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Belles Lettres

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Belles Lettres

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Virginia, a sophomore, lives in Cynthiana, Kentucky. She plans a major in biology.

INTERMEZZO

VIRGINIA R. IVIE

Sweet sensations to the spirit,
Why do you hasten so?
There is time, always time.
Time does not exist!
Stay and enlighten us,
The ones who understand.

Let them snicker and sneer
Those stiffs of velvet and lace
Let them speak intelligibly
Of Wagner or of another—
Why should we presume?
Why should we care?

Look at them in all their grandeur
Bored in your presence
Now you are gone unnoticed, forgotten.
Opus II splendidly makes entrance!
Watch them—their spirit overwhelmed,
Their minds intellectually absorbed.

Hush! Don't squirm so in your chair!
Silence and reverence are in demand.
Insensibility? Yes!
Look indignant, freedom is yours—
But this is truth.

Shirley is a senior majoring in English. She lives in Totz, Kentucky.

"STOP IT, I SAY."

SHIRLEY METCALFE

The clock rattled around on the hard table top. A little, wrinkled hand wiggled out from the small lump under the cover. It groped around until it came to the button on the clock, which it pushed in hastily.

For about a minute the small lump remained still under the cover. Then all at once the covers flew back, and she jumped into the run-over, dirty bedroom shoes and little green housecoat.

Her gray hair flew out behind her as she dashed through the house. She opened the back door with a jerk and hopped down onto the railroad tie which she used for a step. She looked at the sky. It was a deep red along the horizon.

"Humph," she said aloud. "Morning red and evening gray sends a traveler on his way, but morning gray and evening red brings down rain upon his head. But, it just can't be; that almanac said. . . ."

She ran back into the bedroom, stretched up to the top of the chest of drawers and pulled off a book. As it fell, she caught it and began going through the pages all in one motion. Then she stopped and ran her finger down the left page pausing about halfway down.

"See there," she said, "I knew it. It's gotta rain today. The almanac says it will."

Looking very pleased at her findings, she ambled back into the kitchen, turning on the radio as she went. She wadded up some newspaper and poked it into the old black and white stove, picked up some kindling and laid it on the paper with an exactness which comes with years of experience, laid a few blocks of coal on the wood, tossed a dash of kerosene on the coal and wood, and dropped a match on it. As the fire blazed up, she raked the top of the stove into place.

The radio was blasting, but she didn't even notice it.

She went again to the back door and stepped out. This time she walked out to the edge of the house. She looked all around. First she looked at the sky, which was still red. Then she looked out over her garden. It was merely a brown patch on the ground with lots of footprints up and down between the rows. She smiled and went back into the house.

As she was slapping the bacon into the skillet, the voice on the radio said, "Now for your early morning weather report."

She stopped dead. Her hands seemed to be suspended, a piece of bacon dangling from the right one.

"Good news for all picnickers," the voice continued. "Fair and sunny is the prediction for today. I repeat fair and sunny."

She dumped the rest of the bacon into the pan all in one big wad, wiped her hands on her apron, and snapped the radio off abruptly. "What does he know anyhow? He don't know if it's goin' to rain or not," she argued aloud. "And besides the almanac says it will."

All the time, it was getting brighter outside; there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It wouldn't be long until the sun would be up.

She went back to the bedroom, looked at the almanac once again and mumbled, "See there, I was right." After returning to the kitchen, she dumped the half-burned bacon into a plate on the table and sat down to eat.

After she had eaten a few bites, she looked out the window beside the washstand, but there was no change in the sky. She could see the sun shining on the new leaves of the silver maple which leaned out over the yard.

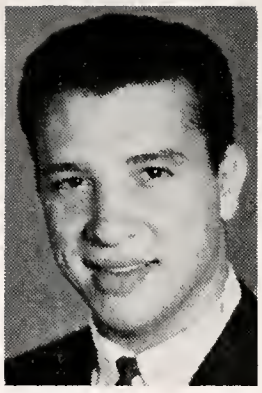
"Oh, well, the clouds will blow up fast like they do sometimes. Yeah, that's what'll happen."

She continued eating fully expecting it to rain at any minute, but no rain.

Then she heard them. "No!" she said as she dashed out the back door, down the step and out toward the garden. But there they were, crows!

"Well, that beats all I've ever heard of, and to think I planted my garden yesterday especially because the almanac said it'd rain today," she rambled on. "I wish it'd hurry and start."

"Stop it, you blasted crows," she yelled as she ran into the garden fanning her apron at them. "Stop it! Stop it I say!"



Chuck is a senior and a music major. He lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

THE DEVIL'S FORTUNE

CHARLES F. CAMPBELL, JR.

What good is life, if you wonder
If life was ever good to you?
Grasping at something,
That was never there to grasp.
Ah, but what real worry is that to you?
You loved all forms of life;
Death would never do.
You carried a torch for a heart that burned constantly
Like a glowing wick that might always last.
Drinking then loving—
Always living just one day;
Then bribing your way through the next.
But you loved every minute of it;
Your days were those with nothing but fun.
What care you about the future,
Or the past?
But the past was to be your future;
Oh well, the future was yet to buy.
Fun was your motto—why worry about death?
Life is too short.
Live it up while there is still time.
However, time runs short as years go by;
Yet the older you became,

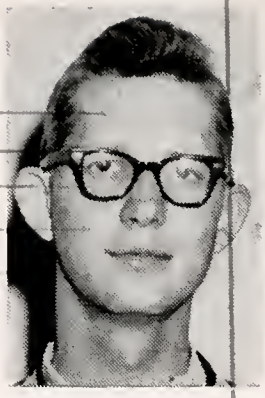
The faster life seemed to fly.
Years went too fast—the past was gone.
Then you yelled, "Bring the fun of future years on."
But then I said, "Your life has gone past;
The future of your soul is mine
And you're here to stay at last."
Was that sadness in your eyes, or did you realize
That I had bought your soul for earthly fun
That is now gone?

Galand is a freshman and plans a major in history. He lives in Norwood, New York.

CHANSON de SUPPLICATION

GALAND W. PETTYS

Lord Almighty, if now Thou shouldst question me
Hear me, oh Lord, this shall my answer be:
Ere the cord was broken, me unheard Thou hadst blamed
Ere a word I'd spoken, a rebel I was named.
For I was born a slave to those desires
Which life in the heart of man inspires:
Hunger has been so oft unsatisfied
'Twixt evil and good, sometimes I have erred;
Have I by one farthing e'er Thy wealth abated,
Or ever to myself Thy power abrogated?
When did I ever rob Thee, steal or borrow
That which left Thee hungry on the morrow?
I alone in my own heart have thrust a sword:
This is my sin: How have I wronged Thee, Mighty Lord?
Is't not enough, vengeance taking, killing me,
Stilling me, and in death with earth filling me?
A handful of dust is not worth such dispute.



Arthur is a senior majoring in English. He lives in Richmond, Kentucky.

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

ARTHUR LEE POTTS

CAST

Calhoun Milquetoast, the business man
Spirit of Calhoun
Saint Peter
Almighty
Devil
Margaret Milquetoast, Calhoun's wife

SCENE I

In the back left corner of the stage there is a bed and a table beside the bed with a lamp and an alarm clock on it. Calhoun is asleep in the bed. A door opens onto the stage at the foot of the bed. Another door opens onto the stage at the front left. In the center of the stage are the Pearly Gates and a gold street leading to the Almighty's throne at the back center. There is one dim spot on the bed, and the rest of the stage is lit with white and blue lights. Calhoun is lying in the bed dreaming. His spirit enters. He is dressed in slacks and a sport shirt. His shirt tail is out and his shoes need polishing badly. St. Peter is standing at the gates. He greets Calhoun.

St. Peter: Calhoun Milquetoast. Yes, the Lord said you would be here today.

Calhoun: St. Peter, I presume. [pointing to the gates] Hmm, my wife always wanted some pearls of that quality. I would like to send her a necklace of those. She would be proud of me if she knew I was in Heaven.

St. Peter: Calhoun, this is no time to be thinking of worldly things. The Almighty will be very displeased with you, and besides you

aren't in Heaven yet. What is your worldly expression? Oh, yes, 'you're counting your chickens before they hatch'. (He is surprised at himself.) Oh, dear, what am I coming to? This way, Calhoun. [walking toward the Almighty, sitting on his throne]

Calhoun: My business would have been a much greater success if I had had part of this gold I'm walking on.

St. Peter: Your business was what you made it, Calhoun. [at the foot of the throne of the Almighty] Lord, Lord, presenting the spirit of your servant, Calhoun Milquetoast, who departed only a few hours ago.

Almighty: Servant, Calhoun Milquetoast? Oh, yes, I was expecting you, Calhoun. Tell me, Calhoun, what treasures have you laid up in the Kingdom of Heaven for the Almighty during your brief worldly life?

Calhoun: Treasures, Lord? Well, uh, I gave to the Red Cross.

Almighty: You gave only your money, and that was only a very small amount, just enough to make your friends think well of you. What have you done for the Lord, Calhoun?

Calhoun: I was very faithful in paying my debts.

Almighty: Yes, you were, Calhoun, but they were all gambling debts. What have you done for the Lord?

Calhoun: I had a good business, Lord.

Almighty: It could have been better, but you, Calhoun, were a loafer. What have you done for the Lord?

Calhoun: I raised a good family.

Almighty: But you weren't faithful to your wife, as you weren't to me. What have you done for the Lord, Calhoun?

Calhoun: I was the Sunday school superintendent, and I went to church every Sunday.

Almighty: You gave only your time, Calhoun; you didn't give your heart. Where your treasures are, your heart is also. There is no room in Heaven for loafers, Calhoun.

Scene II

Calhoun is now between Heaven and Hell. There is still a dim light on the bed and the rest of the stage is still lit with blue and white lights. Calhoun's spirit enters, disgusted and disappointed. He stretches out on a cloud, as he think about the situation he is in.

Calhoun: [speaking slowly]: Well, I don't guess there is any rush, since I have all the time there is. I might as well stretch out on

this cloud for awhile. There's no place in Heaven for loafers, hmph. I'm not a loafer, and besides, they couldn't drag me into Heaven now. I had sooner go to Hell. Gads, Hell! There's no place else to go. What will Margaret do when she finds out I'm in Hell? Surely the Almighty won't send me to that hot place. Heat makes me miserable, anyway. If I could only stay right here. Maybe I can get in a poker game and get my mind off the heat, and there might even be a cold place in Hell. Old Charlie always said he was going to Hell; so maybe I won't be lonesome. Anyway, if home is Hell, then home is better than nothing; so I guess Hell is better than nothing too.

Scene III

The gates of Hell are in the front and center. In the back center the Devil is sitting on his throne. The stage is dimly lit; otherwise, it is the same as Scene I.

Devil: [speaking in a loud, boisterous voice]: Ha, Ha, Ha, Calhoun Milquetoast, turned away from Heaven and sent to Hell! Welcome home, Calhoun. Don't be bashful; come on in. I'll swear by the smell of Hell, you're the whitest one that has come from Heaven in a long time. You did nothing for the Almighty. What have you done for the Devil?

Calhoun: [quite sure of himself]: The Almighty thought I did quite a bit for you. (He moves closer to the Devil's throne.)

Devil: He only turned you away from Heaven. He didn't qualify you for Hell. What have you done for the Devil, Calhoun?

Calhoun: I was a crook in business transactions. I always got the best end of the deal.

Devil: Quite true, but it was always for the betterment of Calhoun. What have you done for the Devil?

Calhoun: A weekend never went by that I didn't get drunk.

Devil: You were only drowning your troubles and neglecting your responsibilities. What have you done for the Devil, Calhoun?

Calhoun: I was the cause of a car accident that killed two people.

Devil: Yes, and you killed one of my disciples. What have you done for the Devil?

Calhoun: I had an affair with another man's wife.

Devil: But, Calhoun, you were only satisfying your own selfish desires. What have you done for the Devil?

Calhoun: I was a gambler.

Devil: You didn't know your cards, Calhoun. I wouldn't want you

to haul cinders for me. There's no room for mediocrity in Hell.

Calhoun: Where between Heaven and Hell shall I go?

Devil: You must again take your worldly form and do the work of the Devil or the work of the Almighty. You must put your heart, soul, and mind into your work and not be a mediocre, middle-of-the-road person. If you choose to be a gambler, then excel. You cannot do my work and the Almighty's work too. What is your choice? Whom do you choose, Calhoun? (Calhoun's spirit exits. The stage is black for a moment, and then the area around the bed is brightly lit with spots. The alarm goes off, and Margaret enters and sits on the side of the bed.)

Margaret: It's your day off, Calhoun. What are your plans?

Calhoun: [rising from the bed]: I am going to practice my poker game today. I've been losing every game.

Rebecca, a junior, is majoring in English. Her home is Richmond, Kentucky.

AUTUMN AFTERNOON

Rebecca M. Turner

Dino had been lonely since Diana had died. It was just not the same, and he knew it. To walk through the yard, even, was different as there was no Diana to watch the butterflies with. Of course it was difficult at mealtimes, as she was not there to see that he ate enough but yet not too much. In the wintertime it seemed as if he did gain more weight than usual, but he always lost it in the summer. Diana had never made much of a fuss over his weight, but he knew that she did not think that it was good for him, even if all she did was wrinkle her nose at him or maybe hit at him playfully when she saw him gulping down too much.

Diana had been more like a sprite, where the word for him would be butterball. Both his and Diana's eyes were the same shade

of blue, which always caused people to remark about them; but where hers would sparkle vivaciously, his had more of a calm and placid expression. Diana was old, but to the last she never lost her agility. He was old, too, the whiskers around his mouth beginning to gray. He knew that it would not be long for him, and until that time he would be content to sit in the sun and be warm.

Diana was all that he could think of on this September afternoon. It was still warm, but today there was just a touch of autumn sharpness in the air, and the edges of the leaves were beginning to turn into the desperate, glorious crimson they always turned just before dropping off. It was as if the crimson was the very last attempt after the pleading appeal of the yellow.

Dino was sitting on the steps of the high back porch where there was a touch of sun, but as he got warmer and warmer he decided to move up to the coolness of the porch itself. It would be suppertime soon, but he was not ready to go in just yet, as he was still thinking of Diana. Her personality seemed to be with him every place that he looked. She had been full of life, enjoying the sunshine, the flowers, and the yard. She did not care for the streets. Also she would not like just anyone she met, just as he was particular about people too.

On the day that she died she had inspected the back yard as usual. She was careful to keep her dainty feet out of the mud left over from a recent rain, which was unusual for the dry, hot month of August. Later in the day, just before the turn of the late afternoon into dusk, she had gone to sleep. . . .

All of that was behind him now and he must get over it. Suddenly he heard footsteps at the side of the house. Around the corner came a tall, thin, elderly man with a beaked nose that almost met his pointed chin. His snow-white hair kept falling into his eyes. Dino sat still and watched him as he settled down on a bench beside the steps to read his book. Mr. Potts had never cared for Dino or Diana. Dino secretly suspected that he was jealous because in his old age he could not enjoy life as they had in theirs. Remembering the gruff way that Mr. Potts had talked to Diana on the day she died, Dino became enraged and there were almost red glints in his blue eyes. Looking about the porch he spied a fruit jar. Yes, that would do. Surely.

* * *

Klunk! Jumping startledly Mr. Potts looked down. At his feet

lay a fruit jar. Realizing how close it had come to hitting him, he looked up. There above him on the high porch sat a Siamese cat, contentedly licking his seal-brown paws, while the shadows of leaves flickered over his cream-colored body. Slowly he turned and looked at Mr. Potts, his blue eyes brilliant in his seal-brown mask, his tail, of the same color as his paws and face, flipping lazily back and forth, making a thump each time it hit the porch floor.

"No, it couldn't be," muttered Mr. Potts as he turned back to his book.

Connie is a freshman and plans a major in education. She lives in Cynthiana, Kentucky.

WIND SYMPHONY

CONNIE WILLS

The wind conducts a splendored symphony,
Which fills with awe the ones for whom he
plays.
His music swells in richest harmony;
The world he never ceases to amaze.

He swirls around about the wooded lands
And soars up high, so high, with haughty
airs;
Then trips along the seas and shifting sands.
He's like a wanderer; he has no cares.

Oh, think what power he must feel within!
Each blade of grass, to him, is like a flute;
Each bough of pine he makes a violin.
The warbler's note trills forth as if a lute.

So powerful and strong if he but wills,
Yet he the world with gentle sweetness fills.

Jerry is a junior majoring in biology. He lives in Graysknob, Kentucky.

RIPPLES

JERRY C. METCALFE

I walked alone on the river's shore
Where wind bows cry in somber dirge
With weeping willow trees;
And from the sky Apollo skipped
Upon the waters in dancing glee,
Mocking and teasing in glee.
Yet, the river flows on evermore.

Angered!
I threw a stone into the deep
    Shattering all its gleam
And sat upon the shore to weep
    O'er a shattered dream.

    The waves grew and grew
    Only to fade away;
    For when the endless flow
    Had calmed the angry waves
    There, radiant as ever, lay
    The sun's golden ray.

Happily,
I walk on the river's shore
    Where willows and nature sing.

THE FOX HUNT

JERRY C. METCALFE

The rooster crowed as Jeb stooped through the low doorway onto the splintered, log-halved porch of his small cabin. He yawned, simultaneously pulling both suspender straps over his broad, lean shoulders.

The sun had just begun to show its rim in the saddle of two distant mountains like tiny spokes from a great gold hub; its rays penetrated the hazy fog and leaves of the oak, then reflected in the dewdrops that hung on the symmetrically placed arched stones on a hill to the left of Jeb's cabin. On each stone was chiseled a Biblical name such as Jacob, Isaac, Ezra, Rachel, Joshua, Micah, and Malachi. Jeb looked longingly and reverently at the twenty-seven markers; then he stepped to the dewy ground to lace his brogans. After he had finished, he yawned again, walked to the side of his cabin, and rolled over a log about twelve feet long that had ten deep, hand-carved notches in it. Then he clasped his long, white beard and gave it several gentle strokes as if searching for tangles, and sprightly walked back into his cabin. In a few minutes he returned to the peculiar log, holding in one arm a huge bowl, and in the other hand a long, wooden spoon. Then he began to dip the hot ground hog gravy, corn pone, and meat scraps out of the bowl into the bowl-shaped notches in the log, making sure each had an equal portion. Looking toward his log barn, which was much like his cabin except that it did not have a chimney or porch, and in competition with the crowing rooster, he gave a shrill whistle. No sooner had the echoes died than there were nine mixed-blood hounds at their feeding places along the log, each with gravy on his muzzle and wagging his tail. Jeb returned to his one-room cabin and proceeded to make his own breakfast over the glowing, hot coals of the open fireplace.

In his mind he visualized the things he would do for the day and spoke them aloud as if talking to an unseen partner. "Feed and milk Canaan." He had named his cow after the land of milk and honey; he thought Canaan was an apt name for the old cow. He named all his livestock after Biblical lands, but he named his dogs after Biblical characters, characters he admired. "Taters need plowing, and when I'm through, I'll let ole Egypt out to pasture, and then I'll

go fox huntun'." And, with that, a smile of satisfaction beamed through the white beard stained with egg yellow.

Jeb had led a simple life ever since he and his brother disagreed over a piece of farm land down in the valley that their folks had left to be divided between them. That was forty-three years ago, and ever since that time he had lived on the mountain farming, hunting, and digging herbs for a living. He ventured off the mountain only to trade his hides and herbs for the things he could not grow, make, or kill in his little kingdom. And Jeb figured he had a kingdom because he had all nature in which to exercise his will. Nature was peaceful and beautiful, and there were no men with whom to disagree.

Jeb never longed for the things that the people in the valley longed, grumbled, and fought for; he was happy, completely happy, for his dogs and little kingdom provided for all his needs.

Evening came, and Jeb had everything in order for the coming fox hunt. He took his five fox-hounds to the top of the mountain where he could see the unsettled valleys beyond. He left the other four dogs behind, because they were trained to hunt other animals, and he didn't want to ruin them chasing foxes. When he reached the top, he released the five companions to pick up the trail of a fox and started building a fire. Soon he heard the short, high-pitched bark of Luke, who had picked up the scented trail, and then the others joined in with their different voices making mellow, musical harmony to Jeb's ears.

"Come on, Danal," Jeb shouted, "you ain't gonna let them young squirts outrun ye, are ye?"

Daniel was the father of the four younger dogs, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. Then a long, sad, half-howling bawl joined the melody. "That's hit, Danal, show 'um ye ain't too old."

