots out. Then he went on, walking fast with his short bouncing curiously stiff-kneed gait. When he turned into Grandlieu Street he could see a clock, though he was already hurrying or rather walking at his fast hard gait like a mechanical top that has but one speed, and though the clock’s face was still in the shadow of the opposite street side and what sunlight there was was still high, diffused, suspended in soft refraction by the heavy damp bayou-and-swamp-suspired air. There was confetti here too, and broken serpentine, in neat narrow swept windrows against wall angles and lightly vulcanised along the gutter rims by the flushing fireplugs of the past dawn, while, up-caught and pinned by the cryptic significant shields to door front and lamp-post, the purple-and-gold bunting looped unbroken as a trolley wire above his head as he walked. It turned at last at right angles to cross the street itself and meet the bunting on the opposite side making its angle too, joining over the center of the street as though to form an aerial and bottomless regal-colored cattle chute suspended at first floor level above the earth, and suspending beneath itself in turn, the outward-facing cheesecloth-lettered interdiction which Jiggs, passing, slowed looking back to read:
Grandlieu Street CLOSED To Traffic 8:00 P. M.—Midnight

Now he could see the bus at the curb, where they had told him it would be, with its cloth banner fastened by the four corners across its broad stern to ripple and flap in motion, and the wooden sandwich board at the curb too: *Bluehound to Feinman Airport 75¢*. The driver stood beside the open door; he too watched Jiggs’ knuckles travel the length of the pocket. “Airport?” Jiggs said.

“Yes,” the driver said. “You got a ticket?”

“I got seventy-five cents. Wont that do?”

“A ticket into the airport. Or a workman’s pass. The passenger busses dont begin to run until noon.” Jiggs looked at the driver with that hot pleasant interrogation, holding his breeches by one hand while he drew the other out of the pocket. “Are you working out there?” the driver said.

“Oh,” Jiggs said. “Sure. I’m Roger Shumann’s mechanic. You want to see my license?”

“That’ll be all right,” the driver said. “Get aboard.” In the driver’s seat there lay folded a paper: one of the colored ones, the pink or the green editions of the diurnal dogwatches, with a thick heavy type-splattered front page filled with ejaculations and pictures. Jiggs paused, stooped, turning.

“Have a look at your paper, cap,” he said. But the driver did not answer. Jiggs took up the paper and sat in the next seat and took from his shirt pocket a crumpled cigarette pack, upended it and shook into his other palm two cigarette stubs and put the longer one back into the crumpled paper and into

his shirt again. He lit the shorter one, pursing it away from his face and slanting his head aside to keep the match flame from his nose. Three more men entered the bus, two of them in overalls and the third in a kind of porter's cap made of or covered by purple-and-gold cloth in alternate stripes, and then the driver came and sat sideways in his seat.

"You got a ship in the race today, have you?" he said.

"Yair," Jiggs said. "In the three-seventy-five cubic inch."

"How does it look to you? Do you think you will have a chance?"

"We might if they would let us fly it in the two hundred cubic inch," Jiggs said. He took three quick draws from the cigarette stub like darting a stick at a snake and snapped it through the still-open door as though it were the snake, or maybe a spider, and opened the paper. "Ship's obsolete. It was fast two years ago, but that's two years ago. We'd be O.K. now if they had just quit building racers when they finished the one we got. There aint another pilot out there except Shumann that could have even qualified it."

"Shumann's good, is he?"

"They're all good," Jiggs said, looking at the paper. It spread its pale green surface: heavy, black-splotched, staccato: *Airport Dedication Special*; in the exact middle the photograph of a plump, blankly innocently sensual Levantine face beneath a raked fedora hat; the upper part of a thick body buttoned tight and soft into a peaked light-colored double-breasted suit with a carnation in the lapel: the photograph in-letted like a medallion into a drawing full of scrolled wings and propeller symbols which enclosed a shield-shaped pen-and-ink reproduction of something apparently cast in metal and obviously in existence somewhere and lettered in gothic relief:

FEINMAN AIRPORT
NEW VALOIS, FRANCIANA
DEDICATED TO
THE AVIATORS OF AMERICA
AND
COLONEL H. I. FEINMAN, CHAIRMAN
SEWAGE BOARD

Through Whose Undeviating Vision and Unflagging Effort This Airport was Raised Up and Created
out of the Waste Land at the Bottom of Lake Rambaud at a Cost of One Million Dollars

"This Feinman," Jiggs said. "He must be a big son of a bitch."

"He's a son of a bitch all right," the driver said. "I guess you'd call him big too."

"He gave you guys a nice airport, anyway," Jiggs said.

"Yair," the driver said. "Somebody did."

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “It must have been him. I notice he’s got his name on it here and there.”

“Here and there; yair,” the driver said. “In electric lights on both hangars and on the floor and the ceiling of the lobby and four times on each lamp-post and a guy told me the beacon spells it too but I dont know about that because I dont know the Morse code.”

“For Christ’s sake,” Jiggs said. Now a fair crowd of men, in the overalls or the purple-and-gold caps, appeared suddenly and began to enter the bus, so that for the time the scene began to resemble that comic stage one where the entire army enters one taxicab and drives away. But there was room for all of them and then the door swung in and the bus moved away and Jiggs sat back, looking out. The bus swung immediately away from Grandlieu Street and Jiggs watched himself plunging between iron balconies, catching fleeting glimpses of dirty paved courts as the bus seemed to rush with tremendous clatter and speed through cobbled streets which did not look wide enough to admit it, between low brick walls which seemed to sweat a rich slow over-fecund smell of fish and coffee and sugar, and another odor profound faint and distinctive as a musty priest’s robe: of some spartan effluvium of mediaeval convents.

Then the bus ran out of this and began to run, faster still, through a long avenue between palm-bordered bearded live oak groves and then suddenly Jiggs saw that the live oaks stood not in earth but in water so motionless and thick as to make no reflection, as if it had been poured about the trunks and allowed to set. The bus ran suddenly past a row of flimsy cabins whose fronts rested upon the shell foundation of the road itself and whose rears rested upon stilts to which rowboats were tied and between which nets hung drying, and he saw that the roofs were thatched with the smoke-colored growth which hung from the trees, before they flicked away and the bus ran again overarched by the oak boughs from which the moss hung straight and windless as the beards of old men sitting in the sun. “Jesus,” Jiggs said. “If a man dont own a boat here he can’t even go to the can, can he?”

