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Belles Lettres, 1944

Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

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Belles Lettres



1944

Belles Lettres

An annual anthology of student writing sponsored and published by the
Canterbury Club at Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College
at Richmond, Kentucky

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VOLUME TEN

NINETEEN HUNDRED FORTY-FOUR

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FOREWORD

War conditions still make the publication of *Belles Lettres* somewhat difficult. A considerable drop in the enrollment of students at Eastern has decreased the amount of available material and made it necessary to publish fewer pages. The editors have tried, nevertheless, to maintain the same high quality of student creative writing as in previous years and to present material representative of different types of writing and of the students at Eastern. With these conditions in mind, the editors present the tenth annual volume of *Belles Lettres*.

EASTER PRAYER

Betsy Ann Smith

Our Father, we, like the women of old, have come very early in the morning at the rising of the sun, not to the sepulchre as they, but to a shrine of nature to worship. We have come with our hearts filled with the joy of the knowledge of a risen Christ, not with a feeling of despair and grief because of a dead Lord. We have come bearing neither oil or spices, but praising and thanking Thee that we worship the living Jesus, the conqueror of sin and death. We are worshipping here near the Cross, a symbol of shame and defeat to the Marys, but to us a symbol of Thy Love and Thy gift of life eternal.

Dear Father, we pray that here we may find that peace of soul that comes to those who believe in and love the risen Lord, that we may find the true understanding of the possibilities of the application of Thy Love to this war-torn world, and that we may find the courage to apply Thy way of life to our daily living. And, our Father, may we too depart with great joy. Amen.

LITTLE THINGS

Nina Mayfield

When others look about to admire
The imperial might of kings,
I find that I am more inclined
To like the little things.

To lie beneath a shady tree
And watch the green leaves dance
For some is just a frightful bore;
To me it is romance.

A favorite book, a winter day,
A rug before the fire,
They're frightfully dull and drab to some;
They're all that I desire.

The crystal drops of dew that kiss
The stately daffodil
To some are simply water,
But they give my soul a thrill.

I know that some will think me queer;
I don't know or care just who;
But I'm glad that not all people like
The same things that I do.

I know there's worry and strife and strain
With presidents and kings,
But I find the world is made up, too,
Of a myriad of little things.

ARTIST LIFE

Billy Layman

Tonight I'm watching from my bed
Through her windowpane.
She's carving out somebody's head,
Lowering her own in pain.

She's been there all day long,
Will work until complete,
Then will sell it for a song
Just for a bite to eat!

Tomorrow night she will be through,
The "masterpiece" soon to be sold,
Then deep sleep for a day or two
And start again to mold.

If she thought someone was watching her
Just a house away,
I wonder, would she leave her clay,
To change her faded negligee?

WAR THOUGHTS

Marjorie Kerrick Taylor

There's blood in the moon tonight,
And the bat flies low,
And all of the dreams that once were so dear
Have gone to the valley where dead dreams go.

There's death in the air tonight
And grey battle smoke,
And all the bright plans we made long ago
Have turned to a bitter, ironical joke.

There's war on the earth tonight
And horrible strife,
For man, the creature with reason and soul,
For pastime, is taking his brother's life.

COUNTY FAIR

Sara A. Tribble

The huge red and black sign blazed up before him :

BONNY COUNTY FAIR

August 16-20

Races Afternoon and Night

Admission 25-50c

"Gee," said Teddy Higgins. "Gee! Wonder what a fair'd be like." With a hunch of his faded blue overalls, he stepped nearer to look at the red and black horses scampering around the poster.

He read it again. Teddy was twelve, but he could read very well. Ma and the truant officer had insisted that he go to school. Pa had said, "Sassafras," but he had to give in.

Pa didn't think much of school. In fact, Pa didn't think much of anything except work and three square meals a day. Pa said fairs were wicked. "Just a gambler's den," he said. Pa had said all this rationing was foolishness, too, but the store keeper said he'd have to come to town to get sugar to can with. The old farm kept up three generations of Higginses, but it couldn't grow sugar. That's what Teddy was doing in town.

Teddy got back in the buggy with the sugar. He jingled the fifty-cent piece he had left over. "Robbin," he addressed his old horse, "wonder what Pa'd do if I went to the fair. S'pose he'd find it out. He most gener'ly does find out my meanness. Then I get beat."