Jeb sat by the warming fire and unwrapped his salt bacon and corn pone; his eyes searched into the night sky as if looking for the force that held the stars and misty clouds in place. He laid a piece of salt bacon on the corn pone, slowly put it to his bearded lips, and unconsciously took a bite. "Lord," he said, "I jest don't know how to tell you this, but—but—well, when I have to go, and I know hit ain't gonna be too long, 'cause I'm a gittun to be a ole man now,—well, what I want to say is—well, I jest hope heaven will be jest like here! Earth!—with mountains and rivers and plants and animals,—all of 'um, good uns and bad uns, even folks, Lord, even if I

don't have much ta do with 'um. What I mean to say, Lord, is, they jest couldn't be a purttier place than right here; hit's jest perfect, even if the gnats do bite, and folks fuss, and I have t' kill other creatures ta eat; and besides all them animals I've kilt will go ta heaven too—so why don't ye make hit jest like earth, with dogs fer pals, instead of angels?"

The melody of the chase faded beyond the ridge with Mark in the lead. Jeb was a little disappointed with Daniel, because many times he had watched his dogs grow old and fall behind in the chase, or be drowned by a big coon chased into the river, or after digging for ground hog all day wearily make it to the barn, and not show up for the early morning feeding. These were the dogs that lay in the hill beside his cabin with markers he had carefully made and placed at the head of their graves. It was fitting, thought Jeb, for they were good hunters; they were his most faithful companions.

The chase began to circle with Matthew and John fighting for the lead. Then the melody crossed another ridge and faded away. The next time Jeb heard them Daniel was well in the lead, but the fox was heading into the "Stone Country." Jeb was afraid one of the dogs might run over a cliff; so he decided to call them in, but he was satisfied. Daniel was not too old yet.

He stood by the fire; put the long, curled bull-horn to his lips and blew three long, mournful notes that came echoing back from the hunting hills. He waited, then blew three more. The night was silent except for the long, drawn-out bawl of Daniel,—then Daniel's voice stopped. Jeb sat by the fire waiting for the dogs to come in. The moon began to rise from behind the distant Stone Mountain, and he decided it was time to blow again. And again the sad notes echoed from the hills and valleys. Soon, Matthew ran up to his master, and Jeb rubbed the dog's glistening coat saying, "Good chase, ole boy, ye shore give ole Red hell t'night." One by one, Mark, John, and Luke made their way to the fire and received the same smiling, white bearded face, and warm, loving hands. Jeb picked a piece of glowing wood from the fire to light his corncob pipe. Passively he drew a few puffs and blew them into the still night air; with his teeth still crimped on the stem of the pipe he looked into the dog's eyes and said, "We'll wait on yor pa fer a spell." And the dogs returned a look of understanding. They waited till the moon was nearly overhead, but Daniel did not come. Jeb rose to his feet and kicked dirt on the fire. The dogs knew it was

time to leave but that their master was not deserting their companion. They saw Jeb take off his briar-snagged coat and place it on the ground beside the dying embers. They knew, because many times they had been the ones that were late; and when they had come back to the cold ashes they had found the same coat with the scent of the one who had the kind voice and warm hands; and they knew he would come for them the next morning and take them back to the gravy and meat scraps, and warm fire on cold winter nights. They knew; so they would wait on this token of companionship placed for them, just as Daniel would wait tonight. Then Jeb called to his friends and started home.

The next morning Jeb rose earlier than usual; fed his dogs, livestock, and chickens; wrapped a lunch of fried salted pork and corn pone in oil cloth; stuck three home-grown apples in his overalls pocket; and started for the top of the mountain. When he came to the camp of the night before, he expected to see Daniel waiting for him, but the dog was not lying on the coat. Then he decided to go to the "Stone Country" where he had last heard Daniel. About two hours later as he began to enter the mountain area of cliffs and canyons he blew his horn and sat down to eat. When he had finished, and Daniel had not come to him, he trudged on over the rocky paths he thought the dogs had run on the night before.

Every few minutes Jeb would call, "H-e-r-e, Danal! H-e-r-e, boy! H-e-r-e, Danal!—Here! Here!" An hour passed, but Jeb pushed on. As he walked on a trail along the side of a high cliff, calling for the dog, he heard Daniel bark about a hundred yards ahead. Overjoyed, Jeb rushed to the barking only to see his friend on a narrow ledge about twenty-five feet below, with his left fore-paw held high in pain. "Well damit, Danal, I thought ye were smarter than any ole fox; looks like this one's purtty sly—hit's a wonder if he hadn't tricked ye inta killing yor fool self." Jeb chuckled. "Peers ta me like ye'd know better by now, but thank tha good Lord ye didn't go plum ta tha bottom!"

Daniel just wagged his tail in gratitude that his master had found him.

Many times Jeb had seen a fox cross its own trail trying to split a pack of dogs, or lead them down into the farm lands hoping one of the dogs would get caught in a barbed-wire fence. Sometimes the fox would cross rivers trying to lose the pack, or run to the edge of a cliff, then back track, leap off the trail, and run on down the

ridge hoping that the dogs, with their noses to the ground, would run blindly over a cliff. But Jeb understood. This was part of nature, and nature was his challenge, his love and life.

Jeb surveyed the problem for a minute, then figured he could make his way down the nearly vertical cliff and back up without much trouble.

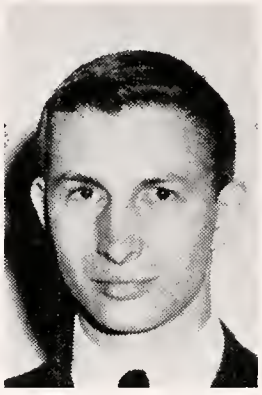
"Hold on, Danal, I'll be there in a little bit." Carefully Jeb backed down the cliff searching for hand and foot holds. Laughingly he said to the dog, "Ye remind me of ole Danal in the lion's den."

Suddenly the loose sandstone gave way, and Jeb came crashing to the startled dog's feet. Jeb lay there with his eyes fixed on Daniel; then a smile came to his lips. The dog limped closer to his master's side and began to lick his bearded face, as he had often done when Jeb slept under the oak tree at the cabin, but there came no caressing response from the calloused hand. The dog then pawed anxiously at the gnarled fingers, but only a trickle of crimson oozed from the corner of the smiling lips, staining the long, white beard, which bristled slightly in the cool mountain wind. The dog sat on his hind parts holding his crippled paw slightly off the ground, and stared at his master, waiting for him to wake.

Overhead a hawk circled effortlessly, gave a shrill whistle, then folded his wings and dived unexpectedly on a playful squirrel below. The blue jay and yellow hammer scolded each other in the gum tree, and a timber rattler tightened its squeeze on a young rabbit in the sedge brush below. The evening wind bowed the head of the snow trillium, and a ground hog gnawed contentedly on a stem of the delicate, lavender colored wood orchid. A grouse strutted back and forth on a decaying log like a Shakespearian actor on stage; then, raised his autumn colored wings high and brought them crashing to his sides in gay self-applause, making the sound of war drums; faster and faster the wings would beat; then fade away. The grouse then turned his head to one side in an effort to hear the drumming of his future mate in a distant laurel cove.

The moon rose, and the sad notes of the whippoorwill searched through the valley in disappointment. A masked eyed coon playfully turned over stones, in the rushing mountain stream, looking for a tasty crayfish. Higher the moon rose, but the dog still sat waiting for his master to wake. Impatient, the dog pawed the silent form, ventured to nuzzle the hand to show devotion; slowly he backed away and limped to the end of the ledge. The dog crouched

with his tail beneath his undersides, held his crippled fore-paw limply above the sandy stone, raised his head till encircled by the misty moon, then deep within his being began his lonely howl, sad and mournful, the death howl. And the night was hushed save for the rustling leaves beneath the feet of a searching fox.



Steve, a junior, is majoring in education. His home is Corbin, Kentucky.

AS THE CITY BY NIGHT

STEVE GREGORICH

Way glow, blue, with mercury vapor,
Wide below, thins, to a taper;
Fuel hose, signs, and neon lines—
Portrait of night as the city resigns.

Passing movements of listless light,
Lesser reasons for carrying sight.
A fog-bedded creature, with one eye closed,
Tosses restlessly, in uneasy repose.

Afar-off chimes the tone of time,
Nebulous heard in man's misty mind—
Whispers to finish with soft entreat,
Night work, day fails to complete.

Would that when my day enters night,
And loves and friends cloud from sight;
I might my task on earth complete,
By night, in soft, whispered entreat.

Alda is a graduate student majoring in English. Her home is Valparaiso, Chile.

TO HAVE A COKE

ALDA CANESSA

"Mt. Sterling," announced the bus operator with such a mechanical and low tone, that if he had said, "I killed my grandmother," no one would have noticed it.

After all, who cared, I thought, if it were Mt. Sterling, Moscow, or Washington; when one has been travelling for many hours, bored and sleepy, what really interests one is how many more minutes he has to go before getting to his destination.

Just a few passengers got out; a lot were waiting by the door for their turn to get on.

I closed my eyes. Maybe I would get to sleep a bit now. But oh, if it were not for that stupid seat which made my neck feel as if it were made of lead.

A gouge on my head, followed by an "Oh, excuse me" brought me back to reality. It was a woman behind me, trying to put her suitcase up on the luggage rack.

As far as I could see, it was not in Mt. Sterling that I would get to fall asleep.

Two rows in front of me a young woman was standing in the aisle. She was slim, tall, had black hair, was wearing fitted, black slacks, a red sweater, dark glasses, and lipstick matching her sweater. Apparently she was trying to make room for the boy who was standing by her.

"You better sit here; I don't see any other vacant seat," she said, casting a quick, inquisitive look around the bus, so as to prove that she was right. "Here is your suitcase."

The boy, medium-sized, with shiny copper hair, approximately four feet tall and eight years old, sat down.

"Bye, Eddie," she said, while she bent down to kiss him on his forehead. "Be good."

"Bye, Mama."

I followed her with my eyes. She was ready to get off the bus, her charm bracelet tinkling as she walked.

Outside, a late model red Cadillac convertible was waiting for her. A colored man opened the door for her, and she got into the car with a nonchalant movement.

The man turned, walked behind the car and around to the chauffeur's seat. They left.

Our bus was also leaving. I had not even realized that there were people standing.

"They should put more buses on Sundays," complained an old lady who could not get a seat.

Now that the motor was running, the bus was getting heated little by little again.

