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# Belles Lettres, 1957

Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

# Belles Lettres

## Eastern Kentucky State College

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# Belles Lettres

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# FOREWORD

The Staff of BELLES LETTRES has attempted to include in this volume a variety of writings from as many students as possible and to maintain a high literary standard.

The Staff wishes to thank all of those who have contributed in any way to the publication of this volume. Especially do the editors wish to thank all of those who have presented literary offerings for this volume.

# IT'S SOMETHING I THOUGHT ROSE WOULD LIKE

ANNA COOPER

All the way home from work that evening, Carl thought of Easter Sunday, which was only two days away, and of his young wife, Rose, who had died of pneumonia and been buried in the last winter month. As Carl started to climb the stairs to his apartment, he felt very lonely. His feet felt heavy. By the time he got to the landing he seemed unreasonably weary, and he rested to take a deep breath. He was a tall, thin, young man wearing a baggy tweed suit. He had a fair, thin moustache, which he sometimes touched with the tip of his tongue, and his blue eyes, behind the heavy horn-rimmed glasses, were deep-set and wistful. He had been thinking how all the church bells would ring on Easter Sunday while the choirs sang of the Lord, who had risen from the dead, and he hoped it would be a crystal-clear, sunlit day. Last Easter, at a time when he and Rose had been married only a few weeks, they had gone to church together, and he had held her hand tightly even while they knelt down to pray. Her eyes had been closed as she knelt beside him and he had kept on looking at the expression of contentment on her nervous face, half-framed in her bobbed, dark hair.

"I guess there's no use thinking of that," he said as he started to climb the stairs again, yet he went on thinking stubbornly that all over the country on Sunday there would be a kind of awakening after the winter; in the city the church choirs would chant that the dead had returned to life, and for some reason it stirred him to feel that Rose was so alive and close to him in his own thoughts.

In the narrow hall below his own apartment he encountered Irma Jones, a friend of his dead wife, who was going out, dressed in a smart blue suit and a little blue straw hat. She was an assertive, fair-haired, solidly-built girl. Since Rose had died, Irma Jones had taken it for granted that Carl wanted her to look after him. In the dimly-lit hall, she waited—smiling, leaning back against the wall.

"Hello, Irma," he said. "Have you got your new Easter suit on?"

"I sure have. How do you like it, Carl?" she said, turning and pivoting with one foot off the floor.

"It looks good. When I was coming along the street I was thinking that Easter was Rose's favorite time of the year."

"I know, Carl, but be a little fairer to yourself," she said brusquely as she pulled on her black gloves.

"You oughtn't to go around always with a long face like that. It isn't right," and for no other reason than that she had a malicious disposition and was irritated by his persistent devotion to his dead wife, she went on, "Poor little Rose. I was thinking of her today. She didn't have much of a chance to enjoy herself, did she? There were even little things she missed."

"What little things?" he said.

"Oh, nothing much," she said, smoothing her coat at the hips with her gloved hands. "You know just a few days before she died, she told me about a porch swing she saw downtown and had her heart set on. Fancy that."

"You must have got her wrong," he said. "She didn't really want that swing. We were saving to get along. I was studying engineering at nights and we needed every nickel. But I had planned to get her the swing for her birthday."

With a sly, knowing look at him, Irma patted him on the shoulder, took a deep, sighing breath and walked away.

Carl sat down as soon as he was alone in his own room, took off his glasses and thought of the last time he had been downtown with Rose and they had seen the swing. She had hardly mentioned wanting it. She had sat down in the swing and smiled up at him. Then she had stood up, still smiling, and had patted the swing with her hand. It had never occurred to him that she would come home and tell Irma Jones that she wanted that swing.

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That night Carl did not sleep well; he had a bad dream, and then he lay awake wondering why Rose had been afraid to ask him for the swing.

All the next day while at work, Carl was wishing earnestly that he could find some way to show Rose that he would not have begrudged her anything in the world. He thought of telling her in a prayer. The more he thought of it the closer she seemed to him, and then he decided at noontime when he was out in the crowded streets that he would like to do something more definite than praying.

He had just come out of a drugstore after having a sandwich and a cup of coffee and was looking at the noonday crowd passing along the street. A great many of the women were wearing their winter clothes for the last time. On Easter Sunday they would go for a walk down the avenue with their new dresses blowing in the breeze. Carl and his wife had watched the fashion parade last year. It had been like watching people coming to life in new raiment and getting ready for a new season. As he lit a cigarette, he smiled and thought, "Maybe nothing, or no one ever dies."

Then he grinned to himself and said, "I'd like an awful lot to go and buy that swing and take it home and have it in the porch for Easter Sunday." He wouldn't admit to himself at all that he was trying to prove he had never begrudged anything to Rose.

On Saturday afternoon Carl went downtown to the store where they had looked at the swing. At first he had the notion that it might be gone, but as he looked around he saw four or five swings just like the one Rose had wanted. But when the salesman approached him he felt uneasy and foolish. "If I want to buy a swing, why can't I buy a swing?" he thought stubbornly.

"I've had this swing picked out for some time," Carl said as he put his hand in his pocket for the money. Then he surprised himself by adding confidentially, "I had planned to buy this swing for my wife. I don't know why she liked this particular style so much."

"If she liked it then, she'll like it now," the salesman said with judicial assurance. "And it'll stand up against a lot of wear, too."

On Easter Sunday when he got up he wouldn't admit that he was eager, but he was quite pleased with himself. He didn't wait to dress. He put on his old brown dressing gown and his bath-room slippers and went into the porch to look at the swing. With a gentle motion he pushed it back and forth a few times, a faint, tender smile at the corners of his mouth, because it was so easy to imagine that Rose was sitting there in her pale blue printed house dress. He began to walk up and down. It was just the kind of Sunday he had wanted it to be with a cloudless blue sky and streaming sunlight. For a long time he listened to the clanging church bells and watched the people moving down on the sidewalk. "I ought to let Irma Jones look at the swing and see if she gets the idea," he said.

He got dressed in a hurry. But when he went downstairs and rapped on Miss Jones's door he felt both shy and awkward, for it occurred to him it would be hard to explain why he bought the swing, if he were asked, especially if she didn't get the idea at once. Her blue eyes snapped wide open when she saw him. She held her pink dressing gown across her throat. As she began to show that she was pleased at seeing him there, he said, "Say, Irma, come on upstairs and have a bit of breakfast with me, will you? You know, it's Easter and we'll boil a lot of eggs."

"That's a fine idea. Just sit down here," she said as she pointed to the couch.

Irma almost laughed to herself. "The poor fellow's lonely and can't hold out any longer," she thought as she ran into her bedroom, daubing powder on her face and twisting her yellow hair back in a knot. Coming out, she smiled brightly and gaily at him. She began to hum, and when they went upstairs together to his apartment she had hold of his arm as if they were going off to a quiet place to have tea.

"I bought something yesterday. Maybe it'll surprise you a bit to see it," he said with a certain diffidence.

"What is it?"

"Just something I thought I ought to have around," he said.

They walked on through the living room and out into the second story porch. He stood behind her to conceal his embarrassment as she glanced quickly at the swing. She turned, and he gave her one wistful smile. She seemed to puff out with good humor. "He's trying to please me by showing me he's not afraid to spend his money now on something he was too tight to give Rose," she thought. Then she sat down slowly in the swing, relaxed, and swung gently back and forth. "You're a dear boy, Tom," she said. "You really are a dear boy."

Running his hand through his mop of hair, he waited for her to participate in his own secret feeling. But she was swaying back and forth, her face creased with little smiles. He felt angry. "The stupid woman," he thought. He knew she thought he was trying in some clumsy way to please her. As she swung back and forth, beaming good humor, she looked so comfortable he felt outraged.

"Please don't sit in the swing," he said in a mild voice.

"What's the matter with me sitting here, Carl?"

He felt he was going to appear absurd, so he said, coaxing her, "I just want you to come over here by the window, that's all."

"This swing's so comfortable. You come here," she said coyly.

"Why do you want to stay there?" he said impatiently. "You can't have your breakfast there, can you?"

Reluctant, she got up, and as she came towards him, humming, she started to sway her hips. But he went right past her to the swing and sat down with a stubborn expression on his face, while he blinked his eyes and watched her putting her hands on her hips and her head on one side in exasperation. He watched her embarrassment increase. Her face got red. With sober angry faces they kept on staring at each other. "My, you're rude," she said at last. "Such a stupid way to act."

He took off his glasses and wiped them with his handkerchief because his eyes felt moist. "I suppose I didn't want anybody to sit in this swing," he said, trying to make a decent apology. "It's something I thought Rose would like, that's all."

"I see, I see," Irma said sharply. "Of course I see. But I can't help thinking you're a fool," she said. "You can't blame me for that. Though I suppose it's more likely you went out and bought the swing for yourself." Nodding her head up and down in little jerks, she said contemptuously, "Imagine you going out and buying that swing after refusing it to your poor wife."

"You don't get the idea at all," he said.

"Maybe I don't," she said. "But I'll be hanged if I stay and have breakfast with anybody as rude as you." She gave him one bitter glance and walked out of the room.

He put his glasses on and adjusted them on his nose. Then he closed his eyes and with one hand on the arm of the swing, he moved it back and forth, back and forth. "What did I expect anyway?" he thought. He pondered the matter; in the beginning he had been thinking of the church choirs that would sing, "Christ the Lord has risen today." He stopped swinging and leaned forward with his eyes open and his hands gripped between his knees. "But what did I expect the swing to do? Did I actually think it would help bring Rose closer to me?" Then he started to swing again, and frowning he wondered why he had bought the swing at all. Outside the last of the church bells were ringing. Closing his eyes he went on swinging, back and forth.

## ONE DEATH

SHARON BROWN

Alone within my breast my heart stopped its faithful throb,
And missing your heart's velvet touch, mine floated up to God.

## A COUNTRY BOY'S TALK WITH THE CITY STRANGER

TIPPY NOE

He began in the same manner I'd met afore
To explain how he was a commodore,
Where all he'd been—What all he'd seen:
He'd visited Paris—Talked with a queen.
But where had I been—and what had I seen?
And here I was goin' on Seventeen—
He talked and I listened—and when he was done,
I talked and he listened—and laughed out of fun.
Suh—is you ever been bucked off a mule?
Swum naked in a bright clear pool?
Shot bottles spinnin' high in the air?
Tended God's earth with lovin' care?
Felt the black soil between your toes?
Smelt honeysuckle—seen it grow?
Swung on a grapevine—driven a team?
Seen a whole field of Kentucky wheat gleam?
Heard gittars strummin under the moon?
Been huntin' for the big-eyed coon?
He listened, laughed, and left that day,
And we wus both happy—in our own way.

