

# The Clinic

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Steve pulled open the heavy glass door to the clinic, walked in, stopped, took off his sunglasses, and rubbed the burning spots behind both ears. The army doctor had told him that rubbing or scratching his skin could cause infection. The clinic smell was still the same. He had his five senses, but he needed to feel the old emotions, or at least recall them. Dr. Jensen had taken out his appendix, tonsils, treated him for all of his childhood diseases, and set his broken wrist. He had come to the clinic the last time four years ago to get his free missionary physical. Dr. Jensen's name had been a household word as long as he could remember, a man his parents respected, loved, and trusted. His only son had been drowned on a family water-skiing trip at Bear Lake.

Steve knew that the feeling wouldn't come. He had the memories, the words, images in his mind, but he could not invoke the emotion. His body felt heavy and dull, like soft metal. The things he had done in Vietnam had destroyed his capacity

to feel. For nearly a month now, since his return home to Provo, he had wanted to touch things, lay his face against them, for it was as if he were more than deaf, dumb, and blind. He needed to use every square inch of his burning skin to feel, make his whole body a receiver tuned to emotion. He wanted to put his arms around people on the street he didn't even know, embrace trees, press against old buildings; he was afraid he was going insane. God and Jesus had become only pictures. He had been drafted two days after he got back from his mission.

Steve had walked late at night to look at the houses of the girls he had gone with. At least half of the girls were married now; some had children. He looked at the places in front of their houses where he had parked with the girls. He had gone to their parties, been invited to dinners by their mothers. He kissed the girls good-night on their porches. He knew which windows were the girls' bedrooms. But standing in the darkness looking at the houses, his arms folded tight across his chest, he had felt nothing. It was as if he had never known the girls, and had no rich memories of the laughter and warmth he could use.

His mother mentioned the names of his old girl friends who were still single, but he did not phone them. His brothers had come home to see him. It was like talking to them underwater or through thick glass. He wanted to wear gloves when he was around people. He was afraid that some little boy might ask him how many people he had killed.

Steve climbed the four steps from the clinic foyer to the waiting room. The big framed picture of Custer's last stand still hung on the wall above the radiator. The last man on his feet, Custer stood at the center of his dead and wounded men, a kneeling sergeant holding up the American flag on Custer's right side. Custer, a pistol in each hand, his long yellow hair blowing in the breeze, shot at two mounted war chiefs charging him from opposite directions with raised lances. Braves jumped from their horses to kill the wounded soldiers. Dozens of braves lay dead or wounded. Steve had learned all the faces as a boy.

Mrs. Anderson sat at the reception desk talking to a man sitting on the green leather sofa. The man's right leg had been cut off just below the knee; a pair of crutches leaned against the wall behind him. The man's garments showed through his short-sleeved white shirt. The aquarium, yellow with afternoon light, stood before the large window. Mrs. Anderson turned. "Well, *Steve*, how nice to see you home again safe and sound. I noticed that one of the girls had made an appointment for you. I've talked to your mother in church about you. You've been home two or three weeks now haven't you?"

Steve took a *Life* from the magazine rack. "Yes."

"Mr. Simmons, you may not know Steve. He just got back from Vietnam. Before that he was on a mission for the Church in California, so he's been gone over four years altogether." The phone rang.

"Is that right, son? Well, welcome home." Mr. Simmons leaned forward to shake his hand. "Always glad to see you boys get home from Vietnam in one piece. I was in the first war myself."

Steve sat down on the black leather chair next to the aquarium, but he didn't open the *Life*. Mrs. Anderson pushed one of the buttons and put the phone back in the cradle. "My boy Richard and Steve were baptized the same Saturday and confirmed the same fast Sunday. I have a picture of them standing together in their white baptismal clothes. They were sweet. They grew up together. Richard

is married and in dental school." She looked over at Steve. "How does it feel to be back home, Steve? Your parents certainly are grateful to have you back all safe and sound, aren't they?"