Directly in front of me a girl with long, loose blond hair was starting a conversation with the woman next to her, who was wearing a smart-looking blue hat with a delicate veil around it.

On the next row, the little boy stood up to take off his grey coat. His hair was the color of a rooster's comb. I wondered if he had freckles. Maybe I would get to see his face when I got off the bus.

Self-confidently, he sat down.

I closed my eyes and started pondering.

"My name is Eddie," a clear, loud childish voice interrupted my thoughts. "And yours?"

The young man sitting next to him uttered something I could not understand.

"It's hot here, isn't it?"

"I think it's all right." This time I could understand what the man said.

"My mother didn't say a word about this, but I think I'm getting off in Lexington to have a coke."

"I am going to Louisville," said the same penetrating voice. "And you?"

"I'm going to Lexington."

"Oh, then we are getting off together. O.K.?"

"O.K.," replied the man.

I would have preferred to be sleeping, like the girl sitting by me, but for some reason I could not.

I closed my eyes, anyway. When I opened them, the boy and the young man were changing seats. This one could have been an elec-

trician, a clerk, or a college student. His thin figure, brown hair, and dark suit did not reveal very much about him. Eddie was now by the window.

Weariness seemed to be sweeping over me. Now I could only unconsciously hear the sound of the motor running and feel the movement of the bus going on its way.

Five, ten, or twenty-five minutes passed; I did not know. But I did know that a cold breeze on my face awakened me. I straightened myself—Eddie's window was open.

What came to me as a soft breeze assumed the characteristics of a strong wind for those in front of me and right behind Eddie. The young girl's long hair was blowing in every direction. The woman next to her tried to hold her stylish hat with her right hand while she buttoned her coat with the other. I could hear some isolated coughs and someone sneezing.

"This feels good," said Eddie, and that was the only sign of approval I heard.

This time the man sitting beside him said nothing.

I thought that maybe when his mother said "Be good," she meant, "Don't talk to anyone, don't get down before time, and don't open the window."

We were now entering a new town. One more and I would reach my destination.

"Winchester," announced the same droll, monotonous voice, followed by the same old getting down and up of passengers, and the same inquisitive looks cast by the old women at young men for the possibility of getting their seats.

One of these women attained her purpose. She had the typical look of the kind old woman whose beauty had seen better days many, many years ago. She was wearing a beige coat, a bouffant white scarf around her neck, and a simple brown hat, which was not exactly the last cry of fashion. Under the quaint little hat, her gray hair was discreetly in place. Her wire-rimmed glasses seemed to pinch her slender nose. Her serene and sweet expression reflected the mark of years in her soft blue eyes. Her shriveled face and thin colorless lips etched a glint of sunshine in a very black day.

She must have inspired the young man sitting next to Eddie,—maybe the memory of some old relative—for he hurried to give her his seat.

After a soft, "Oh, you don't need to," the old lady sat down, innocent of what would happen when the bus started again with the window open next to her.

But this time Eddie closed it.

We were now leaving.

"My name is Eddie, and yours?"

"Mine is Hazel."

"Oh, Hazel is the name of a T.V. program, isn't it?"

"You're right."

"Hazel what?"

"Hazel Philco."

"Well, Philco is the name of a refrigerator."

"You're right again!"

No one else talked on the bus, and I wondered whether everyone was concentrating on Eddie as I was.

"I'm going to Louisville to school again—they're waiting for me. Where are you going?"

"Oh, I'm just going to Lexington."

"Well, I don't know what's wrong with this bus, but everyone is going to Lexington. What are you going to do there?"

"I'm going to see one of my grandchildren who is sick."

"Oh, I'm getting off in Lexington to have a coke."

This time my attention was diverted to two women talking behind me:

"What a cute boy!"

"I wish my Bobby managed that well."

"Well, let me tell you that mine is older and doesn't dare to go anywhere by himself."

An exclamation and there was Eddie again.

"Mmmm . . . coconut cookies, my favorite ones. Do you always take them with you?"

"Not always. These are for my grandchildren, but I don't think there's anything wrong with our having some now."

"Do you make them?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you make chocolate cookies? Those are my favorite too!" He did not wait for an answer but went on. "I'm going to tell Mother to give me some whenever I go on the bus."

"Do you travel a lot, Eddie?"

"No, Ma'am. Just on the week ends when I go home."

By the time we arrived in Lexington, Eddie had talked about planets, dogs, ice cream, guns, and Russians.

When I got off the bus, I lost sight of him. He had probably already scurried off with the crowd.

Then, in the midst of those who were walking towards the station, there was Eddie. He and the old lady had become good friends, for now she was taking him by his hand.

I walked forward so as to see his face. Eddie had no freckles, but he had in their place a vivacious smile which contrasted with his closed eyes, lacking any life and drawing on his face that countenance of emptiness and placidness that whispers, "I am blind."

Suzanne is a senior majoring in English. Her home is Mt. Olivet, Kentucky.

THE STRIPED GOD

SUZANNE HALE

ACT I

Time: present day, 1961

Scene: [a bomb shelter—9 X 12 foot room, containing two bunk beds, a small table, two chairs, and a small sink.]

AT RISE: [The stage is in semi-darkness. The repeated wail of an air raid siren prevails. A lone figure—indistinguishable as to features—except that he is a man—is sitting on the bottom bunk bed facing the audience. His head is in his hand, and one arm hangs loosely at his side. He moans softly.

A shuffling sound announces the descent of someone else into the shelter. A second man moves deliberately into the room.]

First Man [moans quite loudly]: Thank Heaven! Help me. My arm. . . .

Second Man [remains standing by the table. Makes no move. Speaks no words.]

First Man [leans toward standing figure—trying to see him]: Can't you hear me? I'm *hurt* . . . *bleeding* . . .

[Standing figure still makes no move. There is a silence. Then he reaches into the pocket of his jacket and draws out a cigarette lighter, walks toward the man on the bed and flicks it. The seated figure draws back from the sudden glare of light. Obvious *now* to the audience in the fact that the seated man is white and the standing one is Negro.]

Negro Man [nonchalantly]: What's wrong, white boy?

White Man [weeping]: It's my arm. I think it's . . .

[The Negro turns away. He holds the lighter out from him and looks around the room. He walks from the bed to the sink.]

Negro Man: Nice hous'—yassum—shore is one nice hous'. [He walks to the table. On the table is a miner's flashlight. He flips it on—the stage is lighted now—and turns to survey the room again.]

White Man: If only those sirens would stop! Why do they keep . . .

Negro Man [coldly]: Jes' a minute, white boy an meybe de soun' ob dem bombs gonta drown dem out. BOOM! BOOM!, white boy. [laughs loudly]

[The white man makes an attempt to cover his ears against the sound of the sirens, but on lifting his arm cries out in pain. Still the Negro makes no move to help.]

Negro Man [speaks more or less to himself]: Not meny 'membered 'bout dis shelter, did dey. Me, I watch dem dig it. A family ob white folks, dey stay down here fo' a week. Five ob dem. Big goberment exsperment. Pictures en de paper. Dey nebber thoug' dey'd bomb us! [laughs loudly] But dey gon' to, white boy—dey is gon' to bomb us dead! [laughs again]

[Crashing, hurried sounds.] A woman hurls herself into the room, her hand across her mouth muffling sobs. She knocks the chair over, slumps to her knees beside it and sobs breathlessly. The woman is around thirty-five years of age and has long, heavy hair that is standing wildly from her head. Her face is heavily made up—smeared now — and her whole appearance announces "street-walker."

The Negro watches, but makes no move to help her to her feet. The white man again tries to move but is forced back on the bed by pain. They both just look at her without speaking.

Gradually the sobbing ceases and the woman looks around the room. The siren has stopped wailing, and the silence is broken only by the heavy breathing of the woman. Still no one speaks. She pulls

herself clumsily—by use of the chair—to her feet. She yanks the chair upright and sits down in it.

White Man [falling back on the bed]: Ohhhhh—please help . . .

[Both the Negro and the woman look toward him.]

Negro Man [the Negro picks up a first-aid kit from the table and hands it to the woman]: The man's hurt, white gal.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Time: minutes later

Scene: same

AT RISE: [a meal has been opened from stored goods. The white man, arm in a sling and with his head heavily bandaged, is propped up on the bed. The woman is rather awkwardly poking spoonfuls of food at him. The Negro is seated at the table—pushing his spoon through the food, but eating little.]

Woman [in a high nervous voice]: Gosh, we ain't even told our names yet. Mine's Pearl. [looks around expectantly, but neither of the men answers. Speaks to the white man.]: What's yours, honey?

White Man [softly]: Charles. [sadly] Charles Pierce Browning, *the Third.*

Woman [turns to Negro]: And what's yourn?

Negro Man [staring directly into the woman's eyes]: *Uncle Tom.*

Woman [smiles quickly. She is uncertain whether he jokes or not. She stands up]: Well, - - - Tom, would you like some more food?

[Tom turns his back on her, picks up the radio, and fiddles with the dial.]

White Man: Any idea what's wrong with it, Tom?

Negro Man [throws the radio on the bunk opposite him]: Hit don' work—dat's what peers to be wron' wid hit, white boy. [The Negro walks over to the bunk—opposite him—and climbs to the top bed. He stretches out full length, puts his hands behind his head and sings softly]

"Nigger pick de cotton, Nigger tote de load,
Nigger build de levee foh de ribber to smash,
Nigger nibber walk up de handsome road,
But I radder be a Nigger dan po' white trash.

Oh Lawd, radder be a Nigger,
Radder be a Nigger, oh my Lawd,

Nigger nebber walk up de handsome road,
But I radder be a Nigger dan po' white trash."

[The woman looks nervously at the white man, who is watching Tom. She grabs some dishes and begins scraping them, rattling them noisily. Tom continues to sing the last verse over and over. The woman walks to the sink, piles the dishes in it, picks up a cloth, and dabs at the table. Her face is beginning to redden and her mouth is set in an angry line. She looks again at the white man. He meets her eyes and looks away. She jerks her hand and accidentally drops a cup to the floor. The singing ceases. Tom props up on his elbow, looks at the cup, and smiles. He lies back down and starts to sing again.]

Woman [whirls angrily toward the Negro]: Shut up singing that song!

