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In describing the genesis of a successful work, a writer often will say that he stumbled across his idea, giving the impression that it was purely a matter of luck, like finding a hundred-dollar bill on the sidewalk. The truth, as Henry James observed, is usually different: "His discoveries are, like those of the navigator, the chemist, the biologist, scarce more than alert recognitions. He *comes upon* the interesting thing as Columbus came upon the isle of San Salvador, because he had moved in the right direction for it."

So it was that Truman, who had been moving in the right direction for several years, came across his San Salvador, his interesting thing, in that brief account of cruel death in far-off Kansas: he had been looking for it, or something very much like it. For no apparent reason, four people had been slain: Herbert Clutter; his wife, Bonnie; and two of their four children, Nancy, sixteen, and Kenyon, fifteen. As he read and reread those spartan paragraphs, Truman realized that a crime of such horrifying dimensions was a subject that was indeed beyond him, a truth he could not change. Even the location, a part of the country as alien to him as the steppes of Russia, had a perverse appeal. "Everything would seem freshly minted," he later explained, reconstructing his thinking at that time. "The people, their accents and attitude, the landscape, its contours, the weather. All this, it seemed to me, could only sharpen my eye and quicken my ear." Finally he said to himself, "Well, why not *this* crime? The Clutter case. Why not pack up and go to Kansas and see what happens?"

When he appeared at *The New Yorker* to show Mr. Shawn the

clipping, the identity of the killer, or killers, was still unknown, and might never be known. But that, as he made clear to Shawn, was beside the point, or at least the point he wanted to make. What excited his curiosity was not the murders, but their effect on that small and isolated community. "As he originally conceived it, the murders could have remained a mystery," said Shawn, who once again gave his enthusiastic approval. "He was going to do a piece about the town and the family—what their lives had been. I thought that it could make some long and wonderful piece of writing."

Truman asked Andrew Lyndon to go with him, but Andrew was otherwise engaged. Then he turned to Nelle Harper Lee. Nelle, whose own book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was finished but not yet published, agreed immediately. "He said it would be a tremendously involved job and would take two people," she said. "The crime intrigued him, and I'm intrigued with crime—and, boy, I wanted to go. It was deep calling to deep." Watching with some amusement as the two amateur sleuths nervously made their plans, Jack wrote his sister: "Did you read about the murder of the Clutter family out in Kansas? Truman's going out there to write a piece on it. The murder is *unsolved!!* He's taking Nelle Harper Lee, an old childhood friend, out with him to play his girl Friday, or his Della Street (Perry Mason's sec't.). I hope he'll be all right. I told him curiosity killed the cat, and he looked scared—till I added that satisfaction brought it back."

He also enlisted the aid of Bennett Cerf, who, he correctly assumed, had well-placed acquaintances in every state of the union. "I don't know a soul in the whole state of Kansas," he told Bennett. "You've got to introduce me to some people out there." By coincidence, Bennett had recently spoken at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, and had made a friend of its president, James McCain. By further coincidence, McCain had known the murdered Clutter family, as he did nearly everyone else in Finney County. He would give Truman all necessary introductions, he told Bennett, if, in exchange, Truman would stop first at the university to speak to the English faculty. "I accept for Truman right now," Bennett responded. "Great!"

Thus assured, in mid-December Truman boarded a train for the Midwest, with Nelle at his side and a footlocker stuffed with provisions in his luggage. "He was afraid that there wouldn't be anything to eat out there," said Nelle. After a day and a night in Manhattan,

where the Kansas State English faculty gave him a party, they rented a Chevrolet and drove the remaining 270 miles to Garden City, the Finney County seat. They arrived at twilight, a month to the day after he had come upon his interesting thing in the back pages of the *Times*. But if he had realized then what the future held, Truman said afterward, he never would have stopped. "I would have driven straight on. Like a bat out of hell."

When people speak of Middle America or the American heartland, they are talking about Garden City, or somewhere very much like it. Located at the western edge of the state, only sixty-six miles from the Colorado line, it sits on the semiarid high plains, at a point where the continent begins to stretch upward before making its great leap to the Rocky Mountains. "Pop. 11,811," read a brochure of the Santa Fe Railroad, whose trains passed through there on their daily runs between Chicago and the West Coast. "Largest irrigation area in midwest with unlimited supply of underground water. World's largest known gas field. Sugar beet factory. Largest zoo in Kansas, largest buffalo herd in midwest." Although the pamphlet did not note it, in December, 1959, Garden City was also prosperous, mostly from wheat and natural gas, and staunchly Republican, a town of teetotalers and devout Christians who filled twenty-two churches every Sunday morning.

There was not much more to say. Unlike Dodge City, forty-six miles to the east, where Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp had dispatched a platoon of outlaws to Boot Hill—the real Boot Hill—Garden City had led a colorless and relatively placid existence. The terrible events in the outlying village of Holcomb, just six miles west on U.S. Route 50, were thus even more shocking than they might have been in many other places. As Truman had predicted, the murder of the Clutters had started an epidemic of fear. Robbery did not seem to be the motive, and the peculiar brutality of the killings—Herb Clutter's throat had been cut before he was shot—led most people to believe that the killings were the doing of a vengeful psychopath, someone local who might well have other targets in mind. Lights burned all night; doors that had never been locked were bolted; loaded guns were placed next to beds.

It was into that atmosphere, darkened by fear and mistrust, that Truman and Nelle now came. A few people may have recognized his name; the Garden City public library owned two of his books,

Other Voices and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. But no one in those parts had ever seen anyone remotely like Truman. In their eyes, said Nelle, "he was like someone coming off the moon." Inevitably he was greeted with derision. Asked what he had thought of Truman, one resident was most likely replying for the majority when he later drawled, "Well . . . I'd sure hate to tell you." Jokes were made about his mannerisms and his height. "By God! Don't he look like a little old banty rooster?" observed one farmer to everyone within earshot. At Christmas parties imitations of his voice were heard as often as "Jingle Bells." Some people were openly hostile; a few suspected that someone so strange-looking might be the killer, returning to rejoice in the commotion he had caused. Truman did not look like a reporter, certainly, and it did him no good to say that he was on assignment for *The New Yorker*—the magazine had more readers in Moscow than in Finney County.

His ability to charm, which had overcome many other formidable obstacles, momentarily failed him, moreover. Soon after arriving, he and Nelle walked into the office of Alvin Dewey, who was supervising the investigation for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation. He needed a long interview, Truman told Dewey. Telephones were ringing, other detectives were waiting to make their reports, and Dewey, a tall, good-looking man of forty-seven, was not at all impressed by the names Truman dropped. He refused to grant an interview. Truman would have to get his information from the daily press conferences, he said, just like all the other reporters. "But I'm not a newspaperman," Truman objected. "I need to talk to you in depth. What I'm going to write will take months. What I am here for is to do a very special story on the family, up to and including the murders. It really doesn't make any difference to me if the case is ever solved or not."

"Well, he could have talked all day without saying that," Dewey recalled. "Solving the case made one hell of a difference to me." Truman was lucky, in fact, that the detective, who had lost twenty pounds in an almost round-the-clock search for leads, did not throw him out. Not only was he the agent in charge, but the Clutters had been family friends, fellow parishioners of Garden City's United Methodist Church, people much-admired and much-liked. Time and again Dewey had looked at photographs of their bodies in hopes of discovering some hitherto hidden clue. Time and again he had seen nothing but horror. "Nancy's forehead, where the shotgun

blast exited, reminded me of the jagged peaks of a mountain range," he remembered.

Under those circumstances, his reaction to Truman's flippant remark was surprisingly indulgent. "I'd like to see your press card, Mr. Capote" was all he said. Truman meekly admitted that he had none, but offered to display his passport instead. Dewey was not interested and told him once again the time of his press conferences. At last Truman gave up, and the next morning he and Nelle took their places among the other reporters.

James McCain's letters and calls opened a few important doors, but Nelle's help proved more valuable during those difficult first days. Her roots were still in Monroeville, and she knew how farmers and the inhabitants of small towns thought and talked. She was the kind of woman people in Finney County were accustomed to; where he shocked, she soothed. "Nelle walked into the kitchen, and five minutes later I felt I had known her for a long time," said Dolores Hope, a columnist for the *Garden City Telegram*.

Not once was he or Nelle seen taking notes: it was Truman's theory that the sight of a notebook, or worse still, a tape recorder, inhibited candor. People would reveal themselves, he maintained, only in seemingly casual conversations. Unless they saw a pen or pencil flying across a page, they could not believe that their words were being recorded. "It wasn't like he was interviewing you at all," said Wilma Kidwell, the mother of Nancy Clutter's best friend Susan. "He had a way of leading you into things without your knowing it." Only when they had returned to the Warren Hotel did he and Nelle separate and commit to paper what they had learned. Each wrote a separate version of the day's interviews; they then compared notes over drinks and dinner. "Together," declared Nelle, "we would get it right." Their method was time-consuming but productive. When their combined memory failed, as it sometimes did, they went back and asked their questions in a slightly different way. On occasion they talked to the same person three times in one day.

The farmers who plowed that flat and forbidding terrain did not work harder than the two who came to talk to them. "It was always bitter cold, really so incredibly cold on the plains," said Truman. "We would drive out to some lonely ranch or farmhouse to interview the people who lived there, and almost invariably they had a television set on. They seemed to keep it on twenty-four hours a day.

They would sit there talking—and never look at us! They would go on looking straight at the TV screen, even if there was just a station break or an advertisement. If the television wasn't on, if the light wasn't flickering, they began to get the shakes. I guess television has become an extension of people's nervous systems."

Nowhere else had he felt at such a loss. The Kansans spoke the same language, paid their bills in the same currency, and pledged allegiance to the same flag. Yet they seemed utterly different. If they thought that he had dropped from the moon, he may have wondered if that was where he had arrived. A CARE package from Babe Paley, a tin of delicious black caviar, reminded him how far he was from his friends and all the things he loved. At one particularly bleak point, he despaired, telling Nelle that he was thinking of giving up and going home. "I cannot get any rapport with these people," he told her. "I can't get a handle on them." She bucked him up. "Hang on," she said. "You *will* penetrate this place."

So he did, on Christmas Day, appropriately enough. Dolores Hope had told her husband, Clifford, one of the town's leading lawyers, that they ought to share their holiday dinner with someone who had no other place to go. The visitors from New York fitted that description and were invited to partake of the Hopes' dinner of duck and twice-baked potatoes. "Of course, Truman dominated the conversation," recalled Mrs. Hope. "Once you got over the high-pitched voice, why, you didn't think about it, really. It was not your everyday Garden City talk. The things he said were from another world, and they were fascinating for us. It was a right pleasant day. People started calling me. Had I really had him to dinner? I said yes, and then things kind of started for him. Entertaining him became the in-thing to do. He was an attraction and people didn't want to be left out."

The switchboard at the Warren Hotel began buzzing with invitations from the local aristocracy. Instead of imitating his voice, people found themselves listening to the real thing and, for the most part, liking what they were hearing. Even Alvin Dewey, who attended one of those parties, melted when his wife, Marie, who had been born and bred in New Orleans, discovered another native of that city. Within a night or two, Truman and Nelle were at the Dewey house dining on grits, gumbo, and red beans and rice, a menu that few steak-and-potato Midwesterners could properly appreciate. Within a week the Deweys had become such good friends that Tru-

man felt free to give Alvin a nickname, Foxy. "Foxy, you're not telling me everything!" he would say, with an accusing wag of his finger. He and Nelle were at the Deweys' the night of December 30, 1959, when Alvin received the phone call he had been praying for: two suspects in the Clutter murders had been arrested in Las Vegas. Elated, Alvin made plans to go get them. Truman asked if he could go along. "Not this time, partner," Alvin replied.

But Truman and Nelle were part of the crowd shivering outside the Finney County courthouse a week later, when Alvin and his colleagues returned with their handcuffed quarry, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. All the theories about the murders had been wrong. The two killers—both had confessed—were not local men, but alumni of the Kansas State Penitentiary. Robbery had been their motive after all. They had erroneously heard that Herb Clutter kept large amounts of cash in an office safe, and they had made their plans with meticulous care. Nor had the killings been spontaneous. From the start they had decided to kill all witnesses—in cold blood.

Their arrest fundamentally altered the nature of Truman's project. By the time Alvin heard the good news from Las Vegas, Truman and Nelle had completed most of their reporting for the relatively short piece he had initially conceived: the reaction of a small town to a hideous crime. But now, with the men who had committed the crime behind bars on the fourth floor of the courthouse, his story had expanded far beyond his original conception. He had done only half his reporting; and a worthless half at that unless he could reconstruct the lives of the killers as precisely and minutely as he had those of their victims.

He received his first close look at them only when they were arraigned in Garden City. Hickock was twenty-eight, blond and slightly above average in height, five feet, ten inches. A car collision had disfigured his face. His eyes were at different levels, and his head appeared, as Truman phrased it, to have been "halved like an apple, then put together a fraction off center." Appearances aside, he was in no way unusual or interesting—just a "two-bit crook" in Alvin's words. His parents were poor but honest, and he had grown up on their small farm in eastern Kansas. Instead of going to college, as he had hoped, he had become an auto mechanic, forced to scratch for every dollar. Twice married, he had also been twice divorced. He was a braggart, consumed with envy of all those who had had it

easier, and he had a mean spirit: his notion of fun was to run down dogs on the highway. He was easy to talk to, however, and he had an extraordinarily accurate memory, which was to prove invaluable to the biographer of his short and shabby life.

Except for the blood on his hands, Perry Smith was Dick's exact opposite. From his mother, a Cherokee Indian, Perry had inherited his black hair and sad, droopy eyes; his almost pixielike features came from his Irish father. "A changeling's face," Truman called it, which meant that he could alter it at will, making it seem gentle or savage, vulnerable or ferocious. He too had been in a near-fatal accident, a mishap with a skidding motorcycle that had so deformed and shortened his legs that he was only an inch taller than Truman himself.

His parents had been rodeo performers—"Tex & Flo," they had billed their riding act—who fell apart because of hard times and Flo's weakness for alcohol and other men. She became a messy, hopeless drunk, and Tex went off into the Alaskan wilderness to earn a meager living as a trapper and prospector. After Flo died, choking on her own vomit, her four children were sent to various homes and orphanages. Perry fared worst. His habit of wetting his bed made him a target of scorn and abuse. Nuns beat him; an attendant rubbed a burning ointment on his penis; another held him in a tub of ice water until he developed pneumonia. In a recurring dream, a parrot, "taller than Jesus," swooped down to rescue him from his enemies, pecking out their eyes and carrying him to paradise. But no such miraculous bird appeared, and he ran away to live in the wilds with his father until he was old enough to join the Merchant Marine. His life after that had been, as Truman was to observe, "an ugly and lonely progress toward one mirage and then another." Convinced, obviously with good reason, that the world had not given him a fair chance, Perry bathed himself in self-pity. "Oh," he exclaimed, "the man I could have been!"

Yet he never gave up hope of becoming that man, devouring self-help learning books, making lists of vocabulary-broadening words, and nursing adolescent fantasies of finding gold in Mexico; he had sat through *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* eight times. Unlike Dick, he considered himself to be kind and considerate, and by his own mingle-mangled logic, he was. Worried that Herb Clutter would be uncomfortable on his cold basement floor, for instance, he gently lifted his bound body onto a mattress—and then butchered him

with as little emotion as he might have a hog. "I thought he was a very nice gentleman," he said. "Soft-spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat."

Such a kaleidoscope of contradictory emotions fascinated Truman and all those who were to read his narrative. Norman Mailer went so far as to call Perry one of the great characters in American literature, and there is a pathetic irony in the fact that the twisted little man who hungered for education, who constantly corrected Dick's grammar and who peppered his speech with large and ungainly words, has achieved a kind of immortality as a literary darkling. But there he stands, alongside such other native Iagos as Roger Chillingworth in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd*, and Flem Snopes in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga.

When Perry sat down in front of the judge to be arraigned, Truman nudged Nelle. "Look, his feet don't touch the floor!" Nelle said nothing, but thought, "Oh, oh! This is the beginning of a great love affair." In fact, their relationship was more complicated than a love affair: each looked at the other and saw, or thought he saw, the man he might have been.

Their shortness was only one of many unsettling similarities. They both had suffered from alcoholic mothers, absent fathers, and foster homes. At the orphanages he had been sent to, Perry had been a target of scorn because he was half-Indian and wet his bed; Truman had been ridiculed because he was effeminate. A psychiatrist could have been speaking about both of them when he said of Perry: "He seems to have grown up without direction, without love." Finally, both had turned to art to compensate for what had been denied them. Perry was convinced that with a little encouragement, he could have made his mark as a painter, a singer, a songwriter.

In Joel Knox, the thirteen-year-old hero of *Other Voices*, Truman had projected his fictional alter ego. In Perry, it is not too much to suggest, he recognized his shadow, his dark side, the embodiment of his own accumulated angers and hurts. When he looked into those unhappy eyes, he was looking into a tormented region of his own unconscious, resurrecting the nightmares and fears that had found form and body in such early stories as "Miriam" and "The Headless Hawk." Reversing the coin, Perry perceived in Truman the successful artist he might have been. "He saw Truman as someone like

himself," said Donald Cullivan, an Army buddy who visited him in jail. "He thought Truman also had been kicked around, and he thought Truman had spunk."

Like the good folk of Garden City, Perry had never encountered anyone like Truman. He was fascinated by him and quizzed him endlessly. "After I had known him a couple of years, he wanted to know whether I was homosexual," Truman said, "which seemed to me to be quite ludicrous—it should have been perfectly clear to him by *that* time. He was a very sophisticated boy on that level, and I don't know what he thought. I think somewhere in the back of his mind he thought I was living with Harper Lee. He was one of those people who think if you're living with a girl, you can't be homosexual, and if you're living with a guy, you can't be heterosexual. Everything has to be black and white. He wanted to know who I lived with and whether I was promiscuous, and I was very frank with him."

From the beginning, theirs was a confused, uneasy, but unremittingly intense relationship. Although Truman knew he needed Perry's trust and goodwill, he could not restrain himself from objecting to Perry's ever-moist self-pity. When Perry blamed his unhappy background for all that he had done, Truman indignantly interjected: "I had one of the worst childhoods in the world, and I'm a pretty decent, law-abiding citizen." Perry answered with a shrug.

Perry was in only slightly less need of Truman, who listened to him and gave him books, magazines, and small amounts of money —items worth more than all the treasure of the Sierra Madre to a man behind bars. Nonetheless, Perry was often sulky and quick to take offense. "He was suspicious, like many people in prison, and uncertain as to whether Truman was using him," said Cullivan. "He waffled back and forth." Flexing his weight lifter's muscles during one interview, he pointed out to Truman that he could kill him in a minute, before a guard could come to his rescue. "I've half a mind to do it," he said. "It would give me pleasure. What do I have to lose?"

Perry was deeply offended by Truman's inscription in a gift copy of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. "For Perry, from Truman who wishes you well," Truman had scrawled in his small and distinctive hand. But in Perry's outraged opinion, those few words were cold and unfeeling. "Is that all!" he had exploded when Truman handed it to him. On the opposite page, in the beautifully formed script he had

learned from a book on handwriting, he later wrote: "Capote, you little bastard! I wanted to call you a name at the time, I was getting angered. It's not to [sic] late yet—'You little Piss Pot!' "

By the middle of January, 1960, Truman had spent hours with both Dick and Perry, and he felt that he had done all he could for the moment in Kansas. In a driving snowstorm he and Nelle boarded a Santa Fe sleeper for the trip home. "An extraordinary experience, in many ways the most interesting thing that's ever happened to me," he wrote Cecil a few days later from Brooklyn Heights. How had he been greeted on the lone prairie? asked Glenway Wescott, who met him at a Manhattan party. How had those hardy Kansans reacted to such an exotic species as a Truman Capote? "At first it was hard," said Truman. "But now I'm practically the mayor!"

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HE was not exaggerating by much. When Truman and Nelle returned to Garden City for Dick and Perry's trial in March, he was so esteemed that there was a competition for his company at parties and dinners. Indeed, as Dick Avedon, who had come along to take pictures, recalled, his conquest of Kansas had made him more than a little cocky. The farmer who had compared him to a banty rooster was not altogether wrong. Avedon was with him when he swaggered into the sheriff's office one morning and went up to Roy Church, one of the K.B.I. agents waiting to testify. "You don't look so tough to me!" he sneered.

