828
W95266sa
1965

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

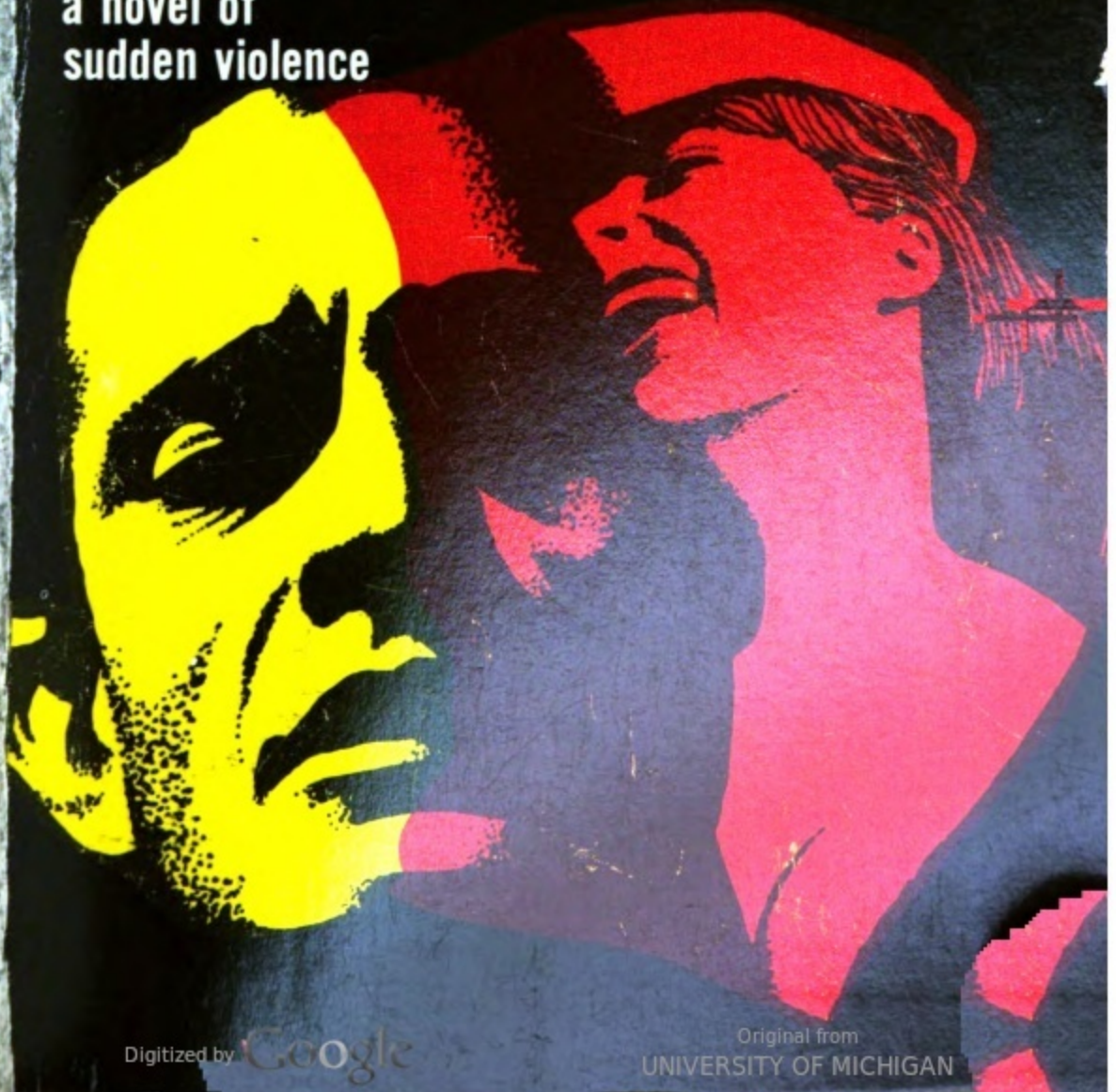
AWARD BOOKS A A 558N 95¢ MAC

ONE OF THE GREATEST BLACK WRITERS OF ALL TIME. "ONE OF THE MOST NOTABLE GIFTS IN U.S. WRITING" —Time Magazine

RICHARD WRIGHT

SAVAGE HOLIDAY

a novel of sudden violence



Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Near the center windows in the left wall and at a table decorated with a giant, spraying bouquet of long-stemmed roses sat a quiet, reserved group of men whose fleshy faces, massive bodies, gray and bald heads marked them as wealthy executives. One of them, a white-haired man whose forceful, ruddy face, China blue eyes, and squared chin gave him the demeanor of a tamed pirate, was speaking:

"And now, this doughty warrior, after thirty long years of care and toil, lays down his burden of responsibility and can honestly look any man in the eye and say, 'I've earned this rest of mine with the sweat of my brow—this is the end of a perfect day!'"

The speaker's hearers were visibly moved and the handclapping was as soft, as shy, as the rustling of tree leaves in a spring wind.

"Brothers and sisters, just think—Erskine Fowler looked upon Longevity Life as his family! Ah, I remember him years ago—though it seems to my mind's eye that it was but yesterday!—running errands, learning the ropes, figuring the angles, growing up with a growing company, becoming a Mason, a Rotarian, a Sunday School Superintendent, a man of parts . . . What a miracle life is! What a tremendous boon we have been to this man, and what a godsend he has been to us! What a collaboration! What a partnership! What a fulfillment of promise . . . !"

Applause, strident, deafening . . .

"Brothers and sisters, thirty years is a long, long span of time:—Time enough to cap the hair of a head like mine with silver frost. . . . Time enough for countless souls to be chastened in the valley of suffering. . . . Time enough for Almighty God to lay His final Hand upon some of us. . . . Time enough for millions of new faces to make their God-given appearance here on earth in our midst. . . . Time enough for war

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

was that, at the last moment, instead of hurling a monkey wrench into Warren's smoothly organized machinery of falsehood, he had had a failure of nerve, had collaborated in the game of make-believe.

The urge to expose to his co-workers the hidden reasons for his leaving Longevity Life had clashed with his pledged word to hold his tongue, and the resulting tension had so tautened his muscles that he could not have endured any more of that ceremony without actually collapsing temporarily. His sitting there at his table so quietly and knowing that within an hour a thirty-years' relationship would, against his will and in spite of his protest, irrevocably terminate had been like watching a knife whose sharp edge of blade was nearing a bared nerve....

To avoid meeting his erstwhile associates, he sought to leave the hotel by a side entrance. He came to the head of a rear stairway and paused, gazing broodingly down at the descending sweep of wide, carpeted steps. He was alone. Slowly his left hand reached inside his coat and his fingers touched the tip ends of a row of four automatic pencils—black, red, blue, and green—clipped to an inner pocket. Whenever he was distraught or filled with anxiety, he invariably made this very same compulsive gesture which he had developed in some obscure and forgotten crisis in his past; his touching those pencils always somehow reassured him, for they seemed to symbolize an inexplicable need to keep contact with some emotional resolution whose meaning and content he did not know....

Yes; his leaving that banquet had been indefensible and irrational. He had not only broken his promise to Warren to stick it out, but he had revealed himself as a man who could not keep a grip upon himself. Yet he knew that his running out had another and deeper

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

meaning. In fleeing from that banquet room, he had been really trying to flee from himself; that banquet room had been but an objective symbolization of a reality which he, at that moment, had wanted more than anything else on this earth to avoid. And the reality that had so frightened him was so completely himself and his own past life that he could only feel it, suffer it; he couldn't know it, master it . . .

Squeezing the flat box in his right palm, he crept down the stairs like a criminal. He'd been discarded, scrapped; he was outdated, no longer of any use to the company he'd helped to build. Sure; he could easily get another job; he was known far and wide in the insurance world as an A-1 executive, as a cracker-jack who always delivered the goods. But that wasn't the point. He knew Longevity Life from A to Z, better than he knew himself, and to see his own company toss away a man of his value—he was sure that he'd have felt the same way about it if it had been someone else!—made him furious. He wanted to spit as he recalled those lying, oily phrases spewing from Warren's thin lips—Warren, who had wanted him out of the way *more* than any of the others! He was deadwood that they'd gotten rid of; he'd been pensioned off. True; he'd drawn a handsome batch of dollars as severance pay; but they'd wanted him out of the way just the same.

But, by God, he'd show 'em! They thought that he was old-fashioned, a washout. He'd find another position; no; not right away; he'd look around first; and when he did find another job, he'd make such a name for himself, he'd be such a whizz that Longevity Life would wish that they'd never let him go. . . . They made me take a bribe, he told himself bitterly. But they'll regret it. He wouldn't be at all surprised if, after a year, they called him back . . .

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"If you want to put it that way," Warren had said. "You're going to play your part?"

"Okay. I'll play my part," Erskine had said with a sigh; he had not looked up.

There wasn't anything more to be said. The harmonious strain of a waltz wafted to them.

"All right; let's get going," Ricky had said.

Erskine had marched slowly out of the room between Warren and Ricky; he'd felt that he was an animal being flanked by its two trainers. They were leading him toward the circus ring and, though he would snarl, bare his fangs, he was going to go through his paces. . . .

Erskine reached the bottom of the stairs and let his eyes rove over the crowded rear lobby. Yes; that scene of degradation would live in his heart to his dying hour. They hadn't even been sympathetic enough to say: "We know how you feel, Erskine . . ." They were streamlining and modernizing the organization and they had replaced him with young Warren who was from Harvard and had studied insurance scientifically . . .

"They've gone hogwild and haywire over new ideas and methods," he mumbled to himself. "And they don't know what insurance really is . . ."

Erskine was unalterably convinced that there was nothing that any university could instill in anybody that could remotely match his own superb, practical knowledge of insurance. Insurance was life itself; insurance was human nature in the raw trying to hide itself; insurance was instinctively and intuitively knowing that man was essentially a venal, deluded, and greedy animal . . .

Yes; insurance was a shifty-eyed, timid, sensual, sluttish woman trying, with all of her revolting and nauseating sexiness, to make you believe that she'd

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

been maimed for life in an automobile accident, and you wouldn't, couldn't believe her or take her word for it, or take her doctor's word for it, and you'd smiled at her and led her to believe that you believed her and you easily beat her at her crooked game by just looking into her eyes and letting her fool herself into thinking that maybe you were falling for her, and, in the end, you'd trapped her into admitting that she was lying and you settled her claim for one-tenth of what her itchy palms had been wanting . . .

Yes; insurance was a small-time, stupid, greasy-faced Italian grocery-store keeper who had amateurishly set his dingy, garlic-reeking place ablaze hoping that he'd collect enough insurance money to start all over again under another name and in another state, and you'd talked to the dope for fifteen minutes and had caught him in such a tangle of contradictions that he'd gotten frightened and had confessed and was eventually sent to prison for five years . . .

Yes; insurance was an old, sweet-looking woman of seventy-odd who'd insured her new daughter-in-law for a huge amount of money and then had, with a stout hatchet, killed her one night in her bed and had told a seemingly plausible tale of having awakened from her sleep and having seen a tall, dark man (Erskine was convinced that all "tall, dark men" were but the figments of guilty women's imagination!) fleeing down the dark hallway of their frame house and of immediately afterwards hearing groans in her daughter-in-law's bedroom and of finding her daughter-in-law in bed hacked to pieces and soaking in blood, and you had from the first doubted the sweet-looking old woman's sobbing story and a few days later, while rummaging about the house with an inspector from the company, had found the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

deeper than the flesh... Then, what was he to do...?

