

# The Visit to Uncle Jake's

A STORY

*By George Milburn*

MY Grandfather Beals was a slow-talking man. His talk was that of the Virginia hills, and I suppose that the whining Arkansas share-croppers and the drawling Texans thought him a little queer on account of it. They could understand why their farm neighbors from Kansas and Iowa and other Yankees and foreigners had strange accents, but a man whose talk was Southern and yet unlike their own was unaccountable. They used to mimic the old man when he wasn't around.

His way of talking slowly and gently gave him an innocent air that was a good help to him in his cotton business. While he had a name for honesty and pride, his methods, perhaps, were as sharp as the next cotton-buyer's. Lots of times the farmers, misled by those guileless accents, would be bested in a deal at the very moment they felt that they were skinning the simple old man.

Although his dialect got him a reputation for eccentricity, the only surprising thing I ever heard of his doing was buying a Ford touring-car. During the War he made money with cotton, and after the War he was able to retire, well fixed. He was about sixty-five then, tall and dignified, with a fine head of white hair. The first thing he did, after he sold the good-will of his cotton business, was buy a flivver.

That was extraordinary, because he had done without a car in his cotton business, where he had had a real need for one. Year after year he had driven about the country, sizing up the cotton crop, in a ramshackle old phaeton hitched to a team of roans. The automobile agents had been after him for years, but he had put them off. Then, when he was an old man and out of business, he up and bought an automobile for his own pleasure.

I say for his own pleasure, because my Grandmother Beals refused, from the day he came driving up with the salesman, to ride with him in his car. There was wisdom in her decision, too. My Grand-

father Beals never did get to be a very good driver. He had the most trouble with the foot-pedals which that model Ford had for gear shifts, and he was apt to step on the reverse instead of the brake and go wheeling backward to the detriment of whatever was behind him. Another thing that made riding with my Grandfather Beals a dubious pleasure was his habitual neglect of the steering-wheel. Driving his roans in the old days he got used to letting the reins fall idle across the dashboard while he pointed and gestured toward the fields along the way. When he began driving the Ford he was likely to let go the wheel completely while he motioned toward a fine stand of cotton.

It was a wonder that he didn't kill himself and others too. He didn't, though. He ploughed through barbed wire, he backed off into deep ditches, he knocked a row of cast-iron palings off the neighbor's ornamental fence, and once he broke out one end of the converted stable in which he kept the car. The new flivver got wofully scratched and battered, but my grandfather always came through unscathed. That is, excepting the acid comments of my grandmother.

But he was a headstrong man, and my grandmother's ridicule served only to make him more determined. He practised driving on country dirt roads, and he cut a droll figure, jouncing over the ruts with his legs akimbo, crooked up on each side of the steering-wheel. He escaped having any serious accident, and in a few months he was getting the gully-jumper up around twenty-five miles an hour regularly.

It was about this time that presages of the post-war business depression were beginning to appear. The first was a lowering of prices on Fords. My Grandfather Beals saw then that he could have saved fifty dollars had he waited a few months to buy his car. He took this as a personal grievance against Henry Ford. The manufacturer had got the best of him in a business deal. At the time he had

bought his car from him, Ford had known that prices were going to be lowered shortly, and he had taken my grandfather to a cleaning. Other price-cuttings followed and hard times were at hand. He blamed Henry Ford for everything.

"That man Fohd," he would say in opening his remarks on the subject, "he ought to be took out and hanged on the highest tree in the land."

His resentment was so strong that he could no longer get any pleasure out of driving his automobile. He would have sold it, but it was so bent and torn, it would have brought scarcely any price at all, even if the market had not been falling. So he drove the Ford touring-car into the stable, where he had cut out stalls and mangers to make a garage. There it stayed for several years, gray and dejected under its coating of silt and straw and dust.

There was only one thing that could have made my grandfather forget his soreness and set those narrow-tired, mud-crust-ed wheels in motion again. That came one morning in the fourth June of his retirement—word from his brother Jacob.

He hadn't seen or heard from Jacob in more than fifty years. There had been eight brothers in that family. As each of them had come of age, the father had given him a horse, saddle and bridle, a jug of brandy and twenty dollars in cash and had told him to light out.

Jacob was the oldest, so he had been the first to go. His going had made a strong impression on my grandfather, a boy of fifteen, and he had carried the memory of it through the years. He had stood in the yard with the rest of the family that morning watching Jacob mount up. Better than half a century had passed since he had stood gazing after Jacob galloping away from the hills, the jug of liquor jouncing at the saddle-side and the twenty silver dollars clanking in time.