“Your first visit down here?” the driver said. “Where you from?”

“Anywhere,” Jiggs said. “The place I’m staying away from right now is Kansas.”

“Family there, huh?”

“Yair. I got two kids there; I guess I still got the wife too.”

“So you pulled out.”

“Yair. Jesus, I couldn’t even keep back enough to have my shoes half-soled. Every time I did a job for her or the sheriff would catch the guy and get the money before I could tell him I was through; I would make a parachute jump and one of them would have the jack and be on the way back to town before I even pulled the ripcord.”

“For Christ’s sake,” the driver said.

“Yair,” Jiggs said, looking out at the back-rushing trees. “This guy Feinman could spend some more of the money giving these trees a haircut, couldn’t he?” Now the bus, the road, ran out of the swamp though without mounting, with no hill to elevate it; it ran now upon a flat plain of saw grass and of cypress and oak stumps . . . a pocked desolation of some terrific and apparently purposeless

reclamation across which the shell road ran ribbon-blanching toward something low and dead ahead of it—something low, unnatural: a chimera quality which for the moment prevented one from comprehending that it had been built by man and for a purpose. The thick heavy air was full now of a smell thicker, heavier, though there was yet no water in sight; there was only the soft pale sharp chimera-shape above which pennons floated against a further drowsy immensity which the mind knew must be water, apparently separated from the flat earth by a mirage line so that, taking shape now as a double-winged building, it seemed to float lightly like the apocryphal turreted and battlemented cities in the colored Sunday sections, where beneath sill-less and floorless arches people with yellow and blue flesh pass and repass: myriad, purposeless, and free from gravity. Now the bus, swinging, presented in broadside the low broad main building with its two hangar wings, modernistic, crenelated, with its façade faintly Moorish or Californian beneath the gold-and-purple pennons whipping in a breeze definitely from water and giving to it an air both aerial and aquatic like a mammoth terminal for some species of machine of a yet unvisioned tomorrow, to which air earth and water will be as one. And viewed from the bus across a plaza of beautiful and incredible grass labyrinthed by concrete driveways which Jiggs will not for two or three days yet recognise to be miniature replicas of the concrete runways on the field itself, a mathematic monogram of two capital Fs laid by compass to all the winds. The bus ran into one of these, slowing between the bloodless grapes of lamp globes on bronze poles; as Jiggs got out he stopped to look at the four Fs cast into the quadrants of the base before going on.

He went around the main building and followed a narrow alley like a gutter, ending in a blank and knob-less door; he put his hand too among the handprints in oil or grease on the door and pushed through it into a narrow alcove walled by neatly ranked and numbered tools from a faint and cavernous murmur. The alcove contained a lavatory, a row of hooks from which depended garments—civilian shirts and coats, one pair of trousers with dangling braces, the rest greasy dungarees, one of which Jiggs took down and stepped into and bounced lightly up and around his shoulders all in one motion, already moving toward a second door built mostly of chicken wire and through which he could now see the hangar itself, the glass-and-steel cavern, the aeroplanes, the racers. Wasp-waisted, wasp-light, still, trim, vicious, small and immobile, they seemed to poise without weight, as though made of paper for the sole purpose of resting upon the shoulders of the dungaree-clad men about them. With their soft bright paint tempered somewhat by the steel-filtered light of the hangar they rested for the most part complete and intact, with whatever it was that the mechanics were doing to them of such a subtle and technical nature as to be invisible to the lay eye, save for one. Unbonneted, its spare entrails revealed as serrated top-and-bottom lines of delicate rocker arms and rods, inferential in their very myriad delicacy of a weightless and terrific speed any momentary faltering of which would be the irreparable difference between motion and mere matter, it appeared more profoundly derelict than the half-eaten carcass of a deer come suddenly upon in a forest.

Jiggs paused, still fastening the coverall's throat, and looked across the hangar at the three people

busy about it—two of a size and one taller, all in dungarees although one of the two shorter ones was topped by a blob of savage meal-colored hair which even from here did not look like man's hair. He did not approach at once; still fastening the coverall he looked on and saw, in another clump of dungarees beside another aeroplane, a small towheaded boy in khaki miniature of the men, even to the grease. "Jesus Christ," Jiggs thought. "He's done smeared oil on them already. Laverne will give him hell." He approached on his short bouncing legs; already he could hear the boy talking in the loud assured carrying voice of a spoiled middle-western child. He came up and put out his blunt hard grease-grained hand and scoured the boy's head.

"Look out," the boy said. Then he said, "Where you been? Laverne and Roger—" Jiggs scoured the boy's head again and then crouched, his fists up, his head drawn down into his shoulders in burlesque pantomime. But the boy just looked at him. "Laverne and Roger—" he said again.

"Who's your old man today, kid?" Jiggs said. Now the boy moved. With absolutely no change of expression he lowered his head and rushed at Jiggs, his fists flailing at the man. Jiggs ducked, taking the blows while the boy hammered at him with puny and deadly purpose; now the other men had all turned to watch, with wrenches and tools and engine parts in their suspended hands. "Who's your old man, huh?" Jiggs said, holding the boy off and then lifting and holding him away while he still hammered at Jiggs' head with that grim and puny purpose. "All right!" Jiggs cried. He set the boy down and held him off, still ducking and dodging and now blind since the peaked cap was jammed over his face and the boy's hard light little fists hammering upon the cap. "Oke! Oke!" Jiggs cried. "I quit! I take it back!" He stood back and tugged the cap off his face and then he found why the boy had ceased: that he and the men too with their arrested tools and safety wire and engine parts were now looking at something which had apparently crept from a doctor's cupboard and, in the snatched garments of an etherised patient in a charity ward, escaped into the living world. He saw a creature which, erect, would be better than six feet tall and which would weigh about ninety-five pounds, in a suit of no age or color, as though made of air and doped like an aeroplane wing with the incrustated excretion of all articulate life's contact with the passing earth, which ballooned light and impedimentless about a skeleton frame as though suit and wearer both hung from a flapping clothesline; a creature with the leashed, eager loose-jointed air of a half-grown highbred setter puppy crouched facing the boy with its hands up too in more profound burlesque than Jiggs' because it was obviously not intended to be burlesque.

