

THE QUARRY

At daybreak gun-smoke still burned in Hal O'Neill's nostrils as all night he'd taken remote country roads to avoid the police. The stench only proved what he fought not to believe: He'd shot Jan, his wife. And killed his son, Chad. His only child, his life's center.

The rising Sun in the rearview mirror struck his eyes. He averted them just as Dot's Country Diner appeared ahead. Suddenly desperate for coffee, he pulled onto Dot's gravel parking lot.

He'd just put a steaming mug to his lips when a black-and-white cruiser barreled in and skidded to a stop. He slammed the mug down as two cops, heads down and shoulders hunched, hurried in, sliding out of the booth, he stood, pulled a twenty from his pocket and dropped it on the table for the breakfast he'd ordered. Pretending to head for the restroom, he slipped out the side door.

They knew. Every cop in Connecticut knew he'd killed Chad, his son. And maybe his wife, Jan

Stan Priori would have described him, and his red Tacoma. Stan was running across the lawn as Hal it tore away. Stan would have run through the gaping front door, seen his war chest open on the living room floor. Seen his Iraqi Freedom souvenirs and medals where Hal had thrown them. Seen his smoking Navy-issue pistol. Seen Jan writhing, blood oozing from her shoulder. And Chad, blood pulsing from the hole in his chest. Or stopped already.

Afraid the cops would spot him, but half-hoping they would, Hal drove slowly out of the lot. But as he pulled away he wondered: Escape? To what world? What universe? From what his drunken rage over a fight about what about he'd forgotten cost him? Cost Jan? Chad? Chad!

Vaguely, he assumed he was heading for his brother Liam's in Conway in northern New Hampshire. Even after a good night's sleep, and taking interstates instead of secluded country

roads, an exhausting long day's drive. And Liam? By then he'd know. Instead of taking him in, he'd turn him in.

Minutes later he turned left off of State 65 onto Wisley Hill Road, the first of miles of westward-trending remote country roads that snaked beneath pine, hardwood and mixed forests, past cornfields and hayfields, garages, orchards, dairy farms and vegetable stands, welding shops and sleepy villages. He'd head west, about 40-45 miles, he guessed. When at last he reached the old factory village of Godwin's Mill, he'd swing north, on an old, narrow and most likely deserted road he remembered but not its name, and cross into Massachusetts. For over an hour he wound around bends, sharp turns and a hairpin, up and down hill after hill, obsessed with thoughts of what might have been.

If he hadn't started drinking before lunch when he and Janice started fighting. Hadn't even—knowing he shouldn't dragged out and thrown open his footlocker. Hadn't grabbed the pistol and shoved in its clip. If he hadn't spun and instinctively pulled the trigger when Chad rushed him after the first unintended shot felled Jan. But he had.

A half-mile past old Becker's Farm Stand, he turned onto Peckam's Quarry Road. After so many hours of narrow, twisting roads, he breathed a relieved sigh on reaching the nearly-mile-long straight stretch at the base of Mattatuck Mountain. He slowed and glanced up when passing the long-abandoned quarry.

Unlike more common pit quarries, Peckham's long-gone owners had blasted away half of Mattatock's solid granite mountainside, creating a formidable manmade cliff. Hal remembered how in his teens they'd drunk stolen beers there and raised hell until cops arrived and kicked them out. Mature Staghorn sumacs, oaks and maples blocked his view of the towering cliff's massive face. He slowed before the straightaway's end, then slowly rounded its sharp blind turn.

And slammed on his brakes, barely avoiding hitting a boy frantically waving and jumping up and down in the middle of the road.

Hal blasted his horn. “Get out of the road!”

The boy leapt aside. But before Hal could pull past him, he grabbed the driver’s-side mirror, pleading in a high soprano, “My friend! He’s stuck!”

“Let go! Move way!” Hal revved the engine.

The boy held on. “Jamie! He’s stuck on the cliff!”

Hal revved the engine louder. “I can’t stop! Let go!”

Ignoring him, the boy reached in and tugged his sleeve. “Jamie! He can’t move! I tried but he won’t! Mister! He’s stuck up there! Pleeease!”

“Let go I said!” Hal repeated. But suddenly he feared some fool might tear around the corner on two wheels. “Alright,” He said, “I’ll pull over. You can let go” The boy obeyed.

Hal knew he should speed away. But he glanced at the boy, and saw both relief and hope in his face. He pulled the Tacoma onto the shoulder, stopped, and glared at him. Round-faced, freckled apple-cheeks, with rust-colored rock dust flecks in his tousled mop of black hair. Preteen, maybe thirteen. Not Chad’s age—fifteen forever now.

Hal asked. “What do you mean, ‘stuck?’ Where??”

“The quarry! The cliff! Pleeez!”

“The quarry? What the hell’s he doing up there?”

“He’s—we went—we were going—” The boy broke off, “You have to get him down! *Pleeeze!*”

“Is he hurt?”

“No! He’s fine! Just stuck!” Struggling for calm, the boy explained, “He’s way, way up. He can’t move.”

“What do you mean, ‘can’t move’? Why not?”

“Can’t *mo-oove!*”

“Goddammit! Why not?”

Speaking almost too fast for Hal to understand him, the boy explained, “He’s too scared, I mean totally totally *totally* frozen! He thinks he’ll fall if he moves, or even lets go. He’s on this ledge! His hands’re in this crack and he won’t take them come out. Won’t let go!” He stopped for breath, then, struggling for calm, explained, “He’s too scared to let go. I said do it! I said let go! But he won’t! He’s too afraid!”

Hal slowly shook his head, then nodded. “I get it: You two numbskulls thought you’d conquer Connecticut’s excuse for Everest.” He remembered reading, years ago, how New York City skyscraper steelworkers. Brave, proud men, sometimes they are seized with fear and will wrap themselves around a girder. It can take hitting their hands with a wrench to make them let go.

“So, he’s not injured, not in any actual trouble. He just panicked?”

“Panicked! It’s really scary up there. Totally if you look straight down. But he won’t let go. I kept saying to. But he won’t!”

“Where?” Hal peered up through the windshield.

The boy pointed upward. “High up. Try the this-side window.”

Hal climbed over the console, leaned out the passenger window, and craned up. Through a narrow gap in the trees, he spotted Jamie. Two-hundred feet up, maybe three, his arms and legs were splayed against a sheer granite wall.

Back behind the wheel Hal stared ahead. The Massachusetts line was no more than twenty minutes away. But it occurred to him that if he drove into the quarry, the Tacoma would be invisible. For a long moment he said nothing. Then he turned to the boy and ordered, "Get in." The boy raced around and jumped in, saying, "The way in's there."

"I know. I was here when I was a dumb kid too."

The Tacoma rocked and bounced over a roadway of coarse riprap hidden under knee-high seedling of fast-growing staghorn sumac. The way quickly narrowed and branches scraping against the truck's sides made squealing noises. Both he and the boy leaned in to dodge branches whipping in through their open windows until stopped by a barricade of chest-high boulders. They jumped out and hurried along a winding path to a makeshift campsite where a the boy's green nylon tent sagged under sleeping bags draped over its ridge. Next to an ancient stone fire ring, a soot-blackened, bail-handled aluminum mess-kit pot lay on its side. Over a bed of dying embers, wisps of steam curled around a charred can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew, two twisted, shriveled plastic bowls and plastic spoons. On a makeshift plank bench lay an open box of Quaker Oats breakfast bars, a crumpled bag of broken Chip Ahoy cookies, and four crushed, empty half-pint cartons of chocolate milk.

Hal winced to recall camping with Chad on a father/son Boy Scout Camporee. While supper cooked they'd bickered good-naturedly over who would clean up until Chad, seeing two younger scouts about to burn their burgers, rushed over to help. He'd have made Eagle.

At the edge of the boy's campsite two mountain bikes leaned against a rotting fence post. Each boasted new-looking handlebar bags and saddlebags flanking the rear wheels. Hal remembered a few months ago watching Chad kneel in awe beside his shining new Italian Vittorio Simonelli Mont d'Oro 18-speed road racer, on his fifteenth birthday. *His last.*

That Saturday Hal had promised himself wouldn't drink. But then Janice started again for the bike's \$1500-plus cost—on their near maxed-out VISA, for the overdue Tacoma payment, for too little money as always. By two that afternoon he sat on his usual barstool at Rick's Sportsman's Café double, double-shot in hand and staring, , without interest at the stuffed red fox on the back bar. Last night: if only he'd fled to Rick's, been three miles from home. Three miles from calamity never to end.

He looked up, traced the cliff's face and stopped at Jamie. Pressed against a wall of granite whose immensity dwarfed not just him but all below. He pointed up at Jamie and asked the boy, "That's Jamie. Don't you have a name?"

"Teddy, but Theodore really," Teddy piped. Then added, an octave lower, "Ted.

He pointed to a dark shadow at the base of the cliff. "The way up starts there."

At the the base, Hal said, "You wait here, Teddy. Ted." *Frowning, Teddy nodded.*

The 'way up' proved to be a broken, jagged series of often giant, barely reachable 'steps, hand-over-hand vertical ascents using shallow, often hard-to-find handholds and footholds. At times mere toe and fingerholds sufficient for a boy's hands and feet but dangerously small for a grown man's. Several times Hal paused to quell a gut-wrenching rising panic. At treetop level he sensed that if he didn't keep going, panic might paralyze like the boy.

Occasional ledges, level or less so, offered welcome spots where he could stop and catch his breath. Most ledges were scarcely a yard long and a foot or less wide. Rare longer, wider ones seemed boulevards. He recalled climbing rigging in Naval Officer training school. He hadn't minded scrambling up. But at the top he hated looking down.

At about twice the height of the forest below, he rested on a ledge. As waited while his heart slowed and his belly settled, he scanned the horizon. His eyes stopped at a white, pointed church

steeple a few miles away, and he realized that except for weddings and funerals, he hadn't attended Mass since Chad's christening. He would miss his funeral mass. When he guessed it was being said, he resolved, he would say the Rosary. He wished he had his, or even knew where it was.

Far off in the east, a pillow of morning fog blanketing the Connecticut River was burning off under the rising, fast-warming Sun. He traced the distant horizon, the river valley's eastern ridgeline. Its highest point, Somerset Mountain, he'd crossed under the dark grey light before daybreak. He sighed and gauged his next climb, a vertical face half-again his six-two height.

Minutes later, beneath a climb that seemed to tilt over him, he couldn't shift his weight on to his left foot, which was wedged into a foothold almost as high as his waist. In language he'd learned in the Navy he cursed himself; coward, candy-ass, lily-livered landlubber. Handholds were within reach, also a foothold that looked as if it were deep enough. *Only looked* was why he couldn't budge. At least five minutes passed before, thinking of the Rosary's 'both now and at the hour of our death, did his pounding heart almost stop. He sighed deeply, grabbed handholds both of which proved ample. As did the other foothold. Those above did too.

After climbing nearly twice his height he wriggled onto then stood upon a level-floored ledge about eight feet long. Though a reassuring two feet wide at its start, it quickly tapered to less than a foot at the far end where a corner blocked the view ahead. He rested several minutes, then, carefully, he faced the cliff and groped around the corner until he found an unseen handhold. Quashing yet another urge to panic, he edged around the corner and onto a ledge just wide enough for his foot.

Six feet ahead clung Jamie.

So pressed against the sheer rock that Hal might have missed his spindly frame were it not for his baggy New England Patriots T-shirt. Unlike Chad, who had shot up to five-foot seven by eighth grade, Jamie looked scarcely five feet. His back facing the Sun. Both legs and arms were splayed, with both his hands wedged in a fissure above him. The heel-ends of his dirty Nikes jutted into thin air. His head faced away, to his left. He seemed not to have heard Hal's approach.

Despite his pounding heart, Hal edged a step closer, saying, "Hi, Jamie. I'm Hal O'Neill. And I'll help you down."

Jamie wailed as he spun his head around, eyes wide teeth clenched in a grimace, eyes. Hal's heart skipped: Jamie's pale hazel eyes matched Chad's. Below them dried tears traced paths down his hollow, soot-smudged cheeks. Long-faced to begin with, he'd grown as may a boy on puberty's cusp the beginnings of a prominent chin beneath a young boy's small, upturned nose. His uncombed light-brown hair, sun-bleached to reddish-tan on top, covered half his brow and curled outward in feathery wisps over his ears and at his nape. Thin as he was, his outgrown jeans revealed the sturdy calves and haunches of summer days on a bike.

Despite his quavering stomach Hal edged closer and reached out, saying, "Take my hand."

Jamie whimpered but didn't move.

"Go ahead."

Still Jamie didn't move.

"Jamie—it's okay. I've got you."

Again Jamie whimpered.

"I'm a bricklayer," Hal lied although on college vacations he'd mixed mortar, hauled bricks and cement blocks for his mason grandfather "I've got real strong hands."

He heard scuffling behind him. Teddy poked his head around the corner. Hal frowned but said nothing. He turned back to Jamie and gently but firmly pressed his palm over Jamie's white-knuckled hand. It felt hard as the rock itself. "It's okay, just grab hold."

Jamie's lower lip trembled. He shuddered, then through clenched teeth squeaked, "I can't!"

"Sure you can, Jamie. I know you can," Hal said in the soothing tone he'd used when Chad, just five, insisted he couldn't ride his little first two-wheeler without training wheels. "Go ahead, just take your hand out of the rock, and take mine."

"I can't let go!" Jamie wailed in the soprano boys will have before voice-change. Hal remembered once when Chad answered the phone, he'd mistaken him for Jan. "Teddy says I'm chicken. I am! I'm a coward!"

"Screw you, Jamie Francis Quinn!" Teddy yelled, "Forget me calling you chicken! I was an asshole! Don't you be one too!"

"Language, Teddy," Hal said automatically. In silence, he thought.

Finally, he said, "Quinn? Irish? I'm O'Neill. One-thousand-percent Irish! You too?"

Jamie flicked up his eyebrows, then nodded.

Hal spotted a section of small chain around his neck. "Irish Catholic? Same here."

"Altar Boy!" Teddy chimed in.

"Was." Jamie grunted.

"He quit," Teddy sneered, "Wouldn't join the boy's choir either. The Priest begged him too."

"Okay boys," Hal said, seriously, "Time to get cracking. Jamie, think. You made it up here in one piece. Which absolutely proves you can make it back."

From below a police siren sounded two short blasts.

A cruiser lurched and swayed up the roadway and stopped behind the Tacoma. Hal knew he wouldn't see Conway. A policeman climbed out and looked up, then opened his trunk, bent in and rose with a bullhorn. In a metallic voice he commanded, "You! On the cliff! Come down now!"

"WE CAN'T!" Teddy screamed, then explained to Jamie, "This real old lady stopped. She said she'd let the cops know."

Hal looked down at the cruiser. Oddly, instead of alarm, he felt a wave of relief. Felt his fate settled at last.

He turned to Jamie, "Okay, you heard the cop."

"Come down!" The cop repeated. Then, after a second, asked, "Injuries? Is anyone injured?"

"No, officer!" Hal yelled, "The boy's just panicked!"

"I'm contacting the State Police rescue force." The cop reached in his cruiser's window, took out and spoke into handheld radio. Seconds later, he looked at the Tacoma, then up at the ledge. He read Hal's license plate, spoke again into his radio, then looked up again. Through the bullhorn he asked, "Sir! Are you Mr. Harold O'Neill?"

Hal paused, then said, "I am. I'm Hal O'Neill." The cop spoke again into his phone.

A minute later a distant siren quickly grew closer. In minutes a State Police cruiser rumbled in and jerked to a stop, soon followed by a second one. Out of both a trooper jumped out with gun drawn. A third cruiser hurried in with two more troopers. One aimed a telescope-equipped rifle at Hal.

"There's kids up here! Put those away!! "I'm unarmed!" Hal shouted, enraged. Fleetingly he wished the same cops had been at the house last night, on time.

Using the town cop's bullhorn, a trooper commanded, "Mr. O'Neill! Spread your arms, your legs, and turn around slowly."

"He can't!" Teddy screeched. "Can't you see he's helping Jamie? Anyway there's no room to turn around!"

"I'm unarmed!" Hal repeated. "I surrender! No need for guns!"

The troopers looked at each other. First one, then the others they holstered their sidearms. The rifleman cradled his weapon in his arm. After conferring briefly, two ran to the ledge. More sirens approached. Moments later a fire engine lumbered in, followed by two more State Police cruisers.

A quarter-hour later a panting Trooper, tall, husky bordering on heavysset, his hair graying at the temples, gained the ledge.

Shaken by its narrowness, he hesitated while Teddy, arms waving, insisted, "Wait! Wait! Hal's helping Jamie! There's no more room out there for you." The trooper frowned, opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing. He studied the tapering ledge, and didn't try going around Teddy.

Despite his resisting, Hal slowly but persistently encircled Jamie's thin wrist and, ignoring his protests, pried his hand out of the fissure. Jamie yelped when his hand lost contact. With surprising strength, he fought to put it back, but Hal held it firmly until he ceased trying.

"I've got you, man," Hal said, remembering how boys Jamie's age relish hearing themselves called 'man.' He edged closer; when Hal's foot touched his, Jamie wailed.

"Man, don't sweat it," Hal said. Then after a moment he asked, "An Altar boy? I was too! AND the choir, but youth, we didn't have a boy's, just mixed boys and girls." Flippantly and too

fast, he chanted, “Hail Mary full of grace, blessed is the fruit of thy —*art thou among of wom—* womb!”

“Jesus,” Jamie muttered.

Hal laughed. “I skipped ‘*Blessed art thou!* It’s been a long time. One Easter, Sister Agnes forced me to solo *Ave Maria*. When the time came, and we were waiting to come down the aisle, I got so scared I threw up, all over my robe. I had to change, but the only extra robe was too small. It barely covered my knees.” Jamie snickered. Hal went on, “So the whole time I was singing, I was praying my barfy-smelling breath wasn’t stinking up the church and grossing out the whole congregation.” Jamie and Teddy both giggled.

“When my voice finally changed, I quit the kid’s choir forever. Anyway,” he continued after a thought, “To tell the truth, I always felt closer to God when I was fishing. Or just being out on the water. I had a canoe.”

“We have a sailboat. It’s a yawl. My dad keeps it in Old Saybrook, down on Long Island Sound.”

“A Yawl?” Hal thought of the high-powered Captain’s Yawlboat on the carrier he’d served on.

Jamie continued, “A yawl’s got two masts. A mainsail, and a small one at the stern. The stern’s the back of the boat.”

Hal laughed, “I know what stern means! I’m an ex-navy lieutenant.” He recalled sailing up the Persian Gulf and remembered how, assigned to supervise a delivery of shoreside supplies for troops, he’d seen charred, twisted Iraqi soldiers napalmed in their vehicles. And a family, including four crumpled children, made charcoal by a misplaced incendiary bomb.

“FAITH’s the name. She sleeps four. The dinghy’s a sailing dinghy. I sail it in the harbor all the time. Sail FAITH too after my dad takes out of the harbor!”

“Sounds cool,” Hal said. Then, gravely, “Not like up here. Think that Sun’s warm now? Wait an hour! You know Jamie, you’re scared? Up here scared the smart thing. Hell, I’m scared as hell.”

Jamie's eyes went wide.

“But scared’s the smart way to be. You see, like my grandfather the mason said one day: ‘Forty years, I’ve slapped’ mortar on bricks. Every damn morning I look up my ladder, and still I get scared. That’s good. Why? Cause the day you’re not scared, that’s the day you go down head-first.” Hal fell silent, letting that sink in. Finally he said, “So, Jamie, let’s both be scared, and get the hell down from here.”

“But—” Jamie stammered, “But—I can’t!”

“Of course not!” Hal shot back, “As long as you don’t move, you’re safe! Right?”

Jamie frowned.

“Safe—but for how long? Till Sun’s at high noon? Till you’re hungry? How long will those Quaker Oats bars last? Chip Ahoys? But thirsty—aren’t you already?” He released Jamie’s wrist and watched his hand shoot back into the fissure. “Or what about needing to take a leak? What, with both hands stuck in that crack? What? Pee your pants?”

Jamie winced.

Hal chuckled, “Don’t worry. With all the sweat you’ll be sweating, taking a whizz be the last thing you’ll do.”

Hal reached out and extended his left arm over and beyond Jamie's. A shiver ran down his spine when he discovered the fissure there would only accept his fingertips.

“Listen, Jamie, I’ve figured it out. Listen: Press against the rock and hold completely still while I straddle you.”

“Nooooo!” Jamie cried. “You—*We’ll* fall!”

“Hey man, I said listen! I came all the way the hell up here so *you* don’t fall. You think I’d let *myself*?” More calmly he said, “I’m counting on you, Jamie. Just...be...still.” Whimpering, Jamie clenched his eyes shut and ground his cheek into the wall.

Hal took a deep breath and held it a long moment. Exhaling slowly, he slid his left hand as far as possible beyond Jamie, felt for and found a small handhold. Inhaling again but quietly to hide his fear, he set his right hand over Jamie’s. Hoping he wouldn’t hear his pounding heart, he backed away from the rock face as far as he dared, then said, “*Ave*—Say it Jamie! Sing it! *Ave!*”

Jamie, hoarsely but in tune, Hal in a monotone, they sang, “*Ave Maria, gratia plen*—”They stopped when Hal gingerly swung his left leg around.

“*Mari*—,” Hal’s voice choked as, unable to find a foothold, his leg flailed in midair. Finally, he found barely enough ledge receive the ball of his foot if he curled his toes. He jammed his fingers in the fissure until he thought his knuckles would bleed. He then shifted his weight onto both feet.

Jamie’s head brushed his chin and he felt trembling but wasn’t sure whose it was. A faint scent of woodsmoke surprised him until he realized it was in his hair.

“Okay, Popeye the Sailor,” Hal cracked, “You’re battened down like a hatch in a hurricane.” The he whispered, “*Hail Mary.*”

In a half-whisper Jamie added, “*Mother of God.*”

After a moment Hal asked, “What now? Shall we just say the Rosary until angels show up and carry us down?”

Jamie stifled a laugh.

Hal slid his right foot two inches toward the corner. Jamie whimpered, but then he followed with his own foot.

“*Gratia plena!* Jamie! Again!” Hal edged his foot six inches more. Jamie followed. Then, together, they drew their left feet over. “*Gratia!* Let’s rock Popeye!”

After several more shuffling sidesteps, they reached the corner. After hesitating, they rounded it. Ignoring the trooper’s barked orders and Teddy’s bubbly cheerleading, they crabbed onto the ledge and stopped. In silence, all four looked each other. For long moment no one moved or spoke.

Finally, Hal quipped, “Okay Jamie,” “It’s been lovely doing the *Ave Maria* tango with you. But the music’s stopped. You all set?”

“Uh-huh.” Jamie grunted. Hal stood erect and stepped back.

Jamie started to rise but his knees buckled and, wailing, he collapsed, pressed his brow to the ledge and sobbed.

“Jamie!” Teddy knelt before him.

“Son! Are you injured? Where?” The trooper bent over them.

“He’s not hurt, officer.” Hal knelt and lay his hand on Jamie’s shoulder. He looked up at the trooper and said calmly, “He’s okay.”

Several seconds later, Jamie raised his head and looked up, then bent down again and touched his brow to the ledge floor. Just before he quickly rose onto one knee, Hal thought he saw him furtively make the sign of the Cross.

Talking Hal’s hand, he shakily stood.

“Are you hurt?” Asked the trooper.

“I’m okay!” Jamie protested, “I’m okay—it’s just—stupid knees!” In his quavering half-smile, and in a new light in his eyes, Hal knew his terror had flown.

Laughing, Teddy squealed, “Quinn, you idiot!”

“Me the idiot?” Jamie smiled and shot back, “*You’re* the idiot who said, let’s mountain-climb the quarry!”

“Boys!” Taking charge, the Trooper towered over them. “Position yourselves between me and—” He stopped, frowned at the narrow ledge, then said, “No, follow me down. When we get to where it’s wider, transition ahead of me, then descend between we two officers.”

He glared at Hal, who offered his wrists. Reflexively the Trooper reached for his handcuffs, but he stopped, saying, “Mr. O’Neill, you’ll need both hands to descend. You said you’re unarmed?”

“I’m under arrest,” Hal said to Jamie and Teddy, and pictured his smoking pistol on the living room floor.

To the trooper he said, “Miranda me now, or you can do it later.” Without speaking, the trooper nodded.

“So you know for sure, here goes.” Hal spread his arms and, the boys watching in dismay, turned around.

“Follow me,” the trooper ordered, adding needlessly, “Carefully.”

Hal watched first the trooper, then Teddy, then Jamie descend. Leaning over, he smiled to note how nimbly--and fearlessly—Jamie scampered down, finding as if by instinct each hand and footholds. A yard before the lower ledge, and apparently just for fun, he let go jumped down.

Seeing him safely below, Hal turned around and with his right foot found the topmost foothold, then began his lower his left.

Halfway down he froze, his foot in midair. Suddenly he pulled it up, looked back down at the boys and the two troopers. He then looked across to the ledge's far end, briefly lifted his eyes to the sky and dashed to the corner.

"Hal! Come back!" Jamie shrieked. Before the Trooper could stop him, he scrambled cat-like up and onto the ledge where he saw Hal, his back to the wall, disappear around the corner.

"Hal!"

His eyes cast upward, Hal crabbed sideways and stopped at Jamie's place.

The bullhorn blared: "Halt, Mr. O'Neill! Halt and descend!" Then it ordered Jamie, "Boy! Return to the troopers on the level below!"

"Hal!" Ignoring the bullhorn, Jamie edged around the corner, pleading, "Come back Hal! Come back! Please! Come to me Hal!"

Hal scanned the horizon. Quietly and without lowering his eyes, he said. "Go back, Jamie."

"Mr. O'Neill!" A different cop on the ground appealed, "Janice, your wife, she's wounded, but she'll recover! Give yourself up! You fired in passion. That's only manslaughter!"

As Chad had done before he fell, Hal threw his arms wide and opened his hands as if to embrace the heavens. He whispered '*Hail Mary.*'

And was about to fall forward when Jamie's hand touched his.

"*Mother of God,*" Jamie said.