In later years Jacob's destiny was my grandfather's favorite topic for surmise. He would spend futile hours making guesses about what had become of his oldest brother. Out of fictitious circumstance he would build up possible careers for him, and then, at the end, he would reject them all.

He had kept up with all the others. His brother Charlie, he knew, had a good thing of it with a melon farm in Colorado. Lacey had frozen to death in the Yukon, Web had a homestead in Idaho, Dick was a tobacco farmer back East, and so on. But Jacob interested him more than all the others, and of Jacob he knew nothing.

Then one morning the letter came bearing word of my grandfather's oldest brother. It had an Arkansas postmark, and it was written by Jacob's second wife. She explained that they had been married three years. She had been a widow and he had been a widower and both of them had families grown and gone away. She called Jacob "daddy." Daddy had often wondered about his brothers and sisters, but he had never made any attempt to get in touch with them. At last she had written to the cross-roads postmaster near the old home back in the Virginia hills. She had obtained from him the addresses of various members of the family. Daddy was getting old, she wrote, and she thought it would be nice if he could hear from his favorite brother before he passed on.

My grandfather was not a demonstrative man, but the letter put him in a transport of joy. He was triumphant. It was as if he, unaided, had worried through to the solution of a problem that had puzzled every one for ages. He wore the letter to a limp, ink-stained frazzle, rereading it, studying it, speculating on ambiguous phrases, trying to read more than was in the writing.

The woman wrote a fine Spencerian hand, making her first *s's* like *f's* and finishing off words with slight curlicues. That was a good sign. Jacob's second wife was an educated woman. My grandfather said, "Well, Jake's got him a good woman, as old as he is, so he must have got to be somebody." But the handwriting was wavering, and that showed that the woman was old.

My Grandfather Beals got a road-map of Arkansas and began hunting for the town of the postmark. It was a hard search. But finally, deep among the hachures of the Ozarks, dense as a handful of eyebrows, he located the name in print so fine it was barely legible. The discovery delighted him almost as much as the letter had, and he was in a fever of excitement.

That same day he backed the old Ford out of the stable. It was the first time he had laid hand on it in three years. He washed it carefully. What black enamel there was left on the scarred, dented sides was peeling, so he made a quick job of repainting the body.

He made his preparations quickly, and when he announced one night that he was going on a trip over into the Arkansas hills the next day, and that my brother Ed and I were going along, he took

every one so completely by surprise no one opposed him.

"It's two hundud mile, a right smaht piece," my Grandfather Beals said, "and we ah goin' to staht in the mawnin' befo' day."

## II

The cold engine banged and started all the roosters in the neighborhood crowing before their time. A spasm shook the old car and it shivered and clanked as my grandfather twisted the wheel around and the flivver lights cut a broad arc. We rolled out of the barnyard, halting for Ed to get out and close the gate. Ed ran back and got up in the front seat. I sat in the back drowsing and running my tongue over my front teeth, feeling the place where the breakfast coffee had scalded it.

We rattled out of town and went wheeling eastward at a great speed. The lights let a dim, quivering swath ahead on the dirt road, turning the cool, dewy dust to talcum. My grandfather pulled the gas-lever down and the powdered road went slithering out from under us. Ed and I held on for dear life. Through the dark we could make out the grim set of Grandfather Beals's jaw.

It was getting light and the foot-hills had appeared out of the dusk before us when he finally pushed the throttle back up to its usual notch. As the speed slackened and the engine quieted, he turned to Ed.

"I alluhs like to staht in like I can hold out," he said, smiling slyly.

These were the first words spoken, and Ed took advantage of the opening to ask, "How long are we going to stay over in Arkansas, grandpa?"

"Oh, we'll talk about that when we get thah. Me and brothah Jake ah goin' to have lots to talk about."

He had put the treeless prairies behind us and we were in the shaded hills when the sun, like a bloody thumb, came poking up through the mist wreaths.

As day broadened and we were rolling along at a more leisurely rate, my Grandfather Beals began to take notice of the surrounding landscape. We were climbing a mountain road, where a slight jog to the right would have meant plunging over the bluff into the creek-bottom, hundreds of feet below. My grandfather let go the wheel and threw out both his hands with a Delsartian gesture toward the smoky valley.

