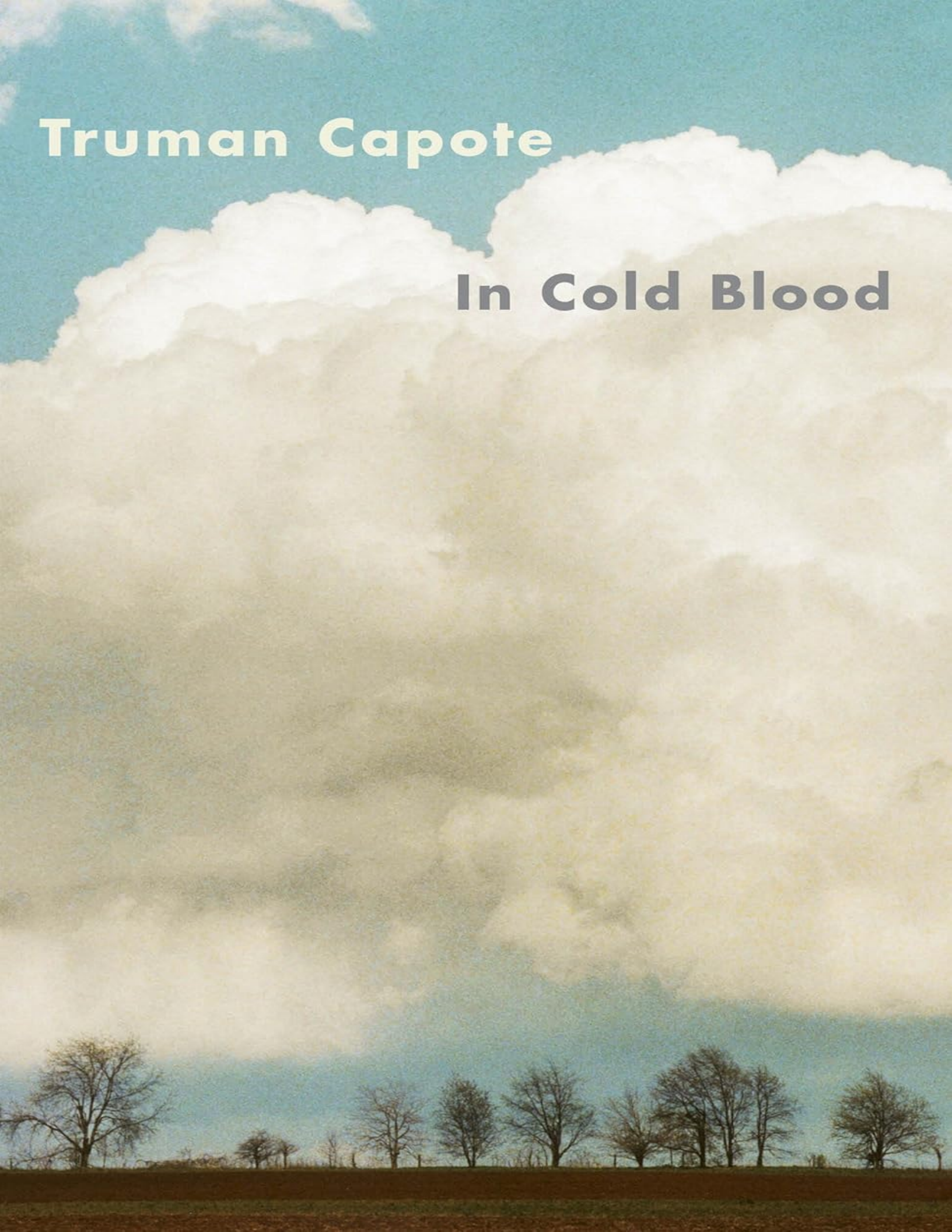
Truman Capote

In Cold Blood



IN COLD BLOOD

A TRUE ACCOUNT OF A MULTIPLE MURDER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

TRUMAN CAPOTE

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TRUMAN CAPOTE

Truman Capote was born Truman Streckfus Persons on September 30, 1924, in New Orleans. His early years were affected by an unsettled family life. He was turned over to the care of his mother's family in Monroeville, Alabama; his father was imprisoned for fraud; his parents divorced and then fought a bitter custody battle over Truman. Eventually he moved to New York City to live with his mother and her second husband, a Cuban businessman whose name he adopted. The young Capote got a job as a copyboy at *The New Yorker* in the early forties, but was fired for inadvertently offending Robert Frost. The publication of his early stories in *Harper's Bazaar* established his literary reputation when he was in his twenties, and his novels *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), a gothic coming-of-age story that Capote described as "an attempt to exorcise demons," and *The Grass Harp* (1951), a gentler fantasy rooted in his Alabama years, consolidated his precocious fame.