Church replied by stamping over to the wall, pulling his arm back, and smashing his fist into it. "Oh, my God!" Avedon thought. "What can we do? This is it. Truman's gone one step too far." But he had not. Although it had taken him a while, he had learned how to handle those tough Kansans. Putting his hands over his head, he jumped from side to side and, assuming a thick Southern accent, cried: "Well, Ah'm beside mahself! Well, Ah'm beside mahself! Well, Ah'm beside mahself!" Joining in the laughter, Church relaxed his still-clenched fist. "It was one of the most brilliant, physically inventive and courageous things I've ever seen in my life," said Avedon. "Truman would have survived in the jungles of Viet Nam. He won that duel in the same way he had won the town."

The trial began Tuesday morning, March 22, with Judge Roland Tate presiding. There was never any doubt that the defendants were guilty. Besides their confessions, the prosecution had conclusive physical evidence, including their boots, whose heelprints matched

those found at the Clutter house; the knife that had cut Herb Clutter's throat; and the shotgun that had actually killed him and his family. The question was not guilt or innocence, but life or death, and on March 29, after deliberating for only forty minutes, the jury answered it. Both were guilty and should be executed. As they were led away, Perry snickered to Dick, "No chicken-hearted jurors, they!" No more so was Judge Tate, who pronounced sentence a few days later. Their execution was set for Friday, May 13, 1960, when they were to be hanged at the Kansas State Penitentiary in Lansing.

That was a scene Truman did not want to witness. Shortly after the trial ended, he and Nelle left for home. He realized that he could not write in New York, however, between lunches with Slim and weekends with the Paleys. "Gregariousness is the enemy of art," he explained to a reporter, "so when I work, I have to forcibly remove myself from other people. I'm like a prizefighter in training: I have to sweep all the elements except work out of my life completely." Two weeks after his return to New York, he and Jack sailed for Europe, where he planned to stay until his book was finished. He estimated that that would take about a year.

Landing in Le Havre in late April, they picked up a car and drove south to Spain, where they had rented a house in the fishing village of Palamós, on the Costa Brava between Barcelona and the French border. Although he had brought with him trunks full of notes, Truman continued his reporting by mail, bombarding his friends in Garden City with more questions and requests for updates on the news. Bulletins were not long in coming. The Kansas Supreme Court granted Perry and Dick a stay of execution while it reviewed their request for a new trial; but Perry, who did not have much hope, decided to beat the hangman by starving himself to death. "You can wait around for the rope, but not me," he informed Dick, who occupied an adjoining cell. After neither eating nor drinking for six weeks, he began hallucinating, believing that he was in constant communication with the Lord. "It is really too awful," Truman wrote Donald Cullivan. "They are only keeping him alive in order to hang him."

Since that November day when he had learned about the Clutter killings, Truman had been moving so fast that he had not had time to sit back and take stock. In Palamós he did have time, and his thoughts were sobering. When he had begun most of his other projects, he had had a fairly good idea of how long they would take and what the result would be. Almost from the start, however, his murder story had taken its own independent and unpredictable course. Now it had veered again. No one could say how long the appeal process would last or what would happen to Perry. There was no end in sight.

As he sat there in his cliffside house, gazing out at the gentle waters of the Mediterranean, he also comprehended, probably for the first time, the full dimensions of what he was seeking to do. *In Cold Blood*, as he had titled his book, was not just the chronicle of a gruesome crime; it was a tale of a good and virtuous family being pursued and destroyed by forces beyond its knowledge or control. It was a theme that reverberated like Greek tragedy, a story that Aeschylus or Sophocles might have turned into a drama of destiny and fate.

That same fate, Truman was convinced, had sent him to Kansas and had given him an opportunity to write a work of singular power and grandeur. He had a sacred responsibility to his subject, to himself, and to the art he worshiped to create a book that was, as he told Cecil, unlike any other that had ever been written. If *Answered Prayers* would someday be his *Remembrance of Things Past*, then *In Cold Blood* would be his *Madame Bovary*. "[It] may take another year or more," he declared to Newton. "I don't care—it has to be perfect, for I am very excited about it, totally dedicated, and believe, if I am very patient, it could be a kind of masterpiece; God knows I have wonderful material, and lots of it—over 4,000 typed pages of notes. Sometimes, when I think how good it *could* be, I can hardly breathe. Well, the whole thing was the most interesting experience of my life, and indeed has changed my life, altered my point of view about almost everything—it is a Big Work, believe me, and if I fail I still will have succeeded."

What was hidden between those lines was the fear that fate might have entrusted him with too big a task. Imagining how good *In Cold Blood* could be made him realize at the same time how high he had to reach—how much higher, in fact, than he had ever reached before. No one valued his rich gifts more than he did himself: there was no other American of his generation, he felt, who had such a clear ear for the music and rhythm of the English language, no one else who wrote with such style and grace. But the truth of the matter was that until now, he had exercised that style only in small spaces.

Other Voices, a short novel by any measure, was his longest piece of writing.

His Kansas book, on the other hand, would be not only long, but complicated; he would have to weave together a bewildering collection of characters, facts, legal explanations and psychological studies. It demanded skills he had never demonstrated and was not certain—could not be certain—he possessed. He was like a composer of string quartets who was nervously wondering if he was capable of a symphony. He was trying to scale Parnassus itself, and he could not help but approach the job ahead with awe and dread.

He plunged quickly ahead, nonetheless. In June he flew to London, where he talked with a psychiatrist who helped him unravel the psychology of his two murderers. He did not linger, returning almost immediately to his pencils and pads in Palamós. By October he was nearly a quarter done. "Whether it is worth doing remains to be seen!" he fretfully told Mary Louise Aswell. "I think it is going to be 'good'—but it will have to be more than that to justify ALL I HAVE GONE THROUGH."

To Donald Windham he expressed the worry that he might be writing too much for *The New Yorker* to digest. "Never thought that I, of all writers, would ever have a length problem," he said, "but actually it is very tightly written, and really can't be cut (I've tried). Well, if I can't come to terms with Shawn (and I can see that they might hesitate to devote 4 full issues to this enterprise—especially since it is not 'pleasant' reading, and not very 'entertaining,' as the word is used) my only regret will be that I have spent over $8,000 on research, which I will not be able to recover. But I shall go right on with the book, regardless. I suppose it sounds pretentious, but I feel a great obligation to write it, even though the material leaves me increasingly limp and numb and, well, horrified—I have such awful dreams every night. I don't know now how I could ever have felt so callous and 'objective' as I did in the beginning."

Those fierce prairie winds had followed him across the Atlantic, and they howled in his ears through the soft Spanish nights. "Alas, I am rather too much involved emotionally with the material," he confessed to Newton. "God, I wish it were over."

There were, of course, a few pleasures on that Mediterranean shore, and in June he and Jack changed addresses, moving down the beach to a grander house, staffed by a cook, two maids, and a gardener. "I'll think 3 times before taking on such a responsibility again," he grumbled to Donald Windham. From time to time a boat dropped anchor offshore, and fancy friends like Noël Coward and Loel and Gloria Guinness paid their respects. "Every once in a while friends of Truman's come in on a yacht," wrote a surprisingly genial Jack, "and so I'm forced to meet people I would not ordinarily even see. I really don't mind any more, though, about that sort of thing. Most of the time if I'm asked I go. It's the least I can do. I suppose I used to take it all seriously. I know now that these people are like hummingbirds, feeding here and there off flowers they really don't take in at all. All they ask is that you behave. Then—as far as I'm concerned anyway—it's out of sight, out of mind."

With Truman Jack was not always so mellow. After a visit in May, Cecil, who was always fascinated by their paradoxical relationship, described it in his diary: "It was sometimes embarrassing to hear Jack lambasting T. for his duchesses & his interest in rich people & his being considered a genius by the Mrs. Paleys. Jack lashes out with Irish articulation & American violence. Sometimes it must hurt T. very much. But it teaches him also. He learns when not to argue, when to let Jack have his own way. He knows when Jack is right, & accepts the healthy criticism, but if Jack is unfair then he will fight bitterly & courageously.

"It is interesting that these two should have found one another, that they should recognize the fact that each gives the other an essential that would be otherwise lacking in their lives. This was a true glimpse of both of them, & it was very touching to see, despite the banter & tough onslaughts from Jack, how when anything serious occurred they were together closely knit as one unit. Jack had received a letter of despair from his sister Gloria. She was in hospital suffering from hepatitis (jaundice) & after 2 days her sister had had Gloria's pet, a Pekinese, & another dog destroyed. T. was so upset that he trembled: 'We must send Gloria a ticket to come out & stay with us & we must have Gloria to live with us always.' "

Jack liked to ski, Truman enjoyed cold weather, and at the end of October they traded the seashore for the mountains, driving to Verbier, a Swiss ski resort where Loel Guinness' son Patrick had found them a small apartment. It was cold, dark and raining when they arrived, and their car became mired in the mud. So inauspicious was their first night that Jack was afraid to wake up the next morning, dreading that they might be stuck in a place they despised. But

when they woke up, the sun was shining, the thin air tasted delicious, and the apartment was just what they had hoped it would be. "It is rather like living on the side of a moss-green bowl whose rim, zigzagging sharply up and down, is covered with snow," Jack wrote Gloria. "I asked, where do you ski? and was told—everywhere."

The apartment had already been rented for the Christmas holidays, unfortunately, and they spent three weeks in Munich, where, almost without warning, their bulldog Bunky died. Freud, who learned to enjoy canine companionship late in life, declared that an owner's feeling for his dog is the same as a parent's for his children, with one difference—"there is no ambivalence, no element of hostility." Truman and Jack felt that way about Bunky, who had been with them since the making of *Beat the Devil*. "Last week we found out Bunky had leukemia, and yesterday he died in my arms," Truman told Donald Windham. "I know you know how much I loved him; he was like my child. I have wept till I can weep no more."

Back in Verbier, Truman put aside *In Cold Blood* for a few weeks to write a movie adaptation of another dark tale, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. The story was one of Truman's favorites: a psychological thriller about an English governess who believes she is battling two ghosts for the souls of her young charges. When the director, Jack Clayton, who had worked with him on *Beat the Devil*, begged him to do a rewrite of the script, he could not refuse. "He did it in the most unbelievable speed," recalled Clayton, "most of it in eight weeks, with a little bit of touching up afterward."

Titled *The Innocents*, the picture, which starred Deborah Kerr and Michael Redgrave, contained his best film script, Truman thought, better even than that of *Beat the Devil*. "I thought it would be a snap because I loved *The Turn of the Screw* so much," he said. "But when I got into it, I saw how artful James had been. He did everything by allusion and indirection. I made only one mistake. At the very end, when the governess sees the ghost of Miss Jessel sitting at her desk, I had a tear fall on to the desktop. Up until then it wasn't clear whether the ghosts were real or in the governess' mind. But the tear was real, and that spoiled everything." Few of the critics agreed. "A beautifully turned film," said the *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer, "one of the most artful hauntings to come along on film in a long time."

After the cold and drizzle of a London winter, Verbier looked more appealing than ever. "Oh how glorious it seems here," he

exclaimed when he returned in February, 1961. "Such *sun*, *skies*, silence, *air*. I really do like it." He liked it so much, in fact, that he used part of the money he had earned from *The Innocents* to buy a two-room condominium. After moving from one rented place to another, he and Jack enjoyed the feeling of permanency. "Today I stood in back of the little church with the men folk—farmers," Jack wrote his sister. "It was a comfort. The strangest people go to church, rich and poor, dumb and bright. The priest was a big man with a long grey beard. I have to walk a mile or so to the church, which has a *rooster* on its steeple. I like that."

The pattern of their lives changed hardly at all during the next two years: spring and summer in Palamós; fall and winter in Verbier. Truman worked on *In Cold Blood*; Jack persisted with his plays. Kelly, the Kerry blue terrier that had been with them since 1950, also died, causing more pain. Although he had vowed that he would never go through the agony of love and loss again, in July, 1961, Truman bought another bulldog. In London for last-minute chores on *The Innocents*, he heard a familiar-sounding bark in Harrods. "Is there a pet shop here?" he asked, and was taken down a corridor to a room that held a macaw, a parrot, an owl, a fox terrier, and, as he told Cecil, "the most adorable, cuddly little bulldog pup you've ever seen." Marching over to the saleswoman, he said, "I've bought that bulldog."

"No, that's a special order," she replied. "That dog's not for sale. We can order you another."

"No," said Truman. "That dog is mine. I wish to buy *that* dog. Here's my checkbook."

"You can't buy that dog," she insisted. "Besides, he costs fifty-five pounds!"

"My dear woman. I've come all the way from Spain and have been directed straight to that dog. It is my destiny to have that dog." After an appeal to higher authority, destiny prevailed. When he returned to Palamós, the puppy—Charlie, he was called—was with him. "Charlie J. Fatburger is (as Diana V. [Vreeland] would *scream*), deevine," he wrote Cecil that fall.

In January, 1962, Truman returned to the United States to interview Perry's sister, whose testimony was crucial to an understanding of her brother's character, and to visit Perry and Dick on Death Row—"an extraordinary and terrible experience," he told Cecil. While he was in New York, Babe Paley gave him a large welcome-

home party. But the sight of a hundred famous faces turned in his direction, which would have thrilled him not long before, now left him almost numb. Back in Verbier, he described his feelings to Cecil: "Somehow they, it, the whole thing seemed quite unreal, remote. The only thing that seemed real was Kansas, and the people there—I suppose because of my work. Actually, it is rather upsetting—the degree to which I am obsessed by the book. I scarcely think of anything else. The odd part is, I hate to work on it: I mean, actually *write*. I just want to think about it. Or rather—I don't *want* to; but I can't stop myself. Sometimes I go into sort of trance-like states that last four or five hours. I figure I have another 18 months to go. By which time I should be good and nuts."

After two summers in Spain, he and Jack planned to spend the summer of 1962 in Corsica. Within hours they realized their mistake. The other tourists were loud and pushy, and Jack watched with disgust as one group noisily drove off on a boar hunt. "Of course they all arrived back at the hotel the next morning not speaking to one another," he gleefully recounted, "and without so much as a Boar Turd amongst the lot of them." Describing their stay as a nightmare, Truman added that the Corsicans "combine the worst characteristics of both the wops and the frogs—ugh." Back to Palamós they scurried, to the best house yet, with a private beach, a large garden, and a cottage by the sea. Jackie Kennedy's sister, Lee Radziwill, came in the middle of July; she was followed by the Paleys. When the Paleys left, Gloria Vanderbilt arrived, accompanied, Truman informed Cecil, "by a lady-in-waiting in the form of Tammy Grimes—who wears *mink* eyebrows and a leather bikini."

In the process of changing husbands again, Gloria had warned her future Number Four, a sometime editor and writer named Wyatt Cooper, to be discreet in the letters he addressed to Palamós. Truman, she said, was certain to open and read them before she did. What she apparently did not explain to Wyatt was that she did not want Truman to know of their affair while she was telling him about another romance entirely. "Well, Gloria has come and gone and we had a 'real nice' visit," Truman wrote Marie and Alvin Dewey, adding, with the excitement of a reporter in possession of a hot scoop: "There *is* a new man in her life. It's supposed to be a great secret, but I will tell you because I just must tell somebody,

it's so fantastic: Nelson Rockefeller. Heaven knows what will come of it—it would certainly be a strange thing if they got married." Nothing did come of it, and Gloria married Cooper, with whom she had two sons.

Truman and Cooper later became good friends, and in 1972 they collaborated on a television prison drama, *The Glass House*. Truman's friendship with Gloria, on the other hand, which had been tenuous from adolescence, progressively deteriorated. "She was a nasty little girl," he said. "She lied about her mother during her custody trial, and she was terrible to her until shortly before she died. She had a father complex. Her first husband, Pat DiCicco, was a rough-and-ready type who used to really beat her. She finally got rid of him and married Leopold Stokowski, who was more like a grandfather, or a great-grandfather, than a father. I introduced her to Sidney Lumet, and she only married him because she thought he would make her a movie star. But the only part she ever got was as a nurse in some television thing. When she found out he wasn't going to make her a star, she dumped him quick.

"Why she married Wyatt is a mystery. He certainly wasn't like anybody's father, although he did tell me that when they had sex together, she would scream, over and over, 'Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!' He grew to hate her, and he was terrified that she would leave him and take their two boys, to whom he was devoted. He was always calling me, asking me what he should do. I think that that anxiety contributed to his death. In fact, I had lunch with him just before he died [in 1978]. He seemed fine, but he kept talking about those boys. 'If only I can live another ten years,' he said, 'everything will be all right. But Gloria just isn't responsible enough to raise them.' "

In early October, Truman and Jack were back in Verbier, where, Truman said, he was "bedded down with my book—on which am now heading into *fourth* year. Maybe one day it will all seem worth it: I wonder though." In November he interrupted his work long enough for a lunch with royalty in London. The lunch, in honor of the Queen Mother, was given by Cecil, who boasted to his diary that it was "another milestone—the biggest yet perhaps—in my social rise." Besides Truman, just three others had received invitations to his house on Pelham Place: Frederick Ashton, principal choreographer of the Royal Ballet; Ashton's wife, June; and that

poet with the medieval manner, Edith Sitwell, who profusely apologized for not being able to rise from her wheelchair to curtsy to the royal guest. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Ma'am, I'm so ashamed that I can't get up to greet you," she said.

The conversation was lively and energetic. For his part, Truman told the Queen Mother the latest gossip about the Whitney family —Jock Whitney, Babe Paley's brother-in-law, had recently retired as ambassador to Britain—and he talked about the book he was writing. By dessert "restraint was far away," said Cecil. "T was yelping with laughter & gave a great whoop of joy when the summer pudding appeared." Truman had made yet another conquest. After Cecil had escorted the guest of honor to her car, she pulled down the window to say "she thought Mr. Capote quite wonderful, so intelligent, so wise, so funny."

"Yes, he's a genius, Ma'am," Cecil gravely replied.

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BY the beginning of 1963, *In Cold Blood* was three-quarters completed. "I have been rising every morning at 3 or 4 to work —it is now 4," Truman told Cecil in February. "But *yesterday* I *finished* Part Three! I have never worked so hard in my life. But it is done, and I know you will be really thrilled by it. It is all I wanted it to be—which is saying a great deal. But I am exhausted; tense as nine newly tuned pianos."

True to his vow, he had stayed in Europe, away from the distractions of Manhattan, so that he could concentrate on his work. He could not do much more until he had an ending, however, until Perry and Dick had either been hanged or given reduced sentences. Neither of those possibilities appeared imminent; after nearly three years on Death Row, they were still bouncing appeals between the state and federal judicial systems. To the Deweys he confessed, not for the first time, his chagrin and frustration: "Will H & S [Hickock and Smith] live to a ripe and happy old age?—or will they swing, and make a lot of other folks very happy indeed? For the answer to these and other suspenseful questions tune in tomorrow to your favorite radio program, 'Western Justice,' sponsored by the Slow Motion Molasses Company, a Kansas Product."

There was no longer any point in isolating himself. It was time to go home, and in early March, after nearly three years away, he and Jack returned to America and once again took up residence in Oliver Smith's basement apartment in Brooklyn Heights. For Truman, coming back to New York was like coming back to the world. "I lead such a monastery life," he had grumbled in Europe. "No news

at all." Now, throwing off his monk's robe—"*I need a rest from my book*," he emphatically explained—he let loose and enjoyed himself, slipping into old routines as easily as he slipped into his old back booth at the Colony. He lunched with his favorite swans, spent weekends at Kiluna Farm with Babe and Bill Paley, and visited the Kennedys in the White House. As an emblem of his liberation, he bought what was to be one of his proudest possessions: a silver-blue Jaguar sports car. "It's like Fabergé on wheels," he bragged. "I sailed into the Jaguar place and said, 'I'll take it.' "

He was home in time to say a few last words to Newton, who died of pancreatic cancer at the end of March. Paradoxically, his arrest and the scandal over the pornographic pictures seemed to have strengthened Newton. Not only had he regained his self-esteem, but he had also acquired a stoical serenity he never before had possessed. From wisdom born of torment he said: "The staple of life is certainly suffering, though surely not its real meaning, and we differ mainly in our capacity to endure it—or be diverted from it."