"Come on, Dempsey," the man said. "How about taking me on for an ice-cream cone? Hey?" The boy did not move. He was not more than six, yet he looked at the apparition before him with the amazed quiet immobility of the grown men. "How about it, huh?" the man said.

Still the boy did not move. "Ask him who's his old man," Jiggs said.

The man looked at Jiggs. "So's his old man?"

"No. Who's his old man."

Now it was the apparition who looked at Jiggs in a kind of shocked immobility. "Who's his old

man?" he repeated. He was still looking at Jiggs when the boy rushed upon him with his fists flailing again and his small face grimly and soberly homicidal. The man was still stooping, looking at Jiggs; seemed to Jiggs and the other men that the boy's fists made a light wooden-sounding tattoo as though the man's skin and the suit too hung on a chair while the man ducked and dodged, trying to guard his face while still glaring at Jiggs with that skull-like amazement, repeating, "Who's his old man? *Who his old man?*"

When Jiggs at last reached the un-bonneted aeroplane the two men had the supercharger already off and dismantled. "Been to your grandmother's funeral or something?" the taller one said.

"I been over there playing with Jack," Jiggs said. "You just never saw me because there aint any women around here to be looking at yet."

"Yair?" the other said.

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Where's that crescent wrench we bought in Kansas City?" The woman had it in her hand; she gave it to him and drew the back of her hand across her forehead, leaving a smudge of grease up and into the meal-colored, the strong pallid Iowa-corn-colored, hair. So he was busy then, though he looked back once and saw the apparition with the boy now riding on his shoulder, leaning into the heads and greasy backs busy again about the other aeroplane, and when he and Shumann lifted the supercharger back onto the engine he looked again and saw them, the boy still riding on the man's shoulder, going out the hangar door and toward the apron. Then they put the cowling back on and Shumann set the propeller horizontal and Jiggs raised the aeroplane's tail, easily, already swinging it to pass through the door, the woman stepping back to let the wing pass her, looking back herself into the hangar now.

"Where did Jack go?" she said.

"Out toward the apron," Jiggs said. "With that guy."

"With what guy?"

"Tall guy. Says he is a reporter. That looks like they locked the graveyard up before he got in last night." The aeroplane passed her, swinging again into the thin sunshine, the tail high and apparently without weight on Jiggs' shoulder, his thick legs beneath it moving with tense stout piston-like thrusts, Shumann and the taller man pushing the wings.

"Wait a minute," the woman said. But they did not pause and she overtook and passed the moving tail group and reached down past the up-tilted cockpit hatch and stepped clear, holding a bundle wrapped tightly in a dark sweater. The aeroplane went on; already the guards in the purple-and-gold porter caps were lowering the barrier cable onto the apron; and now the band had begun to play, heard twice: once the faint light almost airy thump-thump-thump from where the sun glinted on the actual horn mouths on the platform facing the reserved section of the stands, and once where the disembodied noise blared brazen, metallic, and loud from the amplifier which faced the barrier. She turned and reentered the hangar, stepping aside to let another aeroplane and its crew pass; she spoke to one of the men: "Who was that Jack went out with, Art?"

“The skeleton?” the man said. “They went to get an ice-cream cone. He says he is a reporter.” She went on, across the hangar and through the chicken-wire door and into the tool room with its row of hooks from which depended the coats and shirts and now one stiff linen collar and tie such as might be seen on a barbershop hook where a preacher was being shaved and which she recognised as belonging to the circuit-rider-looking man in steel spectacles who won the Graves Trophy race at Miami two months ago. There was neither lock nor hook on this door, and the other, the one through which Jiggs had entered, hung perfectly blank too save for the grease prints of hands. For less than a second she stood perfectly still, looking at the second door while her hand made a single quick stroking movement about the doorjamb where hook or lock would have been. It was less than a second, then she went on to the corner where the lavatory was—the grease-streaked bowl, the cake of what looked like lava, the metal case for paper towels—and laid the bundle carefully on the floor next the wall where the floor was cleanest, and rose and looked at the door again for a pause that was less than a second—a woman not tall and not thin, looking almost like a man in the greasy coverall, with the pale strong rough ragged hair actually darker where it was sunburned, a tanned heavy-jawed face in which the eyes looked like pieces of china. It was hardly a pause; she rolled her sleeves back, shaking the folds free and loose, and opened the coverall at the throat and freed it about her shoulders too like she had the sleeves, obviously and apparently arranging it so she would not need to touch the foul garment any more than necessary. Then she scrubbed face neck and forearms with the harsh soap and rinsed and dried herself and, stooping, keeping her arms well away from the coverall, she opened the rolled sweater on the floor. It contained a comb, a cheap metal vanity and a pair of stockings rolled in turn into a man’s clean white shirt and a worn wool skirt. She used the comb and the vanity’s mirror, stopping to scrub again at the grease-smudge on her forehead. Then she unbuttoned the shirt and shook out the skirt and spread paper towels on the lavatory and laid the garments on them, openings upward and facing her and, holding the open edges of the coverall’s front between two more paper towels, she paused and looked again at the door: a single still cold glance empty of either hesitation, concern, or regret while even here the faint beat of the band came in mute thuds and blares. Then she turned her back slightly toward the door and in the same motion with which she reached for the skirt she stepped out of the coverall in a pair of brown walking shoes, not new now and which had not cost very much when they had been, and a man’s thin cotton undershorts and nothing else.

