

# You'll Always Remember Me

## Steve Fisher

IT WAS THE GOAL, the dream, of the penny-a-word writers for the pulps to break out, to get into the higher-paying slick magazines, to have books published, or to get a break in Hollywood. Of the handful who made it, few enjoyed more success than Steve Fisher (1912-1980), the extraordinarily prolific pulp writer (almost two hundred stories between 1935 and 1938) who became a sought-after screenwriter.

Of the twenty novels written under his own name and as Stephen Gould and Grant Lane, the most famous is *I Wake Up Screaming*, the basis for the classic film noir starring Victor Mature.

Among the many notable motion pictures on which he received screen credit are such war films as *To the Shores of Tripoli*, *Destination Tokyo*, and *Berlin Correspondent*. Crime films include *Lady in the Lake* and *Song of the Thin Man*. He also wrote more than two hundred television scripts for such popular shows as *Starsky & Hutch*, *McMillan & Wife*, and *Barnaby Jones*.

"You'll Always Remember Me" is not a subtle story, as expected of a tale written for a pulp magazine, but its theme still resonates more than a half-century after it was written. What should society do with juvenile killers who cannot be tried as adults? William March explored this successfully in his play *The Bad Seed*, which later became a controversial movie.

This story, with its chilling last paragraph, was originally published in the March 1938 issue of *Black Mask*.



## You'll Always Remember Me

### Steve Fisher



COULD TELL IT was Pushton blowing the bugle and I got out of bed tearing half of the bed clothes with me. I ran to the door and yelled, “Drown it! Drown it! Drown it!” and then I slammed the door and went along the row of beds and pulled the covers off the rest of the guys and said:

“Come on, get up. Get up! Don’t you hear Pushton out there blowing his stinky lungs out?” I hate bugles anyway, but the way this guy Pushton all but murders reveille kills me. I hadn’t slept very well, thinking of the news I was going to hear this morning, one way or the other, and then to be jarred out of what sleep I could get by Pushton climaxed everything.

I went back to my bed and grabbed my shoes and puttees and slammed them on the floor in front of me, then I began unbuttoning my pajamas. I knew it wouldn’t do any good to ask the guys in this wing. They wouldn’t know anything. When they did see a paper all they read was the funnies. That’s the trouble with Clark’s. I know it’s one of the best military academies in the West and that it costs my old man plenty of dough to keep me here, but they sure have some dopy ideas on how to handle kids. Like dividing the dormitories according to ages. Anybody with any sense knows that it should be according to grades because just take for instance this wing. I swear there isn’t a fourteen-year-old-punk in it that I could talk to without wanting to push in his face. And I have to live with the little pukes.

So I kept my mouth shut and got dressed, then I beat it out into the company street before the battalion got lined up for the flag raising. That's a silly thing, isn't it? Making us stand around with empty stomachs, shivering goose pimples while they pull up the flag and Pushton blows the bugle again. But at that I guess I'd have been in a worse place than Clark's Military Academy if my pop hadn't had a lot of influence and plenty of dollars. I'd be in a big school where they knock you around and don't ask you whether you like it or not. I know. I was there a month. So I guess the best thing for me to do was to let the academy have their Simple Simon flag-waving fun and not kick about it.

I was running around among the older guys now, collaring each one and asking the same question: "Were you on home-going yesterday? Did you see a paper last night? What about Tommy Smith?" That was what I wanted to know. What about Tommy Smith.

"He didn't get it," a senior told me.

"You mean the governor turned him down?"

"Yeah. He hangs Friday."

That hit me like a sledge on the back of my head and I felt words rushing to the tip of my tongue and then sliding back down my throat. I felt weak, like my stomach was all tied up in a knot. I'd thought sure Tommy Smith would have had his sentence changed to life. I didn't think they really had enough evidence to swing him. Not that I cared, particularly, only he had lived across the street and when they took him in for putting a knife through his old man's back—that was what they charged him with—it had left his two sisters minus both father and brother and feeling pretty badly.

Where I come in is that I got a crush on Marie, the youngest sister. She's fifteen. A year

older than me. But as I explained, I'm not any little dumb dope still in grammar school. I'm what you'd call bright.

So that was it; they were going to swing Tommy after all, and Marie would be bawling on my shoulder for six months. Maybe I'd drop the little dame. I certainly wasn't going to go over and take that for the rest of my life.

I got lined up in the twelve-year-old company, at the right end because I was line sergeant. We did squads right and started marching toward the flag pole. I felt like hell. We swung to a company front and halted.

Pushton started in on the bugle. I watched him with my eyes burning. Gee, I hate buglers, and Pushton is easy to hate anyway. He's fat and wears horn-rimmed glasses. He's got a body like a bowling ball and a head like a pimple. His face looks like yesterday's oatmeal. And does he think being bugler is an important job! The little runt struts around like he was Gabriel, and he walks with his buttocks sticking out one way and his chest the other.

I watched him now, but I was thinking more about Tommy Smith. Earlier that night of the murder I had been there seeing Marie and I had heard part of Tommy's argument with his old man. Some silly thing. A girl Tommy wanted to marry and the old man couldn't see it that way. I will say he deserved killing, the old grouch. He used to chase me with his cane. Marie says he used to get up at night and wander around stomping that cane as he walked.

Tommy's defense was that the old boy lifted the cane to bean him. At least that was the defense the lawyer wanted to present. He wanted to present that, with Tommy pleading guilty, and hope for an acquittal. But Tommy stuck to straight denials on everything. Said he hadn't killed his father. The way everything

shaped up the State proved he was a drunken liar and the jury saw it that way.

Tommy was a nice enough sort. He played football at his university, was a big guy with blond hair and a ruddy face, and blue eyes. He had a nice smile, white and clean like he scrubbed his teeth a lot. I guess his old man had been right about that girl, though, because when all this trouble started she dropped right out of the picture, went to New York or somewhere with her folks.

I was thinking about this when we began marching again; and I was still thinking about it when we came in for breakfast about forty minutes later, after having had our arms thrown out of joint in some more silly stuff called setting-up exercises. What they won't think of! As though we didn't get enough exercise running around all day!

Then we all trooped in to eat.

I sat at the breakfast table cracking my egg and watching the guy across from me hog six of them. I wanted to laugh. People think big private schools are the ritz and that their sons, when they go there, mix with the cream of young America. Bushwa! There are a few kids whose last names you might see across the front of a department store like Harker Bros., and there are some movie stars' sons, but most of us are a tough, outcast bunch that couldn't get along in public school and weren't wanted at home. Tutors wouldn't handle most of us for love or money. So they put us here.

Clark's will handle any kid and you can leave the love out of it so long as you lay the money on the line. Then the brat is taken care of so far as his parents are concerned, and he has the prestige of a fancy Clark uniform.

There wasn't another school in the State that would have taken me, public or private, after looking at my record. But when old man

Clark had dough-ray-me clutched in his right fist he was blind to records like that. Well, that's the kind of a bunch we were.

Well, as I say, I was watching this glutton stuff eggs down his gullet which he thought was a smart thing to do even though he got a bellyache afterward, when the guy on my right said:

"I see Tommy Smith is going to hang."

"Yeah," I said, "that's rotten, ain't it?"

"Rotten?" he replied. "It's wonderful. It's what that rat has coming to him."

"Listen," said I, "one more crack like that and I'll smack your stinking little face in."

"You and how many others?" he said.

"Just me," I said, "and if you want to come outside I'll do it right now."

The kid who was table captain yelled: "Hey, you two pipe down. What's the argument anyway?"

"They're going to hang Tommy Smith," I said, "and I think it's a dirty rotten shame. He's as innocent as a babe in the woods."

"Ha-ha," said the table captain, "you're just bothered about Marie Smith."

"Skirt crazy! Skirt crazy!" mumbled the guy stuffing down the eggs.

I threw my water in his face, then I got up, facing the table captain, and the guy on my right. "Listen," I said, "Tommy Smith is innocent. I was there an hour before the murder happened, wasn't I? What do you loud-mouthed half-wits think you know about it? All you morons know is what you read in the papers. Tommy didn't do it. I should know, shouldn't I? I was right there in the house

before it happened. I've been around there plenty since. I've talked to the detectives."

I sat down, plenty mad. I sat down because I had seen a faculty officer coming into the dining-room. We all kept still until he walked on through. Then the table captain sneered and said:

"Tommy Smith is a dirty stinker. He's the one that killed his father all right. He stuck a knife right through his back!"

"A lie! A lie!" I screamed.

"How do you know it's a lie?"

"Well, I—I know, that's all," I said.

"Yeah, you know! Listen to him! You know! That's hot." I think I'll laugh!"

"Damn it," I said. "I *do* know!"

"How? How? Tell us that!"

"Well, maybe *I* did it. What do you think about that?"

"You!" shouted the table captain. "A little fourteen-year-old wart like you killing anybody! Ha!"

"Aw, go to hell," I said, "that's what you can do. Go straight to hell!"

"A little wart like you killing anybody," the table captain kept saying, and he was holding his sides and laughing.



LL THAT Monday I felt pretty bad thinking about Tommy, what a really swell guy he had been, always laughing, always having a pat on the back for you. I knew he must be in a cell up in San Quentin

now, waiting, counting the hours, maybe hearing them build his scaffold.

