

They sat for a while in silence. Then the man spoke.

“Which direction are you headed?” he asked.

“North,” said Stuart.

“North is nice,” said the repairman. “I’ve always enjoyed going north. Of course, south-west is a fine direction, too.”

“Yes, I suppose it is,” said Stuart, thoughtfully.

“And there’s east,” continued the repairman. “I once had an interesting experience on an easterly course. Do you want me to tell you about it?”

“No, thanks,” said Stuart.

The repairman seemed disappointed, but he kept right on talking.

“There’s something about north,” he said, “something that sets it apart from all other directions. A person who is heading north is not making any mistake, in my opinion.”

“That’s the way I look at it,” said Stuart. “I rather expect that from now on I shall be traveling north until the end of my days.”

“Worse things than that could happen to a person,” said the repairman.

“Yes, I know,” answered Stuart.

“Following a broken telephone line north, I have come upon some wonderful places,” continued the repairman. “Swamps where cedars grow and turtles wait on logs but not for anything in particular; fields bordered by crooked fences broken by years of standing still; orchards so old they have forgotten where the farmhouse is. In the north I have eaten my lunch in pastures rank with ferns and junipers, all under fair skies with a wind blowing. My business has taken me into spruce woods on winter nights where the snow lay deep and soft, a perfect place for a carnival of rabbits. I have sat at peace on the freight platforms of railroad junctions in the north, in the warm hours and with the warm smells. I know fresh lakes in the north, undisturbed except by fish and hawk and, of course, by the Telephone Company, which has to follow its nose. I know all these places well. They are a long way from here—don’t forget that. And a person who is looking for something doesn’t travel very fast.”

“That’s perfectly true,” said Stuart. “Well, I guess I’d better be going. Thank you for your friendly remarks.”

“Not at all,” said the repairman. “I hope you find that bird.”

Stuart rose from the ditch, climbed into his car, and started up the road that led toward the north. The sun was just coming up over the hills on his right. As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed long. But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction.