

5-1-1965

Belles Lettres, 1965

Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

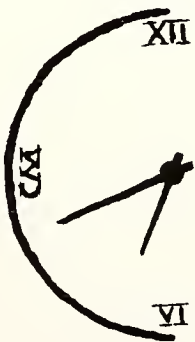
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BELLES LETTRES



1964 - 1965

Belles Lettres

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

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Volume Thirty-One

1964-65

Number One

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Cover by Craig Meadows

THE PLAYGROUND

DONALD H. SMITH

The drab mounds of humanity hugged the snow-covered wheat-field like lichens on a white rock. Scattered on the white shroud, pocked with shallow black craters, lay the remnants of a rifle platoon. Two hundred yards in front of them stood the dead green wall of an evergreen forest, their objective, where the enemy was hidden. Each of the twenty survivors lay alone in his coffin-like cavity of snow waiting to be snatched from the cold of fear and climate by one of the bullets that snapped over his head like the ends of a hundred bullwhips.

The leader was young. All soldiers seem to be young. It is part of nature's law that the young must prove themselves. He lay still, looking out from under the rim of his helmet, looking for a place to go. Any place of sanctuary in this white purgatory would do. To his left front, above the rattle of small arms fire, he could hear the dreaded approach of any enemy tank; its squeaky clank brought new fear to him. He tried to wet his lips, but there was no saliva in his mouth. On his right, a farmhouse was burning. The blaze was hidden by the stark wall still standing, but the sound could be heard over the battle noise.

Snap! Crackle! Pop!

"Bobby, eat your cereal, it's getting late," warned his mother.

The eight-year-old had his head cocked to one side and his left ear down next to the cereal bowl as he whispered.

"The radio announcer on the 'Tom Mix' program said that this cereal would talk back to you. Listen, Mom."

"Eat your cereal, honey; it's late."

He dug his spoon into the milk and Rice Krispies and stuffed them into his mouth as fast as he could, hardly bothering to chew. When the bowl was empty, he scraped back his chair, pulled on his coat, picked up his lunchbag, and ran to hug his mother. She was so warm, so happy, and so full of love. He released her, after she had kissed him on the forehead, and ran out the door shouting,

"We have a ball game with the other third grade this afternoon; we'll win, Mom."

The screen door swung shut behind him.

Ka-wham!

The tank had arrived at the edge of the forest curtain. It was pumping 88 millimeter shells from its long cannon with sickening

regularity and accuracy at the lonely dark spots huddled in the field. The leader knew he had to move or he would soon be the bull's-eye for a tank gunner. The nearest shelter he could see was a dark indentation in the snow about forty yards closer to the darkness of the woodline. It was probably an irrigation ditch. Ka-wham! The flying mud clods, snow, and concussion from a near miss made his decision for him. He pulled his hands to a position under his shoulders, pushed up and sprang forward running. He zig-zagged across the slippery snow and lunged the last five yards into the ditch. He hit hard on his belly with his carbine in front of him.

Whoosh!

The bat connected squarely as it traveled around in its anxious arc; the ball changed direction with the suddenness of a lightning bolt. Bobby didn't drop the bat until he was half way to first base. The three runners ahead of him were tearing around the bases as the ball hit in the left field corner. Bobby rounded third base hearing his teammates yelling.

"Slide! Bobby, slide!"

Bobby threw himself forward in the air and was one step ahead of the ball as he hit the hard ground.

"Safe!"

His momentum pushed him deep in the snow; his helmet almost came off as he hit, but his carbine came to rest pointed directly into the startled face of the German soldier whose outline had made up part of the darkness in the ditch. The panting leader found himself looking aghast into the muzzle of a machine pistol. Impasse! If either pulled his trigger both would die because of the reflex action of the other's finger. The sound of the burning farmhouse crept into the ditch as the two young killers eyed each other and death.

Snap! Crackle! Pop!

"Hans, eat your brotchen or you will be late to school," warned his mother.

"Yah, Mamma, I was just listening to the fire in the stove. It sounds so warm as it crackles and pops."

Mamma was so happy and soft and warm. Her kitchen even seemed full of her love.

Whoosh!

He lay there in the cold snow staring at the carbine. Mamma

Four

was dead now. The bombers had killed her, and Poppa was a frozen corpse on the Russian front. The Fatherland is dying fast; all is gone, so why must we die too? I will surrender to this American, and we can both live.

Their eyes had not moved in the ten seconds they had lain there. They were motionless, each waiting for the other's move. The German had made his decision. He moved his hand to drop his weapon as he released his grip. The carbine, held so tightly by the leader in his terror, jumped as it fired.

Blam!

The wildly swinging screen door slammed behind the shouting boy.

"Hey, Mom, Mom, guess what?"

"What, Bobby?"

"We won, Mom! I smacked a grand-slam homer and we won."

"That's nice, honey, but scrape off your muddy shoes before you track up my kitchen."

He burst out the door again as he happily called,

"O. K., Mom!"

Blam!

Han's head snapped back with the force of the bullet, and a small hole appeared low on his forehead like a third eye. He seemed to smile at Bobby as his head fell forward into the wet snow, and as the last breath rattled from between his lips it carried the word he was about to say,

"Kamerad"

INFINITUDE

DONALD GUINNIP

A slow hand climbs and falls: time.
Elsewhere the hand is non-existent and
No longer does the hand fold man
Into limited balls of dough thus
Confining him so low and close
To the stop and go of society.
O.K., Eternity, flow past and above
Man's hampering hand with untold speed.

WINTER'S LAMENT

CAROLYN MARIE MURPHY

Cold hovers—
Ice mocks the shell of warmth that
Encircles my soul
You wait, Winter—
Soon you'll die, be crucified
Upon a cross of silver spring.
And then I'll run with
Fragrant winds blowing my
Hair to the heavens,
And I'll fling myself upon
A bed of cool grass who never heard
Of cold, white nothingness.

THE 5:18

OWEN COLLINS

I started to amble down the narrow concrete corridor that led from the Union Terminal and was nearly crushed by the wave of people behind me. I drew myself up close to the hard, cold granite and hung on like a man on a ledge fifteen stories up. After ten minutes, so it seemed, the rush quietened, and I breathed again. After looking right and left, I eased back into the crowd and was swept along, a leaf in the whirlwind.

This was my first experience in Chicago, and I shall never forget it. I can hear clearly the sounds of that first day: the hissing of air brakes on giant semi-trailers, the grating screech of metal against metal as cab drivers skidded through traffic, the protesting groan of a heavy motor as it labored to overcome tons of inertia, the thunderous steel roar of the overhead trains as they whooshed by, the vibrant whistle of a policeman directing traffic, the unintelligible, guttural sound of the paper man squatting on the corner, the wail and clang of fire trucks as they demanded right of way.

The people seemed odd to me. Emotionless, poker-faced, they

seemed to be preoccupied with themselves. Into giant buildings, out of them, down streets, up streets, around corners. I thought of the experiment at school that had mice in a maze, and they had to find their way out, only these people seemed to be making no progress.

The wind carried smells: half-rotten banana peelings, pungent odors from the breweries, the taste of half-burnt cinders from the smokestacks, air that suggested it had been breathed too long by too many people.

Yet, I thrilled at being part of this great milieu. This was a great machine. My body wound up like a clock.

I had lived my 32 years mostly in Kentucky, teaching school. I was not bad-looking. My wife told me that when I wore my button-up sweater and had my best pipe in my mouth, I reminded her of Cary Grant when he played the role of a college professor. However, I know my wife is a bit optimistic about some things—especially me.

I learned quickly. The next day I hit the runway at a pace somewhere between a run and a fast walk. I prided myself that on the exterior, at least, I was one of the crowd. Palm Beach suit, button down collar, Homburg hat, I looked the part—all except cuff links. I don't like cuff links. Down the runway, across the bridge, we sounded so much like a herd of buffalo in an old-time western, I sneaked a glance from the corner of my eye. Yes, we looked like people.

* * *

9:00 A.M. I saw a crevice between two men on the elevator and pushed into it. It opened and closed after me.

9:01 A.M. I had to get off. Everyone else did.

9:05 A.M. I was busy analyzing the financial report of Richmond Oil.

9:10 A.M. Griffith called me into his office. "Barnes, you've been here six months now. You should know the ropes. I want a model portfolio for a lady on \$25,000, about half income, half growth. Be able to back up your choices. She'll be here by two, so step on it."

9:15 A.M. I was working hard on the \$25,000 portfolio.

10:45 A.M. I handed a list of the companies I had chosen to a secretary. "Run these through IBM for short and long term prospects."

Cold, impersonal, the IBM machine stood in the northwest corner of the room. All anyone had to do was take a company's card and number, run it through the machine, and out came all the vital information on that company. I had a card, too, and a number.

10:15 A.M. Coffee was brought up. I paused, looking over the office of Black and Brothers. But nobody ever called it Black and Brothers. It was always "Let's go down to the Big Board," or "Been to the Big Board today?" or "How's the Big Board?"

The thing, lit by neon, was about the size of a revolving door turned longways. When it ticked—which it always did from 9:00 A.M. till 3:00 P.M.—it sounded like a streamlined threshing machine. Sometimes churning, sometimes crawling, it never stopped. X 109 $\frac{1}{4}$ was sliding across the Board now. Was that up or down? I followed X through the reference board and found X-Xeroy, Hi 108, Lo 106, Close 107 $\frac{1}{2}$. Xeroy was moving.

The Big Board gripped everyone's attention: the near-sighted copy girl wandering jerkily under the reference board; the coy secretaries who knew how to wear their dresses short enough to be interesting, long enough not to be repulsive; the account executives who sat in their glass stalls facing the Big Board, talking to clients and answering the telephone; the sharpsters who lounged in the two-row gallery and told obscene jokes, parleying knowledge and wit.

I noticed one particularly. He kept making remarks to the copy girl, following her every movement, watching her bend over, her skirt inching higher. He had anemia, I know. Pale, cadaverous, I was sure death had been cheated. Narrow-set eyes, a sharply-hooked nose, and a mouth that seemed pursed to whistle reminded me of an eagle ready to descend with predatory passion on an unsuspecting field mouse.

He was telling a joke. "You know what my psychiatrist told me? He said that I really didn't have an inferiority complex—I am inferior." He smiled, an oily smile that crinkled up his nose, showing protruding, long black hairs badly in need of trimming. I believed the psychiatrist. But this man had money, big money via the Big Board.

10:20 A.M. I reviewed the financial record of Goodland. Long term debt: \$38,965,000. More than last year. Depreciation allowance: \$3,482,000. That's down—bad signal. Number of shares out-

Eight

standing: 79,832,641. Up nearly 2,000,000 shares. Earnings last quarter—\$.63, compared to \$.72 a year ago. Goodland looks risky.

11:00 A.M. I ran Waterson through IBM. Better prospects. Good buy as now priced. I checked through the financial reports on Waterson. I reached the same conclusion.

12:01 P.M. I was squashed in a corner of the elevator. I held my breath and made it. The man ahead of me pinched a secretary on the buttocks. She scowled, swiveled her head, then smiled—she saw Griffith.

12:05 P.M. I stood in the dinky little restaurant across the street, awaiting my hot dog and chili—that's all I had time for. It was not long in coming.

"Seventy-five cents, please," the waitress rasped like a talking doll.

12:20 P.M. I hurried back to work. I glanced in a shop window underneath our building. There was a painting of the country in autumn—golden maple leaves, fodder shocks, boys and girls riding bicycles. Price: \$3.98.

12:30 P.M. I took the model portfolio to Griffith. He was not there, so I put it on his desk.

1:00 P.M. Griffith called me into his office. "Can you justify the breakdown you gave us?" He snapped the words through thin, bloodless lips.

"Well," I said—my hand shook, so I pressed it down hard on the desk—"IBM is the outstanding growth stock of the past fifteen years."

"Go on." His eyes were icy, uncommitted.

"Chilean's record is unmatched in the chemicals."

"Go on."

"And Xeroy for the past year . . ."

He cut me short, "Go on."

"Same for CL&O. However, I think Goodland ought to be approached with caution, so I am substituting Waterson instead."

"Go on."

"The rest I recommend for U. S. bonds. If they fall, goodbye."

"The only trouble, Barnes," he glowered, "who are you working for? Black and Brothers or this dear, little, old, sweet lady?" He tore up my portfolio like a short story writer tearing up his first draft.

I closed the door behind me, the door knob feeling cold and greasy in my palm.

1:15 P.M. I helped file some portfolios. Blazer #903604231, Blink #903604232, Block #903604233.

1:30 P.M. Conference with the superintendent of Black and Brothers. He said, "Money is not everything, but it's way ahead of anything that might be in second place. We're not running this business on sentiment."

2:00 P.M. Griffith inspected the work I was doing on Richmond Oil. "Does it take you all day to analyze one company?"

2:15 P.M. Coffee:

2:20 P.M. I was comparing Lancaster and Dark Gavis.

3:00 P.M. Griffith wanted a resumé of all developments of the Dark Gavis contraceptive pill by 9:00 A.M. tomorrow. That means work tonight.

5:00 P.M. I drooped onto the elevator.

5:15 P.M. I flopped onto a smoke-eroded seat of the 5:18, and as it gently rocked, I dozed.

5:55 P.M. Sylvia met me at the station. Good old Syl. If it weren't for her, I couldn't stand it.

"Gene, I've planned the most wonderful evening." Her hazel eyes sparkled. "We're going to see the White Sox and Yankees in a double-header. Do you want to take the boys?"

"Sorry, Syl, I have to make a resumé of Dark Gavis contraceptives." I shut my teeth hard, balling up the muscles in my jaw. I wanted to see the White Sox. I like baseball. "It has to be in by nine in the morning. I'll have to work tonight."

"But I've already fixed a picnic lunch," she protested, trying to hide her disappointment. "We've not had a night out in so long."

"Can't help it, Syl. I don't make \$15,000 a year on nights out, you know." I plopped behind the wheel of the powerful Wildcat and scurried through the traffic.

We had driven in silence several miles when Sylvia said, "Gene, you know I've always gone along with you wherever you wanted to go or whatever you wanted to do, but I'm worried. Money's not everything. Sure, I like it. I like our \$30,000 home. I like the wall to wall carpeting. I like the central heating and air conditioning. But I want to enjoy life too."

Griffith's house appeared on the corner. It was always easy to

spot Griffith's house. It was larger and more expensive than the others. He talked of buying a bigger one.

"We could never have a house like we have now back home. Teaching and air conditioning are strange bedfellows."

"Sure, it was hot in our little house, but after supper we would go out and sit on the lawn for hours, watching the twilight and lightning bugs."

"We don't have to go to Kentucky to sit on our lawn at twilight. Why don't we right here?"

"We don't have time. You know that. How many times have we been on our lawn in the past month?"

"I don't know. How many?"

"Not one! Besides it's not fashionable. If anyone does have time to sit out up here, he has to build a screened-in back porch to keep from being bothered by mosquitoes. I like mosquitoes."

"You're silly, Syl."

I whipped into the driveway of our two-car garage. Actually we only had one car, but the salesman said everybody else on the street had a two-car garage. So we bought it.

6:10 P.M. "Where are the boys?" I asked.

"The babysitter took them down to the Little League games. I told her to have them home by 6:30 in case we went to the ball games."

Sylvia brought the picnic lunch out on the patio.

"Gene, you're eating too fast."

I slowed down for a bite or two, but was soon eating just as fast as ever. Our doctor had told me to watch what I ate and to eat slowly, but somehow, no matter how hard I tried, I ate too fast.

"I know, but I haven't much time. I need to get to work on Dark Gavis—about ten medical articles I have to dig through."

"What am I going to do when you have a heart attack in a couple of years, or less time?"

"Oh, you'll probably marry some dumb executive in a month or two. Besides you'll get \$50,000 in insurance."

"Sure, I'll take the \$50,000 and marry another robot."

We sat looking at each other.

"Well, I had better hit it." I had gotten up to go to the study when Sylvia called after me.

"We got a letter from home today. It's on the dresser."

I walked out of the kitchen into the bedroom and picked up the

letter: Eugene Barnes, 204 Maple Street, Glenn Ellyn, Illinois, zip code 6361.

“I haven’t got time to read it. What’d it say,” I yelled.

“Mother said that she had been over to our house. Everything’s okay except the weeds in the garden are about head high. And, oh, yes, old Hiram is not expected to live.”

I remembered the hilly little garden. I came home at four from teaching, and many afternoons I would work till dark, pushing a hand plow that I had borrowed from old Hiram. Blisters popped and broke and the water ran between my fingers, but I liked it.

Then there were always things tearing up around the house. Our \$25.00 washing machine was forever in need of repair. Sylvia learned to start it by pulling on a belt on the motor.

Old Hiram! I used to go up there and take him newspapers that we had read. He sat swinging on the porch, reliving his life—the elections, the gunfights, the times when he had to buy schools. I thought life had passed him by.

I used to like church, too. I was a deacon in the Christian Church in Jackson. Sylvia taught the beginners in Sunday School. Little Mark would never stay in his class. After giving his teacher his money, Mark would fly to Sylvia and clutch her legs.

There were churches here in Glenn Ellyn, of course. Sylvia and I had gone a few times, but they were so big. I never got to say anything in Sunday School, and expressing my opinion was what I liked best about the little church in Jackson.

But I had to work occasionally on Sunday, and gradually Sylvia and I quit going. An assistant pastor called once or twice, but after we explained the situation, he did not bother to come again.

“Well, I’d better hit it,” I muttered to myself, and plopping the letter down on the dresser, I walked down the hallway to my study.

I fumbled around in my briefcase until I found the articles on contraceptive pills. I placed them on top of my mahogany desk, propped my feet up on the desk, tilted my chair backwards, and began to study.

For some reason, my eyes began to wander about the room, coming to rest on the bookshelf in the corner opposite my desk.

The boys had several books on their shelf: *Black Beauty*, *Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a set of *Childcraft* which they felt they had outgrown. We still kept those little books that Sylvia used to buy at the supermarket for \$.19. We had used

Twelve

them to read the boys to sleep when they could but point at the pictures and make sounds which only we suspected were words.

Sylvia had her shelf, too. She kept her old college textbooks and every other book she ever had, so it seemed. She had belonged to the Book-of-the-Month Club, and I recognized *Green Willow*, *Pilgrims in Paradise*, *Green Mansions*.

On the top shelf were the classics: *The Works of Tolstoi*, *Poe*, *Stevenson*, *Dickens*, *Shakespeare*, *Milton*, *Thoreau*. My eyes lingered on *The Works of Thoreau*. I started to study again, but I kept thinking about Thoreau. Could life really be backed into a corner?

I looked back at the cold medical magazine lying on my lap. Then, I looked back at Thoreau. "Sylvia, where are the boys?" I tried to hold down the excitement in my voice.

"In here, getting ready for their baths, why?"

"Ask them if they would like to go see the White Sox play. I don't think we are too late."

I slid the medical reports into the waste basket.

COLD

GAYLE TOY

Love strode swiftly out of my life, today,
With the security of a smirk wrapped 'round Him.
"Love waits for no one."
He laughed and ran on.

How cold I am
So dank the night; so black.
The winds are clawing, tearing at my gown.
They smell and seethe of Death.
Death?
Whose death?
Someone who by chance once stood
Where I stand now.

FREE

GAYLE TOY

Crisp, yet warm, the moon skims the tip
of a lone owl's wing,
Blue white in her ebony bed clothes.
She is free.

Minute lamps flicker in the extremities of
Andromeda,
Bright, sharp, yet soft in their freshly polished
Brilliance.
They are free.

I breathe deeply, deliberately
And walk with determination,
Wearing only the wind.
I am free.

The night is white with His laughter.
God is pleased.

PURPOSE

KENN KEITH

Notified by letter, I went.
Poked, pushed, probed. I passed.
I rode in a train with others.
Laughter. Jokes. Tears.
We were one.
Train halted, and left.
In the cold night, we stood.
Carted to a Barracks,
yet not to bed.
Sixteen different ones yelled.
Each told us we were theirs.
We were theirs.

Training they called it.
Submission the quest.
Push-ups.
Pull-ups.
Pin-ups.
Now we were men.
We had a purpose,
a country to defend.
We were theirs.

The boat was at the dock.
We were a healthy crew.
We were going for our purpose.

The sailing was not bad.
The water was faulty and green.
Sometimes it seemed peaceful.
Sometimes we forgot,
we were theirs.
Sometimes.

The landing was fire.
It remained with us.
Through the jungle,
passing death,
no longer men.
We were our purpose.
We were theirs.

The tree I lie under is yellow.
It sways, gently sways, in the wind.
Leaves drop.
I am covered.
I am yellow.
I am dead.

Where does my purpose now lead me?
Where shall I now go to fight?
But I think I shall just lie here,
alone and safe in the night.

THE COVENANT

JAY ROBERTS

as downward i spiral
through the so dark tunnel
of the night
blindly
irresistibly
toward the soft salt warmth
of the sea
let there be no talk
of cause
effect
or purpose
little i know of these
defensive ciphers
still less am i concerned

my covenant
personal
sacred
is with the sea
we have no need for the mind's
treacherous intermediaries
that we may fulfill the law
the first of all such laws
and covenants
preceding that of the lemming
by a heartbeat

ARDENNES '44-'45

DONALD SMITH

Strewn silently along Siegfried,
Loosely lie the brave.
Frozen fragments of the freed
Ready rubbish for the grave.

CHILD SONG

KENN KEITH

Tears on a window sill,
drying there,
beneath the bowed head
of a child, watching
other children play in
the street below:
An animal game of noisiness
being conjured before the
small girl's eyes.

“Linda, Linda, come away
from the window before
you fall. Are you warm
enough? Put your shoes
on. Practice your piano
lesson. Don't slouch.”

(Tears on piano keys make
them slippery.)

THE EXAMPLE

DONALD GUINNIP

Look here at this man
And his books and art
As his nook provides him
The enjoyment of seclusion.
Yes, away from loud-mouth
Pseudo-minds talking with
Mindless heads clashed together
In their “profound” black-is-white way.
Fools, hear his voice: silent.
This is a real drinker of real learning.

THE HUNT

DONALD TAYLOR

Slowly I crept,
Heart pounding,
Body trembling.

Upward he leapt,
Muscles straining,
Wings whirring.

Quickly it fired,
Hammer clicking,
Shell exploding.

Downward he dropped,
Feathers floating,
Blood oozing.

Suddenly I stopped,
Eyes burning,
Throat tightening.

SKY-BLUE BRAID

DONALD SMITH

Destiny knows him.
Mud-and-mire,
Hell-and-fire,
Pride-and-ire,
Need that's dire,
Gun for hire.
Low-
Paid-
Killer-
With infantry braid.

THE RATS

JIM STEVENSON

“Orville. There’s water here! C’mere an’ take a look!”

Orville walked calmly up the slope of white, salty sand and looked down at Starkie, who was kneeling beside a small pool of water.

“It’s warm, Orville. But it’s fresh. Ain’t any salt to it.”

Orville dropped heavily upon his knees and pushed his face into the tepid water. There was a succession of gurgles and slurps, and the water was gone.

“Tastes fine, Stark.” Orville rolled over on his back in the dry sand and folded his hands over his stomach. “Ya’ on the ball, Stark. Ya’ on the ball.” He inhaled deeply, flexing the large, powerful muscles in his massive body.

“Orville.” Starkie stood up weakly and wiped a bony wrist across his hot forehead. “You drank ’er all!”

“Why don’t yer look around the island for some more, Stark?” He let his thick arms drop into the sand. The thick, black hair on his hands was snowed with granules.

Starkie pointed towards the small empty basin. “Ya’ drank all the water an’ I haven’t had none!” His eyes widened exposing large, crimson veins.

“I heard ya, Starkie. Go get some elsewheres.” Orville flattened his long black hair over his pasty forehead with a closed fist.

“What if there ain’t no more?” Starkie began to shake slightly, his bony arms and thin face twitching.

“Then yer gots the whole ocean!” Orville laughed.

“Orville, if there’s another drinkin’ hole, I get to drink from it first.”

“Ah, matey, yer gettin’ a little high an’ mighty, aren’t ya? Get goin’ before I break yer leg!” Orville lay motionless, his eyes closed.

Starkie stumbled down the sand slope to the edge of the water and let the surf slap back and forth over his hot, dry feet.

“Orville! Yer not goin’ to take it all for yerself!” he shouted at the breakers.

Suddenly, about fifty feet ahead, Starkie saw a long wooden pole roll in the breakers, turning slowly. One end became sandbound momentarily, then with the next wave, floated up and was pulled quickly back out into the breakers.

“*Zanzibar*. The mast from the *Zanzibar*. Did ya bring any crates with ya? Somethin’ ta eat . . . or ta drink?”

Starkie walked back over the slope to where Orville lay sleeping beside the small basin. In the soupbowl-sized spring there was water. It was half full.

Starkie dropped to his knees and peered into the hollow in the sand. “Water! Orv! She’s a spring! She’s filling up again!”

Orville opened his eyes. They were bloodshot and angry.

“What?”

Starkie dropped to his knees and pushed his face into the warm water. There was a sudden crashing hammer-blow against Starkie’s left ear, and the sky and ground became superimposed, accompanied by a loud, screaming ring tearing through his brain. He rolled to a stop and choked up a thick sweetness that suddenly began to flow from nowhere in his mouth.

He opened his eyes slowly. The blurry figure of Orville slowly raised itself on un-focused knees. An arm wiped across a wet mouth in a ripple and the whole mass rolled over silently. A hand rubbed a stomach and dropped into the sand quietly.

Starkie closed his eyes, squeezing the pain from his head, and pushed himself to a sitting position.

“Orville . . . Ya’ smashed my ear, damn ya’ . . . smashed it right in!” The ringing became a needlepoint pain. Tears rolled from the tightly sealed eyelids. He pulled his hand from his drenched ear and wiped it on his shirt.

He coughed a thick, red phlegm and spat it towards the water hole.

“I’ll drink the next one, Orville. I’ll drink the next one, and I won’t wake you up . . . I can’t hear anything outta’ my smashed ear. . . .” He leaned back into the sand, put his arm across his closed eyes.

The ringing screamed high and loud in his brain, and the blood dripped slowly and dried clinging to his hair. His ear began to itch madly.

Starkie’s breath came slower and easier, and the sound of a waterfall rumbled somewhere behind the ringing, and the scent of fresh pure water tingled in Starkie’s nose. The cottonballs in Starkie’s cheeks turned to snow and melted cool, trickling down his dry, cracking throat.

“Starkie. Find somethin’ ta eat.” A sharp pain drove through

Starkie's ribs. He opened his swollen eyes and looked up at Orville.

Orville stood, his fists on his hips, his thick black eyebrows shadowing the dark black eyes in the evening sun.

"Get up and go get somethin' ta eat." Orville jammed his boot into Starkie's ribs again.

Starkie groaned and struggled to a sitting position. Instead of an ache in his muscles came a dry burning.

He turned his face towards the water hole. It was empty.

"Get up, you lazy stripe-shirt, 'fore I break your leg!" Orville's hands dropped to his sides, clenching into angry fists.

Starkie turned over onto his knees and steadied himself with his hands against the ground and dizzily stood up. "Orville," his voice cracked, "ya drank it all again." He was nearly whispering. "Ya smashed my ear, and ya drank the water."

"Shut up and look for somethin' to eat!" Orville turned and began walking up the slope towards the sparse clusters of shrubs and vines.

Starkie stumbled after him, his eyes following Orville's tracks in the sand. At the top of the small hill he slowly turned in a complete circle. The whole island was sand and shrubs. There was no place to hide from Orville. Just the sand hill sloping away in all directions to the sea.

Orville was fifty feet away kicking at vines and tearing away at small shrubs.

"Ain't nothing ta eat here, Orville." Starkie said, his voice cutting phlegm in his throat.

"Look for somethin'!" he shouted back.

"There's only these small bushes, and there's nothin' on them. . . ."

Orville was paying no attention. He was squinting into the sun that stood red almost on top of the ocean. Suddenly he broke into a run towards the beach. "Starkie! Some of the wreck is floating in!"

Starkie looked into the sunset, and against the glaring flames on the water there were massive silhouettes bobbing up and down.

He stumbled down the slope, his left hand unconsciously feeling the dry crust of his mangled ear.

"Starkie!" Orville shouted. "Look! Crates and crates!"

Starkie moved slowly to Orville's side. Coming in on the tide were six or seven large wooden barrels and cartons.

“Wait a minute, Stark. Take a look at those over there.” He pointed to a cluster of smaller crates coming in down the beach.

Starkie squinted, trying to see through the sticky clouds that covered his eyes.

“Starkie, them crates are carryin’ rats.” Orville smiled.

“Rats?” Starkie said.

“The ship sunk, and the rats climbed on the crates. Must be fifty of ’em on that one box alone.”

The crates bobbed up and down, moving closer to the beach.

“Go get ’em, Starkie,” Orville said.

“Go get ’em? I can’t go out there and . . .”

“GO GET ’EM!”

“Orville,” Starkie began to cough loudly and brought up a mouthful of red phlegm.

“Okay! We’ll let the rats off first.” Orville brushed heavily against Starkie, causing him to fall to the wet sand.

Picking a floating board from the water, Orville reached its full six feet length and began prodding a crate towards the beach. He was as deep as his waist, and with each breaker he jumped with the current and pushed hard on the box.

The top of the crate was crowded with fifty or so large brown rats, all staring at Orville, hissing. Their scum-yellow teeth glittered in the last light of the sea-swallowed sun. Their mouths were wet with saliva. There was a sickening scent of rotting blood and drying flesh. Orville watched the rats hop over each other, kicking and nosing into bones and tattered gristle of their slaughtered.

Orville laughed loudly, and the rats hissed and squealed at him, their mouths yawning open and shut, their eyes snappy with famine. From somewhere there came a sudden, sharp, angry squeal. The rats churned and darted. The top of the raft became a living, creeping conglomerate of fur, swallowing itself and spewing itself back. Suddenly the churning stopped, and small sounds of choking and pleasurable swallowings were emitted from the center of the bristling fur.

The crate thumped against the sand bottom and tipped, throwing three or four rats into the churning tidewater. A sharp claw tore at Orville’s pants somewhere underwater and disappeared with the current.