I imagine a guy doesn't feel so hot waiting for a thing like that, pacing in a cell, smoking up cigarettes, wondering what it's like when you're dead. I've read some about it. I read about Two Gun Crowley, I think it was, who went to the chair with his head thrown back and his chest out like he was proud of it. But there must have been something underneath, and Crowley, at least, knew that *he* had it coming to him. The real thing must be different than what you read in the papers. It must be pretty awful.

But in spite of all this I had sense enough to stay away from Marie all day. I could easily have gone to her house which was across the street from the campus, but I knew that she and her sister, Ruth, and that Duff Ryan, the young detective who had made the arrest—because, as he said, he thought it was his duty—had counted on the commutation of sentence. They figured they'd have plenty of time to clear up some angles of the case which had been plenty shaky even in court. No, sir. Sweet Marie would be in no mood for my consolation and besides I was sick of saying the same things over and over and watching her burst into tears every time I mentioned Tommy's name.

I sat in the study hall Monday evening thinking about the whole thing. Outside the window I could see the stars crystal clear; and though it was warm in the classroom I could feel the cold of the air in the smoky blue of the night, so that I shivered. When they marched us into the dormitory at eight-thirty Simmons, the mess captain, started razzing me about Tommy being innocent again, and I said:

"Listen, putrid, you wanta get hurt?"

"No," he said, then he added: "Sore head."

“You’ll have one sore face,” I said, “if you don’t shut that big yap of yours.”

There was no more said and when I went to bed and the lights went off I lay there squirming while that fat-cheeked Pushton staggered through taps with his bugle. I was glad that Myers had bugle duty tomorrow and I wouldn’t have to listen to Pushton.

But long after taps I still couldn’t sleep for thinking of Tommy. What a damn thing that was—robbing me of my sleep! But I tell you, I did some real fretting, and honestly, if it hadn’t been for the fact that God and I parted company so long ago, I might have even been sap enough to pray for him. But I didn’t. I finally went to sleep. It must have been ten o’clock.

I didn’t show around Marie’s Tuesday afternoon either, figuring it was best to keep away. But after chow, that is, supper, an orderly came beating it out to the study hall for me and told me I was wanted on the telephone. I chased up to the main building and got right on the wire. It was Duff Ryan, that young detective I told you about.

“You’ve left me with quite a load, young man,” he said.

“Explain,” I said. “I’ve no time for nonsense.” I guess I must have been nervous to say a thing like that to the law, but there was something about Duff Ryan’s cool gray eyes that upset me and I imagined I could see those eyes right through the telephone.

“I mean about Ruth,” he said softly, “she feels pretty badly. Now I can take care of her all right, but little Marie is crying her eyes out and I can’t do anything with her.”

“So what?” I said.

“She’s your girl, isn’t she, Martin?” he asked.

“Listen,” I said, “in this school guys get called by their last name. Martin sounds sissy. My name is Thorpe.”

“I’m sorry I bothered you, Martin,” Duff said in that same soft voice. “If you don’t want to cooperate—”

“Oh, I’ll cooperate,” I said. “I’ll get right over. That is, provided I can get permission.”

“I’ve already arranged that,” Duff told me. “You just come on across the street and don’t bother mentioning anything about it to anyone.”

“O.K.,” I said, and hung up. I sat there for a minute. This sounded fishy to me. Of course, Duff *might* be on the level, but I doubted it. You can never tell what a guy working for the law is going to do.

I trotted out to the campus and on across to the Smith house. Their mother had died a long while ago, so with the father murdered, and Tommy in the death house, there were only the two girls left.

Duff answered the door himself. I looked up at the big bruiser and then I sucked in my breath. I wouldn’t have known him! His face was almost gray. Under his eyes were the biggest black rings I had ever seen. I don’t mean the kind you get fighting. I mean the other kind, the serious kind you get from worry. He had short clipped hair that was sort of reddish, and shoulders that squared off his figure, tapering it down to a nice V.

Of course, he was plenty old, around twenty-six, but at this his being a detective surprised you because ordinarily he looked so much like a college kid. He always spoke in a modulated voice and never got excited over anything. And he had a way of looking at you that I hated. A quiet sort of way that asked and answered all of its own questions.

Personally, as a detective, I thought he was a big flop. The kind of detectives that I prefer seeing are those giant fighters that blaze their way through a gangster barricade. Duff Ryan was none of this. I suppose he was tough but he never showed it. Worst of all, I'd never even seen his gun!

"Glad you came over, Martin," he said.

"The name is Thorpe," I said.

He didn't answer, just stepped aside so I could come in. I didn't see Ruth, but I spotted Marie right away. She was sitting on the divan with her legs pulled up under her, and her face hidden. She had a hankchief pressed in her hand. She was a slim kid, but well developed for fifteen, so well developed in fact that for a while I had been razed about this at school.

Like Tommy, she had blond hair, only hers was fluffy and came part way to her shoulders. She turned now and her face was all red from crying, but I still thought she was pretty. I'm a sucker that way. I've been a sucker for women ever since I was nine.

