At first, Pete could not believe what he was seeing. He closed his eyes and held them shut. When he opened them again, he knew his eyes had not deceived him. The end of the string led to Conchita's mouth and then disappeared. Nausea gripped Pete with an icy chill and his breakfast coffee was bitter in his mouth. Conchita covered on the ground, but not from guilt. She was trapped like a fish on a hook.

Afterwards, Pete could not remember going berserk. The only things he remembered clearly were the chopping block and the feel of a hatchet in his hand. The rest of it came back in elusive snatches. Conchita snapping the string in her terror, the sound of flapping wings as she dodged the slashing blows, and Conchita clawing her way to the top of the fence.

Conchita must have been squawking and he must have been screaming, because his mother had burst out the door in her big white apron and was running toward him. She reached him as he was clambering over the fence in pursuit of Conchita. He felt the strong hands pinion his arms and set him down on the ground.

"What are you doing? Have you gone crazy?"
"God damn you! Leave me alone!"

And then lights exploded in his head. He reached up to touch his face. It was numb, and he realized he had been slapped. Pete raised his eyes to his mother's and knew that if he said one word, another slap was ready for him. The madness had dissipated and now his courage deserted him. He wilted and bowed his head and tasted injustice. She had not even bothered to ask why he had wanted to kill Conchita.