A subtle sense of terror, potent but vague, seeped into his soul and the night's damp heat made sweat beads on his upper lip. Yes, God; *this* was that unwelcome, uncanny, haunting sensation against which he had to employ all his emotional energies now; the dodging, the eluding of *this* nameless and invisible enemy had gripped and preoccupied him more and more since his life had turned from a settled routine into a nagging problem. He was plagued by a jittery premonition that some monstrous and hoary recollection, teasing him and putting his teeth on edge because it was strange and yet somehow familiar, was about to break disastrously into his consciousness. He blinked his eyes, shook his head, touched the tips of his four pencils in his inner coat pocket to free himself of these filmy cobwebs dusting at his mind... A red traffic light made him halt and he felt the hot pavement vibrating beneath his feet as a subway train sped through the underground. Nervously he slipped the flat, black box holding his gold medal into his outer coat pocket and swabbed his face with his handkerchief. He sighed, angry and repelled by this haunting sense of not quite being his own master.

Work had not only given Erskine his livelihood and conferred upon him the approval of his fellowmen; but, above all, it made him a stranger to a part of himself that he feared and wanted never to know. At some point in his childhood he had assumed toward himself the role of a policeman, had accused himself, had hauled himself brutally into the court of his conscience, had arraigned himself before the bar of his fears, and had found himself guilty and had, finally and willingly, dragged himself off to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

serve a sentence of self-imposed labor for life, had locked himself up in a prison-cage of toil . . . Now, involuntarily reprieved, each week six full new Sundays suddenly loomed terrifyingly before him and he had to find a way to outwit that rejected part of him that Longevity Life had helped to incarcerate so long and successfully. He was trapped in freedom. How could he again make a foolproof prison of himself for all of his remaining days? What invisible walls could he now erect about his threatening feelings, desires? How could he suppress or throttle those slow and turgid stirrings of buried impulses now trying to come to resurrected life in the deep dark of him? How could he become his own absolute jailer and keep the peace within the warring precincts of his heart?

The majority of men, timid and unthinking, obey the laws and mandates of society because they yearn to merit the esteem and respect of their law-abiding neighbors. Still others, reflective and conscious, obey because they are intelligently afraid of the reprisals meted out by society upon the breakers of the law. There are still other men of a deeper and more sensitive nature who, in their growing up, introject the laws and mandates of society into their hearts and come in time to feel and accept these acquired notions of right and wrong as native impulses springing out of the depths of their beings and, if they are ever tempted to violate these absorbed codes, act as though the sky itself were about to crash upon their heads, as though the very earth were about to swing catastrophically out of its orbit . . .

Such a man was Erskine Fowler, but the laws and mandates which he had introjected into his heart were of a special sort, and were unknown to him

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

trees and he peered cautiously and saw a tall man swinging a huge ax chopping furiously into a v-shaped hollow of a giant tree and the chips were flying and the man's face was hard and brutish and criminal-looking and he was now resolved upon surprising the man and demanding that he get out of the forest and stop stealing his trees and he crept closer and saw that the man was about to cut straight through the tree and all at once the man stopped and whirled and saw him and yelled *run go quickly the tree's about to fall* and he looked up and saw the tall tree bending slowly and falling towards him and he heard the man yelling for him to run but he couldn't move his feet and when he looked up this time the tree was crashing down upon him and he managed to move at last trying to keep his eyes on the falling tree and he tripped on something and fell headlong and when he looked back to see where the falling tree was it was too late for the tree was upon him and he could feel the leaves and branches swishing and stinging his face and eyes and ears and then the crushing weight of the tree trunk smashed against his head . . .

Bang bang bang came into Erskine's ears. He opened puffy eyes and blinked at the bright sunlight. Morning already? He was still sleepy. He turned his head and saw the towering tops of Manhattan's skyscrapers drenched in golden sunlight, but he was still staring at the strange dream images which were now fleeing from his consciousness. Again he heard that loud banging and he knew that Tony was beating his drum.

"That child," he muttered.

His watch told him that it was seven-thirty; Sunday School did not commence until nearly ten; he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

forced himself to lie still and there came to him a recollection of a tormented night: he'd been ill in bed and his mother had told him to go to sleep, that she was going out... He'd begged, wept, his teary eyes intent upon the fat, bald man who stood at his mother's side. He'd hated that man. His mother had been powdered, rouged, wearing a wide hat... Whom had he hated more? His mother or the man? They'd gone out and he, burning with fever, had gotten out of bed and had gone to the window and had yelled and yelled... His mother had told him that she'd found him the next morning lying huddled under the window, dopey with fever. He'd had pneumonia and his mother had nursed him and he'd wanted to remain ill all of his life to keep her with him. But after he'd gotten well she'd gone off again, as always, and he'd been left alone in the house all day and night, hating her, trying to think of the many things he wanted to do to her to make her feel it...

Full of sullen, impotent rage, he had let his heated imagination range wild and had choked back his yen to act. He'd developed into a too-quiet child who kept to himself, ignoring a world that offended him and wounded his sense of pride in what he loved most; his mother... He'd sought refuge in dreams of growing up and getting a job and taking his mother into some far-off land where there'd be no one to remember what had happened.

Then one cold winter day—he was eight years old—his mother had been hauled off to jail as a public nuisance and Aunt Tillie had come down from New York and fetched him. He'd never learned the name of his mother's offense; when he'd asked Aunt Tillie about it, she'd shaken her head and turned him off with: "It's the men who ruin women, Erskine."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LIBRARIES

bloody spots away from the sill and the floor. He rinsed the towel clear of stains and left it balled in the sink.

Tony's dead! He began to tremble and he leaned weakly upon the edge of the bathtub. Good God! What could he do? Tentatively, he lifted the pressure of his fingers from his left palm and at once the blood began to flow again. He'd have to hold the wound shut until the blood had coagulated . . .

Automatically, his mind sought for someone else upon whom to shunt the blame for what had happened; but, remembering the undeniably accidental nature of the episode, he realized that he didn't need a scapegoat upon which to dump the responsibility. It had all transpired so quickly, so inevitably, so utterly shorn of any intention on his part that he could have sworn that it had happened to somebody else.

The incident had thrust him entirely on his own, and nothing he had ever heard of could offer him any guidance now. Clinging to the whole balcony tableau of horror was a hopeless nebulosity, something irresistibly unreal; one moment he felt that he knew exactly what had happened, and yet the next moment he was not so sure. His jaws trembled as he heard again that distant, unmistakably cushy: *PLOP!* Dread rammed a hot fist down his throat as he wondered if anyone had seen him naked on that balcony . . . *Christ* . . . Maybe somebody was now phoning the police that a naked man had been seen chasing a child! Under the sweat of his face his skin turned gray. What could he do? Tell his story now, at once? He bowed his head in indecision. But maybe nobody had seen him and if he started babbling now he would only put a frightful idea in other people's minds. Perhaps he should say nothing . . . ?

He stood and stared again at the opened bathroom

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

known to fall six floors and still live . . . And if Tony was alive, what would he say? He leaned weakly against the window casing, hearing Tony's piping voice telling the police that he'd been playing alone upon the balcony and then Mr. Fowler had come running, panting, wild-eyed, naked, and angry upon him and he had been so frightened that he'd fallen . . .

And what would be his rebuttal to Tony's story? Could he tell the police that he'd tried to get his paper and that his door had slammed shut and he'd been trapped in the hallway and had been dodging naked and terrorized through the building and had finally rushed to the balcony like that . . . ? Erskine knew instinctively how others would regard that story and his knowing made even *him* protest against believing it. And if he didn't believe it, would others? Yet it was an objectively true story; it had happened just like that . . .

Such a story would be the ruin of him. What would the *Daily News* or the *Mirror* think of it? What would his friends and relatives think? They'd think that he was "queer" . . . As the word *queer* came to his mind, he felt again a tight cap of something like steel pressing down upon his skull and he all but collapsed. Yes; these days everybody was talking about "complexes" and the "unconscious"; and a man called Freud (which always reminded him of *fraud!*) was making people believe that the most fantastic things could happen to people's feelings. Why, they'd say that he'd gone *deliberately* onto that balcony like that, nude . . .

He saw Westerman, the building superintendent whom he had sought so futilely and frantically half an hour ago, running toward the crowd, pulling on his coat. Another police car arrived, its siren scream-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

dressed, but her tumbling black hair spread wildly over her shoulders, half hiding her face and spilling down to her waist. The door of Mrs. Blake's apartment slammed shut and Erskine stared at it as though hypnotized, recalling how, just less than an hour ago, he had been standing naked and terrified before his own door that had slammed shut.

"Will she be able to get back in?" the policeman asked, coming forward.

"Don't bother," Mrs. Westerman said. "I've got passkeys to all the apartments in the building. I'll let her in when she comes back."

Mrs. Blake walked with difficulty, her knees sagging. She paused as she passed Erskine and stared blankly before her. Erskine imagined that, for half a second, her large, limpid, brown eyes were resting upon him. Or had they? He grew tense. He had to be careful and keep a tight hold on himself....

Mrs. Fenley went to her husband's side and clutched his arm nervously, staring at Mrs. Westerman and Mrs. Blake. The two women, Westerman, and the policeman entered the elevator; the door closed and the elevator sank.

"Poor, poor woman," Mrs. Fenley murmured in awe.

"I wonder if there's anything we can do?" Erskine spoke uncertainly.

"Well, the police are taking care of everything now," Mr. Fenley said. "It's too bad ... Come, dear." He took his wife's arm and led her into their apartment.

Erskine stood alone in the hallway, hugging his bundle of Sunday papers. Suddenly he was afraid to enter his apartment. He dreaded being alone now. When supported by the presence of the others, everything had seemed natural, his not telling had

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LIBRARIES

and day-dreaming—none of this would have happened! But who, in the name of God, could have foreseen such a concatenation of events?

One aspect of the accident bothered him above all: why had little Tony been so frightened of him as to lose his balance when he'd come running nude onto the balcony? Tony knew him, admired him; then, why had he gone into such a panic . . . ? It's true that he'd been naked, and, when naked, Erskine knew that he was not a pleasant or poetic sight . . .

Erskine realized that a child's mind was a strange shadowland, and what seemed ordinary to adults would loom as something monstrous or fearful to Tony who had lived in a world of Indians, horses, bombing planes, soldiers, whales, and perhaps things never seen on land or sea. What, then, had Tony associated him with that seemed so fantastic, frightful? Why had the sudden sight of him—huge, hairy, sweating, panting—sent Tony reeling?

And where, in the medley of these unrehearsed episodes, did the element of his guilt lie? Was it because he'd denied any knowledge of how the child had died that he felt guilty? No. He knew that even now, if he told Mrs. Blake or the police how utterly blameless he'd been, he'd still feel guilty? Why?

Never in Erskine's life had his emotions been a problem to him; indeed, he had lived with the assumption that he had no emotions. From puberty onwards he had firmly clamped his emotions under the steel lid of work and had fastened and tightened that lid with the inviolate bolts of religious devotion. Now he felt ambushed, anchored in a sea of anxiety, because he was tremblingly conscious of all of his buried demons stirring and striving for the light of day. What did one do in situations like this? He then felt guilty of feeling guilty. . . . Ought he to seek ad-

felt guilty

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

been in a big battle in the skies. Erskine had brooded pityingly over the child, a frown creasing his forehead. Tony had felt Erskine's silence and had stopped stiffly; he'd lifted his little face in fear toward Erskine.

"Are you angry with me, Mr. Fowler?" Tony had asked anxiously.

"God, no! No, Tony—"

"I thought maybe you were thinking of fighting me—"

"No; no... You mustn't *think* of such things!" Erskine said in a frenzy.

"But if somebody's going to fight you, you must always try to know it," Tony had said, reasoning and frowning.

"Why, Tony?"

"So you can run and save yourself," the child had told him.

"But I'm not going to fight you, Tony," Erskine had pleaded with Tony. "I'm your friend."

"For real?" Tony had asked with rising inflections of voice.

"For real, Tony," Erskine had said in the tone of one swearing an oath.

Erskine became aware of the strong, yellow sun, the green grass, the distant, tall apartment hotels looming across Central Park. Could it have been *that* that had frightened poor little Tony? Was it *possible*? He had the sensation that reality was dissolving before his eyes. Tony had been living in an unreal world, a dream, and, by accident, he had become a figment of Tony's dream, a frightening figment which had scared Tony into falling... Erskine sighed, his eyes glistening, staring without seeing. Now that he was thinking of poor Tony, he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

She stared at him for a moment, then began weeping afresh, covering her face with her hands, leaning against the sagging iron railing which wobbled perilously as her weight impinged upon it.

"Be *careful!*" he told her, taking her arm and pulling her roughly from the edge of the balcony. "It's dangerous there..."

"I don't care," she whimpered.

"You don't know what you're saying," he told her.

"Poor Tony," she sobbed. "I feel like dying..."

"You must take care of yourself," he said.

She continued weeping as though she had not heard; she leaned now against the brick wall of the building. The thought shot through Erskine's mind that if she'd fallen accidentally over that iron railing, there'd be one person less to say that they'd seen him or "naked feet" on the balcony this morning... The idea created such instant horror in his mind—it was as though the idea had been pushed upon his attention by some force—that he was seized with pity for her and he sought at once for something to banish the notion, to cover it up. Touching the tips of the pencils in his inner coat pocket, he stared at her shuddering body and his fear and moral condemnation of her fled and he yearned to soothe her. Timidly, he patted her shoulder.

"There, now... You must brace up... I'll take these things inside for you. Where do you want them? In your apartment?"

"Yes," she gulped. Then she whispered: "Tony was so deeply fond of you." She coughed. "Next to me, he loved you most in this world..."

"And I loved him too," he said quickly.

As she leaned against the wall, she sobbed. He picked up the tricycle, a baseball bat, a toy rifle, and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

taken apart and stored away in the closet. Holding the knife, he stood over her. She still wept, her face hidden in her arms.

"Is there something else you want me to do?" he asked her, his eyes searching over her slumped form.

She straightened and, seeing the knife, leaped from her chair and backed off with terror in her face.

"What's the matter?" he asked, feeling terror too.

"That *knife* . . . Don't point it at me like that . . . I can't stand knives!" she cried.

He looked down in surprise at the knife in his hand; he had forgotten that he was holding it.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

Was she afraid of him? Did she think that he'd killed Tony and was now trying to kill her? He put the knife in the kitchen; when he returned, she forced a smile.

"I'm sorry . . . I act so silly," she apologized.

"You are a little unstrung," he commented.

They were silent. He recalled that awful thought that he'd had about her falling off the balcony, as Tony had fallen, and now he was wondering what she'd seen in his face to make her leap up in terror when he'd stood over her with that knife in his hand . . . He had to struggle to overcome thoughts of death about her and it made him almost hysterically anxious to help her. It was only when he was reacting to her distress that he felt right about her.

"You've been so kind," she murmured. "God, I must look a sight . . ." She cocked her head and her right hand fussed nervously with her disordered hair.

"I wish I could be of some help to you," he mumbled humbly. "After all, Tony was a little friend of mine. I used to talk with him a lot, you know . . ."

Her eyes rested full on him with that same blank,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

was still smarting under Mrs. Westerman's intimidations.

"I thought I saw . . ." She broke off, abashed. "You see, there've been complaints about Tony's making so much noise. I was sleeping . . ." She paused, swallowed. "I got up when I heard Tony banging his drum. I waved at him—You know, I can see a tip of your balcony by leaning out of my kitchen window—Well, he saw me and he quieted down. That was the first time I looked . . . I went back to bed. Later a noise, like a pistol shot, woke me up. I thought that something'd happened to Tony. I ran to the kitchen window and looked out . . . I didn't see Tony. I thought maybe he'd gone downstairs, though I'd told him not to . . . After a while I still didn't hear 'im and I got worried . . . I ran into the hallway and peeped at 'im; he was playing like a little lamb, riding his hobbyhorse. I went back to sleep . . ."

