

try to kill him.'

'That's right . . .'

'You read about these things in the paper. Nothing much happens to the driver. Maybe he gets fined. But my dad can pay that. And even if I had to go to gaol, it wouldn't be for long, would it, Arlene? What do you think it would be? Thirty days?'

'Or maybe sixty. That wouldn't be so bad.'

Santin listened to them. And slowly the anger welled higher in him. Or maybe even ninety days, he could have added. Some insurance company would pay. But the killer himself wouldn't pay nearly enough. Ninety days for murder.

'There's just one thing,' the boy said suddenly.

'What?'

'It'll be called an accident. And maybe it'll be called my fault. A little bit anyway. That is, if this guy here doesn't spout off to anybody.'

'About what?'

'About who dimmed lights and who didn't. And who was on whose side of the road. But of course he can't spout off if he's dead.'

'That's right.' There was suddenly something strange in the girl's voice, an awareness.

'So he's got to be dead. Do you see what I mean, Arlene?'

'He said he was going to die . . .'

'Yeah, but he doesn't know. And neither do we. But he's got to die. We've got to make sure he dies.' The boy's voice went up suddenly, toward the pitch of hysteria.

Santin saw the girl clutch the boy's arm and look up into his face. The whole posture of her body denoted fear.

'There's another thing too.' The boy spoke swiftly, almost babbling. 'My dad has told me about insurance. They have to pay more for a guy who's just crippled than for a guy who's dead. They pay big money to cripples. I don't know whether our insurance is that big. If this guy doesn't die, and is just hurt real bad, it might cost us a lot more than the insurance we got. And, man, what my dad would do to me then.'

The girl was terrified now. 'But he's going to die,' she whispered hoarsely.

'How do we know that, Arlene? How do we know?'

Santin felt no pain now. Only fury. They hadn't offered to help him. They wanted him dead. They were selfish, unbelievably selfish. And they were cruel enough to discuss all this right in front of him.

Suddenly, the boy was kneeling, and the flashlight was probing Santin's face again. Santin blinked in the glare, but despite it, he got his first look at the boy. Young. Young like the girl. But not calm like she'd been. Panic was in his eyes. And he was hurt too. An ugly scalp wound marred the left side of his head, and blood was matted in his hair.

'How do you feel, mister?' the boy asked.

Santin disdained to answer. He wouldn't give them the same satisfaction again. He wouldn't tell them of the hot flood of pain that washed over him in ever-growing waves. He wouldn't tell them he'd already heard death whispering in his ear, cajoling him to let go of life.

But he saw the desperation in the boy's face. The boy searched farther with the flashlight, playing it up and down Santin's body. Then he stood up.

'He doesn't look like he's hurt bad enough to die,' he told the girl.

No, it doesn't look like that, Santin thought. The damage is inside. But it's just as fatal. Don't tell them though. Let them sweat. And you might stay alive till somebody comes.

A sudden eruption of pain blotted out his thoughts, leaving him barely conscious.

The girl screamed, and it was as though she was screaming for him. The boy had apparently struck him in some way. 'What are you doing?' she demanded.

The boy's answer was almost a scream too. 'He's got to die. I've got to make him die.'

There was a strain of decency in the girl somewhere. Or a woman's compassion. 'But you can't kill him,' she told the boy fiercely.

'What difference does it make?' he argued back, with hysteria in his voice again. 'I've already killed him, haven't I? He's just got to die quick, that's all. Don't you understand, Arlene?'

Obviously she didn't. She clung to him, holding him back.

'Nobody will ever know the difference,' he told her. There was logic in his argument. 'He's hurt already. They'll think it's from the accident.'

They were silent for a little while. By twisting his head as far as he could, Santin could see them. They were two dark shadows against the lighter background of the sky, so close together that they merged. Santin could sense the desperation in their embrace. The girl with her feminine instinct for mercy. The boy nothing