

It Rained Today

MARY ALICE KESSLER

It had been raining all day. Fritz hated the dingy flannel clouds that hung upon the forlorn pine trees; he hated the squishy gray sand and the dimpled cheek of gray sea water that lay at the foot of the slippery hill. He hated the prostrate sand grass and dripping birch leaves, for they held him imprisoned in the cottage, and he wanted to walk and swim and race with the wind. He wanted to write, but he couldn't write on a day like this. His inspiration was as bogged down as the muddy sand. There was no wind today, only a sullen breath of wet air, and Fritz kicked the dripping porch glider hard with his foot as he stood on the wet porch watching that which he hated.

"Hell," thought Fritz, "this is the kind of day I wish I were dead." He sat down disgustedly on the cold, wet glider and rested his chin in the palms of his hands. His dark blue eyes stared out past the forlorn day into a second world, and he unlocked that part of his mind that usually remained closed. He allowed the terrifying thought of death to creep from the locked part of his brain and stand boldly before him.

..... What would it be like? It was the only thing he could be certain of. He remembered Dr. Nesbitt saying in his psychology class that "birth and death are the two inevitable facts in our story. We must cease living in a state of waiting, of actually breathing and feeling, and step over the indistinguishable line between life and death." But what was it going to be like?

Like the newspaper boys said would it be a bullet tearing flesh, or a car careening from a cliff, or terrible pain and

blood-spotted sheets, or clenched fists and taut bodies and etherized air?

Or would it be like the poets said was it walking, floating easily into a sea of mist, where the color was faint and the atmosphere cool and empty? Would it be a great, gentle wave pushing him into the clouds and caressing his body with warm liquid? Would it be drifting into blue clouds and hearing high winds and feeling the roar of a great sea?

And could eternity be as eternal and everlasting as he felt it must be? Would it go on forever and ever and ever?

Fritz could not bear the thought, so he chased it quickly into his unlocked mind and locked that part securely. It was too depressing a thought for a rainy day.

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Late in the afternoon the rain stopped, and the house became oppressive from the big log fire on the hearth and the sounds of people. Fritz pulled on his trench coat, buttoning it high about his face, and stepped out into the clean, biting air. The tramp down to the sea was steep and rocky, but he felt he must get down to its roaring mouth and feel it in his face. The steps that descended to the breakers creaked from standing against the wind, and Fritz stood, hypnotized by the rumbling surf, the biting spray that stung his face. After the rains, the skies were clean and chilled, having put on the garb of winter. Frozen navy blue clouds stuck into a frosted orange flare of sun. Ice-coated waves lurched against the low slag vapors of darkness and the trees twisted wildly, nodding and gesticulating to the trembling glazed cliffs. Fritz felt elated

and powerful. He felt as if he could conquer the world. There were no fuzzy blurs in his mind now. Death was remote, impossible at such a moment. He had to live and prove himself. His soul shouted brave words to the sea.

"I am not of the slums or castles or dark rooms. I will not be weighed down by squalor or wealth or mediocrity. My soul shall not be veiled and spent, nor shall I sink I will live and reach lofty heights as if some great throbbing swell of music or words were lifting me higher and higher and nearer to my answer. I will not bow my head under yokes of pain or death or hypocrisy. I will not level off

on an even keel of monotony. Ah, Fate will fling me to the moon; I mustn't be thrown back, fumbling in the mist like a boat in a hot swirl of sea vapors, lost and hopeless. I will try, try, try for perfection — a word, a book, a song, a symphony — just one perfect whole thing, Dear God, with the throb and color and grate and loveliness of Life itself. No dreary, endless sea. Let me taste beauty. I must have done one thing perfectly, no matter whether the world knows it or not."

Fritz closed his dark blue eyes, exhausted, and as he pulled his free body up the blown hill he was too weary to hear a low rumble of thunder in the night. It was going to rain tomorrow.

Case Of Claude

BETTY JO FARK

Claude rose easily when he heard the monotonous voice of the judge announcing, "Case of Claude Winters versus the United States." He was surprised when his pulse didn't quicken. He wasn't excited. He walked forward slowly because he walked stiffly, conscious of the filled court room behind him.

Claude felt as if he were moving in a most unrealistic world. The Claude he used to be — the old familiar Claude — seemed to be looking down from somewhere on this Claude — a stranger. His senses were sharpened to the finest point, but his reactions were few and mechanical. Outlines in the courtroom appeared hard and clean-cut as Claude looked at them with cool brown eyes. The judge's bench before him stood out black and massive against the pale cream wall. The murals on the ceiling were painted in

subdued colors and the carved wall panels on the sides of the room added a solemn tone to the whole, which would have appeared majestic except for the simple actions of the people in the elaborate surroundings and for the excess of yellow-gold sunlight filtering through the high windows and filling the room with warmth.

The words of the judge were staccato and sure, but were over-shadowed by the sameness of the tone in which they were spoken. The drone blended with the lazy sunlight and fitted into Claude's dream.

"Take the table on the left," the judge instructed. Claude put his hand on the back of a carved mahogany chair, walked around it, and sat down. His lawyer spread a few papers on the shiny table top and sat opposite Claude. They both faced the judge.

"You will rise and be sworn in," the