From the start of his career Capote associated himself with a wide range of writers and artists, high-society figures, and international celebrities, gaining frequent media attention for his exuberant social life. He collected his stories in *A Tree of Night* (1949) and published the novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), but devoted his energies increasingly to the stage—adapting *The Grass Harp* into a play and writing the musical *House of Flowers* (1954)—and to journalism, of which the earliest examples were *Local Color* (1950) and *The Muses Are Heard* (1956). He made a brief foray into the movies to write the screenplay for John Huston's *Beat the Devil* (1954).

Capote's interest in the murder of a family in Kansas led to the prolonged investigation that provided the basis for *In Cold Blood* (1966), his most successful and acclaimed book. By "treating a real event with fictional techniques," Capote intended to create a new synthesis: something both "immaculately factual" and a work of art. However its genre was defined, from the moment it began to appear in serialized form in *The New Yorker* the book exerted a fascination among a wider readership than Capote's writing had ever attracted before. The abundantly publicized masked ball at the Plaza Hotel with which he celebrated the completion of *In Cold Blood*

was an iconic event of the 1960s, and for a time Capote was a constant presence on television and in magazines, even trying his hand at movie acting in *Murder by Death*.

He worked for many years on *Answered Prayers*, an ultimately unfinished novel that was intended to be the distillation of everything he had observed in his life among the rich and famous; an excerpt from it published in *Esquire* in 1975 appalled many of Capote's wealthy friends for its revelation of intimate secrets, and he found himself excluded from the world he had once dominated. In his later years he published two collections of fiction and essays, *The Dogs Bark* (1973) and *Music for Chameleons* (1980). He died on August 25, 1984, after years of problems with drugs and alcohol.

INTRODUCTION

BY BOB COLACELLO

In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences riveted the nation's attention when it was first published as a four-part series in *The New Yorker* in the fall of 1965 and then in book form by Random House in early 1966. I met Truman Capote several years later. Although Truman and I sometimes spent entire days together, he almost never mentioned the work that had brought him fame and fortune. Occasionally, he'd remark that Norman Mailer—who had published his tour de force of novelistic journalism, *Armies of the Night*, two years after *In Cold Blood*—was receiving far too much praise for exploiting the hybrid form Capote claimed he'd invented: the nonfiction novel. ("But no matter how hard Mr. Mailer tries," he'd say, "he will never beat me at my own game.")

Capote's early "fiction" novels—*Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), *The Grass Harp* (1951), and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958)—were gems of style, charm, and character. But it was only when he turned to journalism in *The Muses Are Heard*, his acutely observed, amusingly told 1956 report of a tour of Russia by a troupe of American actors performing *Porgy and Bess*, that his work became modern. He later noted, "*The Muses Are Heard*" had set me thinking on a different line altogether: I wanted to produce a journalistic novel, something on a large scale that would have the credibility of fact, the immediacy of film, the depth and freedom of prose and the precision of poetry."

In Cold Blood began with a one-column story, datelined Holcomb, Kansas, on page 39 of *The New York Times* of November 16, 1959. Its headline read "WEALTHY FARMER, 3 OF FAMILY SLAIN." Two weeks later, Capote was on his way to Kansas. "He bought a new Dior suit for the trip," says Phyllis Cerf Wagner, the widow of Random House chairman Bennett Cerf. "That was the first thing he said to the professor Bennett sent him to at the University of Kansas: 'Have you ever seen a man in a Dior suit?' The professor replied, 'Not only have I never seen a man in a Dior suit, I've never seen a woman in a Dior suit.' " Yet, within a month, the New York City slicker in his Paris wardrobe had succeeded in winning over not only the upstanding citizens of Finney County who re-created the life and personalities of the murdered

Clutter family, but also the killers themselves, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, who poured out their ragtag tales of woe.

Over the next six years, after Hickock and Smith were quickly convicted, sentenced to death, and then granted five stays of execution, Capote grew increasingly close to them. Too close, his friends would say afterward, particularly to Perry Smith, who was almost as short as Truman, and like him, the son of an alcoholic mother who had abandoned him and a father who had disappointed him. Diana Vreeland liked to tell a tale she said Truman had told her: During one of his death row interviews with Smith, "Perry grabbed Truman's ballpoint pen and pressed it right against his eyeball, while he held him by the back of his head for something like fifteen minutes. Can you imagine, poor Truman? But it was an act of love you see, as well as an act of terror."

At Hickock and Smith's request, Capote was witness to their execution by hanging on April 14, 1965. "Truman told me he always felt guilty about not doing enough for them, about using them," recalls Bianca Jagger. Another friend, C.Z. Guest, says, "I begged him not to go to the execution. He felt he should. I think it affected him more than he ever realized. That book took everything out of him. He was so sensitive. He wasn't a tough nut."

By the time I met him, Capote was obsessed with novel-in-progress *Answered Prayers*—which he said, again and again, would be the American equivalent of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*—and after a chapter from it, "La Cote Basque, 1965," was printed in *Esquire* in December 1975, with defending himself from the snubs and insults of the rich and powerful friends who found themselves insufficiently fictionalized. But *Answered Prayers* was never finished. It was during that time that Capote turned to the downtown world of Andy Warhol's Factory, where I was then working as editor of *Interview* magazine. Capote's association with Warhol turned out to be surprisingly productive.

