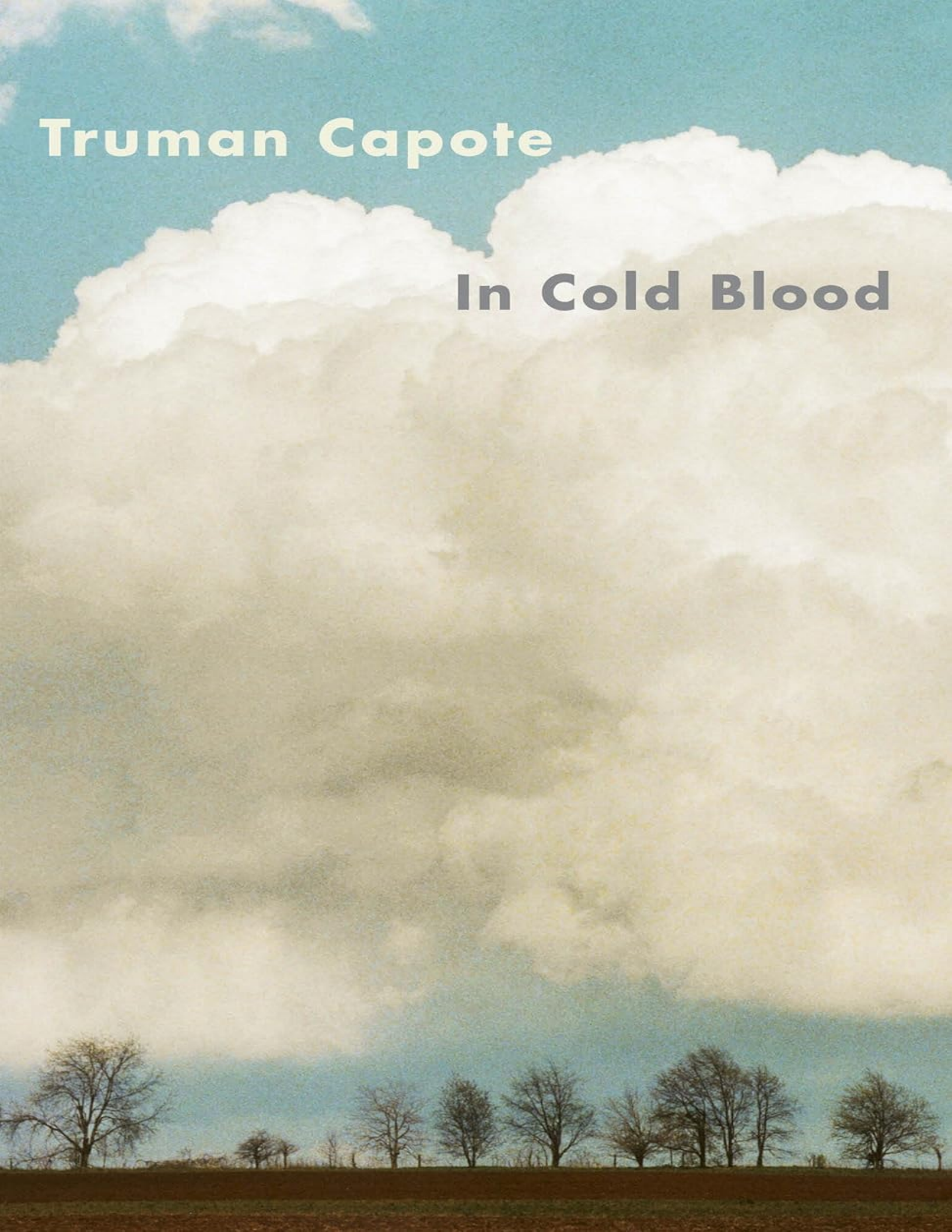


The background of the cover is a photograph of a landscape. The sky is a deep, clear blue, filled with large, billowing white clouds that have a slightly yellowish or aged tint. Below the clouds, a dark, flat horizon line separates the sky from the ground. Along this horizon, there is a row of bare, leafless trees with intricate branch structures. The ground in the foreground is a dark, brownish field, possibly a plowed field or a winter landscape. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

Truman Capote

In Cold Blood

Annotation

The detached yet penetrating account of the savage and senseless murder of a family.

With the publication of this book, Capote permanently ripped through the barrier separating crime reportage from serious literature. As he reconstructs the 1959 murder of a Kansas farm family and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, Capote generates suspense and empathy.