She had wide spaced green eyes, and soft, rosy skin, and a generous mouth. Her only trouble, if any, was that she was a prude. Wouldn't speak to anybody on the Clark campus except me. Maybe you think I didn't like that! I'd met her at Sunday school or rather coming out, since I had been hiding around waiting for it to let out, and I walked home with her four Sundays straight before she would speak to me. That is, I walked along beside her holding a one-way conversation. Finally I skipped a Sunday, then the next one she asked me where I had been, and that started the ball rolling.

"Thorpe," she said—that was another thing, *she* always called me by my last name because that was the one I had given her to

start with— "Thorpe, I'm so glad you're here. Come over here and sit down beside me."

I went over and sat down and she straightened up, like she was ashamed that she had been crying, and put on a pretty good imitation of a smile. "How's everything been?" she said.

"Oh, pretty good," I said. "The freshmen are bellyaching about Latin this week, and just like algebra, I'm already so far ahead of them it's a crying shame."

"You're so smart, Thorpe," she told me.

"Too bad about Tommy," I said. "There's always the chance for a reprieve though."

"No," she said, and her eyes began to get dim again, "no, there isn't. This—this decision that went through Sunday night—that's the— Unless, of course, something comes up that we—the lawyer can—" and she began crying.

I put my arm round her which was a thing she hadn't let me do much, and I said, "Come on, kid. Straighten up. Tommy wouldn't want you to cry."

About five minutes later she did straighten up. Duff Ryan was sitting over in the corner looking out the window but it was just like we were alone.

"I'll play the piano," she said.

"Do you know anything hot yet?"

"Hot?" she said.

"Something popular, Marie," I explained. Blood was coming up into my face.

"Why, no," she replied. "I thought I would—"

“Play hymns!” I half screamed. “No! I don’t want to hear any of those damned hymns!”

“Why, Thorpe!”

“I can’t help it,” I said. “I’ve told you about that enough times. Those kinds of songs just drone along in the same pitch and never get anywhere. If you can’t play something decent stay away from the piano.”

My fists were tight now and my fingers were going in and out. She knew better than to bring up that subject. It was the only thing we had ever argued about. Playing hymns. I wanted to go nuts every time I heard “*Lead Kindly Light*” or one of those other goofy things. I’d get so mad I couldn’t see straight. Just an obsession with me, I guess.

“All right,” she said, “but I wish you wouldn’t swear in this house.”

I said, “All right, I won’t swear in this house.”

“Or anywhere else,” she said.

I was feeling good now. “O.K., honey, if you say so.”

She seemed pleased and at least the argument had gotten her to quit thinking about Tommy for a minute. But it was then that her sister came downstairs.

Ruth was built on a smaller scale than Marie so that even though she was nineteen she wasn’t any taller. She had darker hair too, and an oval face, very white now, making her brown eyes seem brighter. Brighter though more hollow. I will say she was beautiful.

She wore only a rich blue lounging robe which was figure-fitting though it came down past her heels and was clasped in a high collar around her pale throat.

“I think it’s time for you to come to bed, Marie,” she said. “Hello, Thorpe.”

“Hello,” I said.

Marie got up wordlessly and pressed my hand, and smiled again, that faint imitation, and went off. Ruth stood there in the doorway from the dining-room and as though it was a signal—which I suspect it was—Duff Ryan got up.

“I guess it’s time for us to go, Martin,” he said.

“You don’t say,” I said.

He looked at me fishily. “Yeah. I do say. We’ve got a job to do. Do you know what it is, Martin? We’ve got to kill a kitten. A poor little kitten.”

I started to answer but didn’t. The way he was saying that, and looking at me, put a chill up my back that made me suddenly ice cold. I began to tremble all over. He opened the door and motioned for me to go out.



HAT CAT thing was a gag of some kind, I thought, and was wide awake for any funny stuff from detectives, but Duff Ryan actually had a little kitten hidden in a box under the front steps of the house. He picked it up now and petted it.

“Got hit by a car,” he said. “It’s in terrible pain and there isn’t a chance for recovery. I gave it a shot of stuff that eased the pain for a while but it must be coming back. We’ll have to kill the cat.”

I wanted to ask him why he hadn’t killed it in the first place, whenever he had picked it up from under the car, but I kept my mouth



shut and we walked along, back across the street to the Clark campus. There were no lights at all here and we walked in darkness, our feet scuffing on the dirt of the football gridiron.

“About that night of the murder, Martin,” Duff said. “You won’t mind a few more questions, will you? We want to do something to save Tommy. I made the arrest but I’ve been convinced since that he’s innocent. I want desperately to save him before it’s too late. It’s apparent that we missed on something because—well, the way things are.”

I said, “Are you sure of Tommy’s innocence, or are you stuck on Ruth?”