## REFULGENT LOVE

SHARON BROWN

In muffled tones I said his name—
My gaze upon his lips.
I heard him answer back my name—
With voice that swerved and dipped.
His hand on mine was smooth and cool,
His fingers thin and stern.
His eyes like gentle rainy pools
With depths that made me burn.
He op'ed his lips and said his love,
And I with open ear,
Felt the angels stir above,
And music did I hear.
His lips sought mine with gentle tread,
And passing love paused overhead.

## WHEN THE STARS GO DANCING

JUNE C. FULLER

The silver stars and the silver moon,
Shine upon me within my room;
As I sit in the window of the silvery night;
They seem to me such a beautiful sight;
They dance around in, oh, such grace,
In their low-cut costumes all fluffy with lace;
Stars all surround the silver moon;
He looks so funny in his tight costume.
They dance and dance, you never saw such a sight,
When the stars go dancing on a dark blue night.
They dance around, until it is very late,
Then they fly away, until they have another date
To dance for my enjoyment upon a stage,
Which is now just a memory, covered by a dark blue haze.

# THE CLAM DIGGER

J. Fair McCrery

The sun rises over the edge of the sea,
And the tide creeps out.
The air is fresh and the breeze is cool.
A lone figure walks along the shore line.
She takes her time as the dying wavelettes
Nip at her bare feet, and
Her golden hair glistens in the sun.
No song from her lips, no smile in her eye.
Slowly she treads across the eternal sand,
Leaving her trail to fill up with water.
What is the chore which brings this comely maid
Out at this hour?
She sets her pail down and kneels to the ground.
With long slender fingers
She begins digging in the sand.
One by one she places her pieces of treasure
Into the bucket.
It is filled.
She rises and walks into the water,
Holding her skirt with one hand,
Dips the other in the water and then
brushes a stray lock from her face.
Leaving the water, she picks up her clam bucket,
And sets her intent on returning wither she came,
Before Apollo's chariot reaches the top of the sky.
The water erases all trace of her presence
Lake a large broom sweeping a hearth.

A single gull wings it's solitary way across the sky.

# A DOLLAR BILL AND RED INK

Bert C. Bach

Saturday in Fordsville, Kentucky, is a festive affair. Fifteen hundred people make up the total population of this community, but in its own way, the little county seat becomes a busy metropolis on the long-awaited day of the week. All the country people come to town and stay until sunset; then, almost without a fellow realizing it, they begin to leave and by dark Fordsville is the sleepy little county seat again.

As the Saturday noonday traffic moved slowly up the narrow main street, I leaned against a rail which ran down the courthouse steps and finally formed one of them antique (Mom used to call it an-ti-cue) circles at the bottom. That is, it used to form an antique circle. Now the rail shows knife marks some old man made trying to make time pass while he was waitin' on the bus that goes up to Lotts Crick. The sidewalk all the way down to the A & P store is hot as hell. Down there they got one of them veranders that keeps the sun off until about half after three. Then the sun gets around the verander and the sidewalk there is hot too. It ain't that I want to stand on the hot sidewalk rather than go down in front of the A & P; it's just that it's too hot to walk down there. As long as I'm going to stand here, there are two things I got to resign myself to. First, if you stand in front of a hot courthouse on Saturday you always got to smell spat-out 'baccer; you are also obligated to buy some cookies from the Boy Scouts. It ain't that I dislike cookies—it's just that Saturday has an effect on Boy Scout cookies that always makes them taste like they come over on the Mayflower. Again it ain't that I dislike the Mayflower or the Pilgrims or that I doubt that the Pilgrims could make good cookies. It's just that I don't like Boy Scout

cookies, especially on Saturday, that taste like they come across the water that fer back. Puttin' all and all together, I don't think I particularly like Fordsville on Saturday after all. Take yesterday for instance—It was peaceful. Yeh, I think if I had my pick of days they could leave out of the week, I'd pick Saturday and be sure to keep Friday nights.

Last night about six I was fixin' to go pick up my gal when I decided to get a shoe shine. I saw the little boy that always shines shoes standing down under that same verander at the A & P store. Guess he must have thought since the sun hit there last this evening it would stay warm the longest and he could crawl next to them glass doors and sleep until somebody wanted a shine. I yelled at him to come up and shine my shoes on the courthouse steps.

That little shine boy had always seemed like a kind of strange kid to me. He had long sandy hair and deep, blue eyes that seemed like they was watering all the time. Don't think I ever saw him wear anything but those blue overalls and the white sweatshirt with the picture of Bob Feller on the front. All in all, he was a kind of normal kid, but he still seemed kind of quiet and strange to me when he walked up the sidewalk with the long sandy hair bouncing with each step he took.

I must have kind of dozed off when I heard the regular beat of his brush on my brown shoe. Then it may have been the warmth of the wall I leaned against that made me sleepy. Anyway, it seemed as if I was sort of dreamin' and then I remembered a long time ago when I had been shining shoes on the same street. No, I'll take that back. I was shining down on the corner where the parkin' lot is now. Back then there was a feed store there and right next door a livery stable that all the well-to-do folks in town used.

Twenty years ago it must have been, when I was there on the street. I remember a Saturday best; maybe it was longer than that, but still I remember it exactly. I was on my knees on the sidewalk buffing a pair of boots when a barker from a carnival came along in an old beat-up, Ford pickup. I don't know why I did it, but as the crowd began to gather I couldn't help slipping under the tall ones and around the fat ones until I was right in front of the barker. Then I could really see him good. He was a short and fat man; his receded hairline showed me that he was of middle age. I guess I remember best that bright red vest and the pink tie and lavender pants. Boy, he was dressed real elaborate like. I've never seen anybody in the world that had on any sich an outfit as that'un was.

The more that old barker yelled, the more interested I got. Finally, when he said he could do a great miracle, I got real interested. From his pocket he took a dollar bill and poured red ink all over it. Then he told us all that we knowed it was a federal offense to deface currency. I remember when he started putting the ink on the bill the crowd started to get even larger. From the back of his broken-down, Ford pick-up he took one of his bottles of cleaner. Opening the bottle he poured just a few drops on the dollar bill and the ink began to fade. It was a miracle. Within a half minute not a trace of the ink was left. Well, I decided then and there that some of that cleaner was just what I needed. Certainly if it would take ink out of a dollar bill, it would get some of the tar off my customers' shoes. So I dug down in my pocket and found that I had only three dollars. Disappointed at the fact that I would be able to buy only six bottles of the cleaner, I hurriedly questioned the barker as to when he would be back and I could get another shipment. He kind of brushed me off and I began to think. You know, it's a funny thing—you hardly ever see the same one of them barkers around but once.

Well, I started using my cleaner on all the shoes that were especially dirty. No luck at all. I tried each and every bottle of that cleaner and it wouldn't even take egg off breakfast dishes. It was then that I decided I better do some investigatin'. I took a sample of the cleaner to an older friend of mine and he took it to his high school chemistry teacher. It's a funny thing about what he found. It seems that the only thing in the world that cleaner was good for was takin' red ink out of dollar bills. Well, as I had never had a customer come to me who wanted red ink taken out of a

dollar bill, I decided then and there that I had six bottles of cleaner and nothin' in the world to do with it.

The slap of the brush on my shoe brought me back to reality. I glanced at my watch and realized that I had spent too much time. Suddenly I felt good all over. I don't know why, but as I looked at the sandy-haired boy I had felt as if I saw myself. In fact, last night I felt so good that I reached in my pocket and handed the boy a dollar bill and told him to keep the change. He thanked me gratefully, smiled, and walked on down the street. You know, I could have sworn that when he put that dollar bill in his overall pocket I saw a bunch of red ink stains on it.

Oh well, it's six more days 'till Saturday rolls around again. Yes sir, I sure wish that we could just skip Saturday and have two Friday nights in a row.

# THE LIE

TOMMY LOGSDON

Once upon the wrinkled face of time, when dinosaurs were house pets and men hung fig leaves from their belly buttons, man made a startling discovery—he could talk!! The grunts and groans and hisses that he had been using to scare animals, attract women and get the blackberry seeds out of his teeth could actually be used to communicate with his fellow man. He was so delighted with his new discovery that he was speechless. At last he could tell his wife that his feet hurt; at last he could tell the gang about the saber-toothed tiger that got away; at last he could tell his lady love that she had cute mosquito bites and colorful calluses. In short, man could now lie.

When the North Pole sprung a leak and the great glaciers moved down upon the resort towns, many of the top flight liars were killed. The few remaining ones, having no one to lie to, hid out in caves and carved numerous pictures of ridiculous looking animals so as to pull a sneaky trick on the gullible archeologists of the future. Man had developed from telling lies to carving lies.

When the great glaciers melted, man sauntered out of his cave and traded his club for a spear and his fig leaf for a bulky metal overcoat. Since the pants to this suit of armor weighed 85 pounds, naturally his suspenders kept breaking . . . consequently, he spent most of his time wedged against a lamp post lying to the natives about all the dragons he had slain and all the damsels he had undistressed. He was getting fairly adept at lying when his suit began to rust and people and dogs kept mistaking him for a newfangled fire plug.

When oxidation put the knight out of commission, he was replaced by another highly skilled liar—the fisherman. These fishermen held nightly lying contests in local taverns. The one that could manage to separate the palms of his hands the greatest distance without blushing was proclaimed the winner. Around the turn of the century, fishermen became too equipment conscious. They bought gum boots, artificial baits, glass rods, nylon lines, out-board motors and poker chips. Commercialism caused man to lose sight of the true purpose of a fishing trip . . . lying.

With the development of technological science came a totally new type of liar—the statistician. He used graphs and charts and statistics to prove all sorts of lies. Sometimes he even hired a large research staff to help him find out what lies needed proving. With all his univac machines and mathematical formulas, he naturally could produce better lies than anyone else. The other liars, however, looked down their noses at him since they deemed it unethical to accept money for lying. Many statisticians, for this reason, smashed their electronic machines and resumed their amateur standing.