The ever-practical Andy gave Truman a tape recorder so that he could, as Andy put it, "Write without writing," and offered to do Truman's portrait for free if he'd publish the results in *Interview* as "Conversations with Capote." During 1979, while *Interview* contributing editor Brigid Berlin sat beside him in his raspberry-lacquered dining room, heaping praise and

making sure he kept writing, Truman completed ten pieces for the magazine that purported to be transcripts of tapes but were actually highly structured compositions of recorded and remembered dialogue. At least three of them —an extraordinary profile of Marilyn Monroe entitled “A Beautiful Child”; the hilarious and heartrending “A Day’s Work,” in which he followed a Caribbean-born cleaning woman on her Manhattan rounds, and “Hand-Carved Coffins,” “a nonfiction novella” about a series of bizarre murders in Nebraska—were as compelling as anything he had previously written. All ten pieces were included in the collection *Music for Chameleons* (1983), his first book of new work since *In Cold Blood*, and the last one before his death, at age 59, in 1984.

It seems fitting that Capote’s final testament was a work of reportage, because, as *In Cold Blood* made magnificently clear, journalism was his true calling. In fact, he was among the first writers—Joan Didion and V. S. Naipaul also come to mind—to realize that as our culture rushed headlong into the Age of Information, it was no longer as interesting or as vital to imagine reality as to report, shape, and define it. *In Cold Blood*, it is now apparent, was the compass pointing the way to much of the most exciting writing that has since followed, on both sides of the border between fiction and nonfiction, from the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese to the Literary Journalism of Bruce Chatwin and Ryszard Kapuscinski, from James Ellroy’s *American Tabloid* to John Berendt’s *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

Capote was one of the first who dared to elevate journalism to the level of art. *In Cold Blood* is a work of great discipline and even greater restraint, a tale of fate, as spare and elegiac as a Greek tragedy, as rich in its breadth and depth as the classic French novels of Stendhal and Flaubert. “We all have our souls and we all have façades,” Truman Capote told his friend Kay Meehan a year or so before he came upon the news that would inspire his masterpiece, “and then there’s something in between that makes us function as people. That’s what I have the ability to communicate.”

For Jack Dunphy and Harper Lee
with my love and gratitude

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the material in this book not derived from my own observation is either taken from official records or is the result of interviews with the persons directly concerned, more often than not numerous interviews conducted over a considerable period of time. Because these “collaborators” are identified within the text, it would be redundant to name them here; nevertheless, I want to express a formal gratitude, for without their patient co-operation my task would have been impossible. Also, I will not attempt to make a roll call of all those Finney County citizens who, though their names do not appear in these pages, provided the author with a hospitality and friendship he can only reciprocate but never repay. However, I do wish to thank certain persons whose contributions to my work were very specific: Dr. James McCain, President of Kansas State University; Mr. Logan Sanford, and the staff of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation; Mr. Charles McAtee, Director of the Kansas State Penal Institutions; Mr. Clifford R. Hope, Jr., whose assistance in legal matters was invaluable; and finally, but really foremost, Mr. William Shawn of *The New Yorker*, who encouraged me to undertake this project, and whose judgment stood me in good stead from first to last.

T.C.

Frères humains qui aprés nous vivez,

N’ayez les cuers contre nous endurcis,

Car, se pitié de nous povres avez,

Dieu en aura plus tost de vous mercis.

François Villon

Ballade des pendus

IN COLD BLOOD

I

THE LAST
TO SEE THEM ALIVE

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.

Holcomb, too, can be seen from great distances. Not that there is much to see—simply an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas (pronounced “Ar-kan-sas”) River, on the north by a highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields. After rain, or when snowfalls thaw, the streets, unnamed, unshaded, unpaved, turn from the thickest dust into the direst mud. At one end of the town stands a stark old stucco structure, the roof of which supports an electric sign—DANCE—but the dancing has ceased and the advertisement has been dark for several years. Nearby is another building with an irrelevant sign, this one in flaking gold on a dirty window —HOLCOMB BANK. The bank closed in 1933, and its former counting rooms have been converted into apartments. It is one of the town’s two “apartment houses,” the second being a ramshackle mansion known, because a good part of the local school’s faculty lives there, as the Teacherage. But the majority of Holcomb’s homes are one-story frame affairs, with front porches.

Down by the depot, the postmistress, a gaunt woman who wears a rawhide jacket and denims and cowboy boots, presides over a falling-apart post

office. The depot itself, with its peeling sulphur-colored paint, is equally melancholy; the Chief, the Super-Chief, the El Capitan go by every day, but these celebrated expresses never pause there. No passenger trains do—only an occasional freight. Up on the highway, there are two filling stations, one of which doubles as a meagerly supplied grocery store, while the other does extra duty as a café—Hartman's Café, where Mrs. Hartman, the proprietress, dispenses sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks, and 3.2 beer. (Holcomb, like all the rest of Kansas, is "dry.")

