

I walked out; Hansen was there, Mrs. Hansen was in Paris; there was also an actor there reading the funny papers and a director staring out at the ocean.

"Linda's getting ready," I told them, "we'll be going soon."

somebody coughed.

Linda came out and we walked to the car, there was broken glass about.

I got it into reverse without trouble but scraped the side of the car against a cement abutment.

then I drove off the wrong way into a one-way street.

I noticed that right off and took a left at the next corner.

it was a Sunday morning in a Hades they called Marina del Rey.

WAR

the black and the yellow hit together at the bottom of the hill.

the black stopped in the crash and the yellow veered off from the black

and came directly toward me with the driver slumped over the wheel.

I should put my car in reverse, I thought, but my hand didn't move upon the gearshift.

then the yellow began slanting off and I thought, it's not going to hit me directly, it's going to scrape the side, and then it passed on my right side silently,

you couldn't have gotten a sheet of paper between us.

then the yellow crashed head-on into the car of a man braked to my right and two car lengths back.

the yellow pushed him back, bounced off, slanted right behind my car, crossed the street, ran up a curbing and was still.

I had not seen the initial crash

I had only heard it.

I circled into a gas station and sat there

looking at the three crashed cars.

if I had put it in reverse,

I would have been there too.

I started the engine and drove

out thinking, let's see? where was I
going? oh yes, the post office.
I needed stamps.

I hit the classical music button
on the car radio.

GUEST

we got drunk
and then he started,
he said, "listen, I know that
people claim you're uneducated
and unread
but here we've been talking about
The Red and the Black,
you know that Lorca was gunned down
in a Spanish road.
you've mentioned the painters
and I know that you know of
the great musicians.
you know who wrote The Cherry
Orchard,
you know that Ambrose Bierce was
killed by Mexican bandits,
and you know who wrote The Devil's
Dictionary,
you know who whipped Hemingway's
ass and that Gertrude Stein had a
wooden leg,
you know of the one who went mad
in a rowboat,
you know those who died of syphilis,
and you know that Anton Chekov
shot his dog ... pardon me"

he got up, went into the bathroom.
I could hear him puking.

then he walked out, sat on the couch,
lit his pipe, took a hit at his beer
can, put it down and passed out,
sitting there, his head dropping
just a bit.

she came down the stairway.
"is he all right?"

"he's all right, he's staying
tonight, I think."

"I'm sorry I left but I couldn't
listen anymore, he just kept
talking."