

more than a brute, mad with the desire for self-preservation. Yet somehow the girl could love him. And because she loved him, she was in this together with him.

'All right, Vince,' he heard her say finally. And still all Santin could do was to lie there. Probably he was going to be beaten and kicked to death. Murdered deliberately, logically, to protect a weak, vicious kid. Somehow he hadn't been so afraid of that other death. But he was afraid of this one. This death had a quality of horror about it.

'No!' he yelled at them with all his strength. 'No!' His cry broke up their embrace. The flashlight in the boy's hand probed his face again. Santin had been proud before, but he wasn't now. He didn't turn away from the light. He let them see his terror.

'Do you think you can do it, Vince?' the girl asked. Her voice was steady. Now that she'd been convinced, she'd be the stronger of the two.

'I don't know,' he said. 'But I've got to.'

Santin saw him coming and closed his eyes.

'Wait a minute,' he heard the girl say, as from the far end of a long tunnel. He existed in a red haze of agony now, and her voice seemed far away.

'What's the matter?'

'You're getting blood on yourself, aren't you?'

'I don't know.'

'Look and see.'

'Yes, I am. But what difference does it make?'

'Vince, Vince, are you crazy? They'll see the blood. And maybe somebody will get suspicious. They can analyse blood, and tell who it belonged to.'

A spark of hope, and Santin dared to open his eyes again. The boy was poised over him for another onslaught, but now he hesitated.

'I know what to do,' he said finally.

He left suddenly, exited from Santin's view. But Santin could hear him thrashing around in the weeds. And then finally his shout.

'Arlene, come over and help me lift this.' More thrashing among the weeds. The girl joining the boy. And the boy's excited voice. 'The guy was thrown out of the car, wasn't he? Okay then, he just hit his head on this, that's all. We'll rearrange the body a little. Come on now, let's lift it together.'

A slow returning of the footsteps. Wildly, Santin searched for them. Saw them. They were coming toward him together, their backs bent, straining. Between them they carried a wide flat object that seemed to be very heavy.

He didn't scream this time. He couldn't. Even his vocal cords were paralysed. But he could watch them. They walked slowly, with great effort. They stopped, one on each side of him, and the huge, heavy, flat object they held blotted out the sky above his face.

Then, at the very last moment of his life, he became aware of something. A soothing calm flooded over him. I was going to die anyway, he thought. This is quicker, of course, maybe even merciful. But it's also murder.

He prayed. A strange prayer. He prayed for a smart cop.

Sergeant Vanneck of the State Highway Patrol was a smart cop. In the grey light of dawn, he studied tyre marks on the road. They were hard to see on the dark asphalt, and he couldn't be entirely sure.

He was a little surer how he felt about the pair who stood by his car and watched him as he went about his work. The boy called Vince and the girl called Arlene. They were like most other youngsters who got involved in fatal accidents, and they were also different. So, as the dawn grew brighter, he continued his search.

He found more than he'd expected to find. The body had been removed and the area was pretty well trampled. But he found the evidence nevertheless. It was clear, unquestionable.

He climbed back out of the ditch and walked over to the girl and the boy. There must have been something terrifying in his face, because it made the boy ask nervously, 'What's the matter, Sergeant?'

'There are two sides to a rock,' Sergeant Vanneck said. 'The top side stays clean, washed by the rain. The bottom side is dirty from contact with the ground. Now you tell me, sonny, how Mr Santin was thrown from his car so that he hit his head on the bottom side of that rock?'