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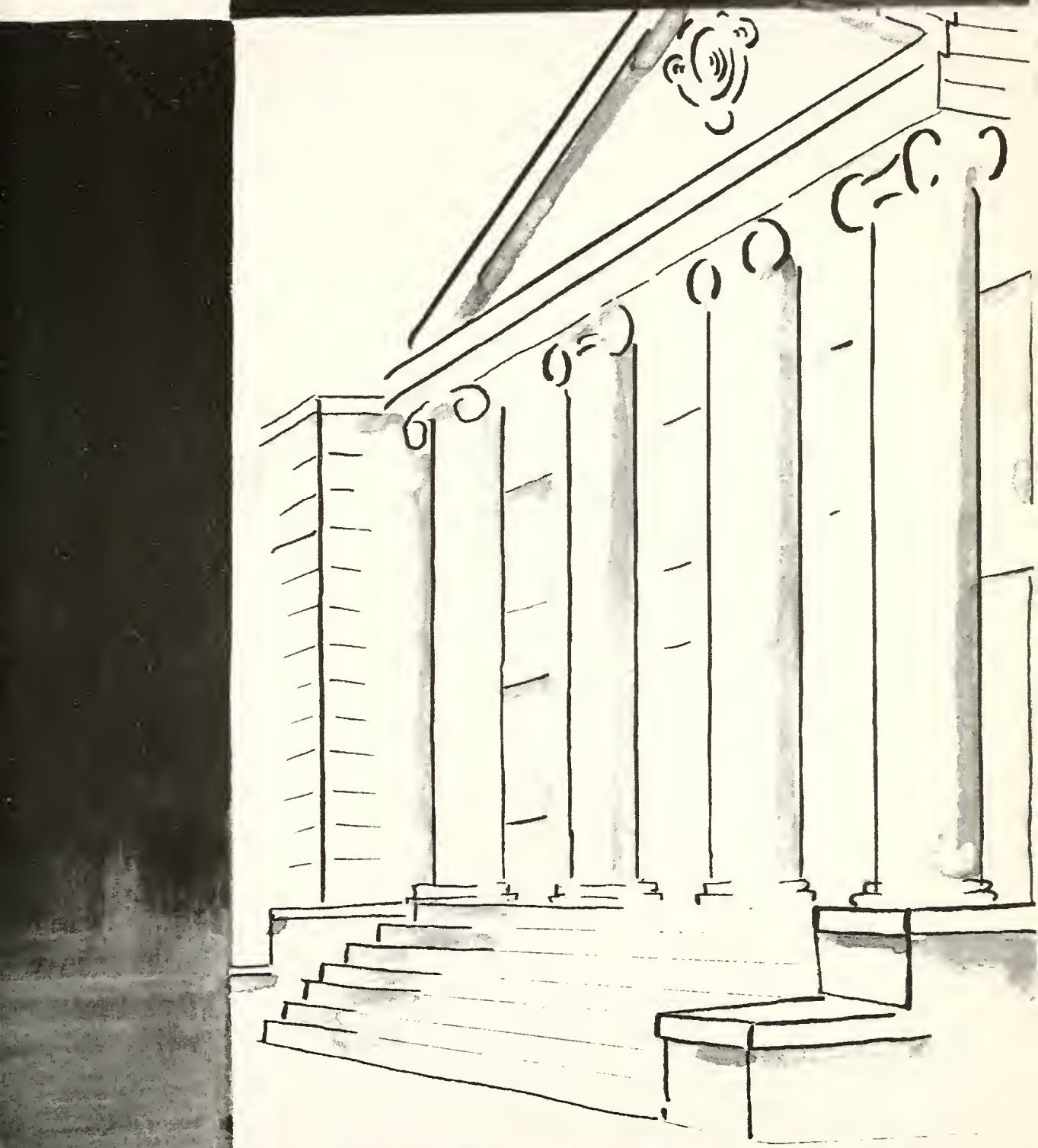
Belles Lettres



1960-61

Belles Lettres

An annual anthology of student writing sponsored and published by the
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COMPENSATION

ROBERT L. PEERCY

I watched him tap his dark way down the street,
With young head bent, his sightless eyes cast down,
Unknowing that a stranger's troubled frown
Might ask, "Oh, God, how can you deem it meet
That such as he, on curbed, uncertain feet,
Must daily tramp, in seasons green and brown,
The rayless paths that hold no victor's crown,
And hold no gleam of light in dark retreat?"
Ah, wait, my child, that burdened, cane-free hand
His tools of trade enfold in tender clasp,
And could you see him in yon concert throng,
You would with hordes, acclaiming, stand
And with your puny mind awakened, grasp
His lofty triumph in his violin's song.

UPON HEARING HAYDN'S CREATION ORATORIO

BAILEY PEARSON

I thought I heard the Angels sing His love;
I felt the power and presence of God.
And yet, from reason safe, I'll never rove,
Nor take as law for life His gentle nod.

No sounds on earth can reach my heart so close,
Nor call it from recluse toward man to move.
Nor words of tongue do make me start to lose,
Myself in God's most harsh command to love.

O Man, who movest me to God in song:
Thou workest too well in tone thy task;
For now, I've come too late to love the throng,
And have all but forgot whose will did ask.
It was a simple thing to do, for me;
O Man, I worship Thee.

TRIAL BY TERROR

SUZANNE HALE

The thunder woke me. There was a resounding burst that sounded like the work of an angry drummer, and I opened my eyes to see a sheet of blue light sweep out of the floorboards and crackle at the walls. Storms scared me. I felt the familiar tingle start at the nape of my neck and crawl over my head. I didn't feel quite so brave now as I had this afternoon when:

"Don't worry, Mom, for goodness' sake! You and Dad will be back before we get up in the morning. After all, I'm a big girl now —almost eighteen—and besides, *what* would bother us?"

Well, a storm would for one thing. The ground rumbled and shook itself. I pattered across the floor to the window. I could just hear Mom now:

"Angie, don't stand by the window when it's lightening and don't walk around barefoot and don't run around without your robe and don't start bringing those wet, smelly animals into the house!"

Poor bugs and birds or poor anything that was out on a night like this. Bet ole Ma Robin is sure telling this storm off. Like she does me when I get too close to her nest. Wish it would lighten again, so I could see what's out there. I'll stare toward Paul Bunyan, the maple, and count to ten. Then things will be visible. I smiled now at the wish-game that I had taken so seriously as a child, but started counting anyway. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . .

At first it seemed like an illusion, unreal; it seemed as if he had happened there simply because I had counted to ten and made him materialize. I squinted my eyes tight, but he was crouched in my mind as clearly as he was crouched by Big Paul. A big man, wearing a big red plaid shirt that was plastered to his back with water. He was staring right toward the house with water running off his hairy face, water running down his hairy arm, and water running off the gun in his hairy hand. It seemed as if I had been staring at him for hours, but it was not more than five seconds. With a sudden jerking movement, he stumbled toward the house.

Something was happening to my throat. My tongue was like a dead, brittle stick poked in dry sand. I swallowed against the stick. He was coming into the house—in here with Jonilyn and me—and with a gun! I was on my knees, half in prayer and half because I

was too weak to stand. I had to do something—something—something—anything! I'd lock the doors. He couldn't get in if the doors were locked! I staggered out into the hall. One step . . two step . . three . . and the stairway yawned in front of me, colored a soft yellow by the tiny "nite-lite." Down—one step . . two step . . there were no sounds except the frenzied working of my heart. I bumped into the front door and slid my fingers up and down trying to find the key. Twisting it to the right, I heard the soft click that seemed to whisper, "I'm locked." Groping along the wall I moved into the kitchen. Lightning darted past me and found the back door. I could see that it was locked. I moved my lips to take the stiffness out of them and started my journey back. The house was so quiet. It seemed to huddle around me, attentive.

Something seemed to be behind me, above me, below me, wrapped around me, shouting "Gun! Gun!" Gun. Of course, get the gun! It's in Dad's desk drawer. It's always there and always loaded. Remember:

"That hawk's gonna get too damn close to the chicken house someday, and I want that gun right where I can lay my hands on it. And I want it loaded so I can fire it! The hawk isn't gonna wait around for me to get ready, you know. Don't worry, Mom, the girls aren't going to bother it. They're old enough to realize the danger."

"Sure, Dad, the danger." I sobbed now. "Well, I want to borrow the gun for a minute—just a minute—to kill a man! You don't mind do you, Dad? He is getting too damn close to the house!"

I pulled open the desk drawer and slid my hand inside until I felt the hard, cool surface of the gun. I drew it out slowly. Then something gave a sharp tug on my pajama top. I whirled and grabbed the tiny arm.

"Quit, Angie! You're hurting my arm! Let go! Anyhow, I want a drink and why don't you turn on the lights 'cause I can't see and ooooh!—*what* are you doing with Daddy's gun? Daddy said never to touch that and I'm gonna tell and . . ."

"Jonilyn, shut up! Please shut up and go upstairs. Upstairs! Now! Don't cry, honey. I'm going with you."

I put my arm around her and scooted her toward the stairs. She felt bony. If she had fur, she'd feel like a kitten, I bet. A tiny, weak, and helpless kitten. Her little face wrinkled up like an old woman's and she started hiccuping sobs.

"Angie, I'm—I'm scared and I want Mommy and Daddy to come home and it's thumpin' outside and I don't like to hear it and . . ."

"Shhh! Don't cry, Cheebie. Remember last summer when you picked up that little snake? You were so brave. You're no 'fraidy cat, are you? Anyway, you and I are going to play a game. We're going to crawl up the steps real quiet-like, just like Indians. That's good, Jon. Now, we're going to lie down on the floor right here behind the banister and right near this window. 'Tend like we're hiding from—well—from everyone. And there are only two ways that anyone can find us. They could climb up on the front porch and look in the window or come up the stairs. Now you watch the porch roof, and I'll watch the stairs, and if I see anyone I'll tell you, and if you see anyone you tell me. Then before they see us, we can run and hide again. And if no one finds us before Mom and Dad come home, why we'll be the winners. Understand?"

