

# DELIVERANCE

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**James Dickey**



R A N D O M   H O U S E

# DELIVERANCE

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**James Dickey**



RANDOM HOUSE

PRAISE FOR JAMES DICKEY’S CLASSIC ADVENTURE NOVEL

**DELIVERANCE**

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# **Deliverance**

by James Dickey



To  
Edward L. King and  
Albert Braselton,  
companions



*Il existe à la base de la vie humaine,  
un principe d'insuffisance.*

GEORGES BATAILLE

*The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee,  
thou that dwelleth in the clefts of the rock,  
whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart,  
Who shall bring me down to the ground?*

OBADIAH, verse 3

## **Contents**

*Before*

*September 14th*

*September 15th*

*September 16th*

*After*

**Before**

IT UNROLLED SLOWLY, forced to show its colors, curling and snapping back whenever one of us turned loose. The whole land was very tense until we put our four steins on its corners and laid the river out to run for us through the mountains 150 miles north. Lewis' hand took a pencil and marked out a small strong X in a place where some of the green bled away and the paper changed with high ground, and began to work downstream, northeast to southwest through the printed woods. I watched the hand rather than the location, for it seemed to have power over the terrain, and when it stopped for Lewis' voice to explain something, it was as though all streams everywhere quit running, hanging silently where they were to let the point be made. The pencil turned over and pretended to sketch in with the eraser an area that must have been around fifty miles long, through which the river hooked and cramped.

"When they take another survey and rework this map," Lewis said, "all this in here will be blue. The dam at Ainty has already been started, and when it's finished next spring the river will back up fast. This whole valley will be under water. But right now it's wild. And I *mean* wild; it looks like something up in Alaska. We really ought to go up there before the real estate people get hold of it and make it over into one of their heavens."

I leaned forward and concentrated down into the invisible shape he had drawn, trying to see the changes that would come, the nighttime rising of dammed water bringing a new lake up with its choice lots, its marinas and beer cans, and also trying to visualize the land as Lewis said it was at that moment, unvisited and free. I breathed in and out once, consciously; my body, particularly the back and arms, felt ready for something like this. I looked around the bar and then back into the map, picking up the river where we would enter it. A little way to the southwest the paper blanched.

"Does this mean it's higher here?" I asked.

"Yes," Lewis said, looking quickly at me to see if I saw he was being tolerant.

Ah, he's going to turn this into something, I thought. A lesson. A moral. A life principle. A Way.

"It must run through a gorge or something" was all he said though. "But we can get through that in a day, easy. And the water should be good, in that part especially."

I didn't have much idea what good meant in the way of river water, but for it to seem good to Lewis it would have to meet some very definite standards. The way he went about things was strictly his own; that was mainly what he liked about doing them. He liked particularly to take some extremely specialized and difficult form of sport — usually one he could do by himself — and evolve a personal approach to it which he could then expound. I had been through this with him in flycasting, in archery and weight lifting and spelunking, in all of which he had developed complete mystiques. Now it was

canoeing. I settled back and came out of the map.

Bobby Trippe was there, across from me. He had smooth thin hair and a high pink complexion. I knew him least well of the others at the table, but I liked him a good deal, even so. He was pleasantly cynical and gave me the impression that he shared some kind of understanding with me that neither of us was to take Lewis too seriously.

“They tell me that this is the kind of thing that gets hold of middle-class householders every once in a while,” Bobby said. “But most of them just lie down till the feeling passes.”

“And when most of them lie down they’re at Woodlawn before they think about getting up,” Lewis said.

“It’s the old idea that you’re going to get yourself in shape, one of these days. Just like you were when you were on the B-team in high school and had to do all those wind sprints. Some few people may jog, once in a while. But who runs sprints? Who goes down rivers?”

“Well, you’ve got a chance to go down one,” Lewis said. “The chance is coming up this weekend, if you can get Friday off. Either Ed and I will go, or we all four can go. But you have to let me know right now, so I can get the other canoe.”

I liked Lewis; I could feel myself getting caught up again in his capricious and tenacious enthusiasms that had already taken me bow-hunting and varmint-calling with him, and down into a small, miserably cold cave where there was one dead, crystalline frog. Lewis was the only man I knew who could do with his life exactly what he wanted to. He talked continuously of resettling in New Zealand or South Africa or Uruguay, but he had to be near the rental property he had inherited, and I didn’t much think he would ever leave. But in his mind he was always leaving, always going somewhere, always doing something else. These techniques and mystiques had built up in him something that impressed me a good deal, even so. He was not only self-determined; he was determined. He was one of the best tournament archers in the state and, even at the age of thirty-eight or -nine, one of the strongest men I had ever shaken hands with. He lifted weights and shot arrows every day in a special kind of alternating rhythm and as a result was so steady that he could easily hold a sixty-pound bow at full draw for twenty seconds. I once saw him kill a quail with an aluminum target arrow at forty yards, the arrow diving into the back feathers at the last possible instant.

So I usually went with him whenever he asked me. I had a bow that he helped me pick out, and a few tags and odds of secondhand equipment, and it was enjoyable walking in the woods with Lewis, when the weather was good, as it usually is in our part of the South in hunting season. Because it took place in such pleasant country, and because of Lewis, I liked field archery — with its faint promise of one day killing a deer — better than golf. But it was really Lewis. He was the only man I knew determined to get something out of life who had both the means and the will to do it, and it interested me to see

how, as an experiment, this turned out.

I was not much on theories, myself. But I had a good feeling about this trip. After so much shooting at paper images of deer, it was exciting to think of encountering a real one.

“How, exactly, do we get to the river in the first place?” Drew Ballinger asked.

“There’s a little nothing town up here, just past the high ground,” Lewis said, “name of Oree. We can put in there and come out in Ainty a couple of days later. If we get on the water late Friday, we can be back here the middle of Sunday afternoon, maybe in time for the last half of the pro game on TV.”

“There’s one thing that bothers me,” Drew said. “We don’t really know what we’re getting into. There’s not one of us knows a damned thing about the woods, or about rivers. The last boat I was in was my father-in-law’s Chris-Craft, up on Lake Bodie. I can’t even row a boat straight, much less paddle my own or anybody else’s canoe. What business have I got up there in those mountains?”

“Listen,” Lewis said, knocking on the air with his fore-knuckle, “you’ll be in more danger on the four-lane going home tonight than you’d ever be on the river. Somebody might jump the divider. Who knows?”

“I mean,” Bobby said, “the whole thing does seem kind of crazy.”

“All right,” Lewis said. “Let me demonstrate. What are you going to be doing this afternoon?”

“Well,” Bobby thought a minute. “Most likely I’ll see a couple of new people about mutual funds. I have to draw up some papers and get them notarized.”

“How about you, Drew?”

“See some more route salesmen. We’re making a cooler count to figure out who’s doing what, and where we’re falling short. We’re trying to find ways to up the cold-bottle sales, the same as always. Sometimes they’re up, sometimes they’re down. Right now they’re down.”

“Ed?”

“Oh,” I said. “Take some photographs for Kitts Textile Mills. Kitt’n Britches. Cute girl in our britches stroking her pussy. A real cat, you understand.”

“Too bad,” Lewis said, and grinned, although talk about sex was never something he seemed to enjoy. He had made his point without saying anything about the afternoon. He looked around the suburban bar and brought his hand under his chin, waiting for the other two to decide.