Negro Man [swings his feet over the side of the bed and sits up. He looks at the woman and asks haughtily]: What's wrong, white gal? Make you homesick? [pauses. He looks from the woman to the white man. Adds sneeringly] Well now don' feel poorly. Why you an' Charles Pierce Browning, the *Third,* thar could jon' up and sing dat little ditty 'bout—now how's dat go—we are the b-e-s-t best of all the r-e-s-t rest—yeh, dat's hit. You 'member hit, don' you? Dat's what you all sing when youse sees a little pickaninny astandin' on thu corner. Don't you? [angrily] Don't you sing dat when you sees people lak me? [The white man and the woman exchange glances. They are bewildered by the sudden outburst. The Negro jumps down from the bed. The white man and woman jump as if startled by the crash. They stare—almost fascinated—at the enraged Negro.] ANSWER ME! DIDN'T YOU SING THAT SONG?

[The white man draws back into the corner of the bed, pulls his knees up as in self-defense.]

Woman [takes a small step toward the Negro. She speaks softly]: I ain't never sung no songs like that! What's the matter with you, Tom?

[The Negro turns his back to her and picks up the radio and again fiddles with the dial. There is a moment of complete silence.]

Negro Man [suddenly throws the radio against the wall and whirls to face the woman]: I'll tell you *what's wron'* wid me, white gal. What's wrong wid me is I'm black. [holds his arms out for her to see] Not inside, min' you, but outside whur ebberbody kin see

hit! An' you know what bein' black does fo' you? Hit makes you go to school inna *shack*. Hit makes you sit en de *back* of de bus. Hit won't let you take your family to de *nice* eating places. [points a finger at the cowering figure on the bed] Hit's always wid you—big as life and hit won't go way an' you can't cover hit up wid no mask 'cause dey can see behind dat an' see dat you is *black!* [turns away from the two and looks upward. He now speaks softly as if meditating] And happiness—why happiness sure 'nuff mus' be afraid of de cullud man—cause hit runs away and dar ain't no way you can ketch hit. No sah, you can't catch happiness if'n you is a *black* man.

Woman [stares at him for a moment, then begins to laugh—a braying mirthless laugh. She stops the laughter as quickly as she began it]: You mean to say—that you think—that all you have to do to be happy is to be white? [laughs again] Look at me! Just look at me! I'm white, ain't I? Do you think happiness is a huggin' on me? No sir, I ain't ever even smelled of that thing! It takes a powerful lot more than the color of your skin. [She closes her eyes and breathes deeply as if trying to recall what it takes to be happy.] It takes—money. Money. You gotta have a rich daddy and you gotta be born in one of them big white houses on the top of the hill. Happiness don't fool around with us people that live on the wrong side of the tracks.

White Man [bitterly]: There isn't any such thing as happiness! It's just a word that you see in books—like love. [Both the Negro and the woman turn to look at him in surprise—surprised to hear the "shy" man speak in such a tone. The white man tries to stand. He makes it to his feet, but moans and slumps. The woman makes a move as if to help. He wards her off with his good arm] Leave me alone. [He recovers somewhat, staggers to the chair and sits down heavily. He hesitates—getting his breath.] Be white and rich and you are happy. Is that what the good book says? Because if it does—it's wrong. *I* was born in one of those "big white houses on the hill," and I even had a "rich daddy" to go with it. He was so rich that he had a silver dollar for a heart. [He lays his head on the table and gasps with pain or with remembering. The woman makes another move to help, but again he holds up his hand in protest. He takes a jerky breath] My daddy could make dirt turn to gold—but he couldn't make a man out of his son. And that made him mad, 'cause he had never failed before.

[looks up at the Negro] Do you know what he used to do? He'd whip me for crying—the harder I'd cry the harder he'd whip me. I was so afraid of him that every time I saw him I'd cry and then he'd take that big black belt off . . . [Sobs as he can still feel the pain from the whippings.] But I lived—I didn't even have enough guts to die. [speaks lower and rather slow now.] When I was eighteen, he put me in a military school. It was their job to produce a man—they were getting paid to do it. The very first thing they did was to put me out on a football field. [laughs/sobs] And the first time I saw blood on my jersey—I started running and I've never quit! Run, Charles, run.—"Three blind mice—see how they run." [puts his head on his arm and sobs heavily.]

[The Negro and the woman exchange looks. They look at the sobbing man. The woman rubs her hand across her eyes. The Negro beckons to her and makes a move toward the sobbing figure. Together they half lead and half carry him back to the bed.]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

Time: minutes later

Scene: same

AT RISE: [The white man is lying on the bed—motionless. The Negro is leaning against the other bed, his head pressed against the top bunk. The woman is sitting, elbows leaning on the table, running her fingers through her hair, then rubbing her hand across her eyes. All three remain silent.

Suddenly the siren peals out in short, sharp blasts—blasts denoting immediate bombing in the area. All three jerk and look upward —toward where the sound is. The woman reaches for the table for support and in doing so knocks the lamp to the floor. The stage is once more in semi-darkness.]

Woman [fervently]: God help us!

Negro Man [looks at the woman as if studying her.]: God. God help—*us*. White gal Pearl, do you think God is—a black man or a white one?

Woman [hesitates only a moment.]: I think—I think that God is striped. [Both men seem shocked at the idea.] I think that He has a red stripe that runs down here [motions down a part of her body] and a yellow stripe that runs along here [points to another section of her body] and a black stripe and a white stripe. I think we got a striped God that is in charge of that handsome road you was singing about, Tom. And along that road there ain't no signs

that says: "Whites only" or "Negroes only"—there's just one big ole sign and it says: *"Welcome All."* [She makes a circling gesture with her hand.]

Negro Man [leaning toward her—dreamlike—straining to see.]: Yeah. Hit's just one big sunny road wid lot of flowers and such and ebberbody's gwine to walk up dat road a singin' and laughin'. [turns to white man] And, Charles, dar ain't gwine to be no cowards dar, 'cause dar ain't nothin' to be afraid of and dar won't be no po' white trash 'cause you don't need money to have a big house and lots of friends. An' who'll be dar to greet us and say "Come right in Tom, and Pearl, and Charles? *Our* God—our *striped* God.

[The sound is shattered by the first bomb blast.]

Woman: Do you think we're going to die, Charles?

White Man [simply]: Yes.

Woman: And you ain't afraid?

White Man: No. No, for the first time in my life—I'm *not* afraid.

Woman [closes her eyes and stretches her arms wide.]: You know what? - - - I feel just like a lady—a real grand lady—one all dressed in silks and satins—just waiting to—to meet a handsome gentleman—one that's going to give me happiness—a ticket on the handsome road. [mimics the "upturned nose" and "airs" of a socialite.]

Negro Man [Bows elaborately to her. Snatches the cloth from the table and swirls it like a cape. He drapes "the cape" over her shoulders gently.]: Your carriage awaits you, Madame.

Woman [curtsies]: Why thank you, kind sir.

Negro Man [stands straight and puffs out his chest. He repeats softly]: Sir. Sir Tom. Sir Thomas Abraham Jones. Dat sure does soun' nice.

[A second blast slices the air. Dust and smoke fill the room. The remaining lights grow dimmer—and dimmer. The Negro once again pulls his cigarette lighter out and flicks it.]

White Man [arises unsteadily and walks toward the other two. He takes the lighter from the Negro and snuffs it. He kneels and prays]: The Lord is my Shepherd. . . .

[The woman and the Negro kneel also and join]:

I shall not want.
He maketh me. . .

[Slowly while they repeat the Twenty-third Psalm]

CURTAIN

Beverly, a sophomore, lives in Richmond, Kentucky. She plans a major in chemistry.

FULL UP AT THE INN

BEVERLY CARNES

When the new bridge was built across the Hishon River, traffic mainly bypassed the old road that wound its way down the tree-covered hills to the ancient steel-clad bridge formerly used as a passage across the river. In so doing it had left the river inhabitants largely on their own since they rarely came out from the shadow of those hills overlooking the river. Thus, a thriving community had no name; it was just "down around the river."

It was a peaceful community, with its combination filling station and general store; that is—it was peaceful until some man from the town up the road decided to build a night club there. Oh, it was a good enough idea, really. It was not exactly a splendid night club. Just a small place designed to capture the rustic charm of the river and draw down some customers from town. It was even given an original name—The River Inn. What the older people did not count on was the rapidity with which the younger generation accepted the Inn. They could get liquor here and never once was an identification card asked for.

After this someone decided to build a boat dock on the river. Then, the wealthier people with their boats and beer flocked from the town. Another boat dock sprang up. So did a motel, summer cabins, even a beach. The river soon became a playground for the town people. And the younger river people reveled in these sudden developments.

No longer was the old River Road cut off from the rest of the world and protected by the overhanging cliffs. The rest of the world

came to it. And this effect on the young set was stupendous. Soon they were copying the dress and hair styles of the town people. Boys were demanding cars of their own, and girls insisted upon complete new wardrobes fashioned in the latest styles. Some of the more enterprising young adults even wheedled their parents into sending them to the college in the town.

Vivienne Victor was a product of this upheaval.

Vivienne was a lovely girl with soft blonde hair and violet eyes, as she described them. At least, this was what she was thinking as she slid into the brown waters of the river late one Saturday afternoon. She swam easily for the opposite bank, wondering if the four people on Johnny's boat dock were watching her.

Indeed, these four young people were—only, out of curiosity instead of admiration.

"Now, who is that darn fool swimming across the river at a time like this?" the tall boy, Mark, wondered, as a boat swung sharply to the right to avoid hitting Vivienne. Then, he peered closer and a smile of recognition broke over his face. "Three guesses who that is," he laughed to the boy in the boat alongside the dock.

"You reckon?" the boy answered back with pretended eagerness. "Well, see you all later!" and he gunned the boat out into the river.

"Is it Vivienne?" the small, dark-haired girl, Toni, asked.

"Who else? Who would pull a stunt like that except Vivienne?" Mark cracked.

"She probably swam out there just so someone would pick her up," Toni answered.

"Probably."

There was a short silence as they all watched Vivienne climb into the boat.

Then Mark warmed to the subject. "Yes, sir! Vivienne's sure some character."

"You know," Toni mused, "she's almost unbelievable."

"I'll tell you what she acts like. She acts like a gold digger . . . but she really isn't. That's the impression she gives everybody."

Toni laughed, "She's really pulled some crazy stunts."

"Yeah! I remember one time I was up at the Inn and she was there. She was just leaving when I got there, so I told her to come back and I'd buy her a drink. Well, it made her mad, and she blew up! 'If you can't come and pick me up for a date, you can just forget it!' " They all laughed at Mark's imitation of Vivienne's nasal

voice. "So I just told her I wasn't asking her for a date. I just wanted to buy her a drink, and if she didn't like it, she didn't have to come back."