He breathed a sigh, as he turned the buggy toward home. A long string of cars streamed down the street. Unconsciously, Teddy turned the horse to follow them. From a distance, the throbbing music of a band lured him on—on toward the music; on toward the gambler's den.

Nearer the gates, he heard an uneven hum of voices; he heard the dull, even thud of racing horses' feet. He saw the tops of many tents above the high board fence.

Teddy jingled the fifty cents in his pocket. "Wonder if Pa would miss it. I could say I lost it; then I'd get beat."

The band started again. Its music stirred the boy's blood. Inside was music, laughing people, beautiful running horses. There were all things he knew so little of.

He felt the money again. "I'd like to see a horse that could run fast," Teddy said wistfully.

Ahead of him was the gate. A pompous gentleman, in a white suit and carrying a cane, stopped the cars and sold them tickets.

Teddy bit his lip determinedly, guided Dobbin toward

the pompous gentleman. He held out the fifty cents in a grubby hand to the gentleman.

"I'd like mighty well to buy a ticket," he said humbly, and remembering his manners, added, "Please, sir."

He took his change and drove Dobbin inside the gate, where he hitched him near another horse, to keep him company.

"Well, I'm here—here inside the fair," he told himself excitedly.

With wide-eyed wonder, he walked briskly toward the mainway. Throngs of people pushed him and pulled him—people of all kinds; children well-marked with evidence of sloppy ice cream; big boys and girls with funny little hats on; parents with one eye on their young fry, the other on the look-out for old friends; men, some drunk, talking in large, loud groups; grandmothers, with blue ribboned quilts under their arms; performers, riders in jodphurs and tall silk hats; politicians, overalled farmers—people of all kinds, shapes, and sizes, but all enjoying themselves.

Teddy looked longingly at stands selling pink lemonade, ice cream, popcorn, crackerjacks, juicy slices of water-melon. He bought an ice cream cone from a man that hol-ered through his hands.

"I'm gonna get beat anyway. I may as well have a good time," he excused himself.

He investigated the wheel he had seen turning from outside the gate. He let the man persuade him to ride on it. Teddy was scared at first—the seat rocked, and it took his breath going down; but when he was on the top he could see all over the grounds. The fair seemed a seething mass of color.

He watched the merry-go-round a while—saw proud young fathers holding their terrified offspring on the ponies for their first ride. He watched the swings till he was dizzy. Then he remembered the horses.

The band was playing when he slipped into the crowded grandstand. Somebody blew a horn, and eight beautiful horses galloped on to the track. The horses were different colors and sizes—little bays, a sorrel, a roan or two, and one big black. The riders were boys and girls Teddy's age. Teddy pretended that the sleek black that lifted its white feet so carefully was his; and that he was the erect rider in the black cutaway coat and top hat.

The man in the center dropped his cane, and the high-stepping horses walked, trotted, and cantered around the ring. The people cheered and clapped; and when they gave the boy on the black horse a blue ribbon, Teddy thought the building was coming down.

When those eight horses trotted out the gate again, four more galloped in. Teddy noticed that their riders had on bright colored suits and funny little caps. The horses can-

tered around awhile. Then the man in the middle of the ring, yelled, "Let 'em go!" and the horses began to run. The crowd yelled. Sometimes they would stand up. Teddy yelled and stood up, too. They ran faster and faster until the ring looked like one streak of brown with splotches of red, and blue, and green, and purple. Never had horses run so fast that Teddy had seen. Not even old Bett ran that fast home to see her colt.

When the riders had put their ribbons in their mouths and left the ring, the band played again, and everybody stood up.

Teddy looked at the sun. "It'll soon be time to milk," he regretted. He bought Robbin a sugar bun with the last nickel.

As he unhitched the horse, he confided, "Robbin, I'll get beat good when I git home, but, gosh, it's worth it."

Over the Fence—Just Over the Fence

Anita Beatrice Goins

Just over the fence, there is a broad green meadow,
Just over the fence, my lad, just over the fence.

There is thick green grass
And bright blossoming flowerets

And earth that is brown, deep and rich.
Just over the fence, my lad—just over the fence.

SOMEBODY'S IDEAL

Norma Raybourne

You walk with a slump,
You talk with a shout.
You spend your time foolishly,
Just gadding about.
You're acting quite awful;
Maybe that's how you feel;
But you are surely forgetting
That you're somebody's ideal.

