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Belles Lettres, Autumn 1953

Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

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Belles Lettres

*Eastern Kentucky
State College*

AUTUMN 1953

Belles Lettres

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

STAFF

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FOREWORD

In the hope of promoting literary efforts and encouraging worthwhile reading, we, the Editors of BELLES LETTRES, take pride in presenting this, the first issue of our twentieth volume.

the sun in jeopardy

THOM MCELFRISH

There was a small Christmas tree on the table. I hadn't noticed it before. In the darkness the flashing sign across the street caught red and green sparkles in the tinsel and burnished them in tiny flames.

The room was cold. A silent barren chill lay across the shadowed floor. They—those simple complements of the man's life—stood frozen in some strange tableau. The sound of the brittle December wind rattling in the windows accented the coldness of the room.

I shivered and thought of the warmth of other places—home, a subway, a theatre lobby where a billboard advertised his play, *The Sun in Jeopardy*.

Then I realized that this was the last time I would ever see the study like this—with the spirit still there. By tomorrow the place will have been defiled by the investigators seeking the cause of a routine suicide.

The note caught my eye. It was lying pale against the dark green desk blotter. Addressed to me. Simple.

Ken

Whatever you do, remember that there is only one time—now. The past is gone and will be forgotten. The future is cold and forbidding. I couldn't take today. I was weak. Ken, forgive me. And tell Julie, tell her this.

Tim

I lighted a cigarette and threw the burnt-out match into the cold ashes in the fireplace. Someone passed along the corridor outside the door, footsteps drumming into the worn carpet.

This had been the center of Tim's life. The study with its drama collection, the worn furniture, the broad desk. Without its usual clutter the desk seemed naked and sorrowing in the darkness.

The note still lay on the blotter. I had not yet touched it. All that Tim had been and had believed was there in those simple words. And I knew that no one should ever read it but me. In alien hands it would have been an outrage, for in it Tim had poured out the last of his heart.

He knew and had taught me that there is no time like the present, although the world is full of innocent bystanders—those who look back at the good old days, and those who look forward to a bright and shiny better day to come. They are blind to the now.

In the breathless, chilled hush of his deserted study I saw his life end as he finally put into words what he had always believed but had never dared to write.

Tim had known and had hated himself for knowing, for it was a knowing sickened with regret. As he realized that the now is the only important time, he also realized that he was without the strength to grasp that time and live it to its worth. And it broke his heart to see the now drift by untouched or barely touched by him.

His plays had spoken only part of it. *The Sun in Jeopardy* had come closest. He made his characters feel as he wished to feel and speak as he died to speak, but within himself he feared. And no man can live with a broken and fearing heart.

The audience was applauding for the fourth curtain call in the warm theatre down the street as I burned the note. A stem of blue smoke rose from the ash tray, twisting into the chilled air.

OCTOBER FIRE

E. M. AGUINALDO

October flames upon the hill
Where tree leaves burn against the sky,
And sparks from sumach torches spill
In every path that they blaze by.

Burn slower, autumn, yes, burn slow!
Too soon your fire will sink to ember,
Too soon the last, bright flickers glow,
And sink to ashes of December.

MY SOUL AND THE SEA

BETTY BRETT OGDEN

I walked alone one dreary night;
My soul was seeking peace and light.
I walked along a lonely shore
And beheld the ocean there once more.

The moon had risen o'er the sea
And lit a pathway just for me.
Somehow as I looked at that great sea,
My heart was filled with peace—and glee.

For the waves roll in and the waves roll out
As on and on they go
With perfect rhythm—perfect time—
Never fast—never slow.

Seasons come and seasons go—
War and peace; sun and snow;
Day and night; love and hate.
None can change the ocean great.

Oh, if my soul could only be
Strong and bold as that great sea,
Fixed upon the Rock that's strong—
My soul would sing this song:

For the waves roll in, and the waves roll out
As on and on they go
With perfect rhythm, perfect time,
Never fast—never slow.

EMOTION

WALLACE SULLIVAN

A thing so great it brings the tears,
Along with thoughts of by-gone years.
Hidden deep within one's heart,
With love, even hate it cannot part.
It grows and grows with each new phase,
Until it bursts in jumbled maze.
A thing so lovely, and yet so sad,
It brings out good but also bad.
It blocks the mind, it tears the heart,
And pierces the body like a dart.
A light may go out, wind subside;
But emotion will in you abide.

IL PENSEROSO

MARY ELIZABETH JOHNSON

Genii of rest and pensiveness
Bring twilight's touch of quietness.
In solitude and silence steep
The "me" that will forever keep
The memories of a child's soft coo,
Or kind, true friends that are so few,
Or words but whispered to the air,
That were so sweet when in my ear.
This vesper hour, oh, let me hear
In memory a hymn so dear
As never sung by earthly man,
But played on harp with peace and plan
That quiets trouble, quickens thought
To all good things which God hath wrought.
Then place me in a sphere of blue,
Blue sky, blue grass, and clear blue dew,
Surround me with a clean close smell,
Lilacs of spring. Then let me dwell
On work completed, just some small task.
Then I shall sleep. No more I'll ask.
Genii, if all these works you'll do,
I will forever live with you.

THOUGHTS ON A WINTER'S DAY

ROSALYN RUSSELL

I watch the snow fall from the heaven's gray,
And wonder as it piles in drifts of white
What peace it holds! The promise that some day
O'er all the world the glow of freedom's light
Will pierce our hearts, and we shall live in peace.
But as the beauty of the snow soon dies
The lovely thoughts within my heart all cease,
And I can see the ground on which it lies
As something ugly—to despise and hate,
Not as it really is—a promise too,
That there will come a day, as sure as Fate,
When flowers, and grass, and hearts will live anew.
But life is so involved in haste and duty,
Who dares to see in things around us beauty?

A DRINK OF SHADES

ALICIA McCHORD

Sleep, image of death,
I love thee, for thou dost cloak my sorrows.
Thy still peace bringeth relief from worldly care.
Thou art moral drunkenness, my friend.
And from thee I shall rise anew, readied to take up
old and new strifes.
I rise rested from thy limbo.

THE COME-BACK

MARY JO CAMPBELL

"Dave said she looks terrible," Janet said. "He saw her at the movie by herself the other night."

"By herself!" Anne seemed shocked. "First time I ever heard of Joyce Parker going somewhere by herself! She must be in bad shape."

"Well," said Joanne in her customary calm way, "I suppose if I had been in a bad automobile accident and my face was scarred, I'd be a little shy about seeing all my old friends again, too. I think she'll be all right when she finds out that we don't care how she looks. She'll still be the same old Joy."

"I wonder when she's going to come out of hiding," said Anne.

"Pretty soon, I hope," replied Janet untactfully; "I'm getting curious to see what she looks like."

"Well, you'll get your wish this afternoon," Joanne said sharply. "I talked to her mother this morning and told her we would be glad to meet Joy here this afternoon. She said Joy had just about gotten up enough courage to come downtown."

"So that's why you called us down here!" Janet exclaimed. "But why did you pick this place—you know the whole gang is here every afternoon about this time."

"I thought she might as well find out that no one is against her just because she isn't as pretty as she used to be."

Anne suddenly looked out the plate glass window of the drugstore. "Don't anybody look now," she said. "She's crossing the street."

"What will we say to her?" Janet asked nervously.

"I don't know," Joanne replied calmly. "It will all depend on how she acts toward us. Please don't anybody look shocked."

The three girls suddenly began to drink their cokes as if they hadn't had a drink in a month.

Joyce Parker walked into the crowded drugstore and spoke shyly to a few surprised boys seated at the soda-fountain, who responded as best they could. Her face was scarred, but not as much as the girls had expected. To one who had never seen the girl, she might appear almost normal. But to the people she had known all her life, she looked very different. From the way she walked over to the girls' table, they could tell she had changed inwardly, too. It would take a lot of courage for her to become the smiling, happy, carefree Joy again—a lot of courage and a lot of patience to become the popular, confident girl she had been before the terrible accident.

Now she walked up to the table quickly, as if she wanted to get the ordeal over with as quickly as possible.

"Hi, girls," was all she could say.

"Hello, Joy," Janet replied nervously.

"Welcome back, Joy," Joanne said sincerely.

"Pull up a chair," invited Anne. "We were beginning to wonder if you had forgotten us."

"No, I hadn't forgotten you," Joy said cuttingly. "Mother has reminded me a dozen times that I had to meet you today."

"Well, I like that," Anne began thoughtlessly. "What are we, social outcasts or something?" As soon as the words were out, she knew she shouldn't have said them.

"No, but I am," Joy said defiantly, as if daring them to deny it.

No one said anything. Again the girls drank their cokes as if they were dying of thirst.

Joanne broke the embarrassing silence. "You're no different than you

ever were, Joy, unless you make yourself different by always reminding people of your—accident.”

Joy was immediately sorry that she had spoken so rashly. “I know you’re right, Joanne, but I just can’t—”

“Don’t say another word, Joy. We know how you must feel, but please don’t make us unhappy, and please wait to pass judgment on yourself until you see how glad everyone will be to see you again.”

The gang was beginning to drift into the already crowded drugstore, and gradually several of the boys drifted over to the table. Finally the whole gang was crowded around the table, welcoming Joy back. Joanne could have kissed them every one for being so nice.

“Hi, Joy! Good to see you back! How do you feel, kid?”

“Long time no see, Joy! Going to the party tonight?”

“Well, look who’s back! Life begins again!”

Joy, at first embarrassed and painfully self-conscious, began to talk and joke with the boys as she had always done. Soon she lost herself in conversation with the gang, and was asking one question after another, trying to catch up on the events of the last three months that she had missed. She laughed and soon everyone else laughed. The gang was happy to have her back, and she was glad to be back.

Joanne got up from the crowded table, unnoticed. She walked back to the telephone booths and dialed a number.

“Hello, Mrs. Parker. This is Joanne. You don’t have a thing to worry about, Mrs. Parker. Joy is just the same as she’s always been—right in the middle of a crowd.”

LONGING

JEANETTE SOWDERS

Last night I dreamed of you,
And days when our love was new
Of happy moments past
Of days when I saw you last.

Last night I relived our love
And walked again on skies above.
I sang with the heavenly host
Of you, the one I love most.

Till morning light broke through
I peacefully dreamed of you
But with morning reality came
And I knew things weren’t the same,

For you, my love, are far away
And every dew drop seems to say,
‘He left—gone—forever—
No use to hope—whatever.’

And so the dream is burst,
But still for you I thirst.
Please, my darling—return to me.
Return in answer to my last plea.

Yet a few days I may linger
Then I’ll be a heavenly singer.
Till you come, I’ll pray heaven above.
Come back—come back—my love!

SUDDEN RECOGNITION IN PSYCHOLOGY CLASS

G. H. W.

Sing me no sad songs,
Tell me no sad tales,
For I have seen the light,
The shaft of recognition whizzing through the darkness
of misunderstanding and doubt.
I have seen
that I am in love with love itself.
And I am sad.

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

WANDA SMYTH

There's so much I must do today.
The ironing lies unsprinkled
On the old couch with dust beneath;
The weeds have stifled the petunies;
The yard high with leaves is heaped.

There are dishes in the kitchen sink
And the beds must be made by nine,
Potatoes need diggin' and peas pickin',
Dinner must be right on time.

Gee, there's so much to do.
Aunt Susie to write; a new book
To read if I keep up with the times;
But first, first I'll just:

... sit here on the porch
And wiggle my bare toes in the sand;
And listen to the ringing symphony
Of the wind in the maples.

I'll watch the tiny wisps of fluff
Wander aimlessly across the sky;
I'll get lost in the space ship
Of the burning bright bowl of the sun.

I'll tour from flower to flower
On the energetic wings of the butterfly.
I'll taste the sticky sweet honey
And make love to the leopard lily.

I'll forget the dinner, the ironin',
The letter to Aunt Susie, the kitchen sink;
I'll fly off now with the bumble bee—
Huh? Yes, Mother, just a minute—

MY LOVE

ANONYMOUS

Tonight, the moon is full, my love—
Tonight on this fall evening
As it shines bright above
And through the clouds it's weaving.

Tonight, the moon is full, my love,
As on that night last spring.
But now you do not want me—No!
"TO BE ALONE," I sing.

Tonight, the moon is full, my love,
As it pales from its orange hue.
Though you are now with someone else
For me there'll be no one but you.