After a minute he continued, "She'd better be glad for anybody she can get. Believe me, the word's out on her. Oh, nothing bad," he added for the benefit of the second girl, Libia, who did not know Vivienne. "It's just out."

The second boy, Johnny, alone said nothing. It was well enough for Toni and Mark to talk. They didn't know Vivienne. They hadn't lived on the river all their lives, and they could never know Vivienne nor anyone else who lived here. It was true. Vivienne was a horribly affected little person, subject to the ridicule of the more sophisticated town people. And he talked about her as much as they did, but that was different. It really was different. They didn't know Vivienne as he did.

The boat pulled alongside the dock, and Vivienne spoke warmly to each of them. "Toni! How sweet you look today . . . Mark, you simply must see Daddy's new boat. You'll love it! And, Johnny, my dear friend Johnny. It's been ages!"

Each of them managed to get in a greeting, and the boy in the boat sat back, enjoying it all.

Vivienne continued, "Toni, I didn't expect to see you down here today. And how is your sister?" She hurried on obviously not interested in Toni's reason for being here today.

"Oh, she's fine," Toni managed.

"That's wonderful! Are you staying for the band at the Inn tonight? Do come home with me, and I'll do something with this hair." She made a sweeping gesture toward her wet tangles. "Then we can go together tonight."

"Thanks just the same, Vivienne, but I think we four are going."

"Are you going to sing for us tonight, Vivienne?" Mark mocked.

She missed the sharp barb in his speech. "Well, I just might," she flirted. "But I must be going now. See you later." And at a flip of her hand, the boy roared the boat on toward the other dock.

Johnny had sat back watching Vivienne make a fool of herself. "Will she ever learn?" he thought.

The other two seemed to be looking at Libia, the new girl, expectantly. "She's some character," was her answer.

Quietly, the sun sank behind the rim of the western cliff, and darkness gathered over the river. Lights twinkled on here and

there, and the large neon sign above the River Inn came on. Cars began their descent along the old road from the busy highway above and stopped in front of the Inn. Finally, the noises of the band burst across the quiet river, and the windows of many houses were shut to keep out the blare.

But Vivienne loved it. It was Saturday night, and just everybody from the town would be down. Well, not everybody, but everybody who counted, anyway. And Mark had asked her to sing. And when she sang tonight, that would mean everybody else would hear her, too. It was just simply too wonderful! And she'd even worn her new dress tonight. She liked its short skirt. Besides, that was the fashion now. There was no one to tell Vivienne that her dress was ridiculous. Too extreme and too fashionable.

She entered the dimly lit and smoke-filled room of the Inn. She saw Wally, the owner, busy at the bar. With a slow and obviously practiced walk, she moved toward him and sat down.

"Wally," she smiled, "I'm going to sing tonight."

"Huh?" Wally raised his head. "Oh, that's nice, Vivienne. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm busy," and he turned once more to his task of mixing drinks.

Vivienne's entrance had not gone unnoticed by the four sitting at a nearby table. Toni and Mark smiled at each other. Libia said nothing and Johnny only blushed. Then Vivienne caught sight of them and waved.

"Hello, there. It's nice to see you again."

"Yes, it's been such a long time," Toni replied.

"Tell me, Vivienne. Are you going to thrill us with your beautiful voice tonight?" Mark asked, eyeing her in a way that she took for a compliment.

"Oh, I might." She decided to keep him guessing.

"Here. Sit down, Vivienne," Johnny offered, hoping to get her off her feet before she completely disgraced herself. Somehow, Vivienne's mistakes were not quite as bad when she was sitting down.

The band played on, number after number, and still Mark did not ask her to dance. Johnny danced with her once, but that was unimportant. All Mark seemed to be doing was drinking and attempting to dance with Toni although his knees were becoming a little unsteady.

Finally, there was an intermission, and Vivienne decided the time was ripe. Excusing herself, she floated across the dance floor and

sat down by the band leader at the bar. "Eddie, when are you going to introduce me?" she asked.

Eddie turned to her. "Introduce you? What do you mean, Vivienne?"

"When are you going to introduce me? I'm singing tonight. Didn't Wally tell you?"

Eddie looked at her with disbelief. "Why, I can't do that, Vivienne!"

"What do you mean, you can't?" Vivienne asked incredulously. Then her lips tightened. "Well, all right! Just be that way about it!"

She spun off the stool, crossed over to the bandstand, and climbed up the steps. "Be ready to play 'Some Enchanted Evening'," she ordered the band members. They stared at her. Then she turned to the audience with a brilliant smile.

"Hello, everybody. I am Vivienne. And I'm going to sing for you tonight. The song is 'Some Enchan. . . .' "

Then she stopped, for she had heard it. At first it was an irrepressible giggle, then a snicker, and finally an uproarious and unending laugh. Slowly, Vivienne's eyes turned to the table. Mark lolled helplessly in his chair, his whole body shaking with convulsions of laughter. Toni was laughing, too. Libia smiled. Johnny did not smile, but then Johnny did not count.

Vivienne stood on the bandstand making soundless words with her mouth. Her eyes appealed helplessly from side to side, but there was no help here. Finally, the laughter drove her from the stand, across the floor, and out into the darkness.

She did not stop running until she had crossed the steel bridge and was under a tree on the opposite bank. There, she slowly dropped to her knees and bent her head to the ground. For endless moments she remained like that, hearing only the laughter, the everlasting laughter.

Then she raised her face to the river. "I'm not like them," she said aloud to the waters, "and I wanted to be so bad." The tears streamed down her cheeks. "Now, there's nothing left," she whispered. "Nothing."

As if in answer the moon broke from behind the clouds. It illuminated the Inn in all its falsity and cheap imitation of life. Then slowly its beams came to play on the brown waters of the river, ancient as time, and on the enduring hills above, revealing here a soft beauty and quiet truth.

Larry is a junior majoring in English. He lives in Corbin, Kentucky.

THE COAL GATHERER

JOHN LARRY WALKER

Lige's aged body shuddered as he hovered over the small open grate. He hugged himself hard while he watched the last flicker of the fire waver among the pink cinders.

Slivers of December air filtered around the edges of the greased brown paper that covered the solitary window and cast a tawny gold haze on the pasteboard walls.

Lige pulled himself to his feet. His brow throbbed and burned as he tottered over to the coal box. "Out again," he muttered. Reaching for his shabby grey jacket with frazzled sleeves, Lige swayed back and forth and seemingly far, far away he heard the whistle of the five o'clock daily to Knoxville. Steadying himself on the gritty edge of the box, he stooped to pick up a large brown burlap bag. Wadding it up, he shoved it under his thin left arm and thrust his quivering, wrinkled hands into the pockets of his patched short-legged trousers. Lige wobbled over to the narrow door, where he tugged several times before it finally creaked open. The bent old man turned his face to the gray winter sky that showed black humps in the north, then stepped outside onto the piece of black slag that he used for a doorstep and began slowly to make his way toward the tracks. The cold wind stung Lige's feverish face and forced him to walk faster. Lige wondered how it could be so cold and yet his face be so hot.

As Lige looked down the two shiny rails that seemed to draw toward each other ahead, he wondered how long they were. He bet they were very, very long, long like his life—seventy-three years long. Then the old man stopped, took the burlap bag from his armpit, and held it out, letting it unfurl. He began picking up pieces of

coal lying beside the tracks where they had fallen from fast-moving coal cars. Slowly he dragged along, hesitating every few steps as he stooped to pick up more coal and let it tumble into the big bag. Lige's head throbbed harder now, and the flush of his face burned outward to the penetrating little gusts of wind that nibbled and pricked at his cheeks and numbed his crooked old fingers. He reached down to a little piece of coal, and his head reeled. His eyes blurred, and in his ears drums pounded louder and louder. He grasped at the little piece of coal. "Little, little, little," it echoed. Louder they pounded. . . . "Don't ever take away your little brother's toys again," screamed mother. "Lige, you're five years old and should know better. Besides, you have more toys than Andrew." Lige was running now toward the barn, gritting his teeth, clinching his fists, and batting tears down his plump cheeks.

A gust of sharp air seemed to revive him as he straightened, and the small piece of coal slid down the inside of the great brown sack.

He staggered on dragging the sack behind. He saw another piece of coal. It was a little larger. As he reached for it, it blurred, and fire rushed into his eyes. Again the drums pounded. He groped blindly for the larger piece of coal. "Larger, larger, a little larger," it rang. . . . "Why did you do it, Lige? Why did you steal my gradebook?" shouted Mr. Morgan. "You've been doing good sixth grade work. You had all B's. Didn't you think I would know the difference if you changed them to A's?"

He stretched out the hand that clutched the coal and tried to balance himself, straining his neck to hold his head up, finally righting himself. He straightened and let the coal drop into the sack where it rolled against the other pieces with a dull thump.

Again he stumbled on, not noticing the blackness from the north covering the sky or the gusts getting stronger and brisker.

He went forward dragging the sack, looking over smaller pieces of coal, searching for a larger lump. Then he saw one. It was bigger than two fists. His ears still pounded louder and louder. Outward he clutched again. Now his throat pounded. His wrist pounded. Fire burned his face and chest. His fingers whitened, and veins and tendons stood high on the back of the aged hand as he grappled with the larger piece. "Larger," it pounded, "larger, larger." . . . "Wasn't your salary enough, Lige? Couldn't you be satisfied without taking that sack of apples?" questioned Mr. McNeil. "Well, I can't put up with that. I'm afraid I'll have to let you go."

The larger piece thudded into the bag against the others. Teetering and rocking he tried to clear his head and eyes. The high winds blew his long white hair, and tufts of snowflakes brushed against his face.