"Yes." Richard hadn't gone on a mission or been in the army.

"But we haven't seen you out to church. I asked the bishop if he had seen you."

"I haven't made it yet."

"Oh."

The bishop had come by the house to welcome him home, and the president of the elders quorum had phoned twice to invite him to play on the ward softball team. Behind Mrs. Anderson on top of the first filing cabinet was a display rack of Books of Mormon and three tracts, "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story," "The Plan of Salvation," and "A Practical Gospel." Dr. Jensen had been a bishop for ten years, and now he was in the Provo Stake presidency. He prayed before every operation he performed, and his patients often asked him to bless them.

Steve's body was very heavy. He never thought anymore about having the priesthood. He had always liked the idea of God and Jesus Christ. Things slipped in and out of focus. He was afraid he would forget how to tie his shoes or to button his shirt. He had lettered in tennis and basketball at Provo High.

"Have you found a job yet, Steve?"

"No." He opened the magazine.

"What are you doing with all of your spare time before school starts at BYU?"

"I don't know. I like to listen to music." He had bought over a hundred dollars worth of new records. He lay in the dark in his room and tried to keep his burning body full of soft sound. He wanted to fade into the darkness and the sound. He had always had a sense of order.

"Well, you boys who have been in Vietnam deserve to rest a week or two before you get back into harness. I guess you were able to do a lot of missionary work with your army friends while you were in Vietnam and preach the gospel, weren't you, Steve? I understand that some returned missionaries make more converts in the army than they do on their missions because they're such good examples."

"I suppose that some of them do." He had thought that he could never lose what he had felt the two years he was on his mission in southern California. Elder Decker had been killed outside of Bien Hoa in an ambush. They knelt to pray together three and four times a day by the bunk beds, bore their testimonies to each other before they went out each morning tracting, had a scripture memorization contest going. They testified daily to the truthfulness of the gospel, Jesus Christ, the atonement, redemption, blessed the sick, performed marriages, and, dressed in white, they baptized, felt that they were walking on air half the time because they had so many good investigators. Six months after his release he was in Vietnam.

They washed their garments themselves in the sink, always joking about what the girls back home would say. He had to stop himself from thinking about Elder Decker, control his mind so that he wouldn't turn completely to soft metal. His mother had sent him the *Church Section* and the *Improvement Era*, but after the first month in Vietnam he couldn't read them anymore. His battalion had gone in twice to rescue ambushed outfits. Both times it was the same. He had heard about Elder Decker through another returned missionary he met in Saigon.

The phone rang again. Steve turned the pages of the *Life* magazine. He had

made his appointment for Wednesday afternoon because he didn't want to be in the waiting room with a lot of other patients. Dr. Monson and Dr. Harris had Wednesday off. He didn't like people talking. One day when he had an appointment for a pre-school physical, a man had screamed from one of the rooms down the hall, "Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!" The screaming came through the closed hall door, and for those seconds afterward no one in the waiting room moved or talked, the only other sound the bubbling from the oxygenator in the aquarium.

Mrs. Anderson put the phone back in the cradle.

Twice he had seen blood trails that started out in the parking lot, led up the steps, across the tile floor, to vanish down the hall. One of the girls came out with a damp cloth to wipe up the blood. All three doctors had gone rushing out one afternoon when he sat with his mother waiting. The sound of sirens vibrated through the big window in front of the aquarium, but his mother wouldn't let him go outside. Later, when they walked up University Avenue, he saw where the accident had been, although the cars had been towed off by then. The intersection was sprinkled with headlight glass, a big stain of radiator fluid on the black asphalt, as if a large animal had been killed there. He had read that over fifty thousand Americans were killed every year in automobile accidents and millions of others injured.

"Steve, this isn't serious is it?"

