

CAIN ROSE UP

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Garrish walked out of the bright May sunshine and into the coolness of the dorm. It took his eyes a moment to adjust, and at first Harry the Beaver was just a bodiless voice from the shadows.

“It was a bitch, wasn’t it?” the Beaver asked. “Wasn’t that one a really truly bitch?”

“Yes,” Garrish said. “It was tough.”

Now his eyes pulled in the Beaver. He was rubbing a hand across the pimples on his forehead and sweating under his eyes. He was wearing sandals and a 69 T-shirt with a button on the front that said Howdy Doody was a pervert. The Beaver’s huge buck teeth loomed in the gloom.

“I was gonna drop it in January,” the Beaver said. “I kept telling myself to do it while there was still time. And then add-drop was over and it was either go for it or pick up an incomplete. I think I flunked it, Curt. Honest to God.” The housemother stood in the corner by the mailboxes. She was an extremely tall woman who looked vaguely like Rudolph Valentino. She was trying to push a slip strap back under the sweaty armhole of her dress with one hand while she tacked up a dorm sign-out sheet with the other.

“Tough,” Garrish repeated.

“I wanted to bag a few off you but I didn’t dare, honest to God, that guy’s got eyes like an eagle. You think you got your A all right?”

“I guess maybe I flunked,” Garrish said.

The Beaver gaped. “You think you flunked? You think you—”

“I’m going to take a shower, okay?”

“Yeah, sure, Curt. Sure. Was that your last test?”

“Yes,” Garrish said. “That was my last test.”

Garrish crossed the lobby and pushed through the doors and began to climb. The stairwell smelled like an athletic supporter. Same old stairs. His room was on the fifth floor.

Quinn and that other idiot from three, the one with the hairy legs, piled by him, tossing a softball back and forth. A little fella wearing horn-rimmed glasses and a valiantly struggling goatee passed him between four and five, holding a calculus book to his chest like a Bible, his lips moving in a rosary of logarithms. His eyes were blank as blackboards.

Garrish paused and looked after him, wondering if he wouldn't be better off dead, but the little fella was now only a bobbing, disappearing shadow on the wall. It bobbed once more and was gone. Garrish climbed to five and walked down the hall to his room. Pig Pen had left two days ago. Four finals in three days, wham-bam and thank-ya-ma'am. Pig Pen knew how to arrange things. He had left only his pinups, two dirty mismatched sweatsocks, and a ceramic parody of Rodin's Thinker perched on a toilet seat.

Garrish put his key in the lock and turned it.

"Curt! Hey, Curt!"

Rollins, the asinine floor-counselor who had sent Jimmy Brody up to visit the Dean of Men for a drinking offense, was coming down the hall and waving at him. He was tall, well-built, crewcut, symmetrical. He looked varnished.

"You all done?" Rollins asked.

"Yeah. "

"Don't forget to sweep the floor of the room and fill out the damage report, okay?"

"Yeah."

“I slid a damage report under your door last Thursday, didn’t I?”

“Yeah.”

“If I’m not in my room, just slide the damage report and the key under the door.”

“Okay.”

Rollins seized his hand and shook it twice, fast, pumppump. Rollins’s palm was dry, the skin grainy. Shaking hands with Rollins was like shaking hands with a fistful of salt.

“Have yourself a good summer, m’man.”

“Right.”

“Don’t work too hard.”

“No.”

“Use it, but don’t abuse it.”

“I will and I won’t.”

Rollins looked momentarily puzzled and then he laughed. “Take care, now.” He slapped Garrish’s shoulder and then walked back down the hall, pausing once to tell Ron Frane to turn down his stereo. Garrish could see Rollins lying dead in a ditch with maggots in his eyes. Rollins wouldn’t care. Neither would the maggots. You either ate the world or the world ate you and it was okay either way.

Garrish stood thoughtfully, watching until Rollins was out of sight, and then he let himself into his room.

With Pig Pen’s cyclonic clutter gone it looked barren and sterile. The swirled, heaped, drifted pile that had been Pig Pen’s bed was stripped down to the bare—if slightly comestained—mattress pad.

Two Playboy gatefolds looked down at him with frozen two-dimensional come-ons.

Not much change in Garrish's half of the room, which had always been barracks-neat. You could drop a quarter on the top blanket of Garrish's bed and it would bounce. All that neat had gotten on Piggy's nerves. He was an English major with a fine turn of phrase. He called Garrish a pigeonholer. The only thing on the wall above Garrish's bed was a huge blow-up of Humphrey Bogart that he had gotten in the college bookstore. Bogie had an automatic pistol in each hand and he was wearing suspenders. Pig Pen said pistols and braces were impotency symbols. Garrish doubted if Bogie had been impotent, although he had never read anything about him.

He went to the closet door, unlocked it, and brought out the big walnut-stocked .352 Magnum that his father, a Methodist minister, had bought him for Christmas. He had bought the telescopic sight himself last March.

You weren't supposed to have guns in your room, not even hunting rifles, but it hadn't been hard. He had signed it out of the university gun storage room the day before with a forged withdrawal slip. He put it in its waterproof leather scabbard, and left it in the woods behind the football field. Then, this morning around three A.M., he just went out and got it and brought it upstairs through the sleeping corridors.

He sat down on the bed with the gun across his knees and wept a little bit. The Thinker on the toilet seat was looking at him. Garrish put the gun on his bed, crossed the room, and slapped it off Piggy's table and onto the floor, where it shattered. There was a knock at the door.

Garrish put the rifle under his bed. "Come in."

It was Bailey, standing there in his skivvies. There was a puff of lint in his bellybutton. There was no future for Bailey. Bailey would marry a

stupid girl and they would have stupid kids. Later on he would die of cancer or maybe renal failure.

“How was the chem final, Curt?”

“All right.”

“I just wondered if I could borrow your notes. I’ve got it tomorrow. “

“I burned them with my trash this morning.”

“Oh. Hey, Jesus! Did Piggy go and do that?” He pointed at the remains of the Thinker.

“I guess so.”

“Why did he want to go and do that? I liked that thing. I was going to buy it off him.” Bailey had sharp, ratty little features. His skivvies were thready and saggy-seated. Garrish could see exactly how he would look, dying of emphysema or something in an oxygen tent. How he would look yellow. I could help you, Garrish thought.

“You think he’d mind if I scooped up those pinups?”

“I guess not.”

“Okay.” Bailey crossed the room, stepping his bare feet gingerly over the pottery shards, and untacked the Playmates. “That picture of Bogart is really sharp, too. No tits, but, hey! You know?” Bailey peered at Garrish to see if Garrish would smile. When Garrish did not, he said, “I don’t suppose you planned on throwing it away, or anything?”

“No. I was just getting ready to take a shower.”

“Okay. Have a good summer if I don’t see you again, Curt.”

“Thanks.”

Bailey went back to the door, the seat of his skivvies flapping. He paused at the door. "Another four-point this semester, Curt?"

"At least."

"Good deal. See you next year."

He went out and closed the door. Garrish sat on the bed for a little while, then took the gun out, stripped it, and cleaned it. He put the muzzle up to his eye and looked at the tiny circle of light at the far end. The barrel was clean. He reintegrated the gun.

In the third drawer of his bureau were three heavy boxes of Winchester ammunition. He laid these on the windowsill. He locked the room's door and went back to the window. He pulled the blinds up.

The mall was bright and green, peppered with strolling students. Quinn and his idiot friend had gotten up a raggle-taggle softball game. They scurried back and forth like crippled ants escaping a broken burrow.

"Let me tell you something," Garrish told Bogie. "God got mad at Cain because Cain had an idea God was a vegetarian. His brother knew better. God made the world in His image, and if you don't eat the world, the world eats you. So Cain says to his brother, 'Why didn't you tell me?' And his brother says, 'Why didn't you listen?' And Cain says, 'Okay, I'm listening now.' So he waxes his brother and says, 'Hey God! You want meat? Here it is! You want roast or ribs or Abelburgers or what?' And God told him to put on his boogie shoes. So ... what do you think?"

No reply from Bogie.

Garrish put the window up and rested his elbows on the ledge, not letting the barrel of the .352 project out into the sunlight. He looked into the sight.

He was centered on Carlton Memorial women's dormitory across the mall. Carlton was more popularly known as the dog kennels. He put the crosshairs on a big Ford wagon. A blond coed in jeans and a blue shell top was talking to her mother while her father, red-faced and balding, loaded suitcases into the back.

Someone knocked on the door.

Garrish waited.

The knock came again.

"Curt? I'll give you half a rock for the Bogart poster."

Bailey.

Garrish said nothing. The girl and her mother were laughing at something, not knowing there were microbes in their intestines, feeding, dividing, multiplying. The girl's father joined them and they stood in the sunlight together, a family portrait in the crosshairs.

"Damn it all," Bailey said. His feet padded down the hall.

Garrish squeezed the trigger.

The gun kicked hard against his shoulder, the good, padded kick you get when you have seated the gun in exactly the right place. The smiling girl's blond head sheared itself away.

Her mother went on smiling for a moment, and then her hand went to her mouth. She screamed through her hand. Garrish shot through it. Hand and head disappeared in a red spray. The man who had been loading the suitcases broke into a lumbering run.

Garrish tracked him and shot him in the back. He raised his head, looking out of the sight for a moment. Quinn was holding the softball and looking at the blond girl's brains, which were splattered on the NO PARKING sign behind her prone body. Quinn didn't move. All

across the mall people stood frozen, like children engaged in a game of statues.

Somebody pounded on the door, then rattled the handle. Bailey again. "Curt? You all right, Curt? I think somebody'—"

"Good drink, good meat, good God, let's eat!" Garrish exclaimed, and shot at Quinn. He pulled instead of squeezing and the shot went wide. Quinn was running. No problem. The second shot took Quinn in the neck and he flew maybe twenty feet.

"Curt Garrish is killing himself!" Bailey was screaming. "Rollins! Rollins! Come quick!"

His footsteps faded down the hall.

Now they were starting to run. Garrish could hear them screaming. Garrish could hear the faint smack-smack sound of their shoes on the walks.

He looked up at Bogie. Bogie held his two guns and looked beyond him. He looked at the shattered remnants of Piggy's Thinker and wondered what Piggy was doing today, if he was sleeping or watching TV or eating some great big wonderful meal. Eat the world, Piggy, Garrish thought. You gulp that sucker right down.

"Garrish!" It was Rollins now, pounding on the door. "Open up, Garrish!"

"It's locked," Bailey panted. "He looked lousy, he killed himself, I know it."

Garrish pushed the muzzle out of the window again. A boy in a madras shirt was crouched down behind a bush, scanning the dormitory windows with desperate intensity. He wanted to run for it, Garrish saw, but his legs were frozen.

“Good God, let’s eat,” Garrish murmured, and began to pull the trigger again.