

# ESCAPE

A Dramatic Reading

by  
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The road lay exactly as Matthew had remembered it, brown-rutted and narrow, and the bushes along it tangled with wind.

He had taken the train out the way he and Cathy had once come, and had walked up from the village, leaving behind the bright gardens and the neat people.

The road began to rise sharply, and in the strong westerling light of the sun, the black edge of the cliff was silhouetted just ahead of him. Beyond that there was nothing except sky and gulls and the heavy crash and pound of an incoming breaker, and he turned away.

He stood for a moment with his back to the sea and looked around him. It was twenty years since he had come here on a picnic with Cathy. He could remember that she had been wearing a yellow dress and some kind of band to keep her hair out of her eyes.

He stood with his eyes closed, remembering her there. When he opened them, she was gone.

He looked down at his hands. They had never been a worker's hands; they had been good hands for a teacher, gentle with books and capable with a pen, and he had never meant them to stop being a teacher's hands. Cathy had been deeply proud of his profession and had made highhearted plans for promotion, not so much because she was ambitious as because she wanted everyone to appreciate him.

When she had died suddenly, he lost more than he could bear to lose. He lost his own faith, and although he tried with a kind of desperation, he couldn't learn how to go on without it.

He told himself that time would cure him, and perhaps time would have, but it was never given. The school could not afford patience, and when his contract expired, he was told that it would not be renewed.

Now he stood staring at his hands. He had always meant to go back to teaching; but the fear of failing again in the only work he cared about kept him from applying for a position. He took a job in a bookkeeper's office; but the close columns made his eyes ache, and he couldn't afford new glasses. The mistakes he made were from trying to hurry, not carelessness; but they were still mistakes, and he wasn't being paid to add up errors at the foot of a ledger page. He had lost that job, as he had lost all the later ones.

He was getting old, and he had to try too hard; the work you pleaded for you could never get, and his rent was paid only to the first of the month.

The loneliness, the knowledge of failure, and the emptiness would lie down beside him at night, wake with him in the morning. He was no longer sure that the living was worth the fear.

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