He looked up from the magazine. Mrs. Anderson had taken his manila folder from one of the fireproof filing cabinets and held it open on her desk. "It's a skin problem. I ran out of salve the army gave me, and I need a prescription." He wanted to ask Mrs. Anderson for his folder. What had Dr. Jensen said about him since he was born? The eight fireproof filing cabinets with locks were full of medical histories in manila folders, all the things that Dr. Jensen and the other doctors knew about their patients and had forgotten they knew, diseases, accidents, operations, treatments, and prescriptions. Everybody in the stake liked to hear Dr. Jensen's sermons. He always spoke about Jesus Christ. He had a strong testimony. After his son's death at Bear Lake, he had sold his boat.

"Is it something you contracted while you were in Vietnam, Steve?"

"Yes."

"Those jungles must be terrible places to have to fight in, and I understand that you were right out fighting the whole year you were there. My husband always says that as long as he had to fight, he was glad it was in France and Germany. He was in the war."

"I fought in France in the first war." Mr. Simmons leaned forward on the green leather sofa. "It's been fifty years and I still haven't forgotten some of the things that happened over there. I don't know what I would have done all these years without the Church."

A large silver safety pin held the empty pant leg to the side of his hip.

"But it's so terrible when you think about all those boys still in hospitals. My sister's neighbor's boy was in Korea, and he's still in a mental ward in a veterans hospital at Denver. He was such a nice boy. Dr. Jensen was in the Pacific all during the war, Steve, and he has other skin patients. You're lucky to have a doctor with experience. Dr. Jensen is a wonderful man."

"Yes."

"Richard will have to go in the army after dental school, but he'll be a captain."

Steve said nothing; a woman came in to pay a bill.

The breast markings on Mr. Simmons' garments showed through his white shirt. Steve looked down at the big *Life* pictures. He found himself checking white shirts to see who wore garments. He had liked receiving the Melchizedek priesthood, going through the temple and wearing garments; he felt clean and safe. He had always believed there were things he could never do. Everything seemed the same now; he had lost his sense of opposites.

He knew that members mistook his T-shirt for garments. His mother washed his boxers and T-shirts, ironed them, and put them in his drawer by his folded white garments, some of which he had worn on his mission. Neither she nor his father said anything. He had turned his father down on three fishing trips to Strawberry. He didn't want to be alone in the boat with his father all day.

Reaching down, Steve rubbed the inside of his ankle. At times his whole body burned faintly. The army doctor had told him that some men lost all control and lay in bed scratching themselves until they had deep infected sores. He had always liked the shower after he had played basketball or tennis. His body had always been light and clean. He knew that he had begun to stare at things.

"All right Mr. Simmons, Dr. Jensen will see you now." Steve looked up from the *Life* again. "Well, hello, Steve, how are you? It's nice to see you home again. Several people have mentioned you were back."

Mrs. Bryce stood by the open hallway door in her white nurse's cap and uniform. She stepped into the waiting room to let Mr. Simmons swing through the door on his crutches. Steve stood up. "Thank you."

"You've been away four years haven't you, what with your mission and then the army?"

"I was discharged early."

"Well, now that you have that all behind you, you can start school again at BYU and get married like all of the rest of the boys. I'll bet you wrote to half a dozen girls while you were gone." He sat back down on the black leather chair.

Mrs. Anderson handed Mrs. Bryce his manila folder with a pink charge slip clipped to it. "I don't think that Dr. Jensen will be very long, Steve. Mr. Simmons is just in for a check-up and a change on his prescription." Turning, she closed the hall door behind her.

"Richard and his wife are expecting a baby, Steve. Did your mother tell you?"

"Yes."

A woman came into the clinic with a little girl who needed a shot, and Mrs. Anderson sent them back to the lab. The front cover of the old *Improvement Eras* in the magazine rack was a picture of Joseph Smith's first vision. God the father stood in bright light, his hand extended toward Jesus. The large white letters said, "This is my beloved son. Hear him." He didn't feel like he deserved anything now.