You play to the winner,
No matter the cost;
And brag about winning
When you've really lost.
Your laughs are all grouches,
Your smiles never real;
Isn't it a pity
That you're somebody's ideal?

You work toward the finish;
But not toward a goal.
You're losing your will-power,
You have lost self-control.
You have got to keep working,
And not lose your zeal;
You mustn't forget
That you're somebody's ideal.

You can live for yourself
At the rate you do go;
But you've got nothing for others,
Nothing to show.
You are working machinery
Steering life's wheel,
Not for yourself
But for somebody's ideal.

SHADOWS

Nina Mayfield

Shadowed in the eyes of those who return, I see
The loneliness that comes from being far from home,
The blood and tears from months spent on Guadalcanal,
The pride that means he's done his part and done it well,
The doubt that comes from knowing he might fail,
The sadness at finding that some at home have let him down,
The mystery of what he has done and the places he has been,
The burning happiness because so many have gladly given all,
The stark fury when he recalls the brutal savagery he has seen,
The calculating look from having killed the enemy,
The puzzled look when he no longer seems to belong,
The disillusion because someone has stepped in his place,
The watchful look from having waited for so long;
But most of all, thank God, I see
The happiness, the gratefulness, and the peace that come
from being back again,
From knowing that all he is and all he saw and all he did
was worth it,
Because of home.

STARTING

Pvt. John Accardi

If love should call on you some day,
Just pay no heed, but order him
To turn about and go away
And don't be taken at his whim.

That's what you'll do if you are wise—
You'll send him off and spoil his plot;
You'll save yourself some aches and sighs—
If you are wise—as I was not.

I AM A STRANGER IN THE EARTH

Julie Hoffman

I am a stranger in the earth.
Men do not know me, or understand me.
My soul finds a certain intrinsic delight
In love, and things lovely—
And I am a foreigner in the land.

I am a foreigner in the land.
I have a word to say for kindness,
Truth, charity, and divine impassioned trust;
I have a message for the masses—
But I'm an unwelcome crusader to the throng.

I am an unwelcome crusader to the throng,
And the way seems dark and desperately alone;
But I rise and sing my song eternal—
I urge companionship indissoluble—
And I am a stranger in the earth.

LITTLE WHITE LIES

Margaret Dye

Alice Powell admired the way her long blonde hair touched the back of her short black imitation seal, or rather Aunt Mary's black imitation seal cut down to fit Alice.

"Mom!" she called, as she fastened her patent ankle-strap.

"Yes, Alice?" Mom always looked so young and her hair was soft frost on a winter window-pane.

"Do I look older than fifteen? Do I look like Ann Sheridan? Maybe I could use some of Anne's super perfume, maybe, huh?"

Mom stepped back to avoid the barage of questions.

"You look very nice, Baby, but wear your scarf. There's snow outside. Don't use too much perfume," she called as Alice tick-tocked down the hall.

"I hope something exciting happens on this trip to Lenore's. Rick thinks I'm like Ann Sheridan, at least one brother-in-law appreciates me. Mom, don't you think this is a good picture of Ed Daviess, the University athlete? He's an air cadet now. Won't he make a wonderful pilot?"

"Yes, dear, but you don't even know him. Don't forget your scarf—Give Lenore and Rick my love. Be a good girl."

"Bye, Mom."

Alice settled back in the bus and yawned in imitation of neither Bette Davis or Ann Sheridan. Thus preoccupied, she turned to see a thin, lanky soldier sitting beside her. He took a magazine from his pocket and began to read.

Alice had a Movie Magazine that had much easier words than the one he had, so she tried to find what Betty Grable had for breakfast. Week-ends at her sister's home weren't so boring since her brother-in-law, Rick, had once told her she was a natural-born actress and very talented. Besides the week-ends, anyway, helped give more room for Anne's fiance who was on leave from the Navy and Mom labeled him as a good catch.

How could Alice attract her companion's attention? An idea came to her.

"Look," she said, holding up her magazine; "doesn't Clark Gable have a long address now?"

"Er—yes, he certainly does." He held it close so he could read through the thick lensed glasses.

"I know several fellows from the University whose addresses are almost as long as that," he continued.

"The University?"

"Yes, I was in school there for awhile."

Alice fluttered her lashes and asked casually, "Did you know Ed Daviess?" She thought of her scrapbook of clippings. This poor moron would never understand how things really were.

"Er—yes, I think I knew Daviess, but rather remotely. I never ran with the football crowd a great deal."

"Then you probably amuse yourself some other way. But Ed is so energetic, we can't be together five minutes, unless he outlines a new play. He's outlining new plays for Uncle Sam, now." Alice thought the last remark was very clever.

"Really? I hadn't heard. Is he—well, a good friend?"

"I feel honored to be known as his best girl friend. But really!" Even Barbara Hutton would envy the way Alice rolled her eyes.

"What!" he yelled. "Oh, his girl friend! How long have you known him?"

"We've been very good friends since we were children, and before he went away, our friendship became something bigger, I mean greater. We're going to be married when he comes home."

"Really?"

"But, yes, we haven't definitely set the date." Alice lowered her lashes and pretended to blush.

"Tell me, do your parents and his approve of this marriage? But that's a personal question, isn't it? Excuse me."

He was so interested in this affair, Alice thought he was almost sweet.

"Oh, that's perfectly all right. I feel as if we're old acquaintances. My parents are very fond of Ed, but his mother objected in the beginning. After I talked to her a few moments, we were all reconciled. She's really a dear, isn't she?"

"I certainly think so," he muttered.

"His father doesn't give him much attention. His work is too confining. Eddy and I have agreed to devote our lives to making our children happy. We both feel we owe it to them. I don't know just how I'll manage his parents. In-law trouble is so disgusting."

"I don't think you will find the Daviess family too difficult. I hope you will be happy." He was getting up to leave as the bus pulled in the station.

Alice noticed his broad shoulders then and his friendly smile.

"Thank you," she smiled.

"Thank *you!*" he called and he was laughing as he left the bus.

Alice looked down at his seat. There was a name plate such as men in uniform wear. She picked it up. It read—Edward K. Daviess—.

CALENDARS

Betty Strachan

The days go on—
One is a big day
Written in red letters,
Remembered in red letters;
Others are ordinary days,
Black-rimmed days,
Black days, which we forget
In trying to paint
The next one in red.

YESTERDAY TO TOMORROW

Katherine Fossett

As the bombs from the enemy planes rained down
Upon the helpless people of that silent town,
It kindled the flame in the hearts of all
That America shall live and never fall.
They fought a battle that Sunday morn,
And the love for our country was then reborn.
We will give our lives to uphold her name—
We will win for her glory, freedom, and fame.
Through the turmoil of time this land shall be
What it was once called, the Land of the Free.
The stars and stripes shall wave on high,
And for her honor we will do or die.
Yesterday has gone down in the book of life
As a day of conflict, contention and strife;
But with each new tomorrow, we pray we will be
Nearer our goal—our victory.

ETERNITY

Anita Beatrice Goins

I see trees,
 and flowers,
 And couples strolling
 By the water.
A lake,
 a moon,
 with silver sand,
 And shadows in the water.
I wander lonely by the lake
 To echoed sounds of bugles,
 And far, far down in blue-black depths
I see—
 Shadows in the water—

TRAGEDY

Betty Strachan

Some minds are unfertile acorns
Which reach their full growth and drop.
They lie in atmosphere conducive to life,
But they shrivel and die
Or rot away,
Depending on natural conditions.
And whether they dry up or rot away
Makes no particular difference.
The loss was the potential intellect
Starved by the confines of
Not-unprecedented narrowness.

GOODBY, TOMORROW

Janet West

You smiled today, I talked of spring,
We laughed, and we were gay.
We made no mention of tomorrow;
We lived our life in just today.

Our lips spoke no words of sorrow;
Our eyes were clear and bright;
And yet our souls were whispering
The truth to us all night.

We said goodby, and raindrops fell.
You smiled; I laughed aloud.
Oh, we were brave, and we were young;
Then I was alone in a maddening crowd.

You were gone, and I was there;
Our today fast dwindled out.
Now I must face reality
With tomorrow all about.

PEOPLE

Pvt. John Accardi

One, the tom-tom of a drum,
One, the tinkle of the bell;
Some, the shining rays of sun,
Some, the blazing fires of Hell,

One, the drip-drip of the rain,
One, the flakes of winter snow;
Some, the blueblood of a vein,
Some, the fluttering of a crow.