And that, really, is all. Unless you include, as one must, the Holcomb School, a good-looking establishment, which reveals a circumstance that the appearance of the community otherwise camouflages: that the parents who send their children to this modern and ably staffed "consolidated" school—the grades go from kindergarten through senior high, and a fleet of buses transport the students, of which there are usually around three hundred and sixty, from as far as sixteen miles away—are, in general, a prosperous people. Farm ranchers, most of them, they are outdoor folk of very varied stock—German, Irish, Norwegian, Mexican, Japanese. They raise cattle and sheep, grow wheat, milo, grass seed, and sugar beets. Farming is always a chancy business, but in western Kansas its practitioners consider themselves "born gamblers," for they must contend with an extremely shallow precipitation (the annual average is eighteen inches) and anguishing irrigation problems. However, the last seven years have been years of droughtless beneficence. The farm ranchers in Finney County, of which Holcomb is a part, have done well; money has been made not from farming alone but also from the exploitation of plentiful natural-gas resources, and its acquisition is reflected in the new school, the comfortable interiors of the farmhouses, the steep and swollen grain elevators.

Until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Like the waters of the river, like the motorists on the highway, and like the yellow trains streaking down the Santa Fe tracks, drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there. The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life—to work, to hunt, to watch television, to attend school socials, choir practice, meetings of the 4-H Club. But then, in the earliest hours of

that morning in November, a Sunday morning, certain foreign sounds impinged on the normal nightly Holcomb noises—on the keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles. At the time not a soul in sleeping Holcomb heard them—four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended six human lives. But afterward the townspeople, theretofore sufficiently unfearful of each other to seldom trouble to lock their doors, found fantasy re-creating them over and again—those somber explosions that stimulated fires of mistrust in the glare of which many old neighbors viewed each other strangely, and as strangers.

The master of River Valley Farm, Herbert William Clutter, was forty-eight years old, and as a result of a recent medical examination for an insurance policy, knew himself to be in first-rate condition. Though he wore rimless glasses and was of but average height, standing just under five feet ten, Mr. Clutter cut a man's-man figure. His shoulders were broad, his hair had held its dark color, his square-jawed, confident face retained a healthy-hued youthfulness, and his teeth, unstained and strong enough to shatter walnuts, were still intact. He weighed a hundred and fifty-four—the same as he had the day he graduated from Kansas State University, where he had majored in agriculture. He was not as rich as the richest man in Holcomb—Mr. Taylor Jones, a neighboring rancher. He was, however, the community's most widely known citizen, prominent both there and in Garden City, the close-by county seat, where he had headed the building committee for the newly completed First Methodist Church, an eight-hundred-thousand-dollar edifice. He was currently chairman of the Kansas Conference of Farm Organizations, and his name was everywhere respectfully recognized among Midwestern agriculturists, as it was in certain Washington offices, where he had been a member of the Federal Farm Credit Board during the Eisenhower administration.

Always certain of what he wanted from the world, Mr. Clutter had in large measure obtained it. On his left hand, on what remained of a finger once

mangled by a piece of farm machinery, he wore a plain gold band, which was the symbol, a quarter-century old, of his marriage to the person he had wished to marry—the sister of a college classmate, a timid, pious, delicate girl named Bonnie Fox, who was three years younger than he. She had given him four children—a trio of daughters, then a son. The eldest daughter, Eveanna, married and the mother of a boy ten months old, lived in northern Illinois but visited Holcomb frequently. Indeed, she and her family were expected within the fortnight, for her parents planned a sizable Thanksgiving reunion of the Clutter clan (which had its beginnings in Germany; the first immigrant Clutter—or Klotter, as the name was then spelled—arrived here in 1880); fifty-odd kinfolk had been asked, several of whom would be traveling from places as far away as Palatka, Florida. Nor did Beverly, the child next in age to Eveanna, any longer reside at River Valley Farm; she was in Kansas City, Kansas, studying to be a nurse. Beverly was engaged to a young biology student, of whom her father very much approved; invitations to the wedding, scheduled for Christmas Week, were already printed. Which left, still living at home, the boy, Kenyon, who at fifteen was taller than Mr. Clutter, and one sister, a year older—the town darling, Nancy.

In regard to his family, Mr. Clutter had just one serious cause for disquiet—his wife's health. She was "nervous," she suffered "little spells"—such were the sheltering expressions used by those close to her. Not that the truth concerning "poor Bonnie's afflictions" was in the least a secret; everyone knew she had been an on-and-off psychiatric patient the last half-dozen years. Yet even upon this shadowed terrain sunlight had very lately sparkled. The past Wednesday, returning from two weeks of treatment at the Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, her customary place of retirement, Mrs. Clutter had brought scarcely credible tidings to tell her husband; with joy she informed him that the source of her misery, so medical opinion had at last decreed, was not in her head but in her spine—it was *physical*, a matter of misplaced vertebrae. Of course, she must undergo an operation, and afterward—well, she would be her "old self" again. Was it possible—the tension, the withdrawals, the pillow-muted sobbing behind locked doors, all due to an out-of-order backbone? If so, then Mr. Clutter could, when addressing his Thanksgiving table, recite a blessing of unmarred gratitude.

Ordinarily, Mr. Clutter's mornings began at six-thirty; clanging milk pails and the whispery chatter of the boys who brought them, two sons of a hired man named Vic Irsik, usually roused him. But today he lingered, let Vic Irsik's sons come and leave, for the previous evening, a Friday the thirteenth, had been a tiring one, though in part exhilarating. Bonnie had resurrected her "old self"; as if serving up a preview of the normality, the regained vigor, soon to be, she had rouged her lips, fussed with her hair, and, wearing a new dress, accompanied him to the Holcomb School, where they applauded a student production of *Tom Sawyer*, in which Nancy played Becky Thatcher. He had enjoyed it, seeing Bonnie out in public, nervous but nonetheless smiling, talking to people, and they both had been proud of Nancy; she had done so well, remembering all her lines, and looking, as he had said to her in the course of backstage congratulations, "Just beautiful, honey—a real Southern belle." Whereupon Nancy had behaved like one; curtsying in her hoop-skirted costume, she had asked if she might drive into Garden City. The State Theatre was having a *special*, eleven-thirty, Friday-the-thirteenth "Spook Show," and *all* her friends were going. In other circumstances Mr. Clutter would have refused. His laws were laws, and one of them was: Nancy—and Kenyon, too—must be home by ten on week nights, by twelve on Saturdays. But weakened by the genial events of the evening, he had consented. And Nancy had not returned home until almost two. He had heard her come in, and had called to her, for though he was not a man ever really to raise his voice, he had some plain things to say to her, statements that concerned less the lateness of the hour than the youngster who had driven her home—a school basketball hero, Bobby Rupp.

Mr. Clutter liked Bobby, and considered him, for a boy his age, which was seventeen, most dependable and gentlemanly; however, in the three years she had been permitted "dates," Nancy, popular and pretty as she was, had never gone out with anyone else, and while Mr. Clutter understood that it was the present national adolescent custom to form couples, to "go steady" and wear "engagement rings," he disapproved, particularly since he had not long ago, by accident, surprised his daughter and the Rupp boy kissing. He had then suggested that Nancy discontinue "seeing so much of Bobby," advising her that a slow retreat now would hurt less than an abrupt severance later—for, as he reminded her, it was a parting that must eventually take place. The Rupp family were Roman Catholics, the Clutters,

Methodist—a fact that should in itself be sufficient to terminate whatever fancies she and this boy might have of some day marrying. Nancy had been reasonable—at any rate, she had not argued—and now, before saying good night, Mr. Clutter secured from her a promise to begin a gradual breaking off with Bobby.

Still, the incident had lamentably put off his retiring time, which was ordinarily eleven o'clock. As a consequence, it was well after seven when he awakened on Saturday, November 14, 1959. His wife always slept as late as possible. However, while Mr. Clutter was shaving, showering, and outfitting himself in whipcord trousers, a cattleman's leather jacket, and soft stirrup boots, he had no fear of disturbing her; they did not share the same bedroom. For several years he had slept alone in the master bedroom, on the ground floor of the house—a two-story, fourteen-room frame-and-brick structure. Though Mrs. Clutter stored her clothes in the closets of this room, and kept her few cosmetics and her myriad medicines in the blue-tile-and-glass-brick bathroom adjoining it, she had taken for serious occupancy Eveanna's former bedroom, which, like Nancy's and Kenyon's rooms, was on the second floor.

The house—for the most part designed by Mr. Clutter, who thereby proved himself a sensible and sedate, if not notably decorative, architect—had been built in 1948 for forty thousand dollars. (The resale value was now sixty thousand dollars.) Situated at the end of a long, lanelike driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms, the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass, impressed Holcomb; it was a place people pointed out. As for the interior, there were spongy displays of liver-colored carpet intermittently abolishing the glare of varnished, resounding floors; an immense modernistic living-room couch covered in nubby fabric interwoven with glittery strands of silver metal; a breakfast alcove featuring a banquette upholstered in blue-and-white plastic. This sort of furnishing was what Mr. and Mrs. Clutter liked, as did the majority of their acquaintances, whose homes, by and large, were similarly furnished.

Other than a housekeeper who came in on weekdays, the Clutters employed no household help, so since his wife's illness and the departure of the elder daughters, Mr. Clutter had of necessity learned to cook; either he or Nancy,

but principally Nancy, prepared the family meals. Mr. Clutter enjoyed the chore, and was excellent at it—no woman in Kansas baked a better loaf of salt-rising bread, and his celebrated coconut cookies were the first item to go at charity cake sales—but he was not a hearty eater; unlike his fellow-ranchers, he even preferred Spartan breakfasts. That morning an apple and a glass of milk were enough for him; because he touched neither coffee or tea, he was accustomed to begin the day on a cold stomach. The truth was he opposed all stimulants, however gentle. He did not smoke, and of course he did not drink; indeed, he had never tasted spirits, and was inclined to avoid people who had—a circumstance that did not shrink his social circle as much as might be supposed, for the center of that circle was supplied by the members of Garden City's First Methodist Church, a congregation totaling seventeen hundred, most of whom were as abstemious as Mr. Clutter could desire. While he was careful to avoid making a nuisance of his views, to adopt outside his realm an externally uncensoring manner, he enforced them within his family and among the employees at River Valley Farm. "Are you a drinking man?" was the first question he asked a job applicant, and even though the fellow gave a negative answer, he still must sign a work contract containing a clause that declared the agreement instantly void if the employee should be discovered "harboring alcohol." A friend—an old pioneer rancher, Mr. Lynn Russell—had once told him, "You've got no mercy. I swear, Herb, if you caught a hired man drinking, out he'd go. And you wouldn't care if his family was starving." It was perhaps the only criticism ever made of Mr. Clutter as an employer. Otherwise, he was known for his equanimity, his charitableness, and the fact that he paid good wages and distributed frequent bonuses; the men who worked for him—and there were sometimes as many as eighteen—had small reason to complain.

After drinking the glass of milk and putting on a fleece-lined cap, Mr. Clutter carried his apple with him when he went outdoors to examine the morning. It was ideal apple-eating weather; the whitest sunlight descended from the purest sky, and an easterly wind rustled, without ripping loose, the last of the leaves on the Chinese elms. Autumns reward western Kansas for the evils that the remaining seasons impose: winter's rough Colorado winds and hip-high, sheep-slaughtering snows; the slushes and the strange land fogs of spring; and summer, when even crows seek the puny shade, and the

tawny infinitude of wheatstalks bristle, blaze. At last, after September, another weather arrives, an Indian summer that occasionally endures until Christmas. As Mr. Clutter contemplated this superior specimen of the season, he was joined by a part-collie mongrel, and together they ambled off toward the livestock corral, which was adjacent to one of three barns on the premises.

One of these barns was a mammoth Quonset hut; it brimmed with grain—Westland sorghum—and one of them housed a dark, pungent hill of milo grain worth considerable money—a hundred thousand dollars. That figure alone represented an almost four-thousand-percent advance over Mr. Clutter's entire income in 1934—the year he married Bonnie Fox and moved with her from their home town of Rozel, Kansas, to Garden City, where he had found work as an assistant to the Finney County agricultural agent. Typically, it took him just seven months to be promoted; that is, to install himself in the head man's job. The years during which he held the post—1935 to 1939—encompassed the dustiest, the down-and-outest the region had known since white men settled there, and young Herb Clutter, having, as he did, a brain expertly racing with the newest in streamlined agricultural practices, was quite qualified to serve as middleman between the government and the despondent farm ranchers; these men could well use the optimism and the educated instruction of a likable young fellow who seemed to know his business. All the same, he was not doing what he wanted to do; the son of a farmer, he had from the beginning aimed at operating a property of his own. Facing up to it, he resigned as county agent after four years and, on land leased with borrowed money, created, in embryo, River Valley Farm (a name justified by the Arkansas River's meandering presence but not, certainly, by any evidence of valley). It was an endeavor that several Finney County conservatives watched with show-us amusement—old-timers who had been fond of baiting the youthful county agent on the subject of his university notions: "That's fine, Herb. You always know what's best to do on the other fellow's land. Plant this. Terrace that. But you might say a sight different if the place was your own." They were mistaken; the upstart's experiments succeeded—partly because, in the beginning years, he labored eighteen hours a day. Setbacks occurred—twice the wheat crop failed, and one winter he lost several hundred head of sheep in a blizzard; but after a decade Mr. Clutter's domain consisted of

over eight hundred acres owned outright and three thousand more worked on a rental basis—and that, as his colleagues admitted, was "a pretty good spread." Wheat, milo seed, certified grass seed—these were the crops the farm's prosperity depended upon. Animals were also important—sheep, and especially cattle. A herd of several hundred Hereford bore the Clutter brand, though one would not have suspected it from the scant contents of the livestock corral, which was reserved for ailing steers, a few milking cows, Nancy's cats, and Babe, the family favorite—an old fat workhorse who never objected to lumbering about with three and four children astride her broad back.

Mr. Clutter now fed Babe the core of his apple, calling good morning to a man raking debris inside the corral—Alfred Stoecklein, the sole resident employee. The Stoeckleins and their three children lived in a house not a hundred yards from the main house; except for them, the Clutters had no neighbors within half a mile. A long-faced man with long brown teeth, Stoecklein asked, "Have you some particular work in mind today? Cause we got a sick-un. The baby. Me and Missis been up and down with her most the night. I been thinking to carry her to doctor." And Mr. Clutter, expressing sympathy, said by all means to take the morning off, and if there was any way he or his wife could help, please let them know. Then, with the dog running ahead of him, he moved southward toward the fields, lion-colored now, luminously golden with after-harvest stubble.