"Rita is a lovely girl and comes from a nice family. Her father is a doctor. Of course Richard and Rita plan to go on a mission together someday after they get their family raised. Richard thinks that maybe the Church will send them down to fix teeth for the Navahos. They had a beautiful reception." Mrs. Anderson got a plastic accordion packet of pictures from her purse in the desk drawer. "These are Richard's wedding pictures, Steve." She stood up, walked over to Steve, pulled a chair up to his, and explained every picture.

"We're all so proud of him." She stood up. "He wants to serve his tour of duty in Europe or Japan." She walked back to her desk and sat down. "What are you going to major in, Steve?"

"I don't know. I'm not certain anymore that I want to go to college."

"Oh, but of course you want to go to college, Steve. Your mother and father would be very very disappointed if you didn't earn at least your bachelor's degree. Your three brothers all graduated after their missions didn't they?"

"Yes."

"Why, what would you do if you didn't go on to finish college?"

"I don't know."

"I thought that you wanted to go to law school at one time."

"I did."

"That's a fine profession. Your family would be proud of you." Mrs. Anderson turned to answer the phone.

The big window silhouetted the aquarium. The metallic fish flickered through the sunlit yellow water. The glass was smudged. As a little boy he had always pressed against the salty glass with his palms, nose, and lips. Fish floated in the rivers after artillery or bombs. He had followed blood trails and found monkeys and small jungle deer, not men. One platoon had found a tiger curled in the grass as if asleep, dead from concussion.

The hall door opened and Mr. Simmons swung through on his crutches, Mrs. Bryce behind him. "We'll see you next week again, Mr. Simmons." She handed Mrs. Anderson the pink charge slip.

"Thank you very much." He held his white prescription in his hand.

"Come in, Steve. Dr. Jensen will see you now."

"Lots of luck, son, now that you're back home."

Steve turned as he walked through the doorway. "Thank you."

Mrs. Bryce closed the door and followed him down the hall. "In here as usual, Steve. Just sit down. Dr. Jensen will be with you in a minute. He's in the lab." Mrs. Bryce closed the door behind her.

Steve rubbed under his belt, then raised his arms to the armrests. He had sat in the brown leather chair last when he had his missionary physical. He had been in perfect health, and he had felt very clean. Dr. Jensen gave all new missionaries from Provo Stake their physicals free. Since his son's death he paid to keep a missionary in the field. Steve looked up at the two yellowish windows. He had his missionary slides, and his mother had saved all of his missionary letters.

He lay on his bed at night to see his slides over and over, set the projector on automatic, stacked his hi-fi with records, and so saw on his wall all the lost images again, sound and images blurred, members, converts, companions in color. He had over a dozen slides with Elder Decker on them, who was always smiling. In his letters to his mother and father he had told what a great missionary Elder Decker was. Half of Elder Decker's squad had been killed with him in the ambush.

Steve had gone through his book of remembrance, the family photo albums, and all of his old high-school yearbooks looking for himself. He looked at the pictures of all the girls he had gone with. He got his little wooden box of boy scout badges out and his merit badge sash; in his book of remembrance he read his birth, blessing, and baptismal certificates and his priesthood ordination certificates. He had thought that when he saw his mother and father at the Salt Lake

Airport that his heart would leap as it had when he returned from his mission, his body alive with memory, pride, gratitude, and love, but that had not happened. And it had not happened either when they drove around the point of the mountain and down into Utah Valley, the lights of Provo bright before them.

He went alone to places he had felt emotion, the Provo High gym, tennis courts, and locker room, the ward chapel, every room in the house, familiar streets under familiar trees, places he used to park with his dates, but he felt nothing. Two weeks ago on one of his long night drives, he swam out to the middle of Deer Creek Reservoir, hung naked there in the hundred-foot-deep water staring up at the moon and stars, his whole body cool, which he knew he could keep cool forever if he wanted.