Orville moved around the crate to the beach side and placed one end of the plank on a long rock reef that protruded above the

water's surface. He stood poised, ready to drop the other end to the crate top to complete the bridge.

The rats suddenly became quiet, their tiny, beady eyes watching Orville as he stood poised. He laughed and looked around at Starkie, who stood on the beach in the darkening blue of the evening.

"Gonna let 'em free, here, Stark!"

Starkie lightly touched the itching crust on the side of his face as Orville stood to the side and let the board drop to the crate top. He stood back, watching the sudden bolt of the rats as they scrambled, tearing splinters, jostling each other, knocking themselves into the sea on the narrow plank.

A sinking, maddened rat snagged onto Orville's pants underwater. It wildly dug its claws into the cloth and tore its way up out of the water and up Orville's belly. He laughed and snatched the rat in his large massive fist and flung it violently toward the beach.

"They're here now, Starkie. There's meat now!"

"Orville . . . they ran into the bushes. We can't catch them"

"When they get hungry, you'll catch them."

The grey moonlight made the ocean black and the sand silver as Starkie and Orville sat on the slope.

"Orville, I gotta drink some o' that water." His voice was full of feathers.

"Easy, Starkie, Plenty where that came from. I'm hungry. Yer crazy to talk about water when I'm so hungry."

A stubby black bush rustled slightly a few feet away.

"Gettin' close, Starkie. Meat's gettin' close."

Starkie crawled towards the water hole.

"Any water in there yet, Starkie?"

The pool flickered under Starkie's hot breath. A terrible fear ran through his whole being as he turned and looked at Orville, who was now on one knee, ready to rise.

"No," his voice crackled. "No water." He turned and plummeted his face into the water.

"Starkie!" Orville's voice came.

The crunch of feet on the sand quickened. "Starkie!" The voice was very near.

Starkie swallowed the last mouthful of water he could catch from the bottom of the basin. A searing rod of momentary pain shot through Starkie's right ear. Then it was gone, and the ringing

was gone, and the last swallow of water hung in the swollen throat incomplete.

"Ya lied ta me! Ya said there was no water, yer rat!" Orville held his breath for a second. Slowly, softly at first, he began to laugh.

"Why don't you come out!" he shouted at the bushes.

Somewhere in the distance he could hear hissing and squealing of rodents squirming into a carcass.

Orville's stomach burned with pain as he chewed the inside of his cheeks. His eyes sparkled. They met Starkie.

"Matey. . . ."

The whole island vibrated in a hissing squealing chorus.

Content, Orville stretched out beside the small pool of luke-warm water. He rubbed his hand over his stomach and chuckled. The chuckle turned to a gurgle, and the rats slinked silently past Starkie's bones. Beady eyes looked ahead of whiskered muzzles. Hair bristled and yellow scum teeth glittered in the fading moonlight, and tiny chatters of contentment rose from the island.

STAGNANT

GAYLE TOY

Scores of Someones throughout Time
Filled their lungs with a poisonous gas
Called Self-Pity.

Nausea resulted and they vomited up
Their Pride.

Scores of Someones looked and saw
Their self-annihilation
But closed tight their lids,
And drowned in the stagnant cesspool
Of the "We."

Only to float to the top an eternity later
And find that "Ape" had been their Essence;
Their only raft, the "I."

ALL THE SHADES OF GRAY

JOYCE WOOLERY

Characters

These characters do not have names. They can be the lady next door or the men you meet in the bus on your way to work.

WOMAN NUMBER ONE	PREACHER'S WIFE
WOMAN NUMBER TWO	TEENAGER NUMBER ONE
YOUNG MAN NUMBER ONE	TEENAGER NUMBER TWO
YOUNG LADY NUMBER ONE	DEACON NUMBER ONE
OLD MAN NUMBER ONE	PREACHER
CHILD NUMBER ONE	

Scene I.

Enough scenery should be placed on the stage to give the impression of a pulpit and pews in a church. It may be very abstract and should have very soft lighting. The people should barely be visible.

The time is unimportant. It may be any church gathering, day or night.

As the curtain rises, the preacher is behind the pulpit and ten people are scattered in the pews. All are motionless. A spotlight suddenly lights the area around a rather large, matronly woman. Her hat and dress do not match, and sprigs of hair poke unfettered from beneath her hat. She rises and speaks. She never takes her eyes off the preacher and nods her head in agreement with him at various times. The color of the spotlight ranges from black to white as the thoughts vary.

NOTE: The italicized part of thought, which is of course the preacher, may be said in a hollow voice by the speaker of the moment or the preacher himself may interrupt.

WOMAN NUMBER ONE: Reverend, I shore wish you'd git to the point. My back is killin' me. I shoul'da' never tried to do all that washin' and ironin' yesterday. (She nods as if agreeing with the preacher.) But Sallie Lou's just had to have that white dress and Buddy Joe—he's awful handsome. He might make somethin' outa' hisself. Imagin' me settin' in a big, black limousine with Buddy Joe! Him smokin' a big cigar. Amen, preacher. You said a mouth full then. Oh, Lord, please let me raise my children right. They're all I got. *If you lived every day as if it were your last, you*

Twenty-five

would certainly change your way of living. Amen, preacher. (She sits down and again becomes motionless.)

(The spotlight focuses on WOMAN NUMBER TWO. She is a small, attractive woman in her early thirties. She is dressed neatly, and she has carefully groomed her hair. It is becoming, although not in the latest style. She stands and speaks.)

WOMAN NUMBER TWO: I'll bet she bleaches her hair. What Harry sees in her, I'll never know. She'll have to fight me for him, though. I love him regardless of what he's done. If he'd come to church with me, the preacher might be able to straighten him out. I think he still loves me. She's just got him interested for the moment. He'll come back to me. I could scratch her eyes out! *Love is intangible*. Is it preacher? I can touch it. I touch it every time I bathe my little son. Every time I put my hand to a sick child's forehead. That must have been what Christ meant by love. I wonder if Harry's thinking about her now. (She sits down and becomes motionless.) (The spotlight picks up a young man. He is well-dressed. He is very handsome. His arm is around the chair next to him. He looks fondly at the girl sitting there. He is seriously attentive to the preacher at times, but he always gazes back at the girl.)

YOUNG MAN NUMBER ONE: Lord knows I love her. She's beautiful. Daddy is so concerned about having a male heir in the family. She'll give him one. She's built to bear children. Lots of them. I want lots of them, too. *Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*. He's throwing that at me. I don't belong in this church. None of them trust me. Just because I have money, they act like it's some sort of crime. We won't go here much longer. She'll realize how they feel about me, and we'll hunt a new church. She loves me. I could make a slave out of her. I believe she would do anything for me. She's wrapped around my little finger. Well, I have to hand it to her. She's from the wrong side of the tracks, but she can make a man feel mighty good. You can't tell she was once disgracefully poor. Of course, it took quite a while to make enough of a lady of her to present her to Mother. Mother still doesn't like her; but Mother is a trooper. She's a real lady. She can hide her feelings. My wife feels right at home with Mother. *And Jesus used another parable to illustrate this point. . . .* (He becomes motionless.)

(The spotlight moves to the young lady. She is beautifully groomed. Her hair is set in the latest style. She frequently returns the looks given her by her husband.)

YOUNG LADY NUMBER ONE: Pompous fool. I hate him and his doting, foolish mother. They think they're such hot stuff. He makes me sick. I wouldn't have married him except for Mom and Pop and the kids. I could never make enough money to help them without his help. If he hadn't been so aboveboard, maybe he could have just visited me now and then and paid me for it. We could have both stayed free. Oh, but he's the innocent type. He didn't even realize my proposition meant anything but marriage. If I can just stand him for another year or two, I'll get out of the damn mess for good. (She becomes motionless.)

(The spotlight moves to an old man. He stands and speaks. He leans his gnarled frame on a homemade crutch.)

OLD MAN NUMBER ONE: *The Lord God sent His only son here to save us from our sins. Do we give thanks to Him? Do we honor Him for it? We should get down on our knees and give praise to Him every night of our lives. Amen!* Emma, I do pray. Every night I pray that I'll be able to meet you in heaven that very night. Lord God, bless Emma and don't keep me away from her much longer. I need her so much, Lord. (He sits down and remains motionless.)

(The spotlight moves to a child fidgeting in his seat. He stands and speaks.)

CHILD NUMBER ONE: Lord, make me like Superman. I'd do everybody good and nobody bad. I'd help the old people and everything. Couldn't you do it, Lord? Amen. (He takes a hymnal down from the rack.) I'd like to hit Molly over the head with this. I hate girls. I wish she'd leave me alone. *As ye must have the faith of a child.* Is that faith like me? I'll bet I can fly. I've got faith. I'll try when I get home. (He sits down and remains motionless.)

(Now the preacher's wife comes into the spotlight. She is a tall, thin woman and is dressed rather poorly. She never takes her eyes from her husband's face. She stands to speak.)

PREACHER'S WIFE: I wish he'd stop digressing. If he'd just follow what I write down each time, he'd be another Peter Marshall. Oh, I wish he'd stand still. He looks so ridiculous sometimes. I wish he'd look at the audience instead of the back wall. I'm afraid

he'll never learn. Well, I've tried. (She sits down and remains motionless.)

(The spotlight is centered on two teenagers. They are busily passing notes. One stands and speaks, and then the other does the same.)

TEENAGER NUMBER ONE: Mrs. MacPherson can wear the corniest hairdos. I don't like her anyway. She's ugly. (Passes a note.) I hope that note explains to her why Glenn doesn't come around any more. She thinks he quit me, but I quit him. She's dying to go out with him. I couldn't stand it if she did. He's the only boy I'll ever love. I just know it. He won't come back to me though. I shouldn't have given him back his class ring that last time. I could kick myself. If I can get that date with Bill that I want, maybe Glenn will see that I mean business and come back to me. Or maybe if I'm prom queen. . . .

TEENAGER NUMBER TWO: I wish she'd stop passing notes to me. I can barely concentrate on what the Reverend is saying. I can't blame her though. She thinks I'm just like her and the rest of the gang. If I should let them find out how seriously I feel about the church, they'd drop me like a hot potato. I like to run around with them—they're really good kids down deep. They just don't think seriously. I wish I had more courage. They might respect me if I told them how I feel. (She answers the note.) All she's concerned with is boys. They are nice . . . especially Ted. He's always at church. He's such a nice boy. If I could get a date with him, my life would be complete. I must listen to the sermon. *And then you must take one final step for Jesus. . . .*

(The spotlight picks up a deacon. He is listening attentively to the preacher. He nods frequently in agreement with him.)

DEACON NUMBER ONE: *Do you feel you have won any lost souls to Christ?* Speaking of lost souls, preacher, you'll be one whenever we have our next board meeting. I'm in favor of getting rid of you, and so is Bob. You're just too young. I tried to tell them that when we hired you. They wouldn't listen to me. Now they're regretting it. Teaching evolution! Indeed! Saying they taught it in college. Saying that you can believe in both evolution and the Bible. We don't intend to expose our children to your fanatical ways. Enjoy your radicalism while you can, Mr. Preacher, sir.

Scene II

(The stage light brightens. The people come alive. The preacher walks to the back of the church and shakes hands with them. They all file out saying, "Sure was a good sermon," "That was your best sermon yet." "Excellent sermon," etc. The people file off the stage and the preacher is spotlighted as he speaks.)

PREACHER: I love this church. It is the best one I've ever had. The people seem so interested. They're all good people. I guess this is the only church I've ever seen in which everybody helps everybody else like the Bible says. They sure live up to Christ's teachings here! (The spotlight dims as he talks, as do the stage lights. Finally all is dark. The curtain falls.)

WHAT DOES THE WILD ROSE KNOW OF HATE

D. WAYNE BEARBOWER

What does the wild rose know of hate?
She concerns herself not with such man-made strife.
She curtsies and sparkles and loves the sun,
In some distant paradise where few men gather.
Those that do come are tender and care for her.
And fondle her lovingly but not destroying her.
She enjoys such admiration, but
Never longs for it, so alone and pure and unworried.

She tucks away at eventide, and dreams beautiful hopes,
But awakens not disappointed, only pleased with
more sun.
Her admirers look, and long, and then leave
wistfully wishing.
They must return, and hate, and know anguish, and
fear death.
The lovely admired, only, stays on in paradise.
And what of death? She fears not, so knows no sting.

THE DETOUR

J. R. EASTLAND

It was a helluva hot Mississippi day, and the speed of the car did not make it any cooler. It was one of those days when the back of your shirt gets soaked and sticks to the seat. The road to Crossville was long and straight. Pine trees formed endless columns broken by an occasional weather-beaten shack. If both shack doors were open, you could see right through them. The sun shimmered off the black tar and danced before you, forming pools of water in the road. The large holes in the aging road kept you shifting from side to side as you dodged them.

The three men had met in Oxford and had been grouped during their training. Jim, the Negro man, was driving the car. He handled the car with his usual ease and poise. He knew this part of the state as well as you know your own back yard, for he had been raised here in a shack similar to the ones that were along the road. This was his first trip back in about five years. He had gone North and was working days and attending night classes. Frank and Ira were from New York. Frank's short muscular arm trailed out of the window in a vain attempt to direct some air into the car. Ira found the back seat cramped as he dozed. They knew what it was like down here for people like Jim.

Smoke was seen rising from a small clearing ahead. A group of Negroes had gathered beside the smoldering ashes which had once been a wooden structure.

"Let's stop and see what happened," said Frank.

Jim swung the car into the clearing in a cloud of dust. The three got out.

"Did everyone get out?" Jim asked.

"There weren't nobody inside. It wuz our church, and some no-good trash burned it last night," came the reply.

Jim inquired further and found out that during the night a group of white men had been seen around the church.

There was a police cruiser there, and one officer had been looking at their license plate. The tall, lanky officer sauntered over.

"You boys a long way frum home, ain't ya?" he asked.

Ira replied, "Yes," without volunteering any more information.

"Ya'll gonna be 'round here long?"

"We're going to Crossville," Ira replied.

Thirty

"If ya'll start any trouble round here, you gonna end up in jail," the officer said.

Under the scrutiny of the officer they got into their car and started on to Crossville. Jim saw him get into his cruiser and pull out a short way behind them.

"We're going to see more of him," Jim told the other two.

Carefully holding the car on the speed limit, Jim watched the advancing cruiser's red light come on and heard the siren. He pulled the car to the shoulder of the road.

The officer advanced, saying, "You boys shore do drive fast."

Jim made a feeble protest, but he knew that it would do no good.

"I'll give you an escort into town and right to the jail house," said the officer.

They followed him into a town which had a population of about two thousand. The main street was tar with worn places and cobblestones showing through. As the car crept along, Jim saw that off the main street ran others of sand, which made the town look as if it had come out of another era. The store fronts were unpainted and streaked with soot. The jail was a foreboding-looking building, distinguished from the others only by its bars. The inside was drearier than they had imagined.

"Where do we pay our fine?" asked Frank.

"You boys jest cool off a little in that there cell, and I'll fetch the judge."

"They sure don't try to hide their feelings about this, do they?" Frank asked.

As the men waited in the cell, it became evident that no rush was being made to get the judge. The hours passed, and still they sat in their prison. That afternoon the judge arrived and set their bail. The three managed to get enough money together to pay their fines.

They emerged from the jail into the sweltering afternoon. The major part of the day had been wasted; so they would have to drive into the night to get to their headquarters in Crossville.

They passed out of the decaying town and on to the open road with the same pine trees and shacks. Their first experience in the state had been what they had expected. A few miles down the road they came upon a detour sign. It seemed strange, for there were no evidence of any construction.

"Sometimes they put these signs up weeks before they start working. So you never can tell if they've started or not," Jim said.

He slowed the car and followed the detour arrow down a bumpy sand road. They were creeping now, and the sun felt as if it would melt them. The dust soon seeped into every corner of the car. They could feel it grind between their teeth. Breathing became a little harder with the dust filling the air. They began to joke about it, saying how nice it would be to get to Crossville and to a cold shower.

All at once a man darted out of the woods waving his arms wildly.

“Stop, stop!” he yelled. “Help me, my wife’s been snake bit.”

Jim abruptly stopped the car. The three men jumped out.

“Where is she?” yelled Ira.

“Back here,” he replied, “in the swamp. We wuz gittin’ far wood when she wuz bit.”

The three men followed him into the woods.

Not twenty minutes later two men emerged from the woods and got into the car. They drove it through the ditch and into the underbrush.

From the steps of the jail house the officer smiled as he watched a distant billow of smoke rise from the woods.

AN EXPLANATION

KENN KEITH

God made our souls a
pencil,
then dirceted us to write;
and we do it tearfully,
with a fervent fright.
So when our tome is
finished,
and we appear quite dead,
say simply to the
sharpening world,
“They’ve gone to get more lead.”

PEOPLE

SISSY McCAULEY

People
People who live unaware
I see them, but they are blind to me in their futile ways.
Existence—Where is their life?
Tears, laughter, sorrow, hate, joy, love—
These people are unaware.
They are without within.
I cannot live as they do
I must create, I must express.
Unaware
They have smothered themselves.
I am an outsider to their mechanical world
I must walk alone.

HOPE I AM WRONG

DONALD TAYLOR

I hear some say You don't exist,
Then how do some explain all this?

I whispered that some time ago
When I had hope and faith to show.

I now must say You don't exist
For now I can explain all this.

I wept this out not long ago
When my strong faith began to slow.

If I am right and once was wrong,
Then "Help" is all we have for song.

SNACK

KATHLEEN HOLLIS

Snacking on ignorance, we:
Munch on mooncheese
Sip of starlight
Swallow the Ape
Profess to know all.

HITCHHIKER

JUD CROSS

hot day
hot pavement
holes in my soles
cars whiz by
“duncan hines recommends”
no money
a hole in my soul

cheap hotel room
cheap booze
have a girl
says she loves me
two dollars please

big wreck
one car
one truck
two dead
lots of blood
burma shave

found some money
gonna take a bus

REBECCA

PHYLLIS ROBINSON

Have you heard about Rebecca,
Pretty Rebecca?
Is it not a shame?
Remember her light laugh?
Think of her delight in the witty, the silly,
The absurd.
And your delight
In Rebecca.
Something gay and unexpected was Rebecca,
Pretty Rebecca.
Pink, blue, fairy green,
White lace, gold-centered daisies
For Rebecca.
I wanted some of the lace,
Some of the daisies,
Some of Rebecca
In me.
I wanted to be
Pretty Rebecca.

Now she is gone and
I remain with you.
With you and your memory of
Pretty Rebecca.
Rebecca never old.
Rebecca ever young, ever smiling, ever beckoning.
Beckoning to you,
Knowing
She is still
Pretty Rebecca.

THE PROPHET OF GOD

MILTON PEARSON

In distant past some men were called to hear
The voice of God in Truth. Their souls did seek
To quench a need long born of hearts grown bleak;
But hearing jarred their patterned lives with fear;
“Go forth” God then would bid a lonely seer
To speak “Thus saith the Lord” to children weak;
But chastened priest and king did smite his cheek
And stone him, breaking life with taunt and jeer.
Frail time has passed and clearly shines that light;
Yet modern men recoil to darkness dread.
And though they pray for courage and for might,
The town and church are lonely—all have fled
Still hoping some one man may stand and fight.
They fear to die for faith—but they are dead.

FREIGHT TRAIN '35

DONALD SMITH

Clickety-click, Clickety-clack, Oo-wha, Oo-wha
Click and whistle on the road
Slam your drivers under that load
Pistons ramming, couplings jerking
Fireman sweating, Brakeman working,
Clickety-click, Clickety-clack, Oo-wha, Oo-wha
Rolling-steaming, Smoke a-flying, Oo-wha, Oo-wha
Roll and shudder on the rails
Boxcars empty, stockcar wails
Engine driving, Waygear tailing
Hogger pushing, Captain balling
Rolling-steaming, Smoke a-flying, Oo-wha, Oo-wha

THE STORM

KAREN BELL

Gone is the sun from yon dark, distant hills.
Their green splendor stands splotched with patches of night.
The steel grey clouds race toward the rim of light,
And the wind in sudden sticky silence stills
The bleak shadows. Swiftly the air fills
With the hum and drone of beetles and bees. Birds bright
In shades of blues and reds and browns fight
To scrouge into the nearest ark. The wind wills
Its way with the waves of the powerful Sea;
The blades of grass droop their slender faces.
Angry Jove hurls his staff across the sky,
And ponders not the upturned leaves' solemn plea
For moist blessing. The mud turtle braces
His house and waits; he knows the storm is nigh.

TEA WITH SANDY

KENN KEITH

Miss Emma seldom ventured from her house. One of her nephews, from whom his dying mother had drawn a promise to care for Aunt Emma, came every Thursday and cut Miss Emma's lovely, smooth lawn and trimmed Miss Emma's beautiful, green hedges, and did Miss Emma's meager shopping for the coming week. Miss Emma's nephew, no longer in mourning for his dead mother, thought his Aunt Emma was a pain in the neck. Miss Emma thought her nephew, whom she had not liked as a child, was a Communist, and spoke to him only when it was entirely necessary. Miss Emma detested Communists, for, many years before, a Russian wolfhound had dug up one of her American Beauty roses.

Miss Emma was sixty-five years old when the Fuffers moved into the recently vacated house next to her own. Miss Emma resented

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the intrusion for several reasons. However, her main objection centered around the Fuffers' two children—a boy of six and a girl of four. Miss Emma's objection was simple enough: the Fuffers' children scampered upon Miss Emma's lovely, smooth lawn as if it belonged to them, and ran down Miss Emma's beautiful, green hedges as though the hedges were meant to lie upon the ground, rather than to grow greenly toward Heaven.

The Fuffers' boy was called Butch, and the Fuffers' girl was called Sandy. Butch was large for his age and had the ways of a demon, Miss Emma thought. The girl, Sandy, in contrast to the boy. Butch, was a small, pale child, and she did not seem to share her brother's obsession with destruction for destruction's sake.

After a time, Miss Emma decided that Sandy had nothing at all against lovely, smooth lawns and beautiful, green hedges, and placed the wrong upon Butch. It occurred to Miss Emma that Butch, had he known he was held in sole responsibility for the act, would have reveled in the knowledge and would have accomplished the deed in an even more thorough manner. Miss Emma reasoned this and decided to love Sandy for the obvious injustice God had done her in giving her a demon for a brother.

For four years, until Sandy was eight, Miss Emma did not speak to the child. If, by chance, Miss Emma went outside, and Sandy spoke to her, Miss Emma would turn away and pretend not to hear. But for those four years, Miss Emma watched Sandy at her play. Miss Emma would sit for hours at one of her dirty windows, sipping warmish, nephew-bought bourbon, and peer at Sandy as she held imaginary tea parties with her numerous dolls. Sandy seemed to be in love with tea parties, and held at least six every day. The tea parties ended in precisely the same manner: Butch would turn the table over, sending dishes and dolls flying, and bringing tears to Sandy. Miss Emma would gladly have murdered the boy, and she strongly suspected that he would grow up to be a killer, himself, one day.

On Sandy's eighth birthday, Miss Emma observed the child at her fifth tea party of the day. Miss Emma suddenly felt a strange stirring of long-forgotten emotion, and the next thing she clearly recalled, she was sitting in a very small chair at an equally small table, drinking murky, salty water from a wee tin tea cup.

Miss Emma and Sandy chattered the chatter of old friends, and Sandy heard, on that day, the plain, austere history of Miss Emma.

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Miss Emma became the father confessor of Sandy on that day, and Miss Emma listened intently to the child's dreams and fears. The party abruptly ended when Butch came and turned the table over, causing Sandy to cry, and forcing Miss Emma to tell the boy that she was sure he would grow up to be a killer. Miss Emma thought she noticed the boy's chest swell with fiendish pride, and so she felt justified in her accusation.

The following day, the Fuffers thought their daughter was struck and killed by a passing car, but, at the very moment of the accident, Sandy was having a tea party with Miss Emma in Miss Emma's kitchen. Miss Emma and Sandy had tea several times each day thereafter until Miss Emma's death five years later.

HIS VICTORY

JOHN SHIELDS

The torrid rays of the tropical sun dispersed themselves over the already parched grass that carpeted the Sarenghetti plains of South-Central Africa. This drought was felt by all. The great beasts of the plains roamed like so many nomads in search of that one last water hole that would sustain their massive bodies even one day longer. The crops of the local natives were things of the past. Long since they had surrendered the fight and wilted in defeat to the relentless dehydrating body. The scent of death was in the air. The huge, black vultures and buzzards circled lazily above waiting for the elephants, rhinos, and other wild beasts to drop that they might tear apart their flesh and quench their thirst with the taste of gushing blood.

For him this was nothing new. He recalled the drought of 1934, and the terrible famine of 1945. They, too, had devastated the plains like the Black Plague that had swept across the face of Europe years before. He shared the misery with the other inhabitants of the plains. His body had become parched until the touch of his hand produced a scraping that sounded like new chalk on a blackboard to his nostalgic ears. The sound reminded him of his childhood and a home that seemed further away than it really was. His body reeked of the sweat and toil that was a product of months without a bath. Under such arid conditions, water could not be considered for such menial tasks. As he sat in his tent, he thought

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of how magnificent it would be to take a shower. He remembered the feel of the warm water as it cascaded forth from the nozzle and streamed over his body. He thought of the fresh fragrance of the Ivory soap as it permeated the air throughout his old bathing quarters. And then, he began to wonder why he sat here in the midst of this God-forsaken country.

His trophy room back home in Atlanta was filled with the spoils of his victories. He had hunted the big game of five continents, and his safaris dated back to a time when man was the intruder on the Sarenghetti and the beasts were not restricted to the game reservations. He was a proud man. He bore the scars of these adventures proudly, like the local football hero who proudly displayed his bruises and scratches to his girl. The black patch over his right eye was the result of a faulty cartridge during an Egyptian hunt. While in search of the great Nilotic crocodile that inhabits this mother of civilization, he had lost his eye. As his steady hand had pulled the cold steel trigger of his new Winchester rifle, he had heard but a solitary click of the bolt. Puzzled by this strange turn of events, he had prepared to unbolt the weapon when he suddenly felt the tearing bite of the white-hot brass grasping his face. He lifted his leathery hand and felt the warm moistness of the blood as it gushed from the socket where his eye had been. Now he wore the black patch with the regal honor of a crown and added this to the list of events that had founded his reputation.

It was this reputation that he valued so dearly that had brought him back to the field of honor for one last encounter with the enemy. The enemy, in this instance, was an old male lion. The great, aging patriarch had sired many prides, and his reputation in the circles of those that hunt commanded respect even from his own reputation. The lion's mane was a thing of beauty. The harsh rays of the sun that punished all else in Africa only sparkled on this lion as they bounded back from the golden strands of hair. Beneath this mantle of honor bulged the sinews and tendons of his heavily muscled body. The mane concealed a huge bull neck that was usually found only on the great fighting *toros* of Spain. Although battle had taken its toll of the animal's great white teeth, those which remained glistened in the same sun that glorified his coat. The great lion was truly lord of that over which he roamed.

As the sun began its relentless trek across the heavens that morning, he loaded his .300 caliber Weatherby magnum and, ac-

accompanied by the alien scent of gasoline, set forth in his Land Rover to challenge this adversary. Because of the thick tangles of scratching briar and brambles and bountiful undergrowth that prohibited further advance by machine, he abandoned his vehicle and with his native guides took to the earth in search of his quarry. As the heat of the ascending sun brought small droplets of perspiration to his tawny brow, he heard the roar. It was distant and nearly drowned by the silent undertones of the wild, but it was unmistakable. It carried with it the force and authority that told his keen ear of the lion's distant presence. It carried with it a challenge supreme; a challenge to build a reputation that would be second to none. It carried a challenge to conquer that had grown keen in the body of this hunter. His heart pounded faster now, his pupils dilated, his breath quickened, and he increased his steps to a feverish pace as he answered the challenge.

As the party approached an elevated clearing, they observed before them this master of the wild. If he could only get closer . . . just three hundred yards, that was all. At this distance, his weapon would discharge its projectile at four thousand feet per second with enough kinetic energy to move two and a half tons. Alone, now, his guides having departed to reduce the chance of scaring off the lion, he drew closer and closer as he cocked the bolt and activated the firing mechanism of his piece. When he was at a suitable distance, he raised the weapon and placed the minute cross-hairs of his telescopic sight precisely and meticulously on the heart of the lion. Now was the moment he had long awaited. With this trophy in his room, he would be undisputed potentate of his profession. The muscles of his forearm drew taut as his finger braced the trigger.

But he could not pull the tiny lever that controlled this aggregation of automated power. Face to face with his foe, it would have been different if he had a knife or his old Winchester, but as it was he could not destroy this patriarch of the wild. For this animal was of the hunter's blood. He, too, belonged to a day in its twilight and a world which had been and which the hunter had known. The hunter had grown to love this world of the wild. He loved it more than the glory this victory would bring. He thought of the magnificent beast on a stuffy wall in his den.

And then he turned and walked away, a far greater victor than he might have been.

WORDS, PERHAPS: POETRY, NEVER

KENN KEITH

The Sun is out and the
kittens are playing
pinochle
on the lawn.
It is a lie, of course.
I have no kittens.
The Sun is out, however.

(Phyllis is going to die.)

Kiss a child and it will
bite you.
Bite a child, and it cries.

(Will she really die?)

Cognac and Pernod are
drunk by Frogs.
If their posteriors were
glass, they would break.

(She'll probably go to Heaven.)

A stein, a mug, a bottle of
beer:
Cheer!

(I hope she goes to Hell.)

Enter Phyllis—
He! I'm gonna die.
Don't cry. Not I.
Exit Phyllis—

A Graveyard Somewhere In Africa:

Phyllis

died

and

she

may

have

gone

to

Heaven

but

we

hope

she

went

to

Hell.

(Kick some dirt on her,
for God's sake, before
the Anteater gets her.)

READING OF THE EPITAPH:

so what if the
silly witch died.
who cares?

The Sun is out and the
earthworms are doing
the Mambo
on my lawn.
It is a lie, of course.
The Sun fell last week.
The earthworms are doing
the Mambo, however.

