

Excerpt from Suicide Note:

[pp 19-21]

Hazard thought of walking into the desert, not to return, and began composing phrases in his mind for the note he would leave.

When he came back to the crest of the dune he saw two men and a boy of about fourteen standing beside his car. One of the men had laid a hand on a fender of the car; it must have been as hot as fire to touch. The boy looked up at Hazard and said something; then the others looked. Hazard came down, heels slipping in the sand, shoving his notebook into a hip pocket to protect it. The three Indians were in rags, their sandals strips of auto tire and baling cord. They had dark, broad-cheeked faces, each in a different reddish shade, serious with hunger. The boy stood promptly aside when Hazard reached to open the car door. The older of the men put his hands on the sill and looked in at him. He said something in an Indian language, then, "Money," in English. The boy, staring at the journalist, adjusted his crotch. The third glanced from time to time at the sand dune where the sets of tracks Hazard had made were visible and, clearly surprised, back at the writer.

Hazard found twenty pesos, which the older man took, folding the money into his hand. He did not move.

Hazard thought that he would not mind much if he were killed here, then decided that he would. He would note it later.

A car appeared in the lake of heat mirage at the horizon of the highway, and he started his engine. When the car was a quarter of a mile off he moved onto the highway regardless of the man, the automobile's motion thrusting him away.

At dusk he struck a dog which had been lying in the center of the road. It had been, he was certain, a piece of pale crumpled paper. He felt the lift of the left front wheel, then the rear one. Then he was past. There had been no sound. He slowed, looking into the mirror, and saw the dog trying to rise: one of those tall brown short-haired animals so uniform in appearance throughout the country that they constitute a breed. It stretched its neck and kicked helplessly against the air. Hazard stopped and began to back, fishtailing on the road's narrow shoulder. He would pause, turn in his seat to see, to get his bearings. When he was close he saw that it was a

human being, not a dog, he had struck: a small adult or child dressed in the usual calzones--pajamas of unbleached cloth. A pair of huaraches stood on the highway's dividing line heel to heel as if placed by someone trained to be neat.

It was almost dark. There were no houses visible, no cars or livestock. A single star lay on the range of bony mountains to the west. There was no sound. The figure he had seen was still. He felt what he knew to be the pressure of terror. He turned on, then off his parking lights and waited until the pressure was too great to bear.

He got out of the car, stood above the brush-filled ravine beside the road, and urinated.

"Of course," he said when he looked.

There was the dog he had seen at first. It was already stiffening. The blood which had poured between its jaws thickened and stopped as he watched. The hallucination, the substitution of the man for the dog, made the actual death for the moment insignificant. He thought that he must describe the incident, but when he attempted to write in the car his hands shook and he could not.