Some of Truman's other friends could do neither. Montgomery Clift long since had descended into a netherworld of drink and drugs. Now he was joined by Cole Porter, whose buoyant spirit had succumbed at last to age, disillusion and the unrelenting pain caused by a long-ago riding accident. In the fifties, when Truman first knew him, Porter was a symbol of the sophisticated world he venerated. Lovingly decorated by Billy Baldwin, his aerie on the thirty-third floor of the Waldorf Towers was a cloud-capped citadel of elegance and luxury. The incandescent grin that once had illuminated those concinnous quarters disappeared with the decade, however. Guests who had once jumped at an invitation to dinner now came out of loyalty alone.

"Cole had a wonderful secretary who kept a revolving list of guests—he couldn't get that many people to go there," Truman recalled. "I would go about once every six weeks. I looked forward to dinner there like I looked forward to the guillotine. During his later days Cole wasn't exactly *non compos*, but he wasn't all there either. He was always immaculately dressed—I mean immaculately—and the food was superb. He would have one double martini before dinner, and after that he wouldn't say a word for the rest of the night. He just sat there, not talking and not eating, and I would talk to myself. After a while I got used to it and really didn't mind it so much. I would even turn on the television while we were eating. Then exactly at 10:30 his valet would come in and say, 'It's time for you to go to bed, Mr. Porter,' and I would leave.

"Cole wasn't always like that, of course. When I first knew him, he was very funny and witty. He used to describe his sex life in great detail—I think it excited him. I used a story in *Answered Prayers* about a wine steward he tried to get to go to bed with him.* Cole thought it was amusing, and now every time I see the man, who's the maître d' of one of the most expensive restaurants in Manhattan, I just smile. Because I know what his past was. But there was another story Cole told that I didn't use because it sounded rather unpleasant—and I liked Cole. It was about his long affair with that actor, Jack Cassidy. Cassidy would say, 'Do you want this cock? Then come and get it!' Then he would stand away so that Cole, whose legs had been paralyzed in that awful riding accident, would have to crawl toward him. Every time Cole got near, Cassidy would move farther away. This went on for half an hour or forty-five minutes before Cassidy would finally stop and let Cole have it."

Yet while he was dining with Cole, lunching with Babe, or sitting through Jackie Kennedy's Mozart evening at the White House, Truman was thinking about, and usually talking about, his book. "If only I could empty my soul and heart and head of it for a while," he lamented. But that he could not do—nor did he want to do. *In Cold Blood* had become part of his life: he could put it aside, but he could not forget it. "Eventually it began to own him," said Phyllis Cerf. "Emotionally, it became something bigger than he could handle. Those boys began to own him, and the town [Garden City] began to own him."

One night, at a dinner party given by Diana Vreeland, he spoke briefly about what he was writing, then, seeing the fascinated faces around him, continued, describing Holcomb and Garden City, the people who lived there, the Clutters, the killers—everything. "He spoke the way he wrote," recalled D. D. Ryan, his old friend from *House of Flowers* days. "He was writing, but orally. It was all formed

* One of Truman's characters relates how the composer lured the steward onto his living-room couch by claiming he needed advice on storing his wine. Every time Porter made an advance, such as squeezing his leg, the steward coolly named his price for allowing such a liberty. As the advances became bolder, so did the bill. When it reached two thousand dollars, Porter angrily wrote out a check and, quoting the lyrics of one of his most famous songs, said: "Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today. Now get out."

in his mind. This went on for two hours, maybe even three or four. Nobody said a word. Nobody moved all that time. It was the greatest tale-telling I've ever witnessed."

The magnetic attraction of Kansas soon pulled him west again. In mid-April he set off in his Fabergé on wheels, detouring first to Monroeville to visit his remaining relatives—Jennie, the last of the Faulk cousins, had died in 1958—and to pick up Nelle Harper Lee, who was joining him again. On their way, they passed through Shreveport, Louisiana, where Arch now lived. "Well, should I?" Truman asked. "Why not?" Nelle answered, and they both giggled. Registering at a motel, he called his father, whom he had not seen since Nina's death, nine years before. "My wife Blanche had never met him," said Arch. "Never, not in eighteen years of marriage; and we had a lovely visit."

It is impossible to know which of those tellers of tall tales, father or son, told more lies during their hours together, but the honor probably belonged to Truman. The Queen Mother's words of praise, which would have turned anyone's head, still rang in his ears like the chimes of Big Ben. In the months since November, Cecil's lunch had been transformed into a royal tribute to Truman himself. As he recounted it, it had taken place not in Cecil's house, but in Buckingham Palace—he even altered Cecil's carefully chosen menu —and the Queen, not her mother, had been the hostess. ("I was in London last week, and the queen asked me to lunch," he had written his grandmother. "She was very bright and charming, and very pretty!") A version of the story found its way back to Cecil, who was understandably annoyed.

Arch had a photograph taken of Truman standing proudly beside his new car in the Persons driveway. Never one to overlook a promotional gimmick, Arch then had it printed on postcards, which he sent to his friends and customers. The caption underneath read: "Truman Capote, beloved only son of Arch Persons, owner of the Dixie Scale Co., on a recent visit to his father at Shreveport, La., in his new 1963 Jaguar Special. Author of 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' 'Other Voices Other Rooms,' 'The Grass Harp,' 'House of Flowers,' and many other famous books, he is ranked among the first three of his profession throughout the nation. He was recently a guest at both The White House and at Buckingham Palace."

. . .

Truman's most important destination in Kansas was the State Penitentiary, a forty-minute drive from downtown Kansas City. Built in 1864, it resembled a turreted English castle; there was no disguising its grim purpose. Inside its walls, on the second floor of a small two-story structure, was Death Row, twelve cells, each of which measured seven by ten feet and was furnished only with a cot, a toilet and a basin; burning twenty-four hours a day, a bulb of low wattage emitted the glow of a perpetual twilight. The world outside was seen through a sliver of a window, which was barred and covered with black wire mesh. Inmates were let out just once a week for a three-minute shower and a change of clothing; during the summer, when temperatures inside sometimes reached 110 degrees, they were disgusted by their own odor. Although they were allowed newspapers, magazines and books, residents were not permitted radios or television sets. Perry and Dick could talk to each other from their adjoining cells—not that they had much to say to each other—but they had to be cautious in their conversations, which could be overheard by guards and other prisoners.

Truman had visited there twice before. But to finish *In Cold Blood*, the last part of which was mainly a history of their lives in those tiny cells, he needed regular communication with them. Gaining that right was not an easy task. Usually only relatives and lawyers were granted the privilege to come and go and exchange letters with condemned men. Prison authorities refused to cooperate with him, and finally, in desperation, he bribed his way in, he said, paying a powerful political figure to pull the right strings. "If I hadn't got what I wanted, I would have had to abandon everything. I had to have access to those two boys. So I went for broke and asked for an interview with this behind-the-scenes figure, who was a man of great distinction and renown in that state. 'I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you can arrange this,' I said. I didn't know if he was going to accept the money or not. He could have said, 'The hell with you! Now you'll never get inside that penitentiary!' But I guess my offer was very tempting, and he just nodded his head."

However the deal was managed, Truman was allowed to visit Perry and Dick almost at will and, beginning in June, 1963, to correspond with them as well. Their letters to him number in the hundreds—his to them were destroyed, alas—and they document more graphically than could any movie or play the endless tedium of hell, which is what Death Row was. Aside from their never-

ending legal battles, Truman became the chief focus of their lives, their main contact with what Dick called "the free world."

His correspondence started first with Perry, who immediately requested *Webster's New World Dictionary*, which, along with the thesaurus that followed, became the source for the high-flown words he loved to use—and often misuse. To Perry a letter was an epistle, good weather was salubrious, and to be fat was to be adipose. He was fascinated by everything about Truman, the master of words. "Amigo mio, I have a multitude of questions I'd like to ask you," he said, "and many diverse subjects I am desirous to discuss." Constantly advising Truman to be careful, he would end his letters with such comments as "If you're driving be extra cautious. Lots of crazy people on roads."

A photograph of Truman with his Harrods bulldog touched him almost to the point of tears. "I have your picture with Charlie before me now. It packs a lot of affection. That half smile is infectious and I can't seem to keep from smiling myself whenever I chance a glance at it. I cannot believe that I have ever seen a more pleasing and contented expression—it appears to have an effect on me similar to an anodyne and it would be useless for you to ask me to return it. (smile). A little poem comes to mind—please allow me to insert it here—it may help you to understand me and I must put it down on paper before it escapes me.

> Far beyond the distant hills,
> The plaintive sounds of whippoorwills,
> Reverberates the rocks and rills,
> 'Tis such a plaintive cry.
> Is the Mockingbird so often heard,
> Intent to make himself absurd,
> Or just a melancholy bird,
> In truth, as sad as I."

His compliments were more effusive than the Queen Mother's. "I like talented personalities very much and I feel that you are a very perspicacious homo sapien." Truman was father, mentor, perhaps even surrogate lover.

Perry scarcely tried to hide his jealousy at the fact that Dick was also receiving epistles from such a perspicacious homo sapien. He liked to point out to Truman that while he was requesting volumes of real literary value—works by Freud, Thoreau and Santayana, among others—Dick was asking for the potboilers of Harold Robbins. "This kind of literature is only degenerating minds that are already degenerated & perverted," Perry angrily asserted. To Dick himself he sneered, "If you had any sense, you would realize that [Truman] thinks twice as much of me as he does you."

His own letters from Truman Perry kept secret, but he expected Dick—"Ricardo," he called him—to share his. When Dick once declined, Perry went into a deep sulk. "P. has another 'madon' at me because I won't let him read your letters!" reported Dick. "Every time he knew I had heard from you, he asked to read it. To keep from hurting his feelings I would let him. Finally I got tired of his crust, and refused. It shows ignorance, ill-manners and no home raising to request the privilege to read someone's mail—especially their personal mail. *I* would never have the gall to request the reading of P's mail. I suppose I should over-look P's faults, because he *is* kind of ignorant and stupid. He has a very low I.Q., and it is difficult for him to understand a lot of things."

Dick's own letters were more in keeping with those that might be expected from someone in his situation. They began in a fairly good humor—he had had a bedmate like Holly Golightly, he joked—and they became progressively darker. "Forty two months without exercise, radio, movies, sunshine, or any physical means of occupation, is a steady strain on a man's nervous system," he said in September, 1963. "Add the mental strain of facing a death sentence, and you have a man—or men—who slowly becomes an animal—or human vegetable." He was, or said he was, sorry that the Clutters had been murdered, though, he claimed, probably accurately in Truman's opinion, that it was Perry who had actually fired the fatal shots. "I doubt if hell will have me," he declared at one point. "I'm feeling lower than whale manure, and *that* is at the bottom of the ocean," he said at another. In April, 1964, he marked the fourth anniversary of his arrival on Death Row: "At times it seems *forty* years instead of four."

After all those months without sun or exercise, prisoners 14746 (Dick) and 14747 (Perry) began to suffer from the illnesses of old age. Perry complained of excruciating pains and occasional paralysis of the shoulders and discussed possible cures with Truman, who was suffering from the similar symptoms of bursitis. In one or an-

other of the many magazines Truman sent him, including *Science Newsletter* and *Nature & Science*, he had discovered a remedy for everything except what ailed him. At the same time, Dick's eyesight began to deteriorate, and he was bothered by fainting spells. What seemed to cause him the most anguish, ironically, was the possibility that he might grow bald. "My hair line, at my forehead, has receded a full inch," he said in September, 1964. "I'm almost frantic with worry about it. I certainly do not wish to be bald headed; I am ugly enough. Also, *no one* in my family was ever bald headed. If you have any suggestions, please state them in your next letter." Truman, who was losing his own hair at an equal rate, was of no help.

Perry and Dick also wondered and worried about how they would appear in Truman's book. One concern was practical. Their appeals rested on their claim that the Clutter murders had not been planned, and they were afraid that Truman would tell a different story—as, indeed, he did. Another was, in a sense, esthetic. They did not want to be remembered as psychopathic killers. "My concern is that the info. you have collected is accurate, correct, and not perverted by the relator to his or her purpose for any ulterior motive," Perry said in one letter. "What is the purpose of the book?" he asked in another. Truman danced around the subject, pretending, until the day they were executed, that he was barely half-done and, in fact, might never finish.

When they discovered his title—which said, in three words, that they had planned the murders—Truman lied and informed them they were wrong. But they knew better, and Perry indignantly told him so: "I've been told that the book is to be coming off the press and to be sold after our executions. And that book *IS* entitled 'IN COLD BLOOD.' Whose fibbing?? Someone is, that's apparent. Frankly, 'In Cold Blood' is shocking to the conscience alone." Truman continued his fibs, and with an unhappy sigh, Perry wrote Donald Cullivan, "Sometimes it's hard to know what to believe." Dick was no less concerned, telling him that any suggestion of premeditation "has me extremely disturbed because, as I have repeatedly informed you, there was *no* discussion at *any* time to harm the Clutters." In a nine-page letter, Dick laid all the blame on Perry.

As 1963 passed, and then 1964, their hopes drained away, slowly at first, then faster and faster, like bathwater swirling down a drain. They watched while another inmate, whose last appeal had been turned down, was taken away for a ride on the "Big Swing." Perry

dispassionately described the aftermath. "After we heard the trap door sprung, it was quite awhile there after [eighteen minutes, in fact] that he was lowered to the ground, layed on a stretcher & carried out in a hearse." With his usual thoroughness, he looked up the medical definition of death by hanging and sent it to Truman: "Death by hanging produced by asphyxia suspending respiration by compressing the larynx, by apoplexy pressing upon the veins & preventing return of blood from the head, by fracture of the cervical vertebrae . . . "

Dick began to complain that he could not sleep at night, and Perry wrote less frequently, confessing in February, 1965, that he had been "pretty well depressed & broken in spirit lately." His once precise handwriting had become a scrawl. "My Dear Friend," he said, "what a pair we are? Yes what a pair of poor wretched creatures we are!" Left tantalizingly unclear was who the other half of his pair was, Truman or Dick. On January 27, 1965, came a new execution date, February 18. "Well, the fat's in the fire!" said Dick. He was only slightly premature. They received another stay of execution—their fifth—and then, as Perry wrote Truman, a new date was set: "April 14 you know is the date to drop thru the trap door—in case you haven't been apprised."

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FOR the better part of two years Truman's life was in a state of suspended animation. He could not finish his book until he had an ending, but neither could he put it aside and go on to something else. Although he was no longer consumed with putting words on paper, his work continued in dozens of nagging chores, not least of which was the composition of two letters a week, the maximum permitted, to Perry and Dick. "The writing of the book wasn't as difficult as living with it all the time," he said. "The whole damn thing, day by day by day by day. It was *just* excruciating, so anxiety-making, so wearing, so debilitating, and so . . . sad."

His frustration was made worse by his knowledge that, lying in front of him, missing only thirty or forty pages, was the best-seller that would alter his life irrevocably, that would make him rich and bring him what he coveted above all else: recognition as one of the foremost writers in America—indeed, the world. At that point such a conviction was a matter of fact, not opinion; the success of *In Cold Blood* was as predictable as the future movements of the planets. All those who had read the first three-quarters—and there was a large number of such people—confessed to being mesmerized. Everybody in the publishing world knew about his new work, and so did many others, all across the country. It was mentioned frequently in syndicated columns; in 1962 *Newsweek* had even run a story, complete with a picture of the author, on "the overwhelmingly factual book he has been working on for more than two years."

Such publicity could not have been purchased, particularly for a book that had yet to be completed. *In Cold Blood* had been touched

by a magic wand. At both Random House and *The New Yorker*, where all copies were locked in Mr. Shawn's office, there was the thrill of anticipation, the excitement that comes with the possession of a sure thing. But nothing—nothing at all—could happen until the courts had at last decided the fates of the two Clutter killers.

So Truman watched and waited and went on, as best he could, with the normal business of living. Following his return from the Midwest in 1963, he and Jack went out to Long Island, to the same beach house in Bridgehampton they had shared with Oliver Smith six years before. "The house is divine, and I am working on my *endless* task," Truman wrote Cecil in July. "But I am very restless—waiting for final developments in Kansas. It's all so maddening." Two months later he added: "I am in a really appalling state of tension and anxiety. Perry and Dick have an appeal for a *New Trial* pending in Federal Court: if they should get it (a new trial) I will have a complete breakdown of some sort." Although they were not granted a new trial, the appeals continued, and in November, still tense and anxious, Truman made yet another trip to Kansas.

He went first to California to visit Cecil, who was designing the sets and costumes for the movie version of *My Fair Lady*. They met in San Francisco, where Cecil was eager to introduce him to his new, thirty-year-old lover, who was everything that Cecil had ever desired. He was tall, blond and athletic; he had been a member of one of the American teams at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. An art historian who was studying and lecturing at Berkeley, he was also far better educated than Cecil himself; he had attended both Harvard and Princeton, where his roommate had been his lover and where belly-rubbing was so common that it was named "First Year Princeton." By some miracle, this handsome all-American was as enthralled by Cecil as Cecil was by him. To Cecil's gratification, Truman heartily endorsed their May-December romance, telling him that his athlete was "adorable, intelligent, appreciative, very fond of you, an important addition to your life." Glowing in the reflected praise, Cecil added, "Felt very proud of my choice, who today seemed more delightfully gay & intelligent than ever."

If Truman showed any of the tension he had referred to in his letters, it was not noticed by Cecil, who was caught up not only in his love affair, but also in a running feud with George Cukor, the director of *My Fair Lady*. During the following days in Los Angeles, Cecil was once again impressed by Truman's ability to instantly take

command. "He was completely at home on the [studio] lot here," Cecil observed. "He was effusively received by the hypocrite Cukor & confided in by Rex [Harrison], who says that he likes working with Audrey [Hepburn], as she has such discipline, but she possesses no fire. Liz Taylor for all her slatterliness does possess this quality."

After his California holiday, Truman dutifully went to Kansas, where he saw friends in Garden City and spent perhaps an hour and a half each with Perry and Dick in Lansing. "I had so much to say & discuss with you and so little time to say it in," complained Perry a few days later. "It seemed as though we no sooner greeted each other, had a few brief words and here I was, back in my limbo again, feeling as though I was cheated of something and a little confused and disappointed."

Truman associated Verbier with hard work and isolation, and in December, 1963, he let Jack go there by himself while he drove to Florida to stay with rich friends, the Gardner Cowleses in Miami Beach—Cowles owned *Look* magazine—and the Guinnesses in Palm Beach. He took Donald Windham with him to the Cowleses', where he received a phone call telling him that Perry and Dick had won another appeal. Donald was witness to his depression and sudden nervousness, which manifested itself as a twitch in his cheek, a compulsive blink, and a darting, snakelike movement of his tongue. "I really have been feeling very low—almost bitter," Truman confessed to the Deweys. "It's all absolutely beyond belief. My God! Why don't they just turn them loose and be done with it. . . . Well, there's nothing to be done—except try to get through another year of this totally absurd and unnecessary torture."

Jack lent his support from a distance. "Go on with your work, it's a miracle of writing," he said. "That's what you must keep before you, day in, day out, waking and sleeping—your story." But Truman's restlessness sent his imagination off in a dozen different directions. He considered buying a house in Westchester, for example, not far from the Cerfs; but he quickly gave up the notion when Jack wrote back: "No, I want to be at least within bicycling-distance of water. Salt water!" He then said that he would like to spend the summer in Spain again. Jack sent a second veto, advising him to stay in America, close to his story. In the end, they again rented a house

on Long Island, where Truman at last bought a piece of American real estate, a small house in Sagaponack, just east of Bridgehampton.

About a hundred yards from the ocean, the house had a high-ceilinged living room and a tiny bedroom downstairs; upstairs, reached by a spiral staircase, were two or three more rabbit-warren bedrooms. Jack hated the place immediately, believing, probably rightly, that they both would go mad in such a small space. He said nothing, but Truman undoubtedly read his face: not long after, he also bought the house next door. He would live in the first house, he said, and Jack would live in the second.

Thus they had found the ideal arrangement: they were within hailing distance, but they could not see each other through the trees and shrubs. Truman's house was just right for him. He removed walls upstairs, giving his little house a more spacious feeling. Jack's house was just right for him, an old-fashioned gingerbread cottage, with one large room downstairs and another one upstairs. He was so pleased, in fact, that, hat in hand—an unusual gesture for him—he asked Truman for title to his own house: he was forty-nine and, standing on his own ground at last, he yearned for the security of actual ownership. "I never asked Truman for anything," he said. "I never asked him for favors. But I did ask him for my house, and he gave me the deeds for both of them in a butterfly box. He said that it was too much trouble to separate titles, so I could have them both in my name. I have never seen anybody else in my life do anything as generous as that."

In October, 1964, Truman went back to Kansas, taking with him Sandy Campbell—Donald Windham's lover—who was a fact checker at *The New Yorker*, assigned, at Truman's request, to check the accuracy of *In Cold Blood*. They first flew to Denver, where Truman had arranged a party for some of his Garden City friends, most notably the Deweys, and Mary Louise Aswell, who had left *Harper's Bazaar* in the fifties for a new life in New Mexico. The Deweys, Sandy noted in his diary, were almost like parents to Truman: he called Alvin Pappy, and Alvin had nicknamed him Coach. They then drove east to Garden City, where Sandy verified such things as dates and distances. Sandy said that he had worked with many *New Yorker* writers, including A. J. Liebling, Richard Rovere and Lillian Ross, but Truman was the most accurate. It was the opinion of Mary Louise that Truman most treasured, however, and

he anxiously awaited her verdict on the first three-quarters of his book. He was profoundly pleased by her response. "That you really liked my book was so touching, and such a *reward.* I sort of dreaded your reading it—because I knew that if I was fooling myself, and had made a real mistake (about the artistic possibilities of reportage) you wouldn't have been able to lie (successfully)."

Just before Christmas, Truman spoke, as he had before, at the Poetry Center of Manhattan's Ninety-second Street Y.M.H.A. The program said he would read from *Breakfast at Tiffany's.* But some, suspecting that he would surprise them with *In Cold Blood* instead, arrived with more than the usual eagerness, like movie fans hoping for the sneak preview of a long-anticipated film. They were not disappointed. *Newsweek,* which sent a reporter, said that the effect he created was like that of "a fabulist of the old order, weaving a spell with voice and word, making one hear, see, feel, *sense.* What he shaped was a whole landscape and the fateful people in it."

Perry's and Dick's numerous appeals not only caused him depression and anxiety. They presented him with an insoluble moral dilemma. He desperately wanted his book to be published. But publication almost certainly meant the painful deaths of two men who regarded him as their friend and benefactor, two men whom he had helped, counseled, and, in Perry's case, tutored. "It wasn't a question of my *liking* Dick and Perry," he carefully explained to an interviewer. "That's like saying, 'Do you like yourself?' What mattered was that I *knew* them, as well as I know myself."

His entire future awaited their walk to the Big Swing, and his comments to his friends, which indicated his real feelings, ran like a grim counterpoint to the consoling comments he was making to Perry and Dick. Perry was of course unhappy when the Supreme Court refused in January, 1965, to hear their latest appeal. But where he saw a black cloud, Truman saw a ray of sunshine. "As you may have heard," he told Mary Louise, "the Supreme Court denied the appeals (this for the *third* damn time), so maybe something will soon happen one way or another. I've been disappointed so many times I hardly dare hope. But keep your fingers crossed." To Cecil he added: "I'm finishing the last pages of my book—I *must* be rid of it regardless of what happens. I hardly give a fuck anymore *what* happens. My sanity is at stake—and that is no mere idle

phrase. Oh the hell with it. I shouldn't write such gloomy crap—even to someone as close to me as you."

In Verbier, waiting out events, he decided not to go back to America for the execution in February, working out an arrangement by which Sandy Campbell would cable him, word for word, the story in the *Kansas City Star.* "Hope this doesn't sound insane," he wrote Sandy, "but the way I've constructed things, I will be able to complete the entire ms. within hours after receiving [the] cable. Keep *everything* crossed." At the last moment the hangings were postponed once again. Desperate for information, he made a transatlantic call to one of the defense lawyers, who infuriated him by suggesting that Perry and Dick might not only escape the noose, but actually gain their freedom. "And I thought: yes, and I hope you're the first one they bump off, you sonofabitch," he told the Deweys, who shared his frustration. "But what I actually said was: 'Is that really your idea of justice?—that after killing four people, they ought to be let out on the streets?' "

The lawyer's optimism was unfounded, and the hangings were rescheduled for the early hours of April 14. This time Truman could not stay away—Perry and Dick had asked him to be with them—and he returned to America. Accompanied by Joseph Fox, who had replaced Bob Linscott as his editor at Random House, Truman arrived in Kansas City a day or two early. "He was incredibly tense and unable to really talk to anybody for more than two or three minutes at a time," recalled Fox. "Tears rolled down his cheeks at the thought of what was going to happen. Alvin came to call, along with a couple of the other K.B.I. agents, and Truman would pace around our suite at the Muehlebach Hotel. At night we went to the movies or strip shows and transvestite shows—Kansas City is one of the six or seven biggest transvestite centers in the country."

For some reason, Perry and Dick thought that Truman might help them obtain another stay of execution, and they tried desperately to reach him. Perry telephoned the hotel two or three times, and an assistant warden, acting on their behalf, tried seven or eight times more. But another delay was the last thing Truman wanted. Rather than say no, he let Fox answer the phone and make his excuses. Finally Perry telegraphed the Muehlebach. "AM ANTICIPATION AND WAITING YOUR VISIT. HAVE BELONGINGS FOR YOU. PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE BY RETURN WIRE WHEN YOU EXPECT TO BE HERE." Tru-

man cabled back: "DEAR PERRY. UNABLE TO VISIT YOU TODAY. BECAUSE NOT PERMITTED. ALWAYS YOUR FRIEND. TRUMAN."

Perry was aware, of course, that he was lying—that he would have been permitted to visit. At 11:45 that night, one hour and fifteen minutes before the noose was put around his neck, he sat down and wrote a joint letter to him and Nelle. "Sorry that Truman was unable to make it here at the prison for a brief word or two prior to [the] neck-tie party. Whatever his reason for not showing up, I want you to know that I cannot condemn you for it & understand. Not much time left but want you both to know that I've been sincerely grateful for your friend[ship] through the years and everything else. I'm not very good at these things—I want you both to know that I have become very affectionate toward you. But harness time. Adios Amigos. Best of everything, Your friend always, Perry."

In a heavy rain, Truman and Joe drove to the prison, and Truman was able to say a few last words to each of them. Dick was hanged first. "I just want to say I hold no hard feelings," he said. "You people are sending me to a better world than this ever was." Less than half an hour later he was dead. Just after 1 A.M. Perry was brought into the warehouse where the gallows had been set up. "I think it's a helluva thing to take a life in this manner," he said. "I don't believe in capital punishment, morally or legally. Maybe I had something to contribute, something . . ." He stopped, and in a lower voice, added: "It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize." The rope was placed around his neck, a black mask was put over his eyes, and at 1:19 A.M. he too was pronounced dead.

Crying, Truman later called Jack to describe the terrible scene he had witnessed. Jack was unsympathetic. "They're dead, Truman," he said. "You're alive."

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AND so at last the wait was over. Truman flew back to New York, tightly gripping Joe Fox's hand all the way and carrying with him a forty-page essay in which Perry had set down his thoughts on life and death. "*De Rebus Incognitis*" ("Concerning Unknown Things"), Perry had titled it, ending with a sentiment that may or may not have consoled him when the rope was placed around his neck: "Did we not know we were to die, we would be children; by knowing it, we are given our opportunity to mature in spirit. Life is only the father of wisdom; death is the mother."

Reading those unexpected words from the grave only prolonged Truman's distress, and in the next few days he made many more tearful phone calls to friends and relatives. "Perry and Dick were executed last Tuesday," he wrote Donald Cullivan. "I was there. I stayed with Perry to the end. He was calm and very brave. It was a terrible experience and I will never get over it. Someday I will try to tell you about it. But for the moment I am still too shattered. Over the years I'd become very devoted to Perry. And Dick, too." Then, as if to assuage his guilt for refusing to talk to them until the hour before they were hanged, he added: "*Everything possible was done to save them.*" Days later, at a cost of seventy dollars and fifty cents each, he ordered simple granite markers for their graves, which were placed side by side in a cemetery near the prison:

RICHARD EUGENE HICKOCK *June 6, 1931* *April 14, 1965*	PERRY EDWARD SMITH *Oct. 27, 1928* *April 14, 1965*

By the middle of June he had completed the pages describing their last night, when the rain, rapping on the high warehouse roof, sounded "not unlike the rat-a-tat-tat of parade drums." *In Cold Blood* was finished. "Bless Jesus," he exclaimed to Cecil. "But incredible to suddenly be free (comparatively) of all these years and years of tension and aging. At the moment, only feel bereft. But grateful. Never again!"

Everything he had set out to do Truman succeeded in doing. He had gambled and he had won. On a superficial level, *In Cold Blood* is a murder story of riveting vitality and suspense. On a deeper level, it is what he had always known it could be, a Big Work—a masterpiece, in fact, that he has infused with the somber energy of Greek tragedy. With stately, even majestic confidence he sets his scene in the first paragraph. "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."

Employing the skills he had learned as a screenwriter, he presents his main protagonists in short, cinematic scenes: the Clutters, unsuspectingly awaiting their fate in the shadows of those dignified grain elevators, and their killers, racing across Kansas to meet them, Nemesis in a black Chevrolet. Going about its peaceful pursuits in Holcomb is one America—prosperous, secure, and a little smug. Along with his many good qualities, Herb Clutter is rigid and self-righteous; he promises to fire any employee caught "harboring alcohol," and he refuses to let Nancy even consider marrying her boyfriend, whose only offense is that he is Catholic. Speeding across the plains is the other America—poor, rootless and misbegotten. "Transient hearts," Randolph prophetically named such people in *Other Voices;* envy and self-pity are their only legacies, violence their only handiwork. Together, victims and killers are America in microcosm—light and dark, goodness and evil.

Truman had long maintained that nonfiction could be both as artful and as compelling as fiction. In his opinion the reason it was not—that it was generally considered a lesser class of writing—was that it was most often written by journalists who were not equipped to exploit it. Only a writer "completely in control of fictional techniques" could elevate it to the status of art. "Journalism," he said, "always moves along on a horizontal plane, telling a story, while fiction—good fiction—moves vertically, taking you deeper and deeper into character and events. By treating a real event with fictional techniques (something that cannot be done by a journalist until he *learns* to write good fiction), it's possible to make this kind of synthesis." Because good fiction writers had usually disdained reporting, and most reporters had not learned to write good fiction, the synthesis had not been made, and nonfiction had never realized its potential. It was marble awaiting a sculptor, a palette of paints awaiting an artist. He was the first to show what could be done with that unappreciated material, he insisted, and *In Cold Blood* was a new literary species, the nonfiction novel.

By that he meant that he had written it as he would have a novel, but, instead of pulling characters and situations from his imagination, he had borrowed them from real life. Perry and Dick, Herb Clutter and Alvin Dewey were as much figures in history as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. He could no more have altered their characters for the sake of his story than he could have affixed a moustache under Washington's nose or shaved off Lincoln's beard. He was fenced in by the barbed wire of fact. Yet within those boundaries, he believed that there was far more latitude than other writers had ever realized, freedom to juxtapose events for dramatic effect, to re-create long conversations, even to peer inside the heads of his characters and tell what they are thinking. "An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere," said Flaubert. And so, in the universe of *In Cold Blood*, is Truman's presence felt in every sentence.

One by one, he repeats the themes, images, and leitmotifs that permeate his novels and short stories: loneliness, the death of innocence, and the danger that lurks in every shadow. In an uncanny way, his true-life chronicle is the culmination of his fiction, the logical extension of all that he had written before. From a multitude of facts he presents only those that interest him. Or, in his words: "I built an oak and reduced it to a seed." Another writer might have laid emphasis on Holcomb's small-town closeness and the warmth

and good-heartedness of its citizens. Truman chooses instead to pick up a thread from his fiction and to dwell on its isolation. Though one sits on arid plains and the other is surrounded by swamps, his Holcomb sounds very much like the Noon City of *Other Voices*—lonesome is the adjective he applies to both. Finney County becomes Capote country, and the people who move through his pages become Capote characters.

In Cold Blood may have been written like a novel, but it is accurate to the smallest detail—"immaculately factual," Truman publicly boasted. Although it has no footnotes, he could point to an obvious source for every remark uttered and every thought expressed. "One doesn't spend almost six years on a book," he said, "the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions."

Challenged by such a flag-waving declaration, several out-of-town reporters made trips to Garden City, hunting for mistakes that would force him to eat those words. A man from the *Kansas City Times* assumed he had found one when he talked to Myrtle Clare, one of the book's most colorful bit players. Dressed in a stylish purple suit, she did not at all resemble the dowdy woman Truman had described. But she had looked every bit that bad, she assured the reporter; she had been postmistress when the Clutters were killed, and she had worn old clothes to drag around seventy-pound sacks of mail. If some people objected to Truman's account, she said, it was because he described Holcomb "as a broken-down place with hicks, but that's the way it is and if the shoe fits, wear it, that's what I say." Inevitably, a few slips were uncovered. After the murders, Nancy's horse Babe was sold to a local man, for instance, not to an outside Mennonite farmer, as Truman had said. But in the end, none of those who dogged his tracks unearthed any errors of substance.

Although the newspaper sleuths did not know it—Alvin and Marie Dewey were careful not to contradict him—Truman did give way to a few small inventions and at least one major one, however, and *In Cold Blood* is the poorer for it. Following his usual custom, he had anguished over his ending, suffering so much from indecision that his writing hand froze and he was forced to compose on a typewriter. Should he end with the executions? he wondered. Or should he conclude with a happier scene? He chose the latter scenario. But since events had not provided him with a happy scene,

he was forced to make one up: a chance, springtime encounter of Alvin Dewey and Susan Kidwell, Nancy Clutter's best friend, in the tree-shaded Garden City cemetery, an oasis of green in that dry country. The Clutters are buried there, and so is Judge Tate, who sentenced their killers. Susan is now completing the college that she and Nancy had planned to attend together, Nancy's boyfriend has recently married, and Alvin's older son, who was just a boy on that murderous night, is preparing to enter college himself. The message is clear: life continues even amidst death.

It is almost a duplicate of the ending of *The Grass Harp*, which brings together Judge Cool and young Collin Fenwick in a similar reunion in a cemetery. But what works in *The Grass Harp*, which is a kind of fantasy, works less well in a book of uncompromising realism like *In Cold Blood*, and that nostalgic meeting in the graveyard verges on the trite and sentimental, as several otherwise admiring critics obligingly pointed out. "I could probably have done without that last part, which brings everything to rest," Truman admitted. "I was criticized a lot for it. People thought I should have ended with the hangings, that awful last scene. But I felt I had to return to the town, to bring everything back full circle, to end with peace."

In Cold Blood is a remarkable book, but it is not a new art form. Like the picture on the cover of *Other Voices*, Truman's claim that it was obscured rather than spotlighted his achievement. Indeed, the term he coined, nonfiction novel, makes no sense. A novel, according to the dictionary definition, is a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length: if a narrative is nonfiction, it is not a novel; if it is a novel, it is not nonfiction. Nor was he the first to dress up facts in the colors of fiction. Although literary historians could refer to examples as far back as the seventeenth century, there were several of more recent vintage, including John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Rebecca West's *The Meaning of Treason*, Lillian Ross's pieces for *The New Yorker*, and Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day*. The trend in both journalism and history was to tell real stories through detail and anecdote, to relate not only what characters did, but also what they ate for breakfast on the day they did it. "Field Marshal Rommel carefully spread a little honey on a slice of buttered bread," wrote Ryan, for instance, as he described the activities of the German commander just before D-Day.

Yet Truman did have a case, though it might have been better if he had let someone else make it for him. He had written something

original, perhaps even unique. *In Cold Blood* was not a new species, but to many readers it seemed like one. Others had used fictional techniques, but no one else had actually written a book of nonfiction that could be read as a novel. He was the first novelist of stature to chance his time, talent and reputation on such a long work of reportage, and to many of his peers, *In Cold Blood* was the pioneer that opened up a new territory. In the years to come there was the literary equivalent of a land rush as they followed his lead, searching for equally engrossing material in the day's news. Many of the titles that have jumped onto the best-seller lists since then, from Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* to Bob Woodward's *Veil*, probably would not have been written, or would not have been written in the same way, if he had not come upon his interesting thing in the fall of 1959.

During its long history *The New Yorker* has printed many important and influential pieces, but never, before or since, has it printed one that has been as eagerly anticipated as *In Cold Blood*. The excitement that had been building for five years was finally to be satisfied. As always, the magazine's cover offered no hint as to what was inside; readers had to know when and where to look. *In Cold Blood* was not even listed in its skimpy table of contents. But people found what they wanted; the four issues broke the magazine's record for newsstand sales. Searching for precedents, some reached back to the time of Dickens, when California gold miners sat around campfires, listening to the latest chapters of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and crowds waiting at a pier in Manhattan shouted to a ship arriving from England, "Is Little Nell dead?"

Perhaps the hardest place to find the magazine, ironically, was where interest was most intense: Finney County, Kansas. For the first issue, *The New Yorker*'s sleepy circulation department had not considered shipping more than the customary five copies. "They evidently didn't give it a thought back there in the inner sanctum in New York City," said the *Dodge City Globe*, which ran an editorial assailing the condescending ways of city slickers. Worse still, even those few copies were lost in transit. "Drug stores say they are being besieged with customers wanting the magazine," reported the *Garden City Telegram*. "Those who have read Capote's first installment praise it with great enthusiasm. One local reader, who happened to get a copy while in Kansas City on a business trip last week, said he

started to read the article and 'couldn't put it down until I finished.' "

"Couldn't put it down until I finished" is beautiful music to any writer, and it was a tune Truman heard endlessly in the weeks to come, from friends and strangers alike, who often added, in some embarrassment, that it was the first time they had ever been moved to write a fan letter. "My wife read each *New Yorker* as it came, tearing it out of the postman's hand," wrote a Lutheran minister from Fresno, California. "Now we will re-read all of them; the first time we gobbled them down, glub-glub!" A woman from Massachusetts said that she was glad when it was all over, "so that ordinarily reasonable people can go to bed at an ordinarily reasonable hour, instead of reading slowly and late on the day *The New Yorker* arrives. I am glad that I was able to resist the temptation to fly to New York to be able to read it two days earlier."

Knowing either the author or the facts did not diminish the suspense. "It's tremendous," said Harold Nye, one of the K.B.I. agents who had worked on the case. "Now I can appreciate the painstaking effort you have given to this little murder scene in Kansas. I found myself caught in the web of the story to the point that I couldn't stop to eat. At the end of part one, I told the wife, 'By God, the old boy has really got something here.' " Leo Lerman grumbled that it was "exhausting to wait a week. I have never before seen people glued to anything—on buses—as they are to *The New Yorker*." In her house, said Truman's Greenwich High School teacher, Catherine Wood, there was a tussle over each copy: "*Who gets it first?* That is the big question as the second installment comes out today. I have made myself stop a few minutes to say a word to you. It seems to me this is a perfect accomplishment. I think I have never read anything so *visual*. I *see* the area, the people and I hear them." A few weeks later, after she had finished Part Four, she added, "I suppose you will have imitators; all I can say is: Let them try! I am immensely proud of you."

The panegyrics went on and on. "I would never have believed such a wild, mongrel subject could be brushed and groomed to give off such beautiful glints and inspire such tenderness," stated the poet James Merrill. Anita Loos adjudged that he had written "a Homeric poem as terrifying as the awful age we live in." Noël Coward, who confessed that he was "in a state of dithering admiration," revealed why at generous length: "Before any of the clever boys have a word

to say, *I* should like to say that in my—not particularly humble opinion—you have written a masterpiece. The suspense is almost intolerable & your compassion infinitely moving. There is not one character who does not emerge complete and true. I, who love form and shape in writing, was unable to find one moment of overemphasis or underemphasis. It is a long book without one moment of ennui or one slipshod phrase. I have been haunted by it ever since I put it down so the only thing to do obviously is to take it up again. I will not apologize for the effusiveness of this letter. Praise from fellow writers is always gratifying and this, believe me, comes from the heart."

When the book itself was published in January, 1966, the modern media machine—magazines, newspapers, television and radio—became a giant band that played only one tune: Truman Capote. He was the subject of twelve articles in national magazines, two half-hour television programs, and an unparalleled number of radio shows and newspaper stories. His face looked out from the covers of *Newsweek*, *Saturday Review*, *Book Week*, and *The New York Times Book Review*, which gave him the longest interview in its history. *Life* ran eighteen pages, the most space it had ever given a professional writer, and advertised its huge spread by continuously flashing the words *In Cold Blood* on the electronic billboard in Times Square. "Such a deluge of words and pictures has never before been poured out over a book," observed a somewhat dazed-sounding reporter for *The New York Times*. The downpour would have been even greater if he had not refused many interviews, including an offer to become the first writer to appear on television's *Meet the Press*, which usually favored politicians and statesmen.

By a peculiar stroke of luck, even a bloody fight at the "21" Club became part of the campaign. Movie director Otto Preminger accused Irving ("Swifty") Lazar, who was handling the book's film rights, of reneging on a promise to sell it to him as a starring vehicle for Frank Sinatra. (It was never explained what part Sinatra wanted.) Harsh words were exchanged, and Lazar abruptly ended the argument by smashing a water goblet on Preminger's bald head. Until they saw pictures of that battered dome, which required fifty stitches to repair, some were tempted to imagine that "L'Affaire '21,' " as one newspaper dubbed it, had been a clever stunt to grab the headlines.

The *In Cold Blood* Express was thundering down the tracks. Jean Ennis, director of publicity for Random House, happily acknowledged that she was only a passenger on the Capote Special. "I would like to take responsibility for this publicity windfall, but I can't," she said. "What has happened, has happened." How could she say otherwise when one of Random House's fiercest competitors had pitched in to help? "I'm mad about the new Capote," said Kenneth McCormick, the editor-in-chief of Doubleday. "His new book has upgraded the entire publishing industry. He believes that reporting is more interesting than fiction, and he's proven it." Truman did his best to keep the engine fueled. "A boy has to hustle his book," he joked, and the story behind the book became as familiar as the book itself. He told the tale of his nearly six-year ordeal so often that it almost became part of the national lore, like Washington's chopping down the cherry tree.

Americans do not expect serious books to make money. When they do, as *In Cold Blood* did, they become news. Even before it was published, New American Library had bought paperback rights for an unprecedented half-million dollars (of which Random House had taken a third), Columbia Pictures had paid a record half-million more for movie rights, and foreign publishers and other sales had all but guaranteed another million. "A Book in a New Form Earns $2-Million for Truman Capote," declared a headline in *The New York Times*, which reckoned that he would make fourteen dollars and eighty cents a word. Truman's impatient reply caused more head-shaking: "When you average it out over six years, and consider the taxes, any small-time Wall Street operator gets at least that much."

Sometimes, when a book, a play, or a movie is preceded by so much praise and hyperbole, critics become tetchy, making it a point of honor to show their independence by finding fault. That was not the case with *In Cold Blood*, and most reviews were all that Truman could have hoped for. The smart boys—and the smart girls too—were just as excited as everyone else. "*In Cold Blood* is a masterpiece," proclaimed Conrad Knickerbocker in *The New York Times Book Review*, "agonizing, terrible, possessed, proof that the times, so surfeited with disasters, are still capable of tragedy. There are two Truman Capotes. One is the artful charmer, prone to the gossamer and the exquisite, of *The Grass Harp* and Holly Golightly. The other, darker and stronger, is the discoverer of death. He has traveled far

from the misty, moss-hung landscapes of his youth. He now broods with the austerity of a Greek or an Elizabethan."

He had recorded "this American tragedy in such depth and detail that one might imagine he had been given access to the books of the Recording Angel," said Maurice Dolbier in the *New York Herald Tribune*. In a critique for *Harper's* magazine, Rebecca West, who had produced some extraordinary nonfiction of her own, described him as "an ant of genius" who had crawled over the Kansas landscape in pursuit of his story. "Nothing but blessing can flow from Mr. Capote's grave and reverent book," she said. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, F. W. Dupee, like most of his colleagues, genially dismissed the notion of the nonfiction novel—"to this claim the only possible retort is a disbelieving grin"—but went on to say that "whatever its 'genre,' *In Cold Blood* is admirable: as harrowing as it is, ultimately, though implicitly, reflective in temper."

One of those who wanted to derail that speeding train was Stanley Kauffmann, who had not liked what he had read and who was incensed that so many others had. "It is ridiculous in judgment and debasing of all of us to call this book literature," he declared in *The New Republic*. "Are we so bankrupt, so avid for novelty that merely because a famous writer produces an amplified magazine crime-feature, the result is automatically elevated to serious literature just as Andy Warhol, by painting a soup-carton, has allegedly elevated it to art?" But his diatribe was itself assailed by several of his readers, whose letters, mostly in defense of Truman, took up five columns of a succeeding issue. "Stanley Kauffmann has himself created a new genre," complained one correspondent, "the Non-Review of the Non-Fiction Novel."

Most of the critics in England were also warm with praise when the book appeared there in March. For Truman the congenial atmosphere was ruined, however, by a bitter and rather cheap personal attack in *The Observer* from an old friend, Kenneth Tynan, who argued, among other things, that Truman probably could have saved Perry and Dick from the gallows if he had spent the time and money to prove that they were insane. "For the first time," Tynan wrote, "an influential writer of the front rank has been placed in a position of privileged intimacy with criminals about to die and—in my view—done less than he might have to save them. . . . It seems to me that the blood in which his book is written is as cold as any in recent literature."

Tynan's thesis was based on a sloppy reading of the book and false assumptions about Kansas law, which would not have permitted the psychiatric defense he was suggesting. Truman set him straight in a lengthy reply, during the course of which he charged him with possessing "the morals of a baboon and the guts of a butterfly." The victory was Truman's, but Tynan's accusation stung more than it otherwise might have because it hit an exposed nerve. Truman could not have saved Perry and Dick if he had spent one million dollars, or ten million, but Tynan was right when he suggested that Truman did not want to save them.

Yet Tynan's much-quoted assault, followed by Truman's much-quoted counterassault, furnished still more publicity, and the *In Cold Blood* Express kept on rolling. Jimmy Breslin, the street-smart columnist of the *Herald Tribune*, told his own readers to ignore everything that was said about it and buy the book itself. "The important thing is [it] could affect the type of words on pages you could be reading for a while. This Capote steps in with flat, objective, terrible realism. And suddenly there is nothing else you want to read."

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NINETEEN sixty-six was his year, and a new, or almost new, Truman greeted it. "I've gotten rid of the boy with the bangs," he said. "He's gone, just gone. I liked that boy. It took an act of will because it was easy to be that person—he was exotic and strange and eccentric. I liked the idea of that person, but he had to go." He was no longer the comparative youth of thirty-five who had first gone to Kansas. He was forty-one, a man of substance and fame, one of the best-known writers in America.

Money had begun coming his way, first in driblets, then in a steady flow, months before *In Cold Blood* was published. During most of the time he was researching and writing, he and Jack had lived decently, but not lavishly, chiefly on the sale of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* to Paramount (sixty-five thousand dollars), his advances from *The New Yorker*, and his fee for writing the screenplay of *The Innocents*. Added together and divided by the more than five years he had labored, it did not make a large annual income. He had had to strain to buy the condominium in Verbier and the houses in Sagaponack. His Jaguar had been his only real luxury—and one he could ill afford, at that.

Now, for the first time in his life, he possessed the options that money alone allows. He was not rich. Some of the two million dollars the newspapers had mentioned was eaten up by fees to agents and lawyers; much also went for taxes. But he had a sizable income nonetheless and began to enjoy some of life's expensive pleasures. He traded in his Jaguar hardtop for a later model, a sporty convert-

ible, and bought a Ford Falcon station wagon for Jack, who needed a roomier car to carry Charlie, the bulldog, and Diotima, the cat.

Brooklyn Heights, he decided, was no longer the only place to live in New York, and he purchased a two-bedroom apartment in what a fashion columnist called "the most important new address" in Manhattan, the United Nations Plaza at First Avenue and Forty-ninth Street, next to the East River and the United Nations. Many of the other tenants were heads of corporations, and the lobby was like that of a luxurious modern hotel, hushed, dignified and a little intimidating. But dignified luxury was exactly what the mature Truman Capote desired, and the sixty-two-thousand-dollar price tag, which was regarded as high in 1965, did not deter him. "He wanted to be in the thick of things," said Oliver Smith. "At the time, the U.N. Plaza was very glamorous, *the* place to live in Manhattan."

His apartment, on the twenty-second floor, was as bright as Oliver's basement had been dark, and it had a panoramic southern view that stretched to the bottom of Manhattan and beyond. With the help of Evie Backer, who had decorated for some of his friends, Truman ransacked Third Avenue antiques shops to furnish it. From Brooklyn he brought his collection of paperweights, including the White Rose that Colette had given him in 1948, and his menagerie of ornamental birds, animals and reptiles. His portrait, painted several years earlier by James Fosburgh, Minnie's husband and Babe Paley's brother-in-law, was hung over a sofa in the living room. Every room but one was done with elegant restraint. The exception was the library–dining room, which was a combination of dark reds; walking into it, he wrote in *House Beautiful*, was "rather like sinking into a hot raspberry tart—a sensation *you* may not relish, but I quite enjoy."

Along with his studio in Sagaponack, his aerie at 870 U.N. Plaza was the place he liked most to be, and he never regretted moving there. "I once stayed on the top floor of the Excelsior Hotel in Naples, overlooking the bay," he said. "You could see the shore curving around and the ferries sailing back and forth to Capri. The view from my apartment reminds me of that. I love it at all times. I love it when the sun makes everything sparkle. I love it in the fog when everything looks misty. I love it at dusk and I love it at night, when the green lights on the bridges look like strings of emeralds."

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In February, 1966, shortly after *In Cold Blood* came out, he joined Jack in Verbier. He flew to London in March to help publicize the British edition, and was back in America by April. Followed by a camera crew from NBC News, which was preparing a story, "Capote Returns to Kansas," he gave a reading to an estimated thirty-five hundred students at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. The "Lion of American Literature," the student newspaper called him. He then proceeded to Garden City—his first visit since his book was published—and seemed nervous about what reaction he might expect. He need not have worried. The municipal library placed a framed photograph of him in a prominent position and held a reception to which five hundred fans came, clutching copies for him to autograph. "Garden City Opens Arms to Capote," read the next day's headline in the *Wichita Eagle*.

Manhattan was no less friendly when he gave a reading at Town Hall several days later. His rich friends gave small dinners beforehand, then disembarked at the door from a flotilla of limousines. "His light and somewhat nasal voice held the audience spellbound," said *The New York Times*. "In the eye of the daily beholder," added *Newsday*, "Truman Capote may appear as a slight, balding man. But last night to a rapt audience of New York's most socially prominent readers, he stood 10 feet tall." As usual, "A Christmas Memory" was the favorite, and some still had tears in their eyes when they embraced him afterward. "It was a very moving moment for me," said Babe.

In Cold Blood had established him as an authority on the criminal-justice system, and during the next few years he was often called upon to comment about it. He was opposed to capital punishment —"institutionalized sadism," he termed it—and in favor of prison reforms that would emphasize rehabilitation. His opinions were generally conservative, however, and he did not subscribe to the fashionable view of the sixties that criminals were victims of society. Prosecutors across the country used the examples of Perry and Dick, who had confessed only after some artful prodding by Alvin Dewey and his colleagues, to buttress their opposition to the Supreme Court's *Miranda* ruling, which severely limited the use of confessions in court. Testifying before a Senate subcommittee in July, Truman attacked the ruling, saying that it had all but handcuffed the police. "People simply will not accept the fact that there is such a thing as a homicidal mind," he told the Senators, "that there are people who

would kill as easily as they would write a bad check, and that they achieve satisfaction from it as I might from completing a novel or you from seeing a proposal of yours become law."

A week later he was in France, on his way to Portugal with Lee Radziwill, then to Yugoslavia for a cruise down the Dalmatian coast with the Agnellis. "Have not had a genuine holiday in God knows when," he told Cecil, "so am taking off all of August." In Paris he proudly informed a reporter that *In Cold Blood* was not the only Capote book that would be published in 1966. "A Christmas Memory," first published a decade before, would now be brought out in a special boxed edition. "Serious writers aren't supposed to make money, but I say the hell with that. My next book will be called *A Christmas Memory*. It's forty-five pages long, and it's going to cost five dollars and be worth every cent. How do you like that for openers?"

Alexander after the Battle of Issus, Napoleon after Austerlitz could not have been cockier than Truman was after *In Cold Blood*. He had the golden touch, and he was already looking forward to his next triumph, a party that would end the year as it had begun—with all eyes focused on him.

The idea came to him in June, and it immediately captured his imagination. Nothing, he reckoned, could be a better symbol of the new, grown-up Truman. In one evening he could not only repay his peacock friends for all their years of entertaining him, but also satisfy a wish he had nursed most of his life. "I think it was something a little boy from New Orleans had always dreamed of doing," said Slim. "He wanted to give the biggest and best goddamned party that anybody had ever heard of. He wanted to see every notable in the world, people of importance from every walk of life, absolutely dying to attend a party given by a funny-looking, strange little man —himself."

Once he grabbed hold of something, he did not let it go, and until he left for Europe at the end of July, he sat by Eleanor Friede's pool in Bridgehampton nearly every afternoon, jotting down ideas. He was not merely planning a party; he was creating one. It would have his name attached to it, and his presence would be felt in every detail, just as it was in *In Cold Blood* or any of his other books. Bit by bit, his scheme evolved. The date would be Monday, November 28, 1966; the place, the Plaza Hotel, which, in his opinion, had the

only beautiful ballroom left in New York. To add a touch of the fantastic, he settled on a *bal masqué*, like those in storybooks. Until the masks came off at midnight, identities would be secret, or so he liked to think, and strangers would meet, dance and perhaps fall in love. And like Prospero, he would be the magician who had arranged those revels.

Unlike fabled gatherings from New York's past, in which champagne spurted from fountains, live swans floated on artificial lakes, or gilded trees were hung with golden fruit, his would be a model of good taste and simplicity. Inspired by the Ascot scene in *My Fair Lady*, which Cecil had costumed in black and white, he decided to call his party the Black and White Ball and require his guests—the characters in his own play—to dress in nothing else. Worried that the multihued sparkle of rubies, sapphires or emeralds might destroy his austere design, he considered adding a stern "Diamonds Only" to the bottom of the invitations, but relented when Eleanor, who was one of his oldest friends, told him that if he did, she could not go. "Truman," she said, "I haven't got any diamonds. My tiaras have all been hocked."

Most hosts who give large balls permit their guests to bring companions of their choosing. Truman would not. His control was to be absolute. No one could walk through the door whom he did not know and like, and when he sent an invitation, it meant the named person or persons, and no one else. If he did not like a friend's wife or husband, he dropped both. Single people were expected to come singly. "You can't bring anybody!" he told Eleanor, who, as a widow, protested vigorously. "There will be a hundred extra men. I'll see to it. They'll all be marvelous."

"Come on!" she replied. "You can keep your hundred extra men! I'm not going to get myself all dolled up and put on a goddamned mask to go to the Plaza by myself. I just won't come. And Truman, dear, it's not just me. I'm sure half the single women on your list won't come either." Afraid that she might be right, he pondered and returned the next afternoon with the solution. He would arrange small dinners beforehand, and the diners would come in groups. No woman would have to endure the humiliation of arriving by herself.

The secret of a successful party is not lavish food, expensive wine or extravagant decorations; it is the right mixture of lively guests. No one else had friendships as diverse as his, and lounging by Eleanor's pool, he matched names as carefully as he usually matched

nouns and adjectives. Marianne Moore and Marella Agnelli, Henry Ford and Henry Fonda, Sargent Shriver and John Sargent, Andy Warhol and Mrs. William Rhinelander Stewart, Frank Sinatra and Walter Lippmann, Irving Berlin and Isaiah Berlin. "I don't know whether or not I should invite the Johnsons," he said in a tired voice. "It's such a *bore* when you have to have the Secret Service and all that. No, I don't want the President to come. I think I'll just invite his daughter Lynda Bird." He did, along with the daughters of Teddy Roosevelt (Alice Roosevelt Longworth) and Harry Truman (Margaret Truman Daniel). He also wrote down the names of several princes and princesses, two dukes and a duchess, two marquises, a marchioness and a marquesa, two counts, a countess and a viscomtesse, an earl, a maharajah and a maharani, three barons and two baronesses, and two lords and a lady.

Leo Lerman joked that "the guest book reads like an international list for the guillotine." Thinking along the same line, Jerome Robbins, the choreographer, speculated that perhaps Truman had made up a roster of those who were to be shot first by those fearsome radicals of the sixties, the Red Guards. Oh, no, said John Kenneth Galbraith, not while *he* was on it. Some suggested that maybe Truman was bringing them all together for some momentous announcement, such as the end of the world. But not everyone on his list of more than five hundred was rich and famous. There were many whom celebrity watchers could not begin to identify—farmer friends from Sagaponack, acquaintances from Garden City, and of course Jack and Jack's friends and relatives.

Rarely had Truman enjoyed himself as much as he did during those hours in Bridgehampton. Many of those whose names he was inscribing in his schoolboy notebook could buy and sell great corporations, dictate fashions for millions of women, snap their fingers and cause armies of flunkies to jump up and salute. That was not the kind of power he desired. The power he coveted he held in his hand on those sun-scorched afternoons: he could put their names on his invitation list, and he could just as easily cross them out.

One of his masterstrokes was his choice of Katharine Graham, head of the family that owned both *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*, as his guest of honor. Babe had introduced them in the early sixties, and she had immediately become one of his favorites. Kay Graham was neither beautiful nor stylish like his swans—in those

days Washington wives took a perverse pride in their dowdiness—and she was shy and lacking in confidence. The suicide of her dynamic but philandering husband in 1963 had forced her to take command of the family empire, but she was still walking gingerly, step by step. Though she was in her late forties, she was, in short, ideal clay for Truman's eager sculptor's hands: rich, powerful and yet amenable to instruction. When her own lawyer, who also had an apartment in the U.N. Plaza, suggested that she buy there too, she said no; when Truman recommended it, she said yes. "Now, honey," he told her, "I think you ought to have an apartment in New York, and if you can't run it, I will!"

With considerable reluctance, she had also heeded his command to join him on the Agnelli yacht in the summer of 1965. With him at her side, her fear that she would appear dull proved groundless, and she and Marella became good friends. Sailing off the coast of Turkey, she also had an opportunity to read *In Cold Blood* in galleys, before anyone else. "Truman wouldn't give them to me all at once. He'd just let me read one section at a time, and then we would discuss it. It was wonderful, like going to school, and he would tell me what the people in it were like, what Kansas was like, and why he had done what he had done. Before we finished, I felt I knew all those characters." In November, not long after their return, she gave a dance for him and the Deweys at her house in Georgetown.

"Now, don't think you can ever hide something from me!" he told her. "Because I'll find out about it anyway." She laughed, but he did see a side of her she showed to few others. "She's a very, very warm person," he said. "And very down-to-earth. She once said that seventy percent of the men who came into her office, whether they were Senators or journalists who worked for her, made it clear one way or another that they would like to go to bed with her. 'They just want to say that they've fucked a tycoon,' she told me. But she said she would never have an affair with anyone who either worked for her or was somehow influenced by her paper.

" 'Kay,' I said, 'that leaves out everybody in the country, with the possible exception of some cowboy in Wyoming.'

" 'Well,' she answered, 'maybe someday I'll meet a cowboy in Wyoming.' "

He liked her and wanted to pay her back for her hospitality to the Deweys. But he doubtless had other reasons as well for picking her as his guest of honor. More than Babe, Marella or any of the other swans, she would attract attention. She was arguably the most powerful woman in the country, but still largely unknown outside Washington. Putting her in the spotlight was also his ultimate act as Pygmalion. It would symbolize her emergence from her dead husband's shadow; she would become her own woman before the entire world.

She was vacationing on Cape Cod when he called her up to tell her his plans. "Honey, I just decided you're depressed and need cheering up, so I'm going to give you a party."

"What do you mean?" she said. "I'm not depressed. I'm all right."

"I'm not so sure about that, honey. Anyway, I'm going to do it very big. I've always wanted to give a party in the Plaza ballroom, and it will be in your honor."

She thanked him but thought little more about it. "But as the thing gathered steam," she said, "I was just incredulous. I was stunned by what was happening."

Invitations, written in longhand, went out in early October.

In honor of Mrs. Katharine Graham
Mr. Truman Capote
Requests the pleasure of your company
At a Black and White Dance
On Monday, the twenty-eighth of November
At Ten O'Clock
Grand Ballroom, The Plaza

RSVP
Miss Elizabeth Davis
46 Park Avenue
New York

DRESS
Gentlemen: Black Tie; Black Mask
Ladies: Black or White Dress
White Mask; Fan

What happened after that can best be described as a chemical reaction. By itself, each of the ingredients Truman had poured into his flask—the select guest list, the strict dress code, the thrill of a masked ball—might have remained inert. Together, they fizzed and gurgled, bubbled and boiled, and all of New York knew that something remarkable was soon to occur. "I've never seen women putting so much serious effort into what they're going to wear," said Halston, who was making many of the masks.

As word spread, the scenario went precisely as Truman had hoped: everyone he had ever cared about or thought to impress, from Fifth Avenue aristocrats to West Side intellectuals, was longing to come. For some reason, he had not included his old friend, the actress Ina Claire, and she telegraphed from San Francisco, asking for an invitation. No, he replied. He said the same to Tallulah Bankhead, but when she continued to beg, telling him how important it was to her, he gave in. One acquaintance told him that his wife cried herself to sleep every night because they were not on the list. His heart touched, Truman lied and told him that their invitations must have been lost and that a new set would be forthcoming. But he did not send one to his aunt Marie (Tiny) Rudisill, who, as a result, nurtured a grudge that was never to die. "I feel like I fell into a whole mess of piranha fish," he moaned, joking that he was making so many enemies that he might as well have called his party *In Bad Blood*.

"People were really carrying on," recalled Diana Trilling. "There was a woman who lived in Europe who was absolutely incensed that she hadn't been asked. Oh, there was a great to-do! I never heard anybody who was so voluble about not having been invited to a party! She was so wildly, ludicrously offended that Leo Lerman tried to intercede. For my own part, my dressmaker, a terribly nice man I'm devoted to, said, 'You couldn't possibly get me an invitation, could you? It's the one thing in this whole world I want to go to.' He was so desperate that I wanted to give him mine." But she could not have surrendered it even if Truman had permitted: her husband, Lionel, the most glittering ornament on Columbia's literary faculty, was also eager to attend.

Hearing the commotion from her house in Nyack, Carson McCullers, who was not among the chosen, became increasingly agitated. She had bitterly resented the success of *In Cold Blood*, and she was so tortured by the prospect of a second Capote triumph that she began talking about giving a party of her own, but bigger and better in every way. "I'll invite Jacqueline Kennedy," she told her cousin Jordan Massee.

"Do you know Jacqueline Kennedy?" Massee inquired.

"No, but she'll come. I'll see to it that she comes. And if she comes, you can be certain everyone else will come." Ill and an invalid—she was to die less than a year later—Carson did not give a ball. But the following March she did have an ambulance deliver

her to the Plaza, where she celebrated her fiftieth birthday as a steady stream of admirers came to her suite to pay court.

Truman did not stop at dictating the makeup of his own party; he arranged the preball dinners as well, pairing hosts and guests like a general placing his regiments along the line of battle. "He *ordered* his friends to give preliminary dinner parties," said Glenway Wescott, "and he told me whom I had to have." He changed those guest lists too, juggling names from one group to another. The Haywards were given a show-business contingent that included Claudette Colbert and Frank Sinatra and his new wife Mia Farrow; the Paleys were presented with the Deweys, the Agnellis and Cecil, who had made a special trip from England to see what his *My Fair Lady* design had inspired. Kay and Joe Meehan—he was a leading figure on Wall Street—were assigned some of their society chums, including Elsie Woodward, the mother of poor Bill, whose shotgun death had caused such a scandal in 1955. And Glenway was entrusted with such eminent geriatrics as Thornton Wilder, Katherine Anne Porter, Virgil Thomson, Anita Loos and Janet Flanner, who had been *The New Yorker*'s Paris correspondent since the twenties. In her excitement at being asked, Katherine Anne forgot that she had heartily disliked Truman ever since their summer at Yaddo. "The pimple on the face of American literature," she had called him. Now, cooing to Glenway, she declared, "Oh, I like Truman. I always have."

For a few tense weeks, however, it appeared that Glenway's Rich Amella (minced veal) might never leave the oven. Wilder said he would be in Berlin on November 28, and a variety of ailments finally confined Katherine Anne to her house in Washington. Flanner, who was preparing to fly in from Paris with the first long dress she had purchased in nearly thirty years, was ruffled because Natalia Murray, her best friend and New York hostess, had not received her expected invitation. Flanner asked Glenway to drop Truman "a blackmailing note" saying that unless Murray came, she would not come either. "Without her," said Flanner, "it is inconceivable that I should go and dance with a merry heart—I don't dance at all anymore, actually." Glenway did as he was bidden and was soon pleased to report that she could keep her long dress and plane ticket. "Piping away like Blake's little devil in the cloud," he told her, Truman had sworn that Murray's invitation had merely been misplaced. "He sounded innocent," Glenway said, "and in any event,

having had our way, we'll never know. My general principle about him is that it isn't necessary to like him as much as one admires him."

Others of the appointed dinner hosts doubtless witnessed similar scenes of comedy and consternation. "This city's normally blasé social set is flapping like a gaggle of geese over a not-so-private party being thrown by author Truman Capote for 500 guests here Monday night," a reporter for *The Washington Post* wrote a few days before the momentous night. "The magic Capote name—immortalized by his recent blockbuster nonfiction book, *In Cold Blood*—coupled with a guest list that reads like Who's Who of the World, has escalated his party to a social 'happening' of history-making proportions. The New York newspapers are calling it variously the party of the year, the decade or the century."

Indeed, nearly everyone in the five boroughs seemed to be watching the flutter overhead. When Herb Caen, a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, arrived at Kennedy Airport, a cabdriver noticed his wife's feathered headpiece and said, "Hey, you gonna go to Truman's party, huh?" Guests came from all parts of America—eleven from Kansas alone—as well as from Europe, Asia and South America.

"The ladies have killed me," said Halston, who had been busy for six weeks designing the masks for which he charged as much as six hundred dollars. One woman, he said, had come in eight times, taking an hour each time to have hers fitted. "I think I've lost my mind, and it's just too much," added his rival, Adolfo. By the twenty-eighth, the furor had reached Kenneth's, Manhattan's elite hairdressing salon. Arriving that afternoon, Kay Graham automatically went to the second floor, where ordinary customers were sent, rather than the third, where the smart set went. "But I didn't know Kenneth, didn't know anybody," she said. "I had never really done my hair much. I had never made up my face. I hardly knew how to do it! We didn't *lead* that kind of life in Washington. Then, while I was on the stairs, a wonderfully funny, Cinderella-ish thing happened.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Graham,' one of the hairdressers said. 'We're all so busy with this Black and White Ball! Have you heard about it?'

" 'You won't believe it, but I'm the guest of honor.'

" 'You are? Well, who's doing your hair?'

" 'I don't know. I was just trying to find out.'

" 'Kenneth has to do it,' she said. And so I went to Kenneth himself. But I had to wait while Marisa Berenson had curls placed all over her head. I was the last one in and the last one out."

Many of those expensive coiffures unraveled a few hours later, in a chill, end-of-November rain—Truman had arranged everything but the weather. As the Caens were leaving the Regency Hotel for their dinner, the bell captain whispered, "Boy, is this town full of phonies. Do you know there are people hanging around here in black-and-white clothes who ain't even going to Truman's? Whoo—eeee!" At Eleanor Friede's, where soft background music was playing on the radio, a newscaster interrupted to say that crowds were already beginning to gather outside the Plaza to watch the guests arrive. Eleanor's group, mostly editors and publishers, were amused, but still did not realize how fascinated people were by what seemed, after all, like only a dance. Truman and Kay Graham had drinks at the Paleys', then went to the Plaza for a supper for two, in the suite he had taken for that purpose. But they also were late, not arriving until 9:10, and had time only to enjoy a few bites of caviar before taking up their posts at the ballroom door, alongside a man in white tie and tails, who was to announce each guest to them.

Television cameras had been set up in the lobby, and almost two hundred still photographers and reporters jostled for position, stepping on the delicate toes of every fashion columnist in the city. Security guards had been stationed in the kitchen to keep out gate-crashers, and black-tied and black-masked detectives waited to mingle and watch for jewel thieves. A dozen Secret Service agents came along to look after Lynda Bird Johnson; like it or not, Truman was forced to endure the boredom of Government agents. Four bars had been set up to dispense four hundred and fifty bottles of Taittinger champagne, and chefs were preparing a simple midnight buffet: chicken hash, spaghetti bolognaise, scrambled eggs, sausages, pastries and coffee. (As such things go, Truman spent relatively little on his fete: about sixteen thousand dollars, part of which he was able to deduct from his taxes.)

At 10:15, the ballroom was all but empty. Onlookers began to mutter that there were more reporters and photographers than guests, and it appeared that Pamela Hayward might have been right in fearing "that with all the publicity, the party might flop." But that, of course, was an impossibility. At 10:30 masked faces began

emerging from the rain. "Your names, please," intoned the man in the white tie and tails, who then turned to Truman and Kay and announced, "The Maharajah and Maharani of Jaipur."

The masks did not actually hide many faces, but then, despite Truman's fantasy, they were not really supposed to. Many of the women, like Marella Agnelli and Rose Kennedy, attached theirs to elaborate feather headdresses. Others wore fur around their eyes. Candice Bergen's mask was topped by giant rabbit ears; Frank Sinatra's had cat's whiskers. Mrs. John Converse, Gary Cooper's widow, wore black velvet, from which sprouted a gardenia tree bearing live blooms. Breaking Truman's rule that men wear black, Billy Baldwin had engaged a Tiffany craftsman to make him a golden unicorn's head. "Oh, Billy, that's fantastic!" exclaimed Truman. Princess Luciana Pignatelli had also cheated by painting her mask on her face. She made up for it, however, by attaching to her feathered headdress a sixty-carat diamond, which bobbed above her pretty nose like a piece of bait on a fish line.

In a gesture that hinted of reverse snobbery, the host himself proudly announced that he had paid only thirty-nine cents for his simple Halloween mask. Hearing that, Alice Roosevelt Longworth was even prouder to say that she had bought hers for only thirty-five cents. Whatever they cost, most were removed long before midnight. "It itches and I can't see," complained Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt.

At 11 o'clock, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the historian, was asked if it was a good party. "It's too early to tell how it's going," he judiciously answered. "History is made after midnight." So it was, and most of those who were there talked about it afterward the way they might have a cherished childhood Christmas. There were no spectacular scenes, but there were dozens of memorable ones: Lauren Bacall and Jerome Robbins holding the floor to do one of the best dance numbers since *Top Hat*, the daughters of three Presidents exchanging White House anecdotes, Kay Graham dancing with one of the doormen at the U.N. Plaza, who thanked her for the happiest night of his life. "It was always shimmering," said David Merrick, the Broadway producer, who was not usually given to praising other people's productions. "It was never still, nor was there a static moment." Even Jack, who had resisted coming, had a good time. "It was *formidable vraiment*," he told Mary Louise Aswell, who had elected to stay home in New Mexico. "*Extra!*"

Across the country the party made front-page headlines. "Splendor Runs Over at Capote Ball of Decade," said the *Houston Chronicle*. "Capote's Big Bash Was Just That," added the *Fort Lauderdale News*. Some who had not been there grumbled that such frolics had also attended the fall of the Roman Empire. Pete Hamill wrote an outraged column in the *New York Post* that contrasted what Hamill thought were silly comments from the merrymakers with grisly scenes from the Viet Nam War. A soldier in an Army training camp sent a letter to *Time* objecting to being called upon to protect "this fat, lethargic, useless intelligentsia." To which another correspondent, who said he had spent seven years on active duty, responded: "So Truman Capote had a blast. So what? Must we read the trite analogies about the Roman Empire and the U.S. every time somebody has a [party]?"

Truman himself heard few complaints. One came indirectly from Gloria Guinness, who said that she had made a terrible mistake in adorning her elegant neck with not one, but two heavy necklaces, one of rubies, one of diamonds. Their combined weight had exhausted her, she said, and she would have to stay in bed all the next day to regain her strength. Another came from an actress who had taken a handsome stranger home for the night. She had assumed that he was also a guest, but when she woke up in the morning, she discovered, to her vocal dismay, that he was just one of the detectives in black tie.

"So?" Truman inquired. "What's wrong with that? You had a good time with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she admitted. "I did."

"Well, then, what are you complaining about?"

On the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Joe Meehan's friends lined up to quiz him about what had happened. A few days later Russell Baker, the resident humorist of *The New York Times*, said that "sociologists are still debating whether it was the most important party of the Twentieth Century." Baker's own thought was that "writers surely will experience an instant inflation of self-esteem from the knowledge that one of their colleagues has seized Mrs. Astor's former role as social arbiter." Diana Trilling, an amateur sociologist herself, declared the party "a very complicated social moment in this country's life."

Those who study such things agreed that something important had occurred—exactly what, no one could say. The Museum of the

City of New York assembled masks and souvenirs, which were placed alongside memorabilia from such other social moments in the city's history as George Washington's first inaugural ball and a gala tribute to General Lafayette in 1824. Also taking her cue from *My Fair Lady*, Suzy Knickerbocker, the gossip columnist, all but burst into song when she told her readers: "He did it. He did it. We always knew he'd do it—and indeed he did."

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"You might say Truman Capote has become omnipotent," declared *Women's Wear Daily*, and for several years he very nearly was. His party did not fade from memory; it became a legend, magnified by the hyperbolic atmosphere of the sixties. Every subsequent ball was compared with his, and magazine or newspaper profiles of famous people often noted if they had been on the guest list, which was the irrefutable proof of their importance. So great was Truman's reputation—"his name has a magic ring to people today," Kay Meehan told a reporter—that his mere presence virtually guaranteed the success of any event he attended. "Anything he does, everyone sort of gravitates to," said Jan Cowles. He no longer received invitations; he received beseechments: come to lunch, dinner, cocktails, anything—but come.

"There's a little secret to charity benefits these days," wrote a society reporter for *The New York Times*. "It's called Truman Capote. Mr. Capote is considered by many to be a 64-inch, 136-pound magnet, particularly attractive to the gilded people who count when it comes to fashionable fund raising. His name on an invitation to just about anything, even if it costs money, is as potent as a Rockefeller signature on a check. There is just about no chance that it won't be honored."

Among ordinary, ungilded folk his name was equally potent. Like most other things, fame can be measured, and his was now on the level of a movie idol or a rock star. He was as sought after by the television talk shows as he was by Manhattan hostesses, and nearly every public move he made was considered newsworthy by national

magazines. He had not given a ball; he had presided over his own coronation. He was Truman, Rex Bibendi—King of the Revels.

Every monarch needs a consort, and he had his, Jacqueline Kennedy's younger sister, Lee Radziwill. They were together so often that a woman friend wrote to complain: "I don't want to see another picture of you holding Lee Radziwill's hand. I want you to hold my hand." Suzy Knickerbocker jokingly chided him in her column: "Somebody has got to tell Truman that Lee Radziwill can't have him ALL THE TIME. There's only one Truman and we saw him first." Their jealous finger-waving did no good. Truman was besotted, as enamored of "Princess Dear," as he called her—she was married to a former Polish prince—as he was of Babe. "I love her," he gushed. "I love everything about her. I love the way she looks, the way she moves, the way she thinks." Writing in *Vogue*, he said, "Ah, the Princess! Well, she's easily described. She's a beauty. Inside. Outside."

Although she was less effusive, Lee felt much the same about him. "He's my closest friend. More than with anyone else, I can discuss the most serious things about life and emotional questions. I miss him *terribly* when I'm away from him. I trust him implicitly. He's the most loyal friend I've ever had and the best company I've ever known. We've always been so close that it's like an echo. We never have to finish sentences. We just know what the other one means or wants to say. I feel as if he's my brother, except that brothers and sisters are rarely as close as we are."

It was easy to see why he appealed to her; he was the man of the moment. It was harder to understand why she appealed to him, and many searched in vain for the extraordinary qualities that made him prattle like a moonstruck adolescent. She was stylish and undeniably lovely: slim, dark-haired, and favored with eyes that were, to use his words, "gold-brown like a glass of brandy resting on a table in front of firelight." Even so, she did not seem to belong in his pantheon of goddesses: she lacked Babe's stellar presence, Gloria Guinness' transcendental chic, Pamela Hayward's fabled charm. Lee seemed, indeed, to have no clear sense of her identity, possessing nothing like the cast-iron egos of those formidable females. Just the reverse; she appeared to be spoiled—even he admitted that—and rather shallow.

But those who were puzzled by his infatuation did not judge her by his standards. He saw her through the eyes of a novelist; he

viewed her, as he did all those he enshrined, as a character in a work of fiction. Seen from his perspective, she was a modern Becky Sharp for whom fate had chosen an exquisitely poignant torture: her childhood rival—her sister, Jackie—had grown up to be the wife of a President and the most celebrated and admired woman in the world.

Lee's father, John Bouvier III, had been a darkly handsome, blue-blooded wastrel—"Black Jack," he had been called—who had squandered his inheritance and cheated on his wife even during their honeymoon. After their divorce, her mother had married Hugh Auchincloss, who was boring but safe, rich enough to provide his wife and two stepdaughters with all the perquisites of the privileged class, including estates in both Newport and Virginia. Having learned her own lesson the hard way, the new Mrs. Auchincloss taught her daughters one simple rule: marry money. And they did, Jackie spectacularly well, Lee a little less so, marrying first Michael Canfield, whose father was a well-known publisher, then Stanislas Radziwill.

Though he was not Kennedy-rich, Stas Radziwill (who, as a naturalized British subject, had no real claim to his Polish title) had made enough money in London real estate to provide her and their two young children with an exceedingly comfortable life: a three-story Georgian town house near Buckingham Palace, staffed by a cook, a butler, two maids, and a nanny; a Queen Anne country house with a huge indoor swimming pool near Henley-on-Thames; a twelve-room duplex on Fifth Avenue; vacations in Portuguese and Italian villas.

She was not happy, however, as Truman quickly discovered. Stas, who was nineteen years her senior, was jealous, moody and unsympathetic to her desire for greater independence. "Understand her marriage is all but finito," Truman wrote Cecil in 1962, following what was probably his first intimate conversation with her. So it seemed to be. A year later she and Stas spent much of the summer on the yacht of Aristotle Onassis, and she appeared to be deeply in love with the golden Greek, who, despite his froglike appearance, was irresistible to many women. The irate husband of his longtime lover, Maria Callas, went so far as to crow to the press that Onassis tossed Maria aside so he could be with Lee. Washington columnist Drew Pearson asked, "Does the ambitious Greek tycoon hope to become the brother-in-law of the American President?"

When the Kennedys' newborn son Patrick died in August, 1963, Lee told Ari how shaken Jackie was. He responded by inviting Jackie to join the cruise as well; the *Christina* would go anywhere she wanted, he said. "Oh, Jackie, it would be such fun," Lee assured her and Jackie was persuaded. But for Lee it was not fun, and if she had dreams of marrying Ari, they were soon forgotten. At the end of the cruise, he bestowed on Jackie a diamond-and-ruby necklace. Lee's reward for bringing them together was only three little bracelets, so "dinky," she complained to Jack Kennedy, that little Caroline Kennedy would have been embarrassed to wear them to her own birthday party. That was not the end of Lee's complaints, and nearly five years later she called Truman to inform him of the final, bitter result of her good deed. "She's crying and weeping and sobbing," he told friends. "I can't tell you what she said, but it's going to be in the news. It's the biggest piece of gossip there is, and she's crying her eyes out because of it." The piece of gossip, which resulted in headlines all over the globe, was that Jackie and Ari were soon to be married. Lee's consolation prize, according to Truman, was a valuable parcel of land on a promontory near Athens, which Ari apparently had given her in hopes that Jackie would build a house there.

Her sister's climb from peak to peak was thus the second and perhaps more enduring cause of Lee's melancholy. When they were growing up, Lee was the center of attention, and Jackie sat off in the corner reading a book. "Lee was the pretty one," sighed Jackie. "So I guess I was supposed to be the intelligent one." From then on, the fickle spotlight turned the other way, and Lee seemed condemned to live in Jackie's shadow forevermore. "Why would anyone care what I do when there are so many more interesting people in the world?" Lee asked not long after Jackie became First Lady. "I haven't done anything at all." Only a few perceived the resentment that lay behind that plaintive comment. "My God, how jealous she is of Jackie: I never knew," wrote Truman in 1962.

Lee was desperate to make a name for herself, but did not know how. Enter Truman, the master of self-promotion. If Lee yearned for recognition, he yearned to give it to her. Never before had he had either the time or the opportunity to play Pygmalion on such a grand scale. Babe and the other swans were several years older than he was; he could give advice here and there, but the plots of their lives had been laid out long since. Lee was nearly nine years

younger; her future was still undetermined. It was his dream to shape it, to make of her life a work of art. He saw her not merely as a character in a novel, but as a character in his novel. Molding her into a woman who could rival and perhaps surpass her sister became a cause to which he would devote much of the year following his ball. "She doesn't want to be just somebody's sister," he said. "She wants to have a life and identity of her own. She's a very, very extraordinary girl. She's got a really good, first-class mind. It just has to get released!"

In January, 1967, he joined that extraordinary girl for a leisurely week or so in Morocco, which the international set had turned into its playground. Lee had been there twice the previous year. They traveled south, from Rabat to exotic Marrakesh, to pink-walled Taroudant. She rode horses while he slept and relaxed under the palm trees of their hotel gardens. Parting from her at the end of the month, he flew to Switzerland, going first to St. Moritz, where the Aga Khan was giving a party for the Shah of Iran, then to Verbier, where Jack and the animals—Charlie and Diotima—awaited him. He returned to New York with Charlie in early March, then proceeded to a spa in Miami Beach, where he went on a crash diet and lost, by his own account, eleven pounds.

In April he was back in Kansas, watching the filming of *In Cold Blood*. He had chosen the director, Richard Brooks, over the many others who had wanted to make the picture because he thought that Brooks was especially tough. "I don't know if any other director would have the strength or the stamina to do this movie right," he said. Brooks, who had previously directed such movies as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Blackboard Jungle*, proved that he had both. The studio expected *In Cold Blood* to be filmed in color; he insisted on the stark clarity of black-and-white. The studio wanted Steve McQueen and Paul Newman to play Dick and Perry. "For chrissake," said one executive, "we'll have a big hit!" Brooks demanded two unknowns: Scott Wilson and Robert Blake, who bore an eerie resemblance to Perry. Though Truman promised not to interfere, he did ask to see the script, which the director had written himself. Brooks said no to him, just as he had to everyone else. "Truman, I can't work that way," he said. "Either you trust me to make it or you don't."

Truman did trust him, and Brooks went to uncommon lengths to capture his book on film. Many people in Finney County, including

the editor of the newspaper, wanted to hear no more of *In Cold Blood*. "Why in hell they can't let people stay dead—rest in peace—is beyond me," grumbled one of Herb Clutter's neighbors. But Brooks maintained that the movie had to be made there and nowhere else, persisting until he had obtained permission to film not only in the courtroom, but also in the Clutter house itself. He then persuaded seven of the twelve original jurors to sit in the jury box once again, hired the same hangman who had executed Perry and Dick, and brought Nancy Clutter's horse Babe out of retirement. When the young actress who was portraying Nancy sat on her back, faithful Babe instinctively headed toward the Clutter orchard, where Nancy had always guided her.

Shooting was well under way when Truman arrived in his Jaguar, in time to greet the planeload of foreign and American journalists Columbia's publicity department had flown in. An intense director who liked to keep outsiders off his sets, Brooks was visibly irritated by the disruption, and when they were alone, walking in a field of freshly planted winter wheat, Truman asked why. "You're not happy. What's the matter? Am I in the way?"

"You're not in the way, Truman, but your personality is, bringing all these people out here. I can't shoot with them around."

"My personality?"

"Truman, you're a big star."

"When do you want me to take them away?"

"As soon as possible. Tonight would be fine."

"Well, if that's what you want, I'll have them out of here tonight." Truman kept his word, but only after he had been interviewed and photographed. Two weeks later *Life* put him on its cover, standing on a lonely prairie road between the two actors who were portraying the killers he had known so well.

The movie opened at the end of the year to generally excellent reviews. It is as accurate and uncompromising as Truman had hoped, but despite Brooks's efforts, it has little of the book's impact. Paradoxically, it is also less cinematic than the book; its flashbacks are clumsy; its pace, tedious. Worst of all, Brooks added a new character, a tall, lugubrious-looking reporter whose main purpose is to preach against capital punishment. Though he praised the film in public, Truman had private reservations. "The introduction of the reporter, who acted as a kind of Greek chorus, didn't make sense. There also wasn't enough on the Clutter family. The book was about

six lives, not two, and it ruined it to concentrate so much on Perry and Dick. On the other hand, I thought that the actors who played the two boys were very well cast, acted well, and were directed well."

Still sunning himself in the glow of the book's renown, Truman embarked on several new projects, the most important of which were for television, a medium in which he already had had one conspicuous success. *A Christmas Memory*, which he had adapted the previous year with the husband-and-wife team of Frank and Eleanor Perry, had won both popular and critical approval, including an Emmy. Thus encouraged, he and the Perrys began dramatizing several of his other stories. Working on a commission from ABC, he was also writing a documentary on capital punishment, which sent him to several Death Rows to interview still more prisoners awaiting execution. But the question of Lee's future was rarely far from his mind: how could he help her make a name for herself? In the end, the answer seemed obvious. He would turn her into an actress—a movie star.

As they discussed it, probably under a palm tree in the Sahara, the idea made eminent sense. Between them, they had everything she required. She had the looks, the desire and some training; he had the brains, the experience and the connections. He persuaded Milton Goldman, who represented Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud, to be her agent, and he and Goldman decided that in her first appearance, she would twinkle brightest away from the lights of New York and Hollywood; a Chicago dinner theater, the Ivanhoe, seemed sufficiently out-of-the-way. Although she preferred to play a Chekhov heroine, they further decreed that she should begin with an easier role; Tracy Lord, the rich, spoiled heroine of Philip Barry's comedy *The Philadelphia Story*, sounded about right. She was understandably annoyed at the inevitable suggestions that she would really be playing herself. "I feel absolutely *nothing* in common with that girl," she said. "She has none of the feelings I understand, of sadness, despair or of knowing loss."

Determined to succeed, she studied the part with a drama coach in London, and in late May she joined the rest of the cast for rehearsals in Chicago. Kenneth flew from New York to do her hair; George Masters, a Hollywood makeup artist, came from California to prepare her face; and Truman and Stas arrived to hold her hand. With

such a crowd in attendance, the scenes of pandemonium in her penthouse suite at the Ambassador East Hotel may well have been funnier than those in Barry's comedy. Much of the humor was provided by Masters, who called Stas "Princie" and complained that the colors of her Saint Laurent dresses—shocking pink, purple and chartreuse—were all wrong. One of them, he said, looked like "a dog's lunch—the Supremes wouldn't even *think* of wearing something like that."

But Lee did, and as opening night, June 20, approached, she professed to be philosophical about her reception. "I have a feeling of now or never," she said. "Maybe it will be a flop, but all I can do is hold my nose and take the plunge." After examining her signs, the Cabala Woman, a California astrologer Masters introduced to her by long-distance, pronounced them "very promising for theater work."

Either the signs lied or the Cabala Woman miscalculated, and the career of Lee Bouvier—she used her maiden name—should have received a quick but dignified burial. Searching for something to praise, the reviewer from the *Chicago Sun-Times* settled on her spunk, observing that, given the pressures, it was a triumph that she had remembered all her lines; searching even harder, the critic from the *Daily News* noted that she had "at least laid a golden egg." For all his planning, Truman had neglected to ask a basic question: could she act?

Ignoring the unpleasant truth, he proceeded as if she had heard nothing but cheers in Chicago. And astonishingly enough, he almost convinced other people that she had—or that the boos were irrelevant. When he returned to Manhattan, he asked David Susskind, who was an independent television producer as well as a talk show host, to give her the lead role in a TV special. As an inducement, he said, he would write the script himself. Although Susskind had not been favorably impressed by Lee's acting, he had been impressed by the publicity she had received. He soon announced that ABC had signed Lee Bouvier, at a salary of fifty thousand dollars, to star in Truman's adaptation of John Van Druten's comedy *The Voice of the Turtle*. Truman had performed an act of magic: he had persuaded Susskind and the network to gamble a large budget and two hours of prime time on a pretty amateur with not a hint of talent.

Reflecting on her inability to find the humor in *The Philadelphia Story*, Susskind discarded Van Druten's comedy and chose a drama for her instead, an adaptation, also to be done by Truman, of the 1944 movie *Laura*. She would take Gene Tierney's part and George Sanders would take Clifton Webb's. She did not mind the switch, and in her letters to Truman, sounded uncharacteristically ebullient. "I wish we could begin tomorrow—it's going to be marvelous," she said in August. "My interests have narrowed down in such a violent way that now I'm just possessed. Thank you!" Although she would not have to leave home this time—Susskind had arranged for *Laura* to be shot in London—Stas was not encouraging her new endeavor, which caused her to lean even more heavily on Truman. "When I want advice I feel you're in the room giving it to me," she told him. "When I want to laugh at something I can hear you laughing with me & that makes me so much happier." As taping time approached and Stas became more difficult, she added, "I was *so* happy to get your letter except that it made me weep because I miss you so much & need you to make life worthwhile." As an expression of her gratitude and appreciation, she sent him an elegant gold-lined Schlumberger cigarette box, in which she had had inscribed: "To my Answered Prayer, with love, Lee. July 1967."

Despite the fact that she required direction so extensive that it might more accurately have been called on-the-job training, Susskind insisted that "there *is* something there." Perhaps, but when the show was broadcast in January, 1968, that something eluded most viewers. Indeed, she was as close to being invisible as an actress playing a title character can be. Susskind had done what the director of *The Philadelphia Story* may have wished he could have done: he had left much of her performance on the cutting-room floor. More than one reviewer pointed out that when the camera should have been looking at her, it wandered off in other directions, as if it were too polite to embarrass her. As a result, her Laura "was reduced to a stunning clotheshorse upon whom no discernible thespian demands were made," said Jack Gould, the *New York Times* television critic. When she was glimpsed on screen, she was, said *Time*, "only slightly less animated than the portrait of herself that hung over the mantel."

The negative reaction finally finished Lee's acting career, and Truman was released from his rash promise to write something original for her. It is hard to say who looked sillier at the end of their

quixotic adventure. But that unhappy honor probably belonged to Truman, who publicly demonstrated that where Lee was concerned, he had no judgment at all. Trying to be kind, he had succeeded only in being cruel. Instead of making her a star, he had turned her into a figure of fun and ridicule.

Laura had yet to be broadcast and that bad news had yet to be delivered when she returned to America in the late fall of 1967 and joined him in Alabama to watch the filming of "The Thanksgiving Visitor," the story he had dedicated to her. Turning the occasion into a family reunion, he also invited, at his own expense, a dozen or so of his relatives, including Arch and his wife Blanche.

After not having written or talked to him since 1963, Truman had telephoned his father in August, then sent him five hundred dollars for his seventieth birthday. Arch was ecstatic, believing that it was merely the down payment on the rewards due him as the father of a rich man. "When that check fell out of the letter as I opened it, I could not believe my eyes," he exclaimed to Truman. "It was the first gift of any kind you ever sent me in my whole varied, interesting and eventful life." The years had not diminished his cupidity, and the gold mine he had spent most of his life hunting for he now espied in his own son. "He is now the No. 1 writer, and the wealthiest, now ten million, and a *guaranteed* million a year from now on," he bragged to a friend, greatly inflating both Truman's assets and his income. Making up for lost time, within the space of five days Arch wrote Truman three letters and a postcard, alternately flattering him, scolding him for past neglect, and trying to make him feel guilty enough to provide the annuity he wanted so much.

Like all good salesmen, he began with the compliments. "Where I was dumb was not in realizing early that you were a 'genius,' not like other people, and treating you as a genius! That mistake won't occur again! You are not only a genius as a writer, but you are a genius in the manner in which you keep yourself constantly ahead of the public. Just when they begin to think the Truman Capote hubbub is dying down, a new avalanche lies just ahead transcending even the public imagination. In other words, you maintain and even increase the momentum and keep it going to the boiling point. Some of that, if not the writing capacity, you inherited in an elementary way from me."

Then came the reproaches for Truman's having neglected him,

particularly, he said, in the "sunset period" of his life. "Now in my four years of isolation, I told Mama and any others not to intercede for me. I feel that such things have to be spontaneous and come from the heart. I felt we were the same flesh and blood, and somewhere in your innerself, the right elements would assert themselves in due time. I just worried it might be too late for me to enjoy it."

Finally he reached his main point. "You must of course realize that almost everyone thinks that because you have millions with a future earning capacity of even more, that this fact automatically gives your father the position of sharing more or less, when we know that is not the situation at all. I do believe in families sharing their lot in life, both good and bad, but it does not work out that way in many cases." If he were in Truman's financial position, he asserted, he would help a mere friend, and of course do much more for his own father. He made the same argument in several different but similarly graceless ways, then underlined it by adding: "I would like also for you to remember that whereas you are undoubtedly the greatest exponent of the powers of description alive today, I can still clearly and vividly remember when it was the ultimate struggle for you to say just 'Ma-ma and Da-da.' "

All but hidden behind his blatant self-pity, his whining rebukes, and his unguent wheedling was almost certainly a grain of genuine affection; in his own way he loved the son to whom he had given so little and from whom he now expected so much. "It is hardly necessary for me to say HOW PROUD I am," he said, "proud—not that I am your father, BUT PROUD THAT YOU ARE MY SON. There IS a difference!!" What Truman felt about that midsummer downpour of words he did not say. He was not mortally offended, in any event —it was the same old Arch—and three months later came Truman's invitation to see the filming of "The Thanksgiving Visitor."

On Monday, December 4, groups from both sides of Truman's family converged on Montgomery. From Shreveport came Arch and Blanche; from various parts of Alabama and Georgia came representatives of the Persons clan; from Monroeville came his favorite aunt, Mary Ida Carter, her two sons and their wives. And from New York came Truman and Lee, whose superannuated Polish title had caused the staff of their Montgomery motel several days of nervous anticipation. "Should we call her Princess or Your Highness?" the waitresses in the coffee shop had anxiously asked. Truman and Lee

were immediately driven to the decrepit farmhouse in the piney woods country south of town where the Perrys were re-creating his childhood. Holding Lee's hand—as if he were still a child, a reporter noted—Truman walked through the old place, which had been decorated to look like Jennie's house in Monroeville. "Marvelous!" he exclaimed. "Absolutely marvelous!"

The following day the entire party assembled there for a picnic under a hot winter sun. Almost as if by prestidigitation, Gene Callahan, the film's inventive art director, had spread two Oriental rugs on the muddy field next to the house and had piled them high with Italian food and wine, which were served from crystal bowls and silver wine coolers. Despite its incongruous splendor, however, the backwoods *fête champêtre* was not a total success. "Truman's relatives just wouldn't integrate," said Eleanor Perry. "They gathered on one rug, and the rest of us on the other rug. I think they felt we were all New York people and too chi-chi for words, even though, except for Truman and Lee, we were all dressed in filthy blue jeans. Truman, who was wearing a Cardin jacket with more zippers than I could count, was nice to them, but his male cousins were very chip-on-the-shoulder with him. 'He's made it,' they seemed to be thinking. 'He's a millionaire, and we're just being tolerated.' I remember especially the sullen face of a young cousin, a sheriff or God knows what, who obviously didn't adore him. It really was a funny scene, like something out of a Fellini movie. There we were, surrounded by mud and cow dung, eating our Italian food and drinking wine that was cooled in silver buckets. At one point I looked up to see a goat and a black sharecropper, who was probably starving to death, watching us over the fence."

From the minute he arrived until the minute he left, Truman never stopped holding Lee's hand. Arch, who all along had refused to believe that a son of his could be truly homosexual—he blamed Jack, whom he called "that bastard," for leading him astray—saw his faith confirmed. "Don't you never think he's homosexual," he later asserted. "He's screwed more women than he has fingers and toes! He's a real stud. I think he just loves it both ways, that's all. He's what you call a bisexual." Watching him mooning over Lee on Callahan's rug amid the cowpats, he was convinced that Truman's preference had swung decisively toward women; above the clatter of plates and crystal he began to hear the stately progress of a wedding march. "I think he's going to marry Lee Radziwill," Arch

announced with excitement. "He's going to marry the princess!" Assuming the unaccustomed role of concerned father, he said to the princess herself, "Lee, I hope that you'll work it out so that you and Truman can get married."

No doubt amused by his naïveté, she indicated that she shared his wishes, later repeating his remark to Truman, who did not find it equally funny. "I think you used very poor taste in saying that to Lee!" he yelled over his shoulder as he passed Arch during the evening. When he and Lee left for New York the next morning, December 6, Truman did not bother to say goodbye. By themselves, Arch's misdeeds did not seem serious enough to provoke so much anger: added onto a thousand other grievances, promises broken and hopes smashed, they had been sufficient for Truman at last to cry, Enough, no more.

Truman never saw his father again. Four years later, after losing his job and suffering a serious accident, Arch wrote to ask for an allowance of ten thousand dollars a year. But even in old age the huckster in him could not be stilled; he made a plea for help sound like a once-in-a-lifetime bargain, pointing out that because of inflation, ten thousand dollars in 1971 was equivalent to only two thousand in the distant past. Nor could he resist going perhaps one step too far, suggesting in addition that Truman provide him with a house in Colorado, Arch's favorite state in the Union.

Truman did not jump to grab that bargain. He thanked Arch for his frankness, but replied that at the moment an income-tax problem was tying up all his funds; he would be in touch when it was settled, he said. Ever the optimist, Arch translated that bland and equivocal reply into a promise. He was thus all the more disappointed a few months later when he received an unmistakable no. "He had that Jew lawyer he's got write me a letter of three or four lines saying he couldn't do anything for me. Down in the corner it said, 'Copy to Mr. Capote.' It was just as brutal as hell. It's awful to have one son and have him turn his back on you, especially for no reason at all. It's one of the mysteries of the world and I'm just flabbergasted. It hurts like hell, I'll say that. I never did him anything in my life but good."

So he doubtless believed: Arch's powers of self-deception were infinite. But Truman, who knew the true story behind "The Thanksgiving Visitor"—the mother and father who had abandoned him in a household of old maids while they were off pursuing their

own lives elsewhere—was not deceived, and as he himself advanced into a troubled middle age, he was not disposed to forgive either. In 1977, four years before Arch died at the age of eighty-three, Truman entered a clinic for alcoholics and was handed a form that asked whether his parents were alive or dead. "I put down 'mother deceased,' " he said. "Then I thought a minute and put down 'father deceased' too."

FOUR

45

THE day *In Cold Blood* was published, Jack attached a piece of paper to the screen door of Truman's house in Sagaponack. "*Le Beau Jour*," he had scrawled on it—"The Good Day." But he was only half right; it was a day that was both good and bad. In some lives there are moments which, looked at later, can be seen as the lines that define the beginning of a dramatic rise or decline. It was Truman's misfortune that for him the same day marked both. Even as he was reaching the summit, he was starting his descent. For years he had pondered the aphorism attributed to Saint Teresa—more tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered prayers—and had collected illustrious examples for his projected novel. Now he too was destined to join that unhappy list. His life began to slip out of control, and slowly at first, then with terrible speed, it careered ever downward.

The proximate cause of his tragic fall—for that is what it was—was *In Cold Blood* itself. "He never really recovered from that book," said Phyllis Cerf. "Until then he had been able to cope with all of his problems extremely well. But it was very destructive for him, especially when those boys wanted him to witness their hanging. I don't know why he put himself through that, but he did. He thought that he was tougher than he was and that he could take it. But he couldn't. That book started the unsettling of his life. He began to live—I don't know—recklessly."

He had mined his subject, but his subject had also mined him, exhausting his nerves, his reservoir of patience, and his powers of concentration; depleting, in short, his capital as both a man and a

writer. "No one will ever know what *In Cold Blood* took out of me," he said. "It scraped me right down to the marrow of my bones. It nearly killed me. I think, in a way, it *did* kill me. Before I began it, I was a stable person, comparatively speaking. Afterward, something happened to me. I just can't forget it, particularly the hangings at the end. Horrible!" The memory of all he had gone through continued to reverberate in his head, he said, like the echo in the Marabar Caves in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. And it delivered the same dark message: life is meaningless; or, as Forster phrased it, "everything exists, nothing has value."