One, as hard as ivory tusk,
One, as powder of a gun;
Each of them must come to dust,
Be he crow, or rain, or drum.

CLASS REUNION

Herbert Searcy

June had finally arrived. It was the season of the year, bursting forth in all its splendor, when spring runs into summer; orange blossoms and roses bow in the moonlight; *Lohengrin* floats from stained glass windows; red birds flit in the breeze; sunshine and freshness permeate the air.

The time for graduations and reunions of bygone classes was at hand.

Everything wasn't so pleasant and comfortable on this June morning in a cool, white-tiled room of a naval hospital, however. There between smooth, white sheets lay the brawny form of Lieutenant Philip Craig, U. S. N. He had been resting on the narrow bed since living through those hours of darkness when his ship had been bombed. Two weeks he had been there with a broken ankle in a heavy cast and a dreadfully numb feeling in his legs. That feeling would disappear, he reasoned, when the cast was removed.

Phil spent most of his hours in sleeping and in thinking. His college days at Kansas State flashed across his mind, and he thought also of the reunion that his class was holding the following week. Although the doctor hadn't said when he would be released, Phil was already making plans to attend his class reunion. He had even asked the nurse to see about crutches for him. Despite the fact that he had never walked on crutches before, he was only too anxious to learn. He could just see the amused looks and hear the greetings his friends would give him as he hobbled in. He could hardly wait to see all his old class-mates and to find out what Fate had done for them in the six years since they had separated to the four corners. Oh, he realized that a lot of the fellows and many of the girls, too, wouldn't be there, but some of them would be able to make it. No one could possibly forget, no matter where he might be. When he swung in on his crutches, he could even imagine hearing an old friend shout in a loud voice of welcome, "Why here's old Phil," and everyone would rush to shake his hand. The smile which these pleasant remembrances caused soon disappeared from his lips, and the peculiar feeling of deadness seemed to be creeping farther up his body.

The door of the cool, white-tiled room opened noiselessly, and a figure in white starch entered. "Do you want anything, Lieutenant?" asked the nurse in her hospital tones.

"Yes, nurse," he answered somewhat meekly. "You may think I'm terribly helpless with only a broken ankle, but would you help me turn over on my side?"

"When he was comfortable, he asked in somewhat enthusiastic tones, "Have you seen about my crutches," and in almost the same breath, "When does the doctor say that I can leave?"

The nurse avoided the hopeful look in his eyes and replied that the doctor had said nothing to her about his leaving the hospital. When she saw how crushed he was, she added, "You're not quite well yet," as a way of explanation.

"But I just have to attend my class reunion," he pleaded.

"I'll talk to the doctor again," she murmured. As she straightened the books on the bed-side table, she thought of what a difficult task the doctor had before him. A task that had been postponed until there was no longer any doubt, and as she thought of the doctor's words a chill crept up her spine. "Lieutenant Craig will never walk again. Both of his legs," the surgeon had told her, "are hopelessly paralyzed."

As the white-starched figure hurried toward the door and tiptoed out, she caught the words of a barely audible voice from the smooth, white sheets gasping, "I wonder—if they'll—miss me—"

LIKE A BABY, SPRING

Pauline Amburgy

You awaken and yawn;
Stretch so tenderly
Like a morning-glory dawn,
And then so gingerly
In your innocent baby ways
You give the earth
A coverlet of sunlit rays—
While your song of mirth
Inspires the robin to sing,
And like a baby's smile
Is the laughter you bring
Along life's trodden mile.
Your subtle breeze is his sleep;
The flowers that bloom
Are lovely roses on his cheek
That cease so soon.
The dream blue of the sky
Across its broad highway
Is the tiny, winking baby eyes
That look askance at day,
And your cotton-candy clouds above
Forever and forever shifting
Is this fairyland of love
Forever and forever lifting.
The dew you give each year
Is the dawning aftermath
Of a baby's crystal flowing tear
That breaks at morns fast;
The showers of spring that beat
Upon the barren land
Are the baby's lily-nimble feet
And this chubby, waving hand...
Oh, yes, the promise you give
Is his soul and heart

While time and destiny does live
And life's seasons take part;
True the ethereal look you cast
Is his innocence supreme
That makes mortals lone hopes last
For the rebirth you bring,
And as you change and grow
With life's surge you sing,
You are a laurel hope aglow—
So like a baby, Spring!

