

He picked up another page and continued. "Wife, Melissa Foster, nee Burke. Lazy, greedy, also domineering—my friend, Sigmund, might defend you, but responsibility's the key, Foster."

"You were employed, I see, at the Chesterville Bank for a period of thirty years where you computed accounts, an occupation which you pursued for the entire term of your employment there."

He dropped the page on the desk and looked up at Henry. His words were quiet and slick. "Your life has been one filled with misery, Foster, but—I might add—one devoid of any damning actions or thoughts—until, of course, your terminal act."

Henry's eyes came wide, and he protested as a man who sees a light through his desperation. "But you can't judge me! It's not your place. The—"

The man waved the protest aside. "I would like to remind you that you judged yourself but a short time ago out there on the plaza. Besides, when you were—or are—judged matters but little. Time, as you shall see, means nothing here."

He leaned forward on his desk, pinning Henry to the chair with an intense gaze. "Suicide is a very serious offense. You realize that, of course, or you would not have chosen this place. And, as a serious offense, it demands quite a unique punishment."

Henry squirmed, trying to escape the glare of the deep black eyes. "You're going to relive your life, Foster—just as it was!" the man's voice crackled across the room.

"NO! You can't. It was horrible. That's why—"

"Exactly," the man interrupted. "And that," he said sardonically as Henry faded from sight, "is the Hell of it."

Crazy Horse

Ronald M. Corn

IT WAS eight o'clock when Fred Rienke slammed the screen door and side-stepped the bright colored blocks and tiny plastic and metal toys that lay scattered and broken upon the porch floor. He hurried down the steps and across the walk and kicked open the front gate. Worriedly, he looked northward to see if he could catch a glimpse of the eight-o-five express bus before it reached Ninth Street.

From inside the house, Ethel Rienke watched her husband's hurrying form move out of sight behind the listless leaves of an overhanging elm tree; then silently she opened the screen door and quickly glanced up and down the street. Pausing for a moment, she listened thoughtfully. But she heard only the noises of distantly moving traffic. Finally, she pulled herself soundlessly back into the house. As she turned away from the door, a childish, babbling sound came from a hall-way leading off from the small darkened dining room.

"I'm coming, baby. Mommie's coming," she replied to the sounds. Nervously, she tightened the stringy bow of her kitchen apron and hurried toward the hallway. Her hand pushed open the door to a brightly colored bedroom. On the walls in vivid reds and deep blues and pastel pinks, were the faces and forms of Mickey Mouses and Donald Ducks and Bambies and Plutos, all arranged in helter-skelter antics. On a bed that seemed to be legless, sat a boy whose thin black hair lay like faded threads across his forehead. He sat with his shoulders slumped forward, his arms dangling motionless between his legs. His eyes seemed to be fixed as if there were some object on the bare floor that was of unusual interest. Ethel stood quietly for a moment, not looking directly at the boy, then softly she spoke to him:

"Come on, Eddie, it's time for you to play now." She leaned forward, patting the boy's shoulder and with her other hand wiped a trickle of slobberings from the corner of his mouth. "Come now, sweetheart, Mommie will take you out on the porch and you can play with your toys." She took the boy by the hand and led him through the house.

On the porch, Ethel leaned back against a cement railing and watched her son as he squatted down amidst his playthings. At first he took no interest in the toys, but then suddenly, he began to giggle and wave his arms, motioning toward the other end of the porch.

"Horsey! Horsey. My horsey!" he cried gleefully. "All right, baby, Mommie will get it. Mommie will get your horsey," Ethel said trying to calm the child. But Eddie squirmed impatiently as he eyed the small, white and red hobbie-horse that his mother was dragging toward him. "Here, now, Mommie will help you," she said, lifting the boy to his feet. She helped him get onto the heavily-sprung horse and Eddie immediately began to bounce and yell and wave his right hand in jerky, circular motions. His voice was pitched high and it squeaked as he shouted with each springy and bouncing movement. "Geeyup! Geeyup! Geeyup, horsey!" Ethel clenched at her apron and looked toward the street and at the same time her voice pleaded with the child, "Darling, don't be so noisy, and don't bounce so hard or you'll fall off and hurt yourself." But the boy kept bouncing and yelling and waving his hand in the air as if his body and the horse had merged into one mass of wild form and sound. Ethel straightened herself and stood stiffly for a moment and then relaxed. "Please now, baby, be a good boy and play quietly while Mommie works in the kitchen." The yelling stopped but the bouncing seemed to increase with a new vigor. As Ethel opened the door she turned back towards her son and said hesitatingly, "Remember Eddie, today's . . . today's your birthday, and . . . and Mommie's going to make you a pretty cake and it's going to have . . . it'll have candles on it and . . ." but she didn't finish, for the boy seemed not to hear her words. She closed the door and took one more look at her son as he continued to bounce on the toy horse.