“Sure of his innocence,” he said in that soft voice. “You want to help, don’t you, Martin? You don’t want to see Tommy die?”

“Quit talking to me like a kid,” I said. “Sure I want to help.”

“All right. What were you doing over there that night?”

“I’ve answered that a dozen times. Once in court. I was seeing Marie.”

“Mr. Smith—that is, her father—chased you out of the house though, didn’t he?”

“He asked me to leave,” I said.

“No, he didn’t, Martin. He ordered you out and told you not to come back again.”

I stopped and whirled toward him. “Who told you that?”

“Marie,” he said. “She was the only one who heard him. She didn’t want to say it before because she was afraid Ruth would keep her from seeing you. That little kid has a crush on you and she didn’t think that had any bearing on the case.

“Well, it hasn’t, has it?”

“Maybe not,” snapped Duff Ryan, “but he did chase you out, didn’t he? He threatened to use his cane on you?”

“I won’t answer,” I said.

“You don’t have to,” he told me. “But I wish you’d told the truth about it in the first place.”

“Why?” We started walking again. “You don’t think I killed him, do you?” I shot a quick glance in his direction and held my breath.

“No,” he said, “nothing like that, only—”

“Only what?”

“Well, Martin, haven’t you been kicked out of about every school in the State?”

“I wouldn’t go so far as to say *every* school.”

Duff said, “Quite a few though, eh?”

“Enough,” I said.

“That’s what I thought,” he went on quietly, “I went over and had a look at your record, Martin. I wish I had thought of doing that sooner.”

“Listen—”

“Oh, don’t get excited,” he said, “this may give us new leads, that’s all. We’ve nothing against you. But when you were going to school at Hadden, you took the goat, which was a class mascot, upstairs with you one night and then pushed him down the stairs so that he broke all his legs. You did that, didn’t you?”

“The goat slipped,” I said.

"Maybe," whispered Duff. He lit a cigarette, holding onto the crippled cat with one hand. "But you stood at the top of the stairs and watched the goat suffer until somebody came along."

"I was so scared I couldn't move."

"Another time," Duff continued, "at another school, you pushed a kid into an oil hole that he couldn't get out of and you were ducking him— maybe trying to kill him—when someone came along and stopped you."

"He was a sissy. I was just having some fun!"

"At another school you were expelled for roping a newly born calf and pulling it up on top of a barn where you stabbed it and watched it bleed to death."

"I didn't stab it! It got caught on a piece of tin from the drain while I was pulling it up. You haven't told any of this to Marie, have you?"

"No," Duff said.

"All those things are just natural things," I said. "Any kid is liable to do them. You're just nuts because you can't pin the guilt on anybody but the guy who is going to die Friday and you're trying to make me look bad!"

"Maybe," Duff answered quietly, and we came into the chapel now and stopped. He dropped his cigarette, stepped on it, then patted the cat. Moonlight shone jaggedly through the rotting pillars. I could see the cat's eyes shining. "Maybe," Duff breathed again, "but didn't you land in a reform school once?"

"Twice," I said.

"And once in an institution where you were observed by a staff of doctors? It was a State institution, I think. Sort of a rest home."

"I was there a month," I said. "Some crab sent me there, or had me sent. But my dad got me out."

"Yes," Duff replied, "the crab had you sent there because you poisoned two of his Great Dane dogs. Your dad had to bribe somebody to get you out, and right now he pays double tuition for you here at Clark's."

I knew all this but it wasn't anything sweet to hear coming from a detective. "What of it?" I said. "You had plenty of chance to find that out."

"But we weren't allowed to see your records before," Duff answered. "As a matter of fact I paid an orderly to steal them for me, and then return them."

"Why, you dirty crook!"

I could see the funny twist of his smile there in the moonlight. His face looked pale and somehow far away. He looked at the cat and petted it some more. I was still shaking. Scared, I guess.

He said, "Too bad we have to kill you, kitten, but it's better than that pain."

Then, all at once I thought he had gone mad. He swung the cat around and began batting its head against the pillar in the chapel. I could see the whole thing clearly in the moonlight, his arm swinging back and forth, the cat's head being battered off, the bright crimson blood spurting all over.

He kept on doing it and my temples began to pound. My heart went like wild fire. I wanted to reach over and help him. I wanted to take that little cat and squeeze the living guts out of it. I wanted to help him smash its brains all over the chapel. I felt dizzy. Everything was going around. I felt myself reaching for the cat.

But I'm smart. I'm no dummy. I'm at the head of my class. I'm in high school. I knew what he was doing. He was testing me. *He wanted me to help him.* The son of a——— wasn't going to trick *me* like that. Not Martin Thorpe. I put my arms behind me and grabbed my wrists and with all my might I held my arms there and looked the other way.