"Now, look ye thah!" he exclaimed. "Ain't that a mastuh sight?"

"Watch it, grandpa, watch it!" said Ed, snatching at the wheel.

Grandfather Beals resumed the wheel coolly and held it until, a short distance on, a vineyard marching up over a hill-top attracted his attention.

"See thah, you boys. You-all ain't nevah seen nothin' like that. That's just like back East. You-all ain't nevah known what it is to live in the hill country." And he was forgetful of the steering-wheel again.

Occasionally we would stop to consult the road-map, or to question ruminative mountaineers.

The road led through summer-resort towns with their concrete, wire-fenced bathing-pools, past tall-stacked canning factories, along the base of high, sheer stone bluffs, with Bible texts and sets of gums and teeth advertising dental parlors and short Holy Roller exhortations stencilled on the rock. By noon, however, these encroachments vanished. We were deep in the hill country. We came to the town of the postmark.

The postmaster let his tilted chair thump down on the store-porch floor. "They's a Jake Beals that gets his mail out on the Goshen Road," the postmaster said, rubbing his thighs, "but most possible he lives off back of the road a ways."

All along the Goshen Road, an engine-racking mountain trail, we stopped to look at mail-boxes. Finally we found one, almost hidden by tall weeds, with "Jake Beals" scrawled on it in black paint. There was no sign of a house, but a narrow, rock-strewn lane wound off from the road.

When I got out to inquire at a cabin, a stately, red-haired woman chewing a snuff-twigg said, "Uncle Jake Beals? Why him and his woman lives up the lane a piece, over on Seven Mile Crik. Won't you-all get out and come in?"

But we drove on. Just as the lane was petering out we reached a log house on a knoll. A barrel-stave hammock was stretched between two trees in the yard. Lying in it was a small, white-haired man dressed in faded blue overalls. As grandfather stopped the Ford and shut off the engine, the little old man sat up in the swing, blinking.

"Howdy do, suh?" said my Grandfather Beals.

"Quite well, thank you, suh. How ah you, suh?" said the little man. He got to his feet and sauntered out to the car.

A faint smile quivered on my Grandfather Beals's



lips. "We're lookin' foh a man by the name of Jones that lives around in this country somewhuh."

"Jones?" said the old man of the hammock. "Well, now it appeahs to me like thah is a family of Joneses livin' on down the crik a ways, but I 'low you'll have to go back around by the big road to get thah. Won't you-all light and rest yo'se'ves a while?"



My Grandfather Beals was close to tears. His eyes glistened. This was the meeting he had tried to envisage untold times during the fifty years they had been separated.

"Don't you know me, Jake?" he said softly.

The old man stepped back, startled. He put his hand up to his frowsy white head, scratched, and peered suspiciously at the man in the automobile.

"Why, no, stranguh, I can't say as I do."

"It's Jawn," said my grandfather in a voice so low it was almost a whisper.

"How was that?"

My grandfather cleared his throat. "It's yo' brothah Jawn," he said.

The transformation was immediate. The gnomish little man jumped and pranced.

"Jawn! Jawn!" he shouted, scrabbling up on the running-board. "Get out o' thah and let me see you!" He jumped back down and made off toward the house to bring up short and bawl, "Mahthy, come out o' thah! Brothah Jawn's hyah!" Then he came charging back.

My Grandfather Beals descended stiffly from the car. This was not the tender reunion he had dreamed about. His dignity, alongside the joyous unrestraint of his older brother, made him seem pompous and a little ridiculous.

He was straight and well fed, whereas Jacob was stooped and scrawny. The inactivity of his retirement had let my grandfather develop a paunch.

When he stepped to the ground Jacob ran up to him with a rigid forefinger. "Lawdy, what a belly!" he shouted. "Jawnnie! Jawnnie! Lawdy, what a belly!"

My Grandfather Beals colored and chuckled uncomfortably. His older brother ran circles around him, as delighted as a puppy.

A woman came out from the cabin. She wore a dingy Mother Hubbard. Her yellowish-white hair flew in strings about her face, and her eyes were pink and weak.

"Mahthy," cried Jacob, "this is my brothah Jawn you heered me talk about."

Martha batted her eyes and smiled a toothless smile and shook hands. "And whose younguns air them?" she asked pleasantly, turning to Ed and me. It was the first time we'd been noticed.

"These ah Cayoline's boys," my grandfather said, "Eddie and Dave."

