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Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

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Belles Lettres



1962-63

Belles Lettres

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STAFF

EditorMELVA LEE GROOT
Assistant Editors.....MARY ANN NELSON, MARLEEN SHAVER
Business Manager.....DIANA CRAWFORD
Circulation Managers.....JANICE KEETON, LARRY WALKER
Faculty Sponsors.....BYNO R. RHODES, PHILIP H. MANKIN

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METAMORPHOSIS

SHELLEY MORGAN SAUNDERS

More glorious day to man God ne'er had given
Than this fine day which now I call to mind
When I set out to view myself more clearly
Forsaking all the barriers of time.

My thoughts at this point were somewhat confused
Until I viewed the heavens, sparse with clouds,
Enraptured by the very act of seeing
Perhaps for the first time, the home of God.

Then thoughts I'd had came into my perception
With greater focus than before, or since;
Just being kin to heaven can do wonders
For one who's never fallen on his knees.

Sweet reverie was shattered at this moment
And all that beauty seemed to run and hide;
The heavens broke, white flashes charred His temple,
The rain began to pour, and my God died.

Bright heavens turned at once to dark'ning skies,
And I, who'd scarcely seen the light before
Could not conceive the meaning of the darkness
Which now caused fear to soak through every pore.

Slight consciousness was now my state of being,
Not in my mind the virtue to be brave;
Just to find shelter, shelter that could save me,
And, near insane, once more I sought my cave.

Here in the warmth of my cold cave I vowed
Henceforth from tarnished beauty to abstain,
And with this vow my soul felt some release;
With my God dead outside, here I remain.

THE VEGETABLE CART

JAN LYLE

Around the corner of the sooted brick building came a worn, board vegetable cart with two rickety wheels that wobbled like an old lady on her last pair of crutches.

Pushing the cart around the corner was an old Italian, Mike Bramante, who held, with one hand, the lettuce leaves to keep them from blowing in the crisp March air, and with the other hand and his left thigh eased the cart on its pivot, and stopped.

"Fresh tomatoes, lettuce and corn," shouted Mike as he carefully placed the plumpest red tomatoes on top of the stack.

"Well, Mike, how are your turnips today? My Luigi just got a notion for them." A fat sweaty woman ambled over to Mike's cart dragging her youngest boy with her, and made an effort to smooth her greasy black hair into the topknot it was originally put into that morning.

"I got the best ones in the city, Marietta. Plump and purple. Eh so, little bambino?" With this question, he patted the young boy, dragged over like a kitten by his mother, on the head. This was not a gesture of fondness for children especially, but just another way to keep the "customer" happy.

"Sure is a nice breeze today, huh, Mike? How many Marches have you been pushing that ragged old vegetable cart around this section? Maybe you need a new cart, or that one could use a new paint job—like me." The greasy woman jabbed Mike sharply in the side with her elbow, grinned widely, and bearishly ambled off, yanking her skinny son away from the cart wheel in which he had entwined his arms.

Mike shook his head back and forth, gave a slight sigh, and yelled, "No, Mrs. Carboniotti, it is good as new—ha, like you." Always keep the customer happy.

The old lady sheepishly giggled as she closed the loose hanging screen door, which had cotton plugged in the holes in the wire to keep the flies out. Her giggles became fainter as she climbed the rotted wooden stairs bounded by dirty green wallpaper which had peeled and left traces on the steps. The small bony boy settled on the sidewalk to play a game of make-believe.

Mike, or Michelangelo as his mother had named him after the famous Italian sculptor, pulled his dingy felt hat, which had captured many beads of sweat over the years, further over his wrinkled

forehead till it touched his bushy grey eyebrows, and yanked his collar up around his double chin almost to the longest hair on his moustache. He was so heavily clothed for March that he looked like an Egyptian mummy ready for burial.

“Yes,” he thought as he took the cart handles in his palms and gave a weak push, “there have been many Marches with their winds to blow this sturdy cart and me.” He remembered the first day, twelve years ago, when he got the vegetable cart from the widow of another “vegetable peddler.” She had said it was almost new then. He remembered the bold white letters reading “MIKE’S PRODUCE” that he had painted on the side of the bright red cart. He had been very proud then when people would crowd around and buy his vegetables, but now the supermarkets and shopping centers were springing up. It was true the paint was peeling around the wheels, and he had noticed an unusual rattle in the left wheel, but there was nothing seriously wrong. It was a good stout cart. It had lasted this long and would last another twelve years, just as he would.

A piece of newspaper blew under the cart and through the wheel, and skipped down the dirty street past garbage cans without lids, a drunk sitting on the steps asleep, a grey and black cat licking its wounds, and a group of teenage boys playing in the street.

Mike continued his chant, “Fresh tomatoes, corn and lettuce, also plump turnips,” and he trudged further down the narrow street displaying its familiar “Empty Rooms for Rent” signs. His flat feet ached, but he consoled himself by saying, “It won’t be long till I can go home to a spaghetti supper cooked by Alice. Poor Alice. She looks just like her mother, God rest her soul.” He raised his eyes heavenward and crossed his heart for his departed wife.

The sound of his clomping large round shoes and the creaking of the cart wheel called the attention of the boys playing in the street.

“Oh darn, here comes that rickety old vegetable wagon,” one boy cursed as Mike’s approach caused him to miss the ball soaring toward him.

“Why does he always come rattling through this block and break up our games. Nobody hardly ever buys any of his dumb old tomatoes.”

Mike had grown used to these phrases as an old shoe gets used

to being kicked under the bed. The old peddler passed the boys with his eyes fixed on the breaks in the sidewalk directly ahead. These were punk kids who stole bananas from his cart when his back was turned, and they didn't stop at bananas. Nobody paid any attention to them until their names appeared in the paper.

When he had gotten past them, one tall boy, with his bones poking out from under a pair of tight jeans and a cracked leather jacket, strutted over to Mike. He held a cigarette between two brown-stained fingers and flicked the ashes continuously. His greasy, longish hair stirred in the wind as he tossed his head and addressed Mike.

"Say, man, that vegetable totter of yours looks like it is ready for the junk yard. I picked one up the other day. Let you have it cheap." With this offer he crushed the cigarette out with his forefinger and thumb. He stuffed his dirty knuckles in the pockets of his jeans, and stood waiting for an answer as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

Mike raised one eyebrow and gave the boy a sideways glance with both small black eyes.

"No, this cart is good enough for me. I don't want the police knocking on my door over stolen merchandise. No, this cart is a good cart. It has many more years till the junk yard, many more." Mike stammered over his words, but managed to say them curtly. The old peddler stiffly stooped down with one hand on his knee and the other on the cart to unwrap a piece of newspaper which the wind had gustily entangled at his feet.

With this haughty reply from Mike, the greasy punk aimlessly kicked the cart wheel, which moaned with a creak, and slowly turned to return to his friends who had been watching.

"All right, Michelangelo, old boy, you'll get yours someday." The boy yelled, raising his voice loud enough for his friends to hear. Mike was already down the street a good half block pushing the cart as fast as his stiff knee joints would permit, and he didn't turn back to see the grinning punk rakishly tear the peeling from a banana he had snatched when Mike stooped to get the paper at his feet.

Further down the street past alleys and rows of high brick apartment buildings which wouldn't let the sun peek over and shine on Mike, he pushed the red cart with the bold white letters on the side. These too were beginning to peel. He slowed down, partly because

he was tired and partly because the boys had gone in the opposite direction, and thought of the good hot spaghetti dinner waiting for him. No definite harm had been done, so far as he could tell.

A slight creak and a large jolt seemed to interrupt his thoughts because with a start he came to his senses, and opened his small eyes as wide as was possible. Several bolts tinkled on the pavement and one cart wheel plopped on the street. A hole in the concrete had jarred the wheel, kicked by the boy, and all the wilting lettuce and hot tomatoes sprawled on the ground. Tomatoes rolled under cars, and turnips fell into sewer grates.

Stunned at first by the misadventure, Mike stood in the midst of the wilting produce looking like an Italian farmer kicked into his trampled garden by a stubborn mule. He raised both shaggy grey eyebrows, slapped one hand to his head and, muttering some old Italian curse words, pushed his hat back to see when he stooped. He pulled one trousers leg up, rested first one stiff knee on the tepid concrete, and with several grunts, sprawled on all four appendages to recover the damaged merchandise.

“You kids get away now. Don’t step on anything,” he managed to say as he spied several youngsters squashing the plump tomatoes and pitching them at each other and at him under the cart. By this time, the noise and loud Italian curses had drawn a crowd. One small-boned, grey-haired lady sat on some apartment steps waving her fan back and forth, and generally enjoying the commotion. Several men, attracted from the nearby bar, examined the wheel and disjoined axle lying in the street. Each told his own version of the happening.

“Seems like he was just walking down the street pushing the wagon when a couple of gangsters pushed his cart over,” stated a youthful red-faced man who had managed to stumble out of the bar after finishing his beer.

“Naw, that ain’t the way I seen it at all,” argued another red-faced gent.

None of this arguing seemed to help Mike, who looked like a referee in a street fight, by this time. “Mama mia, mama mia,” wailed Mike, as he proceeded crawling about salvaging the remains.

Mike found the missing bolt under a lettuce leaf and managed to get the wheel on its axle while two men held the cart up. He screwed the bolt tightly against the hub and replaced the cap. He collected the damaged vegetables and placed them in the repaired old cart.

It was dark when he reached the steps of his apartment, and as he pulled himself up the popping stairs, he thought of at least a good dinner. There was a note on the oil cloth covered table from his daughter, Alice, reading, "Papa, couldn't wait any longer. Spaghetti in ice box."

"Ugh," he muttered as he crumpled the paper in his short fingers, and threw it into the coal box behind the iron stove. "Cold spaghetti, no good, and everything on account of that rickety old cart.

"Maybe I had better get a new cart after all. I will do it tomorrow, maybe."

RATIONALE

JAY ROBERTS

A man, beset by ill fortune,
stretched out his arms
toward the limitless night,
and cried, "God, help me!"
The sky heard him not,
but he went on greatly lightened,
having placed his burden on the dumb
all-patient sky.

HIS OWN IMAGE

JAY ROBERTS

A lone man, at great peril,
scaled the highest peak,
left his mark, and returned,
to astound the world with his feat.
None believed,
They had not seen him.
Some attempted the climb,
to find his name, but returned,
proclaimed the climb impossible.
They cast the man into prison,
a convicted liar.
For six days he brooded, broken,
despairing.
On the seventh he created god.

THE SPELL

KENNETH EVERSOLE

Cal was a quiet man. Never said much. Though, if he did talk, his family listened to him like they would of Doc Brown. Even the neighbors got quiet when he'd say something; they just stared at him and didn't say much.

"He's a funny man," Lucy told her neighbors. "He don't like no foolishness," and we could tell he didn't.

Aunt Edith used to talk about him a lot; how he come up to Kentucky from Virginia at seven. She said he never had no home, far as she knowed. Only parents he could remember were just borrowed parents. They said he didn't even know his real name; he just took Cal Green 'cause they called him that back in Virginia.

As I started to say, he was a quiet man. Down by the well-house he'd set whittling all day at times. He'd set there, staring at the thin slices of shavings he cut off.

Every once in a while, he'd gaze down at the hillside orchard where pink blossoms floated to the ground and turned rusty. That was before his spells come on.

Anyways, the time I seen him take a spell—well, it was a mighty hot day. I recollect I was coming along on Gray-Squirrel Ridge. I could see heat a-dancing out in front of me like little black, liquid snakes wigglin' toward the sky. That road was dry; ever' step you'd take, little puffs of dust swirled up 'round your pant legs. It was so hot shucks was curling off the early corn which growed along the road.

I rounded the bend along about Fox-Crossin' and seen Cal a-coming up the road. I'd a-knowed him a mile off by his walk. He always walked straight, right stiff-like. I kind of stepped over t'other side of the road.

I knowed he was funny.

"Howdy, Cal," I says when I come up to him. He looked kind of pale. Didn't say a cordial word.

"Have you seen my red mule?"

"Why no, Cal, I shore h'aint."

"He's out ag'in and I been searching . . ." he set down in the middle of the road.

He didn't set down fast. He set down real slow, like he expected to hit a cheer bottom if he kept goin'. He started turning whiter,

'specially round the mouth, and laid over slow-like on his side. His eyes was staring, fixed toward the cornfield, but you could tell he didn't see no cornfield. Then, his whole body a-gain to jerk. It was a quick-like kickin', like our old cow when she died with an inverted uterus. His legs and arms, jerkin' back and forth, made little trenches in the dirt. Them trenches looked like little roads cut out in thick dust.

I couldn't move hand nor foot. A tightness come all over me. Dust b'iled up and choked me, and I could feel a drop of sweat trickle down my nose.

All a-sudden, like it come on him, the spell wore off. He laid still like a dead sow. Foamy white spit streamed out the corner his mouth, run down his face and splashed in blobs on the dust.

Well, he got over it. I helped him up. He jest looked 'round, funny, like he didn't know where he was. Then he breshed off his clothes and said he'd head on home.

I went on down to the post office to fetch my mail. Mrs. Wheatherby was there. Told her about Cal. Said she'd seen him take them fits. Told her it were a awful thing to see. Said she had almost got sick to her stomach, and had had bad dreams a month afterward. Told her I'd better go 'cause I seen a cloud coming up 'bove Pine Ridge.

I smelled Hanna's tater-cakes fryin' as I come through the draw. By that time, that black cloud had stirred up the hot air. Looked like a thunderstorm was brewin'. I hollered to Hanna to go latch up the chickens while I went to help Barney with the milkin'. She done it.

By the time me and Barney finished milkin', them clouds had moved from Pine Ridge 'til they'd seemed to settle down all 'round us. Wind was shiftin' around too, stirring up a ruckus in the silver maples along the lane. Rain was spattering in big drops as we come up the cobbles at the kitchen door.

We'd set down to a supper of Hanna's tater-cakes, late beans from the garden, and corn pone when Cal's wife busted in a-cryin'. I'm tellin' you, that woman was a sight. Her hair all wet and tangled, her round face red and puffed out like a blowed up bag.

So finally, I managed to git her calmed down enough to tell me what the matter was.

"Hit's Cal," she blubbered. "He took a-cramping in his stomach. I give him soda and everything I could think of, but it ain't done

no good. He's gettin' worse. He's not complainin' much, but I know he must be sufferin' somethin' awful 'cause his face is all twisted up with pain."

"Barney," I says, "go saddle the red mare and ride fast to the Crossing to fetch Doc Brown! Me and Hanna'll go back with Lucy Jane to see if Cal's havin' a spell."

I knowed if Cal was havin' a spell, I'd best be there to put a spoon in his mouth. I knowed them women couldn't handle him, bein's he was sech a big man.

Well, we run through the rain 'most all the way to Cal's, but I knowed it weren't no use a-runnin' soon as I seen Cal. He was a goner. I'd heard that rattlin' before, when Aunt Sal died.

"How ye feelin', Cal?" I says and laid my wet coat in the hall as I come through to the dim bedroom.

"I'm passin' out, George," he said in a simple way. "But hit don't matter nohow, 'cause I ain't no use no more."

"Don't say that, Cal," Lucy was off to her blubberin' again.

"I reckon you're ready to go, ain't you?"

"Ready or not, I want to go. I ain't never had nothin' but sufferin' and misery here. Way I see it, hell can't be much worse," he grabbed his stomach.

None of us knowed what to say. The storm seemed to be gettin' louder outside, and Lucy's blubberin' was louder too. She was might' near to a steady scream now. The winder panes behind Cal's bed rattled from puffs of wind and rain. That rain sounded like somebody throwin' sand 'gainst the winder. Them flowers on the wall-paper 'bove Cal's head didn't fit together right. Lucy hadn't got 'em straight when she done her paperin', I reckoned. Hanna started sniffing.

That's when Cal started that laughin'.

First, it was jest a little noise like a gruntin', like it couldn't come out. I thought shore, at first, hit was another spell a-comin' on. Then, he kept gettin' louder and louder; and as he got louder, Lucy got louder at screamin', 'til I couldn't even hear the wind no more.

I'll say one thing, 't weren't no natural laugh Cal Green done that night. I ain't heard nothing before nor since like hit. I knowed he weren't tickled 'cause that was a dry laugh that didn't have no funniness in it.

Even though Doc Brown said it was appendicitis what killed him, I'll say 'til judgment day it was one of them crazy-spells that

killed him. 'Cause right when he got the loudest, that's when he gurgled and stopped breathin'.

Well, Lucy, she put up some of the loudest howlin' I ever heard. Doc Brown finally had to put her to sleep. By that time, a whole passel of neighbors had got there. Barney had told them 'bout Cal at the Crossin'. Mrs. Wheatherby was the first one there, and ask me if he got salvation a-fore he went. I said I didn't reckon. She said she was sorry she never had no chance to speak with him. I told her it wouldn't of done no good.

Hanna wanted to stay the night, but when I seen all them neighbors crowdin' in, I thought we'd best go on home. Told Hanna to git her coat, and she done it.

We walked out the road, and I tried not to think 'bout Cal or that mornin' no more.

The road had a thousand little trenches washed out in it now. They run ever' which way, like little rivers, in the dust turned to mud. The dim light of Hanna's lantern shined off the corn blades drippin' with water. Ditches gurgled, and the air smelled clean like fresh-washed sheets.

THE MISERABLE ONE

BILL F. CAUDILL

Lewis awoke slowly and rubbed his eyes. Outside the little store-room he could hear the yellow cat scratching on the garbage can as it made a sickly attempt to meow. He knew the cat was there; it always was at seven in the morning, he knew because it depended on him. Lewis sat up on his pallet and reached for his tattered clothing that lay on an empty vodka case. Slowly a feeling of despair passed over him, his eyes blurred, his head throbbed, his stomach turned over, and his tongue felt like sandpaper in his mouth. He needed a drink, and it was an hour before Joe would open the door and let him into the rear of the bar.

Rising to his feet and fighting off the hunger within him, he stepped to the door and opened it to the alley where the cat was waiting. "Dance," as Lewis had named him, jumped onto the sticky garbage can and waited for Lewis to pick him up.

"Morning, Dance, hope the world's smiling at you today," Lewis muttered through puffed lips as he picked the cat up in a shaky hand and lifted the lid from the can with the other. He stroked the

yellow fur a few times, then dropped Dance into the can. He watched as a yellow paw raked through the lettuce leaves and potato parings in search of a tasty tidbit of hamburger or fish that one of Joe's customers had failed to eat.

From where Lewis stood he could see red caps and hear voices of the school kids as they passed on their way to school. He watched as they filed happily by, swinging their books and hooting loudly as though on their way to a circus. One little fellow he noticed in particular was always behind. He was about a head taller than the rest of the boys and always wore a determined look on his face. This little fellow was always kicking a can or carrying a stick which he would wave vigorously in the air and listen to the whistling sound it made.

When Lewis reached into the can to retrieve the cat, he discovered it was acting queerly. Its eyes were red-rimmed, and they looked forlornly up at Lewis. Dance was sitting against the wall of the can as if afraid to move. Lewis picked him up and placed him on the ground. He stood for a minute, then slowly walked around the corner of the little room. This puzzled Lewis, for he had never seen the cat act this way before.

Contemplating this strange action, Lewis stepped back into his sleeping quarters and began to roll up the two blankets that covered him during the night. Under the blankets he slept on sections of cardboard that had been torn from whisky and beer cases. As he picked up the cardboard, a large rat scurried from a hole in the corner to a pipe that led outside. As he stacked the bedroll neatly on a shelf, Lewis heard the bell on the front door of the bar ring. That would be Joe opening up for the day. In a few minutes he would let Lewis in by the back door and pour him a drink.

After the lights had been turned on, Joe let Lewis into the bar. Lewis moved a little too rapidly getting to the bar stool where he always had his first drink.

"Needin' it bad this morning, ain't you, Lewis boy," Joe said in a dry, flat voice.

"Yeah, my stomach's on fire, and my blood just don't want to get moving."

Joe reached for a tall glass and poured it half full of port wine from a gallon jug under the bar. As Lewis drank, Joe stuffed a large cigar, paper and all, into his mouth and chewed slowly. He watched Lewis carefully as he sucked hungrily at the cool, refreshing liquid.

When Lewis finished his drink, he picked up a worn broom and began to sweep. This was the way his days began and ended. All day and into the night he swept the floors, emptied ash trays, and carried bottles into the storeroom. For this Joe gave him his drinks, his food, and his sleeping place. Lewis probably cost Joe more than his work was worth, but Joe liked him and felt sorry for him. All day each went about his work without speaking to the other. People drifted in, had their drinks, and drifted out again; then Lewis would clean up the messes they left. Occasionally well-dressed men would come in for one of Joe's Manhattans. These were the customers Lewis liked best. They were always clean with their cigarettes, and they never spoke harshly to him.

Today was like any other. Morning eased into afternoon, and business dropped off. Lewis stepped out back for a breath of air, and was just beginning to relax when he heard a frightened yell. He peered into the alley to see the little boy whom he had watched with the cans and sticks. The little fellow was backed against the wall, and facing him was the yellow cat crouched as though ready to spring. The cat's mouth was covered with a foam-like substance, and its eyes were glaring. It was easy to see that the cat was suffering from rabies in the worst stage. Slowly it began to stalk the boy, who had evidently been able to withstand its first assault without harmful injury.

"Don't move, Kid," Lewis yelled as he ran toward the cat. When he was within a few feet of the cat, he reached to pick up an iron bar which lay against the brick wall.

"Dance, Dance," Lewis spoke calmly but loudly, and the cat turned. When it began to focus its vision on Lewis, he was close enough to strike. The yellow cat dropped to a crouch, and Lewis struck. He felt the skull give as the iron bar connected, and the cat died instantly.

"Did he scratch you, Kid? Did he bring the blood anywhere?" Lewis asked the boy excitedly.

"No, sir," the boy answered in a weak and shaky voice, "I kicked at him the first time he ran at me and he backed off. That's when I screamed, I guess. What was the matter with him, sir?"

"He had rabies, Kid, he was mad. What were you doing in this alley anyway?"

"I came in here to get a can to kick," the boy explained sheepishly.

“Well, you’d better run along home before you get into any more trouble,” Lewis grinned.

“Thank you for helping me,” the boy said as he ran back to the sidewalk.

Lewis picked the dead cat up and placed it in a small paper box. With the box under his arm, he walked the two blocks to the river. Here he threw the box into the river; and as it sank, he pondered the loss of a true friend.

That evening as Lewis was making the rounds cleaning ashtrays, he noticed a young man talking intently with Joe at the end of the bar. Strangely enough he didn’t seem to be the type to spill his troubles to the bartender, and he wasn’t drinking at all. Lewis watched as the man left the bar and approached him.

“Are you the one who killed the cat in the alley this afternoon?” the man asked in a clean voice.

“Yes, I killed a cat. I don’t know if it’s the one you’re talking about or not,” answered Lewis.

“It must be. I’m Paul Jenkins; the little boy you saved is my son. I wanted to thank you for it; and if you’ll accept, I’ll reward you.”

“I don’t want no reward. I did the only sensible thing I could do. The boy could have saved himself easy enough if I hadn’t been there.”

“Please accept something as a token of gratitude from my wife and me. If nothing else, I’ll buy you a drink. How about that?”

“Okay, I’ll take a little drink, Mr. Jenkins, but you don’t have to thank me. Just helping that cute kid is all the thanks I need.”

Both men seated themselves at the bar, and Mr. Jenkins ordered Lewis a drink but would not have one himself.

“The stuff makes me sick,” he explained, “guess I’m just not man enough for it yet.”

When Lewis finished his drink, it was almost closing time. Mr. Jenkins shook his hand and thanked him again. Lewis noticed that Mr. Jenkins spoke a few words to Joe and handed him something as he walked out.

Closing time came; and as the last customer closed the door behind him, Joe reached into the cash drawer and fished out a neat five-dollar bill.

“That fellow Jenkins left this for you, Lewis,” Joe said as he handed Lewis the bill.

Lewis felt the crispness of the bill for a moment and then handed it back to Joe.

“Give me a fifth of port, Joe, and you have the change.”

“You sure that’s what you want to do with this money?” Joe asked.

“I’m sure,” Lewis replied. “Money don’t mean much to me, only wine.”

Joe handed him a shiny new fifth of port wine, and Lewis, already tearing at the seal, hurried toward the back door. He took one long pull from the bottle, stuffed it into his shirt, and walked into the alley. By the time he turned the corner into Elm Street, the wine had already begun to make him dizzy and unsteady. Strolling aimlessly along, he turned down Oak Street. The night was dry and hot. A slight breeze filtered between the buildings and gently moved the dust on the sidewalk. Lewis stopped beneath the sign that read CAIN’S LAUNDRY and pulled the wine bottle from his shirt. Just as he was lifting the long neck of the bottle to his lips, he thought he noticed a faint flicker of firelight in the library across the street. Maybe he was just imagining things. He couldn’t be sure since the wine had made him feel loose and woozy in the head. He took a drink and tried to shake off the feeling of dizziness that threatened to pull him to the ground. There was the light again; he was sure it was fire this time. Quickly he placed the cap back on the bottle and ran the few yards to the fire alarm. As he pulled the alarm, everything about him reeled. He went to his knees and tried to regain his balance, but he failed and blackness overcame him.

Lewis awoke from his stupor with water in his face and a stout fireman’s hands on his shoulders.

“Wake up, fellow, wake up,” the fireman was shouting above the roar of fire trucks and sudden claps of thunder. The rain was beginning to gush down in big irregular slashes. Lewis passed the sleeve of his dirty shirt over his face and stared up at the big fireman.

“Better get out of this rain, fellow,” the fireman was shouting. “Your pulling that alarm saved the library, but looks like you’re in a bad state.”

Lewis stood up as the fireman walked away. He reached for his bottle; it was still there. With haste he opened the bottle and drank long and hungrily. The soaking rain cooled his skin as the wine flowed through his veins bringing life to every limb.

“Guess I did something worthwhile tonight,” Lewis laughed to himself. “Ha, ha, think I’ll celebrate.” He finished the bottle and smashed it savagely against the corner light post. Tottering along

muttering to himself, Lewis found himself in a quiet neighborhood with neat brick houses and new-mown lawns. The rain had stopped now, and Lewis felt relaxed and sleepy. He walked onto a plush lawn, sat down in the wet soggy grass and soon fell asleep.

Bright morning sunlight and a shrill feminine voice brought Lewis awake with a start. He looked around to see a mailbox on a neat white post. On top of the mailbox was a nameplate which read NOSEGAY in large black letters. Near the box stood a slender woman, probably in her fifties, talking in a hurried voice to a young policeman.

“Officer,” she was saying, “I want that filthy excuse for a man removed from my front yard immediately. Look what a mess he is. His filthy clothes are soaked and muddy from sleeping in such places. He’s not fit to be seen by decent people. Just think of all the little children on this block having to look at such a despicable wretch, and in MY front lawn. I want this man arrested right now. Such trash should not be allowed to live in this town, and if I can have it done, I’ll see that he is run out of town. Arrest him and get him out of my sight.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” the officer said calmly as he walked toward Lewis. Lewis met him, and as they walked toward the officer’s car, the woman hissed at Lewis.

“Filthy pig.”

On the way to the city jail, Lewis remained quiet as the officer explained that the woman, Mrs. Nosegay, just happened to be the mayor’s wife.

“That’s unfortunate for you,” the officer said, “because she will make her husband call a meeting of the council, and then she will make accusations against you. The council will, of course, vote to have you sent out of town. They can’t very well vote against this woman’s wishes, especially since she is the mayor’s boss, and all the council members are loyal to him.”

Lewis was placed in jail. That afternoon Joe paid his fine and brought him back to his only home. Lewis thanked Joe but said no more.

Two afternoons later the young policeman called on Lewis. He was expecting such a visit and was not surprised when Joe informed him of it. He walked to the bar where the officer was waiting.

“Looking for me?”

“Yes,” the officer replied, “I’ve just come to tell you that you have until tomorrow to leave town. The council decided that you

are 'unfit' to be free in this town. I'm sorry that this has happened, and there are others who feel the same way. A Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins tried to defend you, as well as Mr. Gromville, who is the librarian. They cited the examples of your saving the kid and the library, but that didn't seem to carry much weight with the 'prosecutor,' Mrs. Nosegay. You should have been there to defend yourself, or did they inform you?"

"They didn't let me know," Lewis smiled; "I wouldn't have come anyway. There wouldn't be any use of me trying to defend myself against them people. I wouldn't know what to say to people like that. I would feel like a rat among a bunch of big hungry cats. Guess I got off to a bad start somewhere, and I just can't get going right again. Seems I'm always getting in people's way. I'm no good to nobody. If it hadn't been for people like you and Joe and them other people who tried to help me, I don't guess I would have made it this far."

"Well, again I'm sorry it happened this way, and I wish you luck wherever you go," the officer said and left.

"Thanks," Lewis called after him.

"I heard, Lewis, and I am sorry," Joe said as he took the officer's seat. "I'm gonna miss your helping hand around here."

"Thanks for the sympathy, Joe, but you won't miss me. Nobody ever misses a drunken bum. I'll be a damn good riddance to you after you've thought it over. You can always comfort yourself by thinking that some other barkeep will be plagued by me. Anyway, Joe, it's been kinda nice staying around this little place with you, but I'm unfit to be around decent people, so I'll just have to get out of their way." Lewis laughed bitterly and stalked out.

At seven that evening, Lewis stood by the railroad track. He kicked at the ends of the cross ties impatiently. The train was late, and Lewis thought cunningly of how guilty the townspeople would feel when they heard how he had stepped in front of a speeding train and ended a life that no one wanted. He could see Mrs. Nosegay as she read the morning paper. Her conscience would bother her, of course, but she would never show it. She would keep her guilty feelings penned up inside her until one day she would break under the strain, and then she would have to be sent to a mental hospital. He'd show her and everybody else.

The loud blast of the whistle shook Lewis from his thoughts. The train was bearing down on him. He felt the ground tremble, and heard the steel shudder as the weight on it grew closer and closer

to him. He could hear the loud blast of the whistle as it grew to a deafening pitch. Suddenly he could see his body being mangled as the big steel wheels cut through his flesh and splintered his bones. Then suddenly Lewis was afraid, so afraid that he turned and ran. He ran across several sets of tracks, and reaching the last one he ran between the rails. Scared, afraid to die, afraid to face death even more than life. That was the story of his life, he thought, always afraid, always running.

Down the track he ran. He could still hear the whistle and roar of the train. It seemed to be getting louder, and with a sudden horrible realization Lewis turned. Then he saw his mistake. He had forgotten the 7:10 on the outside track. Now it was too late. The front of the engine looked unusually big as it bore down on him. Lewis tried feebly to step from between the rails, but the big mass of steel caught him and cut him down. Lewis Colby had left town.

A PRAYER

HELEN TERESA FAGAN

If thou hast given me a life to live
And placed me in this world I know not why,
Then, God, to thy bewildered child pray give
A burning faith whereby to live and die.
For I must know that there exists a cause
For being—not just as the flower grows
And blooms and dies because of nature's laws
Or as the brute aloof throughout life goes.
My soul perceives the grave is not its goal,
For in Thine own is not my image wrought?
Oh, God, I pray, incorporate my soul
Into that whole which it has ever sought.
Make me a part of thy eternal plan
Which an abiding purpose gives to man.

SEVEN NO-TRUMP

JUNE HEILMAN

It was the stillness in the room which woke Dick Stevens. He lay on his side in bed taking in the calmness which surrounded him, but not knowing exactly what was wrong. The only light in the room came from the moon through the window across from his bed.

"What is it?" he asked himself.

But almost as soon as he had questioned himself, he was answered. There was no other person in the bed but him; he could tell even without looking, he was so used to having his wife's body next to his. Dick turned over in bed to feel the pillow beside his own to make sure she was not there. There was nothing but the pillow. No dark head lying there where it belonged. He had known what to expect before he had felt, but when it became a reality, the qualminess in his stomach seemed like a paper weight being dropped into the core of his insides.

Turning back, away from the pillow, his eyes were drawn to the clock on the bedside table. Its luminous dial read a few minutes before one o'clock. Its tick was like a mockery of the passing time to Dick, and it angered him. He reached for his cigarettes lying by the clock and lit a cigarette quickly. The glow of the cigarette seemed like a friend in the dark, and as the smoke was leaving his lips, he smiled.

"Remember, Dick old boy, some women live, eat, and breathe bridge. Is Betty any different? Once she gets started on something, she never lets go until she has conquered it, yourself included."

But even while he was telling himself this, he thought how much Betty had changed because of her liking the game. She used to beg off every time he had asked her to play a rubber or two with the rest of the gang at a party. In her own words, the game was a waste of time, and she had better things to do with her time.

"Yeah," he thought now, "better things, like getting George Carey in the corner to discuss the latest jazz albums, or following Art Walters in the kitchen for a fresh drink while his wife played bridge with me."

"Hell, man," he flashed out at himself, "that's your own wife you're talking about. You should know better than anyone else how she is about the time. Probably sitting there at Marge Browning's house this minute telling her about that damn hat she drug home from town the other day."

Twenty

Sighing to himself he tried to put his mind on the hat which Betty had brought home from town. Taking another drag from the cigarette and putting it out carefully in the ashtray, he pictured the hat.

“Good Lord,” he smiled, “what a hat! Flowers or fruit—something in an upside-down basket.”

“Where is she?”

“All right, Dick, you can quit fooling yourself now. You know as well as anything she’s not playing bridge at this hour. It’s no good, fooling yourself. No help at all.”

“Christ, why doesn’t she come on home?”

His questions went unanswered in the blackness which surrounded him. He again felt the pillow, but it remained the same. Still bare. No head. His mind then went to the many unanswered questions he had conceived in the last six weeks. No questions really then, but they had become questions now.

Dick remembered the time when Betty had first announced her plans to join the bridge club. Why had she looked so guilty then, just as if she were trying to hide something?

“Just two nights a week, Dick,” she had said. “Surely you can manage by yourself for two nights a week so that I can get out of this damned house for awhile.”

“So what’s wrong with the house, huh?” He started to say it and wanted to say it, but it had come out: “Of course, darling, if that’s what you want, I’m all for it. You do need a change.”

Yes, he had agreed. Just as he had agreed to everything she had wanted or said in their seven years of marriage. But each bridge meeting had been getting longer and longer. Still, he had said nothing to her about being late.

“Why should I?” he asked himself. “She’s a big girl now and able to take care of herself, that’s for sure.”

“Damn, if I’m not a jolly good fellow,” he muttered now.

Another scene flashed before his eyes. It had happened about three weeks ago on a Saturday afternoon at the country club where he always played golf. He had just run into Paul Browning, and as they were making their way into the clubhouse for a drink, Paul said to him:

“How’s the wife, Dick? Haven’t seen Betty in a coon’s age. Anyway since that last big party at the McIntyers’ where you got so stoned that somebody had to bring you and Betty home.” Paul laughed at that.

“Yes,” Dick had thought to himself, “and if you knew why, you

wouldn't be standing there with that big grin on your fat face. Betty just happened to be in a damn corner with that damn Bill, leaving me to amuse myself. So I drank that night to amuse myself."

Instead, Dick had said aloud to Paul: "Paul, if I didn't know you better I'd say you're crazy. Betty was at your house only last night playing bridge with her club. Surely with a thousand gossiping women in your front room you'd notice. Especially Betty, since she never shuts up."

"Bridge club?" Paul had asked, looking at Dick strangely. "Now who's crazy? You know Marge doesn't play bridge. Anyway, we went to the movies last night. Pretty good show, too. Have you seen it?"

Dick had looked at Paul blankly for a moment, then muttered some appropriate answer, but he was positive Betty had said bridge at the Brownings'. It was soon forgotten as the afternoon wore on. Forgotten, that is, until now.

"Forget this bit for a while, Dick; your mind's working overtime again."

But he paid no heed even to himself. The two phone calls were then dragged up from the depths of his mind. He was in the bathroom shaving one afternoon, after leaving work early. He was running water in the basin when the phone rang.

"I'll get it!" Betty had yelled. Too loud. Too quick.

Even above the running water he could make out what Betty was saying. She hadn't been aware of this apparently, for the door of the bathroom was half-closed and the phone was located around the corner from where he was.

"I told you never to call me here," she was saying to the other voice, ". . . yes, he's here . . . okay . . . tomorrow then."

"Who was that?" Dick had asked as soon as she had dropped the receiver back in the cradle.

"Wrong number," she had replied quietly, then gone back to her ironing.

There was nothing he could say to that, now was there?

The other day when he had decided to come home for lunch instead of eating downtown as he usually did, the phone rang. As soon as he had answered it, the receiver at the other end had clicked into place. He had put his own receiver down and turned, finding Betty standing beside him with a perplexed look on her face. She turned and left the room before he had a chance to say anything.

"But what could I have said?" he wondered now in the dark.

“No, no! Don’t think of these things. Betty loves me as much as I love her. I know that. Seven years of marriage can’t change anything. We have love, a good home, enough money, everything she wants to make her happy. Just don’t think of it. I won’t do that to her.”

“Christ, why doesn’t she come home?”

The clock read one-thirty now, and in the darkness Dick Stevens could find no rest for himself.

“Maybe she’s had an accident. No, I would have been notified. Maybe she . . . no!”

Swift thoughts now came galloping into his head. Little incidents, guilty looks, which he couldn’t before put his finger on now added up to an immense fearful thing he dreaded to realize.

“I may as well admit it,” he thought, “Betty has found another playmate, someone else to play her little games with. Someone else who can afford to give her better things than I can give her. She always has found other men more attractive than she should have. All my life I’ve seen men and women cheat on their mates, and it made me sick to my stomach. That won’t happen to me ever, no matter how much I love her. I can only beat her to the draw. Divorce. A hell of a big word, but a hell of a big hurt without it. I won’t be played a sucker by any woman. I’m gettin’ out! Leaving! She can sue me for a divorce; it’ll be worth it no matter how much I love her. I love her. I do love her. Don’t I love her? Hell, what difference does that make? I’m getting out! Leaving! Desertion is what they will call it. Ha! Big laugh, who’s deserting who? When she comes in tonight, she’s in for a big surprise. I’ll tell her as soon as she walks in through that damn door. I’ll tell her I want a divorce just like that.”

His thoughts were interrupted by the click of the lock turning in the door. Dick looked at the clock with a smile on his face. One forty-five a.m.

“Leaving!” he thought.

Betty walked quietly through the living room to the bedroom where Dick lay.

“Getting out now while the gettin’s good!” he thought.

He reached up and switched on the bedside lamp and looked at her steadily.

“Leaving!” he shouted inwardly.

Betty leaned against the door frame and stared at Dick innocently. Dick looked at her as if to say something but stopped. The

light from the lamp cast deep shadows on her face. Her hair was lying neatly around her shoulder, and a hint of a smile played on her lips. Never had he seen her so beautiful.

Then he said it, "Have a nice time, dear? Come on to bed now; you must be tired. Tomorrow is my day off and maybe we can pack a lunch and drive to the mountains together for the day."

GATOR HUNT

TOM HENDERSON

"I'll bet I date that new cashier before you do."

"Okay, loser pays the tab on the date."

"What if your wife finds out?"

"She'll bitch and moan a while, but she'll get over it. I'll just tell her I'm goin' 'gator huntin', and she'll never know the difference."

"Let's go soak some suds after we quit this afternoon."

"Naaa, I can't. I've got to take my kid to the doctor. He's got a cold or somethin'. I want to be sure to take some home, though. Me and that dumb Seminole are goin' after a few foot of 'gator tonight. A couple of beers will taste good after roamin' the swamps half the night."

"I'd have to be crocked before I'd go out there. I wouldn't wrestle them things for twenty dollars a foot, much less five."

"You ain't supposed to grab the big uns. Two little ones are worth just as much."

"Aw, go on home. I'll hang around till the Honey-Crust man comes. Then I'll close up. See you in the morning."

"Okay, but don't start on that cashier behind my back."

Leroy stretched his long, lean body and ran a comb through his curly brown hair. He picked up a six-pack of 'City and with lively strides he ambled over to his Holiday Ninety-Eight. It was a blue and white '56 hardtop; it ran well and still looked smooth. He slid on to the white leather seat and cranked her up. Her twin glass packs rattled the windows of the supermarket as he squealed away.

When he got home, Mark was playing in the sand of the front yard. He was a quiet, well-mannered little two-year-old. He must have gotten his manners from his mother.

"Are you going to take Markie to the doctor now, Honey?"

"He don't look too sick to me. I'll take him tomorrow. I've got

to run down to that old 'gator chaser's and see if his squaw will let him out tonight."

"Are you going out again tonight?"

"Well, we got to eat, ain't we?"

"Yes, but you make enough working down at the supermarket for us to live on without running around in the swamps all night. Besides, I get lonesome."

"Awww, I'll be home."

"Sure, about two in the morning. Now you're not going out with that Frog again, are you? I've heard that he killed a man once. I wish you wouldn't go."

"He's just high-tempered, that's all. He's all right if you don't make him sore, and I'm not about to get him mad at me."

"Honey, I——"

"Get off my back will ya. As long as I make the livin', I'll do it my way."

"Your supper's in the refrigerator."

He ate a couple of bites of Jello and strolled out the screen door with a chicken leg in his hand. He threw the greasy, bare bone at Jewell's big lazy Persian cat. The bone bounced and knocked sand into the sleeping cat's face. There was a big hairy gray streak as he shot under the house. Leroy chuckled as he reached through the window of his Olds and snatched the six-pack from the seat. In a hurry to get away from the house, he trotted down the floating pier to his aluminum outboard. The first time he pulled it she fired; a cloud of blue smoke rose around him. The big Johnson whined as he raced by the coastline. He passed a bobbing red buoy, cut sharply to the right and headed straight for the beach. Thirty feet from the beach he hefted the prop out of the water and let the boat beach itself. He bounded out onto the dry white sand.

"Anybody home?"

The little Seminole and his fat wife came padding around their stilted shack.

"Hi! Frog. Want to go again tonight?"

"Yes, but squaw say I get fifty-fifty."

"Fifty-fifty hell! It's my boat and I do all the work! All you do is take me out and bring me back! I'll give you a fourth."

"How much is a fourth?"

"A dollar and a quarter a foot."

"Good."

"Are you ready to go?"

“We go.”

Leroy sprinted to his boat and deftly sprung aboard. The Seminole pushed him out into the surf. Leroy unchained the Sea Horse and let it fall into the water. He kicked it and let it rev up. After Frog got in he shifted to reverse and let the motor pull him out to deeper water. Leroy then whipped her around and pointed her bow for the cypress trees. They skipped at the clouded sun for fifteen minutes; then Leroy cut her toward the swamp.

“Take it, Frog.”

The silent Seminole cut the throttle and slowly worked his way into the darkening swamp. The only sounds were the throbbing of the motor and the lapping against the hull. It got dark fast; so Leroy sat up front and lighted the way with the carbide lamp. Frog killed the motor, chained it up and began to pole the boat through the hanging black vines and stringy gray moss. No words were spoken. The sounds of the night got louder. Bullfrogs grunted. Tree frogs shrilled. Once a water snake cut a sparkling wake fleeing the carbide lamp.

“Listen.”

“I hear 'em.”

Their grunts and moans became a roar. The roar of a 'gator is like the sound of a drunk two hundred pound bullfrog with a bad throat. They pushed up to a small floating island and tied to a cypress knee. Quietly they stepped on to the cushiony black-green moss. The swamp grass was wet with dew. They were wet to the knees in a minute. They swished carefully to the other side of the island. Frog shined the light on a 'gator all of four feet long. It was lying fifteen feet up on the bank with its head toward the water. Leroy lunged at the 'gator with a flying tackle. The 'gator grunted as Leroy knocked the wind out of him. The 'gator stunned for an instant, Leroy's fast fingers felt for the Adam's apple-like vein that controlled the blood supply to the 'gator's marble-sized brain. He found it and squeezed. The 'gator rolled and lashed his powerful whip of a tail in an effort to free himself. Chunks of grass and mud tore away as the man and beast fought. After twenty seconds of threshing, the 'gator passed out. Frog cut him, and they left him on his belly to bleed while they checked out the rest of the island, but the noise had scared the other 'gators away. Leroy carried the 'gator back slung over his back like a load of palm fronds.

They poled up to a larger island, and this time Leroy took along a gunny-sack. If they were to find a nest, the eggs would bring two

bucks apiece. They saw two more 'gators, but they were too big. The grass under foot was plastered with mud. Frog was already running in and out among the tub-sized mud and grass nests. Seeing no watchful mamas, they began to gather eggs and put them into the sack. As they let a nest pass between them, Leroy froze when he saw the triangular-shaped tail he had just stepped over. His mouth opened but no sound came out. The tail was bigger than a stove pipe. He was safe, and he knew it, but Frog would get his legs broken if old Mama got excited. She grunted. Frog lunged away, but he was a little slow. The 'gator caught him on the heel and spun him into a brick-hard nest. It knocked him colder than a dead snake. Leroy flicked the light off. The old mama pulled herself to the water and splashed into safety. He flicked the light back on and sprang to look at Frog. His head was bleeding where it had hit the nest. Leroy tied his bandana around Frog's head to stop the trickle of blood. He slumped down on a 'gator nest and pushed back his hair. His mind raced wildly.

“What if he doesn't come to? I'd hate like hell to be out here all night. Damn, it's cold.” His clothes were soaked with sweat and stuck to him. He unbuttoned his left shirt pocket and fumbled nervously for his Salems. The cellophane felt smooth and familiar. He shook one and stuck it between his lips. He turned the lamp to the sky and raised it to his lips. He held the cigarette over the reflector and inhaled. He carefully placed the lamp on the edge of the nest where he could get the most light. A 'gator croaked behind him, and as he lurched to look for the danger, he hit the lamp with the back of his hand and sent it smashing against another mound. It exploded like a Fourth of July rocket. Leroy was blinded for a minute; all he could see was a big red and yellow glowing bulb dancing before his eyes. Huge waves pounded inside his head. For the first time in his life he was absolutely helpless.

“I wonder if Jewell's waiting up of me? I doubt it. She hasn't for a year now. Wonder if Mark's throat is still sore. Wish I was home in bed. Where in the hell am I? What if Frog has a concussion? How long would it take me to find my way out of here? I'd probably never make it. I'd be fined a thousand dollars and sent to the pen if I got caught out here. I wonder if Jewell realizes I'm later than usual? She probably thinks I'm out somewhere drunk. Dammit, wake up, Frog. What if he does wake up? Will he blame me for what happened? I could leave him here, but everybody knows that Frog wouldn't get lost in the swamp. I could say a

'gator sneaked up on him and pulled him into the swamp. Naaa, nothing never snuck up on him. I shoulda warned him. If I had of turned the light off he would have froze or if I'd hollered he woulda stopped. He shoulda seen her anyhow; I ain't supposed to have to look after him. Damn 'gators, wish they would shut up. What if that old bitch comes back? Wake up, Frog."

The swamp got unbearably quiet. The 'gators hushed. Not an insect buzzed or chirped. He heard the wind seeking its way through the hanging moss. A cold raindrop hit the back of his hand. A million flashbulbs went off at once. The roar of a hundred cannons chased the big photographer. The rain came down like it was being poured out of buckets. The cold rain and the thunder awakened Frog. Leroy stepped back, half afraid. A flash of lightning showed the bandana around his head. The dried blood on the side of his face made him look evil.

"Frog too slow, old. Damn mama 'gators. You sick, White Boy? We go."

Leroy let his breath out slowly. His cold fingers fumbled with the button on his left shirt pocket.

THE POLTERGEIST

STEVE GREGORICH

I found a little poltergeist
A sitting on my knee—
I didn't ask from whence he came,
He didn't question me.

I never really thought before
That he had ever existed,
Nor did I doubt it anymore
When here I was so vis'ted.

I wondered if he believed in me
While through his life he flitted,
Or if he'd e'er expect a knee
Upon the place he sitted.

He couldn't have come haunted or charmed
To spook a soul like me.
No one could have looked more alarmed
Than did the poltergeist, he.

From pumpernickel to poltergeists
My knowledge is only a smither.
For sure, his knowledge of you and me
Wasn't much to speak of 'ither.

I guess he was a good poltergeist—
That is, as poltergeists go;
But as I mentioned just before,
I really wouldn't know.

Perhaps he thought of me just then
As cumbersome and crude,
And draped in such unwieldy cloth,
Whereas he was in the nude.

But all too soon in sprinkle dust
The poltergeist was gone—
As if to tip his hat and say,
“I really can't stay long.”

Too bad he couldn't have stayed awhile,
We could have been such friends;
But that's the way the button pops,
The way the old back bends.

But so as not to appear the fool,
Through life, I'll still insist—
When asked about the poltergeists,
I'll say, “They don't exist.”

ONE FOOT OF CLAY

ROBERTA G. MITCHELL

“Plinkety, Plunk, Plunk
Plinkety, Plunk, Plank”

The sound of a banjo rang out. But neither the tune nor the tempo was that of the old banjo I used to hear in my childhood. That sound used to set my feet flying in the direction of Mr. Black's old house where I knew I would find him sitting in his little “machine” loudly belting out the old tune “Polly, Put the Kettle On.”

Twenty-nine

It was always the first and last tune he played in the concerts he gave those summer evenings so long ago. As he finished "Polly" with a flourish, he would turn to me perched on the step nearest him and say, "I knew you'd come runnin' as soon as you heard me pickin'." There I would sit until he played his entire repertoire, entranced by his flying fingers and the jolly sounds he brought forth from the old instrument which he had confided to me he had made himself.

Sometimes after he had laid down the banjo, we would sit quietly and watch the stars come out or listen to the cricket as it, too, gave a concert. "Listen to the little feller," Mr. Black would say. "I do believe he thinks he can beat me." When not even the twanging of a banjo string could entice the cricket to sing any more, my old friend would yawn and say, "Well, Old Woman, I guess it is time to go."

Then his thin, perpetually tired, old wife, silent now as she had been all evening, would rise wearily and hold open the screen door. "Good night. Sleep tight." Slowly he would mount the steps and swing through the doorway, followed gloomily by Mrs. Black.

Thus dismissed, I would make my way up the board walk to my home a few hundred feet away. I was tired and ready for sleep, but already I was dreading the chill of the water from the old pump behind the house where I must give my bare feet their usual scrubbing, and, too, I dreaded the shock of the clammy old toad which invariably frightened me by leaping over my wet feet. But I was fortunate, for I had two feet to wash. Mr. Black had only one.

He was a cripple. Long before my time, I was told, Mr. Black had suffered an attack of White's swelling. What the modern name of the disease could be I do not know. White's swelling it was called then, and until now it has never occurred to me to be curious about it. In my childish mind I was certain it was the most terrible of all diseases, for it had cost Mr. Black a leg, amputated about halfway down the right thigh, and, too, it had caused his left leg to be strangely drawn until the knee was stiffened in much the same position it would have been bent had he been sitting in a chair.

In one of her rare talking moments Mrs. Black had recounted to Mama the sad story of his illness and how hard it was for him to adjust to the life of a cripple. Mama said that it seemed to her he had done it splendidly, but Mrs. Black said that he kept her fearful because he attempted to do so many things.

She was right, for he did do many things which not only proved

his inventiveness but also his desire to be self-reliant. And there wasn't a person in town who didn't admire him for it.

His own ingenuity had invented a vehicle which he called his "machine." It was a kind of an elaborate tricycle, as well as I remember. An elongated affair, it consisted of a seat and a foot rest at the right level for his leg in its drawn position. There was also a platform sufficiently wide on the right to make a resting place for his poor stump and yet leave room for him to carry packages in front of him. Somehow it was guided by a very cooperative little wheel attached to the bottom of the platform in front. Its locomotion came from his turning of two handles attached to small wheels supported by a frame which extended forward from the sides of his seat. These small wheels turned other sprocket wheels such as a bicycle is propelled by.

In this contraption he went everywhere,—to the grocery, to the depot, even went fishing a mile away in old Eagle Creek. Near the bridge there was a road down which he could trundle his machine to the water's edge, and in a nearby pool he hooked many a catfish.

As I closed my eyes to sleep, I remembered that I had promised to help him water tomatoes the next evening. "Right after supper," he had said. That night I dreamed that I saw Mr. Black catch a big catfish. But, just as he was drawing it up the bank, it suddenly didn't look like a catfish at all. It looked like Mrs. Black, only more limp than usual.

The next morning I awoke late, and dawdled over my breakfast wondering what I could find to do to make an interesting day of it. Suddenly, I thought of my dream and dashed out to see whether Mr. Black could really be going fishing. Sure enough, there he was tying a minnow bucket in its place on the already crowded platform of his little "machine." Tackle box, a ball of staging, three long poles, and an armful of horse weeds, the latter two items tied to the sides of the frame. All that was lacking was the tin pail of lunch that even now Mrs. Black was reaching out to me from the doorway. This he wedged in by the minnow bucket, mounted the seat, placed his crutch on the hooks where it was wont to rest, grasped the handles, and was impatient to be off.

By this time I knew there was no invitation forthcoming for me to accompany him. One question more I ventured, "Why do you need the horse weeds, Mr. Black?"

“Nice juicy, fat worms for the bream. You’ll see. Bring you a mess for your supper. See you later.”

He was off, and we stared after him. I was envious; Mrs. Black, apprehensive.

“Crazy old thing. We’ll have to fish him out of the water some day,” she muttered.

“Funny thing,” I thought. “Last night it was she who got fished out.” “Crazy old thing”—how I wished she would not say such things! But she did quite often. And lots of times he said things about her, too. Like the time he said an ugly word to her when he was marooned in the barber shop. Yet I knew from the weight of the pail that she had given him a good lunch for his fishing trip.

Number 5 was due. Neither of us stirred until he was safely over the railroad crossing. He knew how to get the little wheel square on the timbers that lay between the rails, and now he was over. Silently, each of us went our way, she to her work and I to find amusement for the day.

But, first, I had a chore to do. Number 5 would bring the mail, and I was the self-appointed letter carrier for both our household and that of my old friends. The half hour spent in the post office while the mail was put up often furnished some interesting thoughts for my day. Today there was nothing but commonplace pleasantries as one person after another stepped up to his box, twiddled with its combination, and then fingered through his mail.

There was nothing of importance in our mail today. Mr. Black had a letter from Cincinnati. I didn’t usually look at his mail, for Mama had told me I was not to be curious about other people’s affairs, but already this letter had slipped out of my hands twice.

By the time I got to Mrs. Black’s I found her quite hard at work cleaning up the little barbershop. It was a little box-like room built on stilts over a little branch which most of the time carried but a tiny trickle of water, but, on the occasion of a hard rain, could become a swirling stream. To make matters worse, directly in front of the door yawned an open culvert. The highway which formed the main street of our town drained into a narrow cut that channeled the water through this culvert. Over this cut and in front of the shop had been built a board walk bridge which connected our strip of sidewalk with that of the Blacks. A more unlikely place in which to place a building could hardly be imagined. But Mr. Black did not lack imagination.

She slid his tall stool out of the way of her mop, and it went

clattering into the corner of the shelf which surrounded two sides of the room. By means of this shelf Mr. Black pushed himself around on the old stool which he had mounted on rollers. One swift push while he grasped the edge of the shelf would enable him to move around the room to positions from which he could easily reach towels, razors, the strop which hung near the mirror, or anything else he needed as he groomed his customers. At the end of the room above the lower shelf there was another on which were arranged the decorated shaving mugs which the more affluent men of his trade had provided for their own use. My father's mug was a lovely green one with raised pine cones of gold on its side. Mr. Black could tell you how many years each mug had stood in its place. Mrs. Black changed the mussed chair cloth to one of starched smoothness, hung up a snowy white neck cloth, and arranged a pile of fresh towels. I laid the mail on the shelf.

On days that trade was slow Mr. Black and I could be found quietly reading the books and magazines which filled a small shelf above the benches on which his customers sat to await their turn. Often we read for hours, he seated like an elf on the white cloth draped throne of his old barber chair, and I drawn into a comfortable knot on the end of the bench. The only sound to be heard was the turning of the leaves or the puffing of his pipe. No need to look longingly at the magazine containing the story that had been unfinished when Mama had called me for lunch yesterday. Mrs. Black was too busy with her cleaning, and, too, she thought Mr. Black and I both wasted our time with so much reading.

Before I went home, I took one look at Mr. Black's garden and counted the ripe tomatoes that I could see. We gathered them that night, and he gave me the nicest one because he said I had to have a share in the project. The neighbors considered the tending of his garden just about his finest accomplishment. Every able-bodied man in that section envied the fine vegetables that he produced. They marveled that he could do the work of cultivating when he was forced to scoot along on a box to which he had attached runners. He pulled himself along the rows with the end of his short hoe handle. The weeds he kept down by pulling by hand. One thing troubled Papa about that garden: it always seemed cleaner when we returned from church than when we left for the morning services. Nothing could induce either Mr. or Mrs. Black to go to church, and on that point the neighbors were both silent and disapproving.

Watering the tomatoes was one chore I really enjoyed, for Mr. Black told his funniest stories and riddles as we went down the long rows, pouring water into the sunken cans beside each plant, tied to its tall stake with strings from Mrs. Black's discarded gingham dresses. The bottoms of the cans were pierced with holes, and through them seeped the moisture which paid off so well in the huge tomatoes in which he took such pride. But tonight there were no funny stories and no conundrums, only a bit of hurry to get the job done. The letter, he said, had brought news of Sarah's coming. She and her family would be down the next afternoon on Number 9. I tried to murmur something polite, but in my heart I was sorry to hear of it. Mama disapproved of Sarah and her husband. "A Cincinnati Dutchman" Mama called him with disparagement in her voice. Just why she should dislike a Dutchman living in Cincinnati and at the same time be so proud of her own Dutch ancestors who lived in New York when it was called New Amsterdam, I did not know. But that was the way she felt about it, and I did not argue with her.

When I told her about Sarah's coming she said, "Poor Mrs. Black." I thought that a queer remark and said so, to which Mama replied, "Well, no doubt she is glad to see them. If they just didn't act so terrible." Then, as if afraid she would forget to say it, she turned and most emphatically said, "See to it that you stay away from there while they are here."

Well, they came, all three of them: Sarah; Tom Eberle, her "Dutchman" husband; and Lucile, the little daughter with whom we often played. My pleasure in seeing Lucile caused me to forget Mama's admonition to stay away. Even Mrs. Black seemed happy, that is, until after supper.

My supper over, I slipped down the old board walk again. The lure of a new playmate, especially one with a new doll whose trunk was filled with city doll clothes was too strong, and, too, Mama was busy with the dishes.

By this time all but Mrs. Black had seated themselves in the old lawn swing in the lower part of the yard. However, one look at the group told me it was not the thing to do to join them. What had become of the nice, tidy look Sarah had when she came up the street from the station? Her hair was now quite tumbled, her pretty dress rumpled, and she giggled and giggled about nothing at all. Tom, her husband, lay stretched out against a small bank asleep

with his mouth open, and he had taken off his shirt. As Lucile reached out to pick up her doll, she brushed his foot. In his sleep he muttered a curse. Now I knew what was wrong. One look at Mr. Black nearly broke my heart. He must be really sick to look like that. I must have asked him if he were sick, for his old black eyes snapped. Then he glared and roared at me, "We've got no time for you. Get on home." Then they all laughed, an ugly insulting laugh.

But not Lucile. She said, "Ah, Pop. Don't act like that!"

Grateful as I was to her for rebuking him, I turned and fled. How could Mr. Black change like that! And how could he talk to me in that manner! Now I knew why Mama said, "Poor Mrs. Black." Why hadn't that "Dutchman" stayed at home? It wasn't like this when Sarah and Lucile came by themselves to visit.

So it was with a great deal of relief that I heard Papa say that the Eberles had gone back to Cincinnati the next morning. Most of the morning Mr. Black sat in his little "machine" by his doorstep with a face like a thundercloud, and for the first time since Papa could remember had nothing to say to him or any other passerby.

Later on in the day Mama passed their open door as she took the short cut to visit her cousin and heard them quarreling. Something he said caused Mrs. Black to burst out crying and to say, "Yes, but you won't be very far behind me. Remember that."

Before she thought Mama stepped up to their door and said, "Is something wrong, Mrs. Black?"

A bit too apologetically, Mr. Black remarked, "Just one of her spells, Miss Lucy. Ain't nothing you nor I can do about it."

Mrs. Black raised her miserable, wrinkled face from her hands, opened her mouth as if to speak, thought better of it, replaced her hands, and sobbed again.

Realizing she had blundered, Mama went on her way. But that night when she told Papa about it, he said, "Poor old souls! There'll be trouble there yet. But what to do about it?"

Mama looked at him thoughtfully and began, "Sometimes I am afraid—" But she never finished, for Papa was shaking his head in my direction.

"It is time for little girls to be in bed." She waved her hand in the direction of the bedroom door. So that was the last of that conversation.

The next day was Sunday. In the hurrying around to study my Sunday School lesson, and the excitement of wearing for the first time my new Sunday dress and shiny patent leather slippers, I for-

got about the unhappiness of our old neighbors. Papa said later that he did not see Mr. Black as he came up the street from his usual Sunday morning conversation with the men who whittled and leaned against the iron railing which enclosed the L and N railroad park as they waited for the morning train. Number 5 was a little late, and we had to hurry to church. The Blacks were forgotten for a couple of hours, at least.

We walked home very leisurely, but as soon as we rounded the corner, we knew something was wrong at the Black home.

“Drug” Jones was usually the first person home from church on Sunday morning. It was he whom Mr. Black called first. Mr. Will Conwell was the next to come along. He said afterwards that by that time Mr. Black was crying and waving feebly in the direction of the house, sobbing, “I did it. I did it. Don’t ask me why. I just did it.”

Papa said never did he see a man look as little, as old, and as pathetic. “Drug” Jones and the men who came out of the house looked sick and as if they had seen a ghost. Yes, Mr. Black had killed Mrs. Black. With his short crutch he had struck her as she sat in her little rocker near the door. Now she was dead, and he was sorry, but being sorry couldn’t bring her back.

The rest was all confusion. Never did I see people so quiet and stunned. Women stood in little groups quietly talking, some crying softly. We children, awed and frightened, stayed close by our mothers, fearful of what would happen next. It seemed more like a nightmare than any experience I had ever had. More and more I thought of my dream. How could he do it? How could he do it? Mr. Black, who could mend our toys and tell such funny tales, how could he do such a thing as this?

Somehow the day wore on. Strangest of all the day’s happenings was the story Papa told of the scene when Bob Courtney, the young sheriff of our county, came to take Mr. Black to the county seat for custody.

Sadly Bob stepped up to the old man, who had given him many free haircuts when he was too poor to pay for one, and seemed unable to say a word.

“Well, Bob, we might as well get this over with. I am ready if you are.”

Bob made an attempt to smile and answered, “Mr. Black, right now I am sorry that I won that election.” There wasn’t a man in the crowd who doubted what he said.

With that courtesy inherent in good, plain people, every man dropped his head as they started toward the sheriff's rig. Bob just reached down and lifted Mr. Black in his arms to the high seat. Mr. Conwell led the way and every man walked up and shook Mr. Black's hand. Bob picked up the reins, and they were gone. Not even "Drug" Jones had a word to say. Nobody cared much for supper that night.

The next day and the days that followed were strange ones, too. From the county seat came news of "bail" and many other strange words that no one took time to explain to us children. But we understood that Mr. Black had gone to Sarah's, though not for long, we were told.

At first, it seemed that nothing could ever be the same again. My footsteps sounded hollow on the boardwalk as I walked past the little shop with its tightly closed door, and the lonely old house seemed deserted in its grief. Most of all the emptiness of the little "machine" seemed to cry out as I passed. How I wished he could have taken it with him!

Soon it became my custom to walk on the other side of the street that I might not see the weeds that were beginning to come in the garden. Mama looked at me strangely, but said nothing.

A few days later Papa came up the street with the afternoon's Cincinnati *Post* in his hand. As he came in, he handed the paper to Mama and pointed to an item in the lower left corner of the front page. Slowly Mama read aloud:

"Mr. James Black, father of Mrs. Thomas Eberle, 2120 Mac-Millan St., died today of a self-inflicted wound. . . ."

I heard nothing more, for all that was pent up in me seemed to pour forth in a wild sobbing, which Mama was wise enough to let spend itself before she spoke.

"Now, sister, I am glad that is over. You are taking this far too much to heart. It has been a terrible thing, and all of us have been saddened by it. But now that it is over we must think of something else. Mr. Black made one terrible mistake, and now he has made another. But he wouldn't want you to think badly of him. Try to think of his happier times. Please?"

Recent lessons in Sunday School had given me thoughts both disquieting and comforting. My finite probing of the infinite brought strange results now. Eternity without music would be dreary indeed to Mr. Black. Could it be possible that he would be allowed the

solace of his banjo? He had forfeited his chance for a golden harp. I was glad he had chosen to make a banjo. Then came a thought, whose facetiousness even now causes me to flush and squirm: there would always be a constant flame for "Polly's" kettle!

An involuntary smile played across my face. Mama, seeing the therapy of the smile, asked its cause. My answer brought from her a half-shocked but appreciative giggle. No doubt somewhere Mr. Black grinned, too. It would have been just like him.

* * *

"Plunkety, Plunkety, Plank."

Young Eddie Turner had more determination than musical ability. I wondered if he could play "Polly, Put the Kettle On"? Tomorrow I'll ask him.

NIGHTMARE

PAT SCHNEIDER

The sunlight cast a horizontal pattern—about twenty two-inch lines separated by thick shadows—on the wall opposite the large window covered by metallic white blinds. With or without this hazy pattern, the pastel green wall seemed to boast a scrubbed air. The regulation bed, situated with its blond head against the window; the tall blond nightstand, supporting a sparkling glass and pitcher of ice; and the dark green leather chair, sitting in the corner near the bed, reflected the neat, orderly, efficient arrangement of the room.

The eyes of Richard Sark were opened quickly by the growing intensity of the sunlight on the wall. He discovered himself between two white sheets which reeked of cleanliness. With squinted, yet determined eyes, and mouth half-opened, he scanned the room.

"Where in the hell am I? This room is so drab, it's unreal! Look at those walls, they looked bleached. That chair doesn't fit into this decoration at all. And, this table! It's so tall! Looks like an eighteenth century hand-me-down. Wonder where those three doors lead. G-o-o-dness, they're all the same size. This bed feels like a flatboat suspended on stilts. I have never seen anything so ugly in my life. One thing's for sure; I'm getting out of here."

However, when he tried to move, he discovered that he was paralyzed from the neck down to his toes. Now the sound of wind

Thirty-eight

flapping the venetian blinds behind him annoyed his sense of security, and a feeling of helplessness enveloped him. Suddenly, he bellowed, "Help, someone help me!" No one came, and his eyes madly searched the room for a clue. Finally, he thrust his head to the edge of the bed, and there he saw a silver tray connected to the bed but folded against the side. "God," he muttered, "I'm in a hospital!"

For two hours he lay in one position silently, not even raising an eyebrow, thinking. "How did I get here? I must be hurt badly since I can't move. Gee, this doesn't seem like a hospital; it's too, too, ugly; yes, that's it, ugly. It seems more like a city morgue, and, damn, I wish I could turn around and stop that blind. This almost seems like a dream. Where are the doctors and nurses? Why aren't they helping me? I've got to get out of here!"

"All right Richard, face facts, you're here for awhile; so calm down and figure out why. Well, let's see, I don't have my clothes, but they must be somewhere close. I don't have my wallet either. My money! Now I know I'm stuck. And gad, I don't have any car. Where is my car? That's it; I must have had a wreck. When? Damn. Why doesn't someone help me? I did have a wreck. Gosh, Dad will kill me if anything happened to that new car. He seemed so pleased that I bought a Pontiac with a 409 engine. He didn't even mind when I had a floor shift and tact installed. The first thing he'll do is accuse me of dragging. But, why shouldn't I race? After all, I've got the fastest car going; no one can beat me."

A door opened, the one in the middle of the three identical doors. A pert five-foot, two-inch nurse walked into the room. Her white uniform and hat, short blond hair, blue eyes, pug nose, and small mouth made her look like a Swedish milkmaid. She quietly shut the door and turned toward her patient, who had been staring at her intently. She noticed that his eyes were open; and with a shy, yet sincere, smile she said, "Good morning. I'm so glad you're awake."

Dogmatically, he returned, "How did I get here?"

"Mr. Sark, you were in a wreck."

"Well, how bad am I hurt? How shattered is my car? Where is my car?"

"You were hurt badly, but should have no trouble recovering."

She busily proceeded to change the sheets, bathe him, fill his water pitcher, give him pills and feed him. He continued the game of twenty questions, but the only answer he received was that she

was glad that he was alive and conscious. After she left, he tried to fit the pieces of this nightmare together.

“That nurse, she shouldn’t be a nurse; she’s too, too, ugly; yes, ugly. She’s put together well, but something is wrong with her face. Her eyes are too close together, her nose seems to have slid out of place, and her mouth looks lopsided; in fact, she could be mistaken for a melted wax manikin. Oh well, some win, and others lose.

“So, I really was in a wreck. Wonder where my car is? Let’s see, that’s it; yes, that’s it. Now I remember. I was driving down a four-lane highway, and there wasn’t another car in sight. What highway? Where was I going? Huh; you know, Richard, you never seem to know where you’re going. Oh, and I remember the bend in the road. It must have been a mile long because you couldn’t see around it, but I don’t remember the end of it. Those walls on the sides of the road, they were odd. So odd that I almost thought they were a mirage. I couldn’t see the top of them; and they were granite, but appeared smooth and soft-like, like baby’s skin. Yeah, I do remember wanting to go fast. I wanted to test the car—on this bend. The speedometer moved steadily, 90, 100, 105, 110, 115, 120. My eyes were so engrossed with the speedometer that when I glanced at the road, all I could see was wall. Then the wall seemed sturdy, solid, and well, almost a refuge like Plymouth Rock to the Pilgrims. Richard, you must have been dreaming to hit a wall. One never knows, does one?”

He continued to ponder over the accident until a doctor traipsed into the room. Ole Doc didn’t as much as look at his patient before he checked the charts, hanging on the end of the bed, and paced the room several times, contemplating. Then suddenly he stopped, turned toward Richard, gave him a quizzical stare, took off his antique glasses which had such narrow frames that they made his small hand look large, and stated, “Son, your improvement is good and since you are conscious, we will operate today.”

Richard, with one eye squinted and one end of his mouth turned up, gave the doctor a hesitant look but questioned, “What is wrong with me? What type of operation do I need? How will it help?”

“Don’t worry about details; we have your best interest at heart, and you’ll be ready to leave in no time.”

“But, sir, you can at least tell me the whereabouts of my car, clothes, and money.”

Forty

“Listen, we aren’t concerned with your money or car, only your health.”

With this comment, the doctor hurried out of the room.

“This is the queerest place. There’s no reason why that doctor can’t answer my questions. Who in the hell does he think he is? However, his performance was rather cute. Those glasses look as old as he, and his eyes were deeply set in their sockets. God! He was just like that nurse! Well darn, what’s wrong with these people and this place? Why are their noses and mouths misplaced? It’s unreal; people just can’t be this ugly. But, what I really like about them is the interest they show for humanity. They know all the answers. Why? Why? Why?”

Before lunch, which Richard never received, the nurse walked into the room as if she had been there a hundred times that day. While she informed him that he would be given a shot now to put him to sleep for the operation, she tried to reassure him by her pleasant attitude that he would be normal and able to leave soon. Of course he protested the entire time and once lost control of his emotions. “Why are you so happy and taking such an interest in me? You’re too ugly to worry about other people.”

This was the last thing he said before falling asleep. However, while in the operating room he heard the doctor comment to the nurse, “Yes, I think this young man will pull through. He’s fought it a lot but really has no choice other than this.”

Several days later, Richard was up and moving about freely. He even had a chance to fix the venetian blinds. He and the nurse had become compatible, even though he still found her ugliness unbearable. With a grin in her eyes, and a giggle in her cheeks, the nurse pranced into the room with a pair of grey slacks, white shirt, and a blue blazer on hangers.

She announced like a nurse telling a father that he has a son, “Mr. Sark, here are your clothes; you are free to leave.” He lifted himself from the leather chair, casually approached her, politely took his clothes, and said, “Thank you.”

She marched out leaving him alone. “Gee, I can’t believe that I can leave. Finally I can rid myself of this room and these people, this mass of ugliness. You know, Richard, you’ve got to admit that these people were humane, but why should humane people have distorted faces? Oh well, it’s not important now; the nightmare is over.”

He rushed into his clothes and was ready to leave except for finding a mirror so that he could tie his tie. There was none in the room. He wandered into the hall and caught a glimpse of one at the end. He danced the twenty-five feet to the mirror yo-yoing his tie. When his eyes met those in the mirror, though, he cried, "Damn them!"

AN ELEGY OF THE 60's

MARIANTHI CORONEOU

There is no diamond to cut the crystallized routine
no voice to hush the whisper of time.
The day repeats itself
this month copies the last
and so does every year.
And clocks never fail to tick.
The ennui. "Le mal du siècle."
Nauseating.
Just like "le mal de mer."
We are nothing but passengers on shipboard. We all have
the inordinate consciousness of one another's deadlines,
of the attempts to escape institutional life
by the means of affected hobbies.
Playing, working, travelling, loving, or simply killing
for the laziest among us.
Anything that will help cure the cancer of futilitarianism.
The tidal wave which agitates the sea of subjectivity.
The lack of rapport between the deception and the deceived.
Nauseating.
Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt? Yes, where are they?
We would like to lend back the inherited doom.
We are their grown-up babes
lulled with bombshells.
—Remember?
—How can one forget?
The alert-weaklings.
The shelter-fed. Boots trailing above our heads.
The subterranean infant audience clapping hands when
history was encoring her past performances

Forty-two

with the human puppets of hateful acts
exhibiting colorful scenes when leaders tried
to outguess each other and snatch the crown
offered by the Kingdom of United Death.

Red Crosses white crosses.

SS. . . . S.O.S.

Of all things most awful is the silence that follows the clashing.
The living and the dead all wrapped in a single shroud.

But then you and I grew tired of self-pity, ashes and blood
and moods none of which was one of hope.
So you and I parted to find a green perspective.
The wind that drives out death and brings in summer.

I was in an old country
sitting at the cobbled public square
where idle bodies and bare dreams
scorch themselves in the sun
oiled by some distant tune of weariness.

I watched and listened to
the mouths sipping and talking about
mister president or Dali.

Endless coffee and cigarettes choked the bitterness.
Words ran across the dry tables
driven like a few late leaves.

Big arguing mouths dropping pebbles.

The chatter of the cultured apes.

Unless ye be one ye cannot enter the kingdom of nothingness.

You went to a young country watching skylines
and sharp needles grow taller at the expense of beauty.

You wrote: "I look for trees and find none;
they have either disappeared or shrunk.

My eyes penetrate those prison cells
falsely called windows

spaced so absolute as time.

Utter lack of communication

because I am in concrete Babel and surrounded by towers.

Each one lives in his own microcosm, all well framed-up.

I watch alcohol wash the sweat-and-oil dripping tongues.

The jungle of modern rhythm

to find the well where springs the fountain of golden coins
and where the fragments of soul are forever sunk.
Poor fakes loaded with packages of concern
that the black ribbons of fear leave untied.
Fears of any and every kind.
With them I breathe that stale smell of a winter room overheated,
thread my fingers in furs,
and carry numbers to identify myself.
With them I share the inarticulate blubber
and the forced, void, sophisticated laughter.
I would like to cry
but have forgotten how.
Besides, there is no time for tears.”

You and I sowed our souls in the four winds
trying to see a better tomorrow
and reaped silence.
An identical addiction afflicts the lands
where there exists nothing but herbs and thorns to chew,
green fat water to push them down our throats.
All roads lead to nullity—
the eternal city built on the seven deadly sins.

EMPTINESS

DAVID A. GLENN

The raindrops fell on concrete walls one night.
Abstractedly, the young man watched their flight.
They fell in loneliness and burst in fear.
Then rain and loneliness all disappear.

The sunshine comes and leaves the young man glad,
And free from all the lonely and the sad.
But soon the rain will come again and fall.
Once more the rain will bounce on concrete walls.