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Truman Capote

In Cold Blood:

**A True Account of a Multiple Murder
and Its Consequences**

I. The Last To See Them Alive

The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call “out there.” Some seventy miles east of the Colorado border, the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air, has an atmosphere that is rather more Far West than Middle West. The local accent is barbed with a prairie twang, a ranch-hand nasalness, and the men, many of them, wear narrow frontier trousers, Stetsons, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes. The land is flat, and the views are awesomely extensive; horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there’s much to see—simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Rail-road, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas (pronounced “Ar-kan-sas”) River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—dance—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window—Holcomb bank. The bank closed in 1933, and its former counting rooms have been converted into apartments. It is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches.

Down by the depot, the postmistress, a gaunt woman who wears a rawhide jacket and denims and cowboy boots, presides over a falling-apart post office. The depot itself, with its peeling sulphur-colored paint, is equally

melancholy; the Chief, the Super-Chief, the El Capitan go by every day, but these celebrated expresses never pause there. No passenger trains do—only an occasional freight. Up on the highway, there are two filling stations, one of which doubles as a meagerly supplied grocery store, while the other does extra duty as a cafe—Hartman’s Cafe, where Mrs. Hartman, the proprietress, dispenses sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks, and 3.2 beer. (Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is “dry.”)

And that, really, is all. Unless you include, as one must, the Holcomb School, a good-looking establishment, which reveals a circumstance that the appearance of the community otherwise camouflages: that the parents who send their children to this modern and ably staffed “consolidated” school—the grades go from kindergarten through senior high, and a fleet of buses transport the students, of which there are usually around three hundred and sixty, from as far as sixteen miles away—are, in general, a prosperous people. Farm ranchers, most of them, they are outdoor folk of very varied stock—German, Irish, Norwegian, Mexican, Japanese. They raise cattle and sheep, grow wheat, milo, grass seed, and sugar beets. Farming is always a chancy business, but in west-era Kansas its practitioners consider themselves “born gamblers,” for they must contend with an extremely shallow precipitation (the annual average is eighteen inches) and anguishing irrigation problems. However, the last seven years have been years of droughtless beneficence. The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators.

Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few American—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside

ordinary life—to work, to hunt, to watch television, to attend school socials, choir practice, meetings of the 4-H Club. But then, in the earliest hours of that morning in November, a Sunday morning, certain foreign sounds impinged on the normal nightly Holcomb noises—on the keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles. At the time not a soul in sleeping Holcomb heard them—four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended six human lives. But afterward the townspeople, theretofore sufficiently unfearful of each other to seldom trouble to lock their doors, found fantasy recreating them over and again—those somber explosions that stimulated fires of mistrust in the glare of which many old neighbors viewed each other strangely, and as strangers.

The master of River Valley Farm, Herbert William Clutter, was forty-eight years old, and as result of a recent medical examination for an insurance policy, knew himself to be in first-rate condition. Though he wore rimless glasses and was of but average height, standing just under five feet ten, Mr. Clutter cut a man's-man figure. His shoulders were broad, his hair had held its dark color, his square-jawed, confident face retained a healthy-hued youthfulness, and his teeth, unstained and strong enough to shatter walnuts, were still intact. He weighed a hundred and fifty-four—the same as he had the day he graduated from Kansas State University, where he had majored in agriculture. He was not as rich as the richest man in Holcomb—Mr. Taylor Jones, a neighboring rancher. He was, however, the community's most widely known citizen, prominent both there and in Garden City, the close-by county seat, where he hardheaded the building committee for the newly completed First Methodist Church, an eight-hundred-thousand-dollar edifice. He was currently chairman of the Kansas Conference of Farm Organizations, and his name was everywhere respectfully recognized among Midwestern agriculturists, as it was in certain Washington offices, where he had been a member of the Federal Farm Credit Board during the Eisenhower administration.

Always certain of what he wanted from the world, Mr. Clutter had in large measure obtained it. On his left hand, on what remained of a finger once mangled by a piece of farm machinery, he wore a plain gold band, which was the symbol, a quarter-century old, of his marriage to the person he had wished to marry—the sister of a college classmate, a timid, pious, delicate girl named Bonnie Fox, who was three years younger than he. She had given him four children—a trio of daughters, then a son. The eldest daughter, Eve Anna, married and the mother of a boy ten months old, lived in northern Illinois but visited Holcomb frequently. Indeed, she and her family were expected within the fortnight, former parents planned a sizable Thanksgiving reunion of the Clutter clan (which had its beginnings in Germany; the first immigrant Clutter—or Klotter, as the name was then spelled—arrived here in 1880); fifty-odd kinfolk had been asked, several of whom would be traveling from places as far away as Palatka, Florida. Nor did Beverly, the child next in age to Eve Anna, any longer reside at River Valley Farm; she was in Kansas Qty, Kansas, studying to be a nurse. Beverly was engaged to a young biology student, of whom her father very much approved; invitations to the wedding, scheduled for Christmas week, were already printed. Which left, still living at home, the boy, Kenyon, who at fifteen was taller than Mr. Clutter, and one sister, a year older—the town darling, Nancy. In regard to his family, Mr. Clutter had just one serious cause for disquiet—his wife’s health. She was “nervous,” she suffered “little spells”—such were the sheltering expressions used by those close to her. Not that the truth concerning “poor Bonnie’s afflictions” was in the least a secret; everyone knew she had been an on-and-off psychiatric patient the last half-dozen years. Yet even upon this shadowed terrain sunlight had very lately sparkled. The past Wednesday, returning from two weeks of treatment at the Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, her customary place of retirement, Mrs. Clutter had brought scarcely credible tidings to tell her husband; with joy she informed him that the source of her misery, so medical opinion had at last decreed, was not in her head but in her spine—it was *physical*, a matter of misplaced vertebrae. Of course, she must undergo an operation, and

afterward—well, she would be her “old self” again. Was it possible—the tension, the withdrawals, the pillow-muted sobbing behind locked doors, all due to an out-of-order backbone? If so, then Mr. Clutter could, when addressing his Thanksgiving table, recite a blessing of unmarred gratitude.

Ordinarily, Mr. Clutter’s mornings began at six-thirty; clanging milk pails and the whispery chatter of the boys who brought them, two sons of a hired man named Vie Irsik, usually roused him. But today he lingered, let Vie Irsik’s sons come and leave, for the previous evening, a Friday the thirteenth, had been a tiring one, though in part exhilarating. Bonnie had resurrected her “old self”; as if serving up a preview of the normality, she regained vigor, soon to be, she had rouged her lips, fussed with her hair, and, wearing a new dress, accompanied him to the Holcomb School, where they applauded a student production of *Tom Sawyer*, in which Nancy played Becky Thatcher. He had enjoyed it, seeing Bonnie out in public, nervous but nonetheless smiling, talking to people, and they both had been proud of Nancy; she had done so well, remembering all her lines, and looking, as he had said to her in the course of backstage congratulations, “Just beautiful, honey—a real Southern belle.” Whereupon Nancy had behaved like one; curtsying in her hoop-skirted costume, she had asked if she might drive into Garden City. The State Theatre was having a *special*, eleven-thirty, Friday-the-thirteenth “Spook Show,” and *all* her friends were going. In other circumstances Mr. Clutter would have refused. His laws were laws, and one of them was: Nancy—and Kenyon, too—must be home by ten on week nights, by twelve on Saturdays. But weakened by the genial events of the evening, he had consented. And Nancy had not returned home until almost two. He had heard her come in, and had called to her, for though he was not a man ever really to raise his voice, he had some plain things to say to her, statements that concerned less the lateness of the hour than the youngster who had driven her home—a school basketball hero, Bobby Rupp.

Mr. Clutter liked Bobby, and considered him, for a boy his age, which was seventeen, most dependable and gentlemanly; however, in the three years she had been permitted “dates,” Nancy, popular and pretty as she was, had

never gone out with anyone else, and while Mr. Clutter understood that it was the present national adolescent custom to form couples, to “go steady” and wear “engagement rings,” he disapproved, particularly since he had not long ago, by accident, surprised his daughter and the Rupp boy kissing. He had then suggested that Nancy discontinue “seeing so much of Bobby,” advising her that a slow retreat now would hurt less than an abrupt severance later—for, as he reminded her, it was a parting that must eventually take place. The Rupp family were Roman Catholics, the Clutters, Methodist—a fact that should in itself be sufficient to terminate whatever fancies she and this boy might have of some day marrying. Nancy had been reasonable—at any rate, she had not argued—and now, before saying good night, Mr. Clutter secured from her a promise to begin a gradual breaking off with Bobby.

Still, the incident had lamentably put off his retiring time, which was ordinarily eleven o’clock. As a consequence, it was well after seven when he awakened on Saturday, November 14, 1959. His wife always slept as late as possible. However, while Mr. Clutter was shaving, showering, and outfitting himself in whipcord trousers, a cattleman’s leather jacket, and soft stirrup boots, he had no fear of disturbing her; they did not share the same bedroom. For several years he had slept alone in the master bedroom, on the ground floor of the house—a two-story, fourteen room, frame-and-brick structure. Though Mrs. Clutter stored her clothes in the closets of this room, and kept her few cosmetics and her myriad medicines in the blue-tile-and-glass-brick bathroom adjoining it, she had taken for serious occupancy Eveanna’s former bedroom, which, like Nancy’s and Kenyon’s rooms, was on the second floor.

The house—for the most part designed by Mr. Clutter, who thereby proved himself a sensible and sedate, if not notably decorative, architect—had been built in 1948 for forty thousand dollars. (The resale value was now sixty thousand dollars.) Situated at the end of a long, lane like driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms, the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass, impressed Holcomb; it was a place people

pointed out. As for the interior, there were spongy displays of liver-colored carpet intermittently abolishing the glare of varnished, resounding floors; an immense modernistic living-room couch covered in nubby fabric interwoven with glittery strands of silver metal; a breakfast alcove featuring a banquette upholstered in blue-and-white plastic. This sort of furnishing was what Mr. and Mrs. Clutter liked, as did the majority of their acquaintances, whose homes, by and large, were similarly furnished.

Other than a housekeeper who came in on weekdays, the Clutters employed no household help, so since his wife's illness and the departure of the elder daughters, Mr. Clutter had of necessity learned to cook; either he or Nancy, but principally Nancy, prepared the family meals. Mr. Clutter enjoyed the chore, and was excellent at it—no woman in Kansas baked a better loaf of salt-rising bread, and his celebrated coconut cookies were the first item to go at charity cake sales—but he was not a hearty eater; unlike his fellow ranchers, he even preferred Spartan breakfasts.

That morning an apple and a glass of milk were enough for him; because he touched neither coffee or tea, he was accustomed to begin the day on a cold stomach. The truth was he opposed all stimulants, however gentle. He did not smoke, and of course he did not drink; indeed, he had never tasted spirits, and was inclined to avoid people who had—a circumstance that did not shrink his social circle as much as might be supposed, for the center of that circle was supplied by the members of Garden City's First Methodist Church, a congregation totaling seventeen hundred, most of whom were as abstemious as Mr. Clutter could desire. While he was careful to avoid making a nuisance of his views, to adopt outside his realm an externally uncensoring manner, he enforced them within his family and among the employees at River Valley Farm. "Are you a drinking man?" was the first question he asked a job applicant, and even though the fellow gave a negative answer, he still must sign a work contract containing a clause that declared the agreement instantly void if the employee should be discovered "harboring alcohol." A friend—an old pioneer rancher, Mr. Lynn Russell—had once told him, "You've got no mercy. I swear, Herb, if you caught a hired

man drinking, out he'd go. And you wouldn't care if his family was starving." It was perhaps the only criticism ever made of Mr. Clutter as an employer. Otherwise, he was known for his equanimity, his charitableness, and the fact that he paid good wages and distributed frequent bonuses; the men who worked for him—and there were sometimes as many as eighteen—had small reason to complain.

After drinking the glass of milk and putting on a fleece-lined cap, Mr. Clutter carried his apple with him when he went out-doors to examine the morning. It was ideal apple-eating weather; the whitest sunlight descended from the purest sky, and an easterly wind rustled, without ripping loose, the last of the leaves on the Chinese elms. Autumns reward western Kansas for the evils that the remaining seasons impose: winter's rough Colorado winds and hip-high, sheep-slaughtering snows; the slushes and the strange land fogs of spring; and summer, when even crows seek the puny shade, and the tawny infinitude of wheat stalks bristle, blaze. At last, after September, another weather arrives, an Indian summer that occasionally endures until Christmas. As Mr. Clutter contemplated this superior specimen of the season, he was joined by a part-collie mongrel, and together they ambled off toward the livestock corral, which was adjacent to one of three barns on the premises.

One of these barns was a mammoth Quonset hut; it brimmed with grain—Westland sorghum—and one of them housed a dark, pungent hill of milo grain worth considerable money—a hundred thousand dollars. That figure alone represented an almost four-thousand-percent advance over Mr. Clutter's entire income in 1934—the year he married Bonnie Fox and moved with her from their home town of Rozel, Kansas, to Garden City, where he had found work as an assistant to the Finney County agricultural agent. Typically, it took him just seven months to be promoted; that is, to install himself in the head man's job. The years during which he held the post—1935 to 1939—encompassed the dustiest, the down-and-outest the region had known since white men settled there, and young Herb Clutter, having, as he did, a brain expertly racing with the newest in streamlined agricultural

practices, was quite qualified to serve as middleman between the government and the despondent farm ranchers; these men could well use the optimism and the educated instruction of a likable young fellow who seemed to know his business. All the same, he was not doing what he wanted to do; the son of a farmer, he had from the beginning aimed at operating a property of his own. Facing up to it, he resigned as county agent after four years and, on land leased with borrowed money, created, in embryo, River Valley Farm (a name justified by the Arkansas River's meandering presence but not, certainly, by any evidence of valley). It was an endeavor that several Finny County conservatives watched with show-us amusement—old-timers who had been fond of baiting the youthful county agent on the subject of his university notions: "That's fine, Herb. You always know what's best to do on the other fellow's land. Plant this. Terrace that. But you might say a slight different if the place was your own." They were mistaken; the upstart's experiments succeeded—partly because, in the beginning years, he labored eighteen hours a day. Setbacks occurred—twice the wheat crop failed, and one winter he lost several hundred head of sheep in a blizzard; but after a decade Mr. Clutter's do-main consisted of over eight hundred acres owned outright and three thousand more worked on a rental basis—and that, as his colleagues admitted, was "a pretty good spread." Wheat, Milo seed, certified grass seed—these were the crops the farm's prosperity depended upon. Animals were also important—sheep, and especially cattle. A herd of several hundred Hereford bore the Clutter brand, though one would not have suspected it from the scant contents of the livestock corral, which was reserved for ailing steers, a few milking cows, Nancy's cats, and Babe, the family favorite—an old fat workhorse who never objected to lumbering about with three and four children astride her broad back.

Mr. Clutter now fed Babe the core of his apple, calling good morning to a man raking debris inside the corral—Alfred Stoecklein, the sole resident employee. The Stoeckleins and their three children lived in a house not a hundred yards from the main house; except for them, the Clutters had no neighbors within half a mile. A long-faced man with long brown teeth,

Stoecklein asked, "Have you some particular work in mind today? Cause we got a sick-un. The baby. Me and Missis been up and down with her most the night I been thinking to carry her to doctor." And Mr. Clutter, expressing sympathy, said by all means to take the morning off, and if there was any way he or his wife could help, please let them know. Then, with the dog running ahead of him, he moved southward toward the fields, lion-colored now, luminously golden with after-harvest stubble.

The river lay in this direction; near its bank stood a grove of fruit trees—peach, pear, cherry, and apple. Fifty years ago, according to native memory, it would have taken a lumberjack ten minutes to axe all the trees in western Kansas. Even today, only cottonwoods and Chinese elms—perennials with a cactus like in-difference to thirst—are commonly planted. However, as Mr. Clutter often remarked, "an inch more of rain and this country would be paradise—Eden on earth." The little collection of fruit-bearers growing by the river was his attempt to contrive, rain or no, a patch of the paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden, he envisioned. His wife once said, "My husband cares more for the trees than he does for his children," and everyone in Holcomb recalled the day a small disabled plane crashed into the peach trees: "Herb was fit to be tied! Why, the propeller hadn't stopped turning before he'd slapped a lawsuit on the pilot."

Passing through the orchard, Mr. Clutter proceeded along beside the river, which was shallow here and strewn with islands—midstream beaches of soft sand, to which, on Sundays gone by, hot-weather Sabbaths when Bonnie had still "felt up to things," picnic baskets had been carted, family afternoons whiled away, waiting for a twitch at the end of a fishline. Mr. Clutter seldom encountered trespassers on his property; a mile and a half from the highway, and arrived at by obscure roads, it was not a place that strangers came upon by chance. Now, suddenly a whole party of them appeared, and Teddy, the dog, rushed forward tearing out a challenge. But it was odd about Teddy. Though he was a good sentry, alert, ever ready to raise Cain, his valor had one flaw: let him glimpse a gun, as he did now—for the intruders were armed—and his head dropped, his tail turned in. No one understood why, for no