When the covered wagons pushed west, they unfortunately discovered a huge strip of desolate waste land called Texas. Little did these weary saddle tramps know that they had stumbled into the largest mecca for liars in the world. By 1897, Texans had so exaggerated the size of their state

that the other forty seven all had to be squeezed into Delaware. Congress had to adopt a bill restricting Texans to lies about the depth of their gopher holes and sharpness of their cactus needles. Although this undoubtedly was a governmental injustice, it did serve more nearly to equalize the size of North America and Texas.

Yes, once upon the wrinkled face of time, when dinosaurs were house pets and men hung fig leaves from their belly buttons, man discovered the delightful past-time of lying. Down through the ages, from the fig leaf-clad cassinova to the univac-equipped statistician; from the suspenderless knights in rusty armor, to the imaginative Texas saddle tramp, lying has made steady progress toward the ultimate. Slowly, but surely, inch by inch, man has learned to produce bigger and better lies. Man's quest for the ultimate in liars has not been in vain. The ultimate has been reached!!! Society has produced a living memorial to lying at its best—the modern politician.

## A TRUMPET LULLABY

KAY WOOD

Across the land
On wings of air,
There drifts a sound
So sweet and fair,

As if the heavens
Had pulled aside
To let its song
Float far and wide.

For Gabriel with
His golden horn
Has bathed the earth
In silver morn!

The sound, it dies
But lingers still
Beyond the valley
And over the hill.

## AN' YE SAY YE'RE LOST?

GENE CLARK

Night had turned to morning and morning had turned to fervid afternoon. Corn had turned from green to yellow and then to brown. The spring had changed to a dry summer and to a drier fall. The sky overhead was clear and the road ahead was blurred where the heat waves reflected from it. The road passed through the valley and extended up the hill and along the benches until you were to the top of the ridge.

You could get a good look at the bottom lands from here, and the rugged outline of mountains showed in the distance. A dog had treed somewhere on the slope. He walked on and his shotgun seemed heavier than it had that morning. Automatics were heavy. Further down the road he noticed a hollow tree with a twist pole running up in it. It looked old and probably already served its purpose.

That morning he had started early before dawn and had got lost. It was hot now and he was thirsty. He had passed houses, mostly deserted, with barns that leaned from age and weather. The houses usually stood a far distance from the road and most of them were unpainted whether they were lived in or not. Some houses stood facing the road and some only showed their sides. Some stood at odd angles, built before the road came through or by people who didn't see the difference.

He would have stopped at one of the houses to ask for water except that he was a stranger, and strangers didn't belong: his shell belt didn't belong, nor his moccasin-toed boots, nor did the automatic that he now carried in his left hand to shift the weight. Sweat rolled down his face from under the fatigue-hat and the heat penetrated his cork-sole boots. The squirrels he had killed were fastened to an overly-large safety pin and were swinging from his belt as he walked.

He had noticed the cedar trees along in some of the old fields between the stretches of wooded lots. Cedars, and under them was limestone. They went together, and in the summer they meant one thing . . . no water.

The limestone projected out of the ground and people used it to fill the ruts in their roads, and you could see their chimneys had been made of it. Sometimes it was used to make the fences but usually they were made of rails. Rails that staggered, angled, sinuous, like a worm that stretched and stretched across the countryside, represented plenty of backache and calluses.

Some people would have got excited at being lost in a strange surrounding, but he had discovered that the way to combat an unpleasant situation best was to be indifferent to it. He told himself he did not care, and he was convinced. He watched the sun and had taken the fork of the road that went south.

He had seen no one all morning and he imagined people had seen him first and had watched him plod along the road and viewed him from behind their doors until he was out of sight.

He came over a little rise in the road and approaching him was a little man with a double-bladed axe. He was stooped and the sun glistened from the blades of his axe. He had on loose-fitting denim trousers with large patch pockets that had faded to a light blue. He had a large leather belt through the trousers and wore a plaid shirt that was patched in two or three places—not very carefully, just patched so the holes would not get bigger. The man had shaved that morning, which only made the ambeer which ran from the corners of his mouth more conspicuous.

"Howdy there," the stranger remarked.

"Hello."

"Been hot quite a spell."

"Sure has."

"Water's been scarce. Had to carry it fer the cows. Don't see signs of rain either."

"Weather forecast didn't mention any rain either."

"Good Lord jest can't see through to give us none."

"We're in a high pressure area now. Radio said it was gonna be that way for a while."

"Guess people ain't livin' right."

"Noticed the birds were flying high this morning and smoke from the chimneys was going up pretty straight. Guess we'll get no rain for a while."

"Good lookin' shotgun ye got there."

"Yes, I like it."

"Guess it cost somethin'."

"Over a hundred dollars."

"Heap of money, fer a gun."

"Say, how do you get to Span Hill? I lost my way from camp this morning."

At this a teasing look came into the stranger's eyes. "Say ye're lost?"

"Yes, but I don't care."

"Ye don't."

"No, how do you get to Span Hill from here?"

The stranger's eyes glistened. He was enjoying himself. "Ye don't know?"

"No, I don't know. It doesn't bother me though."

"What the place look like?"

"Oh . . . a spring, an old mine tipple about a half mile up the road from it, a couple miles from a store . . . said 'Span Hill' on it."

"I ain't quite sure," the stranger replied showing his tobacco stained teeth in what seemed to be a kind of smirk.

"You been cutting timber?" he motioned to the stranger's axe.

"No. Jest cut a tree. Where you from?"

"Neighboring county over there," and he pointed southwest.

"Know any Joneses?"

"Yes, local constable is a Jones. He's a neighbor of mine."

"What did ye say his fers name wuz?"

"I didn't say. It's Tom."

"Don't know 'em. Know any Burkes?"

"No."

"Know any Calhouns?"

"No."

"They's a neighbor of our'n lived down the road, Bill Calhoun. Wife died last week."

"You married?"

"No, er ye?"

"No. You live with your parents?"

"Yeah. Wiff my folks. Say ye don't know any Smiths round over there, do ye?"

"Yeah, I used to go with one. Her old man would get drunk and raise Hell. When he was drinking he was mean. Man, he'd kill you."

There was dismay in the stranger's face and he showed the fundamentalist raising which he had been given and which he had lived with. "Thou shalt not kill." The Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill."

"Oh, he wouldn't really. He was mean when he was drunk, that's all.

The stranger remained solemn and repeated, "The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' " The stranger said nothing for a moment then he gestured, "They's some Smith girls down the road here."

"How old are they?"

"One of 'em's 'bout fifteen. The other one's 'bout eighteen."

"They pretty?"

"Yeah, they're purty all right," the stranger affirmed. "Say, you fool around with girls any?"

"Yeah, a little," he replied.

The stranger frowned and said nothing for a minute; then he suggested, "These girls purty friendly, you might ought to look in on them."

"Are they wild?"

"Yeah, say you might stop by as you pass there. Next house down the road on yer left."

"Smith girls over home were wild too."

"Ye better watch an not get in trouble though."

He looked up at the stranger and felt a bit cocky. He was younger than the stranger by about ten years and he felt a certain assuredness in himself. "Oh . . . I know enough to stay out of trouble," he smiled. He started to say more but sensed he had said too much already.

The gleam came back to the stranger's eye. "An' ye say ye're lost?"

"Yes."

"Don't know which way to go?"

"No. I'm not worried though."

The stranger smiled to himself. He didn't say anything—he just sat and smiled to himself like he was playing with a puppet and pulling the strings he chose and was glad that he could pull them. "Ye got fox squirrels there, ain't ye?"

"Yes, I got lost early this morning and started back. I didn't hunt much," trying to excuse himself for not having killed more. "Killed these on the ridge. They don't seem to be in the hollows yet."

"Big?"

"Yeah, pretty big."

"An' ye don't know how to get back," the stranger said and the sides of his mouth turned into a teasing smile.

"No, but I don't care," and then he wondered if he should have impressed the stranger with such indifference.

"Don't know which way to get back," the stranger vexed.

"No."

"Well, I think ye might take this here road and foller it fer 'bout three miles then take the road that branches to the left an it's 'bout a half a mile to the store."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," he told the stranger throwing up his hand as a sign of good-bye. He swung his gun over his shoulder and quickened his pace. He was still thirsty and he shifted his gun back to his left hand and kept his steady pace. His fatigue hat was wet with sweat around the band and his shirt didn't seem to be dry anywhere. When he had walked about a hundred yards he turned and looked back. There was the stranger still watching him. "Wonder how come he took so long to tell me the way," he thought . . . , "or *did* he?"

## DREAMING

DONNA MINCEY

Ah heart, but a dream,
'Tis this thing you hold so dear,
For it has but beauty,
And the reality be not so clear.

True the cottage stands
Cool and inviting at evensong,
The tides come yet by it
As they have done so long.
The blazing hearth within
Burns clear and bright
And beckons to all who pass
Whenever comes the night.

But how forlorn is the hope,
That when 'tis sunset by the sea,
Across the darkening sands,
You'll come home to me.

## NIGHTMARE'S END

DORIS RAE TURNER

Steve stretched his long lanky body on the hard, musty cot. The mattress could not have been more than an inch thick, and one of the plastic buttons that was half broken dug in his back. He often wondered why buttons were put on mattresses anyway. He reached slowly without looking for the crumpled package of cigarettes on the wobbly stand beside him and wearily lit one. The dripping water from the leaky faucet made him think of the time it had rained very hard when he was a child. He had stood on the porch of his grandmother's home and caught water in a little tin cup as it dripped from the roof.

He put one arm under his head and watched a long streamer of smoke as it floated upward and almost touched the shadow of the cold, steel bars a little on the ceiling. He was still confused how he had ever gotten in that cell. It all seemed like a dream, a bad dream, and it had become a living nightmare. For weeks he had hoped that it was a nightmare and that he would awaken soon and find himself back at his small service station repairing a car motor or fixing a bad brake. But he didn't awaken because he had never been asleep, and he realized this was all true. It was actually happening to him. No matter how hard he wished, no matter how hard he

hoped or prayed, this was real. No one could help him now. There was no escape. He was doomed.

"Think back," he said hopelessly to himself. "Think back and remember every little detail."

He had closed the station early that night. As he was going home he heard the gay organ music from the carnival that had just come to town. The colored lights lit up the sky so one could see even the feathery clouds. The odor of hot dogs and candy apples was so tempting that he automatically parked his car and decided to join in the fun with the other laughing voices.

