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The Punishment Seminar

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THE PUNISHMENT SEMINAR

The father who beat his boy to death claimed his son stuck to the letter 'G' each time he attempted the alphabet. "It was like water dripping all night," he said, "my wife yammering through dinner. 'H,' I'd think. 'H. H. H.' But nothing unglued his brain but my ball-peen hammer."

In Kentucky, intermarriage turns, as lessons, some descendants blue. Luke Combs, for instance, who made those blue people famous by taking his defect to town. The common cold colored his face. Or drinking. The flu or whatever shifts the blood's balance and calls up that polar look from comic books.

In England, once, attempted suicide was a capital offense. Incentive to do things right. Height enough for the gymnastics of dying. Overboard, hours from shore. Pills, a year's dose, swallowed so the criminal wouldn't revive to a trial, to the gallows, the gas chamber, the pocked wall for failure.