one knew his history, other than that he was a vagabond Kenyon had adopted years ago. The visitors proved to be five pheasant hunters from Oklahoma. The pheasant season in, Kansas, a famed November event, lures hordes of sportsmen from adjoining states, and during the past week plaid-hatted regiments had paraded across the autumnal expanses, flushing and felling with rounds of birdshot great coppery flights of the grain-fattened birds. By custom, the hunters, if they are not invited guests, are supposed to pay the landowner a fee for letting them pursue their quarry on his premises, but when the Oklahomans offered to hire hunting rights, Mr. Clutter was amused. "I'm not as poor as I look. Go ahead, get all you can," he said. Then, touching the brim of his cap, he headed for home and the day's work, unaware that it would be his last.

Like Mr. Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a cafe called the Little Jewel never drank coffee. He preferred root beer. Three aspirin, cold root beer, and a chain of Pall Mall cigarettes—that was his notion of a proper "chow-down." Sipping and smoking, he studied a map spread on the counter before him—a Phillips 66 map of Mexico—but it was difficult to concentrate, for he was expecting a friend, and the friend was late. He looked out a window at the silent small-town street, a street he had never seen until yesterday. Still no sign of Dick. But he was sure to show up; after all, the purpose of their meeting was Dick's idea, his "score." And when it was settled—Mexico. The map was ragged, so thumbed that it had grown as supple as a piece of chamois. Around the corner, in his room at the hotel where he was staying, were hundreds more like it—worn maps of every state in the Union, every Canadian province, every South American country—for the young man was an incessant conceiver of voyages, not a few of which he had actually taken: to Alaska, to Hawaii and Japan, to Hong Kong. Now, thanks to a letter, an invitation to a "score," here he was with all his worldly belongings: one cardboard suitcase, a guitar, and two big boxes of books and maps and songs, poems and old letters, weighing a quarter of a ton. (Dick's face when he saw those *boxes*! "Christ, Perry. You carry that junk

everywhere?” And Perry had said, “*What* junk? One of them books cost me thirty bucks.”) Here he was in little Olathe, Kansas. Kind of funny, if you thought about it; imagine being back in Kansas, when only four months ago he had sworn, first to the State Parole Board, then to himself, that he would never set foot within its boundaries again. Well, it wasn’t for long.

Ink-circled names populated the map. Cozumel, an island off the coast of Yucatan, where, so he had read in a men’s magazine, you could “shed your clothes, put on a relaxed grin, live like a Rajah, and have all the women you want for \$50-a-month!” From the same article he had memorized other appealing statements: “Cozumel is a hold-out against social, economic, and political pressure. No official pushes any private person around on *this* island,” and “Every year flights of parrots come over from the mainland to lay their eggs.” Acapulco connoted deep-sea fishing, casinos, anxious rich women; and sierra madre meant gold, meant *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a movie he had seen eight times. (It was Bogart’s best picture, but the old guy who played the prospector, the one who reminded Perry of his father, was terrific, too. Walter Huston. Yes, and what he had told Dick was true: *He did* know the ins and outs of hunting gold, having been taught them by his father, who was a professional prospector. So why shouldn’t they, the two of them, buy a pair of pack horses and try their luck in the Sierra Madre? But Dick, the practical Dick, had said, “Whoa, honey, whoa. I seen that show. Ends up Everybody nuts. On account of fever and bloodsuckers, mean conditions all around. Then, when they got the gold—remember, big wind came along and blew it all away?”) Perry folded the map. He paid for the root beer and stood up. Sitting, he had seemed a more than normal-sized man, a powerful man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick, crouching torso of a weight lifter, weight lifting was, in fact, his hobby. But some sections of him were not in proportion to others. His tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady’s dancing slippers; when he stood up, he was no taller than a twelve-year-old child, and suddenly looked, strutting on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported, not like a well-built truck

driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound, outside the drugstore, Perry stationed himself in the sun. It was a quarter to nine, and Dick was a half hour late; however, if Dick had not hammered home the every-minute importance of the next twenty-four hours, he would not have noticed it. Time rarely weighed upon him, for he had many methods of passing it—among them, mirror gazing. Dick had once observed, “Every time you see a mirror you go into a trance, like. Like you was looking at some gorgeous piece of butt. I mean, my God, don’t you ever get tired?” Far from it; his own face enthralled him. Each angle of it induced a different impression. It was a change-face, and mirror-guided experiments had taught him how to ring the changes, how to look now ominous, now impish, now soulful; a tilt of the head, a twist of the lips, and the corrupt gypsy became the gentle romantic. His mother had been a full-blooded Cherokee; it was from her that he had inherited his coloring—the iodine skin, the dark, moist eyes, the black hair, which he kept brilliantined and was plentiful enough to provide him with sideburns and a slippery spray of bangs. His mother’s donation was apparent; that of his father, a freckled, ginger-haired Irishman, was less so. It was as though the Indian blood had routed every trace of the Celtic strain. Still, pink lips and a perky nose confirmed its presence, as did a quality of roguish animation, of uppity Irish egotism, which often activated the Cherokee mask and took control completely when he played the guitar and sang. Singing, and the thought of doing so in front of an audience, was another mesmeric way of whittling hours. He always used the same mental scenery—a night club in Las Vegas, which happened to be his home town. It was an elegant room filled with celebrities excitedly focused on the sensational new star rendering his famous, backed-by-violins version of “I’ll Be Seeing You” and encoring with his latest self-composed ballad:

Every April flights of parrots
Fly overhead, red and green,
Green and tangerine.
I see them fly, I hear them high,

Singing parrots bringing April spring...

(Dick, on first hearing this song, had commented, “Parrots don’t sing. Talk, maybe. Holler. But they sure as hell don’t sing.” Of course, Dick was very literal-minded, *very*—he had no understanding of music, poetry—and yet when you got right down to it, Dick’s literalness, his pragmatic approach to every subject, was the primary reason Perry had been attracted to him, for it made Dick seem, compared to himself, so authentically tough, invulnerable, “totally masculine.”)

Nevertheless, pleasant as this Las Vegas reverie was, it paled beside another of his visions. Since childhood, for more than half his thirty-one years, he had been sending off for literature (“fortunes in diving! Train at Home in Your Spare Time. Make Big Money Fast in Skin and Lung Diving. free booklets...”) answering advertisements (“sunken treasure! Fifty Genuine Maps! Amazing Offer...”) that stoked a longing to realize an adventure his imagination swiftly and over and over enabled him to experience: the dream of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward a green sea-dusk, sliding past the scaly, savage-eyed protectors of a ship’s hulk that loomed ahead, a Spanish galleon—a drowned cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold. A car horn honked. At last—Dick.

“Good grief, Kenyon! I *hear* you.”

As usual, the devil was in Kenyon. His shouts kept coming up the stairs: “Nancy! Telephone!”

Barefoot, pajama-clad, Nancy scampered down the stairs. There were two telephones in the house—one in the room her father used as an office, another in the kitchen. She picked up the kitchen extension: “Hello? Oh, yes, good morning, Mrs. Katz.”

And Mrs. Clarence Katz, the wife of a farmer who lived on the highway, said, “I *told* your daddy not to wake you up. I said Nancy must be *tired* after all that wonderful acting she did last night. You were lovely, dear. Those

white ribbons in your hair! And that part when you thought Tom Sawyer was dead—you had real tears in your eyes. Good as anything on TV. But your daddy said it was time you got up; well, it is going on for nine. Now, what I wanted, dear—my little girl, my little Jolene, she’s just dying to bake a cherry pie, and seeing how you’re a champion’ cherry-pie maker, always winning prizes, I wondered could I bring her over there this morning and you show her?”

Normally, Nancy would willingly have taught Jolene to prepare an entire turkey dinner; she felt it her duty to be available when younger girls came to her wanting help with their cooking, their sewing, or their music lessons—or, as often happened, to confide. Where she found the time, and still managed to practically run that big house” and be a straight-A student, the president of her class, a leader in the 4-H program and the Young Methodists League, a skilled rider, an excellent musician (piano, clarinet), an annual winner at the county fair (pastry, preserves, needlework, flower arrangement)—how a girl not yet seventeen could haul such a wagonload, and do so without “brag,” with, rather, merely a radiant jauntiness, was an enigma the community pondered, and solved by saying, “She’s got *character*. Gets it from her old man.” Certainly her strongest trait, the talent that gave support to all the others, derived from her father: a fine-honed sense of organization. Each moment was assigned; she knew precisely, at any hour, what she would be doing, how long it would require. And that was the trouble with today: she had overscheduled it. She had committed herself to helping another neighbor’s child, Roxie Lee Smith, with a trumpet solo that Roxie Lee planned to play at a school concert; had promised to run three complicated errands for her mother; and had arranged to attend a 4-H meeting in Garden City with her father. And then there was lunch to make and, after lunch, work to be done on the bridesmaids’ dresses for Beverly’s wedding, which she had designed and was sewing herself. As matters stood, there was no room for Jolene’s cherry-pie lesson. Unless something could be canceled.

“Mrs. Katz? Will you hold the line a moment, please?” She walked the length of the house to her father’s office. The office, which had an outside

entrance for ordinary visitors, was separated from the parlor by a sliding door; though Mr. Clutter occasionally shared the office with Gerald Van Vleet, a young man who assisted him with the management of the farm, it was fundamentally his retreat—an orderly sanctuary, paneled in walnut veneer, where, surrounded by weather barometers, rain charts, a pair of binoculars, he sat like a captain in his cabin, a navigator piloting River Valley’s sometimes risky passage through the seasons.

“Never mind,” he said, responding to Nancy’s problem, “Skip 4-H. I’ll take Kenyon instead.”

And so, lifting the office phone, Nancy told Mrs. Katz yes, fine, bring Jolene right on over. But she hung up with a frown. “It’s peculiar,” she said as she looked around the room and saw in it her father helping Kenyon add a column of figures, and, at his desk by the window, Mr. Van Vleet, who had a kind of brooding, tugged good looks that led her to call him Heathcliff behind his back. “But I keep smelling cigarette smoke.” “On your breath?” inquired Kenyon.

“No, funny one. Yours.” That quieted him, for Kenyon, as he knew she knew, did once in a while sneak a puff—but, then, so did Nancy. Mr. Clutter clapped his hands. “That’s all. This is an office.” Now, upstairs, she changed into faded Levis and a green sweater, and fastened round her wrist her third most valued belonging, a gold watch; her closest cat friend, Evinrude, ranked above it, and surmounting even Evinrude was Bobby’s signet ring, cumbersome proof of her “going-steady” status, which she wore (*when* she wore it; the least flare-up and off it came) on a thumb, for even with the use of adhesive tape its man-size girth could not, be made to fit a more suitable finger. Nancy was a pretty girl, lean and boyishly agile, and the prettiest things about her were her short-bobbed, shining chestnut hair (brushed a hundred strokes each morning, the same number at night) and her soap-polished complexion, still faintly freckled and rose-brown from last summer’s sun. But it was her eyes, wide apart, darkly translucent, like ale held to the light, that made her immediately likable, that at once announced

her lack of suspicion, her considered and yet so easily triggered kindness. “Nancy!” Kenyon called. “Susan on the phone.”

Susan Kidwell, her confidante. Again she answered in the kitchen.

“Tell,” said Susan, who invariably launched a telephone session this command. “And, to begin, tell why you were flirting with Jerry Roth.” Like Bobby, Jerry Roth was a school basket-ball star.

“Last night? Good grief, I wasn’t flirting. You mean because we were holding hands? He just came backstage during the show. And I was so nervous. So he held my hand. To give me courage.”

“Very sweet. Then what?”

“Bobby took me to the spook movie. And *we* held hands.”

“Was it scary? Not Bobby. The movie.”

“He didn’t think so; he just laughed. But you know me. Boo!—and I fall off the seat.”

“What are you eating?”

“Nothing.”

“I know—your fingernails,” said Susan, guessing correctly. Much as Nancy tried, she could not break the habit of nibbling her nails, and, whenever she was troubled, chewing them right to the quick. “Tell. Something wrong?”

“No.”

“Nancy. *C’est moi...*” Susan was studying French. “Well—Daddy. He’s been in an awful mood the last three weeks. Awful. At least, around me. And when I got home last night he started *that* again.”

“*That* needed no amplification; it was a subject that the two friends had discussed completely, and upon which they agreed. Susan, summarizing the problem from Nancy’s viewpoint, had once said, “You love Bobby now, and you need him. But deep down even Bobby knows there isn’t any future in it. Later on, when we go off to Manhattan, everything will seem a new world.” Kansas State University is in Manhattan, and the two girls planned to enroll there as art students, and to room together. “Everything will change, whether you want it to or not. But you can’t change it now, living here in Holcomb, seeing Bobby everyday, sitting in the same classes—and there’s no