The river lay in this direction; near its bank stood a grove of fruit trees—peach, pear, cherry, and apple. Fifty years ago, according to native memory, it would have taken a lumberjack ten minutes to axe all the trees in western Kansas. Even today, only cottonwoods and Chinese elms—perennials with a cactuslike indifference to thirst—are commonly planted. However, as Mr. Clutter often remarked, "an inch more of rain and this country would be paradise—Eden on earth." The little collection of fruit-bearers growing by the river was his attempt to contrive, rain or no, a patch of the paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden, he envisioned. His wife once said, "My husband cares more for those trees than he does for his children," and everyone in Holcomb recalled the day a small disabled plane crashed into the peach trees: "Herb was fit to be tied! Why, the propeller hadn't stopped turning before he'd slapped a lawsuit on the pilot."

Passing through the orchard, Mr. Clutter proceeded along beside the river, which was shallow here and strewn with islands—midstream beaches of soft sand, to which, on Sundays gone by, hot-weather Sabbaths when Bonnie had still "felt up to things," picnic baskets had been carted, family afternoons whiled away waiting for a twitch at the end of a fishline. Mr. Clutter seldom encountered trespassers on his property; a mile and a half from the highway, and arrived at by obscure roads, it was not a place that strangers came upon by chance. Now, suddenly a whole party of them appeared, and Teddy, the dog, rushed forward roaring out a challenge. But it was odd about Teddy. Though he was a good sentry, alert, ever ready to raise Cain, his valor had one flaw: let him glimpse a gun, as he did now—for the intruders were armed—and his head dropped, his tail turned in. No one understood why, for no one knew his history, other than that he was a vagabond Kenyon had adopted years ago. The visitors proved to be five pheasant hunters from Oklahoma. The pheasant season in Kansas, a famed November event, lures hordes of sportsmen from adjoining states, and during the past week plaid-hatted regiments had paraded across the autumnal expanses, flushing and felling with rounds of birdshot great coppery flights of the grain-fattened birds. By custom, the hunters, if they are not invited guests, are supposed to pay the landowner a fee for letting them pursue their quarry on his premises, but when the Oklahomans offered to hire hunting rights, Mr. Clutter was amused. "I'm not as poor as I look. Go ahead, get all you can," he said. Then, touching the brim of his cap, he headed for home and the day's work, unaware that it would be his last.

Like Mr. Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a café called the Little Jewel never drank coffee. He preferred root beer. Three aspirin, cold root beer, and a chain of Pall Mall cigarettes—that was his notion of a proper "chow-down." Sipping and smoking, he studied a map spread on the counter before him—a Phillips 66 map of Mexico—but it was difficult to concentrate, for he was expecting a friend, and the friend was late. He looked out a window at the silent small-town street, a street he had never seen until yesterday. Still no sign of Dick. But he was sure to show up; after

all, the purpose of their meeting was Dick's idea, his "score." And when it was settled—Mexico. The map was ragged, so thumbed that it had grown as supple as a piece of chamois. Around the corner, in his room at the hotel where he was staying, were hundreds more like it—worn maps of every state in the Union, every Canadian province, every South American country—for the young man was an incessant conceiver of voyages, not a few of which he had actually taken: to Alaska, to Hawaii and Japan, to Hong Kong. Now, thanks to a letter, an invitation to a "score," here he was with all his worldly belongings: one cardboard suitcase, a guitar, and two big boxes of books and maps and songs, poems and old letters, weighing a quarter of a ton. (Dick's face when he saw those *boxes!* "Christ, Perry. You carry that junk everywhere?" And Perry had said, "*What* junk? One of them books cost me thirty bucks.") Here he was in little Olathe, Kansas. Kind of funny, if you thought about it; imagine being back in Kansas, when only four months ago he had sworn, first to the State Parole Board, then to himself, that he would never set foot within its boundaries again. Well, it wasn't for long.

Ink-circled names populated the map. Cozumel, an island off the coast of Yucatán, where, so he had read in a men's magazine, you could "shed your clothes, put on a relaxed grin, live like a Rajah, and have all the women you want for $50-a-month!" From the same article he had memorized other appealing statements: "Cozumel is a hold-out against social, economic, and political pressure. No official pushes any private person around on *this* island," and "Every year flights of parrots come over from the mainland to lay their eggs." Acapulco connoted deep-sea fishing, casinos, anxious rich women; and Sierra Madre meant gold, meant *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a movie he had seen eight times. (It was Bogart's best picture, but the old guy who played the prospector, the one who reminded Perry of his father, was terrific, too. Walter Huston. Yes, and what he had told Dick was true: He *did* know the ins and outs of hunting gold, having been taught them by his father, who was a professional prospector. So why shouldn't they, the two of them, buy a pair of pack horses and try their luck in the Sierra Madre? But Dick, the practical Dick, had said, "Whoa, honey, whoa. I seen that show. Ends up everybody nuts. On account of fever and bloodsuckers, mean conditions all around. Then, when they got the gold—remember, a big wind came along and blew it all away?") Perry folded the map. He paid

for the root beer and stood up. Sitting, he had seemed a more than normal-sized man, a powerful man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick, crouching torso of a weight lifter—weight lifting was, in fact, his hobby. But some sections of him were not in proportion to others. His tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers; when he stood up, he was no taller than a twelve-year-old child, and suddenly looked, strutting on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported, not like a well-built truck driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound.