I heard the cat drop with a thud to the cement, then I looked up, gasping to catch my breath. Duff Ryan looked at me with cool gray eyes, then he walked off. I stood there, still trying to get my breath and watching his shadow blend with the shadows of the dark study hall. I was having one hell of a time getting my breath.



UT I slept good all night. I was mad and I didn't care about Tommy any more. Let him hang. I slept good but I woke up ten minutes before reveille remembering that it was Pushton's turn at the bugle again. He and Myers traded off duty every other day.

I felt pretty cocky and got up putting on only my slippers and went down to the eleven-year-old wing. Pushton was sitting on the edge of the bed working his arms back and forth and yawning. The fat little punk looked like an old man. He took himself that seriously. You would have thought maybe he was a general.

"What you want, Thorpe?" he said.

"I want your bugle. I'm going to break the damn thing."

"You leave my bugle alone," he said. "My folks aren't as rich as yours and I had to save all my spending money to buy it." This was true. They furnished bugles at school but they were awful and Pushton took his music so seriously that he had saved up and bought his own instrument.

"I know it," I said, "so the school won't be on my neck if I break it." I looked around. "Where is it?"

"I won't tell you!"

I looked under the bed, under his pillow, then I grabbed him by the nose. "Come on, Heinie. Where is it?"

"Leave me alone!" he wailed. "Keep your hands off me." He was talking so loud now that half the wing was waking up.

"All right, punk," I said. "Go ahead and blow that thing, and I hope you blow your tonsils out."

I went back to my bed and held my ears. Pushton blew the bugle all right, I never did find out where he had the thing hidden.

I dressed thinking well, only two more days and Tommy gets it. I'd be glad when it was over. Maybe all this tension would ease up then and Marie wouldn't cry so much because once he was dead there wouldn't be anything she could do about it. Time would go by and eventually she would forget him. One person more or less isn't so important in the world anyway, no matter how good a guy he is.

Everything went swell Wednesday right through breakfast and until after we were marching out of the chapel and into the schoolroom. Then I ran into Pushton who was trotting around with his bugle tucked under his arm. I stopped and looked him up and down.

His little black eyes didn't flicker. He just said, "Next time you bother me, Thorpe, I'm going to report you."

"Go ahead, punk," I said, "and see what happens to you."

I went on into school then, burning up at his guts, talking to *me* that way.

I was still burned up and sore at the guy when a lucky break came, for me, that is, not Pushton. It was during the afternoon right after we had been dismissed from the class room for the two-hour recreation period.

I went into the main building, which was prohibited in the day time so that I had to sneak in, to get a book I wanted to read. It was under my pillow. I slipped up the stairs, crept into my wing, got the book and started out. It was then that I heard a pounding noise.

I looked around, then saw it was coming from the eleven-year-old wing.

I walked in and there it was! You wouldn't have believed anything so beautiful could have been if you hadn't seen it with your own eyes. At least that was the way I felt about it. For, who was it, but Pushton.

The bugler on duty has the run of the main building and it was natural enough that he was here but I hadn't thought about it. There was a new radio set, a small portable, beside his bed. I saw that the wires and ear phone—which you have to use in the dormitory—were connected with the adjoining bed as well and guessed that it belonged to another cadet. But Pushton was hooking it up. He was leaning half-way out the window trying, pounding with a hammer, to make some kind of a connection on the aerial wire.

Nothing could have been better. The window was six stories from the ground with cement down below. No one knew I was in the building. I felt blood surge into my temples. My face got red, hot red, and I could feel fever throbbing in my throat. I moved forward slowly, on cat feet, my hands straight at my sides. I didn't want him to hear me. But I was getting that dizzy feeling now. My fingers were itching.

Then suddenly I lunged over, I shoved against him. He looked back once, and that was what I wanted. He looked back for an instant, his fat face green with the most unholy fear I have ever seen. Then I gave him another shove and he was gone. Before he could call out, before he could say a word, he was gone, falling through the air!

I risked jumping up on the bed so I could see him hit, and I did see him hit. Then I got down and straightened the bed and beat it out.

I ran down the stairs as fast as I could. I didn't see anybody. More important, no one saw me. But when I was on the second floor I ran down the hall to the end and lifted the window. I jumped out here, landing squarely on my feet.

I waited for a minute, then I circled the building from an opposite direction. My heart was pounding inside me. It was difficult for me to breathe. I managed to get back to the play field through an indirect route.

Funny thing, Pushton wasn't seen right away. No one but myself had seen him fall. I was on the play field at least ten minutes, plenty long enough to establish myself as being there, before the cry went up. The kids went wild. We ran in packs to the scene.

I stood there with the rest of them looking at what was left of Pushton. He wouldn't blow any more bugles. His flesh was like a sack of water that had fallen and burst full of holes. The blood was splattered out in jagged streaks all around him.