Deepening his despair was his doubt that the book had been worth the sacrifice. He had been accorded money and acclaim in abundance, but he had been denied what he perhaps had yearned for most, the respect of the literary establishment—"how he longed for praise from the right people," he had once confessed to Cecil. But that respect and praise were withheld. *In Cold Blood* did not receive either of what he believed, somewhat ingenuously, to be the establishment's official seals of approval, the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the latter of which Newton had won a quarter of a century before for his Melville biography. Displaying what in retrospect seems like a willful blindness, the judges for both awards passed over the most talked-about book of the year in favor of worthy but less important contenders.*

Truman felt like a war hero who has hobbled home, expecting a parade, only to discover that others, who have never even seen the enemy up close, have picked up all the medals. His triumph was incomplete and therefore not a triumph at all: the right people, the ones who had snubbed him when he was Newton's boyfriend with the blond bangs, were still looking down their snooty noses at him.

His belief that he had been robbed of his just reward was confirmed when a spy informed him that one of the judges for the National Book Awards, *Newsweek*'s Saul Maloff, had persuaded his colleagues that the honor should go to a work less commercial than *In Cold Blood*. Truman never forgave an insult, and his revenge came a year and a half later when *The Washington Post*'s Sunday supplement, *Book World*, asked him what volumes he would like to give for Christmas. Maloff's novel *Happy Families* would be just what Frank

* David Brion Davis' *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* won the Pulitzer Prize; Justin Kaplan's biography of Mark Twain, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, won the National Book Award.

Sinatra needed, he said. With a pleasure that can be felt in every word, he explained why: Sinatra suffered from a bad case of insomnia, and "this numbing little novel, an anthology of every chichi literary cliché extant, would tranquilize a kangaroo revved to the rafters on speed."*

Truman's conviction that he was the victim of a conspiracy was reinforced two years later when Norman Mailer was given both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for *The Armies of the Night*, his story of his participation in protests against the war in Viet Nam. There were significant differences between Mailer's book and *In Cold Blood* (the most important was that Mailer made himself the main protagonist, while Truman never mentioned himself), but there was, as far as Truman was concerned, an even more significant similarity. Mailer also wrote nonfiction as if it were fiction, something he had never done before, and like Truman, he affixed a fancy but nonsensical label to his work: "History as a Novel, the Novel as History." Whatever he called it, Truman was convinced that Mailer would not have thought of doing it but for the example of *In Cold Blood* and that if his old friend and rival had been honest, he would have added: "Variations on a Theme by Capote."

"I do something truly innovative, and who gets the prizes? Norman Mailer, who told me that what I was doing with *In Cold Blood* was stupid and who then sits down and does a complete ripoff. There has never been a greater literary ripoff in the twentieth century. He took everything that I had done, all of my hard work and experimental technique, and ripped it off. But I resent only one thing, and that is that neither Mr. Mailer nor all the others who copied me, like Mr. [Bob] Woodward and Mr. [Carl] Bernstein, ever said, 'We owe Truman Capote something; he really invented this form.' They got all the prizes and I got nothing! And I felt I deserved them. The decisions not to give them to me were truly, totally unjust. So at that point I said: 'Fuck you! All of you! If you

* Maloff had good reason to regret the day that he became a literary judge. A few weeks later James Michener, one of Truman's admirers, wrote a letter to *Book World* professing to rebuke Truman for his ill-tempered attack, but in fact taking a second swipe at Maloff: "Granted that Mr. Maloff's novel was one of the most pathetic offerings in recent years, granted that it was a polished up re-working of some deep-think college essays remembered from Freshman English 3, and granted that Mr. Capote was right in describing the novel as a pompous travesty on popular prototypes, there was still no reason to abuse Mr. Maloff personally. He deserves compassion rather than ridicule."

are so unjust and don't know when something is unique and original and great, then fuck you! I don't care about you anymore, or want to have anything to do with you. If you can't appreciate something really extraordinary like *In Cold Blood* and the five-and-a-half years I put into it, and all of the artistry and the style and the skill, then fuck you!' "

Yet it is doubtful that he would have been satisfied even if he had swept the honors. Sooner or later, some professor at Yale or Harvard would have written a disparaging article that would have persuaded him that the right people were still against him. His need for admiration had become insatiable; all the prizes in the world could not have filled it. *In Cold Blood* may have started his slide, but if it had not, something else almost certainly would have. As he entered middle age, the demons he thought he had exorcised long ago, the desperate fears of his lonely childhood, returned to tug at his elbow and whisper in his ear. "No words can express the secret agony of my soul," said Dickens, describing the torments inflicted by the unyielding fears of his own childhood. "Even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time in my life." So, in nearly the same words, might Truman have spoken. "Something in my life has done a terrible hurt to me," he did in fact say, "and it seems to be irrevocable."

That hurt—so he believed, and so was probably the case—was caused by his mother's unending rejection, and it was symbolized by the sound of a key turning in a door: the young Lillie Mae locking him in a hotel room as she left for an evening on the town. "I remember it all in such detail," he said, his mind wandering back, as it did, more and more, to that time. "At this very moment I can see those rooms in St. Louis and New Orleans. That's when my claustrophobia and fear of abandonment began. She locked me in and I still can't get out. She was the cause of all my anxiety—'free-floating anxiety' is what all the psychiatrists say I have. If you've never had it, you don't know what it's like. It has the same relationship to ordinary anxiety as a migraine has to an ordinary headache. I live with it constantly. I'm never ever free from it." Holly Golightly had given a name, "the mean reds," to that hyperanxiety. "You're afraid and you sweat like hell" was how she described it.

"But you don't know what you're afraid of. Except something bad is going to happen, only you don't know what it is."

"All our acts are acts of fear," Truman had written in one of his early stories, "Shut a Final Door." For a long time thereafter his own fears had been largely disguised by his high spirits; they may even have contributed to that puckish, clownish side of him. A frightened child has a choice of either hiding in a corner or showing off, demanding the spotlight that will drive away the darkness. Truman instinctively chose the latter course, and for years that immature side of him had served him well. One of the secrets of his appeal was his infectious exuberance and his refusal to be bound by grown-up conventions, his willingness, so rare in adults, to show affection and dislike and to say exactly what he was thinking. He could brag, lie and behave outrageously, but his friends, recognizing the excesses of a child, adored him anyway. Even his anger at Maloff and the National Book Award committee was evidence of a refreshing candor. All good writers want recognition and feel wounded and resentful when their best work is rejected; few are willing to expose and perhaps embarrass themselves by saying so. But the rebellious child within him had usually been kept in check by an adult of exceptionally clear vision and sound judgment. A remarkably sensitive gyroscope had prevented him from leaning too far in one direction or another.

In the years after *In Cold Blood*, that gyroscope became less dependable and at last broke down altogether. "It's as if two different people were inside of me," he said. "One is highly intelligent, imaginative and mature, and the other is a fourteen-year-old. Sometimes one is in control, sometimes the other." Flexing his muscles, the pugnacious adolescent more often pushed aside the increasingly weary adult, and the man in the middle, the Truman Capote the world saw, found it harder and harder to distinguish between the possible and the impossible, between reality and unreality. It is unlikely, for example, that the Truman of a decade before would have embarked on such a feckless enterprise as trying to make Lee Radziwill into a movie star; or that he would have responded with quite such self-lacerating bitterness to the slights by the award givers.

Contributing to the cloudiness of his judgment was an increasing dependence on pills and alcohol. Both had been part of his life since

he was a teenager in Greenwich, stealing sleeping pills from his mother's bedroom and sweet fruit brandies from Joe Capote's bar. By the sixties, he had become addicted to tranquilizers and various other mood-altering pills, and alcohol, that old and trusty ally, had turned against him. "When I first knew him, we would have a little wine with lunch, then a martini," said Phyllis Cerf. "But during the writing of *In Cold Blood* his drinking grew, grew, grew, grew. He would start with a double martini, have another with lunch, then a stinger afterward. That kind of heavy drinking was new with him." By the early seventies, it had become obvious to him, as well as to everyone else, that he could no longer exist without the bottles in either his medicine chest or his liquor cabinet.

"This phenomenon" Cecil had once christened him, worrying that someone who lived so intensely might someday burn himself out, might be too astonishingly incandescent to last. For a decade and more Truman had proved him wrong, moving more feverishly than ever. But in the months that followed publication of *In Cold Blood*, Cecil's prediction at last came true: the phenomenon of the forties and fifties was no more. "I secretly feel T. is in a bad state and may not last long," Cecil wrote in the spring of 1966. "He has become a real neurotic case."

From the first, Truman's writing had been tinged with nostalgia, a yearning for a serene and smiling past that he himself had not known, nor given to his fictional characters. "Don't wanna sleep, don't wanna die, Just wanna go a-travelin' through the pastures of the sky" was the song Holly had sung as she sat on her fire escape, plaintively strumming her guitar. But nostalgia did not provide him the bittersweet pleasure it offers many others. It was, rather, the manifestation of a pessimism so profound that it darkened every waking moment. "People think I do frivolous things, and I do," he said, "but it's in defiance of this feeling of mutability and death being the central factor of life."

Since his childhood had not provided him with the parental love that usually brings later contentment, he had manufactured his happiness, conjuring it out of his imagination as he had his fiction. After *In Cold Blood* he was no longer able to summon the energy to perform that magic act. Nostalgia descended into sorrow, and to those who knew him well he seemed to be in perpetual mourning, overwhelmed by a sense of loss that was no less keen because he could not say precisely what it was that had been taken from him.

There were even signs that he was growing disenchanted with the very rich and that, on occasion, he was bored by the swans. He had walked on Olympus and had discovered that those who resided there were not heaven's anointed after all. It was a shock—not to his intellect, which had always known better, but to his emotions, which had not. The myth by which he had lived was starting to crumble. He floundered like a man who has lost his religion, and his confidence ebbed with his faith. The sunshine of prior years shone less and less frequently, the clouds gathering so swiftly that it seemed as if they had come from nowhere. That was not the case: they had been there, circling the horizon, all along.

The theme that ran through his life—a ceaseless but unsuccessful search for love—can be likened to a leitmotif in certain symphonies and operas. Surrounded by strings and trumpets at the beginning, the chord sparkles with optimism and laughter; all is possible, it seems to say. Then the tempo of the music slows, and mellow oboes and deep-voiced horns crowd out the lighter instruments that had danced around that melodic line; the best is over, the chord now seems to say, it is past and done. The same notes that once had sung with the high spirits of spring begin to speak of melancholy autumn and the winter that will come after. To the audience that still hears the exuberant echo of their earlier incarnation, they sound, indeed, heartrendingly sad.

46

"IF an idea is really haunting you, it will stay with you for years and years," Truman had once said. "Drain you like a vampire until you get rid of it by writing it down." So had he been haunted by the idea of *Answered Prayers*. Although he put it aside when he went to Kansas, he never doubted that one day he would return to it. "Oh, how easy it'll be by comparison!" he told a reporter in 1965, a week or so after he had finished *In Cold Blood*. "It's all in my head."

But the day of return was continually postponed as he embarked on one bootless project after another, an increasingly lengthy list that included not only his ill-conceived television adaptations for Lee, but also his documentary on capital punishment, *Death Row, U.S.A.*, and a new second act for *House of Flowers*, which was being produced Off Broadway. Added to all the other diversions that are thrust upon a famous author, those endeavors disguised the fact that except for the few final pages of *In Cold Blood*, he had written scarcely anything of his own since the summer of 1964.

Perhaps, unconsciously, that was his wish, and haunted though he was, he seemed curiously reluctant to begin *Answered Prayers*. What had seemed an easy task in the summer of 1965, when it lay off in a hazy distance, appeared considerably more difficult when the time approached to sharpen his Blackwing pencils. One of the reasons may have been that the subject now repelled as much as it mesmerized him. He had not become fixed on Saint Teresa's aphorism because he saw in it the kernel of a novel. He had fastened on it because it expressed his own bleak vision of life, his belief that fate

punishes those it seems to favor by giving them precisely what they desire. It was a variation on an ancient adage: every large gift exacts a large price—"she who lent him sweetness made him blind," said Homer. Again and again he had watched different casts reenacting the same pathetic drama.

In the fifties, when he first conceived the idea of transforming that theme into fiction, he could only have imagined, or have had a presentiment of, finding himself once again an actor in that mournful play. His greatest triumph was still ahead of him; his own prayers were yet to be answered. By the late sixties they had been answered, and he realized that he was paying a price for them. It must have occurred to him that *Answered Prayers* would not only be his most ambitious work; in the loosest sense, it would also be his autobiography. He would be writing about his own disenchantment, as well as that of his characters.

The other reasons for his hesitation were probably more practical. He shuddered at the prospect of another long and lonely labor. And he feared that even if he did make such a commitment, his talent might not match his ambition. Except for two short stories, "Among the Paths to Eden" and "The Thanksgiving Visitor," he had not attempted fiction since *Breakfast at Tiffany's* ten years before. As he thought again about *Answered Prayers* in the late sixties, he must have wondered if he were still in trouble; whether, indeed, he could still write a novel.

Raising the level of his anxiety even higher was an ambition that had grown beyond the bounds of reason. Inspired by the example of Flaubert, he had always set for himself the most elevated standards—"I aspire," he had jotted in a schoolboy notebook—but until *In Cold Blood* he had been a practical perfectionist. He had aimed high, but he had not insisted that he produce a great work every time he picked up his pad. That sensible approach was another victim of his malfunctioning gyroscope: his expectations now exceeded rational limits. *Answered Prayers* had to be a masterpiece. Nothing less would do if he were to be true to his art and, at the same time, thumb his nose at those mocking, smirking faces in the literary establishment. "When I didn't get those prizes, I said to myself: 'I'm going to write a book that will make you all ashamed of yourselves. You're going to find out what a really, really gifted writer with a great determination can do!' "

Setting such an extravagant goal did not send him rushing to put

words on paper, however. It did for him what it probably would have done for any other writer: it constructed a writer's block as impenetrable as the Great Pyramid. His approach toward his craft, so admirable in theory, was well-nigh paralyzing in practice. Even the steady and productive hand of Henry James, the Master himself, would have shaken if he had sat down at his desk every morning with such a warlike, uncompromising spirit.

Small wonder that Truman stopped and allowed himself to be continually detoured from his path and purpose. Looking at that most intoxicating but daunting of sights—a blank sheet of paper—he must have wondered: had he taken on more than he could handle? could he create another masterpiece? did he in fact want to live with characters whose unhappy experience mirrored his own? He might have said, as Flaubert did when he prepared to write *Bouvard and Pécuchet:* "How scared I am! I'm on tenterhooks! I feel as if I were setting off on a very long journey into unknown territory, and that I shan't come back."

By the fall of 1967 it was clear that Truman could no longer delay starting his own journey. He had publicly announced his title and theme: a dark comedy about the very rich. He had received a twenty-five-thousand-dollar advance from Random House, and without showing anybody as much as the first line of the first chapter, he had sold movie rights to Twentieth Century–Fox for the staggering sum of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars—a figure one would have to multiply at least three times to find an equivalent in today's dollars. All he had to do for that money was sit down and write the contractually guaranteed minimum of sixty thousand words: a short novel, in other words, of less than two hundred and fifty pages. But where was he to sit and write those pages? New York, with its distractions, was not the place. Nor was Long Island; although it had heat, his cottage in Sagaponack had been built for warm weather, not cold, and the flat potato fields that surrounded it, which were so lovely in other seasons, were unrelievedly dreary in winter. Verbier was the obvious spot, but the tiny apartment there was too confining and contained too many memories of the tortures of *In Cold Blood*.

He settled the question, at last, by renting a house in Palm Springs, Hollywood's favorite retreat. It had an ideal winter climate. It was small, yet, unlike Verbier, had all the sybaritic services he

enjoyed and was now able to afford. It was out of the way, yet within convenient reach of his California friends, a number that now included even the Governor. "I have a strange new friend—Ronald Reagan," he informed Cecil, adding, as if he were already hearing snickers from London: "Yes, I *know*. But really he's *very* nice and we get on just fine." Reagan had helped him by pulling strings so that he could visit San Quentin for his TV documentary. Truman in turn had helped Nancy Reagan raise funds for one of her own pet projects, the restoration of the executive mansion in Sacramento, by introducing her to some of his rich friends. "Write when you can," she admonished him in November, 1967. "I don't want to lose touch."

At the end of December, Truman headed west in a Buick station wagon. Donald Windham was in the front seat beside him; Happy, a newly adopted black cat, was in the back; and Charlie was halfway in between, panting in Donald's face as he put his paws over the top of the seat to see where they were headed. Averaging five hundred miles a day, the four of them arrived in Palm Springs shortly after New Year's, 1968, and Truman was pleased to discover that his rental, an ordinary but comfortable house at 853 Paseo El Mirador, had exactly what he needed: absolute privacy. A high wall enclosed the garden and pool, and all that could be seen of the world outside was the tops of nodding palm trees and purple desert mountains. "It was a perfect setup for working," said Donald, "especially as no one Truman knew was there."

Truman did not appear to do much work, however, during the two weeks Donald was with him. Much of his time was spent on the phone to New York, conferring with Harold Arlen, who was trying to put together the new *House of Flowers*, and with the women friends who were arranging dinners before the show and a charity party on stage afterward. Less than three weeks after arriving, he interrupted his stay to fly back to Manhattan for his play's January 28 opening. But the renovated *House of Flowers* fared even less well than the Broadway original. "Whatever changes have been made, it is difficult to imagine that they are improvements," said Clive Barnes, the drama critic of the *Times*. The show closed after only fifty-seven performances, and the usually genial Arlen put much of the blame on Truman. "If he had stayed for rehearsals instead of going off to Palm Springs, I think we would have had a fighting chance," he said.

Truman quickly returned to Palm Springs, where a reporter for *West Magazine*, C. Robert Jennings, described a life that seemed to consist mostly of work, massages at The Spa, and frequent stops for drinks. What came through most clearly in Jennings' piece, if only between the lines, was something Truman doubtless did not mean to disclose: the aimlessness of his life in that plush oasis. Although he had many friends there, he was depressed and lonely. "I don't get bored here at all," he said, but added rather poignantly: "But then I have an infinite capacity for boredom."

In fact, just the opposite was true: Truman had little capacity for boredom, and he could scarcely sit still inside his protective walls. In the middle of March he left for ten days in Europe, half of which he spent in London, probably with Lee Radziwill, who had visited him in California only a few weeks before. Returning in late March, he awaited the arrival of Jack. He did not want to spend his winters in Verbier anymore, and he hoped that Jack would join him in making the descent from the Alps. At first, that seemed possible, and Jack was entranced by the desert's strange beauty. "I'm told not to walk out on the desert because there are snakes," he wrote his sister Gloria, "but it is hard not to, the evenings being so beautiful."

Jack's good opinion quickly changed. "Thirst's End" he called Palm Springs, adding, with his peculiar touch of poetry: "Every time I raised my eyes, they bumped into mountains the color of turds." He also hated Truman's house, which he thought was common, and Truman's life in it, which he thought was insanely frantic. "There was something terribly wrong with his life," Jack said. "The doorbell kept ringing with people asking him to do this and that. He was under terrific stress. He was going crazy. He was like a person who has gone into a dangerous nightclub and can't get out. He had gone too far. I didn't say anything, but I just caved in, I felt so lonely. I've never known such depression. The boredom was almost frightening. Pretty soon I began to reel. I went black.

"One day I ate two fried eggs and then went swimming in the pool. Suddenly I had a funny feeling around my heart. I thought I was having a heart attack and was going to die. Truman called a doctor, a tough little Jew, who actually came to the house and gave me a pill—what I had was a terrific case of indigestion. Truman watched me: he had been trying to get me to do something I could not do, which was to stay in a place I loathed so much I couldn't physically be there. He knew what was happening to me. I think he hated it himself. 'You'll be all right when you get wheels under you,' he said. And he was right. As soon as we drove away, I felt better."

In mid-April, two weeks before the lease on the house expired, they started back to New York. "God, what a big lonely country the USA is, and how beautiful," Jack wrote Gloria from Sagaponack. "But I like Long Island best. My heart's here. Here I feel home." He never returned to Palm Springs. But Truman did, buying that rented house and remodeling it to his liking. At the time it seemed like a logical thing to do. Only later did he realize his mistake. "Buying the house in Palm Springs was the beginning of the end for me."