"Cay'line's boys?" said Jacob. "Who's Cay'line? That yo' old woman?"

"No, Cayrie's my oldest daughtah."

"Law, law, got a grown daughtah and grandchilduns!" shouted Jacob. "Little Jawnnie! And lawdy! what a belly! Little old Jawnnie!"

He capered up to the Ford and ran his hand over the green-enamelled sides. "Little Jawnnie," he murmured proudly, "come drivin' up hyah in a cah, just as big as you please. Jawnnie sho' has got ahead in the world."

He spoke with genuine respect, but my grandfather was more embarrassed than he had been when Jacob had poked at his stomach.

Jacob turned away from caressing the Ford. He said, "Well, I guess you-all is right duhty from yo' trip. Come on down to the branch and we'll bathe while the old woman stirs us up a snack."

We went trooping down the other side of the knoll, the four of us. My Grandfather Beals had been so important to Ed and me during the trip. He had kept his plans mysterious and had evaded our questions. But he seemed out of it now, trying to regulate his steps to keep them with the spry little skips and curvets of Jacob.

Ed and I had our clothes all unbuttoned by the time we had crossed the slope and reached the creek, a sluicing mountain stream, polka-dotted with sunlight. Jacob pulling off his overalls.

My Grandfather Beals had on his Sunday suit, so he spread out his handkerchief before he sat down on the creek bank.

"Jawnnie! Jawnnie! Ain't you goin' to bathe?" said Jacob, unstrapping his truss and placing it carefully in the crotch of a tree. He walked mincingly over to the stream and felt the water with a knotty toe. "That watuh's just right—not too wahm and not too chilly."

Ed nudged me and we giggled. The idea of Grandfather Beals stripping off naked and going in swimming was funny.

But he answered Jacob's question as if it were the usual thing for him to swim in the creek. "No,

Jake," he said, "I've been having rheumatism pains hyah lately, and I guess I better not go in to-day."

Jacob dived off a log and swam as gracefully as a water animal. He came to the surface, treading water, shaking the drops from his grizzled eyebrows.

"Pshaw!" he whooped. "Crik watuh won't make it no wuss, will it, boys?" And he dived again and pinched my ankle.

My grandfather sat on the bank in his Sunday suit, watching us. Once or twice he skipped some stones across the water, but he looked out of place even doing that.

The sun was going down by the time we got our clothes back on and came stringing up the rise toward the house. Martha had supper ready, and the oil-lamp was lighted in the kitchen.

We were hungry, after the long trip and the cold bath, but the food, cooked by the decrepit, weak-eyed old woman, was more than we could stomach. It was greasy and slightly soured. And the coffee was worse than the food. My grandfather scarcely touched his plate. Jacob, however, ate with relish. Martha stood up at the head of the table, minding off the swarms of flies with a turkey-wing fan.

"This hyah ain't much eatin'," said Jacob, blowing on the coffee in his saucer, "but to-morrow I'll make us a ketch of fish. And when we have a mess of trout, I wouldn't set down to eat with President Coolidge. No, suh!"

We left the old woman to clear off the dishes and we sat out in the front yard under the trees. My Grandfather Beals gazed off through the twilight.

By and by he said, in a sad, far-away voice, "You know, Jake, the way that stream bends around down yondah just puts me in the mind of the way ouah old stream cut around back in Vuhginia."

Jacob slapped his leg. "Yes, suh! don't it now! Can't you just hyah them old foxhounds belling now? Old Nig and Coon and Josie away off in the chinkapin thicket. Recollect what mastuh fox-hunts we used to have back yondah, Jawnnie? And what was that we called that big lead hound?"

"Old Blanche," said my grandfather softly.

"Old Blanche," said Jacob. "Yes, suh, Old Blanche."

Bedtime came and Jacob showed us the big feather bed where we were to sleep. Martha was putting a quilt pallet down for them. My grand-

father had asthma, so he slept on the outside. We all sank down into the great, soft bed. My grandfather had a hard time getting his breath.

The last thing that night I heard him wheezing. And then some one came pattering across the board floor, barefooted. There was a poking on the outside of the bedclothes and then I heard Jacob chuckle under his breath and mutter, "Jawnnie! Jawnnie! Lawdy, what a belly!"

### III

The next morning, long before breakfast, my Grandfather Beals was out in the yard puttering around the car. He filled the radiator from the well, he measured the gasoline with a stick, and he pumped up a back tire. It was evident that he was getting ready to travel.

Jacob was incredulous. "Jawn, you ain't leavin' a'ready? I allowed from what you said when you come that you was aimin' to stop with us a spell."

Then my Grandfather Beals told a lie.

"No, Jake," he said. "You see, I've got a business, and I have to be thah to attend to it. I hate to leave so quick, and I wish I could stay longuh, but I have to get back. But I know the way to come now, and next time I come I'll be in a fix to stay longuh."

Grandfather Beals knew then that there never would be a next time. But business had an important sound, and Jacob didn't try to argue it down. He said in a dull voice, "Well, Jawn, it grieves me pow'ful to have you go off sudden like this. I had a heap of things I wanted to say to you, and I'm sho' goin' to miss you."

All the liveliness he had shown the day before had suddenly gone out of him. He and Martha stood in the yard while Ed cranked the Ford. The quiet hills echoed with the engine's explosions. We pulled out, trailing a haze of blue smoke. Ed waved back at the forlorn old couple and they waved until we lost sight of them.

In the town of the postmark we stopped to have the gasoline-tank filled and my grandfather bought cheese and crackers. We ate as we rode, washing the food down with strawberry soda pop.

My grandfather drove fast and it seemed that we would be out of the hills before the morning was gone. We were coming along a level stretch of mountain road at a good clip. He caught a glimpse of the prairies spread out beyond the hills, far below us, and he let go the steering-wheel to point.

Before he could get words out of his mouth the front wheels of the car struck a soft spot in the road. The car headed for the bluff, a deep, sheer drop.

"Wup! Wup! Wup!" my grandfather exclaimed, grabbing at the wheel and twisting the car back into the road. He cut the wheels too short and the car reeled, teetered and went crashing over, bottom side up in the road.

The air went yelling out of me as I struck the ground. "This is the way it feels to be dead," I kept telling myself. No one moved for hours, it seemed. Then I could feel the acid from the storage-battery dripping down on my back. I began squirming around and my Grandfather Beals came to, and, groaning, worked his way out from under the wreckage. Ed and I crawled out after him.

A few minutes before the road had been deserted, but now the car was surrounded by mountaineers and more were coming. They helped us turn the Ford right side up.

The wind-shield was shattered, the top was a mass of splinters and torn cloth, and the steering-wheel was held on by a single spoke. Strangely, none of us was badly hurt. All of us were bleeding from small cuts and skinned places. Grandfather Beals complained that his side was paining him, but when we looked down into the purple depths of the valley, we forgot our slight hurts.

Ed cranked the engine again, Grandfather Beals grasped the splintered steering-wheel, and we drove away without thanking the gaping hill people.

Ed said nervously, "Grandpa, I bet you're tired. Don't you want me to drive?"

"No, son," he said with a bland smile; "you can't tuhn it ovah as slick as I can."

On the steep declines going out of the mountains it became apparent that our brakes were no longer working. The air was acrid with scorching oil and rubber. But my grandfather had a substitute for brakes. He started braking with the reverse gear.

"Now you see, Eddie," he said suavely, "thah's mo' ways of killing a dog without chokin' him to death with buttah!"

That was the last time he spoke on the trip. We whirled down out of the hills at a terrific speed. Grandfather Beals, his face wooden, drove like a man possessed, grasping that one sound spoke of the steering-wheel and craning his neck forward.

It seems to me now that all of us must have had a touch of the heat that day. There was no glass

to protect us from the furnace-blast that struck us when we reached the treeless plain. We had left the wreckage of the top back on the mountain road and we were exposed to a cruel white sun. We split the flickering heat-waves, rolling up long columns of dust, and our faces were like masks. The prairies danced to the slow, giddy pulse of the sun-rays. But my Grandfather Beals checked the speed not a whit until he reached home.

As we neared town we met Amos Pridgeon, a Negro cotton farmer whom we knew well, homeward bound with his mule team and wagon. He shouted and waved at us, but my grandfather gave no sign of recognition. Amos Pridgeon was the only person who saw us drive in.

At the outskirts of town my grandfather began to cut around back ways, taking corners on two wheels. He drove the car into his barnyard and on into the garage. When the car was inside we all crawled out. My Grandfather Beals staggered a little, but he came outside and closed the garage doors and snapped the padlock on its hasp.

He turned to Ed and me. "Now, boys," he said, "if you-all won't say nothing to any one about this, I'll give you both a piece of money. I want to see how long you-all can keep anything to yo'se'ves."

He pulled out a canvas pouch, unwound the string, and handed each of us a silver dollar.

Ed and I took the money and left him cooling his hands and face at the horse-trough. We came along down Main Street. At the drug-store, Ed said, "Let's go in and get a coke."

In the drug-store, at one of the soda tables, there was a bunch of men crowded around watching a checker game.

"Hey, do you-all want to know something?" Ed said loudly.

Some of the men turned around and looked at us. Our clothes were torn, our faces were sunburned to a sausage red, and Ed had a cake of dried blood in his hair.

"Sure, we want to know something," one of the men said.

"Well, Grandpa Beals turned over his Ford today and smashed it all up and nearly killed us all," Ed said.

"He sure wrecked it for good this time," I said importantly.

Until his dying day my Grandfather Beals was bitter against Amos Pridgeon, the nigger cotton-raiser.

# Early Afternoon

## A SHORT STORY

*By John O'Hara*

"GOOD afternoon, Mr. Grant. Home early." Mike, the doorman smiled as usual. "Mrs. Grant left about an hour or so ago."

"Did she?" said Grant, casually. He got into the elevator and was aware that he was glad she had gone. He could have a little peace before telling her that he had been fired. God knows he would have no peace to-day anyhow, even if he had not been fired. He had behaved pretty badly last night, and in a way, being tight was no excuse. Or at least people always said it was no excuse: the people who got tight and did awful things always said that. "I'm sorry about last night," they always said. "I was tight, but I know that's no excuse." Why wasn't it? Because you were supposed to be able to hold your liquor like a gentleman, and not fight, or not kiss some one else's girl, or not sing loudly? What about the hearty stories of the gentlemen in, say, Washington's time, or when knight-hood was in flower? If you could believe the stories they certainly were more gentlemen than men are to-day, and yet if you could believe all of the stories, those gentlemen certainly misbehaved. They fought just as quickly and with worse results than people do to-day. And if they didn't kiss any often-er, they did kiss as often. Oh, well; what the hell?

Grant entered the apartment and called: "Are you home, kid?" and then remembered that Mike said she had gone out. He threw his hat across the room; a bad shot; it knocked an ash tray off an end-table. He let his hat and the ash tray lie, and went to the bedroom.

He took off his coat and vest, tie and shoes. He opened the collar of his shirt and let down his suspenders. He unbuttoned the top button of his trunks and lay back with his hands under his head. He stretched, and deliciously was drained of tiredness for the moment. It made him more awake, made him feel less like sleeping than he had felt all day, and he frowned mentally, because he wanted to sleep. Pretty soon he was asleep. . . . He

awoke. He did not know why; then was about to ascribe it to a stiff arm, when he blinked his eyes. The sun was shining in on the bed, and while he was lying down it got him in the eyes. He looked at his watch, and it was only a quarter of three. Asleep hardly more than half an hour. He shouldn't have eaten so much lunch. Well, what to do now? Read? No. Go to the club? No, not at this hour; it would mean meeting the mid-afternoon crowd, which implicitly meant a bender. He could have a drink here instead.

He went to the kitchen and made a highball, then a second, and that finished the ginger ale, so he had a straight rye with water for a chaser. He took the bottle and a glass of water and the measuring glass and returned to the living-room and sat down in "his" chair. He was sorry about last night. In the first place, Bliss Hansen was too nice a girl to make passes at when you were tight, especially if you didn't make them when you were sober, and he hadn't made any passes at Bliss, drunk or sober, since she had been a sophomore at Northampton and he a freshman at Hanover. Bliss was a really swell girl. She didn't like Nancy, but she made a good bluff of liking her. He was sorry, too, because he had made Nancy sore. He was exactly as sorry for having annoyed Nancy as he was for being so damned casual with Bliss. He got a sudden picture of Bliss. She had gray, gray eyes, and almost-black hair. Between the inside ends of her eyebrows and the beginning of her nose there was a sort of dark triangle that made her look as though she were frowning, or quizzical, or something. The fact was that she wasn't frowning, but was nearly always ready to break into a smile.

It might be—it *was*—a very good idea to call Bliss. Not to tell her he was sorry; she would know that. But, by God, to go over and see her. And kiss her while he was sober. That would make everything all right, would prove to her that he was just as eager to kiss her now as when he was tight.