Steve rubbed the right side of his groin. Dr. Jensen's license, medical school diploma, residency certificate in general surgery, and his army medical certificate hung on the wall over the examining table. The chrome, glass, and white enamel surfaces in the room gleamed in the diffused yellowish light. An open medical journal lay face-down on the glass-topped desk by the pile of manila folders. The glass reflected Dr. Jensen's gold-framed family pictures. He had two pictures of his son. Worn copies of the *Articles of Faith, Jesus the Christ*, and the standard works stood in the row of books pushed against the wall. The pad of white prescription blanks lay next to the pen holder. Down the hall a phone rang.

"Well, hello, Steve. It's good to see you again." Dr. Jensen came in wiping his hands on a towel, his white jacket buttoned. He stepped on the foot pedal, dropped the towel into the large chrome container. He shook Steve's hand, his hand cool. "Well, you made it back I see."

"Yes."

"I think that your mother has counted every hour you were in Vietnam and said a thousand prayers. I guess you'll be finding a job and going to school at BYU this fall, and meeting a girl. The sooner you returned missionaries and servicemen get married, the better. You're going into law aren't you?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, I thought that was all decided."

"I don't know anymore."

"Well, there are lots of good jobs if you're willing to work hard enough. Find something you like and work hard at it. Too many people go through life never knowing what they want."

Dr. Jensen looked down at his opened manila folder, adjusted his bifocals. "You've got some kind of skin problem, Steve? Something you brought back from Vietnam with you I suppose?"

"Yes. It's on my army medical records, but I don't want to have to go to Salt Lake to the V.A. Hospital everytime I need some salve."

"Where does it bother you the most, between your toes, around your genitals, under your arms, where you sweat? It burns doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Go behind the screen and undress. You can roll your garments down to your waist."

Steve stripped down to his shorts and walked back out, the tile cool on his feet. Dr. Jensen glanced at him, then pulled the long-necked lamp over to the white metal chair. "Sit down here." The cool metal chilled Steve. Pushing the lamp in

so close that Steve felt the heat from the bulb, Dr. Jensen examined along his hair line, behind his ears, had him stand up and hold out each arm, told him to drop his shorts. "Any chance of venereal disease, Steve?"

"No."

"Okay, good. Put your shorts back on and sit on the table." Dr. Jensen examined between his toes, then straightened up. "It looks like some kind of fungus to me. I can tell you right now that your scratching it hasn't helped any. I can send you to the hospital for some tests if you want or to a skin specialist, but I suppose that the army has already done that."

"Yes. I just want a salve to stop the burning until the weather cools off. They said it would be better when the weather got cooler." He wanted to tell Dr. Jensen how his body was like soft metal that he couldn't feel.

Dr. Jensen sat down at his desk and started to write out the prescription. "It will be better in cooler weather. And it will die down for six months or a year, then flare up again. Summer is the worst because you sweat. I can name you a dozen men here in Provo who still have it from the last war. I have had this prescription made up that helps, but it's one of those things you're going to have to learn to live with. One way or another we all have something."

"I know."

"I doubt that you do, but you may in ten or fifteen years. You can get dressed." Dr. Jensen didn't raise his head.

When Steve came out from behind the screen, Dr. Jensen told him to sit down. Dr. Jensen leaned back in his chair, his head silhouetted against the pale yellow window. "It didn't bother you did it when I asked if there was any chance of a venereal disease?"

"No."

"It would have before you went to Vietnam."

"I guess."

"Two years ago you'd have been insulted that I could even think that of you. Now you don't wear your garments and you haven't been to church since you got back."

"My mother and father have been talking to you."

"No, they haven't, but other people have. You've been home nearly a month now. A lot of people love you, Steve. Everybody's always thought of you as a fine young person."

"They shouldn't."

"Why not?"

"You couldn't understand." Dr. Jensen turned to answer the phone. Steve looked a little to the right of his face. The chrome and glass in the room reflected distorted images. He had needed his own private movie cameraman with him every minute. He could show the movies to all of his neighbors, friends, and relatives. He could sit in his bedroom and watch himself over and over again daily, until perhaps he, too, knew what he had done. But the movies would have to be in black and white, silent, only images. He knew that his father had asked some of his old high-school friends to call him to play tennis, but he always said no. Dr. Jensen had a fine spray of dry blood on the left sleeve of his white jacket.

Dr. Jensen put the receiver back in the cradle. "I might understand, Steve. I was in the Pacific for three years in the last war."



"You didn't fight."

"No, I operated. We worked in teams; we operated ten and twelve hours straight when the fighting was heavy. After a week or two of that, you've cut off and cut out everything a man can lose and still live."

"It isn't the same."

"No, it isn't entirely the same I guess. You lost a former missionary companion in Vietnam didn't you? Your mother did tell me that one day when she was in."

"I didn't tell her."

"She saw his obituary in one of the Salt Lake papers. She didn't want to tell you if you didn't know."

"They cut off his head."

"That's bad."

"We did things like that to them."

"I suppose you did." Dr. Jensen paused. "One winter back in the 1850s my grandfather was one of the Provo settlers who chased about twenty-five Ute Indians out on the Utah Lake ice and killed them in a running fight. A doctor took a sled out, cut all of their heads off, treated them, and then sent them East for a medical museum skull collection."

"Is that supposed to help me?"

"You need to know that that kind of thing happens fairly often."

"Does it?"

"You had a missionary companion wounded, too, didn't you?"

"He wasn't my companion. We labored in the same district."

"What happened to him?"

"He stepped on a mine and it blew off both his legs."

"How did he take it?"

"He tried to commit suicide in the hospital in Japan."

Steve rubbed the side of his neck.

"You should try not to do that, Steve." Dr. Jensen laid both of his hands, palms-up, on the glass-topped desk. Heavy shadows showed through the yellowish opaque windows. When Elder Decker was made zone leader, transferred, they tried just to shake hands, but it wasn't enough, and they hugged each other. Steve had to keep fighting the image of the headless body in the sealed casket going back to Logan. Elder Decker had lettered in basketball and been a National Merit finalist. Steve couldn't let the casket get too big. A body could explode, the flesh and bones marring the trees, brush and earth.

"I can name you men in Provo who saw and did worse things in the last war and in Korea, but they came home, got married, raised families, stayed active in the Church, honored their priesthood. Some of them even went on missions after they got back."

"They fought in a better war than I did."

"They killed other men, Steve. Do you plan to end up in a V. A. psycho ward?" The glass-topped desk mirrored the backs of Dr. Jensen's hands. His gold wedding band glinted. "You should come out to the Utah Valley Hospital with me this afternoon, Steve."

"Why?"

"I've got a little four-year-old boy in the hospital with third-degree burns all over his head, face and shoulders. His mother knocked a pan of boiling water

off of the stove on top of him. And you might want to talk to Dr. Franceman. He delivered a blind baby boy Thursday. The mother is thirty-five and has four children. Her husband infected her with gonorrhea. You remember Kelly Tolman, he played basketball for B.Y.U. about six years ago. He's in intensive care with a fractured skull and two broken legs. He apparently fell asleep driving back from Salt Lake Wednesday night, sideswiped a semi-truck, and killed his wife. Some car accidents can even be worse than a hand grenade or a mortar shell."

Dr. Jensen looked at the gold-framed pictures. His son's name had been David.

"You didn't start to drink or go on drugs, and you didn't sleep with any Vietnamese whores."

"No, I just killed people."

"Don't ever become a surgeon."

"They save lives."

"No, they just prolong them, sometimes." Dr. Jensen looked down at his open hands. "You saw old Ralph Simmons on his crutches." Dr. Jensen nodded toward the pile of manila folders. "He's got diabetes and I had to amputate his leg below the knee four months ago, but I didn't go high enough. Now I've got to take as much of his leg as I can."

Dr. Jensen slowly closed his hands. "You can't love or forgive yourself enough, Steve, and nobody else can either, although they can help. All of us need somebody like Jesus Christ for that. At least it's the only answer I've found that makes any sense."