The sack was heavy now, and Lige had enough coal to heat his small shack all night. His head throbbed worse, and he would be glad to get home and build a nice warm fire. He twisted the neck of the brown bag and started to turn toward home but stopped as he glimpsed something in the darkness. Screwing up his bleary eyes he searched for it. Yes, there it was, showing fuzzy through the gray crisscrosses, but it was there, another glorious piece of coal. It was huge, half as big as his doorstep. "What a wonderful piece of coal!" thought Lige as he started in its direction. "Just that piece, and then I'll go home. No, I've got enough." Again he started to turn and felt his old weak legs tremble. "But it's just one piece, such a nice piece. It won't take but a second." With both hands Lige pulled and strained to drag the heavy sack trailing a black snaky line through the snow. He trudged on pulling harder and harder with his eyes fixed on the huge fuzzy chunk of coal. On and on he tugged with the drums pounding louder and louder. The pounding was deafening. The fire spread to his waist. The chunk was clear now. It was glowing. Brighter and brighter, it was blinding. Lige was reaching, straining. Then coldness struck his front. Yet he reached out while he floundered back and forth in the snow reaching, straining for that huge glowing piece. Now it faded, getting dimmer and dimmer through the gray crisscrosses that were covering the brown burlap bag.

Marguerite, a junior from Evarts, Kentucky, is an education major.

THE ROSE THAT DIDN'T BLOOM

MARGUERITE SMITH

Winter was over—really over at last. Jane didn't need the warm sunshine and cool earth-smell to tell her that. She could feel it. It was the beautiful sense of glad expectancy that flooded her lungs every time she breathed. It was the sensation of life erupting beneath her feet. It was, beyond all things, new hope. For the winter had been hard. There had been so many people with no jobs, and even worse, no expectations of obtaining them. The coal mines had shut down; the shrill whistles that had meant "startin' time" and "quittin' time" had ceased to sever the air, and the blasts and bellows that had roared out of the deep mountain sides were heard no more. All of that was over, and the men who had worked and sweated to carve "black diamonds" out of a reluctant earth now stood idly around the dirty, yellow commissaries and wondered what to do next. There was no place to go, and if there had been, one needed money to travel, and money had to be scrimped and hoarded to buy food and pay rent. And so they stayed, and every day they gathered in little groups at the commissaries, smoking cigarettes they had rolled themselves and talking of the things they would do when the mines opened again. For they never believed that they would not open again. They had to. It was their life. It was all they knew, and they depended on it completely.

But each day their faces grew more gaunt; their overalls more frayed. Their children plodded to school in shoes that should have been discarded long ago. Food had been much too scarce, but with the coming of spring, gardens could be planted, shoes weren't needed so badly, and the warm sun would be a healing balm to

tired, haggard bodies. No wonder Jane felt like singing. It would be so good to see people moving about again as they cleared their garden spots and burned the brush, sending up delicious odors to tempt her nostrils and sting her eyes. "I wish we had a garden," she thought, dreamily wiping a pink saucer that had been dry for five minutes already.

Her mother, seeing the dishes pile up in the drainer to the point of running over, turned from the hot, sudsy sink and looked at her daughter with a weary smile, "Jane, if you don't get busy, we'll be at this all night. What in the world's the matter with you anyway?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking," her voice trailed off, but almost immediately she burst out with new enthusiasm, "Mom, why don't we plant a garden? Wouldn't you just love to have some fresh vegetables this summer?"

"Jane! Now where on earth would we put a garden?"

"We could put one out in the back yard. All it needs is spading up."

"And who do you think would tend it? With you and your sisters gone to school and me working, we barely have time to do the house work, let alone anything else."

Jane thought for a minute. It was true that time had to be strictly budgeted. By the time she had gotten home, helped with the evening meal and daily chores, she barely had time to do her homework and get ready for the next day.

"Still," she mused, "it would be so nice to have a garden like we did when I was a kid." She thought of the days when she and her father had worked side by side among the neat, orderly rows of young, green plants, weeding and hoeing, loosening the moist soil around the tender roots or pouring refreshing water over the sun-parched earth when the rains had failed to come. She had been so happy then. Not that she wasn't happy now, of course, but the times with her dad had always been sort of special—that was before he had gone to the city seeking work. For the mines had been his life, too, but he was one of the luckier ones, and having known something of electricity, he had been able to find employment in one of the industrial cities of the north. She, her two sisters, and her mother had remained at home in order that they might finish school in the small town where they had lived all their life.

But it had never quite been the same with her dad gone. She missed the walks in the woods, their long talks, and the companion-

ship they had enjoyed. Now, with spring in the air, the memory of those days was suddenly excruciatingly poignant and the idea of a garden became almost an obsession with her. She longed to see things growing again; to feel the damp earth under her feet; to taste shiny red tomatoes warmed by the sun, for to her such things made life good.

That evening, as the sun slowly descended the stairway of the heavens, dragging her long satin train of crimson and gold behind her, Jane sat on the back porch of her house, hugging her knees and staring at the clumps of grass spread over the yard. She turned suddenly at the sound of footsteps on the small, brown path.

"Hi, Hawk," she spoke with a smile in her voice as she watched the old colored man laboriously approach the porch, where he heaved a heavy sigh and let drop the shaggy burlap sack that was slung over his shoulder.

'Heah's the rest uf that kindlin' Ah promised yo' mothah, Miz Jane. Cos Ah guess ya'll won't be needin' much mo' now that the weathah's wammin' up."

"No, and I'm glad of it," answered Jane. "It's been cold so long and I'm so tired of it. I was just telling Mom today how anxious I am to see the planting start."

"Me, too, Miz Jane. Ah'm goin' to start spadin' up my groun' tomorrie, in case it don't rain. 'En by the way, Ah'm going' ta have plenty of seeds and onion sets left ovah, if'n ya'll like ta have some."

"Thanks ever so much, Hawk, but I don't guess we'll have a garden this year. Mom and I don't have time to put one out. I sure do wish we could, though. I just love fresh vegetables."

"Yeah, they sho' do taste good. Folks 'roun heah need 'em too. These unemployment checks jest don't go none too far. Seem's like mine's allus gone 'fo Ah git it."

"Well, maybe the mines will open up again pretty soon, Hawk; at least I hope so."

"Ah hopes so, too, Miz Jane; Ah jest like three mo' yeahs till Ah can retire. Sho do hope Ah can git 'em in."

"Yes, I know how it is, Hawk. It's always worse for people who've spent their whole life doing something and then suddenly see it vanish overnight."

"Sho is bad all right. I spect things'll be better come fall though. It can't allus be so bad, yo' know."

Just then a long, high-pitched "H-A-W-W-K" pierced the air,

and the old colored man, his white hair contrasting sharply against his dusky skin, turned to see his plump, roly-poly wife standing on the porch of his house farther up the hill.

"Comin', Georgie," he called, and turning to Jane, said, 'Gotta go, Miz Jane. Ah'll jest put this heah kindlin' in the box and take the sack wit' me." He dumped the long, slender sticks in the huge, cardboard box and began a slow ascent up the path that led to the ancient, stilted house that he and his wife had shared for more than twenty years. Jane watched the retreating figure and felt a strange pang of regret, for somehow she knew that the hope, burning in the breast of the jobless, and keeping them alive, was doomed. She got up and walked into the house, letting the screen door slam behind her. The sun had sunk low now, and twilight had fallen in earnest. Already the little town was preparing for slumber. There was very little else to do.

In the days that followed, Jane could see Hawk patiently spading the field above his house. She watched the lone figure, small in the distance, cajole the unwilling soil into a soft, velvety-brown mass where he gently placed tiny sprigs of life and minute seeds. And he didn't stop with his own garden. Arriving home from school one hazy afternoon, she found him busily biting his spade into the green clods of her own backyard.

"Hawk!" she exclaimed, "what on earth are you doing!"

The old man grunted over a reluctant brown clump of earth, turned huge, kindly eyes toward the newcomer and smiled genially. "Well, Miz Jane," he said, propping his shoulder over the spade handle, "Ah jest figured maybe Ah'd plant what seeds Ah had left ovah heah in ya'll back ya'd, so's you'd have a little sumthin too. 'Sides, Ah aint got nothin' to do but sit aroun' all day anyhow."

"Really, Hawk, you shouldn't be doing that. It's hard work and you've got enough to do as it is. Besides that sun's awfully hot on you out there."

"Naw, it's not so hot, and like Ah say, Ah enjoys doing it and Ah'd hate to see these seeds go to waste. Now, quit yo' frettin', and if ye don't mind, Ah'd like to have a drink of watah."

Jane shook her head, knowing it was useless to argue with him, and went into the kitchen to get some ice water. She poured a full glass, watching the thin droplets form on the outside, and took it to him. "Here you are, Hawk," she said.

He drank deeply without stopping to breathe, and having fin-

ished, sighed heavily. "Sho do taste good, Miz Jane. Thanks evah so much."

Jane took the glass back into the kitchen, then quickly reappeared, kicked off her sandals, and walked out over the fresh-turned earth. "Doesn't it feel nice," she exclaimed. "And doesn't it smell good." Then, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to her, she asked, "Hawk, what are you going to plant?"

"Oh, Ah guess maybe some corn, green onions, few tomatoes, some lettuce, and some okrie too, if you'd like."

"Oh, yes, I love okra. Mom doesn't, but I like it fried and rolled in meal."

"Well, we'll have plenty of evahthing. Won't be too long, eithah, if we keep on having this good weathah. . . ."

And so the days passed. The seeds were planted. The soft rains came, alternating with sunlight that flowed life into the young seedlings, causing them to burst their shells and thrust small, verdant shoots through the soil. Jane watched eagerly while Hawk silently and contentedly cultivated each row. The lettuce was especially pretty, she thought. It looked like the lacy ruffles of a ballroom dress. And the young corn stood so straight, with gently folding blades that curved over on each side in perfect symmetry. Still, there might be an added touch, and she thought she knew what it should be.

The next day after school, she found Hawk, as usual, steadily working among the plants. "Look," she called, giving the screen door another bang, "I've bought something else for the garden." In each arm she carried a slender white sack, and from each sack there jutted the thorny tendrils of a rose bush. "We can put them right here," she said, pointing to the edge of the garden nearest the porch. "Don't you think they'll be pretty? One's red and the other's pink."

Hawk appraised them slowly, took them from their white sacks and began trimming them with the knife he carried in his pocket. "Yeah, they'll be mighty purty, Miz Jane, but this 'n don't look none too healthy," he said, critically eyeing the one that had come from the sack marked red.

"Oh, but of course that one's going to be all right, Hawk. It's the red one and that's the color that reminds me of life. I just betcha it'll grow to be the prettiest red rose bush ever."

"Well, Ah hope so, Miz Jane. Now wheah do you want Ah should put them again?"

"Right here. One at the corner of the garden and one a little farther down. Don't you think that'll be okay?"

"Um-hmm. You go git some watah now, and Ah'll fix a place to set 'em in."

Jane got the water and a cup with which to dip it. She waited until Hawk had finished making the first hole and then she set the bush firmly down in it, pouring water around the roots and watching the hungry earth drink it in. After they had finished with the red one, they placed the pink one about halfway down the length of the garden. She had wanted the red one for the corner so that it would be the first thing she saw when she came out on the porch in the morning. For that's when roses were prettiest—just after the dew had fallen on the soft, fragile petals.

But Jane did not get to watch them bloom. It was decided that she should visit her father that summer and perhaps find a job that would help to pay her way to college the following fall. Before she left she trudged up the worn pathway to the battered old house of Hawk and Georgia. Georgia answered her knock, "Come on in, Miz Jane. My, yo' is lookin' so good this evenin'. Ah guess yo' is all ready to catch the bus fo' the city, huh?"

"Yes, I'm leaving in just a few minutes, Georgia. I just wanted to say good-by to you and Hawk before I left."

"Well, Ah'm so glad you did, honey. Hawk," she yelled into the next room, "come tell Miz Jane bye. She's fixin' to leave now."

Hawk came ambling out of the kitchen, a wide smile spread over his wrinkled face. "Howdy do, Miz Jane. Sho was nice uf yo' to drop by befo' yo' left. We'ah all gonna miss yo' aroun' heah this summah."

"I hate to leave, really I do, but I need to earn some money if I'm going to go to college this fall. It'll be a hardship on Mom and Dad as it is, so I've just got to do anything I can to help out."

"Yeah, yo' go right ahead and git that edgecashun, Miz Jane. It's mighty impo'tan' these days. We'll keep an eye on yo' momma to see that she's okay, so don't yo' worry 'bout nothin'."

"I know you will, Hawk, and take care of the gardens. I'm really looking forward to corn and tomatoes when I get back. Maybe the roses will have bloomed by then, too."

"Oh, yes'm, they'll be bloomin' when you come home. Now yo' jest take care yo'sef and hurry on back soon's yo' can."

"I will, and you all do the same. I'll write when I get the time. Bye now, I've got to go or I'll miss my bus."

"Jes a minute, Miz Jane," Georgia bustled into the kitchen and emerged carrying a large brown paper bag. "Heah's a little somethin' Ah fixed fo' yo' to carry along on the bus wit yo'. Yo' might git hongry on that long ride."

"Um-m-m-m, it smells so good. What is it, Georgia?"

"Fried chicken and some cake Ah made. Hopes yo' likes it, Miz Jane."

"You know I will, Georgia. Thanks ever so much. You and Hawk have been so nice to us. It's so wonderful to have friends like you."

"Well, yo' jest take good care of yo'sef and we'll see yo' when yo' git back." Hawk held the door open and Jane left, calling good-by all the way down the hill. When she reached her house, she turned once more to see the old colored couple standing side by side in the doorway, still waving. "Such wonderful people," she thought. "They'd share the last thing they had with you and be glad to do it."

She thought about them again as she sat on the bus speeding northward. She thought about all the people that she had known and shared a common life with. Happy people, in spite of the hardships and bare existence that most had known. Giving people, in spite of the little they had received from life. Loving people, in spite of a world that had often seemed cold around them. It grieved her now to know that most of them would suffer in the days to come. She knew their livelihood was over. She knew the mines would never hum with activity again. When the unemployment and government checks had run out, she wondered what they'd do. There was no place for the old people to go. It was much too late for them to start a new life. She hoped it was not too late for the young, and she felt it was not, but their lives would have to be made somewhere else, their fortunes sought in the distant cities to the north and west, while the older generation and the small town of her birth would quietly and somberly fold themselves into the past. . . .

For almost three months Jane stayed in the city with her dad, working in a drug store and scrupulously saving her money. In August, she returned home, with enough to pay her tuition for college and then have some left over. She got off the bus and into a cab,

fussing with blue suitcases and wishing for the fiftieth time during the trip that she had a dozen hands. At last, with the cab driver's help, she managed to get settled down, the car was started, and they sped down the grey, dusty road toward her house. She was so glad to be back among the mountains again. They were especially beautiful at this time of year, when the trees flamed scarlet and brown, gold and magenta, painted with the brush of the wind.

But it was not just their beauty she loved; it was their strength also. One could depend on them always to be there, hovering near and casting long shadows or standing proud and steadfast beneath the sun. She remembered how as a child she had liked to lie in bed and look out to see them rise beyond her window, laved in misty moonlight, and they had somehow made her feel safe. She felt the same way now, seeing them again, and she knew that she'd miss them, always.

Her mother had supper prepared from the garden that night. And it was delicious, really delicious! She had just finished dessert when she asked, "By the way, Mom, how's Hawk and Georgia?"

The smile left her mother's face. "Oh," she replied. "Well, Georgia's fine, Jane, but . . . well, we didn't want to tell you until you got back; you see, Hawk's not here any more. He passed away about a month ago. Cancer."

"Oh, Mom, no. . . ."

Twilight had diffused itself throughout the valley. The last rays of the sun played upon the slopes of the mountains, as a young lad who lingers at his games long after his mother has called "Bedtime." Jane stood on the porch, gazing at the tangled mass of tomato vines and corn stalks and all the other dozens of plants that Hawk had lovingly tended. But she didn't see them. All she could see was one pink rose bush growing halfway down the length of the garden. There was no trace of the red. She wondered if this was the answer. Was this what happened to people when the occupation they had built their life around was taken away from them? It was something to think about.

Ronnie, a junior, is majoring in English. His home is Falmouth, Kentucky.

A COMMAND PERFORMANCE

RONNIE WOLFE

Death row was silent. Except for an occasional clanking of the heavy iron cell doors, the only sound to be heard was Max Huffman's sharp, unsteady breathing. As he awaited execution, Max tugged at a long green raveling on his left sleeve.

"One helleva play," Max thought, "and I've been the star. My name will hit the lights soon, especially after this performance." Only a few short weeks ago, the curtain had gone up on act one. . . .

The night of the murder was one big steam bath. Max rounded the corner and headed into the alley to a wave of odors. The smell of decayed mackerel swam into the sultry night air. Max decided to try to hold his breath until he passed through the area, but a dark heap crumpled against one of the tenement buildings caused him to stop short. His investigation hadn't even started when a burly cop rounded the corner.

"Little Max, you've really done it this time. Kid, you've sure fixed yourself up for good."

What actor could resist the opportunity to play such a role?

"Clean job, eh copper?"

"Clean enough to get you the chair. Why'd you do it, Max?"

He forgot his lines. "Ah, come on now, copper, surely you don't think I . . ."

"All your old excuses won't help you this time. Don't give me the old line about your mother. You've gone too far, my boy."

Intermission had been cut short. The trial was a snapshot of hasty justice. The cops hadn't been able to locate his mother. Busi-

ness hadn't been good at the time, and she was forced to move around the city. After all, she wasn't as young as she used to be.

"I could blame her," he thought. He had defended her reputation as a boy, and now after all his defense, he was losing the game.

The doubt whether she was guilty no longer occupied a place in his mind, but the fact that she had kept food on the table did. Her oatmeal had been his caviar. That had been her one talent, making oatmeal, and the mere thought of the word caused Max to swallow.

But she had been stubborn, too. It was this quality of hers which had caused his father to stalk out that day so many years ago. Max could remember their violent quarrel over religion, and he could still picture his father as he had stood there, rigid, flushed, and tangled with frustration. With the deliberation of a pin spotter, he had crossed himself and left. That was fourteen years ago.

He had come back though. He had been rushed to the trial in time for Max's conviction. For a moment Max remembered the feeling he had had when his father entered the courtroom. It was like meeting God face to face. The thought pierced Max and he quickly switched his attention to his last visitors. . . .

It was as if someone had turned on too many stage lights. Both sat on either side of him in his cell trying to apologize in as few words as possible. Max remembered the odd sensation he had felt as each parent begged him to take sides against the other. It was as if his stomach had been a balloon and someone were trying to burst it inside him. The basso voice of the guard had served as a pin when it croaked that visiting hours were up.

The curtain never closed between acts as both prepared to leave. His mother had stood up to go, her once radiant face now sad, like a little girl looking in a store window at a doll which she can never have. Her manicured nails were chipped with the purple-red polish on them. Her fresh complexion was now covered with extra dabs of cheap powder. Now he recalled her concrete face as she pleaded for his understanding. It had all reminded Max of the movies he had paid a dime to see in the theater on the south side.

His father had sat there, rigid and flushed, through the whole ordeal. After fourteen years, words didn't come easy to him. "Son, I was only trying to be a good Catholic. I was wrong and I know it now. What is there to say? Maybe if I hadn't left. . . ."

With his statement unfinished, he rose to leave. With a kind of

manly awkwardness, he embraced Max. "Like a girl," Max had thought until he found himself temporarily abandoning his own sex as well.

His mother left first. She clutched her skimpy little white handkerchief in her hand, twisting it into a wrinkled wad. The colored mascara, eye shadow, and cheap powder caked on her face made her look like an easel in a kindergarten class. She ran down the row with an even gait and well timed sobs. Her scream behind the thick grey sliding door sent a cold chill tumbling down Max's spine.

And then his father made his exit. Again he embraced Max, this time with the awkwardness of a boy in adolescence. He mechanically crossed himself and left. His gait was deliberate like the ticking of a pendulum in a grandfather's clock. He did not look back. The thick grey door had then cut his family from him forever. . . .

The long green raveling broke into Max's hand. Using his thumb and forefinger, he twisted it into a little ball. "Like two children begging to go on a visit to Aunt Bertha's," Max thought. A warm sensation began to stir inside him as if the tip of a flame were being passed back and forth under his stomach.

"Son, your meal's here," interrupted the basso voice. "Sure you don't want anything else?"

"No, no, thanks."

This was it. This was backstage before opening night. Max's heart began to sound like the pounding of an over-eager drummer in a small school band. A flurry deep within him was now suppressed as he sat down stiffly, crossed himself mechanically; and as his spoon rattled against the side of the thin tin bowl, he began to eat his last oatmeal.

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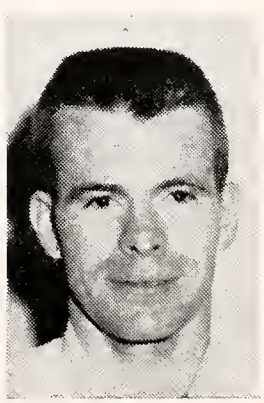

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