As she talked Erskine felt that he was walking barefooted over red hot coals. She'd heard his door when it had slammed shut! And she'd been out into the hallway while he'd been weirdly riding up and down, naked and sweating, in the elevator! Good God! It's a wonder that he'd not bumped into her!

". . . but Tony was so quiet that I got worried. You know how it is with children; when they make noise, you want 'em to stop; but when they're quiet, *too* quiet, you get to thinking that maybe something's gone wrong . . . When I tried to see him this time—leaning out of my kitchen window—I couldn't. I called and he didn't answer. Then I was sure he'd disobeyed me and had gone down into the street. I was about to turn away from the window when I saw . . . I thought I saw—I know it sounds crazy—but I thought I saw naked feet dangling in the air, going up . . ."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He felt her body shudder slightly in his arms.

"But I'm not for you, Erskine," she whispered compassionately.

"Let me decide that," he begged her.

"Are you sure you want me, Erskine?"

"I'm *sure*," he said, looking into her eyes with tears in his own. "Are you engaged to anyone?"

"No."

"Then you'll marry me? There can be no question of my hiding or covering up something now," he argued. "We both know what happened and now we're free from *that* . . . You'll marry me?"

"But, Erskine, we're so *different*," she protested weakly, shaking her head.

"Look, I'll change some and you'll change some," he said, figuring it all out neatly. "Tell me: will you marry me? Tell me *now* . . ."

"You really want it?"

"I do, with all my heart. Now, tell me . . . Will you?"

She began weeping afresh.

"Tell me; tell me," he implored her, squeezing her shoulders.

"Yes; yes, Erskine," she sighed.

He crushed her to him. "We'll make up for little Tony, won't we? We may have a son, hunh? We'll have something around which to build a joyful and solemn relationship, hunh? You understand?"

"Yes," she whispered. "And I need somebody . . ."

She threw her arms about him and clung to him.

"Erskine, teach me how to live, won't you?" she asked him. "I'm through; I'm licked . . . You'll teach me, tell me what's right?"

"Yes, yes," he assured her.

She lowered her eyes and then started violently.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

memory of that battered doll was but the *memory of a dream he'd had!*

He'd never "killed" the doll, really! That memory was but the recalling of a shameful daydream of revenge which he had pushed out of his mind! It was what he had angrily daydreamed one day when he'd been playing games with Gladys and her dolls; they'd been coloring paper with colored pencils and he'd drawn the image of a dead, broken doll and he had imagined Gladys telling on him and his mother branding him as bad . . . He'd pictured vividly to himself what he'd wanted to do to his mother for having gone off and left that night when he'd been ill . . . He now understood the four pencils!

His lips parted in horror as his memory spanned the void of time and revealed the reality of what he had done. He stared about as though drugged, unaware of the policeman and the barred windows . . .

"Don't you hear me talking to you?" the policeman asked.

"Hunh?" Erskine grunted, struggling to orient himself.

"Tell me what happened!" the policeman shouted at him.

How could he ever explain that a daydream buried under the rigorous fiats of duty had been called forth from its thirty-six-year-old grave by a woman called Mabel Blake, and that that taunting dream had so overwhelmed him with a sense of guilt compounded of a reality which was strange and alien and which he loathed, but which, at the same time, was astonishingly familiar to him: a guilty dream which he had wanted to disown and forget, but which he had had to reenact in order to make its memory and reality clear to him! He closed his eyes in despair . . . still touching the four colored pencils!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Only
RICHARD WRIGHT

renowned bestselling author of NATIVE SON and BLACK BOY could have written a novel that so vividly reveals the nameless torments and quiet hungers of a man's soul . . . a soul suddenly beset by a confluence of humiliations in a hostile world and pushed past the breaking point into a nightmare . . .

SAVAGE HOLIDAY

"Wright's landscape was not merely that of the Deep South, or of Chicago, but that of the world, of the human heart."

—James Baldwin

"SUPERB!"

—Yale Review

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN