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Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

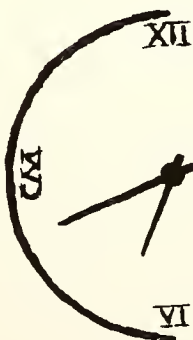
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BELLES LETTRES



1965-66

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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Cover by Craig Meadows

prelude to a storm

f. j. roberts

the small-sunned
overburdened sky
 crushes
 me
against the cold-steel present and i
 whirl
before the gutter-sharp
 jacket-flapping wind
 whose smutty truth assaults my past
and hangs black leaves dead
 and rotting
across the twilight
 grim reminders of the fact

 the table-flat nothing-colored sky
 gives fear tongue
and i flee before the wind's wet burden
bombs of water
 smack the concrete
 bounce and ricochet in
 hot brown-staining fragments
an old man pursuing an errant hat
w h e e z e s a c r o s s t h e e v e n i n g

DEMISE

LANA KRESS

Eye which perceives naught
Ear which believes naught
Heart which bereaves naught
Hand which receives naught
Mind so naive that
Thoughts which deceive . . . not
Present to grieve aught.
The sprite has flown.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

PAT ABNEY

Where is a word to describe this gumbo of
Violence and love
Split atoms and churches
Martyrs and machines
Freud and Kennedy
Jets and A Wall of Shame?

Awareness?

Oh, indeed!
Aware of overhanging death, of time
Passing like a sports car on a sand dune,
Aware of a world of hunger and corruption,
Of glitter and waste;
Aware . . . but helpless . . .

Talking?

A whole hundred years of talking like crazy
About man and God; rationalizing; reasoning;
Psychoanalyzing; pleading; selling;
Arbitrating over U.N. tables . . .
Negotiators for civilization?

World of Invention?

A society progressing toward
“Mental Health” and tranquilizers,
Freeways and split levels.
“Peacetime” with Red China and Viet Nam,
All the hopes of democracy
Riding in space with a man in orbit!

The Atomic Age?

Chemicals of nineteen times a hundred years
In soaring climax . . . AN EXPLOSION!
Not an explosion created by nuclear fission,
But one of . . . HUMAN FISSION.

ODE TO AN EMPTY BEER CAN

BOB TAYLOR

In a corner you cringe, crumpled and bent
Drained of your vital, precious fluid
You lie mangled, mutilated with your brethren.
Forgotten and disregarded, you become only a vague memory.
While you were full and brimming, you were life and vitality
Through you I found a new world
Of beauty, truth, and contentment with myself and mankind
You are truth. You come cloaked in no falsity, you are a mere
honest statement of straightforward facts, but a product of
 ingredients,
Yet more than this.
When you were full, you were my strength and consolation.
I am carried to heights by your fullness
Plunged to depths by your emptiness
Yet people call me weak, and call you my downfall.
The narrow, the petty, the unknowing call you evil;
You and I know different, for between us lies goodness and the
 right.

You are my friend. You do not fail me.
You are permanence and guarantee against a world of frailty.
You are now empty, and I am more lost and forlorn than before.
You are crumpled and bent by this my callous fist of a man,
And I am crushed by the harshness of man's spirit and soul.
We both are wasted, misunderstood, and despised.
Alas, you are empty; I am alone.

A CROOKED PATH

LANA KRESS

God cast me from my home,
Arming me with will and body
And lineage like unto His own;
He dropped me on a crooked path
And dared me to hobble home.

HUMAN TREE

DOLORES ANN ROBB

(Little girl so sad, forlorn,
why view the world with scorn?)

There once a tree in Brooklyn grew
between two dreary buildings.
It strained in clawing toward the sky—
strong spirit never yielding.

This hungry tree from grating sprang
to seek Nature's warming ray;
But buildings hid it from the sun—
brown-edged leaves increased each day.

This tree stretched out its lean, brown arms,
turned its branches to the sky.
Rough fingers begged for soothing rain—
"God failed." Hear their rustling cry?

Some men came to destroy the tree
with axes, saws, and fire.
They failed to kill its clutching roots—
it grew back even higher.

(Little girl for thee I mourn.
Why wast thou ever born.)

in memory of mother

don hill

in a passing reverie
of reflection of the past

i picture your face
amid the dismal shadows of death

while time
continues to exhaust my memory

THE BEAST, WINESPOILER

LEWIS WILSON

Like the searching darkness, curling among
the fields, parched Mind clutches for the pure
wine, pure wine of truth to sate his burning thirst:

Mind sees the only wine there is,
It runs from the Winespoiler's chin
And drips to mix with ugly dirt
That floors the creatures' din.

That polluted stuff that muds the floor,
That sterile mixture of wine and dirt
Yields nothing to the thirsty Mind,
But bugs and worms and hurt.

And all that's left for Mind to do,
To quench his thirst and question,
Is scratch for wine in the bone dry dung,
After the Winespoiler's digestion

O, unattainable wine of truth.

i cannot tell

f. j. roberts

i cannot tell
why april failed
nor why may's whispers
could not warm
the cold death-slumbering
green
perhaps the knives
of march's fear
cut deeper than we knew
or maybe
green is out
this year

the dusten carousel

garry hearne

the morning gerard was born
he found himself astride a massive yellow-orange lion
composed of oak
and decorated by a red-warm saddle
and green-cold eyes
an om-pah-pah, om-pah-pah waltz rhythm
of a nickelodeon had begun softly in the background
and slowly, very slowly, the floor beneath the lion
began to move in a circular pattern.
as the animal began to rock
and sway from side to side
gerard laughed

a large belted, fifty age man
beaming an enamel-wide grin
grinded the pump of the nickelodeon.
children came to ride the horses and the dragons
to keep gerard company
and people with shiny noses
and protruding ears
stood all around the wheel and waved and shouted love
and watched.
the chartreuse, flame, and purple blatant bulbs
pounced off and on and off and on again
and curling ribboned streamers flew from high
and fell around the shoulders of our child
and in his coal-dust hair
and over the mane of the yellow-orange lion

the laughter grew louder, the music stronger
the rocking quicker, and the circle faster

gerard could not see beyond the humanistic wall
surrounding the carousel.
its feather-cream domain
was all he knew
and as no one ever moved to stop the spinning

he laughed for many years
at times he would denote a feeling underneath
whispering stop, stop the laughter
but he did not understand
and he could or would not halt the pouncing pace
to ask
he early learned of thought to give no time
and continued with the others

one night with all the yo-ho's and how do's
gerard grew very tired within the glitter
and fell asleep
when he woke the dew-frost into dust had changed
and the carousel was not moving

the pie-eyed man was not grinding
the clean-chinned people were gone
and the red rose children had vanished
silence and a rattle breeze
replaced the streamers curving through
the animals
gerard and the large carousel sat alone
upon a nomadic and dry-mouthed plain

his mind had never thought before
he could not expect it now

for the first time the child saw the horizon
and choked upon the smothering air
enclosing and covering the land around him
eastward came a tree-height sunken figure
wind blown dust settled in the wrinkles of the jaw
and lay upon the curving of the lashes
“you must come with me”

THE FEBRUARY NIGHT

JAMES K. STEVENSON

A deep sterile blanket
Of melting slush revolves
In eddies moving downward
As night's air-circles dissolve.

A balmy breath of cloudbits
Momentarily scars the snow
As it weeps from closed dark eyelids
And drowns last ember's glow.

Somewhere a smell of newness
Hides fertile, unborn green.
The light cannot be forgotten
Since it's only been foreseen.

These tears of neutral nonsense
Are not of happiness or strife
They're just slush and cloudbits
Eddying behind the night.

EPILOGUE

DONALD H. SMITH JR.

"Illegal" roared the Ref in the sweating resin ring
While the punchy, old fighter danced his sanity away,
(And the screaming, thronging sadists egged the broken
boxer on, throwing verbal punches at his cauliflower brain)
And the murky Kid was shimmering beyond his gauzy glare,
Tapping cruelly at a broken face, its senses long congealed;
Till he hit with force of Hell on Earth and melted him to the Mat.
"Ten" barked the Ref. As they screeched him from the ring,
Plastered to a stretcher and protected by Death's sleep,
Ten thousand watts revealed what ten thousand throats reviled;
The arena was his catacomb, the hollow bell his dirge.

Ten

WORDS COME EASY NOW

PAT ABNEY

Words come easy now . . .
The world will tilt.

All I do is crouch low . . .
Blood o'er me spilt.

Eyes stare from my brow . . .
For the head is slit.

No graves are dug . . .
Bodies pinned to the wall.

Lord of the Bomb fills his mug . . .
A toast to the empty stall.

Look! No longer does Adam slug . . .
Man is gone . . . That is ALL.

the fifth fire

f. j. roberts

Winter howls across the death plain
Fleeing through the dry-smoke darkness
Hiding in the no-mooned night sky
Gives a death kiss to the sun flame
Knows the exile of the out-back.
Spring comes gently as the warm rain
Soaring with the birth soft breezes
Brings the long awaited purpose
Mating with the now-brown earth.
Stubborn levees hold the flood back
Man built dams restrain the fury
Impotent the soul flows onward
Life fires guttering find no outlet
Drown within the ocean's heart flood
Sob filled by tomorrow's tears.

STATUS POLE

LEONARD BURKETT

In the middle of Naomi,
High up on a grassy knoll;
Outlined 'gainst the sky around it
Stands a great, slick, greasy pole.

Since creation it has stood there,
Beckoning to every class;
Getting slimier and slicker
As the generations pass.

'Tis the pastime of the country
'Round about, the game of games,
To see how high up on that pole
It's possible to carve their names.

Spikes are used by all the climbers;
Spikes that range from dull to keen,
And their sharpness is determined
By a marvelous machine.

On the face of this contraption
Is a box to "listen in."
And a horn in which to answer,
When its tapes begin to spin.

Such as this the monster blurts out,
"Trace your family five times back.
Make a list of all the bluebloods.
Count the sheep that turned out black.

Tell how much you earn per annum,
Also what you have on loan.
Place a value on your homestead."
And it rambles on and on.

Finally, "Now information
You would like to volunteer."
Last of all out swings a mirror,
Catches front view, side view, rear.

Then the creature clanks and mumbles,
Grunts and groans and fumes and gripes,
Pauses, sighs, and in a moment
From a small chute spits some spikes.

Now the spikes are clipped on shoesoles,
Then a dash across the knoll,
And a mad and frantic clawing
Starts the climber up the pole.

What a spectacle, that climbing!
And the eye can scarce behold,
All the movements of those people
As they try to climb that pole.

Such a wriggling, twisting, squirming!
Decency does not apply.
Neighbors kick and gouge each other
In this race toward the sky.

Some have climbed too high, cannot hold
Long enough to carve a name.
These slide down to lower stations
With their heads hung down in shame.

Some have died from much exertion.
Some have jumped to doom below
Because of names they saw much higher
Than they possibly could go.

Finally, the game is ended.
All the people gather 'round,
Squinting up the pole, comparing,
Pointing as the names are found.

Now the seriousness of this game
May be shown by quoting here,
The standard prayer of the players,
As the climbing time draws near.

With their hands clasped out before them,
With their bodies almost prone,
With their staring eyes fixed skyward,
This rolls out in pleading tone.

“Take my health, my mind, my money.
Take my heart, yes, take my soul.
Grant me this in restitution;
Help me climb that status pole.”

SONNET II

DONALD H. SMITH

Sweet Westerly fans your meandering face,
Your soft flow kisses the brimming banks to life
With ever sweet touch of outgoing embrace.
The pleasant sounds are not of endless strife
As gently you glide toward our mother's wing.
All you survey is friend, all round about,
Sweet River clear, for all to hear you sing
Of selfless love which comes from him devout.
Chill Norther slows, then halts your clear sweet call.
You draw within as Nature taught you how.
Your gentle lips grow stiff, no longer to enthrall
Or smile on life. Beneath your fear you bow.
But far below your icy cowl so still,
There lies that hope in your slow flow of will.

OOPS!

JULIA HARRISON

fumbling
 tumbling . . . (I)
slip
 flip
 over
 clover
 skipping
 tripping . . . (fell)
right
 quite
 thru
 blue
 flinging
 bringing . . . (in)
happily
 laughily
 oh
 so
 touch
 much (love)

GIRL IN A RED DRESS

BECKY ANDERSON

Why do I stand here
Expectantly in my dress of red.
A girl in a red dress
And why red?
Is there no other color
To be had?
If red is my color,
Why not be a poppy?
(Whose seeds might ease my pain.)
Or flaming like the sky,
“Red sky at night, sailors’ delight,
Red sky at morning, sailors take warning.”
Am I dark clots of blood
 that stain tubercular lips,
Or the scarlet cape with which
The bull fighter flaunts
 the angry bull?
Should I be laughing lips
And smouldering passion
Theatening to bubble over?
Perhaps I am the red flag
That waves down trains
 at lonely stations.
Must I broadcast my redness
Or should the girl
 in the red dress
Hide scarlet feelings
 behind a dress of white?

LIKE TIME

CHRIS BREWER

Time—passing . . .
I cannot hold
I cannot keep . . .
And you
Like time
Will slip away
With all our dreams
Of yesterday.

THE PRICE OF MANHOOD

LEWIS WILSON

In the distant blue-green mist
the mute meditating mountains
sit serene as Buddhas;

and

On the sun touched mosaic walk
the christ-white kitten gambols
with his mother's tail;

and

Lonely, in the springtime field,
among the careless grazing horses,
a rabbit ambles with his broken gait;

and

On the hell-high cliff there stands
the crushed and sobbing unwilling youth
preparing to plunge into a hungry sea,

To plunge and leave behind his
mountain-sure
kitten-gay
rabbit-free
childhood days.

SUMMER ROMANCE

CLYDE CALDWELL

I hold a wrinkled press
Of four leaf clover
Luck to some; my memory
Of golden hair and sand

And here's a faded rose
In one last note left over
From reverence that ended
When summer suns were drowned.

today is

f. j. roberts

this today

like Mobius and
his benighted ass
is far from relevant,
as time stands still for those in
pain,

dripping through the plaster-lathe
of sense

into the cellar where they hide
—the children of next year

or so—

who crouching down to flee the bomb
see time as a liquid drop
dancing briefly through space free
to tinkle in the pan of memory
but we who fall beneath the fact
are too aware that it is we
not time we see that
plummet through the void to smash to
red and crumpled white with
here and there a touch of grey upon
the concrete canvas of that hour
until the color runs away

THE RAINS

BECKY ANDERSON

Somewhere east of morning
Live the rains
That speak with muted voices
To the winds and grass
Caressing the earth with life.

And here I sit in darkness
West of midnight
Tangling my webs
Spitting out my breath
Thirsting for only a drop.

DESPAIR

SANDRA WALLACE

The past is but a dream without fulfillment;
The present but illusion without cause.
My only spark of hope lies in the future,
But can my faith survive this deep despair?

'Twas Yesterday . . . the sky, so blue o'erhead,
Donned puffs of white to stimulate my thoughts
And tease my young and unsure eye as I
Lay on my back in Nature's greenery.

Today . . . a black and evil veil hangs o'er
To claim the throne once reigned by radiance.
The mighty oak which shelters now my soul
Could with one flash of lightning it destroy.

What possible hope can Tomorrow bring
When Yesterday my dreams were shattered and
Today all doubts damned by reality?
My life, my love . . . dead . . . in a rice paddy.

touch me

garry hearne

knock at my door
and I may not open
speak softly
and I might not hear
say hello
and I will continue eating
shout death and life
and I will read my book
but if in fatigue
you say my soul longeth
then I must fall at your feet
and grasp your knees
and if you do but say touch me
what choice have I
but to obey

ANORANZA

SHARON WILSON

I saw the sun set on the ocean,
Watched the ships sail out to explore,
Heard the breakers crash on the sand
And then roll back from the shore.