I thought that they probably wouldn’t go. They were day-to-day happy enough; they were not bored in the way Lewis and I were bored, and Bobby, particularly, seemed to enjoy the life he was in. He came, I believe, from some other part of the South, maybe Louisiana, and since he had been around — since I had known him, anyway — had seemed to do well. He was very social

and would not have been displeased if someone had called him a born salesman. He liked people, he said, and most of them liked him — some genuinely and some merely because he was a bachelor and a good dinner or party guest. He was always around. Everyplace I went I saw him, or caught a glimpse of him going by or leaving. If I was at a driving range or supermarket I would be sure to see him; when I thought beforehand I would see him, I would, and, if I didn't, I'd also see him. He was a pleasant surface human being, though I had heard him blow up at a party once and hadn't forgotten it. I still don't know what the cause was, but his face changed in a dreadful way, like the rage of a weak king. But that was only once.

Drew Ballinger was a straightforward quiet fellow. He was devoted to his family, particularly to his little boy Pope, who had some kind of risen hornlike blood blister on his forehead that his eyebrow grew out of and around in a way to make you realize the true horrors of biology. He worked as a sales supervisor for a big soft-drink company and he believed in it and the things it said it stood for with his very soul. He kept a copy of the company history on his living room coffee table at home, and the only time I ever saw him get mad was over a rival and newer company's sales claims having to do with its drink's weight-reducing properties. "Goddamned liars," he had said. "They've got just as many calories as we have, and we can prove it."

But Lewis and I were different, and were different from each other. I had nothing like his drive, or his obsessions. Lewis wanted to be immortal. He had everything that life could give, and he couldn't make it work. And he couldn't bear to give it up or see age take it away from him, either, because in the meantime he might be able to find what it was he wanted, the thing that must be there, and that must be subject to the will. He was the kind of man who tries by any means — weight lifting, diet, exercise, self-help manuals from taxidermy to modern art — to hold on to his body and mind and improve them, to rise above time. And yet he was also the first to take a chance, as though the burden of his own laborious immortality were too heavy to bear, and he wanted to get out of it by means of an accident, or what would appear to others to be an accident. A year or two before, he had stumbled and crawled for three miles to get out of the woods and back to his car and then driven it home using a stick to work the gas because his right ankle was so painfully broken. I visited him in the hospital mainly because he had asked me to go to the woods with him and I hadn't been able to go, and I asked him how he felt. "It's luxury," he said. "For a while I don't have to lift weights, or work out on the bag."

I glanced over at him. He had a face like a hawk, but it was a special kind of hawk. Instead of the front of his head seeming to be made from top to bottom, his looked like it had been palm-molded into a long-nosed shape from the sides. He was clay red and sandy haired, with a whitish patch back up toward the crown of his head, where the other hair was darker.

“Well well,” he said. “What about it?”

I was very glad I was going. While I thought about Drew and his cooler count, I began to see my own afternoon. The studio lights came on without my wanting them to, and I heard the crackle of newspapers under my feet. I saw what the model would probably look like, though I had seen only a photograph of her, standing in the second row of a nearby small town beauty contest and ringed by the red pencil of Thad Emerson, my partner. He had gotten together with her by means of the newspaper and the chamber of commerce and taken her up to Kitts Mills, where they’d liked her. The agency Kitts used had also liked her well enough, though to the account man she hadn’t seemed “quite professional,” and now we were going to use her. She would be the half-conventionally-beautiful focus of a thousand decisions and compromises that would eventually end up in a small-circulation trade magazine, looking much like the other ads in it. I saw what she would be and what we would do with her, and the layouts I would mess with for hours, and the endless hassles with the agency, the billing, the paraphernalia of bookkeeping and the rest of it, and I was glad I was going with Lewis. In a curious connection between my time with Lewis and my ordinary time, I looked down at the map again, but now as though it were a layout.

It was certainly not much from the standpoint of design. The high ground, in tan and an even paler tone of brown, meandered in and out of various shades and shapes of green, and there was nothing to call you or stop you on one place or the other. Yet the eye could not leave the whole; there was a harmony of some kind. Maybe, I thought, it’s because this tries to show what exists. And also because it represents something that is going to change, for good. There, near my left hand, a new color, a blue, would seep upward into the paper, and I tried to move my mind there and nowhere else and imagine a single detail that, if I didn’t see it that weekend, I never would; tried to make out a deer’s eye in the leaves, tried to pick up a single stone. The world is easily lost.