HUNGRY WATERS

Tommye Rankin

The rain poured steadily from gloomy gray skies onto an already saturated earth and flowed down over the ground to the streams, filling them to capacity with yellow gurgling water. When the small streams had overflowed into the rivers, flooding towns and valleys, the rain did not cease but continued to fall down until every drop was agony to those who realized what the rising water of the flood might mean.

Huddled dismally into a tan oversized raincoat and hood, a small figure stood on the banks of the muddy onrushing river, her eyes never leaving its churning depths. The stream was rising perhaps an inch an hour, but to Dorcel it seemed that she could see the murky mass heaving upwards at almost a foot a minute.

She did not know how long she had stood there, her hands crammed into the deep pockets of her father's coat, but now despite the protection of the coat, she was soaked through and her feet were buried to the ankles in soft earth. Once she pulled her hand slowly from her pockets and took out a half-empty package of cigarettes ruined by the water. Reluctantly she dropped them from her clenched hand, muttering as they fell, "He won't be needing them now." She didn't know, herself, whether or not there were tears mingling with the slithering rain that streamed down her face and dripped from her chin.

With her eyes still glued to the distance she stepped back a few inches when the water began seeping over the edge of the highest bank. She knew that in a short time the greedy flood would rush up to the pretty white house with the green shutters, would claw at the foundation, go into the basement, fill it, reach the first step, the second, up to the porch, cover the first floor, the piano, the comfortable chairs, and then it would climb the stairs with its muddy feet to the second floor. She clenched her hands in her pockets and gritted her teeth.

She thought of the beautiful clear water in the summer,

the green grass and the pretty white house that overlooked the boats below. She could still hear the motors racing over the waters—suddenly she ran to the very brink of the river. Yes, there in the distance was a boat coming toward her.

Restraining her desire to run into the hurdling waters, she waited with outward calm until the boat reached her and the colored man spoke, "Miss Do'cel, de doctah's waiting 'til we gets Mistah Tom dah; he done got de hospital ready and ebah thing. Me and Jim's got stretchahs too." the old darkey was tugging eagerly at something in the boat.

Dorcel's voice was steady, "Yes, bring the stretchers, but we won't be needing the doctor. Daddy's dead now." A wave of muddy water washed over her foot, and suddenly she cried, "Oh, hurry, we've got to get him out of here before the water gets him. We can't let this yellow mud touch him. He liked the clear water, but he hated the flood; he told me so." Her voice was strangled, broken with sobs. She tugged at the old negro's arm. "We've got to get him out. This water's hungry for him. This river wants him, but I won't let it get him." Her voice broke, and she sobbed as she ran on toward the house dragging the old negro with her.

UNKNOWN TOASTS

Billie Layman

The lights were dim in the Scherezade;
The music was dreamy and slow.
Dancers smiled; would sometimes nod
At the people they seemed to know.

Four tables away, she sat from me,
French mysteriously odd;
Yet not once did she ever see
Me in the Scherezade!

I filled my glass with sparkling wine
And lifted it high with care,
"A toast, I drink to my new 'find',
To the lady over there."

"A toast to all those things I've missed;
The love, the wealth I lack;
Here's to the one in the shimmering dress,
Don't let her forget to come back!"

MY STATE OF MIND

Norma Raybourne

Yesterday beautiful—lifes's promises complete;
Toady is so ugly—another defeat.
Yesterday sunshine—beauty in all;
Today is so gloomy—the outlook so small.
The world that was pleasant is now so unkind,
What made the difference?—my state of mind.

Tomorrow in questionable—what will it be?
This big question—depending on me.
My thoughts only, can make it a day.
One like yesterday or another like today.
Which ever it is, I will always find
That it was made so by my state of mind.

A DANDELION

Anita Beatrice Goins

A star fell from the heavens
And in the earth reclined;
Out crept a flower of richest hue,
A modest dandelion.

Yon gentle shrinking recluse
Peeping from her shrine
Of soft and clasping leaflets,
Is the virgent dandelion.

Her downy fluff of beauty
Is simply yet sublime,
For it's less of earth than heaven,
This immortal dandelion.