A few minutes later the whirring of an electric mix-master could be heard from the kitchen and outside the house a new sound was growing closer. It was the noise of children's voices as they banged and whooped in their wildest cowboy-and-Indian fashion.

"You're dead, 'cause I shot yuh!"

"I ain't neither, 'cause I shot you first!"

"If yer not gonna play fair, I ain't gonna play."

"Hey, who's got my rope, gimme my rope back."

"Oh, here's your old rope, it ain't no good anyways."

"Well it's my best rope and I can lasso better'n anybody."

"Ah, it's not even a real lasso, it's just yer mom's old clothes-line."

"'S not either, it's a cowboy rope."

"Aw, your . . ."

"Hey, you guys, look over there. Ain't that nutty Eddie?"

"Yeah, look at him. Ain't he funny? Look at him ridin' that little kid's horse."

"Come on, let's go over an' talk to 'im."

"Naw, we better not, 'cause my mom says he's crazy and we better stay 'way from him."

"Fooyey, he ain't gonna hurt nobody, and besides, I got my lasso."

"Well, he's a lot bigger 'an we are."

"So what, yuh ain't scared, are yuh?"

"Naw, it's just that . . ."

"Well come on then, let's go."

"Ain't nothin' to be scared of, 'cause he thinks he's a baby, and who's scared of babies?"

"Yeah, let's go."

Like a miniature caravan of big-game hunters, the four little boys filed slowly and cautiously across the street toward the Rienke home. As they moved closer to the house, the humming of Ethel's mix-master became more shrill and its speed increased gradually as the icing for Eddie's birthday cake began to thin.

On the porch, Eddie and his horse had continued their frantic bouncing until now both horse and boy were shiny with the sweat that streamed from Eddie's body. He did not look up when the caravan reached the grayed-white picket fence that surrounded the Rienke front lawn. Nor was he conscious at first of the whining voices that called to him.

"Ride'm Eddie, ride yer silly old horse."

"Hey Eddie, how 'bout givin' us a ride? Yer too big for 'at horse anyways."

"Yeah, come on crazy horse, give us a chanct."

But Eddie only looked blankly at them, his slanted eyes glassy with dumbness. He made no effort to move as the front gate swung open and the hunters pushed their way into the yard.

Inside the house, Ethel moved about busily in the kitchen, unaware of the yells that taunted her son. She didn't hear the swish of a clothes-line-rope as it whirled and tightened about Eddie's body, nor did she hear the rattling crash as boy and horse were dragged down the steps, nor did she hear Eddie as he lay on the sidewalk in a whimpering and blubbering lump; she only heard, at that moment, the mix-master as it screamed its final beating of the cake icing, and turning toward its warning sound, she spilled twelve red and blue birthday candles onto the floor.

BIRTHRIGHT

John R. Foutty

Go, sing for your unborn sons and daughters,
Ring out the bell from every lonely tower,
And feel a heat-searched shudder in the womb
Defy the cell to give the rock a flower.

The joy-guised deed is done; the rampant seed
Squirms feebly when the fickle bee is gone
From moist black hollows to the light. It leaves
Tomorrow's moment on a dying lawn.

A wrinkled hand pulls forth a reddened ape—
Slap-roused to test the shape and wake a soul.
The stained spread falls, and sunken flesh is still
As sight comes dazzling to the startled mole.

The caveling seen, a chirstening date is set—
Cross-sheltered blaming of tomorrow's woe
For past: ungendered is the unseen glass
Reflecting in a child's eye from the snow.

A cold-eyed falcon falls on folded wing
Amid the joy; a mocking beak will bring
Its birthright like some strange forbidden toy
To sheltered places where the mothers sing.

The vague smiles fade; the brazen beak is fled
In wild confusion, youth is left alone.
But once-marked, the deserters are not prey;
The blood urged babe must feel the bitter bone.

The babe waits captive in a pen of sheep
Who wait immobile, bleat beneath the claw;
While others, shepherds, feel the gate go down
And pluck out splinters from the bloody straw.

So like a beast in bedded joy we play
An ancient part, fur rubbed against the tree,
And wait below the shadow lost in awe.
The blood-borne babe must pay the falcon's fee.