“I’ll go,” Drew said, “if I can bring a Martin along.”

“Sure, bring it,” Lewis said. “It would be kind of good to hear, way off up in there.”

Without having any talent, as he would be the first to tell you, Drew played mighty well, through sheer devotion. He had been at it with guitar and banjo — mostly guitar — for twelve years, and went in for all the really hard finger-picking stuff; Reverend Gary Davis, Dave Van Ronk, Merle Travis, Doc Watson.

“I’ve got a stove-in reconditioned Martin I picked up from some school kid,” Drew said. “Don’t worry, I wouldn’t bring my number one.”

“OK, fellow primitives,” Bobby said. “But I insist on some creature comforts. Namely liquor.”

“Bring all you like,” Lewis said. “In fact, the sensation of going down white

water about half-drunk is not to be missed.”

“You taking your bow, Lewis?” I asked.

“You know it,” he said. “And if one of us stabs a deer we can eat the meat and pack the hide and the head out, and I’ll cure the hide and mount the head.”

“Atomic-survival stuff, eh?” Bobby said.

“The best kind.”

It sounded fine to me, though I knew it would be poaching, this early in the fall. But I also knew Lewis would do what he said; these were some of the other things he had learned.

Waitresses in sheer net tights and corsages kept staring down into the map. It was time to go. Lewis took off the weight of two steins and the map leapt shut.

“Can you get your car, Drew?” Lewis asked, as we stood up together.

“Sure,” he said. “One of ’em’s mine, and my boy’s not old enough to drive it.”

“Ed and I’ll meet you-all early Friday, around six-thirty, where Will’s Ferry Road runs into the four-lane, at the big new Will’s Plaza Shopping Center. I’ll call Sam Steinhauser this evening and see what shape his canoe’s in. Most of the other stuff I’ve got. Wear tennis shoes. Bring liquor and an open mind.”

We went.

I was walking in the sun and thinking. I was a little late, but it didn’t matter. Thad and I ran a no-sweat shop, as Thad once said in a phrase that he was happy to see get around town and get back to us in a short time. We had had the studio about ten years, having bought it from the fellow — now about seventy — who’d founded it, and who was now realizing a lifelong ambition of making drawings of tourists in Cuernavaca. It was, in a way, a pleasure to work at Emerson-Gentry, at least compared to the way things were in the other studios around town. Thad had developed into a reasonably good businessman, and I was better than adequate, when I worked at it, as a graphics consultant and director. The studio was full of gray affable men who had tried it in New York and come back South to live and die. They were competent, though we demanded no very high standard from them, and when they weren’t working at layouts and pasteups they would sit tilted back from the drawing board with their hands behind their heads, gazing at whatever same thing was there. Now and then we also had boys just out of art school — or, rarely, engineering school — who would have an amazingly good design idea about once out of six months and the rest of the time come up with nothing but trying-for-it absurdities. None of these worked for us for very long; they either used us for the purpose of getting some experience and then moved on to better jobs, or they drifted through us back out into the world

and tried something else. During the time Thad and I had had the shop, we had also hired a small number of people who believed themselves real artists and were willing to do what they openly considered hackwork in order to do their own work in the evenings and on weekends and holidays. These were the saddest of all: sadder than the ex-bomber copilot now drawing-in sacks of fertilizer; sadder than the young design school graduate who sees that he must leave the business, because he can't move up in it. One was a middle-aged local fellow who hung Utrillo prints in his cubicle and tried to keep up the appearance of being in a kind of temporary position or way station that would remember him after he left. But he never would have left, if we had kept him on. When we let him out, he went to another studio for a while and then just disappeared. I never saw anyone so passionately interested in art. Unlike Lewis, he had only one interest, and he believed he had the talent to become more than a local artist; for local artists and Sunday painters he had nothing but contempt and refused to go to any of their shows. He was always talking about applying Braque's collage techniques to the layouts we were getting ready for fertilizer trade books and wood-pulp processing plants, and it was a great relief to me not to have to listen to any of that anymore.

For we had grooved, modestly, as a studio. I knew it and was glad of it; I had no wish to surpass our limitations, or to provide a home for geniuses on their way to the Whitney or to suicide. I knew that our luck was good and would probably hold; that our success was due mainly to the lack of graphic sophistication in the area. What we had, we could handle, and we were in a general business situation that provided for everybody pretty well, even those shading down toward incompetence, so long as they were earnest and on time. The larger agencies in the city and the local branches of the really big New York and Chicago agencies didn't give us much work. We made a halfhearted pitch for some of it, but when they were not enthusiastic we — or at least Thad and I — were happy to take up where we had been. The agencies we liked and understood best were those which were most like us — those that were not pressing, that were taking care of their people. We worked on small local accounts — banks, jewelry stores, supermarkets, radio stations, bakeries, textile mills. We would ride with these.

Going under a heavy shade tree, I felt the beer come up, not into my throat but into my eyes. The day sparkled painfully, seeming to shake on some kind of axis, and through this a leaf fell, touched with unusual color at the edges. It was the first time I had realized that autumn was close. I began to climb the last hill.

I was halfway up when I noticed how many women there were around me. Since I had passed the Gulf station on the corner I hadn't seen another man anywhere. I began to look for one in the cars going by, but for the few more minutes it took to get to the building, I didn't see a one. The women were almost all secretaries and file clerks, young and semi-young and middle-aged, and their hair styles, piled and shellacked and swirled and horned, and almost every one stiff, filled me with desolation. I kept looking for a decent ass and

spotted one in a beige skirt, but when the girl turned her barren, gum-chewing face toward me, it was all over. I suddenly felt like George Holley, my old Braque man, must have felt when he worked for us, saying to himself in any way he could, day after day, I am with you but not of you. But I knew better. I was of them, sure enough, as they stretched out of sight before me up the hill and into the building. And I was right in one of the lines that ceremoniously divided around a modern fountain full of dimes and pennies.

The door swung and a little beehived girl ducked under my arm into the cold air. The lunch hour exhaled from several women and me with a long low sound as we revolved in the door. Muzak entered the elevator and we rose on “Vienna Blood,” played with lots of strings. Between the beginning and end of one chorus my stomach fell like a stone. I let out my belt a notch and the beer settled as I wiped my forehead on the inner part of my jacket sleeve. At the sixth floor there were only two female survivors and myself; the others worked in the larger, open bay offices on the lower floors — insurance companies. I walked down the clean, walled-in corridor to the horse-headed glass of our studio. The only good thing Holley had done for us was to turn one of Braque’s birds into a Pegasus. It flew delicately aside and around me as I went in.

“Any calls?”

“Not any awfully interesting ones, Mr. Gentry. Shadow-Row Shell Homes would like to see the comps next week. You had a request for a job interview from a young lady who wouldn’t give her name, says shell call back. And the model is here for Kitts.”

“Thank you very much,” I said to Peg Wyman, who had been with us the whole time and showed it. “I’ll go on back.”

I went down the office hallway taking my coat off pinch by pinch. It was the first time I had thought to notice that the hall was inside a larger hall, part of the length of the building and the floor. It was a very tasteful place, though. Thad and I had really nice offices with tensor lights all over the place, and the longer-lasting or more highly paid art directors had small offices or at least cubicles. The rest of the studio was a large open bay with drawing boards, and I watched for a minute the gray and bald heads in their places, the shiny black ones, the curly ones and lank ones returning. I may not have had everything to do with this — with creating this — I said to myself in a silent voice that was different from my usual silent voice, but I have had something to do with it. Never before had I had such a powerful sense of being in a place I had created. Alton Rogers would not be sitting there, dreaming of flying the Hump in the old days. If it weren’t for me, George Holley’s cubicle would still be full of Utrillo. The arrangement of heads and fingers and glasses would not be like it is, at this moment, if it were not for me. These people would probably be working for somebody else, but they would not be here. They are in some way my captives; their lives — part of some, most of some — are being spent here.

But then so was mine. I was not really thinking about their being my prisoners, but of being my own. I went into the office and hung up my coat, and for a second put one hand down on my drawing board, as though posing for a house ad: Vice-President Gentry makes important decision. It would be one of those poses that aspires to show you that such decisions by middle-aged responsible men are an important factor in maintaining the economy and the morale of the whole Western world. This could have been true, so far as I was able to tell. Probably in some ways it was.

There were piles of roughs, among which sat my wife and my little boy, Dean. There were stacks of copy, approved and tentative, from agencies, and I made a note to remind Thad that certain of the less inventive outfits were pressing us into service as agency art departments, which neither of us liked at all. And I called Jack Waskow, the photographer, to see if he was ready for me. He wasn't, quite, and I sat down to see if there was anything I could do right quick, anything I could get out of the way.

Before I made a move, though, I sat for maybe twenty seconds, failing to feel my heart beat, though at that moment I wanted to. The feeling of the inconsequence of whatever I would do, of anything I would pick up or think about or turn to see was at that moment being set in the very bone marrow. How does one get through this? I asked myself. By doing something that is at hand to be done was the best answer I could give; that and not saying anything about the feeling to anyone. It was the old mortal, helpless, time-terrified human feeling, just the same. I had had a touch or two before, though it was more likely to come with my family, for I could find ways to keep busy at the studio, or at least to seem busy, which was harder, in some cases, than doing real work. But I was really frightened, this time. It had me for sure, and I knew that if I managed to get up, through the enormous weight of lassitude, I would still move to the water cooler, or speak to Jack Waskow or Thad, with a sense of being someone else, some poor fool who lives as unobserved and impotent as a ghost, going through the only motions it has.

I picked up a rough I had done of the Kitts' ad. If there was one thing I felt a reasonable certainty about, it was my ability to get the elements of a layout into some kind of harmonious relationship. I didn't as a rule like too traditional, cheap Boraxy ads, with screaming typeforms and an obvious and chillingly commercial use of sex, nor did I like the overly "creative" kind of ad, with some farfetched or gimmicked-up formula or calculated craziness. I liked harmoniousness and a situation where the elements didn't fight with each other or overwhelm each other. I had won a couple of modest awards for art direction around town, where admittedly the competition was not of the first class, and they were hanging in the office. I took a close look at the Kitts' layout, which was for a line of artificial silk women's underwear called Kitt'n Britches. It showed a girl in nothing but panties with her back to the camera looking over her shoulder. As we had planned it, a kitten's head was to appear under her chin as she held it, and I was a little worried that, with a photograph large enough to show the britches, the cat's head might be too

small. We could crop in, of course; we didn't actually need to show the girl's *feet*, as the account man had said, but I kind of wanted to. I like feet, for one thing, and a whole being in a photograph is in an odd way more effective, a lot of times, than someone who has been cut up with scissors. We had gone back and forth with the agency about this, and with the Kitts' sales manager, an incredible countrified jerk who had originally had the idea of using a real girl in a situation like the one in the Coppertone ad, where the Scotty is pulling the little girl's bathing suit down off her bare behind. "If we did it with a cat," he said, "it would also show that the pants won't run or tear." The agency and I had managed to talk him out of this, explaining that a reputable trade book wouldn't run it, and we couldn't find a decent-looking girl who would pose for it, either. He agreed with us, finally, but he still wanted more obvious sex in the ad than I did, and had told me when we broke up that "Whoever we get should really fill out those panties,"

I fiddled with the elements of the rough, bringing the girl forward and moving her back, until I thought I had what was a good compromise, with the type centering around the girl's hips. Who will she be? I wondered. Whose body will try to fill out these lines I've put down? I went in to look at the studio.

Thad was there, moving things and people around with his expert, interior-decorator's formality and fussiness. The model was sitting in a camp chair, shading her eyes against the lights. She was in a checked black-and-white robe that — at least to me — had something unexpectedly carnivallike about it, and she looked nothing like a carnival girl, thank God. Around her the room seemed to swarm and tremble with men, though there were actually only five of us, including the lighting technician. Thad's secretary, a mean-mouthed little woman named Wilma, came in with the kitten we'd got from the SPCA, holding it in the crook of an arm as though she were going to be photographed herself. Max Fraley, one of the paste-up men, went to get a saucer of milk for it. I sat on the edge of a table and undid my tie. Inside the bright hardship of the lights was a peculiar blue, wholly painful, unmistakably man-made, unblinkable thing that I hated. It reminded me of prisons and interrogations, and that thought jumped straight at me. That was one side of it, all right, and the other was pornography. I thought of those films you see at fraternity parties and in officers' clubs where you realize with terror that when the girl drops the towel the camera is not going to drop with it discreetly, as in old Hollywood films, following the bare feet until they hide behind a screen, but is going to stay and when the towel falls, move in; that it is going to destroy someone's womanhood by raping her secrecy; that there is going to be nothing left.

Thad asked the girl to stand up. Her feet were strong-toed and healthy and a little tomboyish; I would have bet money that she came from a farm. She had a fine, open, gray-eyed face with a few freckles. She was somebody I didn't mind looking in the eyes. And straight into them, too, so that if she'd permit it, the look would go deep. I did this, because on the spur of the

moment I wanted to. There was a peculiar spot, a kind of tan slice, in her left eye, and it hit me with, I knew right away, strong powers; it was not only recallable, but would come back of itself. One hand, also strong and quiet, was holding the throat of her robe closed, and she put her head back — very far back, almost like an acrobat — and shook her hair so that it hung free of her neck. All at once two more secretaries materialized like nurses or prison matrons, all revolving around the model. Thad had her stand in the chalk marks from around which we had cleared the newspapers. Her feet gripped the cold cork floor. She held out her arms, and Wilma slipped off her robe. She had soft long legs, not as muscular as I would have thought, with those feet, but very shapely and harmonious, though it struck me that they were not firm enough to last for long. Her bare back had a helpless, undeveloped look about it, and this seemed to me more womanly and endearing than anything else about her except her eye. She filled the Kitt'n Britches well enough, but there was nothing especially provocative about the way she did it; she might have been Someone's sister, and that was not at all the effect we wanted. Not knowing exactly how I wanted to change the pose, or if it could be changed, I stepped over and touched her.

She turned and looked into my face at close range, and the gold-glowing mote fastened on me; it was more gold than any real gold could possible be; it was alive, and it saw me. Standing this close, she changed completely; she looked like someone who had come to womanhood in less than a minute. Her hands were folded across her breasts in a way that managed to give the effect of casualness, and Max was not quite sure of how to hand her the cat. She took it with one hand, and in doing so, protecting herself with the other, she simply took her left breast in her hand, and the sight of that went through me, a deep and complex male thrill, as if something had touched me in the prostate. She fixed her feet in the marks, wavering for a moment throwing light off her shoulders, the filaments of the bulbs spitting and buzzing about her, and then seemed to settle.

We got what Thad thought might be some good stuff, though he really didn't believe, he said, that the girl was good enough to use again. I went back to the office and did something I hadn't done since the early days of the studio. I brainstormed with myself for the rest of the afternoon. Nothing much came of it, but my mind was jumping quickly from one thing to another, and the associations were very good ones. I left a sheaf of roughs with Thad and told him I needed Friday off to do some work around the house. He didn't argue with me. We had made it as it was; we had made it.