Now the first starting bomb went . . . a jarring thud followed by a vicious light repercussion as if the bomb had set off another smaller one in the now empty hangar and in the rotunda too. Within the domed steel vacuum the single report became myriad, high and everywhere about the concave ceiling like invisible unearthly winged creatures of that yet unvisioned tomorrow, mechanical instead of blood bone and meat, speaking to one another in vicious high pitched ejaculations as though concerting an attack on something below. There was an amplifier in the rotunda too and through it the sound of the aeroplanes turning the field pylon on each lap filled the rotunda and the restaurant where the woman and the reporter sat while the little boy finished the second dish of ice cream. The

amplifier filled rotunda and restaurant even above the sound of feet as the crowd moiled and milled and trickled through the gates onto the field, with the announcer's voice harsh masculine and disembodied. At the end of each lap would come the mounting and then fading snarl and snore of engines as the aeroplanes came up and zoomed and banked away, leaving once more the scuffle and murmur of feet on tile and the voice of the announcer reverberant and sonorous within the domed sheath of glass and steel in a running commentary to which apparently none listened, as if the voice were merely some unavoidable and inexplicable phenomenon of nature like the sound of wind or of erosion. Then the band would begin to play again, though faint and almost trivial behind and below the voice, as if the voice actually were that natural phenomenon against which all man-made sounds and noises blew and vanished like leaves. Then the bomb again, the faint fierce thwack-thwack-thwack, and the sound of engines again trivial and meaningless as the band, as though like the band mere insignificant properties which the voice used for emphasis as the magician uses his wand or handkerchief:

“. . . ending the second event, the two hundred cubic inch class dash, the correct time of the winner of which will be given you as soon as the judges report. Meanwhile while we are waiting for it to come in I will run briefly over the afternoon's program of events for the benefit of those who have come in late or have not purchased a program which by the way may be purchased for twenty-five cents from any of the attendants in the purple-and-gold Mardi Gras caps. . . .”

“I got one here,” the reporter said. He produced it, along with a mass of blank yellow copy and a folded newspaper of the morning, from the same pocket of his disreputable coat . . . a pamphlet already opened and creased back upon the faint mimeographed letters of the first page:

THURSDAY (DEDICATION DAY)

2:30 P.M. Spot Parachute Jump. Purse \$25.00.

3:00 P.M. 200 cu. in. Dash. Qualifying Speed 100 m.p.h. Purse \$150.00 (1) 45%. (2) 30%. (3) 15%. (4) 10%.

3:30 P.M. Aerial Acrobatics. Jules Despleins, France. Lieut. Frank Burnham, United States

4:30 P.M. Scull Dash. 375 cu. in. Qualifying Speed 160 m.p.h. (1,2,3,4)

5:00 P.M. Delayed Parachute Drop

8:00 P.M. Special Mardi Gras Evening Event. Rocket Plane. Lieut. Frank Burnham

“Keep it,” the reporter said. “I don't need it.”

“Thanks,” the woman said. “I know the setup.” She looked at the boy. “Hurry and finish it,” she said. “You have already eaten more than you can hold.” The reporter looked at the boy too, with that expression leashed, eager, cadaverous; sitting forward on the flimsy chair in that attitude at once iner-

yet precarious and light-poised as though for violent and complete departure like a scarecrow in a winter field. "All I can do for him is buy him something to eat," he said. "To take him to see an air race would be like taking a colt out to Washington Park for the day. You are from Iowa and Shuman was born in Ohio and he was born in California and he has been across the United States four times, let alone Canada and Mexico. Jesus. He could take me and show me, couldn't he?" But the woman was looking at the boy; she did not seem to have heard at all.

"Go on," she said. "Finish it or leave it."

"And then we'll eat some candy," the reporter said. "Hey, Dempsey?"

"No," the woman said. "He's had enough."

"But maybe for later?" the reporter said. She looked at him now: the pale stare without curiosity, perfectly grave, perfectly blank, as he rose, moved, dry loose weightless and sudden and longer than lath, the disreputable suit ballooning even in this windless conditioned air as he went toward the candy counter. Above the shuffle and murmur of feet in the lobby and above the clash and clatter of crockery in the restaurant the amplified voice still spoke, profound and effortless, as though it were the voice of the steel-and-chromium mausoleum itself, talking of creatures imbued with motion though not with life and incomprehensible to the puny crawling pain webbed globe, incapable of suffering, wombed and born complete and instantaneous, cunning intricate and deadly, from out some blind iron bat cavity of the earth's prime foundation:

". . . dedication meet, Feinman million dollar airport, New Valois, Franciana, held under the official auspices of the American Aeronautical Association. And here is the official clocking of the winners of the two hundred cubic inch race which you just witnessed. . . ." Now they had to breast the slow current; the gatemen (these wore tunics of purple-and-gold as well as caps) would not let them pass because the woman and the child had no tickets. So they had to go back and out and around through the hangar to reach the apron. And here the voice met them again . . . or rather it had never ceased; they had merely walked in it without hearing or feeling it like in the sunshine; the voice too almost as sourceless as light. Now, on the apron, the third bomb went off, and looking up the apron from where he stood among the other mechanics about the aeroplanes waiting for the next race, Jiggs saw the three of them . . . the woman in an attitude of inattentive hearing without listening, the scarecrow man who even from here Jiggs could discern to be talking steadily and even now and then gesticulating, the small khaki spot of the little boy's dungarees riding high on his shoulder and the small hand holding a scarce-tasted chocolate bar in a kind of static surfeit. They went on, though Jiggs saw them twice more, the second time the shadow of the man's and the little boy's heads falling for an incredible distance eastward along the apron. Then the taller man began to beckon him and already the five aeroplanes entered for the race were moving, the tails high on the shoulders of their crews, out toward the starting line.

When he and the taller man returned to the apron the band was still playing. Faced by the bright stands with their whipping skyline of purple-and-gold pennons the amplifiers at regular intervals

along the apron edge erupted snatched blares of ghostlike and ubiquitous sound which, as Jiggs and the other passed them, died each into the next without loss of beat or particular gain in sense or tune. Beyond the amplifiers and the apron lay the flat triangle of reclaimed and tortured earth dragged with slow mechanical violence into air and alternations of light—the ceaseless surface of the outraged lake notched by the oyster-and-shrimp-fossil bed, upon which the immaculate concrete runways lay in the attitude of two stiffly embracing capital Fs, and on one of which the six aeroplanes rested like six motionless wasps, the slanting sun glinting on their soft bright paint and on the faint propeller-blurs. Now the band ceased; the bomb bloomed again on the pale sky and had already begun to fade even before the jarring thud, the thin vicious crack of reverberation; and now the voice again, amplified and ubiquitous, louder even than the spatter and snarl of the engines as the six aeroplanes rose raggedly and dissolved, converging, coveying, toward the scattering pylon out in the lake:

“. . . fourth event, Scull Speed Dash, three hundred and seventy-five cubic inch, twenty-five miles five times around, purse three hundred and twenty-five dollars. I'll give you the names of the contestants as the boys, the other pilots on the apron here, figure they will come in. First and second will be Al Myers and Bob Bullitt, in number thirty-two and number five. You can take your choice, your guess is as good as ours; they are both good pilots—Bullitt won the Graves Trophy against a hot field in Miami in December—and they are both flying Chance Specials. It will be the pilot, and I'm not going to make anybody mad by making a guess.—Vas you dere, Sharlie? I mean Mrs. Bullitt. The other boys are good too, but Myers and Bullitt have the ships. So I'll say third will be Jimmy Ott, and Roger Shumann and Joe Grant last, because as I said, the other boys have the ships.—There they are, coming in from the scattering pylon, and it's—Yes, it's Myers or Bullitt out front and Ott close behind, and Shumann and Grant pretty well back. And here they are coming in for the first pylon.”

The voice was firm, pleasant, assured; it had an American reputation for announcing air meets as other voices had for football or music or prizefights. A pilot himself, the announcer stood hip-high among the caps and horns of the bandstand below the reserved seats, bareheaded, in a tweed jacket even a little over-smart, reminiscent a trifle more of Hollywood Avenue than of Madison, with the modest winged badge of a good solid pilots' fraternity in the lapel and turned a little to face the box seats while he spoke into the microphone as the aeroplanes roared up and banked around the field pylon and faded again in irregular order.

“There's Feinman,” Jiggs said. “In the yellow-and-blue pulpit. The one in the gray suit and the flower. The one with the women. Yair; he'd make lard, now.”

“Yes,” the taller man said. “Look yonder. Roger is going to take that guy on this next pylon.” Although Jiggs did not look at once, the voice did, almost before the taller man spoke, as if it possessed some quality of omniscience beyond even vision:

“Well, well, folks, here's a race that wasn't advertised. It looks like Roger Shumann is going to try to upset the boys' dope. That's him that went up into third place on that pylon then; he has just taken Ott on the lake pylon. Let's watch him now; Mrs. Shumann's here in the crowd somewhere: maybe

she knows what Roger's got up his sleeve today. A poor fourth on the first pylon and now coming in third on the third lap—oh oh oh, look at him take that pylon! If we were all back on the farm now I would say somebody has put a cockleburr under Roger's—well, you know where: maybe it was Mrs. Shumann did it. Good boy, Roger! If you can just hold Ott now because Ott's got the ship on him, folks; I wouldn't try to fool you about that.—No; wait, w-a-i-t.—Folks, he's trying to catch Bullitt oh oh did he take that pylon! Folks, he gained three hundred feet on Bullitt on that turn.—Watch now, he's going to try to take Bullitt on the next pylon—there there there—watch him WATCH him. He's beating them on the pylons, folks, because he knows that on the straightaway he hasn't got a chance oh oh watch him now, up there from fourth place in four and a half laps and now he is going to pass Bullitt unless he pulls his wings off on this next.—Here they come in now oh oh oh, Mrs. Shumann's somewhere in the crowd here; maybe she told Roger if he don't come in on the money he needn't come in at all.—There it is, folks; here it is: Myers gets the flag *and* now it's Shumann or Bullitt, Shumann or—It's Shumann, folks, in as pretty a flown race as you ever watched.—”

“There it is,” Jiggs said. “Jesus, he better had come in on somebody's money or we'd a all set up in the depot tonight with our bellies thinking our throats was cut. Come on. I'll help you put the 'chutes on.” But the taller man was looking up the apron. Jiggs paused too and saw the boy's khaki garment riding high above the heads below the bandstand, though he could not actually see the woman. The six aeroplanes which for six minutes had followed one another around the course at one altitude and in almost undeviating order like so many beads on a string, were now scattered about the adjacent sky for a radius of two or three miles as if the last pylon had exploded them like so many scraps of paper, jockeying in to land.

“Who's that guy?” the taller man said. “Hanging around Laverne?”

“Lazarus?” Jiggs said. “Jesus, if I was him I would be afraid to use myself. I would be even afraid to take myself out of bed, like I was a cut-glass monkey wrench or something. Come on. Your guy is already warmed up and waiting for you.”

For a moment longer the taller man looked up the apron, bleakly. Then he turned. “Go and get the 'chutes and find somebody to bring the sack; I will meet . . .”

“They are already at the ship,” Jiggs said. “I done already carried them over. Come on.”

The other, moving, stopped dead still. He looked down at Jiggs with a bleak handsome face whose features were regular, brutally courageous, the expression quick if not particularly intelligent, not particularly strong. Under his eyes the faint smudges of dissipation appeared to have been put there by a makeup expert. He wore a narrow moustache above a mouth much more delicate and even feminine than that of the woman whom he and Jiggs called Laverne. “What?” he said. “*You* carried the 'chutes and that sack of flour over to the ship? *You* did?”

Jiggs did not stop. “You're next, aint you? You're ready to go, aint you? And it's getting late, aint it? What are you waiting on? for them to turn on the boundary lights and maybe the floods? or maybe to have the beacon to come in on to land?”

The other walked again, following Jiggs along the apron toward where an aeroplane, a commercial type, stood just without the barrier, its engine running. "I guess you have been to the office and collected my twenty-five bucks and saved me some more time too," he said.

"All right; I'll attend to that too," Jiggs said. "Come on. The guy's burning gas; he'll be trying to charge you six bucks instead of five if you don't snap it up." They went on to where the aeroplane waited, the pilot already in his cockpit, the already low sun, refracted by the invisible propeller blades shimmering about the nose of it in a faint copper-colored nimbus. The two parachutes and the sack of flour lay on the ground beside it. Jiggs held them up one at a time while the other backed into the harness, then he stooped and darted about the straps and buckles like a squirrel, still talking. "Yair, h come in on the money. I guess I will get my hooks on a little jack myself tonight. Jesus, I won't know how to count higher than two bucks."

"But don't try to learn again on my twenty-five," the other said. "Just get it and hold it until I get back."

"What would I want with your twenty-five?" Jiggs said. "With Roger just won thirty per cent of three hundred and twenty-five, whatever that is. How do you think twenty-five bucks will look beside that?"

"I can tell you a bigger difference still," the other said. "The money Roger won ain't mine but this twenty-five is. Maybe you better not even collect it. I'll attend to that, too."

"Yair," Jiggs said, busy, bouncing on his short strong legs, snapping the buckles of the emergency parachute. "Yair, we're jake now. We can eat and sleep again tonight. . . . O.K." He stood back and the other waddled stiffly toward the aeroplane. The checker came up with his pad and took their names and the aeroplane's number and went away.

"Where you want to land?" the pilot said.

"I don't care," the jumper said. "Anywhere in the United States except that lake."

"If you see you're going to hit the lake," Jiggs said, "turn around and go back up and jump again."

They paid no attention to him. They were both looking back and upward toward where in the high, drowsy azure there was already a definite alteration toward night. "Should be about dead up there now," the pilot said. "What say I spot you for the hangar roofs and you can slip either way you want."

"All right," the jumper said. "Let's get away from here." With Jiggs shoving at him he climbed onto the wing and into the front cockpit and Jiggs handed up the sack of flour and the jumper took it onto his lap like it was a child. With his bleak humorless handsome face he looked exactly like the comedy young bachelor caught by his girl while holding a strange infant on a street corner. The aeroplane began to move; Jiggs stepped back as the jumper leaned out, shouting: "Leave that money alone, you hear?"

"Okey doke," Jiggs said. The aeroplane waddled out and onto the runway and turned and stopped; again the bomb, the soft slow bulb of cotton batting flowered against the soft indefinite lake-haze where for a little while still evening seemed to wait before moving in; again the report, the thud and

jar twice reverberant against the stands as if the report bounced once before becoming echo. And now Jiggs turned as if he had waited for that signal too and almost parallel he and the aeroplane began to move . . . the stocky purposeful man, and the machine already changing angle and then lifting, banking in a long climbing turn. It was two thousand feet high when Jiggs shoved past the purple-and-gold guards at the main gate and through the throng huddled in the narrow underpass beneath the reserved seats. Someone plucked at his sleeve.

“When’s the guy going to jump out of the parachute?”

“Not until he gets back down here,” Jiggs said, butting on past the other purple-and-gold guards and so into the rotunda itself and likewise not into the amplified voice again for the reason that he had never moved out of it:

“. . . still gaining altitude now; the ship has a long way to go yet. And then you will see a living man, a man like yourselves—a man like half of yourselves and that the other half of yourselves like, should say—hurl himself into space and fall for almost four miles before pulling the ripcord of the parachute; by ripcord we mean the trigger that—” Once inside, Jiggs paused, looking swiftly about, breasting now with immobility the now comparatively thin tide which still set toward the apron and talking to itself with one another in voices forlorn, baffled, and amazed:

“What is it now? What are they doing out there now?”

“Fella going to jump ten miles out of a parachute.”

“Better hurry too,” Jiggs said. “It may open before he can jump out of it.” The rotunda, filled with dusk, was lighted now, with a soft sourceless wash of no earthly color or substance and which cast no shadow: spacious, suave, sonorous and monastic, wherein relief or mural-limning or bronze and chromium skilfully shadow-lurked presented the furious, still, and legendary tale of what man has come to call his conquering of the infinite and impervious air. High overhead the dome of azure glass repeated the mosaiced twin F symbols of the runways to the brass twin Fs let into the tile floor and which, bright-polished, gleaming, seemed to reflect and find soundless and fading echo in turn monogrammed into the bronze grilling above the ticket-and-information windows and inlaid frieze like into baseboard and cornice of the synthetic stone. “Yair,” Jiggs said. “It must have set them back that million. . . . Say, mister, where’s the office?” The guard told him; he went to the small discreet door almost hidden in an alcove and entered it and for a time he walked out of the voice though it was waiting for him when, a minute later, he emerged:

“. . . still gaining altitude. The boys down here can’t tell just how high he is but he looks about right. It might be any time now; you’ll see the flour first and then you will know there is a living man falling at the end of it, a living man falling through space at the rate of four hundred feet a second. . . .” When Jiggs reached the apron again (he too had no ticket and so though he could pass from the apron into the rotunda as often as he pleased, he could not pass from the rotunda to the apron save by going around through the hangar) the aeroplane was no more than a trivial and insignificant blemish against the sky which was now definitely that of evening, seeming to hang there without

sound or motion. But Jiggs did not look at it. He thrust on among the up-gazing motionless bodies and reached the barrier just as one of the racers was being wheeled in from the field. He stopped one of the crew; the bill was already in his hand. "Monk, give this to Jackson, will you? For flying that parachute jump. He'll know."

He went back into the hangar, walking fast now and already unfastening his coverall before he pushed through the chicken-wire door. He removed the coverall and hung it up and only for a second glanced at his hands. "I'll wash them when I get to town," he said. Now the first port lights came on: he crossed the plaza, passing the bloomed bloodless grapes on their cast stalks on the quadrate bases of which the four Fs were discernible even in twilight. The bus was lighted too. It had its quota of passengers though they were not inside. Including the driver they stood beside it, looking up, while the voice of the amplifier, apocryphal, sourceless, inhuman, ubiquitous and beyond weariness or fatigue, went on:

". . . in position now; it will be any time now. . . . There. There. There goes the wing down; he has throttled back now now Now. . . . There he is, folks; the flour, the flour. . . ." The flour was a faint stain unrolling ribbon-like, light, lazy, against the sky, and then they could see the falling dot at the head of it which, puny, increasing, became the tiny figure of a man plunging without movement toward a single long suspiration of human breath, until at last the parachute bloomed. It unfolded swaying against the accomplished and ineradicable evening; beneath it the jumper oscillated slowly, settling slowly now toward the field. The boundary and obstruction lights were on too now; he floated down as though out of a soundless and breathless void, toward the bright necklace of field lights and the electrified name on each hangar roof. At the moment the green light above the beacon on the signal tower began to wink and flash too: dot-dot-dash-dot. dot-dot-dash-dot. dot-dot-dash-dot. across the night-bound lake. Jiggs touched the driver's arm.

"Come on, Jack," he said. "I got to be at Grandlieu Street before six o'clock."

AN EVENING IN NEW VALOIS

THE DOWN-FUNNELLED LIGHT FROM the desk lamp struck the reporter across the hips; to the city editor sitting behind the desk the reporter loomed from the hips upward for an incredible distance to where the cadaver face hung against the dusty gloom of the city room's upper spaces, in a green corpse-glare as appropriate as water to fish. He saw the raked disreputable hat, the suit that looked as if someone else had just finished sleeping in it, and with one coat pocket sagging with yellow copy paper and from the other protruding, folded, the cold violent still damp black

ALITY OF
BURNED

. . . the entire air and appearance of a last and cheerful stage of what old people call galloping consumption. This was the man whom the editor believed (certainly hoped) to be unmarried, though not through any knowledge or report but because of something which the man's living being emanated—a creature who apparently never had any parents either and who will not be old and never was a child, who apparently sprang full-grown and irrevocably mature out of some violent and instantaneous transition like the stories of dead steam-boatmen and mules. If it were learned that he had a brother for instance it would create neither warmth nor surprise any more than finding the mate to a discarded shoe in a trash bin. The editor had heard how a girl in a Barricade Street crib said of him that it would be like assessing the invoked spirit at a seance held in a rented restaurant room with a cover charge.

Upon the desk, in the full target of the lamp's glare, it lay too: the black bold still damp

FIRST FATALITY OF AIR MEET
PILOT BURNED ALIVE

Beyond it, back flung, shirt-sleeved, his bald head above the green eyeshade corpse-glared too, the city editor looked at the reporter fretfully. "You have an instinct for events," he said. "If you were turned into a room with a hundred people you never saw before and two of them were destined to enact a homicide, you would go straight to them as crow to carrion; you would be there from the very first: you would be the one to run out and borrow a pistol from the nearest policeman for them to use. Yet you never seem to bring back anything but information. Oh you have that, all right, because we seem to get everything that the other papers do and we haven't been sued yet and so doubtless it's all that anyone should expect for five cents and doubtless more than they deserve. But it's not the living breath of news. It's just information. It's dead before you even get back here with it." Immobile

beyond the lamp's hard radius the reporter stood, watching the editor with an air leashed, attentive, and alert. "It's like trying to read something in a foreign language. You know it ought to be there; maybe you know by God it is there. But that's all. Can it be by some horrible mischance that without knowing it you listen and see in one language and then do what you call writing in another? How does it sound to you when you read it yourself?"

"When I read what?" the reporter said. Then he sat down in the opposite chair while the editor cursed him. He collapsed upon the chair with a loose dry scarecrow-like clatter as though of his own skeleton and the wooden chair's in contact, and leaned forward across the desk, eager, apparently not only on the verge of the grave itself but in actual sight of the other side of Styx: of the saloons which have never sounded with cash register or till; of that golden District where gleam with frankincense and scented oils the celestial anonymous bosoms of eternal and subsidised delight. "Why didn't you tell me this before?" he cried. "Why didn't you tell me before that this is what you want? Here I have been running my ass ragged eight days a week trying to find something worth telling and then telling it so it won't make eight thousand different advertisers and subscribers—But no matter now. Because listen." He jerked off his hat and flung it onto the desk; as quickly the editor snatched it up as if it had been a crust of ant-laden bread on a picnic tablecloth and jerked it back into the reporter's lap.

"Listen," the reporter said. "She's out there at the airport. She's got a little boy, only it's two of them that fly those little ships that look like mosquitoes. No: just one of them flies the ship; the other makes the delayed parachute jump—you know, with the fifty pound sack of flour and coming down like the haunt of Yuletide or something. Yair; they've got a little boy, about the size of this telephone, in dungarees like they wear—"

"What?" the editor cried. "Who have a little boy?"

"Yair. They don't know.—In dungarees like they wear; when I come into the hangar this morning they were clean, maybe because the first day of a meet is the one they call Monday, and he had a stick and he was swabbing grease up off the floor and smearing it onto himself so he would look like they look. . . . Yair, two of them: this guy Shumann that took second money this afternoon, that come up from fourth in a crate that all the guys out there that are supposed to know said couldn't even show. She's his wife, that is her name's Shumann and the kid's is Shumann too: out there in the hangar this morning in dungarees like the rest of them, with her hands full of wrenches and machinery and a gob of cotter keys in her mouth like they tell how women used to do with the pins and needles before General Motors begun to make their clothes for them, with this Harlow-colored hair that they would pay her money for in Hollywood and a smear of grease where she had swiped it back with her wrist. She's his wife: they have been married almost ever since the kid was born six years ago in a hangar in California. Yair, this day Shumann comes down at whatever town it was in Iowa or Indiana or wherever it was that she was a sophomore in the high school back before they had the airmail for farmers to quit plowing and look up at; in the high school at recess, and so maybe that was why she come out without a hat even and got into the front seat of one of those Jennies the army used to sell

them for cancelled stamps or whatever it was. And maybe she sent a postcard back from the next cow pasture to the aunt or whoever it was that was expecting her to come home to dinner, granted that they have kinfolks or are descended from human beings, and he taught her to jump parachutes. Because they aint human like us; they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn't want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight and they dont even holler in the fire; crash one and it aint even blood when you haul him out: it's cylinder oil the same as in the crankcase.

“And listen: it's both of them; this morning I walk into the hangar where they are getting the ship ready and I see the kid and a guy that looks like a little horse squared off with their fists up and the rest of them watching with wrenches and things in their hands and the kid rushes in flailing his arms and the guy holding him off and the others watching and the guy put the kid down and I come up and square off too with my fists up too and I says ‘Come on, Dempsey; how about taking me on next’ and the kid dont move, he just looks at me and then the guy says ‘Ask him who's his old man’ only I thought he said ‘So's his old man’ and I said ‘So's his old man?’ and the guy says ‘No. *Who's* his old man’ and I said it, and here the kid comes with his fists flailing, and if he had just been half as big as he wanted to be right then he would have beat hell out of me. And so I asked them and they told me.” He stopped; he ran out of speech or perhaps out of breath not as a vessel runs empty but with the instantaneous cessation of some weightless wind driven toy, say a celluloid pinwheel. Behind the desk, still back-flung, clutching the chair arms, the editor glared at him with outraged amazement.

“What?” he cried. “Two men, with one wife and child between them?”

“Yair. The third guy, the horse one, is just the mechanic; he aint even a husband, let alone a flyer. Yair. Shumann and the airplane landing at Iowa or Indiana or wherever it is, and her coming out of the schoolhouse without even arranging to have her books took home, and they went off maybe with a can opener and a blanket to sleep on under the wing of the airplane when it rained hard; and then the other guy, the parachute guy, dropping in, falling the couple or three miles with his sack of flour before pulling the ripcord. They aint human, you see. No ties; no place where you were born and have to go back to it now and then even if it's just only to hate the damn place good and comfortable for a day or two. From coast to coast and Canada in summer and Mexico in winter, with one suitcase and the same can opener because three can live on one can opener as easy as one or twelve.—Wherever they can find enough folks in one place to advance them enough money to get there and pay for the gasoline afterward. Because they dont need money; it aint money they are after any more than it's glory because the glory can only last until the next race and so maybe it aint even until tomorrow. And they dont need money except only now and then when they come in contact with the human race like in a hotel to sleep or eat now and then or maybe to buy a pair of pants or a skirt to keep the police off of them. Because money aint that hard to make: it aint up there, fourteen and a half feet off the ground in a vertical bank around a steel post at two or three hundred miles an hour in a damn gnat built like a Swiss watch that the top speed of aint just a number on a little dial but where you burn the engine up

or fly out from between the wings and the undercarriage. Around the home pylon on one wing tip and the fabric trembling like a bride and the crate cost four thousand dollars and good for maybe fifty hours if one ever lasted that long and five of them in the race and the top money at least two-hundred thirty-eight-fifty-two less fines fees commissions and gratuities. And the rest of them, the wives and children and mechanics, standing on the apron and watching like they might have been stole out of a department store window and dressed in greasy khaki coveralls and not even thinking about the hotel bill over in town or where we are going to eat if we dont win and how we are going to get to the next meet if the engine melts and runs backward out of the exhaust pipe.

“And Shumann dont even own a ship; she told me about how they want Vic Chance to build one for them and how Vic Chance wants to build one for Shumann to fly only neither Vic Chance nor the have managed to save up enough jack yet. So he just flies whatever he can get that they will qualify. This one he copped with today he is flying on a commission; it was next to the slowest one in the race and they all said he never had a chance with it and he beat them on the pylons. So when he dont cop they eat on the parachute guy, which is O.K. because the parachute guy makes almost as much as the guy at the microphone does, besides the mike guy having to work all afternoon for his while it dont only take the parachute guy a few seconds to fall the ten or twelve thousand feet with the flour blowing back in his face before pulling the ripcord.

“And so the kid was born on an unrolled parachute in a hangar in California; he got dropped already running like a colt or a calf from the fuselage of an airplane, onto something because it happened to be big enough to land on and then takeoff again. And I thought about him having ancestors and hell and heaven like we have, and birth-pangs to rise up out of and walk the earth with your arm crooked over your head to dodge until you finally get the old blackjack at last and can lay back down again.—All of a sudden I thought about him with a couple or three sets of grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins somewhere, and I like to died. I had to stop and lean against the hangar wall and laugh. Talk about your immaculate conceptions: born on an unrolled parachute in a California hangar and the doc went to the door and called Shumann and the parachute guy. And the parachute guy got out the dice and says to her ‘Do you want to catch these?’ and she said ‘Roll them’ and the dice come out and Shumann rolled high, and that afternoon they fetched the J.P. out on the gasoline truck and so hers and the kid’s name is Shumann. And they told me how it wasn’t them that started saying ‘Who’s your old man?’ to the kid; it was her, and the kid flailing away at her and her stooping that hard boy’s face that looks like anyone of the four of them might cut her hair for her with a pocketknife when it needs it, down to where he can reach it and saying ‘Hit me. Hit me hard. Harder. Harder.’ And what do you think of that?”

He stopped again. The editor sat back in the swivel chair and drew a deep, full, deliberate breath while the reporter leaned above the desk like a dissolute and eager skeleton, with that air of worn and dreamy fury which Don Quixote must have had.

“I think you ought to write it,” the editor said. The reporter looked at him for almost half a minute

without moving.

“Ought to write—” He murmured. “Ought to write . . .” His voice died away in ecstasy; he glared down at the editor in bone-light exultation while the editor watched him in turn with cold and vindictive waiting.

“Yes. Go home and write it.”

“Go home and . . . Home, where I wont be dis—where I can . . . O pal o pal o pal! Chief, where have I been all your life or where have you been all mine?”

“Yes,” the editor said. He had not moved. “Go home and lock yourself in and throw the key out the window and write it.” He watched the gaunt ecstatic face before him in the dim corpse-glare of the green shade. “And then set fire to the room.” The reporter’s face sank slowly back, like a Halloween mask on a boy’s stick being slowly withdrawn. Then for a long time he too did not move save for a faint working of the lips as if he were tasting something either very good or very bad. Then he rose slowly, the editor watching him; he seemed to collect and visibly reassemble himself bone by bone and socket by socket. On the desk lay a pack of cigarettes. He reached his hand toward it; as quickly as when he had flung back the hat and without removing his gaze from the reporter’s face, the editor snatched the pack away. The reporter lifted from the floor his disreputable hat and stood gazing into the air with musing attention, as though about to draw a lot from it. “Listen,” the editor said; he spoke patiently, almost kindly: “The people who own this paper or who direct its policies or anyway who pay the salaries, fortunately or unfortunately I shant attempt to say, have no Lewises or Hemingways or even Tchekovs on the staff: one very good reason doubtless being that they do not want them, since what they want is not fiction, not even Nobel Prize fiction, but news.”

“You mean you dont believe this?” the reporter said. “About h—— these guys?”

“I’ll go you better than that: I dont even care. Why should I find news in this woman’s supposed bed habits as long as her legal (so you tell me) husband does not?”

“I thought that women’s bed habits were always news,” the reporter said.

“You thought? You thought? You listen to me a minute. If one of them takes his airplane or his parachute and murders her and the child in front of the grandstand, then it will be news. But until they do, what I am paying you to bring back here is not what you think about somebody out there nor what you heard about somebody out there nor even what you saw: I expect you to come in here tomorrow night with an accurate account of everything that occurs out there tomorrow that creates any reaction of excitement or irritation on any human retina; if you have to be twins or triplets or even a regiment to do this, be so. Now you go on home and go to bed. And remember. Remember. There will be someone out there to report to me personally at my home the exact moment at which you enter the gates. And that report comes to me one minute after ten oclock, you will need a racing airplane to catch your job Monday morning. Go home. Do you hear me?” The reporter looked at him, without heat, perfectly blank, as if he had ceased several moments ago not alone to listen but even to hear, as though he were now watching the editor’s lips courteously to tell when he had finished.

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