Edna lifted the wilted wild rose petal from the dusty, little table and looked at it carefully as if it were some lovely, cherished thing. She turned slightly as she heard the uneven step of her father on the porch, and then she smiled slowly.

"Pa, come. The rose petal is dying."

The old man limped across the living room as the screen door squeaked slowly shut, and frowned. Then he put his gnarled, rough hands on her shoulders and looked at the brown petal in her palm.

"... Fourteen years with my daughter an' she's the wilted thing in my palm..... or is it just the opposite? ...."

He let his hands drop heavily to his sides and limped to the old secretary where his pipes were thrown in musty confusion. After selecting a stained corn cob with the end bitten almost through, he looked at Edna again.

"Eddie, the fog's in from the lake. You like it — the fog, an' we kin walk down the beach a piece before dinner. Go git your coat and we kin walk in the fog."

Edna stared at his mouth for a moment and then she smoothed back her straggly blond hair with one quick movement. She ran from the room, dropping the brown rose petal on the worn carpet.

When she came back, holding a plaid jacket in her hand, the old man was crouched before the sputtering fire in the wood stove, lighting his pipe with a straw. He straightened up slowly and put her coat over her shoulders. The slight, prickly sound of the wood rubbing over his calloused hands was the only sound in the room except for the sputtering fire and the gentle tick of the little German clock on the mantle.

As they walked down the broken, wooden porch steps leading to the lake path, the old man pulled his coat collar up with a jerk.

"This is the most cold it's bin here in July for twenty-five years, ain't it?"

Edna gazed into the layers of wet fog; and they faded into the folds, as they tramped down the weed-clogged path to the lake.

"It's as thick as bread dough down here by the water — be careful not to go off into the lake. Cain't tell the difference from sand and water — both the same color."

The old man talked incessantly like a small child who had suddenly found that he was being noticed. But he knew he wasn't talking to Edna, but to the fog and the water and whatever lay out beyond the dismal silent blankness.

"Ain't never been out beyond there, but maybe someday we'll take a boat an' go to see what it's like. Maybe it's like in that there book your Ma had 'bout poetry and that Nathanial Hawthorne feller when he said the people were mean and good at the same time. Maybe we know all that and don't realize it, Eddie. Nobody never comes up here to the crag, but maybe that's not so bad."

Edna stopped suddenly and whimpered like a frightened puppy. The old man looked hard into the fog, which was coming in from the water in white puffs now.
The sharp bow of a sailboat nudged into
the wet, gray sand, came out of the fog
like an illusion, and beside it stood a tall
man in slacks and a leather jacket.

"Hallo there!"

The old man stood quietly a few feet
from the boat and looked intently at the
bow as if he had never seen a sailboat
before. The small, blue top sail was
almost blotted out in the fog, but the old
man could see that it hung limp, waiting
for a breath of air to push it out.

The tall man laughed and the richness
of it was like a strange, wonderful music
in the old man's ears.

"I guess I'm in the horse latitudes.
You see, my boat's in the Parlane Downs
boat race, and when this fog set in I lost
my way. It looks as if I'll be here until
the wind blows it off. Do you think I'll
have to wait long?"

The old man pulled his stained corn
cob pipe from his pocket and felt along
the bottom of the lining for a match. His
rough finger scratched against a hole and
he knew that the match had gone through.

"Ya got a match, mister?"

"Sure ... here," and the tall man
pushed a chromium lighter near the bowl
of the corn cob pipe.

Edna, who had been watching from
behind her father's shoulder, jumped a
little as the flame flicked in and out of the
bowl, and then walked shyly to the boat
and stepped onto the deck. The tall man
watched her curiously.

"I see that your girl likes boats. She
should see some of the big yachts down
at White Harbor, they are really beauti-
ful."

The old man puffed slowly on his pipe.

"We ain't never been outside the crag
here, so I don't reckon it's likely she'll see
none."

The tall man's eyes widened and then
he looked at the crouched figure in the
boat. He walked to the bow and began
to climb aboard.

Edna wheeled around, and when she
saw that he was coming nearer, she ran to
the edge of the boat, lost her footing, and
fell into the mucky water. She was so
frightened that she knelt in the shallow
water like a broken statue. Both men
waded out to her and carried her ashore;
and when she was on her feet again, she
ran into the fog that was now clearing
away before a cold, northern wind.

The old man looked at the tall man
with angry eyes and began to shout.

"You kin take your boat out now. The
wind's up. An' don't come back. We're
better off alone here on the crag."

He turned to limp away after Edna.

When he found her she was sitting in
the sand, trembling; her wet clothes clung
to her straight, thin body, and she was
crying. He picked her up in his arms and
carried her to the top of the hill and they
walked back to the old farm house
together.

When Edna stumbled into the living
room, she saw the rose petal, which had
become dry and hard on the worn carpet
before the wood stove. She stooped to
pick it up, and as she lifted it from the
floor it crumbled like ash-logs in a
November wind. Edna turned to the old
man and tears began to rise in her eyes.

"Pa... the rose petal is dead."