We stood around about five minutes, the rest of the kids and I, nobody saying anything. Then a faculty officer chased us away, and that was the last I saw of Pushton.

Supper was served as usual but there wasn't much talk. What there was of it seemed to establish the fact that Pushton had been a

thick-witted sort and had undoubtedly leaned out too far trying to fix the aerial wire and had fallen.

I thought that that could have easily been the case, all right, and since I had hated the little punk I had no conscience about it. It didn't bother me nearly so much as the fact that Tommy Smith was going to die. I had liked Tommy. And I was nuts about his sister, wasn't I?

That night study hall was converted into a little inquest meeting. We were all herded into one big room and Major Clark talked to us as though we were a bunch of Boy Scouts. After ascertaining that no one knew any more about Pushton's death than what they had seen on the cement, he assured us that the whole thing had been unavoidable and even went so far as to suggest that we might spare our parents the worry of telling them of so unfortunate an incident. All the bloated donkey was worrying about was losing a few tuitions.

Toward the end of the session Duff Ryan came in and nodded at me, and then sat down. He looked around at the kids, watched Major Clark a while, and then glanced back at me. He kept doing that until we were dismissed. He made me nervous.



RIDAY morning I woke up and listened for reveille but it didn't come. I lay there, feeling comfortable in the bed clothes, and half lazy, but feeling even' minute that reveille would blast me out of my place. Then I suddenly realized why the bugle hadn't blown. I heard the splash of rain across the window and knew that we wouldn't have to raise the flag or take our exercises this morning. On rainy days we got to sleep an extra half-hour.

I felt pretty good about this and put my hands behind my head there on the pillow and began thinking. They were pleasant, what you might call mellow thoughts. A little thing like an extra half-hour in bed will do that.

Things were working out fine and after tonight I wouldn't have anything to worry about. For

Duff Ryan to prove Tommy was innocent *after* the hanging would only make him out a damn fool. I was glad it was raining. It would make it easier for me to lay low, to stay away from Marie until the final word came...

That was what I thought in the morning, lying there in bed. But no. Seven-thirty that night Duff came over to the school in a slicker. He came into the study hall and got me. His eyes were wild. His face was strained.

"Ruth and I are going to see the lawyer again," he said, "you've got to stay with Marie."

"Nuts," I said.

He jerked me out of the seat, then he took his hands off me as though he were ashamed. "Come on," he said. "This is no time for smart talk."

So I went.

Ruth had on a slicker too and was waiting there on the front porch. I could see her pretty face. It was pinched, sort of terrible. Her eyes were wild too. She patted my hand, half crying, and said, "You be good to Marie, honey. She likes you, and you're the only one in the world now that can console her."

"What time does Tommy go?" I asked.

"Ten-thirty," said Duff.

I nodded. "O.K." I stood there as they crossed the sidewalk and got into Duff Ryan's

car and drove away. Then I went in to see Marie. The kid looked scared, white as a ghost.

“Oh, Thorpe,” she said, “they’re going to kill him tonight!”

“Well, I guess there’s nothing we can do,” I said.

She put her arms around me and cried on my shoulder. I could feel her against me, and believe me, she was nice. She had figure, all right. I put my arms around her waist and then I kissed her neck and her ears. She looked at me, tears on her cheeks, and shook her head. “Don’t.”

She said that because I had never kissed her before, but now I saw her lips and I kissed her. She didn’t do anything about it, but kept crying.

Finally I said, “Well, let’s make fudge. Let’s play a game. Let’s play the radio. Let’s do *something*. This thing’s beginning to get me.”

We went to the kitchen and made fudge for a while.

But I was restless. The rain had increased. There was thunder and lightning in the sky now. Again I had that strange feeling of being cold, although the room was warm. I looked at the clock and it said ten minutes after eight. Only ten minutes after eight! And Tommy wasn’t going to hang until ten-thirty!

“You’ll always stay with me, won’t you, Thorpe?” said Marie.

“Sure,” I told her, but right then I felt like I wanted to push her face in. I had never felt that way before. I couldn’t understand what was the matter with me. Everything that had been me was gone. My wit and good humor.

I kept watching the clock, watching every minute that ticked by, and thinking of

Tommy up there in San Quentin in the death cell pacing back and forth. I guess maybe he was watching the minutes too. I wondered if it was raining up there and if rain made any difference in a hanging.

We wandered back into the living-room and sat down at opposite ends of the divan. Marie looking at nothing, her eyes glassy, and me watching and hating the rain, and hearing the clock.

Then suddenly Marie got up and went to the piano. She didn’t ask me if she could or anything about it. She just went to the piano and sat down. I stared after her, even opened my mouth to speak. But I didn’t say anything. After all, it was *her* brother who was going to die, wasn’t it? I guess for one night at least she could do anything she wanted to do.