He saw a girl. She wasn't beautiful. Most young men would have called her plain, simple. Her skin was too white, her blue eyes too pale and her hair wasn't a shiny brown. But Steve thought she was almost pretty in a lonely way. Somehow they began talking and he found himself riding all the different rides with her. And then later, taking her home seemed like the right thing to do. There were a few kisses and that was all. Simple as that. The next morning he was arrested for the murder and rape of the same girl he met at the carnival. There were questions, so many questions—then the trial and then guilty. It was hard to believe that he had been sentenced to death. He was going to die for a murder he didn't commit.

"I'm innocent! I'm innocent!" he had cried. But he soon learned that everybody who was sentenced to death cried the same thing.

Now it was too late. "Zero hour is almost here," he thought. They would be coming for him soon.

He scratched his head and felt nearly naked since his hair had been shaven. He grinned and thought of a picked chicken.

The shadow on the ceiling moved. The doors clanked. His knees became weak as he walked down the dimly lighted hall. The smell of death was like an evil curse. Or was it really a curse? Suddenly he felt peaceful inside, as peaceful as a child standing on a porch catching drops of rain in a little tin cup. He wasn't scared any more. He really wasn't, because he knew that at last he was really going to sleep and the terrible nightmare would be over.

## BLUE EYES AND BLOOD

BARBARA WETHINGTON

Triumph glistened in the old cat's eyes. She had the mouse backed into the corner of the room. She was gonna get him. The mouse scrambled desperately up the side of the wall, then fell back. The cat, crying death, pounced and ripped open the mouse's fat belly. Vic watched as the tiny, blue eyes of the mouse disappeared in the cat's mouth. Good old cat. Vic walked over and knelt beside her. The cat was still lapping the blood from the floor. Vic put his hand in the remaining drops of blood and then stuck his finger in his mouth. He looked at the cat and laughed. "Good old cat," he said.

He picked the cat up and held her for a minute, caressing her. Then as she began to relax, Vic let his fingers tighten around her neck until terror filled the cat's eyes and she began to claw viciously at Vic. Then Vic laughed and tossed her to the floor. The cat was learning fast—even if she did belong to Laura.

Vic glanced at the tall, antique clock standing in the corner of the shabby room. It was almost time for Laura to be home, and everything had to be just exactly as she had left it that morning. Sweet, kind Laura. She had told him that the least he could do was to keep the house clean and wash the dishes and things. Things that no average, normal husband had to do—but since the accident he was no longer an average, normal husband. Since the accident he was no longer a husband of any kind. Sweet, kind wife. Yeah, he knew he ought to be grateful for the way she had taken care of him while he was sick, and how she was still taking care of him by work-

ing at the sewing factory. Well, he was grateful—someday he'd show her just how grateful.

He picked up a few pieces of scattered paper from the floor and pitched them in the fireplace. Then he stood back and watched as the yellow, crimson-streaked flames greedily swallowed the paper. "Pretty fire," he said. He roamed around placing the brown, straight-backed chairs in their established places and kicking in place the small rugs that Laura had made. Someday he wasn't gonna have no dirty, little chairs and no old rugs that just lay around in people's way. He looked at the dingy, blue wallpaper, stained by age and smoke from the fire. It was drooping from the wall. He wasn't gonna have no blue wallpaper either. Blue was the saints' color. The saints' and Laura's. Yeah, someday everything was gonna be different. Someday soon. Vic laughed.

The front door banged. That would be Laura. Vic slumped into a chair letting an exhausted look distort his face.

"Vic, darling, where are you?"

"In here."

Vic watched his wife glide into the room. Her short, blond hair had edged out from beneath her shabby, gray hat and her face was flushed because of her long walk from the bus. Her eyes were that funny blue, and bright the way they always were when she was excited or something. Laura was beautiful. She was so damned beautiful! It was a shame that things were the way they were. Yeah, it was a damned, sorry shame. Vic laughed silently, bitterly.

Laura stooped and kissed Vic's cheek. "Everything looks fine dear except you did leave a little dust on the top of the bookcase. Where's my baby? What are you laughing at, Vic?"

"I'm not laughing, Laura. Your damned cat is around here somewhere." Vic watched eagerly as Laura headed toward the cat that was sprawled on the couch watching her.

Laura reached for the cat, then jumped back screaming. The cat had cut a long, bloody streak in her arm, and had now jumped to the floor and hid under the couch.

Vic sighed. Everything was working fine.

"Vic, what have you done to my baby?" Laura screamed. "What have you done to her?"

Vic just looked at her for a long time. Finally it seemed to hit her; then she turned and ran screaming outside.

Vic waited until the door slammed; then he jumped up and ran swiftly to the couch and dragged the cat out. The cat screamed with rage and fear. Vic looked at her and laughed. "Remember the little mouse—the little mouse with blue eyes?" He sank his teeth into the cat's throat tasting the warm salty blood mingled with fur. It wasn't Laura's soft neck that his teeth were mutilating, and it wasn't Laura's soft blond hair that he was stroking. Laura wouldn't let him touch her. He wondered if her blood would be salty like the cat's.

Vic felt the life disappearing from the cat's body. No, it wasn't Laura's body he held in his hands—just her old cat's. But there was always tomorrow.

"Bye, old cat," he said.

## CONSOLATION FOR ONE

SUE HULS

Our love's not as bright as it used to be—
We no longer live in a world of ecstasy.
The love we once shared is now all but lost—
Time alone can ease the heartaches it cost.
If perhaps you have found a new love, then I'm glad;
It's consoling to know only one must be sad.

# DESTINY

FANN R. HERNDON

While looking at the mountain's majesty,
The answer to my fervent life I sought.
How will my being, I wondered, be so wrought?
What are my traits that others are to see?

Where lies the answer we all seek in vain?
Do you, wise Mountains, know the truth we
Seek?
You with your proud and stately time-worn
Peaks,
You know the answer which we wish to
Gain.

Oh, You, who are the sages of Time,
Must know the answer to our destiny.
But is this quest for mortals, such as we,
A peak too unattainable to climb?

We must content ourselves with what
We see,
And strive for goals our assets will us be.

# THE COUNTRY TOWN

MICHIKO KANNO

Dear T——,

I have a black wooden box at home, in which I keep many photos. I think you might have seen it one time. Various pictures, old and new, are jumbled together. Among them, there is a picture of a country town. I do not know how that picture came to be in the box, but while ransacking it, I have often seen it among the others, though I never particularly looked for it.

The night just before I left home to live here in a small southeast seacoast town for my health, I took out the box and looked at the pictures one by one. There were pictures of famous places, pictures of hot springs and pictures of seaside resorts where I had been before. Once again I came across the picture of the country town.

It is indeed an old picture and faded—but not too much. This time, I took it in my hand and looked at it carefully. I could not recognize the place; at any rate, it was a place I had never visited. The new town I had come to live in could not be the one in the picture—or could it? Yet, last evening, when I went for a walk for the first time since I came here about a month ago, I had the feeling that I had seen this town before.

Later, gazing at the picture I endulged in various fancies—a man is standing under the eaves of a house whose walls are falling down. The street is deserted and no one is walking about. Certainly, the town itself is quite foreign to me, but the more I gazed at it, the more I feel an inexpressible longing for something. From whichever direction I might look at the picture, part of the houses could never be seen. I thought, however, I could see not only the eaves of the houses but the whole of them. When winter comes, it may snow; the town will be far more lonely on a rainy day; at night, dim lights may flicker in front of the houses. Is that man, standing under the eaves, still alive?—I thought and thought of things like these.

Well, last evening I went for a walk. Leaving the villa behind me, I stood in the dark for a while. Then I went down the hill until I came to the edge of the town which I used to overlook from the garden of the house. Town was nothing but a name. A row of houses stood along both sides of

the rough unpaved road. On either side of the road there was a ditch with a plank in front of each house for the people to use as they went in and out.

Now I was at the very edge of the town. The feeling which stole into my heart was the same one I had had when I saw that picture in the box—seen just a picture—but this was real. However, both are very, very foreign to me. It makes no difference to me whether it is now, or a thousand years ago; time nor place matters little. This is only the human world, with life and death, love and hate, joy and sorrow. Here, in front of me, passes the huge current of human life, passing from generation to generation flowing onward to the sea of eternity.

I walked on slowly. Now I could see everything about the town I wished to look at. No longer was I gazing on a picture. I saw a man leaning against the door and looking vacantly at the darkening sky. I crossed a little bridge and walked down a narrow road leading to the right. Suddenly, I heard a woman scream. She seemed to be railing against someone. Unconsciously, I hastened toward the direction of the scream.

I have written so much that I am quite tired, so I shall make a long story short—a woman, standing alone, was screaming. She was completely insane.

"Damn it! You ungrateful wretch! Villain! Fool!"

Those words she repeated over and over again.

When I came home, I found an elderly man talking with the owner of the villa where I stay. This old man was the very "villain" and "ungrateful fool" whom that mad woman had been calling names.

I will write to you more of the detail next time.

The wind has risen and the sea is roaring, so that I cannot think any longer.

## HE WAVED AND RODE ON BY

PEGGY HINKLE

You never know about people. They're funny. You think you know'em and then—wham!—they up and do somethin' you'd never expect.

Take Jim and me. I thought I knew him well as I knew myself. An' not 'cause we're cousins either. That don't count anyway. But we kinda' grew up together—more like brothers than cousins. My dad and Uncle Fred owned farms right next to each other. Big ones too—somethin' over 800 acres, all told, stretched from the Little Miami River where Mill Creek meets clear up to the railroad bridge to Chillicothe. Anyway there weren't no others close our age, so it was just natural we'd be best friends.

We learned to fish together and hunt too. He used to let me use his new 12-gauge shot gun anytime I'd ask. An' it wasn't like when some people lend you things and then stand around and watch over your shoulder to see what you're going to do, they're so afraid you might break somethin'. Jim wasn't like that at all. I'd just ask for it and he'd say "sure," and then maybe he'd go off as far as the next field to do his huntin'. An' that'd be all there was to it.

We used to have some big times. We always played hookey together. And if there was a bunch goin' off in the afternoon to swim or see the races in Chillicothe and they'd ask me to go along, I wouldn't go unless Jim was in on it too. And he was the same way.

There wasn't much anything we didn't do together. We learned to smoke at the same time even. We'd sneak off to the top of the hill behind Uncle Fred's barn and smoke cigarettes Jim stole from Bert, one of Uncle Fred's hands.

That's the way we were all the while we were growin' up, and everything was fine. It looked like it would stay that way too. We even planned once that when we were grown and the farms were ours—I was the only child on my side and Jim had three sisters that all married and went off to live—we'd build us one big house and share it. And we'd buy up all the farms around and then hire more folks to work for us 'til we were the biggest men in southern Ohio.