My hand began to sweat and the gun became slippery and sticky. Jonilyn's eyes blinked and soon her breathing had a natural rhythm that meant sleep.

I listened so hard that the silence became an eerie humming. Then I heard the muffled tinkle of broken glass. It came from the direction of the kitchen. I visualized the long window next to the sink. It was almost on ground level, and that was how he was going to come in. But what could he possibly want here? There's no money or jewels or anything to steal. Maybe he didn't come to steal. Maybe he knows we're all alone and—well, he's wrong because we're *not* alone. This gun is plenty company, and I guess he'll find that out quick enough when I—when I—could I actually *shoot* a man? Shoot to *kill* him? Maybe I could just shoot *at* him and scare him. No. That's no good. He might shoot back. I can't take the chance. I've got to wait for him to start up the stairs and then—from this angle I'll have to shoot him in the back! He won't have a chance. Maybe I should yell down and tell him that I have a gun and for him to go away. But why give *him* a chance? If I hadn't awakened, I'll bet he wouldn't have given *us* a chance. Wonder what the kids at school will think about me killing a man? They'll probably be afraid to speak to me:

"Don't have anything to do with that Angie Kahn. She's a *murderess!* She killed a man. Shot him in the back. She didn't give him a chance. Stay away from her!

"Poor, poor man. I wonder if he has any children waiting for *him* to come home and make everything safe and happy again?"

The bottom step creaked a protest under the weight. I shuddered and the faint chill in my stomach grew more pronounced. Count—one step . . two step . . three . . .

"Angie! Angie! You're not watching! There's someone on the steps and he's gonna see us and we'll lose the game and . . ."

The giant was lumbering straight toward us with his glistening bald dome, his tiny blurry eyes, and the incredible red plaid shirt, all bursting up the stairs.

I pushed Jonilyn to the floor, put my leg over her neck to keep her there, raised the gun with both hands, closed my eyes and pulled the trigger hard. The roar was deafening and tiny flicks of acid seemed to flit against my face and arms. The giant screamed. It was an awful scream. He thumped back down the stairs. The club-like black stick—it wasn't a gun after all—fell from his hand, and he began to twist and kick as if going into a convulsion, his great hands covering his face. I hadn't shot him in the back.

Jonilyn whimpered. I sobbed too, but not because I was scared.

"Forgive me, man. Forgive me, God. I had to do it. I just *had* to do it! If only *dawn* would come."

A DREAM OF ORANGES

ELIZABETH SHAW

God, how the sun beats down! It's like in the story in the *Post*—a white-hot day; the air doesn't stir; the glaring yellow desert stretches out and out unendingly . . . not even the dogs dare to brave the griddle that the hillside becomes in mid-afternoon . . . that dishtowel I hung out not five minutes ago is dry already . . . why don't they hurry? The potatoes are getting soggy in the grease. . . . I wonder which is worse, standing over a stove in this shack, or staying down in a worn-out mine all day. . . . What makes a man want to spend his whole life grubbing around in the ground for gold, when he can never find it? . . . There's a vulture over yonder gully; must have found a rabbit. . . . Hell couldn't be worse than Montana in August.

I wish I could leave. I wish I could catch that bus that goes by at noon every day and just ride and ride until I leave the desert and

come to a place that's green and fresh. . . . I wonder if Kentucky really has those rolling bluegrass hills and pastures with long, fast horses in them . . . probably just made up for picture postcards . . . the ocean boiling over sand and crashing against jagged rocks. I wonder what a mountain with great forests and cool meadows is like. I think the thing I would like most to do is walk through a grove in California and eat an orange I'd picked. I wonder what an orange tastes like? They're so pretty in magazines—I bet they taste good. . . . My stupid dreams; I can hear Paw now:

"Wake up and stop moonin' around. Why ain't you got supper on the table—you coulda seen me comin' half a mile away. I don't know why in the Hell you cain't be useful like your maw was, 'stead of just loafin' all the time. Allus readin' and thinkin'—what you got to think about? Don't you ever get tired of thinkin'?"

"Paw, I just. . . ."

And then the knock comes at the door.

"See who it is!"

—The walk to the door anticipating Mr. Bryant's monthly visit for the five dollars rent on the two-room shack, and Paw's griping as he digs down into the bureau drawer for the money pinned to the bib of his Saturday overalls.

—The shock of seeing a young man dressed in army khaki covered with dust standing in the doorway.

His face is sun-touched a deep red, and his eyes are almost squinted shut as he looks down at me from his over-six-feet height and says in a voice reduced to a whisper by being forced through a heat-parched throat, "Scuse me, but my car ran out of gas about a mile down the road. Do you have any extra gas I could buy?"

From his place beside the table Paw speaks up genially, "Sure do! We're just now settin' down to eat, though. Set another plate on, Janey. My name's Eli Mason, and this here's my daughter, Janey."

"My name's David Lewis."

"I see you wear army clothes—you been in the service?"

"Just got out. I'm bummin' around now. I'm on my way to California—want to live a little before I settle down."

So he stays for supper, and Paw talks him into staying for a few more days to help replace some of the loose timbers in the mine.

I guess his talk attracts me most. . . . His talk is wonderful. He's

been around and knows what country looks like that isn't baked dry by the sun. He's even been to Germany and Japan. In Japan there are mountains that have snow on them all year round, and men pull carts around and use them for taxis. The ocean at San Diego in California rolls up on white sand and is the most beautiful sight in the world—makes you feel real close to God. The waving wheat in Kansas goes as far as you can see, and trees—real, live, tall, beautiful trees—in Virginia, Tennessee, and all over the east. And, best of all, California has groves and groves of orange trees. People let you pick and eat all you want. . . . David tells such wonderful things.

He and Paw have had their heads together all week. They spend all their time down at the mine, and even when they come in to eat, they're talking. I guess he must love me, because he asked Paw and me if he could marry me. Probably that's why he acts so interested in Paw's gold mine—wants to please my father. He probably knows as well as I do that there ain't any gold in the mine—just enough to keep Paw here scratching away at it all his life.

He's what I've always dreamed of. I don't know if I love him or not. He's like Paw in a lot of ways—not very neat and clean, surly sometimes, and he doesn't like pretty clothes and fixin's—but all that will change when we get away from this God-forsaken hillside. He's not smart, and he only talks when you pump him, but that will be different in California. I don't mind working hard to help him. Maybe we could raise oranges and sell them.

I don't know about his love-making. He hurts me when he hugs me, and his kisses are so fierce. I guess everybody real kisses like that, but all the magazines make it out to be nice and tender. It's just here, though; out here in the desert everything is brutal. I know he'll change when we're married—when you're married you have to be tender. Life can be so wonderful.

Dreams! . . . I guess I was meant to be a dreamer. All my life I've dreamed of leaving this place—I wonder when I'll give up the dream? For twenty years I waited for Paw to give up the mine and go to some decent place, and for twenty more years I've waited for David. Why couldn't we have left when we planned to? What would my life have been like if Dave hadn't gotten the gold bug too? A forty-year-old woman has so little left to dream for, but I can't help but wonder what oranges taste like.

MANIAC!

JERRY HOWELL

Emily read the headlines to herself: "Maniac Still at Large." Absorbed, she read farther:

"Mr. Werner was the tenth victim within a year of the maniac that plagues our city. No clues or motives have been established at the time we go to print." She laid the paper on the tea table, a lovely antique she and Vera had picked up at an auction. Vera and Emily lived alone in the suburbs of York. They were sisters and had inherited their house and money from their father. By the townspeople they were considered snobbish and antisocial, even though Emily did leave the house for a nightly stroll.

"This is frightening, Vera," Emily decided. "It is dangerous for an unarmed person to get out of the house. Imagine, ten people!"

"Yes, it is, Emily," Vera said. "I'm even afraid to go out of the house to get groceries in broad daylight."

"He will be caught, though, Vera; watch and see."

"I surely hope so. Emily, certainly you aren't going for a walk tonight."

"Why, of course, I am. Do you think this maniac will attack an old defenseless woman? Haven't all his victims been men? I know you worry about me, Vera, but I shall not be gone long, and I don't know what I'd do if it weren't for my nightly walk."

"I still wish you wouldn't go."

"I'll be careful," Emily said as she threw her shawl around her shoulders and walked out of the door.

She walked with long, brisk steps down the walk and moved her head from one side to the other taking in all the fragrance of the cool spring night. She passed Mr. Green's house and mused that she would quadruple the two blocks she had already walked before she went back home. In the next block she stopped and peeped in the windows of Mr. Thomas's greenhouse. Emily loved flowers and saw beauty in every green thing. She often wondered why more people didn't take advantage of the living things around them.

She walked slower now, sniffing and absorbing. When she reached the usual turning back point of her walk, she passed it up as if she were in a trance. She walked three more blocks towards York and stopped to look at her watch. "Time to get back," she

said aloud. "Vera will be worried." She did an abrupt about-face and walked towards home.

She hadn't gone more than ten steps when she heard distant footfalls behind her. I wonder who that is, she thought. No, it couldn't be . . . she dismissed the thought from her mind and quickened her pace. She was now two blocks from Mr. Thomas's greenhouse. She stopped; the footsteps stopped. She started up again; the footsteps started again. "It's him," she said softly. Her walking broke into a mild run; the footfalls ran. Maybe . . . she thought, as she ran to the far side of the greenhouse. She heard the footsteps running steadily now. I may be safe behind the greenhouse, she thought. He was getting closer now, and she knew he was not more than ten feet from the corner of the greenhouse. I've got to protect myself somehow, she thought. The footsteps were much closer now, and she could hear the soft sound they made on the grass. A figure turned the corner, and a voice said, "Miss, are you . . ." The sentence was never finished because Emily had already jabbed Vera's pair of scissors into the voice's heart.

The paper was wrong. There was more than one maniac prowling the city. After all, hadn't she done away with eleven now?

INFUSION

Charles Semonis

I thought that you had gone from me
Completely. Anguish, grief, despair
Enshrouded, bound, and blinded me.
My lips, no song; my heart, no prayer
Could find, until, so silently,
While I lay sleeping, unaware,
You stole into my formless dream
And gave it substance and a ray
Of tender light. A splendent gleam
Crept through the shuttered window, grey
And dingy, of my soul. Then while
You lingered there my bitter rest
Was sweetened by your wistful smile.
And when the morning, breeze-caressed,
With leafy petaled splendor came,
I heard a forest breathe your name.

PATIENCE, TO BE SURE, TOO LATE

RAY AKERS

In love he was; in love was she. He
Had loved, and she had said, "Patience,
To be sure."

A hand had touched his soul, saying, "Soon."
He had loved, and she had said, "Patience,
To be sure."

Death touched him, and he had said,
"Patience, to be sure." Death was sure,
And he is gone. He had loved, and she
Is left. She had patience, to be sure.

Into the earth he was placed, and misery
Sailed his ships upon the tears of her
Face, for she was sure, too late.

SONNET ON OUR TIMES

MARY MCGLASSON

These troubled times engender troubled minds
As each day's news brings close the world-wide cry,
"Give equal rights to all of great mankind's
Awakening throng." And for this cause, some die.

The jungle drum, so long a distant beat,
Becomes a thundering, threatening call to arms,
And symbolizes chaos from Far East heat
And Congo's cry to Cuba's grave alarms.

In our own land we see these seeds of strife
Where many still must fight for what is theirs.
Are these, a rebel world and harried life,
What we must leave to trouble hopeful heirs?

If freedom, love, and equal cause would grow,
Man's nobler nature *full* release must know.

DUTY

Barbara Parsons

"Elizabeth, you're a good woman. I knew it the first day I saw you. I'll never forget that day when I looked down from the pulpit and recognized the woman that everyone in church had been telling me about. I'd heard all about you the first week I was in Prakestown. There aren't many women like you, Elizabeth; I knew that the day I asked you to be my wife. You've never stopped being good," the Reverend Howard Oxley feebly said through his swollen lips. "And now here I am lying here dying. You know it and I know it. There's nothing can be done for me, and yet you still hang on. *That's* what drew me to you—that proud faith of yours, Elizabeth. You've always been so kind, so. . . ."

"On and on he jabbers about my goodness. Can't he hush? Doesn't he realize that this is part of my duty to the Lord? What does he expect a minister's wife to do? Cry and carry on? I'm supposed to act brave and faithful, and that's what I'm doing. What more can I do? I know it won't do any good to pray about it; Howard's going to die. There just isn't any hope for recovery from lukemia. As if it wasn't enough just to have Susan to take care of. Oh, how much more I could have had if only she hadn't been in my way. Thought I'd never be able to get married, but my fortieth year was lucky. It didn't seem to surprise a soul in Prakestown that Howard should ask one of the best workers in the church to be his bride. . . ."

Howard groaned. Elizabeth picked up the big, worn black leather Bible from Howard's bedside table and flipped automatically to Jonah 2:2. She knew exactly what to read to him: "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord and He heard me. . . ."

"I hear myself reading, but it means nothing. Repetition so often dulls things. 'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord and He heard me.' The Lord never heard anyone. All He expects is for us to do our duty to Him. Lord knows I've done that. As it says in Galations 6:2: 'Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.' That is I—Elizabeth Grace Oxley, the bearer of another's burdens.

"Howard looks terribly pale. Death seems to be almost upon him. Who'd ever believe a man of God could look so far from holy? His eyes are closed now and I'm glad. I just don't think I can

bear to look into them again and see them so filled with pain. You know, that big English bed—been in our family for fifty years or so —with its high headboard and dark, strong wood makes Howard appear so small and helpless. In a way, I suppose he is—helpless in the face of death. Wonder where his Lord is now? Waiting for him, no doubt. I don't believe He'll have much longer to wait, because, all of a sudden, Howard's *too* still. He looks like he's going to open his eyes any minute, but his chest has stopped its rise and fall. The veins are nearly standing up in his white hands lying there so rigid, yet relaxed on the bedspread. That's a beautiful bedspread—was given to Howard and me as a wedding gift from the church. Bet they never thought it'd be there when Howard died. Maybe they did, though, 'cause it's a good one; and good bedspreads last from family to family. Oh, how still he lies. I guess he's found his God because his face looks so peaceful. He really doesn't look like himself—all swollen like he is, but he still has a look of peace. Yes, the waxen face of peace—Howard. Yes, my husband, the Reverend Howard Oxley, is no longer a burden to me."

* * * *

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," the voice of the Reverend Mr. Smith droned on.

Elizabeth thought the lines over to herself as she sat near the coffin of her husband. "Yes, 'the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,' but who knows what He gives or what He takes? Our duty —that's it. He gives us our duty to Him. Nothing else. All is in duty. Well, I can feel secure, because I'm doing my duty to the Lord. Didn't I marry a preacher, whom I aided the best I could in all the church affairs? Haven't I taken care of that silly sister of mine all my life? Haven't I sacrificed my very all for the Lord? Yes, the Lord gave me a lot—of duty. Here I sit, obeying that duty. Why, aren't I crying like a minister's wife should? You know, quiet, brave tears. Everyone must see that I'm grieved at my loss of a fine husband, but quiet and brave because I'm supposed to show that I believe that Howard's in better hands now."

A tug at the sleeve of Elizabeth's faded black dress brought her eyes to the pale blue, non-understanding ones of her sister, Susan. Susan whispered, "Dead? Dead? No. No. Brother Howard, he asleep. He. He."

"Laugh, darling one, you know no better. It's funny to you. You know no sorrow. All is happiness for you. You have escaped *your*

duty—all by your feeble little mind. It doesn't matter if the townsfolk do stare my way because of your giggles. I can hold my head up proudly, because I know what they're thinking, for I've overheard them talking: 'How noble Mrs. Oxley is—given up her whole life just for her sister. Won't put her in an institution and they have the money, too. Mrs. Oxley just wants to give Susan the kind of love and home life she needs. Elizabeth is the very one who can do that, too. I've never seen a more God-fearing, Christian woman.' Those were good words. Oh, how easy to appear dutiful, faithful, good—just have problems and fall into them. That's the secret. It doesn't matter if you really don't want to do it. God only cares that you do this duty He sets before you. Besides no one will ever know about the way I hated Susan when I was in high school. No one would come see me because of her. But that was before I learned what the Lord expected of me. Why, no one at all is ever going to know . . . no, no one . . . . no one.

"They're closing the coffin now. Funny thing, I'd never noticed before how thick that final closing sound is. *So* final. Well, Howard was a good man; so good that I guess I should have gotten a more expensive coffin, but I'll need the money for subsistence later on and besides, they just put them down in the ground. Poor Howard. He just doesn't seem to be gone. But I'm glad the long nights are over. So many of them I sat up and tried to comfort him. I remember how sincere he was when he asked me to be his wife. He never just thought about himself. He knew Susan would always be around. He knew why I hadn't gotten married when I was a young girl—but, well, Howard was an older man, *too*. Yes, Howard was a good man, so kind and so understanding. I don't guess I was really worthy of a man such as he. But he needed a woman like me—one that could keep her religion every day of the week. Howard really lived an honest life. No one need worry about him."

* * * *

"It's a blessing Susan needs sleeping pills every night. You'd think she, like most 'children', would be able to fall asleep quickly. But she doesn't. It used to disturb me quite a bit because I had to spend so much time with her at bedtime. Course now that she's older—physically—the doctors will let her have sleeping pills. I'm glad for that. They say the Lord works in mysterious ways, and I guess her sleeping pills are a sharp indication of the truth of that. Here, I'll just dump the rest of the bottle in her glass of warm

milk. It's half a bottle—that should be enough. If Howard were here, I probably wouldn't have the nerve to do this; I just wouldn't be able to look into his trusting eyes. Guess his death is really a blessing, too. This is the best thing for Susan. She's getting old and feeble, physically as well as mentally. She has nothing to live for; it's my duty to her and to God to put her in a peaceful state. It isn't that she isn't peaceful now, but her body can't stand what her mind wants. A child's mind and a grandmother's body just don't go together. Here, I'll put a couple of these fudge cookies on her tray to make sure she drinks all of her milk. Now to go upstairs—no, wait a minute—I'll get out the family linen napkins and fix her tray up like I would for one of her little parties. Now, it really looks pretty, and here, I'll put that small antique rosebud vase with its one red rose on the tray, too. There, now. It's complete.

"She's already tucked herself in her bed. I'm glad she finally learned to prepare for bed. Watch her smile—a true idiot's smile. Funny, how people that don't have any sense seem to think a smile should make up for their deficiency. Oh, well, it's rather gratifying to see her so happy over the tray. It doesn't take much to please her, but her gibberish is so irritating at times. She's only sipped the milk. Perhaps it tastes different to her; maybe I should have gotten more fudge cookies; she really loves them. She's already eaten one and has barely touched that milk. Could it taste funny to her? No, I guess not, because she's accustomed to having her pills in warm milk. Oh, she's drinking it in gulps now. Maybe she'll finish it. No, she set it down—only half empty. Oh, she's reaching for the other cookie. Just like a child—taking the top of the cookie off so she can lick the cookie filling. Why does she take so long? Now, she must show me her tongue with chocolate all over it. Ugh! I'll smile anyway, 'cause she's pleased with herself. Now, Susan, please drink your milk. There it goes . . . down . . . down. There, all finished. I probably shouldn't let her go to bed without brushing her teeth—makes the dental bill too high, but there's no need to worry about that any more, is there? She seems to be getting drowsy. Now, to read to her. It'll only take a few lines of 'Hansel and Gretel,' because her head is nodding already. . . .

"That didn't take long. Now to take the 'party' tray back to the kitchen. Uh oh, that glass—there's some sediment in the bottom of it. I must remember to wash it out good before I go to bed."

* * * *

"Just look at Susan; she has the straight, coarse white hair and wrinkles typical of age. That hair—she never seemed satisfied that I had it cut so short, but I just couldn't see wasting money on extra trips to town. It didn't really matter how it looked, anyway. But Susan's wrinkles; they are the wrinkles of age—none brought on by the burdens of life. Her eyes, closed now, always seemed to reflect her intelligence as most people's do. Light blue, almost white, and yet, beady. They always seemed to say, 'I don't really understand what all this means, but it doesn't matter.' And I hope that's what they *were* saying.

"It's been only three months and a week since I sat here in this same position. People have been so kind to me. 'Poor Mrs. Oxley —no family at all now. But Susan's probably resting much better. She was getting rather old. It's been a miracle she lived as long as she did; most people with minds of that kind don't reach old age.' Weren't people kind? It didn't matter to them about *me,* but merely about how Susan was. What does she matter now? But, why should I complain? Two burdens have been lifted from me; now I can do so many things I've always wanted to—why, I can devote all my spare time to my flower garden and, maybe, when I save some money I can travel a bit. But, most of all, I can enjoy that big home of ours . . . Ours?"

A PLAINTIVE WHY WITH A GLIMPSE OF HOPE

Rita Jones

Why is my nose attached so crookedly to my face?
Why do my eyes lock in affectionate embrace?
Did Dame Nature play a prank on my mother?
If she wanted to goof, why wasn't it my brother?
Here I sit on a shelf like a forgotten jug of wine.
Friends look at me, sigh, and turn away;
"Don't sweat it, Reet, your turn will come to play."
But 'pears to me, I'll be left on the parental vine.
Plastic surgery is effective, but very dear;
If it were possible, I'd have no peer.
Since it's not, I'll wait awhile,
Hoping someday to make a pile.
Then my situation so deplorable
Will improve, 'cause I'll be adorable.

TOKEN OF A COMING SPRING

NORVIN JOHNSON

Even in Minnesota, March days should bring
A blooming bud or singing bird,
But still my window holds no word,
Or token of a coming spring.

And outside, the snow won't bring
A blooming bud or singing bird,
And from my window I see the half-frozen herd,
But nothing that even looks like spring.

Of spring no token, sign, or sight,
Until the mailman's horn,

As his car slides through the coming night,
Proclaims a package he has borne.

And what to my delight,
But half a dozen fruit trees wrapped in white.

SUMMER SONG

TOMMY KELLEY

The summer this year came in soft as rain
To sing, like lovely wind-chimes in the night.
Fierce Winter with his blasting breath was slain,
And spice-warm breezes put the frost to flight.
Yet, with just warmth my heart was not content,
For Summer without love is dry and long—
And so I waited with my love unspent
Until you came, and with you brought a song
That wakened in my sleeping soul a fire
I never dreamed existed in the sphere
Of mortal understanding. Thus the lyre
Of Summer's love made me Apollo's peer.
But now the Summer's ended; with it fly
The songs, the chimes, and soft, red lips that lie.

WHAT NOW, MISS ETHELBY

JIMMIE ARTHUR

Jeanie kneeled at the side of her bed, her doll clutched tightly in her arms. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless Mommy and Daddy and Uncle Clyde and Aunt Martha and Miss Ethelby and—and bless Grandma too. But, God, please, please make Grandma leave Miss Ethelby and me alone. Amen."

Jumping to her feet, she belly-flopped on the bed, squashing Miss Ethelby beneath her. Rolling over quickly she picked up the doll, smoothed its bright red pajamas and twisted its arm back in front again. "Did I hurt you, Miss Ethelby? I'm so sorry. You will forgive me, won't you? If you will, I'll tell you a story before we go to sleep. Would you like that?"

"Jeanie! Jeanie!"

"I wonder what she wants this time. You wait right here, Miss Ethelby; I'll be back in a minute." Carefully placing the doll on her pillow, she turned from the bed and started toward Grandma's room, trying to walk with her toes together and her heels apart. "Yes, Grandma?"

"Would you be a good girl and go downstairs and get the new magazine that came in the mail today. I want to read some before going to bed."

"But I was just getting ready to tell Miss Ethelby a bed-time story."

"Yes, Dear, but it will only take a minute, and then you can tell her a story."

"Okay, Grandma."

Hurriedly leaving Grandma's room, she ran to the stairs, climbed on the banister, and swooped to the bottom, spilling herself on the living room carpet.

"Jeanie!" scolded her mother. "How many times have I told you not to slide down the banister?"

"But I came down to get a magazine for Grandma."

"And does that make you have to slide down? From now on you walk down like I've told you."

Jeanie picked at a loose raveling on her pajama top. "Mom, how long is Grandma going to have to stay with us?"

"From now on, I guess. Why? Don't you like your grandmother?"

"Oh, I like her pretty much, but why is she always telling me to run upstairs to get this, and run downstairs and get that? Mommy, why can't Grandma get stuff for herself and not bother Miss Ethelby and me?"

"Since Grandmother broke her hip, Honey, she has had trouble moving about. That's why she came to live with us. When you get as old as your grandmother, you may want someone to wait on you once in a while."

"What's it like to be old, Mommy?"

"Never mind, Dear. Oh, I forgot to tell you. Daddy and I have to go to town in the morning, and we are going to leave you with Grandmother. You be real good and take care of her for me, and I'll bring you back a surprise."

"Okay, Mommy, and bring back something for Miss Ethelby too."

"Jeanie! Haven't you found that magazine yet?"

"Yes, Grandma, I'm coming with it."

With her long blonde hair swaying to and fro, she balleted up the steps and on into Grandma's room. "Here's your magazine. Night, Grandma."

Back in her room, Jeanie picked up the doll and propped her against the headboard of the bed. Then she seated herself in the middle of the bed, sat cross-legged, and faced the doll. "Did you get lonesome here all by yourself, Miss Ethelby? But that's all right; I'll tell you your story now, and Mom and Dad will be gone tomorrow; so we can do as we please. We'll play like we're grownups and read the funny paper and sit and talk while I serve coffee and do exercises and talk a lot on the telephone and just all kinds of stuff. Oh, I forgot. Grandma's here. We'll probably have to help her and won't have any time to play."

"Jeanie," called her mother, "it's time for you to get to sleep. Turn out the light and go to bed."

"Okay, Mommy."

Jeanie took the doll and tucked it under the covers. Then she reached over to the stand beside the bed and pushed off the light. Carefully she crawled under the covers and snuggled up beside the doll. "Isn't the dark scary, Miss Ethelby? Let's hurry and get to sleep, and then it won't bother us."

The next morning Jeanie woke very slowly. Yawning and stretching, she sat on the side of her bed trying to lift up her house shoes

with her big toe. Her soft brown eyes turned sleepily toward the pajama-clad doll in bed with her. Getting up, she went to a miniature dresser and, pulling open a drawer, selected a fresh, clean dress for her doll. This she placed on the bed beside the doll. Then she went to her closet, selected a dress of the same color as the doll's, and slipped into it. "Good morning, old Miss Sleepy-head. Let's get your pajamas off and put on this pretty blue dress. Golly, I'm hungry. Let's hurry downstairs and get something to eat."

Carrying the doll under one arm, she reached the stairs, climbed on the banister, and made her usual descent to the living room.

"Jeanie, didn't I hear your mother scold you last night for doing that?"

Jeanie turned and looked at her grandmother sitting on the couch. "I don't know, Grandma. What's for breakfast? Miss Ethelby and I are starved."

"Your mother set out some cornflakes for you, and you'll find the milk and a banana in the refrigerator."

In the kitchen Jeanie poured some cornflakes in a bowl, spilling some on the floor. Picking them up one by one, she tossed them into the bowl with the others, added five spoonfuls of sugar, sloshed some milk over them, and started eating. "What shall we do this morning, Miss Ethelby? I know, let's play house. As soon as we finish eating we'll—"

"Jeanie," called her grandmother from the living room, "I left my knitting needle on the dresser. Will you run up and get it for me?"

"But, Grandma, Miss Ethelby and I haven't finished eating yet."

"Okay, then, don't go. But I'll tell your mother I saw you sliding down the banister again."

"No, I'll go." Picking up the doll, she reluctantly went to get the knitting needle. Looking the room over, she could find no trace of it.

"Grandma, I can't find it."

"Sure you can, it's right on the dresser."

"No, it isn't. I looked there."

"Well then look around some more. It's there somewhere."

Jeanie went again to the room and made a thorough search for the knitting needle. "It's no use, Grandma, I just can't find it. It isn't here."

"I know it is; I left it there last night. Come on down and help me up the stairs, and I'll show you."

Her grandma clutched the banister firmly with one hand and clasped Jeanie around the shoulder with the other. "Now walk slowly. Just take your time and we'll make it," said her grandmother. "I know that needle's there."

She sure is heavy on me, thought Jeanie as they neared the top. I wish she would hurry up.

Grandmother placed a foot on the next step, moved her grasp further up the banister, and leaned heavily on Jeanie. At this moment, Jeanie suddenly darted from beneath her grandma's body. Grandma's hand started clawing the air, and her clouded eyes opened widely. Then she turned over backwards, landed with a thud on the steps, and rolled end over end to the living room floor.

Jeanie remained motionless, her large brown eyes alone moving, following every twist and turn of grandma's body until it fell at rest crumpled on the floor. She stepped over, climbed on the banister, and slid slowly down.

"Now," said Jeanie across the room to the doll, "we have the whole house to ourselves. What would you like to do today?"

"THE GOOD LORD'S WILL"

NORMAN YONCE

Between Easter and the Labor Day picnic, there was only one big event in the town of Valley View. Near the end of June folks began to talk about it, and around the middle of July signs were posted throughout the county announcing that next Monday Reverend Dickson and his tent revival would be in town.

Mattie and Lottie closed the Fabric Shop a full five minutes early Monday evening and hurried home to have supper and clean up by seven o'clock. Mattie and Lottie were fondly referred to by townfolks as "typical old maids." They lived alone in their house on Peyton's Road and had done so for the past thirteen years. Neither girl had ever been married, and both had long since given up hope —"Not that there weren't plenty of offers"—according to Lottie.

Each girl had been "quite a looker" in her day, but their parents had successfully discouraged any prospective suitors. The only socializing they were ever allowed to do was church on Sundays and Wednesdays, and circle meetings, potlucks, class meetings, and choir practice in between. When Poppa had passed away, it was up to the girls to provide—thus the Fabric Shop—and later Momma died, leaving Mattie and Lottie alone and "set in their ways."

Lottie was the older of the girls—as they referred to themselves

—now fifty-eight, and was the "happy one" of the twosome ("If an old maid can be happy," joked the men loitering around the hardware store). There was no pleasant word to describe Lottie—she was fat. She often worried about her weight problem but never enough to do anything about it. She had one insatiable desire—eating. Lottie was carefree, leaving the business end for Mattie. Lottie was the type to toss a once-worn dress over a chair or leave hairs in the bathroom sink.

Mattie was the opposite. Mattie kept the books, planned their buying, both in the store and at home, and attended to any legal matters. Mattie, now fifty-five, had been the prettier of the two and had never allowed herself to exceed 107 pounds. Mattie was the type to set a complete table for soup and sandwiches and never forget to wind a clock. Despite their differences, the sisters loved each other dearly.

The girls, owning no automobile, had to walk the mile and a half to Creech's field where the big, sprawling canvas tent had been set up. They could hear the piano playing while they were still some distance from the site.

"Oh, hurry, Lottie, we don't wanta miss a thing."

Lottie quickened her pace as much as possible to keep up with her sister, a full ten feet ahead. Mattie and Lottie hadn't missed a single tent meeting in six years.

They nodded and smiled sweetly to friends, and finding two aisle seats about midway of the tent, seated themselves on the straight-backed wooden benches. Lottie immediately began rhythmically fanning herself with the freely supplied pasteboard fans stamped "Singley's Funeral Home" on the back with "Christ, the Good Shepherd" on the front.

Soon Rev. Dickson and his evangelistic group—his wife as song leader, her sister at the piano, his son on the electric guitar, and his daughter with the tambourine—took the pulpit and services began.

Sister Dickson never announced a number; that way she always sang about half a verse before the congregation picked it up. Lottie squirmed with delight at the first song—"Mansion over the Hilltop." The ground fairly shook with the stomping of so many feet. The notes of the first song had hardly faded away when Sister Dickson started on "He Set Me Free." The crowd was really getting into the spirit by now. An occasional "hallelujah" or a "glory" rose above the din of the music.

Now, Rev. Dickson took the microphone and—"Lord, how that

man can pray," thought Mattie. The tent was alive with the murmurings of the hundreds of prayers, accented by long, trembling sighs of "yes" and "grant it." Most were kneeling on the sawdust, except, of course, Lottie, who might get down but never up again. Stifled giggles rose from the young people on the back rows, who were more interested in who would get to walk Sally home after meeting. A small child's babblings became too audible, and the mother had to take it outside.

After the prayer, the daughter, Emily, sang a solo while collection was being taken up. She forgot the words on the third verse and had to hum. Members of the congregation just smiled and nodded their heads.

The congregation stood for "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," followed immediately by "I'll Fly Away." This had long been Lottie's favorite, and Mattie knew she sometimes got a bit carried away on it. The stomping and clapping got louder and louder—almost at a feverous pitch—and above all came the shrill high-pitched scream from Lottie. Her head was thrown back, her eyes were closed, and whatever she was yelling, Mattie could not make it out. Tears rolled off her fat jaws, and her body was convulsed by irregular spasms. Suddenly, she stood perfectly quiet and still and then, with a sort of grunt, she fell out into the aisle.

The music stopped, and there was frenzied shuffling as a circle formed around Lottie's motionless body. No one spoke and Mattie stood frozen, clutching at her throat. Finally, Rev. Dickson knelt and felt for Lottie's pulse but could not find one.

"She's dead," he said, "God rest her soul."

A short, whimpering sound came from Mattie and then a long, terrifying scream as she threw herself down beside the body of her sister, one arm stretched across the enormous body.

"It's the good Lord's will," someone out of the crowd spoke, quickly punctuated by "amens" and "that's right." At this, Mattie, a wild, savage look in her eyes, looked up at the crowd of faces around her and spat.

"Like hell!" she squalled. "If this is all the Lord can do for me, he can—" the rest was lost in the shocked uproar of whispers among the crowd.

The tent revival continues to come every summer, and lots of folks go down Peyton's Road on their way to meeting, but each little group falls silent when they see Mattie there on the front porch, rocking back and forth, staring into space.

LOST

Ray Akers

Wandering aimlessly through the long
Halls of life, searching endlessly for
An answer to my existence, I leave no
Stone unturned, no door unopened; I
Search on, in despair.

Shall I search on throughout all
Eternity only to find there is no
Answer, or shall I find that my
Life on this tangible earth was
Prompted by Satan, to confuse,
Torment, and mislead my fellowmen?

This strange emotion of emptiness and
Despair is like drowning, not
In water, but in life, grasping every thought
To drown with my own ominous soul in the
Hell of mental torment.

SONNET ON THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

Barbara Combs

The soft and soundless sleep of peace has come,
And my love will never feel the pain of loss.
Silence, stillness, and sweet rest have for some
Come to say welcome and bid you across.
But for those of us who must remain,
To watch the dawn of each new day awake,
I know the ache and agony and pain,
For I was left behind and must partake
Of grief. And yet I am grateful, O God,
That You saw fit to spare my love of this
That my soul for seven months has wrought.
For my loved one deserves to know the bliss,
The joy and happiness of life with You,
That is gained and given to so very few.

BLACK OR WHITE

BAILEY PEARSON

Cast

Rev. Gilbert Ross, the pastor
Ralph Graves, lawyer
Samuel Walker, the Negro
Tom Snow
Ten men of mature age

Time: This play is set in 1961, but depicts scenes that have been occurring, and will continue to occur, all over the South.

Setting: Madison represents a small town in one of the border states. The community and its citizens are typical of areas where new ideas, as well as new families, are slow to find acceptance.

PROLOGUE TO SCENE I

The narrator, Rev. Mr. Ross, can be seen at front stage left with curtain drawn and subdued light, except for one dim spot on Ross. Ross stands nearly motionless for the narration; his strained face and expression give an air of tenseness to the scene.

Narrator [Expressively]:

"All men are created equal." But are they? Are all men born with the mind of Socrates? Are all men born with bodies equal to that of a Greek athlete? Are all men born with families and positions equal to the Rockefellers'? Are left-handed men equal, when born into a world built for the right-handed? Are black Negroes equal, when born into a culture predominantly white?

On May 17, 1954, the highest court in our country ruled that racial inequality should not exist in America. But did they know—could they know—what this resolution would mean in the small towns like Madison—in the schools, in the churches, in the government? Did they know what this would mean in counties where the wretched, illiterate Negro outnumbers the more fortunate white? Could they realize how absolute, how cool and indifferent, their decision was in comparison to the subtleties of discrimination? Could they hope to erase with words the deeply drawn lines of prejudice from our children's minds, the lines formed from birth? Could they hope to change in a day the servile attitude of the Negro towards us with a piece of paper? We have cultivated injus-

tice and inequality without real hatred. Can they not bring justice and equality without hateful laws and contemptible interpretations?

We are men, God help us, but we are only men! Perhaps, we have been wrong, but are not the judges also men? Yes, wise men, but men subject to the limitations of the human mind. Could they not be right in their motive and wrong in their method?

We have once again set father against son, brother against brother. We must be sure that it is for more than a family feud!

But this is the dear price, perhaps, that we must pay for change. Have I not told my people so for years? How strangely the words come flying back to slap me across the face! But must the church be wracked with hurt and dissension? Can we not as brothers bound together see with one eye, hear with one ear? Must the pastor look on as his flock is torn apart, his work wrecked? Must each church reenact this scene in its search for the way?

[Lights dim as Ross finishes].

Scene I

The scene is in the study of Rev. Mr. Ross in a small-town church. One wall behind the pastor's desk is filled with volumes that have seen much use. In front of the desk at which Ross is standing reading, ten chairs are irregularly placed with all but two occupied. Rev. Mr. Ross is reading aloud from a document as his session of elders sit and stand in the small room. Lights fade in on scene.

Ross [very determined as he reads]:

"The above conditions having been proven true, we, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, do resolve that:

(1) Racial discrimination is in direct contradiction to the spirit and truth of the Gospel and to the consciences of true Christians who are faithfully striving to achieve that brotherhood on earth which the Scriptures express as desirable, and,

(2) That there can be no basis for, and there exist several arguments against, segregation in places of worship, so that it is strongly recommended that all places of worship should be made, by resolution of their separate sessions, available to all men, regardless of, and without difference to, color or race.

(Silence)

(Ross sits down and watches intently the faces of the men.)

Ross: Well, gentlemen! [He pauses.] You have heard the wishes of the General Assembly. We all realize that this is a somewhat revolutionary proposal that we are being asked to practice. Are there any of you who would like to speak to this resolution? Yes, Ralph?

Ralph Graves [Rising from seat. He is upwards of forty, and an outspoken lawyer. He speaks with confidence]: Preacher, now you know as well as I do that this is not going to be in Madison.

Tom Snow [Always agreeing with Ralph]: Yes, sir. That may sound good on paper, but we can't even consider it for our church.

Session [Now all together]: That's right! That's right!

Ross [Standing, asking hopefully]: Is there another opinion we should hear now?

Snow: I guess Ralph has spoken for us all, Reverend.

Ross: Gentlemen, I [he hesitates] I have never tried to tell you how to run our church or whom to admit within its walls. That always seemed obvious for Christian men. But now we are faced with a problem of such importance that I can't see passing it off so neatly.

Ralph [Unbelievingly]: You don't mean you're for letting the 'niggers' come here to church?

Ross: I don't see any way out of it, and I'm not sure but that it isn't the right thing to do.

Ralph [With emphasis]: What do you mean, "the right thing to do?" You don't think the Church should stand for integration?

Ross [Patiently]: Integration is coming, to schools, to churches, and to neighborhoods. Segregated school systems have been falling since 1954. It is only a matter of time. We can either open the church door to the Negro, or stand back till he kicks it down!

Ralph [Furiously]: But in the church? I say not while I'm here to keep their black faces out, they won't come in! [Sits down hastily.]

Ross [Standing and somewhat peeved]: Now listen, Ralph! I don't share your prejudice to the point of making a mockery of the Christian faith. It's hard for me to get used to the idea that the Negro is like you and me, only darker. But this has been a blind spot in our faith.

Ralph [Somewhat abashed]: The only thing a nigger is good for is to work, and they don't do that very well. I'll forget what you said about them being like me.

Ross [Moving away from desk]: But God does not care for the distinctions we make among men and women, except as they reveal our misunderstanding or our unwillingness to do His will. We must answer to Him, if we would exclude any from His Church. [Returns to desk and sits.]

Ralph [Defiantly]: I'm ready now to answer to heaven or hell for my feelings!

Session [Joining in]: And I! And I!

Ross [Disturbed]: Then you will not even consider the Assembly's proposal?

Ralph: Why should we consider it? We're not going to integrate our services and that's it.

CURTAIN

PROLOGUE TO SCENE II

Narrator [Again Ross is seen front left in light silhouette]:

Yes! That's it for so many people, and yet, why do I feel so compelled to push on to integration? Can I honestly say that I'm looking for racial equality, or, am I just trying to muffle the social explosion which is surely coming? Do I really feel this is my brother in Christ when I face the colored man or woman? Could I face them if I did?

Am I really color-blind to races? Did God mean nothing by His division of men into races of white and black and red? Can I feel for the minority, having always been of the majority? Can I equate a historically inferior group of people with the members of my church without a sense of degrading humiliation?

And when I have made myself accept the Negro into my Church, can I break down those barriers which he has constructed against me and all whites to defend himself against any intrusion into his withdrawn world where the Negro is supreme? Can I erase seething hatred, which boils into rage when I enter his world, or must it end as did my visit to one Negro home?

SCENE II

The scene opens in the living room of the Negro, Samuel Walker, a bitter enemy of the whites. His home is filled with cheap, collected furniture, which has been situated in the room with more care than that with which it was collected. Ross is seen knocking at the door, and shabbily-dressed Samuel opens the door.

Samuel [Without emotion]: Yes, Suh, somethin' I kin do fuh yuh?

Ross [Courteously]: I'm Rev. Ross, down at Faith Church. (He goes into living room as Samuel beckons).

Samuel: You ain't come to invite me to the white church, has yuh?

Ross [Embarrassed by the irony]: Well, not exactly. You see, we need someone to help us as superintendent at the Church. Your name was given to us.

Samuel [Trying hard to show that he knows what the big words mean]: You means you wants someone to clean up de place? That it?

Ross [A bit set back]: Yes. That's it.

Samuel: There's one thing about you white folks ah can't make out.

Ross [Wonderingly]: What's that?

Samuel: Why is it you'll always call on us to help you clean up your messes and never to help you make them?

Ross [Stunned]: Samuel, no matter what I say, I cannot deny the inconsistency of the Church's preaching and its practice sometimes, but please know that there are those of us who do not believe that this is the way the Church and its members should act!

Samuel [Skeptically]: Them folks must not like to talk. I ain't heard no white speak for the black around here.

Ross [Happy to tell of session's talk]: But you're wrong. Why only last night the officers of our church met to consider a move to integrate our worship services.

Samuel [Getting up as to tell another]: Well, when do we git to come? I'd be awful tempted to work on Monday, if I could pray with you on Sunday.

Ross [Taken back, leaves his seat, and moves slowly towards the window. Stops to answer]: Well, Samuel, I said we considered this move.

Samuel [Disgusted]: You mean it didn't git passed.

Ross [Sorry, but eager to explain]: That's right. But, Samuel, we tried. Does it not mean anything to you that we tried? A few years ago such a resolution could not have even been read aloud in our church!

Samuel: A few years ago you folks didn't have the gov'mint after you to let us in.

Ross [Adamantly]: But we don't have to serve the wishes of the government! The war that freed your great-grandfather started because one section of the country didn't go along with the gov-

ernment. But, this time, we didn't fight! We tried to listen and understand. Give us time!

Samuel: Time! There's plenty of that for us. What about for you all?

(LIGHTS DIM AS CURTAIN CLOSES.)

PROLOGUE TO SCENE III

[Narrator is in position at front stage when lights brighten].

Narrator [His speech is obviously directed toward divine ears]: Time! Yes, how much time do we have? Is integration another ideal that must be striven for but never attained? Or is it a goal that must be accomplished before the millennium? I cannot say. How strange, Thy Plan, O God, that we should be called suddenly to act and witness in some new area of living which we had formerly denied as really being important. What can I do or say to wipe out the justifiable criticism of Samuel? How can I lead my people into an area of witness which has only recently touched my life? How can I lead, when I'm not sure I'm willing to follow? In such times, O God, we would ask that all moral questions could be settled with a positive or negative answer; that there would be either a black or a white to choose from and no greys to strain our insensitive eyes! Then I could answer Samuel Walker and every other Negro. Then I could answer the men and women of my congregation when I face them. Then I could answer Ralph Graves!

SCENE III

Scene III opens in Ralph Graves' home, which is that of a comfortably established lawyer. The house is an old mansion of the Victorian style, but it is kept in order. Ralph and Ross are in the sitting room as the curtain rises.

Ralph: So, preacher, you think we were wrong in our decision to keep our church free of niggers?

Ross [With determination]: No, Ralph. But I think you were hasty in your consideration of the Assembly's resolution!

Ralph: Same thing!

Ross: You're right! I was only playing on words. But, I did think that perhaps, if I could talk with you, as clerk of the session, and see on what issues we agree, you might be able to influence the others. How about it?

Ralph [Rising rapidly, speaks with gusto]: I guess I wasn't plain enough the other night. Preacher, I might be able to change some of the other men, but I'm not going to try! My great-granddad was a slave-holder, and though I don't go along with that, I believe his ability to enslave those niggers is proof enough that there is a difference between white and black that papers, preachers, and presidents are not going to be able to bridge!

Ross: But, Ralph, doesn't the Word of God mean anything to you when it speaks of love? How can we love when there is so much fear and lack of trust?

Ralph: Preacher, you know me well. Now, I try to do the best I can in this being a Christian business. But, from as long as I can remember, me and niggers were just different. But feeling we were different didn't keep me from going to church and believing in the Word of God. For more than forty years I have been a Christian, and I have believed that me and the niggers were not equal. Now, I can't believe, and I don't think you can either, that all men remain equal on this earth! Now, tell me, have I been a Christian all these years thinking as I did, and now, still thinking the same way, am I less a Christian? Tell me!

(LIGHTS DIM AS CURTAIN CLOSES.)

EPILOGUE

Narrator:

Tell him? What shall I tell him? Tell him that I don't know? Tell him that I'm not sure myself and wonder about the same issues? Tell him? Tell me what man will do when he faces inwardly the question of integration, the question of Black or White. Will we obey the Law of the Land? But the Law only tells us how we must act! How will we know how we must feel? Perhaps, our greatest integration problem will be to integrate our integrated bodies with our segregated spirits! Black or White! Or Grey!

REPRIMAND

NORMAN YONCE

"Nigger, nigger, nigger! Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

The easy melody of Robert's chorus floated along with the heat waves and was the only sound in the stillness of Maple Street. It didn't even faze Louis at first, but, gradually, the singsong rhythm began to wear on his nerves.

"God," he thought, "why doesn't that brat shut up? Who the devil's he pestering now anyway?"

Finally, Louis rolled to the edge of the hammock and shaded his eyes to see into the Packards' front yard. There sat Robert, his bicycle on the ground beside him, lazily spinning the back wheel and repeating his monotonous chant. Louis frowned and shifted his eyes across the soft, gooey, black-topped street to see the object of this brilliant solo. Sitting on the curb, hunched forward with his arms folded across his knees, was a colored boy about the same age as Robert. He was as still as his scorched surroundings, just staring, more at the bicycle than at Robert.

Louis interpreted the scene immediately and cursed under his breath. Well, he thought, Les and Ruth will sit in there on their cans and let Robert go on all day. Lordy, why don't they teach that boy some manners.

"Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

If he says that one more time, I'm gonna snatch him bald. As if this damn heat weren't enough, I've gotta put up with that squalling. Listen to him. Hell, you'd think with all these integration fights going on, Les would try to teach him some tolerance. Heaven knows he'll be sittin' by one in school soon enough. He'd damn well better get used to the idea.

"Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

Whew! One more time, and if Les can't handle him, by God, I can. My one real day of rest during the week and that spoiled brat has to be around. Looks like Ruth would be ashamed for the neighbors to see him act that way. They're probably over on the patio drinking beer. Neglect, I'd call it.

"Nigger, nigger, nigger!"

Louis swung out of the hammock, ducked under the mimosa tree, and cut across the Packards' driveway. Robert glanced up when he heard the footsteps, but Louis didn't look at him and continued across the street.

"All right, black boy. This isn't your neighborhood. What're you doing around here anyway? Get on home, black boy, before you cause some trouble."

The colored boy backed away for twenty feet and then slowly, with frequent glances over his shoulder, walked on. Louis crossed the street and Robert grinned but said nothing. Louis reached down and rumpled his hair. "Another scorcher isn't it, Robby boy?"

A SOFT RED GLOW

CLYDE PACK

Jed Prescott ordered two fried apple pies, a loaf of bread, half a dozen eggs, and a piece of side meat. Tim Johnson sacked the groceries and shoved them across the big oak counter without saying a word.

"Charge it," said Jed, as he picked up his lunch pail and walked out of the store.

Things seemed to be pretty much as they had been for the past two years. In this length of time Jed and Tim Johnson had not spoken to one another except on a business matter. As a matter of fact, Jed hadn't spoken to anybody for the past two years, except in a business-like manner.

Jed stood on the steps of the store and looked out at Princeville. He hated the sight of it. He hated the narrow dirt street, dusty, dry, and full of holes. He hated the rows of dirty yellow houses that faced the street on both sides. He hated the grey, half-rotten schoolhouse, with its grassless, paper-filled yard. He hated the sound of the ignorant children, as they screamed and yelled and played their silly game of tag. Things might appear to be the same, but Jed knew that they were not—not by any means.

Jed got a firmer grip on his groceries, tucked his lunch pail under his left arm, walked down the steps, and trudged up the street. He tramped on with his head bowed. Jed was tired. He had worked hard today—too hard. His "helper" had not shown up for work. Jed knew why. He knew it would come to this. It had to. All boils come to a head sooner or later.

As he walked past the school yard, the yelling ceased. Jed could feel twenty little, beady eyes watching him.

"Hey, looky who's here," screamed the dirty-faced Thompson kid. Jed did not look up.

"Bow-wow," yelped the Thompson kid.

"Bow-wow," the others joined in. They yelled and barked at him until he passed the yard. Jed despised them. He especially hated the Thompson kid; just like his old man, filthy and mean.

"Fools, all of them," thought Jed. "They ain't got sense enough to realize that if I was going to poison anything, it wouldn't be their dogs. I'd poison ever' last one of them stupid kids, before I would one of their dumb ole dogs."

Jed trod on. A car passed him, followed by a screen of parched dust. It stuck in Jed's throat and got in his eyes. It didn't matter though, because he was covered with coal dust from head to foot.

Jed walked past the Carter house. Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Fairchild were standing in front.

"What the hell they staring at?" Jed wondered. "Ain't they never seen a miner before? I know what they're thinking. They're fools too."

As he passed he heard "smatherings" of their conversation. "It ain't safe . . . something oughta be done . . . carbide in lunchmeat. . . . "

"Let them talk, the ignorant fools." Jed moved on slowly.

As he walked up the weedy path, across the dilapidated porch, and through the door, he gave a sigh of relief. He couldn't help but feel a sense of security as he walked through the house and into the kitchen. He felt a closeness to and a warmth toward his wife. The house was just as she had left it. Nothing had been changed. The same curtains hung at the windows. The same checkered oil cloth was still on the table, though now a little faded.

He couldn't control his bitterness against the world since she had died two years ago, while giving birth to their first child, who later died. Jed too seemed to have died—inside. He couldn't help believing that it was everybody's fault that such a thing had to happen. And now—now after two years of being alone, of being friendless, they were accusing him of poisoning their dogs. Why? Jed could not understand! He could not understand why he hated his neighbors. He could not understand why he hadn't been back to the Princeville Baptist Church, where he once taught a Sunday School Class and led the choir.

Jed set the groceries on the little white cabinet and his lunch pail on the floor. He sat down at the table, put his head in his hands, and cried like a child.

It was almost dark now, and Jed felt sleepy after a good bath and supper. He threw himself across his unmade bed and dozed off.

He was awakened by loud yelling and screaming.

"What on earth's happened?" he said aloud as he pushed himself to his feet. He heard glass smash, and a rock rolled over the living room floor. Other rocks followed. Jed held on to the door facing between the living room and bedroom.

"Come out, you damn murderer," a man's voice screamed. Jed

tried to recognize the voice, but it was too intermingled with the others'. Women and children were screaming; dogs were barking; car horns were honking.

Jed hated them! Every man, every woman, and every child.

"There must be a hundred of 'em, and, God, they've come after me," sobbed Jed.

The rocks ceased. All was silent. Even the dogs stopped barking.

Footsteps came up the porch and moved to the door. Someone began pounding, pounding, pounding.

"Come out, ya dirty murderer!" yelled the voice. Jed recognized it now. MacDaniels. That no-good shiftless skunk.

"Ya hear me, Prescott? Come on out. Ya went too far when you poisoned a helpless little child." He was screaming, pounding, pounding, pounding, pounding.

"Murder . . . child . . . oh, God, no . . . no. . . ." Jed made his way to the rocker in front of the dying fire. He picked up his wife's picture and looked at it. He could scarcely make out the delicate features of her face: her peculiar little smile, and her big brown eyes, because it was dark in the room. Tears ran down Jed's face.

"Come out, you murderer," screamed the voices.

"There must be a thousand of 'em, but I won't go out, Lola. I wouldn't give them the satisfaction. I'll stay here with you." Jed had stopped crying.

Suddenly a soft red glow filled the room. Jed wheeled toward the door. Large red and yellow flames were crawling beneath the door and jumping through the window.

The screaming went on, "You'll come out now. You'll come out now."

Jed looked at the picture. "I'll stay here with you, Lola. Don't be afraid. I'm with you. Don't be afraid. . . ."

The grey dawn crept slowly, throwing streaks of bright sunshine upon the pile of smoldering ashes. The ambulance had come and taken the body to nearby Parksburg.

A few people from Parksburg, along with a few from Princeville, were standing around looking at, and poking in, the ashes. Most were stunned, others puzzled! They couldn't keep from wondering about the two dogs they had found swollen and dying—less than fifteen minutes ago.

THE LAZIEST MAN IN THE COUNTY

KATHLEEN W. HILL

The mountain hamlet hung suspended in a sun-struck vacuum of heat and silence. A drowsy mule looked up and stamped listlessly in the dust as the judge walked slowly down the courthouse steps and eased across the narrow street to sit with his friend, Nate, on the partially shaded store porch.

The judge pushed back his black hat, loosened the knot of his string tie, and flapped the back of his alpaca coat before he sighed lustily and sat down in a splint-bottomed rocker. "It's hotter'n the flue of Hades," he grumbled.

Nate carefully removed a shaving from the end of the soft poplar stick he was whittling and stared out over the dusty street. "Warm," he agreed and then he bent his head again over his knife.

"It'll likely blow up a storm and cool things off a mite before night, though," the judge went on, cheerful now that his feet were resting and his pipe filling.

Nate remained silent for a moment before looking up searchingly into the white glare of the sky. "U-mmm," he said.

It was a matter of some wonderment why the judge spent so much time with Nate, who was known to be the most silent and, some said, the laziest man in the county.

"Why, he won't even wait on trade in that store of his," the judge's wife protested often. "He just says to help yourself and put the money in the cigar box. And he won't talk a word hardly. Just grunts."

"Nate says more with a grunt than some people I know with a whole danged morning gabbling on the telephone," the judge was wont to reply.

Whatever the reason, the judge was apt to spend a great deal of time sitting, as now, with his pipe going steadily, his eyes content as they gazed at the blue line of the mountains marching across the evening horizon.

"Here comes your storm, I reckon," Nate spoke into the quietness.

The judge glanced at the cloudless sky; then following Nate's eyes, he grinned wryly at the blue-jeaned figure that was approaching with a peculiar hitching motion of the head every few steps. When the man was nearer, it was apparent that the motion of the

head was caused by a spitting of something that looked like mangled match stems. He came up the steps and hunkered down in the sun.

"Howdy, Jedge," he mumbled over a new match stem he had just inserted in his mouth. "Howdy, Nate."

"Howdy, Luke," the judge said. Nate said nothing.

Luke chewed violently, snapping off even ends of the match with his teeth and spitting them out one by one without using his hands at all. He spat out the last and pulled a new match from his pocket. "I just plum' can't stand it no longer, Jedge," he said angrily before he popped the match in his mouth.

"You and Old John havin' trouble again, Luke?"

"Ain't *me*. It's him! He's a tellin' lies on me somethin' awful. I can't pass his dooryard hardly without him a railin' and a hollerin' at me." He spat out a couple of match ends. "I'm a aimin' to law him is what I aim to do."

"Now, Luke," the judge said mildly. "It won't come to that."

Luke snapped and spat violently. "He's apt to do me some actual hurt," he declared.

"Oh, Old John wouldn't hurt a flea," the judge soothed. "He couldn't anyhow—all crippled up . . ."

"Might even shoot me!" Luke interrupted, spitting match stems excitedly.

The judge laughed. "Why, I doubt if Old John even has a gun. Besides his hands are all stove up with arthritis—he couldn't even hold a gun!"

Luke sputtered indignantly on and the judge soothed and smoothed to no avail. The familiar and oft-repeated scene seemed destined to go on for some time as usual when suddenly both the judge and Luke were stunned into silence by an unheard-of interruption.

"I kin tell you how to settle this here scuffle," Nate surprisingly said, his eyes far away and dreamy on the crest of the mountain ridge. " 'Thout no lawin' either." He was silent for a full minute and his eyes returned to study the knife in his hand. "Git yore hoe and go on over and hoe out old John's gyarden," he said then. "He ain't able to do it hisself." He began the slow whittling process again.

Luke reddened and sputtered again. The judge harummphed. Nate whittled. He didn't answer even after Luke had taken his leave

with much snapping and spitting, and the judge urged him to enlarge on his philosophy.

"Well, I guess it'd work all right if Luke would do it," the judge said finally in defeat. "But he'll never do such a thing—never! They'll be a fightin' on doomsday."

He was skeptical, then surprised, and finally incredulous as the summer days lazed on and he began to hear rumors that Old John and Luke had patched up their quarrel.

"I don't believe it," he declared flatly.

"Well, it's so!" his wife insisted. "Aunt Minnie saw Luke and Old John fishin' together with her own eyes. And it's said that Old John's wife was seen taking in a plate of her stack cake to Luke's back door."

"I still don't believe it," he said stubbornly and continued to say as the proof piled up. But even he couldn't deny the truth any longer when Luke helped crippled John carefully down the aisle of the courtroom on the next court day and sat beside him to watch the rather dull and confused proceedings of the day.

"I was so plum' flabbergasted that I don't remember one single thing I said all day long," the judge told Nate afterwards when he reached the sanctuary of the store porch and began to relax.

Nate grunted, dropped his poplar whittling stick, tentatively felt down for it and when he saw it was out of arm's reach settled back and stared at the mountains.

"What I can't understand about it is how anybody ever got Luke to hoe that garden in the first place. *How in tarnation?"* He shook his head in puzzlement. "I sure was fooled. I never believed for one minute that he'd do it."

There was silence. Nate cleared his throat. "I never either," he said. "Fact is," he added after a long pause, "he never."

"What? WHAT?" the judge shouted. *"What* did you say?"

"Hmmmn."

The judge stared at Nate searchingly, unbelievingly. "You mean . . ." he sputtered. "You mean you . . .?"

Nate rubbed a stubby cheek with a slow hand. "Didn't make no difference who did the deed," he said. "Long as it was did."

The judge stared skeptically. His eyes narrowed. "But how would you have made Old John *think* that Luke did it?" he burst out.

Nate stared out over the tops of the buildings across the street and his eyes raised to his beloved mountains. Only a suggestion of

a twinkle was in their depths. "Folks don't give Luke near enough credit," he said. "It's hard as thunder to bite off them match ends even like that without using no hands. Course, you can allus cut 'em off," he added slyly after a bit.

THE PENALTY

ELMER R. BANKS

When in the loneliness of empty days,
And in the restlessness of sleepless nights,
My puzzled soul bewails its lost delights,
And all my outward peacefulness betrays,
Then still unanswered are the doubts I raise.
Your only answer was, "God's will incites."
An answer which our parting expedites,
But further explanation quite delays.
And since I'd rather think you're not unkind,
A helpful gleam of insight now has just
Revealed the lurking truth within my mind.
The answer deep into my soul is thrust.
Our separation is indeed, I find,
My penalty for turning love to lust.

THE HATEFUL SONG OF PRIDE

SALLY JO SULLIVAN

How sharp the whispering blade divides
The heart of passion I once knew.
The love is gone, but now resides
A loathing mood of darkest hue.
His self-esteem and vain delight
Sang the pirate chant of deep;
He truly meant those words of spite—
Silent now, but just in sleep.
Memories last as does the fall;
Winter comes and knows not misery.
Phrases tear at me—the thrall
Of deafness is the prayer.
Yes, he wanted one of perfect ways.
I'll sneer and watch him count the days!

PEJOR THE PESSIMIST

David H. Rust

Pejor had always tried to be a good man, and a good man he was, in the eyes of other men, that is. He had led a good life. Being a devoutly religious man, he had, for the biggest part of his life, abstained from drinking, smoking, gambling, swearing, chasing women other than his wife, playing cards for money, and doing all other worldly things that could be mentioned in the same breath as that word, "vice." This is, of course, excluding that part of his life which he did not like to think of, that which could be termed "youth." He had been an abstainer's abstainer since that day when his mind was cleared and his eyes were opened to the ways and the will of Yahweh.

He had known for more than forty years that his destination would be where he now stood, on the threshold of the Province of Yahweh! He knew that his reward would be great. The life he had led after his conversion had been simple and very quiet. It had been as good as any he had read of in the many orthodox books which he had vigorously studied. Just how great his reward would be for this life he could not imagine, but he knew it had to be immense.

Now the hour was at hand. The thundering voice of Yahweh, with its soft edges and indescribable understanding, called out his name, asking for the complete record of Pejor the Pessimist. Immediately a beautiful white angel appeared with a rather large book which advertised Pejor's name in gold letters on its cover. The angel handed the record book to a larger, even more dazzling angel who sat at the left hand of Yahweh. This angel immediately opened the book and began to read in a voice that was rather judicial in tone.

It took Pejor the larger part of an hour to realize that all was not going as he had planned. The angel's voice was becoming more sarcastic with each spoken word, and Yahweh was casting furtive glances in his direction. By the time the angel had finished reading the record of his life (about 26 hours later) and had taken his seat, Pejor knew that his reward would be only a fraction of what he had anticipated. Where had he gone wrong? He had bettered the examples set for him by the leaders of his faith. This was the problem his mind was contemplating when the voice of Yahweh startled him into reality.

"Pejor," said the thundering voice with the soft edges. "Pejor, you were a pessimist. You had a job to do on earth. Did you not realize that I put pessimists on earth to maintain a balance with frivolity, just as I put foxes there to prevent the rabbit family from overrunning the place?"

"Yes, I realized that," answered Pejor.

"And did you not know that you were to impress upon the minds of men that the evil far outweighs the good on earth so that they would rid themselves of this evil?"

"That also I clearly understood," replied the confused Pejor.

"Then you have no excuse for shutting yourself off from this evil, refusing to acknowledge its existence, to meet it in combat and defeat it. You chose to close your eyes to it rather than to be an obstacle in its path. You, in concentrating on keeping the evil out of your own life, ignored that in the lives of your brethren. Therefore you could not show them the way to goodness. You were a good and a just man, Pejor, the perfect pessimist, but you crossed the boundaries of your position. You were to be a pessimist in the world, cynical toward worldly ways, but only to point to the way of extreme optimism in the Province of Yahweh. Thus, Pejor the Pessimist, you are destined to spend eternity in a small cottage on a side street paved with silver, rather than in a mansion on the Highway of Gold as you had anticipated."

With these words the mighty, omnipotent Yahweh stepped down from his white throne, making a gesture with his hand which meant that the case was closed.

COLD AS HELL

Bob Holtzclaw

Then we left—I think. I guess I was a little woozy, but the rest of the gang was too. You see, we'd been celebrating.

There's Bill over there. "Say, Bill, aren't the flowers pretty?" He must not have heard. I must be drunk. That's it.

I hear music—organ music. Now I know I'm drunk. I haven't been to church—well, since Aunt Molly used to make me go. I

hated it. I swore to myself then that I would never darken the door of a church again once I got out of the reach of Aunt Molly's long, bony fingers. I hated her and her fingers.

Boy, it sure is queer—being drunk. I feel so stupid. Look at all those flowers. I feel like I could write a poem, but I don't think I will. I remember one by Tennessee Williams or somebody. It went something like this: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of" ah—angels or something; I can't remember. I never was much at grammar.

It sure is cold in here, and so hazy. I wish someone would close that damn door. "Hey, you with the hair on your head, close that damn door!" He closed it! Wonder he heard me above all of the confusion. There are so many people going in and out.

Hey, there's that fat, little man that always used to try to get me to go to prayer meetings. What's he doing in a joint like this? Probably trying to find a pick-up. Lot of good he'll do here—the backslider—I've tried all night and can't find a decent—well, look who just came in. It's his wife, and mother-in-law. Now I want to see him slide back a little. Hee! All hell is gonna break loose here in a minute. Where'd they go? I'm so drunk I can't even stand up! All I do is lie here.

Damn it! I wish you'd quit staring at me and help me up. Can't you see I'm sick? Idiots! Damned idiots with your eyes bulging out. I'm drunk. Don't crowd, don't rush, don't push, I'm not going anywhere. Why not line up, single file, and gape at me one at a time?" This is silly; they're doing it. Damned fools! I wish I could get up. I'll have to wait until I sober up. Say, there's some poetry.

"I wish you all would sit down!" They're doing it. This must be a dream. That's it. I'm drunk and this is a dream. Well, it's time to wake up. I command myself to wake up! I must be waking up; the music has stopped. People have quit rushing around and about. Good!

I feel a draft. That door's open again! "Close that door." My feet are as cold as hell. Where are my shoes? I've lost my damn shoes! Hell! Someone in this damn room stole my damn shoes—damn it!

Who are you? What are you doing? Did you steal my shoes? Don't close that lid! I'm in here. Stop! Please stop. I've got to find my shoes!

LIVING IS AWARENESS

MARY MARGARET LEWIS

To measure the beauty of awareness,
I need only to count my many loves.
A man's lack of sensing has a bareness
Which cannot be concealed by hats or gloves.
I am alive, not merely existing.
To see, to smell, to hear, to touch, to taste;
All of these, done well, increase my being.
To lay one by, would be to live in waste.
Deprived of sight, how clear the ringing rain!
Deaf—how sweet the memory of laughter!
Surely no man would wish for such a bane,
And yet some seek only for the after.
What good to search for signs of God-like love?
If unseen here, they won't be found above.

POEM: INSCRIBED TO A.F.A.

CHARLES SEMONIS

How exquisite the mystery of you
Who come to me with poignant, pleading eyes,
For you, too, walk in shadows of the moon
And feel the ancient talons at your heels.
You know the awful striving, plague and thirst;
The sweet, ecstatic anguish, grief and scourge;
The black, malignant rapture in the brain
That shrieks incessantly to be released
And beats its bleeding wings against the cage.
Ah, tenderly, I touch your flawless brow
In recognition, yes, and something else
That now is being born within my heart.
You are the lyric, candle, leaf and stone
For which, alone, I've sought and seek no more;
You are the noble kinsman of my soul
To which, redeemed, I'll cleave as flesh to bone.