Outside the drugstore, Perry stationed himself in the sun. It was a quarter to nine, and Dick was a half hour late; however, if Dick had not hammered home the every-minute importance of the next twenty-four hours, he would not have noticed it. Time rarely weighed upon him, for he had many methods of passing it—among them, mirror gazing. Dick had once observed, "Every time you see a mirror you go into a trance, like. Like you was looking at some gorgeous piece of butt. I mean, my God, don't you ever get tired?" Far from it; his own face enthralled him. Each angle of it induced a different impression. It was a changeling's face, and mirror-guided experiments had taught him how to ring the changes, how to look now ominous, now impish, now soulful; a tilt of the head, a twist of the lips, and the corrupt gypsy became the gentle romantic. His mother had been a full-blooded Cherokee; it was from her that he had inherited his coloring—the iodine skin, the dark, moist eyes, the black hair, which he kept brilliantined and was plentiful enough to provide him with sideburns and a slippery spray of bangs. His mother's donation was apparent; that of his father, a freckled, ginger-haired Irishman, was less so. It was as though the Indian blood had routed every trace of the Celtic strain. Still, pink lips and a perky nose confirmed its presence, as did a quality of roguish animation, of uppity Irish egotism, which often activated the Cherokee mask and took control completely when he played the guitar and sang. Singing, and the thought of doing so in front of an audience, was another mesmeric way of whittling hours. He always used the same mental scenery—a night club in Las Vegas, which happened to be his home town. It was an elegant room filled with celebrities excitedly focused on the sensational new star

rendering his famous, backed-by-violins version of "I'll Be Seeing You" and encoring with his latest self-composed ballad:

Every April flights of parrots

Fly overhead, red and green,

Green and tangerine.

I see them fly, I hear them high,

Singing parrots bringing April spring . . .

(Dick, on first hearing this song, had commented, "Parrots don't sing. Talk maybe. Holler. But they sure as hell don't sing." Of course, Dick was very literal-minded, *very*—he had no understanding of music, poetry—and yet when you got right down to it, Dick's literalness, his pragmatic approach to every subject, was the primary reason Perry had been attracted to him, for it made Dick seem, compared to himself, so authentically tough, invulnerable, "totally masculine.")

Nevertheless, pleasant as this Las Vegas reverie was, it paled beside another of his visions. Since childhood, for more than half his thirty-one years, he had been sending off for literature ("Fortunes in Diving! Train at Home in Your Spare Time. Make Big Money Fast in Skin and Lung Diving. Free Booklets . . ."), answering advertisements ("Sunken Treasure! Fifty Genuine Maps! Amazing Offer . . .") that stoked a longing to realize an adventure his imagination swiftly and over and over enabled him to experience: the dream of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward a green sea-dusk, sliding past the scaly, savage-eyed protectors of a ship's hulk that loomed ahead, a Spanish galleon—a drowned cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold.

A car horn honked. At last—Dick.

“Good grief, Kenyon! I *hear* you.”

As usual, the devil was in Kenyon. His shouts kept coming up the stairs: “Nancy! Telephone!”

Barefoot, pajama-clad, Nancy scampered down the stairs. There were two telephones in the house—one in the room her father used as an office, another in the kitchen. She picked up the kitchen extension: “Hello? Oh, yes, good morning, Mrs. Katz.”

And Mrs. Clarence Katz, the wife of a farmer who lived on the highway, said, “I *told* your daddy not to wake you up. I said Nancy must be *tired* after all that wonderful acting she did last night. You were lovely, dear. Those white ribbons in your hair! And that part when you thought Tom Sawyer was dead—you had real tears in your eyes. Good as anything on TV. But your daddy said it was time you got up; well, it *is* going on for nine. Now, what I wanted, dear—my little girl, my little Jolene, she’s just dying to bake a cherry pie, and seeing how you’re a champion cherry-pie maker, always winning prizes, I wondered could I bring her over there this morning and you show her?”

Normally, Nancy would willingly have taught Jolene to prepare an entire turkey dinner; she felt it her duty to be available when younger girls came to her wanting help with their cooking, their sewing, or their music lessons —or, as often happened, to confide. Where she found the time, and still managed to “practically run that big house” and be a straight-A student, the president of her class, a leader in the 4-H program and the Young Methodists League, a skilled rider, an excellent musician (piano, clarinet), an annual winner at the county fair (pastry, preserves, needlework, flower arrangement)—how a girl not yet seventeen could haul such a wagonload, and do so without “brag,” with, rather, merely a radiant jauntiness, was an enigma the community pondered, and solved by saying, “She’s got *character*. Gets it from her old man.” Certainly her strongest trait, the talent