Tonight, the moon is full, my love;
It's here for us to share.
I wish you would come back to me
And show me that you care.

AFTER THE GAME

G. H. WOLFFORD

"What a nice sunny Saturday afternoon," Joan thought as she put the finishing touches on one of her hardest subject papers. But this paper hadn't bothered Joan one bit, for she was going to be with Rod tonight. Out of an orange-colored sky he had come along after math class that morning and asked her to go to the big football game with St. Mary's, and to top it off, the dance that followed. It wasn't one of the more important games, but Joan had been surprised—almost shocked—when she learned Rod wasn't taking Betty to the first home game of the season. Later, by a discreet inquiry, she found out there had been a little spat between the two; and it was the first time they had broken up in the two years of courtship. Yes, Joan was anticipating a wonderful evening.

"Okay, boys, knock it off," were Coach Bronson's orders to the team as they came off the field after preparing for the game.

Jack was anxious for the long hours of waiting to pass, waiting to trounce St. Mary's in the first home game of his college career. The other members of the squad were in just about the same frame of mind that he was, and the whole stadium rocked with their loud rollicking. The cold shower was invigorating, and the team spirit was overwhelming as the squad passed outside in groups of two's and three's. It was only another casual statement that Jack made—"Boy, won't this be a great night for a football game!"

Almost everyone was agreed on one fact—the weather and temperament of the day. All the teachers were glad to see that last class go, and the pupils twice as glad. Everyone was burning with the anxiety of the first home game. All the way down the line they agreed, even now as President O'Connell is telling Pap, the night watchman, what he thinks of the day and predicts for the night. Pap, in his own deliberate "wait and see" manner, is the only one on the campus who won't predict beautiful weather for the weekend.

When the hour of eight had arrived, and Rod had not come, Joan, worried and wondering where he could be, wandered over from Durham hall to Lane Stadium. She had little interest in the football game, and her roving eye finally caught sight of Rod—and Betty!

"Oh dear! What had happened? This is the end of a perfectly lovely evening!"

These and several other thoughts were erased by a roar from the crowd. An injured player was being taken from the field, and a sub going in for him. Her heart jumped as she recognized the new player as the boy who sat near her in English class, and she almost groaned as he was taken out after only two plays, for Jack had had little time to prove his ability as a player.

Jack felt miserable. Here they were, with only seconds to go, and behind 10-0. Although Warhead was putting on a gallant stand, it seemed evident that they were beaten. When the final gun sounded, Warhead was in possession of the ball, and with only eight yards to go.

"What a crummy night," Jack mumbled, as he dragged himself back toward the dressing room. "What else *could* happen?"

Just then the first drop of rain fell.

He was feeling worse as he walked into the Student Union Building.

"Could *anyone* else feel so bad?" A soft voice awoke him from his mournful dream. "You played very well tonight, for what time you were in."

He looked up to see that Joan was the soothing influence on his troubled mind. During the course of events, Jack and Joan got to know each other as well as two young people can get acquainted in two short hours.

After the Student Union Building clock had chimed midnight and the doors of Durham Hall had closed, Jack walked whistling back to his dorm, to dream. Old Pap, the night watchman, who seemed to see and know all that went on, chuckled to his lone companion, a small dog.

"Turned out to be a pretty fair night after all, huh, Crackerjack?"

A MODERN BALLAD

MARY ELIZABETH JOHNSON

The farmer's son was strong and bold,
Black hair and eyes of blue.
The merchant's son was oh so smart.
He had some money too.

Now enters the sweet maiden fair.
Brown eyed, her name was Anne.
Her step was light and fairylike.
Her ring on lily hand.

The farmer's and the merchant's son,
She knew them both quite well.
She tried to make her mind up fair,
But which she could not tell.

Much good advice was given Anne
By family. The kin
Would sit and talk of poor Anne's beau.
They liked both Bill and Ben.

Ben was the merchant's pride and joy.
The farmer's son was Bill.
They both did vow for her they'd die,
For Anne they'd even kill.

In olden days the simple way
For this sad song to end
Would be for our dear Anne to die,
And Bill would soon kill Ben.

But in this modern day and age,
Anne stopped her fear and sob;
She made her mind up, quick and fast,
And ran away with Bob.