But then the summer Jim was nineteen, and I was just seventeen the spring before, Uncle Fred bought that automobile and—wham!—everything was just shot.

It was an ole' black Model A and the first one around, except for a half dozen or so right in Chillicothe. I rode in it only a couple of times, and I wasn't so wild about it, but Jim was crazy about it.

He learned to drive that summer, and that took practice an' time. With work in the day, evenings were the only spare time left. So every night he'd drive from his house over to mine and come in and talk a while and then drive back.

Well, I didn't see him as much that summer. He got pretty good at that car and before long he'd drive on past our house down to where our road meets the pike to town and then he'd drive back. I'd be sitting on the porch 'cause there wasn't much else to do and I could hear him coming by. Then he'd toot that horn and wave when he went by.

That car got to be like a disease with him, and he started going over to Chillicothe every Friday and Saturday night. I'd see him coming down the road about seven, while it was still light. He'd be all dressed up with his coat on and sometimes a stiff collar shirt on and he'd toot that horn and wave and ride on by.

Sometimes I'd still be up when I'd hear him coming back, and if my light was on, he'd toot. But then sometimes I'd lie in bed awake and listen for that car, but after a long while I'd fall asleep and never hear him going back. That happened more and more.

I went fishing a few times that summer and Jim went along once or twice, but he was always in a hurry to get back, so we didn't go much.

The days started gettin' short, and some nights it was cool. Jim would once in a while stop by the house. He came once to show me the new suit he bought in town and he asked me to go in with him some night and he'd show me around. I said, "Sure, Sometime," but I never went.

He was different to talk to then. He'd come to the house and sit in the Morris chair by the stove a few minutes and then get up and walk over to the mantel and look at all the family pictures like he was a visitor. Then he'd pace around pickin' up knic-knacs and things and say "Yeah" and "No" while I was talking. After a while he'd say he had to pick up somethin' or somebody in town and off he'd go.

That's the way things went up to the Sunday after Thanksgivin'.

I was firin' up the stove when Jim and Uncle Fred and Aunt Lou drove up. Mom was by the door and she let'em in. You could tell it was somethin' special. Jim had on that new suit and Aunt Lou's eyes were all red and swollen where she'd been cryin'.

Uncle Fred kinda laughed and said it looked like the last of his brood was determined to leave too. I looked at Jim but he was foolin' with those dumb pictures on the mantel.

Uncle Fred looked at Dad and said Jim had come to say good-bye, that he had a job in a paper-carton factory in Cincinnati, and he was going to stay with his sister, Kay, and her husband there. Uncle Fred kinda slapped Jim on the back and turned him toward Dad and they shook hands. Jim kissed Mom and she told him to be good 'cause Cincinnati was an awful big town. He told her he could take care of himself and that started Aunt Lou cryin' again. Jim patted her clumsy-like on the shoulder and looked around at Uncle Fred just blank. They hugged and slapped one another on the back and Jim walked out.

I went out to the porch with him and he said I'd have to come down to Cincinnati when he got settled and I said that'd be swell. We stood there in front of that car feeling bashful-like and then I said it sure wouldn't be like the ole' days with him gone and he just sorta' laughed and then we stood there again. Finally Jim reached out and grabbed my hand and we shook. By then everybody was out on the porch, and Jim climbed in that car. Aunt Lou was rubbin' her eyes and Jim blew her a kiss as he drove off. We stood there wavin' and callin' 'til he got to the road and looked back. Then he tooted that horn and drove on by.

## ODE TO A LOVELY LADY

KAY WOOD

You are so wonderful and kind
To press me to your breast,
And kiss away the tears that form
From my own worthlessness.

Your strong belief in love divine
Instilled within me grows,
And life and love again is born,
Though no one ever knows.

I think about the way you walk
And beckon with your hand,
My heart cries out as if to say,
"Your wish is my command."

So, Lovely Lady, stay with me
And never more depart,
A memory to live this day,
Forever in my heart.

## GIVE ME YOUR HAND

SUE HULS

Give me your hand,
And lead me on—
Guide me to destinies
Not far beyond.

Lead me through uncertainty,
Through sickness and night;
Help me know death
With no fear in sight.

Whisper thy will gently
That I might understand—
Make my life complete
And give me your hand.

## WHY DID THEY SEARCH THEIR YEARS?

BOBBY R. HICKMAN

Why did they search their years, their life away,
And leave this life with thoughts that they, of all
There was to know, had made so little to fall?
Yet they the chains of time had made to sway.
While there upon their last death bed they lay,
They thought that all they knew was still so small
Beside unknown, to which they did appall,
But still they would search longer if they may.
They rate unequal with the gods on high.
They searched the realms of micros and cosmos
And atoms around which electrons fly,
All of which made truth always so very close.
Why, of all that in this world do live, only few
Will search for that which is most nearly true?

# THE CHAMPION

ROBERT PURDOM

A ruby is gone from the golden band,
A Mighty star has fallen from the
sky.
A great champion has made his
finale stand,
And from the Multitudes there
comes a sigh.
Where in the works of Mortal
Man,
Is there a thing to judge him by?
He ran as no other can.
His victories will never die.
But his ending is only a beginning,
For the tradition and heritage he
holds,
Will go on to others, lending
A greater life yet untold.
And new champions will appear
In the annals of future years.

# THE WHITE FUR COAT

J. FAIR MCCRERY

It was drizzling the night he first saw her. She stepped out of the carriage assisted only by the driver. Although the wind was wantonly blowing around the corners of the buildings, her appearance was unruffled. Unhurried, she glided into the lobby of the theatre.

A look of annoyance spread over her face as she noticed a dirty spot on the hem of her white fur coat, which must have been the result of the rain beating down on the mud-spattered pavement. She slipped back the hood of her coat and revealed long, raven-black hair, which glistened beneath the silvery lights. The cold air had made a rosy glow in her flawless complexion. Hesitantly, she unbuttoned her coat and pulled it off, revealing a gown of crimson color. The bodice was closely fitted with one strap going from the left side and across her right shoulder. Her immaculate white gloves reached above her elbows, and her right wrist was encircled with a gold bracelet which was the body of a serpent with a head on each end entwined to form the catch. On her little finger she wore a ring set with a large square ruby, and around her neck was a gold chain from which hung a locket.

She seemed to be looking for something or somebody, as she surveyed the few people who had left the warmth of their homes early to brave the icy hand of Mother Nature for good seats at the play. The crowd was indeed a dismal one. Of all the lovely ladies who had come and gone from this theatre, in his twelve years of ushering there, never had the usher seen one quite so lovely as the "Helen of Troy" who stood there now in the midst of the small group in the lobby. It was as if an artist had painted a picture with her as the central theme and had placed a few insignificant figures merely as background. Only she caught the viewer's eye.

The lobby was beginning to fill now with people brushing the wetness off their overcoats and trying to revive the circulation in their hands. He was standing in a dimly lighted corner watching her, when through the crowd her almond eyes met his grey ones; she came toward him, her lips parted and she spoke. When did the play begin? Of course he knew, had he not been there for every performance in the last twelve years?

"Half past eight, my lady," he finally managed to say, but she had suddenly turned away. At the same instant three men in dark suits walked over to where they were standing.

"So you finally messed up, and now we've caught you. We didn't think

that your get-away lady would ever lead us to you. The police had her 'nailed' right after the robbery, but let her go until she led us to you."

"Too bad, pop," she whispered with a distinct foreign accent. I guess you were just a victim of circumstances."

They left the theatre together, in handcuffs. He in his black dress suit and she in her white fur coat with the dirty spot on the hem.

## REFLECTIONS

KATHLEEN SHARPE

As I enjoy the Autumn's
hazy hours
And see the golden leaves
Kissed by the frost,
The leaves, a weary being
ever, tossed
By riding to and fro, cool
showers
Will threaten, ending lives
of others. Flowers
Attempt to square out all
the fragrance. Closed,
The blossoms, with their
Autumn gowns and crossed
With dew, that sparkles like
the heavenly power
That maketh all of natures
wonders here
On land, and sky, and in the
stormy sea.
It seems to me that we
have naught this life to fear
But that each life has its
own right to be.
All things are made to bloom
And then to die,
The pattern set by that one
of the sky.

## THEY ARE MINE

SHIRLEY DILLOW

The hall was quiet and all Sue could hear was the steady drumming of the little white Westclox as it tried to fill the silent room with sound. Sitting on the small black table beside her bed, it seemed like a tiny friend, true blue no matter what, and today Sue wasn't sure just what. As her feet hit the cold floor, thoughts raced through her mind.

In the grill Sue tried to act casual and friendly, but the yeast doughnuts stuck in her throat and would not be washed down by the black coffee. She found herself, along with several other candidates, walking back and forth in front of a door. The vote counting seemed an unendurable eternity. Finally the door opened and Fred walked out with the most mysterious of grins. Sue wanted to close her ears. She wanted to hear what he had to say, but she was afraid to hear it.

Two minutes later Sue realized that she had made the first step—one of the top four in the court—but basketball queen seemed too far away to hope for. She half heard Fred say, "Will the four that I have named please come to the gym at 4:00 this afternoon for rehearsal? The queen will be one of you. We have three bouquets of white carnations and one bouquet of red roses. Tonight, one minute before half time, I will give the queen the red roses."

Back in the dorm she made a phone call. Mother and daddy had to know. "I'm one of the top four. Can you come? No, I don't know who the queen is. No, I don't think I got it. I may be queen. I don't know. Come over just in case," Sue said nearly all in one breath. There was much to be done and too little time. A formal was rushed to the cleaners and unending yards of slips were pressed. Food was forgotten and *Pamela,* which was lying open on the desk, was pushed aside. Sue's thoughts were many "—if I only knew one way or the other. White carnations would be beautiful, but who will get the red roses exactly one minute before half time? . . ."

Then Sue was alone again. Mother had been sent to the game with the girls next door. Sue was sitting in a chair unaware of the radio that was broadcasting the first half of the game. Her stomach felt as if someone were trying to churn butter there and her legs ached until she began to wonder if they would hold her up. It was time to put on the three slips and the white formal and, just for luck, an extra spray of the "White Shoulders" that Ray had given her.

As Sue walked over to the gym, her throat felt dry and her feet heavy. She stood in the hall waiting, and the three minutes seemed like thirty. Her heart dropped as the roses were carried past her but two seconds later she felt them being placed in her arms. "The red roses are yours, Sue," Fred said in a quiet tone. . . . "Mine . . . ," Sue thought . . . , "they are mine . . . ," and she gripped Fred's arm tightly as she walked calmly down the floor toward the chair awaiting the queen.

# FIRST BORN

DORIS RAE TURNER

Bill Mallory sat quietly staring out the dingy window. It was his twenty-fourth birthday and he hoped he would never have another one. The sun was almost behind the far away hills and the gray monstrous clouds that were gathering over the small town gave evidence of rain. It would be spring in a few days and he loathed the thought of it. His mother would continuously nag him to go outside and enjoy the warm sunshine and after two or three weeks of refusals he would finally give in just to shut her big mouth.

He could hear her puttering around in the kitchen now and it would be only a short time before she would yell in a tired, defeated tone that the stew was done. He hated stew. He hated the sickening odor of it that filled the shabby house. And he wished that his mother would get out of the house and go somewhere. Anywhere, it didn't matter. He was tired of looking at her all day. That's what he hated about Saturdays. It was her day off at the Silver Diner. It wasn't that he liked to see her work hard either, because deep down in his bitter heart he loved her as much as any son loved a mother. She was all he had.

It had been almost five years since his accident. Five years of sitting in an uncomfortable wheel chair; five years of watching people stare at him as if he were one of the freaks in a side show; five years of helplessness and misery. Why couldn't he have died instead of Julie? His first real love, and he died a thousand times inside when he thought of her, because he had killed her. He could remember that dreadful day as if it were yesterday. . . .

Duke Ellison had let him borrow his old green, beat-up Ford to go to Petersburg, where the annual stock car race was being held. Although Julie didn't like races, he persuaded her to go with him. He felt big and strong behind the wheel and with Julie beside him. The car may have been an old two-door Ford, but to him it was bigger than a Cadillac. He made up his mind he would someday have his own car. He loved to drive and he loved speed. Suddenly he began pressing his foot on the accelerator harder and harder. There was an embankment and he heard Julie's tearing screams as the car went trembling over and over and over. . . .

A draft was coming from somewhere and the rain clattered as the wind blew it against the window. He tucked the light wool blanket tighter around

his waist and for a moment he could have sworn that he felt his legs. Swiftly he moved his hands under the coverlet. His legs ended at the knee joint. He wanted to cry but couldn't and thought God must hate him terribly. He felt his mother's worn gentle hands on his slumped shoulders and shrugged them away.

"Stew's done," she said wearily. "The table is set and you can reach everything. Eat when you want to."

He knew he made her feel uneasy.

"You'll need cigarettes for tomorrow," she said, "so I'll go on out and get you some now."

He wheeled the chair around and saw her pulling on the faded blue raincoat that almost matched the silver in her hair.

"Ma," he said chocking back the sobs, "Ma, don't leave me! Don't ever leave me!"

He stretched out his arms for her and she went to him and stroked his hair as though he were still a little boy.

"Oh, my son, my first born!"

## AND THE RAIN

SHARON BROWN

and the rain
and the rain
and the rain

and the rain
falling down
on
my
face
and the rain
falling down
on
my
hair
and the rain
making
the sidewalk
shiny
and the rain
making
the grass
damp
and the rain
falling down
my cheeks
chasing the tears

## SEARCH FOR A SUB

HAROLD R. SMITH

When Bob Freeman walked onto the campus from the practice field, a bunch of freshmen and sophomores were stringing a huge cloth sign across the main drive. The large purple letters read *Welcome, Dads.*

The sign depressed him. For most of his life he had gotten along quite well without a father; his stepfather was not at all a good substitute. That was all the more reason he wanted his mother to come tomorrow. From the time he had sat cold and alone as a green freshman and watched the yelling crowd carry "Sledgehammer" Lewis from the field, he had wanted to play in the Father's Day game. Tomorrow was it. He had read the papers. His

name was in all of them, but somehow he didn't feel like the dynamic new discovery, "Dynamite" Freeman. He felt small and alone. If only he had someone. . . .

Bob, a good-looking, twenty-year-old senior, playfully shouldered his way into grub line. He was not like the rest of the team. There was a sort of gentleness about him that belied his action on the football field, and a good-naturedness that let him joke with the popular or laugh at the jokes of the shy. He didn't notice his food when he got the tray and almost forgot to say something about the "modern cow" to the shy freshman serving milk. He finished his meal long before the others and walked out upon the darkening campus.

Pop Foley was not in the little room in the basement of old Sutland Hall when Bob knocked on the door. He needed to see Pop. Ever since he had been here at Southern, Bob had relied upon Pop to listen to his troubles and give him advice. A funny one—that Pop! He was a spare, straight little man who always had a twinkle in his eye and a practical joke on his mind when he was doing janitor work on campus, but many times was rather reserved and melancholy when he was alone in his room with Bob. The nearest he had ever come to talking to Bob was the day that he told him the scar on his forehead, which everyone had been wondering about, was gotten in a prisoner-of-war camp in Europe. No one knew where he was from—just that he had come one day in a nice suit when Bob was a freshman. He had taken the only available job on campus which the personnel man had jokingly offered. One of the fellows had accidentally discovered one day that he was a whiz in accounting, and since that time he had become somewhat of a private tutor in varied fields for the follows who were lagging. When they asked him where he had learned or why he didn't use his knowledge, he smiled in that sly way of his and said he liked the "well-bred" side of life, the college "loaf."

Bob wondered where all Pop's money had gone. He had seemed to have plenty when he first came and had owned a nice car. Now that was sold along with all his nice clothes. Pop wasn't wasteful and was always careful to spend only where needed. He didn't have much of anything anymore, but still he was always immaculate and managed to look very distinguished in his blue suit on Sunday morning. Oh, well, Pop was surely able to take care of himself.

Bob walked down the sidewalk toward the stadium. A warm night breeze playfully touched the drying leaves under an old oak. A door slammed, someone was whistling, a radio played; here and there, there were gay fragments of talk and bursts of laughter. The spell of the warm fall night began to get to Bob. His spirits rose a little.

Several undergraduates were walking with their fathers. He had a nice feeling when they spoke to him and called his first name. He said, "Hi, Fellas," and smiled at their dads. He could hear the undergrads whispering to their dads as they went on down the walk.

Dave Whitley stopped him and wondered if Tompkins, who had been laid up with a bad ankle, would be able to play in the game. Bob guessed so. "Say, will your Dad be down tomorrow, Bob?" Dave wanted to know.

I. . . I guess not this time." Bob kicked at an imaginary object and managed a laugh. "Guess his li'l boy will need his help tomorrow, though. Those two ambulance attendants don't look like they're strong enough to carry me off."

Don laughed good-naturedly, poked Bob on the shoulder, and walked on down the sidewalk, his heel taps scraping noisily in the warm night. Bob picked up a scrap of white paper and began tearing off little bits as he walked. He was glad his mother was coming up tomorrow. It was a long way from Kentucky to Alabama, but there had been enough extra in the yellow envelope this time to pay for a nice Pullman and some new clothes. He shook his head as he thought of those envelopes. Just as regular as the weeks now for ten years they had come. They were postmarked always from Florida but always from different towns. His stepfather had at first resented them, but they had come in mighty handy as a supplement to his

meager salary. At first they had tried to find out who was sending the money, but finally they had accepted it and depended upon it just as regularly as the paycheck. And now since his stepfather had been killed in the auto accident, his mother would have to live on it entirely and still send money to him. It was rather funny that their size should start increasing just at this time.

A few dim lights were on in the football field and Bob could hear the screams and laughter of the Southern Peps as they prepared for the bonfire and rally. Off to the right at the entrance he could hear Dot and Joe practicing the song Bob had written the day before for this occasion, "This One's for You, Dad." Their voices echoed from the stadium and sounded hollow and happy. He wondered what his father had been like. His mother had loved him very much, but she wouldn't talk about him. When she received the "missing in action" notice from the War Department, she couldn't believe it. She had waited four unhappy years for him in an attempt to kill her sorrow before marrying again. All pictures had been burned in an attempt to forget him, an act she was sorry for many, many times. And now she was alone again.

It was late when Bob got back from the pep rally. He wondered if he should go in to see Pop. When he walked in Pop looked up from his shabby desk and shoved something into the drawer quickly. Bob smiled because he knew that desk and its contents were the only touchy thing about Pop. Since that time when he was a freshman and had gotten awfully sick, he had spent most of his time down in this room, but he had never seen the inside of those desk drawers. Pop got up, stretched out on the bed, moved over to make room for Bob to sit, and asked about the "young hero's" love life. Bob grinned. He felt warm and good when they were together. Pop had been the nearest thing to a father he had ever known. After the preliminaries Pop sat up and looked at Bob. "All right, you young scoundrel, what is it this time?"

Bob grinned and pulled the hair on Pop's leg. "I've got work for you, you lazy bum," he said. "I want you to drag out that blue suit, comb that old bald head, and be sub for me tomorrow. Mom's coming down to see me play and I need some old grouch to sit on the bench and act like Pa. Read me, Man? Wanna be a Father? My stepfather would have, but . . . well, you know about his death."

The lines in Pop's forehead deepened. He ran a nervous hand through his thin greying hair. Then he shook his head violently. "No, Bob."

"But why not?" Bob was puzzled. "Everyone knows that you and I are . . . are . . . well, are real good friends and it's the natural thing to do. Some of the other fellows will have substitutes, too. It's not as if . . ."

"No, Bob. That's final." Pop spoke loudly, almost harshly. Then he sighed and tried to smile. "Look, you need your rest. Go on up to bed and I'll find you someone. Maybe Mr. Crigler, huh?" His eyes looked pained and sad and the hand on Bob's knee trembled a little. As Bob went out the door Pop said, "Bob!" Bob turned around. "Give 'em hell, Boy!" Bob looked at him a long time, grinned wistfully and walked out.

Bob was awakened the next morning by a wet wash cloth in the face. Pop stood grinning over him. "I've got to go over to the Markeim building and do some work," he said. His eyes were swollen and red and he looked as if he hadn't slept at all. "Thought you'd like to know something before I left. I . . . I've changed my mind. I'd like to take that job as Dad." Bob thought he saw a hint of that mischievous twinkle in Pop's eye as he closed the door and left.

The game was hard and long, but Southern managed to squeeze through with the victory. When it was over, Bob made the yelling mob put him down long enough for him to point out his mother high in the stands in a red dress to Pop and tell him to introduce himself and keep her company. "This mob may never bring me back," he yelled happily.

When Bob walked out of the dressing room he felt warm and good from his shower. He saw his mother talking to Pop and wringing a handkerchief around and around in her hand. As she ran to him, he saw that she

had been crying. "Oh, Bobby, Bobby!" She collapsed sobbing in his arms.

"Mom . . . Mom! What is it?" Bob looked at Pop for an explanation. He was smiling in a queer kind of way and large tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Those yellow envelopes . . . the war department . . ." she sobbed hysterically. "Oh, Bobby!"

Pop came up to stand beside her. "What she's trying to say is," and the hand on Bob's shoulder tightened and trembled a little, "we're both proud of you, son!"

## DELIGHTFUL REMINISCENCE

*or (some tape recordings are better than others)*

TOMMY LOGSDON

You remember, don't you.

You were drinking coffee and I was spilling sugar all over my grey flannels just looking at you. You had blue eyes and a little turned up nose with freckles sprinkled all over it. Our eyes met without a formal introduction—you remember, don't you?

We went to a movie about a horse or something and ate yellow popcorn and I held your hand and you tossed the hair back off your neck, and the country jakes behind us put their ignorance on Public Display—you remember, don't you?

You put red tape on my size nine class ring and made it fit your size six finger and we looked at the moon and the stars and the leaves and stuff together—you remember, don't you?

I went off and fought the Koreans and got my leg and my nerves shot and you held my hand even tighter. I walked with my crutches and my purple heart and I looked down at my shoe laces and blushed a deep red, but you told me that the crutches were a symbol of our love for each other and our country—you remember, don't you?

They threw rice and tied tin cans and shoes and limburger cheese to the old '37 chevy and we started out with the back seat full of suitcases and rattles, and after a while bassinets and passifiers and little pink and blue bundles of love—you remember, don't you?

Gosh, I do!

## CELEBRATION

PEGGY HINKLE

They had potato cakes and fried pork chops and kale for supper and they were all there. They sat in their usual places around the circular table with the red and white oil cloth cover.

Mother sat with her back to the black, cast-iron stove; next to her Jim slouched in the chair with arms and black leather upholstery that was cracked and peeling. Grandmother, in her dirty chenille housecoat, sat in front of the refrigerator. Daddy was already stirring cream in his coffee and Mary bent her head over the folded newspaper in her lap. Edith sat primly in her straight, wooden chair, her feet tucked on the bottom wrung, her hands folded too neatly in her lap.

Daddy tapped his spoon into the saucer and puckered his lips on the edge of the cup, "How'd it go, Edith?" He blew across the top of the cup.

She shrugged her shoulders without looking up and unfolded her napkin across her lap.

Grandmother chewed her bread noisily, "An' you really first? What you say you got agin'?"

"Valedictorian, Grandmother. That means she got the best grades in her class. My sister—97.19!" The older brother raised his glass of milk, "To the brain of the family!"

They went on talking about it . . . the commencement. Aunt Gladys and Bill were coming over from Aberdeen. That was a four-hour drive so they'd have to spend the night.

"Uncle Bill will probably bring you a fine present, so don't you forget to thank him."

Edith jabbed at the pork chop in the center of her plate.

Mary got up and poured herself another glass of milk, "Well, don't count on Howard and me to go up with you-all. I'll take the Plymouth and pick him up and we'll meet you-all at school."

Edith cut her pork chop neatly—two pieces at a time. She ate slowly, quietly.

"An' don't forget to give Miss Cleves her card. She's been planning this for weeks."

Jim smacked his lips, "Yessir! Yessir! Goin' to be a big night for this family!" and he walked off toward the living room.

Edith sipped her glass of water. They hummed around her. Mother'd press the grey gown tomorrow afternoon. Did you polish your shoes? And Daddy, don't forget to pick up the movie film.

Mother began stacking the dirty dishes. Grandmother and Daddy went on, "Well, I think it's a crime that they can't have flowers! After all, families ought to be allowed to do somethin'."

Daddy looked up from behind the paper that he had picked up from Mary's chair, "They're just tryin' to be fair. Some would have, and some wouldn't."

Edith pushed back her chair and walked out on to the back porch. The bees were buzzing over the honeysuckle bushes. Inside plates and cups clattered. Grandmother was singing,—half saying, "The Ole' Rugged Cross."

Edith listened to the bees. Sounds of late afternoon drifted across the back yards of Linden Street houses—the roar of the 5:37 going over the tressel two blocks away, the rattle of pots and dishes and pans from the kitchen next door, the hum of heavy dinner-hour traffic out the front of the house. Inside, Grandmother had switched to "In the Cross."

Edith ran her hand over the porch step where she sat and picked at the cracked, peeling grey paint. She sat like that for a long time. After a while the kitchen was quiet and she went back inside.

They were all watching "64,000 Dollar Question" when she walked into the living room. Daddy sat in his undershirt sipping beer and Mother sat on the footstool mending her yellow, print housedress. Jim and Grandmother drank cokes and laughed at the contestants. Mary was gone.

Edith picked up a magazine and climbed the stairs to her room. She shut the door behind her.

By six o'clock Aunt Gladys and Bill were there. Aunt Gladys wore a red silk dress that stuck to her wet back and a tiny white straw hat that bounced on top of her kinky hair. Bill wore an old brown, pin-stripe suit that pulled across his bony shoulders and hung short above his wrists.

Mother ran back and forth from bedroom to ironing board.

"Jim! Pour Bill a glass of beer! You hear? Edith here's your dress."

Bill and Daddy sat in the living room drinking beer. Mary had gone to pick up Howard.

"You 'bout ready Edith?" Bill grinned at her and tilted his glass again.

Edith smiled and nodded. She sat on the edge of the couch. She spread her white dress out around her and crossed her ankles, careful not to scuff her white heels. She folded the white-gloved hands neatly in her lap and waited. Quietly. Stay cool.

Aunt Gladys waddled in from the kitchen mumbling to herself, "Bill, get up off your tail and get ready. Sister's fixing her face."

"Wha', honey, we're ready; just sitting here waitin'."

Jim was leaning against the doorway in his charcoal suit, "God, it's hot! I gotta get me a summer suit." He mopped the back of his neck.

Mother came in from the dinning room, jabbing a hat pin into her old black hat as she came. She had on a black and white silk that hung uneven around her knees and a necklace of pink beads that swung and jiggled around her fleshy neck, "I'm ready; let's go."

Grandmother talked all the way to the school. She just wanted Edith to know that the whole family was proud of her. Yessir. And it certainly

was a fine thing to be first. Yessir, education is a fine thing and you certainly made the family proud.

Edith watched familiar houses pass by the windows. She didn't move. Stay cool. Don't wrinkle the dress.

They drove along by the railroad yard and then up across the viaduct to Madison Avenue. They passed by the Dairy Bar and Edith leaned forward to peer in the windows like she always did.

They went down the hill between Twentieth Street and Twenty-first. Over the tops of the trees she could see the smokestack behind the cafeteria and the roof of the auditorium.

Jim was reminiscing. "God, it seems like ten years since I made this ride. Ole' barn hasn't changed much though!" They laughed.

Traffic had slowed down and Daddy was beginning to complain about his shirt collar having too much starch.

Edith watched the row of cars ahead turn into the school drive. She sat back in the corner of the seat and readjusted her earrings. She picked and invisible piece of thread from her shirt.

Daddy stopped complaining about the heat and the stiff collar and Mother rolled down the window to call to people walking along the drive.

"Look, Edith, there's Janey. See her? Over there by that tree!" She leaned out the window, "Oh, Janey! Hi you, Janey!"

Janey turned and waved and turned back again.

"Did you see her, Edith?"

Edith didn't answer. She leaned her head against the cool window glass.

Daddy let them out in front of the building and drove on back to the parking lot. Boys who smelled of too much shaving lotion lounged in front of the main entrance. They had to wait until the last minute to put on their caps and gowns and rush into line. That was the way they did it. Girls in white summer dresses clicked importantly up the steps in their high, white heels that wobbled slightly beneath them.

Crowds of parents paraded on the walks. Mothers, as fashionable and confident as their daughters, adjusted gowns and caps while fathers smoked last cigarettes before going into the hot crowded auditorium.

We'll meet you afterward, Edith. You're sure you don't want any help?"

Edith shook her head. Mother kissed her quickly on the cheek and the family walked on into the auditorium.

She turned and walked quickly down the hall to the girls' dressing room. Smothered giggles came from the end of the hall. The processional line was beginning to form. She hurried to change into the grey gown and took her place behind the president of the class. Slowly they began to move down the hall to the auditorium. The school orchestra had finished the introduction of "Pomp and Circumstance" by the time Edith got to the door.

She moved quietly in her place. Slowly. Keep in time. Eyes straight ahead. She was aware of the murmurs of some one-hundred and seventy sets of parents and relatives as the class members took their seats on the stage. She stared at a crack in the balcony plaster until the last one was on stage and the class sat down.

She tucked her feet, ankles crossed, under her chair, crossed her hands over her program and looked into the faces before her.

They were sitting in the sixth row, a little left of center. She found them right away. She saw Aunt Gladys turn and say something to Jim. Then she saw her laugh and the white hat bounced on the kinky hair.

Daddy ran his finger around the edge of his collar and whispered something to Mother. She frowned and shook her head.

Edith looked at them for a long time. Mother raised her hand above her lap, waist high, and waved once.

Edith looked away. The superintendent of schools was introducing the speaker, the president of some college in Minnesota.

She tried to stare at the crack again, but her eyes burned. Her mouth felt dry and her eyes still burned. She bent her head over the program and began reading the list of names but the words began to blur.

She looked out at them once more and the tears came.

# CONVERSION

SHARON BROWN

Fast fell the feather flakes of snow
Upon the graves where dead men lie.
I wondered where their souls must go,
And why we here were left to cry.

Soft dropped the gentle bits of rain
Upon the stones above their heads.
I marveled at the widow's train
As she so faithful mourn her dead.

*Down beat the rays of morning sun*
*Upon the yellow rose. Alone*
*I linger by the tomb of one*
*Whose gentle lips my lips have known.*

# THE LION

M. WILSON

He felt the urge stir. It screamed for satisfaction. Throwing his horn case on the bed he opened it. It always startled him to see the gold against the black velvet. With feverish hands he picked up the saxaphone and assembled it. His fumbling fingers split two reeds. He never knew when it would come, but he knew he must kill it. Through the empyreal they would wander, the horn and he, searching for the lion to slay it. They would not find it he knew.

* * *

A few heads were turned listening to the combo, but most of the crowd were far away. He couldn't blame them; they had come to see an artist create. He wasn't. The boys behind him knew and so did he. They would never make the big time at this rate. At quitting time they would have a talk.

The evening dragged and so did the music. Even the interested few weren't really interested. Inside he suffered; failure he couldn't take. If it were only a dream, but it was hard and real. He wanted a pillow to cover his head and smother the tinkle of glasses, the laughter and the buzz of inattentive conversation. Everything he had ever done ended now in this. This crowd would even listen to hillbilly music. He walked off the stand.

"Hey, bud, where you going?"

"Out and fly my kite."

"Get back up there. I paid good money to hear you."

He unsnapped the horn from the neck strap, and using it like a baseball bat, hit the man across the face. The blow was malignant. Toes pointing to the ceiling, the man lay with blood pumping from his nose.

A sea of faces pressed around and someone held his arms. His horn lay on the floor in a small pool of blood. It was dented and bent. When he saw it, he screamed in agony and broke away. He sank to his knees and picked it up. Without shame he caressed it and rocking back and forth sobbed. The police came and he lost his job. The man's nose was broken.

As a leaf in a gutter engaged with a summer torrent, he was swept by the current of the city. Days and nights became as one. In and out of thousands of alleys, nights in the parks and flop-houses, a bottle here—a bottle there; there was no reality. Music offered no refuge. His horn was injured and so was he. Many times he went and stared into the river. It was always the same, inviting. The water shimmered and begged to embrace him. He couldn't, he was a coward. With each succeeding visit he built his courage for surrender. Finally he decided.

From the middle of the bridge, he gazed into his grave. Alone on the

stage, the moon was his spotlight, the night an unconcerned bystander. From far above the moonlight streamed down permeating all. It penetrated his soul, and awoke the sleeping lion. Stretching its limbs it roared. The demand superseded all else.

* * *

In his room a single bulb cast shadows on the wall. He knew what was necessary. This had all happened before; the answer then was the answer now. This time he would find it and kill it. With the solemnity of a high priest offering a human sacrifice, he took a small box and opened it. Inside were five capsules of heroin, a spoon, a small piece of rubber tubing and a hypodermic syringe.

It was simple, a trade—a monkey for a lion.

# THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

ROY CROSTHWAITE

After Mrs. Clarke died, Jane inherited the responsibility of running the household. She got up every morning and cooked breakfast for herself and Lee Roy and Mr. Clarke, when he was home.

On a full, golden morning in May, she got up and went into the kitchen. It was a spacious room, but it seemed dreary to her that morning. Maybe it was the color, "Wedgwood Blue," the label on the paint can had read, that she and Lee Roy had painted the walls last fall when they'd just moved into the apartment. The stove leaked and there was a trace of gas in the room. It had the smell of a penny held too tightly in a child's hand.

She opened the transom and the two windows, pushing the gauze curtains aside. The good warm air pouring through the windows brightened her thoughts. She thought she would fix "eggs a la goldenrod." Last week Miss Prewitt had shown the home economics class how to fix them that way. The yellow crumbs of egg yolks sprinkled over the cream sauce on the thin, crustless triangles of toast, served with all the decorum and fine table setting that Home Economics 8 could muster, had seemed so magnificent to her. But there wasn't enough time to boil the eggs; it was already 8:30.

She went into the living room where Lee Roy was sleeping on the old blue sofa that Ma bought when she worked at the Hilltop Pie Company. She grabbed his skinny shoulder, sticking out from under the patchwork quilt, and shook him.

"Lee Roy, *Lee Roy,* get up. I want you to go to the bakery and get some rolls. There's enough milk and cocoa for chocolate this morning."

She said it with a little remorse. She could hear Miss Prewitt's sugary tones, warning the class about those dreadful meals of rolls and about what they did to your health, especially your teeth. And it was true; her teeth were terrible, but she'd had them all filled. She went back into the kitchen and smiled into the mirror over the sink. She remembered what the nurse had said when she went for her last examination at school. The nurse looked into the "Ah" that she made, and with a little gasp of amazement admired her fillings.

"My, you sure have had a lot of work done on these."

Lee Roy, who was usually slow about getting up, came into the kitchen as soon as he dressed himself. Jane went to the kitchen cabinet and took out the fat little china cow stuffed with five one-dollar bills, drew one out and gave it to Lee Roy.

"Get some of those with the peanuts on them. I'm tired of those old jelly rolls. You can get some donuts if you want to."

When Lee Roy went out the door, she started to set the cow back in the cabinet. She paused for a minute, thinking of Cummins School. Things were different there; everybody was poor. She had always worried a little about Lee Roy. They had been in the same class ever since she stuck in the first grade. She had missed two months of school, because she'd had scarlet fever. She remembered the fifth grade especially well—the way Miss West

called for the homework each morning. Lee Roy, who day-dreamed constantly with his head propped on his hands, would come out of his dreaming and begin to search through his notebook, crammed full of pictures of dogs, old test papers, letters that he never mailed, and chewing gum wrappers. He searched carefully at first, and then with a little more intensity. Finally he would fumble through the notebook in sheer desperation. Everyone else had carried his papers to Miss West's big oak desk, and Lee Roy would be still searching.

"I know I have it here somewhere." Then Miss West would look over her steel-rimmed spectacles and say, "Dear, why don't you help your brother look for his paper?" Jane would take Lee Roy and his notebook back to the cloak room and go through the awful mess until they found the paper. Sometimes they didn't find it, and Lee Roy would look at her and tremble a little. Then she'd take him by the hand and lead him back into the classroom, announcing to the black eyes looking over the spectacles at the desk and the rows of smirking white oval faces, "My brother can't find his paper. I know he did his work last night. He.—"

The spectacles would cut her off. "Take your seats. Lee Roy, you be sure to bring your work tomorrow."

She set the cow back in its place, thinking now that school would be out soon. And her father would probably be home tomorrow. He worked for the railroad and sometimes he was away three days at a time.

When Lee Roy came back with the white bag, spotted with grease from the donuts, she was pouring the chocolate into big dime-store cups. In the pantry she found a bag of marshmallows that were stale, but they melted nicely in the hot brown liquid. They chewed the sweet rolls with their thick coats of icing and washed them down with the syrupy chocolate. The peanuts tasted a little bitter.

She said with a mouthful of roll and chocolate, "Lee Roy, you got your speech ready?"

"Yeah, sure, what'd you think I was doing last night?"

"I hope that test isn't too hard today. I never could get algebra."

She was silent for a little while afterwards, chewing and watching Lee Roy carefully. She didn't know how to say what she was thinking about.

"Lee Roy—"

Lee Roy had his history book opened beside his cup, half-heartedly studying the paragraph about Egyptian papyrus that he was to recite to the class that morning.

"Uh huh."

"You ought not to bring Harris here. You know how the kids talk. And what if he should start telling them things about—"

Lee Roy looked up and smiled. There was understanding in his look.

"O.K., Jane, I won't ask him over anymore."

When she had carried their dishes to the sink and rinsed them under the faucet, she got her books off the kitchen cabinet, and together they walked out the back door, locking it behind them.

Whenever they walked together, Jane set the pace. Each morning she walked cautiously down the long driveway to the street. The driveway ran beside the house. The house was a four-family apartment building, a gawky, old red brick thing, that was erected when inside plumbing was a luxury. There was a rumor that the toilet was still outside, for the little, faded yellow shack with its four slatted doors was still standing under the ancient pear tree at the back of the house. But, indeed, it did have inside plumbing. What if it was just a stall in the basement? Lately there had been talk that the city council was talking about condemning their apartment building.

The type of house one lived in was very important to the students of Glendale Junior High School. When someone asked Jane where she lived, she always answered, "Oh, down on Harper Street." Her cool pride was a barrier steep enough to block any further inquiries. Lee Roy had only a few friends at school. Most of them were from the Harper Street neighborhood. Many of the students were a little better housed than the Clarkes and cruel because of it. The "little yellow" house was a favorite topic of their con-

versation, and Lee Roy had once cried out to them in a burst of pride that it was used to set garbage cans in.

They had kept the location of their house a secret from the rest of the students at Glendale, but each morning and night they risked discovery on their trip to and from school.

Now they had almost gained the street and Jane had lost some of her caution. There was no one on the street. She looked around her and saw how cool and orderly the tulips bloomed in Wall's front yard. There was a big white trellis full of red rambler roses beside their driveway. It seemed to her that the whole neighborhood had grown up fine and lovely around their ancient apartment. Millers had white-washed the two stone lions guarding their steps, and on the porch old Mrs. Miller was watching her collie romp over the lawn. She could hear her calling, "Here, Lady. Come, Lady. Come here." She was thinking about sending Lee Roy to pick one of the roses to pin in her hair—and then it happened.

There they were almost on the sidewalk when Ernest Tillman, the president of the eighth grade class came riding by on his bicycle. Jane walked in slow little steps. Lee Roy felt her desperation. He thought she was going to run back to the house, but she didn't. Lee Roy called out, "Hello, Ernest."

Ernest didn't answer. He rode by slowly, idly pumping the pedals. When he was almost by, he turned his head around and looked at them and then at the house behind them with its little shack under the pear tree. He turned and pedalled off down the street.

Lee Roy *had* to do something for her. He put his history book under his arm and with his hand he took Jane's arm. She was trembling. He pushed her gently in the direction of the school.

"Come on, Jane, you know how Miss Ramble is about missing tests. You know that Texas Chili you made Saturday sure was good. If you'll make some tonight, I'll stop by the super market and get some hamburger."

They walked like that for two squares without saying a word. Lee Roy didn't know what else to do. Then Jane stopped shaking and turned to him.

"Daddy'll be home tomorrow. Buy a can of baking powder, too. I think I'll make a 'Happy Day Cake.' Be sure the label says 'double acting.' "

By the time they reached the school, she was smiling and talking as if nothing had ever happened.

## AUTUMN FIRE

OLLIE J. ROBERTSON

There's a flame in the forest,
But it isn't a fire.
It's the scarlet of maple,
The yellow of gum;
The wind comes a-blowing,
The flames start a-dancing,
And darting about,
A great yellow-red tongue.

There's a blaze in the woodland.
I must go and see it,
So over the brown fields
I hurry away.
As I run nearer
The flame flashes brighter;
I'll be happy to roam
In the forest all day!