Dr. Jensen sat looking at his closed hands, and then the phone rang. "I'll be there in ten minutes," he said, and hung up.

Dr. Jensen stood up, unbuttoned his white jacket, hung it on the chrome coat tree, and put on his suit coat. He closed Steve's manila folder and set it on the pile. "Get this prescription filled at City Drug. They make it for some other patients of mine. You might as well get used to that burning during this hot weather, but you'll be a lot better off if you don't scratch it." The neckline of Dr. Jensen's garments showed through his white shirt. He wrote on the pink charge slip. "There's no charge, Steve. Use the money for school next month."

"I have money."

"I know that. Try to accept things people want to give you. And here's some more advice. Start going to church. You're not better or worse than most of us. And get married. You need to hold a girl in your arms for about six weeks to thaw you out."

Steve walked down the hall ahead of Dr. Jensen. "Say hello to your mom and dad for me." He turned to Mrs. Anderson at the desk and gave her the pink slip. "There's no charge on Steve."

"Yes, Doctor Jensen."

"Goodbye, Steve. I'm glad you're home." He shook Steve's hand. "I'll be at the hospital, Mrs. Anderson." Carrying his black bag, he walked across the waiting room and down the foyer steps.

"Dr. Jensen is a wonderful man. We need more in the world like him. There isn't anything he wouldn't do for the Church."

"No, I guess there isn't."

"You weren't wounded or anything were you, Steve? I suppose I would have heard if you had been."

"No, I wasn't wounded."

"I prayed night and morning on my knees that Richard wouldn't be drafted and have to go to Vietnam. I know that was selfish of me, but I couldn't help it, Steve. I cried everytime I saw a picture in the *Herald* of one of the boys who had been killed. I guess we can't even guess how terrible it was for you boys. If my Richard didn't go, somebody else's boy had to. I suppose that I was very selfish. I hope the Lord will forgive me for that."

He turned. Silhouetted by the light from the window, the goldfish flashed against the side of the aquarium, the water yellow with sunlight. The oxygenator made a noise. "Mothers should say that kind of prayer, I guess."

Mrs. Bryce came down the hall. "Well, Steve, I suppose that the next time we see you it will be for a blood test to getting married."

He folded the prescription Dr. Jensen had given him and put it in his shirt pocket. "Perhaps."

"Of course it will be. You boys don't stay single long, and you'll make some girl a fine husband. Don't waste any of those wonderful years. It's good to see you back, Steve." Mrs. Bryce turned and walked back down the hall without closing the door. There were no more patients waiting.

"Steve," Mrs. Anderson said, "If I hear of any part-time jobs for school, I'll let you know."

"Thank you." He walked across the waiting room but stopped by the picture of Custer's last stand. Custer shot at the two mounted charging war chiefs with his large silver pearl-handled pistols. He had a bloodstained bandage tied around his forehead and an arrow sticking in his right leg. Many Indians lay dead in front of Custer. Steve turned away from the picture. Mrs. Anderson sat looking across her desk at the aquarium. "Tell Richard hello for me when you write him next time, Mrs. Anderson," he said.

"Oh, thank you, Steve, I will." She reached to pick up the ringing telephone.

Steve walked down the steps and pushed open the door. Outside, he put on his sunglasses and checked to see that he had the prescription in his shirt pocket. He walked along Second South and turned up University Avenue toward the City Drug. By the time he got to the City and County Building, he felt the burning, as if someone were touching him with a sponge dipped in a weak acid solution. He slowly curled his fingers.

Swinging her shoulder purse by the strap, a girl wearing sandals walked just ahead of him. Her long dark hair fell to her waist. Steve crossed Center Street and stood by the door of the City Drug. He took off his sunglasses. She stopped to look in Allen's window. She swung her purse gently across her legs, and her shining dark hair fell down over her bare arm. Steve stood there for a moment after she walked into Allen's, and then he turned and pushed open the heavy glass door.