But then she began playing. First, right off, “*Lead Kindly Light*,” and then “*Onward Christian Soldiers*,” and then “*Little Church in the Wildwood*.” I sat there wringing my hands with that agony beating in my ears. Then I leapt to my feet and began to shout at her.

“Stop that! Stop it! Do you want to drive me crazy?”

But her face was frozen now. It was as though she was in a trance. I ran to her and shook her shoulder, but she pulled away from me and played on.

I backed away from her and my face felt as though it was contorted. I backed away and stared at her, her slim, arched back. I began biting my fingernails, and then my fingers. That music was killing me. Those hymns... those silly, inane hymns. Why didn’t she stop it? The piano and the rain were seeping into my blood stream.

I walked up and down the room. I walked up and down the room faster and faster. I stopped and picked up a flower vase and

dropped it, yelling: “*Stop it! For the love of heaven, stop!*”

But she kept right on. Again I began staring at her, at her back, and her throat, and the profile of her face. I felt blood surging in me. I felt those hammers in my temples...

I tried to fight it off this time. I tried to go toward her to pull her away from that damn piano but I didn’t have the strength to move in her direction. I stood there feeling the breath go out of me, feeling my skin tingle. And I didn’t want to be like that. I looked at my hands and one minutes they were tight fists and the next my fingers were working in and out like mad.

I looked toward the kitchen, and then I moved quietly into it. She was still slamming at the piano when I opened the drawer and pulled out the knife I had used to kill her father.

At least it was a knife like it. I put it behind me and tiptoed back into the room. She wasn’t aware that I had moved. I crept up on her, waited.

Her hands were flying over the piano keys. Once more I shouted, and my voice was getting hoarse: “Stop it!”

But of course she didn’t. She didn’t and I swore. I swore at her. She didn’t hear this either. But I’d show the little slut a thing or two.

I was breathing hard, looking around the room to make sure no one was here. Then I lifted the knife and plunged down with it.

I swear I never knew where Duff Ryan came from. It must have been from behind the divan. A simple place like that and I hadn’t seen him, merely because I had been convinced that he went away in the car. But he’d been in the room all the time waiting for me to do what I almost did.

It had been a trick, of course, and this time I’d been sap enough to fall into his trap. He had heard me denounce hymns, he knew I’d be nervous tonight, highly excitable, so he had set the stage and remained hidden and Marie had done the rest.

He had told Marie then, after all.

Duff Ryan grabbed my wrist just at the right moment, as he had planned on doing, and of course being fourteen I didn’t have much chance against him. He wrested away the knife, then he grabbed me and shouted:

“Why did you murder Marie’s father?”

“Because the old boy hated me! Because he thought Marie was too young to know boys! Because he kicked me out and hit me with his cane!” I said all this, trying to jerk away from him, but I couldn’t so I went on:

“That’s why I did it. Because I had a lot of fun doing it! So what? What are you going to do about it? I’m a kid, you can’t hang *me*! There’s a law against hanging kids. I murdered Pushton too. I shoved him out the window! How do you like that? All you can do is put me in reform school!”

As my voice faded, and it faded because I had begun to choke, I heard Ruth at the telephone. She had come back in too. She was calling long distance. San Quentin.

Marie was sitting on the divan, her face in her hands. You would have thought she was sorry for me. When I got my breath I went on:

“I came back afterward, while Tommy was in the other room. I got in the kitchen door. The old man was standing there and I just picked up the knife and let him have it. I ran before I could see much. But Pushton. Let me tell you about Pushton—”

Duff Ryan shoved me back against the piano. “Shut up,” he said. “You didn’t kill Pushton. You’re just bragging now. But you did kill the old man and that’s what we wanted to know!”

Bragging? I was enraged. But Duff Ryan clipped me and I went out cold.

So I’m in reform school now and—will you believe it?—I can’t convince anyone that I murdered Pushton. Is it that grown-ups are so unbelieving because I’m pretty young? Are they so stupid that they still look upon fourteen-year-old boys as little innocents who have no minds of their own? That is the bitterness of youth. And I am sure that I won’t change or see things any differently. I told the dopes that too, but everyone assures me I will.

But the only thing I’m really worried about is that no one will believe about Pushton,

not even the kids here at the reform school, and that hurts. It does something to my pride.

I’m not in the least worried about anything else. Things here aren’t so bad, nor so different from Clark’s. Doctors come and see me now and then but they don’t think anything is wrong with my mind.

They think I knifed Old Man Smith because I was in a blind rage when I did it, and looking at it that way, it would only be second-degree murder even if I were older. I’m not considered serious. There are lots worse cases here than mine. Legally, a kid isn’t responsible for what he does, so I’ll be out when I’m twenty-one. Maybe before, because my old man’s got money...

You’ll always remember me, won’t you? Because I’ll be out when I’m older and you might be the one I’ll be seeing.