THE LYNCHING TREE

Betty Strachan

Standing alone in a vacant lot, silhouetted against the graying twilight sky, it looked sinister. Strangers thought it was only a large oak tree; but they were impressed by its majesty, its solitude, and the low limb entirely bare of branches and leaves. It seemed to guard some dark mystery. The people who lived in Ammertown knew the secret of that tree. As children, they had heard stories of it. When they became older, they regarded it wonderingly. As adults, they followed the city fathers' debates as to

what should be done with it. For the past fifty years it had been called the "lynching tree."

Ammertown was a small place, having grown very little in the last several decades. It was an old town, but it was not dead; the people took pride in the appearance of their homes and city. Main Street was clean, respectable, and alive in the heart of town; but stretching out through the city, it became less clean and respectable as it reached the outskirts. There were the Negro cabins. These were poor; for besides the few Negroes who were employed in the quarry, most of them worked in the yards and kitchens of the townspeople. Some were respectable and honest. Others were not.

Belonging to the former class were Uncle Bart and Aunt Lindy, both ageless old darkies. Uncle Bart had been born in slavery and liked to tell stories of the old "Massa." They were much too old to do any work, but Aunt Lindy kept the house and cooked the meals for the two of them, and Abe, their grandson, who lived with them. Abe worked in the quarry and provided for the old people food and shelter, meager though it was. In spite of that fact, he was shiftless and good-for-nothing and would have let his grandparents starve if he himself could have comfortably existed without working.

A quiet Sunday morning in October found Uncle Bart and Aunt Lindy in their regular pew in church. They sang the hymns in high, cracked voices, but their minds were not on the words. They were thinking of Abe. When the pastor called on Uncle Bart to lead in prayer, his voice rose in pleading tones. He concluded his prayer thus: "and, O Lawd, be with our wayward boy. We don't know whar he is now, but you know, Gawd; so please keep 'im safe and bring 'im back to de fold. Amen." Uncle Bart pulled out his only handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

After the service, the old couple hurried home; but, when they got there, nothing had been disturbed. Every shabby piece of furniture was just as they had left it.

"Oh, Bart, he ain't heah yet! We jus' gotta do sum'in'," Aunt Lindy wailed, succumbing to her tears.

"Now, Lindy, he's boun' to turn up. Jus' 'cause he ain't bin heah since last night ain't no sign dat anything's happened to 'im. He jus' like as not got drunk, and' 'stid o' comin' home, he's went somewhars else." Uncle Bart spoke as if trying as much to convince himself as to comfort his wife. He succeeded in doing neither.

"They ain't no use sayin' dem things, Bart. Ah knows dey ain't so." Aunt Lindy was still quietly crying.

"Now, Lindy, you be quiet. De good Lawd ain't gonna let nothin' happen to dat boy when we're ole and helpless an' he's all we got," Bart argued.

When the old darky had calmed down some, she rose and said, "Ah'll fix us a bite to eat, Bart." But neither was hungry when they sat down to their meal of pone and cold milk. They nibbled in silence.

About eight-thirty that night old Aunt Lindy heard a step at the kitchen door. She went in as Abe burst in and slumped in a chair. His bloodshot eyes gave evidence that he had been drunk, but now he was fearfully sober. He was breathless as if he had been running a long way, and muddy as if he might have been lying on the ground.

"Git me some food," he gasped, "an' don't ask no questions. Ah'm clearin' out o' heah now. They'll be after me in a little while; so Ah'm gittin' whiles gittin's good. If y'all knows what's good fo' you, you'll git too." Between mouthfuls of pone he got out that much information. He put a pone in his pocket and rose. Before they could question him, he was gone.

Uncle Bart and Aunt Lindy hurried to a neighbor's house. There they learned the story which had already spread. Abe had been drunk and had broken into an apartment. While he had been looking through some jewelry, a girl came in alone. She had started to scream, but he leaped at her throat, caught her, and squeezed—squeezed until life had gone out of her. Two men came in then, and Abe jumped through the window and escaped. But they had seen him, and soon there would be a large party out to get him. Yes, even then the old folks could hear the hounds, the cries of the men. They were coming closer, closer. The dogs were leading the mob into the house, out again, on down the road.

Aunt Lindy sobbed heavily. Uncle Bart sat silent, occasionally pulling out his only handkerchief to wipe his eyes. Later they fell into heavy, exhausted sleep.

Aunt Lindy woke with a start. It was dark in the room, but outside there was a gray before-dawn twilight. "Bart, Bart," she called.

He rose and together they tiptoed out to the porch of the cabin.

Standing alone in the vacant lot, silhouetted against the gray twilight sky, it was terrifying. There was a new shadow underneath the low, bare branch of the lynching tree.

JUST FOR TONIGHT

Billie Layman

I mustn't dream of you tonight—
Of smoke-rings in the air,
Of blue champagne; a dim-lit light;
I must forget that I still care.

I thought you knew our love was through—
We'd forget our favorite "song",
Yet in the darkness I see you—
Reminding me I was wrong.

Just for tonight I'm sure you'd see
That it would be all right
To let your face come back to me;
I'll ask no more, but for tonight.

INTROVERT

Marjorie Kerrick Taylor

Strange lonely heart,
Seeking companionship,
Eager for friendship,
Finding no rest.

Defeated by coldness,
Dreading the future,
Fearing the wind's shriek,
Hoping for death.

LILAC TIME

Marjorie Kerrick Taylor

When you were here the lilacs were in bloom
And in each fragrant blossom was a song,
And I was very happy then. . . .
But you are gone. . . .
You left so very soon!

And now each year I wait impatiently
For lilac time to drive away the gloom,
Because to you lilacs were sacred things. . . .
You who are gone. . . .
You left so very soon!

TO MY TWO BUDDIES

Katherine Fossett

'Tis true, the story never shall grow old
Though for centuries its beauty has been told.
Then why should I tell it here again
When famed poets have related it to men?

But the story is: How do I love thee?
I love thee with all the strength within me,
With all my soul, my heart, and mind—
With all the power in the world I find.

When I come to peace and rest
I find a love that far exceeds the best.
I find thee waiting with a smile to cheer—
With an open heart to banish fear.

And why do I love thee? Because you're you.
With a voice of warmth and eyes of blue,
With a tender smile to greet each day
And a word of encouragement ready to say.

Now I've told my secret of my love for you.
Now you know the reason why my skies keep turning blue.
It's because I love you, and when everything looks gray
You show me to the sunshine of a bright and cheerful day.

TO A LEAF

Billie Layman

The little leaf came fluttering down
And skipped along the wall,
Its edges coiled all around
From the exciting fall.

No sooner had it reached the ground
And felt the earth's light touch;
No sooner reached when it was found
By a boy's treacherous clutch.

Little leaf, farewell to thee;
I'm sorry to see you go.
You kept your cling to the faithful tree
'Til you felt the North Wind blow.

CAN YOU TELL?

Janet West

Can you tell that the heart is merry
Because the eyes would proclaim as much?
Can you tell that a man is holy
By his look or voice or touch?
Can you tell that the soul is loving,
Good, honest, and true?
Can you tell if the heart is breaking
By the things that he says to you?

Are you sure that a man is noble
By the way that he holds his chin?
Are you sure that his spirit is dauntless
Because his eyes laugh and grin?
Would you say that a man is only
As good as his outside looks,
Or would you say that all men have souls
Just as all covers have books?

LIFE'S HIGHWAY

Janet West

Life is a highway of burdens
We must journey before we may rest.
Life is a highway of crosses
We must bear before we are blessed.
Life is a highway of milestone
Treaded with weary feet.
Life is a highway of sorrows
With more that is bitter than sweet.
Yes! life has burdens and crosses,
And sorrows and milestones, too,
But life has a great compensation
That awaits when the journey is through.
For all who have traveled the journey
And taken its jolts with a smile
Life has the prizes we searched for
In vain on each careworn mile.

THE SECRET STREAM

Tommye Rankin

Between two walls of waving grass
The clear stream rushes by
Amidst the stately sycamore
And maple towering high.

Reflecting nodding violets
That tiptoe on its banks
Like little sapphire ring sets
Held with green gold clamps.

Mirroring gentle love scenes ;
A chubby boy at play,
Beggars, princes, maids and queens
The stream goes on its way ;

Happily gurgling secret stories
In a tongue yet strange to men,
Passing scenes of death and glories,
Buries each one deep within.