

'You're pretty badly hurt, aren't you?' The question was right at him.

'Yes... ' He discovered he could speak without great difficulty. 'Where? Do you know?'

'All over, I guess. Inside especially.'

The girl was thoughtful over his reply. Her next question seemed cold, calculated. 'Do you think you could pull through if we got help?'

He thought too, gave himself time to answer. But even so, he made a mistake. 'I think I'm going to die,' he said, and knew he had made a mistake as soon as he'd said it.

The girl's face changed somehow, imperceptibly. Santin couldn't fathom the change. He only knew it had happened. She pulled away from him, rose to her feet, rejoining the boy.

'He's going to die,' she said. As if she knew it as certainly as Santin himself.

'There's no use trying to find a doctor then, is there?' The boy sounded relieved, as if his responsibility for this whole thing had ended now.

'I guess not.'

'What'll we do then?'

'Nothing, I guess. Just wait here. A car's bound to come along sometime.'

'We can ride back to town then, huh?' The boy seemed to depend completely on the girl for leadership.

'Sure. We can send a doctor or somebody back. But this guy will probably be dead by then. And we'll have to report to the police.'

'The police?'

'We'll have to. You killed a man.'

There was silence then. Santin lay at their feet, looking up at the two silhouetted figures. They were talking about him as already dead. But somehow it didn't anger him yet. Maybe because he considered himself dead too.

'Arlene... what'll they do to me?'

'Who, the police?'

'Yes... You said I killed a man.'

'Well, you did, didn't you?'

The boy hesitated. 'But it was an accident,' he managed finally. 'You know it was an accident, don't you, Arlene? I mean, it just happened...'

'Sure.'

They were talking softly, but Santin could hear every word they

said. And he felt compelled somehow to speak. 'Every accident is somebody's fault,' he told them.

They were startled. He could see them look at each other, then down at him again. 'What do you mean by that, mister?' the boy asked after a moment.

'This accident was your fault. That's what I mean.' He still wasn't angry. That wasn't why he argued. But he felt the blame should be established.

'How was it my fault?'

'First of all, you didn't dim your lights...'

'Well, neither did you.'

'I did at first.'

'But you switched back to highway lights again.'

'Only after you refused to dim.'

The boy was silent again for a moment. Then he said, 'But when we hit, you had your lights on bright.'

Santin had to admit it. 'I got mad,' he said. 'But that's not the most important thing. You were driving over on my side of the road.'

The boy's face went around to the girl. 'Arlene, was I on his side of the road?'

It seemed she giggled. Or something like it. 'How do I know? We were—'

She didn't finish the sentence, but Santin guessed the rest of it. They'd been necking, or petting, or whatever young people called it these days. That was why the boy hadn't dimmed his lights. And that was why he'd had poor control of his car. And now he, Santin had to pay the price of their good time.

It angered him, finally. With a curious sort of anger. Detached somehow, separate from himself. Because now in the long run it didn't really matter to him. Since he was going to die.

But also Santin felt a certain satisfaction. He could speak vindictively, and with assurance. 'You see, you were on the wrong side of the road. So it was your fault.'

The boy heard him, but he kept looking at the girl. 'What will they do to me?' he asked her. 'The police, I mean. What will they do to me?'

'How do I know?' she snapped at him. She'd been so calm. Now maybe the initial shock was wearing off. Now maybe she was becoming frightened, nervous.

'Even if I was on the wrong side of the road,' the boy said, 'it was still an accident. I didn't try to run into this guy's car. I didn't