INTERLUDE

WANDA SMYTH

The air is still and cold. A strange moon, a golden lonely moon shines through the soft azure curtain upon a silent countryside. It is a lonely moon that loses its starry companions in the deep deep navy of the sky and the shifting of the clouds.

A light frost covers the crisp grass and catches the wan light from the sky. The hills stretch far away as dark centurions who guard the valley against the changes of man and progress. They are the foreboding of ill will to the stranger who does not know and understand their strange beauty. To the child of them, the lonely hills call as quicksand of the marsh—they call, and promise to solace and comfort.

The owl is heard breaking the silence from the depths of the nearby trees while a few solitary lights beacon from the distance.

There is a feeling about the scene, a feeling of timelessness, as if before your eyes the centuries were walking past and you were lost—a small, small flake of soon-to-melt snow in the intricate pattern of God's eternity. And, yet, you, as the snow flake, have a design, a beautiful pattern that is unlike all others. So you gaze into the vastness of the heavens and are caught into the feeling of bodilessness, as if you stood above and out of the earth, alone with the strange moon and the glittering stars—alone, and unafraid. And, then, a light breeze quivers through the trees and the distant lights seem to flicker. A chill runs through you and, suddenly, the spell is broken; the magic is gone. You stand under only a cold, night sky watching a pale moon and unsure stars.

Yet, it is with a strange new strength that you turn away from your interlude with eternity.

FIRESIDE DREAMER

(FOR AILENE)

DONNA MINCEY

O light before my hearth,
Where red fire is leaping,
It's eery shadows,
Shadows slowly leaping,
You are no more to my woman
Who lies sleeping.

Flicker on, bright fire,
Hear not my weeping,
Burn thou not near a grave
Where red roses slow are creeping,
And embers now, destroy not the grass
Beneath which my woman still lies sleeping.

Cool white ashes now,
No more alight,
Shed no more warmth
Through my window panes at night.
Sleep now, my woman, and this fire,
Both once so warm and bright.

O little dreamer that I am,
I sit alone this night
At a hearth no longer tended
By a woman gay and bright,
And an empty hearth betrays
An empty heart.
Fireside dreamer!!
With dreams no more gay and light.

ON APPLYING FOR A JOB

BRUCE BATES

I admit—I am overly self-conscious when applying for a job. There is something about a waiting room, where everyone is wishing failure on everyone else, that makes my nerves worm out through my epidermis and quiver at a rate of several thousand vibrations per second. My soul-fellowship with the condemned felon waiting in his cell the night before the execution has caused me to oppose capital punishment. These people in the waiting room are invariably and unanimously of Olympian mold. I pale to near-invisibility.

My references take on the aspect of a Belgian neutrality treaty. When at last it is my turn to be interviewed, my general appearance is that of a heroin addict suffering withdrawal symptoms.

Why is it that the job interviewer always looks like a sadistic dentist? These people have missed their calling. Six hundred years ago they would have been Keepers of the Keys, or the man at the helm of an infidel-stretching machine.

The man smiles, displaying row upon row of unnaturally sharp teeth. "What is your social security number?" he asks.

By some intuitive process this fiend has singled out my weak spot. I resolve to go immediately and have my social security number, my draft number, and my automobile license number tattooed on the sole of my left foot. My chances are ruined. By the time I can return with the number the job will be taken. Without a word I pick up my unopened sheaf of references and make for the door.

"Wait!" he cries, and a wave of relief sweeps over me. This great heart, this god-on-earth, this fulfillment of the promise of civilization, he is going to give me another chance! Joyfully I turn back.

He smiles half-apologetically—and says, "As you go, would you tell the next applicant I will see him now?"

THERE IS

ALICIA McCHORD

Who has ever heard of a sun-lit star?

There is such a thing!

There are ruby chandeliers and beneath—

flaming hair with crystal tears rushing from jagged eyes.

There are tree boughs that enfold and near—

waterfalls that sing and are filled with sparkling emeralds—
the only sound, a croak!

There are such things.

There is love and hate, and

love and jealousy, and

love and respite, and

love and weariness, and

love and despair.

But mostly there is love—there must be!

For is there not a sky!

Are there no sweet tender blades of grass!

Is there no ground on which to walk!

And are there no feet with which to walk!

There are, for there are you—and I—and God.