The gulls swooped down and circled
Round the hammock where I lay,
For it was there where I spent
My childhood, that cottage by the bay.

Now from the edge of the desert
I survey the sights of the land,
And wonder what is beautiful
A cactus, a sagebrush, or sand?

Oh, how I long for the ocean,
The sight of the wave and the shore,
For as I gaze at the desert
I long to be home once more.

“DON’T”

PAT ABNEY

Don't try . . .
 you might fail.
Don't search . . .
 you can't find.
Don't want . . .
 you can't have.
Don't listen . . .
 you might hear.
Don't look . . .
 you might see.
Don't wish . . .
 it won't be.
Don't do . . .
 it's been done.
Don't be . . .
 you are no one.

SONG TO THE SUN

KAREN KRUMM

Beat me, O my Master
Till I am red with thy wrath.
Make me sweat and heave
Under thy burning might.

Strip me of my whiteness
Sizzle me with thy fiery stare.

Tease me with light touches,
Then sear me with thy brand.
Make me long for cool valleys of lush green,
Give me only dry, parching heat.

And, when thou hast gone to rest,
Let me remain tortured with burning pain.

O Master, Temper me
Till I am a suppliant servant of the sun.

STALE WORDS

DON HILL

On crumbs of love and hate I dine, and doubt
This man-made world of which I have been taught.
I suck the sweet and spit the bitter out
And ponder; will I live as though I ought?

I love you man but frown at hunger's fate.
You feed me prejudice, a foolish beast.
I ask you why I live within your hate
And suffer through the hell of mankind's feast.

My dreams ascend beyond your tasteless life,
And visions of a paradise appear.
But drifting back to earth and Adam's strife
I choke at man's repugnant atmosphere.

My appetite for you grows dim on sight.
But hopefully, I last both day and night.

SCARLET RIBBONS IN THE SNOW

REBECCA ANDERSON

Every child has his own fears, of wild animals, snakes, or the darkness. Mine was the man who lived up the road from us. He wasn't huge or deformed or even ugly. He was just a drunk. He walked by our house every evening when he got off from work, and I hid behind the barn or pig pen when he passed by.

Like all farm kids I had plenty of chores. I had to round up the cows every summer morning and evening by five o'clock and milk them. We had twelve cows, and they had to be milked in the right order to keep peace in the herd. I always started with June, then Annabelle, Beauty, Lindy, Peggy, Tiny, Blacky, May, Mona Lisa, Bandy, Glory Be!, and ended with my own little Maggie Milkin' Tine. I knew each of these cows better than I knew my family. I knew the exact spot to put my head against Glory Be!'s flank, so she would set her foot back just right. I could sense the moment I'd better move the bucket to keep Bandy from putting her foot in the milk, and I knew every one of little Maggie Milkin' Tine's ticklish spots. I loved those cows every bit as much as I hated the man up the road from us.

He had red hair, a red face, red rimmed eyes, and his name was Red. Sometimes he stopped by on his way home from work as I was doing my chores. He always said he was stopping to talk to my Dad, but he stayed around the barn. Dad could hardly walk, but he could swing a hefty crutch. When Red was sober he walked on by; when he was completely stoned he went to sleep in the dusty road, but if he was only half-lit he stopped and offered to help me with my chores. Even my ten-year-old mind could grasp the idea that he seemed to be always reaching for my arm or leg instead of a cow's teat, and for some reason my ten-year-old mind could not grasp, I was afraid.

One night I was slopping the hogs, and as I turned from the chute, there he stood, his red hands reaching for me. His third finger was missing at the knuckle. I didn't scream for help; I didn't know about screaming then. I dashed the rest of the slop in his flushed face and climbed the side of the pig pen, landing my bare feet in the slop trough. That night I shivered to remember the feel of his hairy hands when I hadn't been quite out of his reach. His stub of a finger had brushed my shoulder.

One week in early summer Red's mother-in-law took sick and went to the hospital. Mrs. Red wanted to spend the week end with her, and she stopped and gave Dad fifty cents to see that her cow was taken care of while she was gone. Of course Dad couldn't lower his crippled body to a milking stool, but he was generous with all he had: me. In the morning I finished my cows before eight and walked the half-mile to take care of Mrs. Red's cow. I didn't know many cuss words, but I repeated the same few over and over. I milked the cow and put the milk in the spring house. That night I didn't get to Mrs. Red's cow until almost dusk. I had just finished stripping the last bit of milk from the big teats when I heard the barn door open and close. There stood old Red, smiling, saying, "I won't hurt you, Honey. Just let me take a bite out of your leg."

I left the milk bucket where it was, jumped into the hay manger, and swung up the ladder into the loft. That was as far as I could go. I took a pitchfork and lifted up a pile of hay. Then I hid down in the hole. Red came climbing up the ladder muttering, "Where are you, Honey? Damn you, don't you hide from your old Uncle Red."

The hay was making my bare legs itch and scratching my face. The dust from the alfalfa hay was making my throat burn, and my nose and eyes were running. Oh, how I needed to sneeze. Red began trampling the hay; he knew I was there somewhere. He stomped the hay on the other side of the loft and started toward my corner. He leaned one hand against a log on the side of the barn as he trampled a pile of hay a few feet away. That's when I jumped up. My body was small, but my muscles were strong from years of farm work. I grabbed the sharp pronged pitchfork and putting everything I had behind it, I heaved it at him. Two prongs went through his side as neatly as through a shock of hay and pinned him to the wall. I climbed down the ladder and picked up my bucket and went home. I felt a little guilty just leaving him there, but I felt a satisfaction that was greater.

Maybe if there hadn't been such a strict church ban on gossip, I'd have told on Red, but then it was not the kind of thing you'd talk about.

Lucky for him, and perhaps luckier for me, his brother-in-law came looking for him and saved him from a possible crucifixion. Red lost blood, and it took a while for him to regain his strength.

Somehow that near tragedy was turned into a blessing, because he saw the Light and gave up liquor. He stopped drinking and joined the church. Though I detested the man, I rejoiced at his conversion. I was sorry that his children had grown up and gone and could not enjoy it. Red was fifty-one years old, and he had been drinking for over thirty years.

God wouldn't let a wondrous happening like Red's being saved go unnoticed, and he worked another miracle. He gave Red another son. Red's wife was fifty years old when she gave birth to Gerald Wayne.

Jerry Wayne had golden red hair and blue eyes. His baby features suggested nothing of his despised father. Jerry walked when he was nine months old, and soon after that he could talk. I thought he recognized me as soon as his Mama and Papa. He was the center of their lives and the darling of the whole neighborhood. But it was me who was his constant companion. He was the baby brother I didn't have, and his parents were too old to play with him.

We picked wild flowers and went a-fishing in the spring; we picked strawberries and blackberries and went swimming in the summer; we made pokeberry ink and looked for chinky-pins and chestnuts in the fall; and we tracked rabbits through the snow in the winter. A thousand other things I taught this bright-eyed little boy.

Jerry Wayne was sharp as a hound's tooth and learned things about as fast as you could show him. But he never grew right. When he started to school he wasn't quite two and a half feet tall. It was only fitting that he should be different from other children on account of him being special.

His first year in school was my Junior year, and Christmas that year, the weather was rougher than I could remember. It snowed every night and didn't melt a bit during the day. Jerry and I spent most of our time indoors.

Red promised he would take Jerry Wayne out to get a Christmas tree the Saturday before Christmas, while Mrs. Red went off to Roanoke to do some shopping. Right after she left, Red's brother-in-law, Charlie, brought over some Christmas liquor. He and Red got stoned, the first liquor Red had drunk in six years.

When Charlie went home he left some liquor with Red. Jerry Wayne still had to have his Christmas tree, so he and Red went off with the sharpened axe to climb Look-Out Ridge and find one. They

picked out a tree and sat down by it. Jerry Wayne admired the tree, and Red finished the bottle. Soon his head was nodding. Jerry got impatient, wanting Red to get up and cut the tree down. His daddy was dead drunk, and probably could have come closer to flying off the ridge than cutting down the tree. His little boy wasn't discouraged. He began to cut the tree down himself. The axe was almost as big as he was, but he swung it vigorously and had chopped the tree over half through when the axe glanced off the tree and cut a deep gash on the inside of his knee. The blood gushed out in spurts, and for the first time in his six years he was frightened. He huddled close to his drunken father and watched the white snow turn red.

* * *

The old Baptist preacher did not comfort Red. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. He gave you a charge to care for, and you failed, so He has taken His red-headed angel back home."

Red didn't agree or disagree. But the next day he was drunk, and the next day, and the next.

My Senior year, Christmas vacation, it didn't snow at all until two days before Christmas. That night I thought I'd take my sled up and coast off Look-Out Ridge. I climbed up slowly through memories of all the times I had climbed it with a little blue mitted hand hanging on to mine.

Lying at the foot of the tree that was to have been Jerry Wayne's tree was Red. My hatred of him came at once. What right had that old drunk to be lying at the foot of that special tree. I picked him up by the armpits, dragged him away from the tree and left him in the snow. I got on my sled and went back down the hill through the zero winds of a possible blizzard. At the bottom I looked back up the hill. "He deserves to die," I said, "he deserves to freeze to death."

As I pulled the sled back up the hill I swore at myself for coming out to start with. He surely would have frozen. Back at the top I was surprised to see Red had crawled back to the tree.

"Red," I said, shaking him, "Red, get up. Let's go."

"Nah. Nah. I gotta get this tree for Jerry Wayne."

Against his will and mine, I put him on the sled and coasted down the hill as carefully as I had with Jerry Wayne many times before.

THE MIRROR

JAMES K. STEVENSON

I'm not goin' into the room 'cause I'm not gonna look at the mirror where the flies are buzzing around inside. Big giant flies like you see on cows and horses in the country landing on the mirror.

I'm scared of the flies because I bet they will bite and sting me all over and crawl around looking for something to bite. I was in the room when Mommie bought the mirror and when she looked in it after she tore all the paper off I remember hearing all the buzzings like a hundred million bees coming and I got scared and asked Mommie what the noise was and she said that she didn't know. Then I looked at the mirror and there were lots and lots of big brown flies.

First they looked like big moths and then they jumped around in a little ball. Mommie screamed and grabbed a magazine layin' on the dresser and she started hitting on the ball of flies and smashing on the mirror hard and saying "Go on, Howie! Get out of the room!" and she pinched my shoulder hard with her hand and closed the door behind me and I could hear loud buzzing and the whap whap whap of the paper hitting on the mirror.

Then Dad came home early and went into the bedroom and I snuck up and watched him look close at the mirror after he hit it with the fly swatter a few times.

Mommie stood behind him and she looked scarder than I ever saw her before then Dad started to laugh and Mommie looked at him with her face all yellow and her eyes big mouth big and empty.

"Those flies aren't on the outside of the mirror, dear."

"What? They're not what?" Mommie was all yellow behind Dad.

"They're on the inside of the mirror. See? You can see their undersides and bottoms of their feet on the inside of the mirror."

"Then they're not real?"

"Did you look behind the mirror, Myrt?"

There's nothing behind the mirror but a wall and I think it's funny for Daddy to take the mirror off the wall to look behind it to see if there are any flies. The flies are in the there and want to get in the here but they can't because the mirror is made out of glass and there's nothing behind it but the wall.

I'm scared to go in there 'cause lots of people came and looked at the flies and went away scared and laughing and mad and

Twenty-five

finally Dad didn't take it down and Mommie put a cloth over it and didn't look in it anymore.

"Called Donnahugh, Myrt."

Donnahugh is a man that always comes out to eat on weekends when he's not in his factory place. Once he took me to his factory place and I saw all these televisions with wavy green lines instead of pictures and lots of buttons all over the walls with red and blue lights and little windows with water meter things and I watched a rocket go up.

"Is he coming out to see it?"

"As soon as he gets off tonight."

I was playing with Billy Todd and we snuck in the bedroom and I showed him the mirror and told him that there were flies that were stuck on the other side of the mirror glass that wanted to get in but I wasn't going to let them get in. I told him that if the glass got broke then they might get in and bite and sting us and I didn't want to get stung and Billy said that he heard his big sister say that big horseflies wait till you're asleep and sting your eyeballs through your closed eyelids and all the water comes out so you can't see anymore and it always stings and stings.

Billy and I listened through the curtain Mommie put over the mirror but we didn't hear anything so I lifted the curtain and Billy looked at himself and I looked at myself in the mirror and there wasn't any buzzing. He said that I was telling a fib and that there wasn't any flies stuck over there in the there place that wanted to get in the here place so I called him a crap and he hit me and we socked.

His face and my ear started bleeding and red from Billy's nose and I couldn't see 'cause of I was crying and Billy was too and just sitting there on the floor with his mouth all over his face and drops of blood dropping to Mommie's rug from his nose.

Mommie heard us and came in. She was mad and she picked me up and spanked me and Billy started laughing and then the buzzing came from behind the curtain and Mommie pulled us both out of the room and closed the door. I couldn't turn the handle because she locked it.

When Billy and I weren't mad anymore we sneaked around to the window and climbed up the grape trellis and slid under the open window to the dresser top and to the floor quiet without making any noise at all and pretty soon we were looking at us backwards in the mirror again.

There weren't any flies buzzing Billy said that maybe if we just stood there and looked and looked and tapped on the mirror the flies would come.

I heard some talkin' outside in the hall and it was Donnahugh and Dad and Mommie. Billy and I got scared and crawled under the bed. The door opened and they walked in Dad saying that he couldn't figure it out that the flies came and covered his face.

There was a buzzing and I whispered to Billy to listen to it that I told him they were real and I didn't fib. We lifted the edge of the big quilt that was hanging almost to the floor all the way around the bed and we could see Daddy taking the curtain off the mirror.

Then there were three big balls of flies in the mirror jumping and buzzing loud and they sounded mean and Billy got scared because he covered his eyes and put his face to the floor.

"What do you make of it, Don?"

"They are covering our faces! They are just massing together and crawling all over our faces . . . in the reflection!"

They buzzed mean and some of 'em flew off their faces and crashed into the mirror hard like they wanted to get into the here place and I started to get scared when Donnahugh ran his hand over his face and the flies jumped and buzzed so loud and flew in a ball swarm in front of Donnahugh's face and crashed into the mirror. Then Donnahugh ran his hand over the mirror and pushed on the glass and the flies jumped and swarmed like mad bees wanting to sting and bite and Billy whispered in my ear that he bet that they would sting our eyeballs and he wanted to go home then Donnahugh started laughing at something.

"Jennings, you have a fabulous sense of humor and a mastermind for practical jokes," and Daddy turned red and he was mad Mommie was yellow and angry and they told Donnahugh that it wasn't a joke and that they thought he had been a good friend and trusted them better than that.

Mommie walked out of the room fast like she does when she and Dad argue and Donnahugh walked out slow and kind of smiling.

"I don't know why you're angry! I think it's a tremendous stunt."

Daddy didn't say anything and he walked out behind Donnahugh and closed the door and the room was half dark since it was after dinner.

Nobody put the curtain back and suddenly the flies buzzed loud

and were gone. I told Billy to come out but he didn't want to 'cause he kept his hands over his eyes and his face was against the floor.

The mirror looks funny when I look at it from the middle of the room.

"Billy, c'mere and look! The flies have all gone away!"

Billy doesn't want to so I let him stay there and be scared.

The window in the mirror is real different looking with sharp lines and outside everything seems to be lighter than if you look outside without looking through the mirror. I can see cars and they look bluer and whiter and it's like everything in there is more here than it is there but the flies are gone.

And Billy crawling out from under the bed isn't scared anymore and he wants to see the flies as long as they don't get into the room and I say that the glass won't let them but that he better not break the mirror.

I wish I could go through to the other side of the mirror because Billy said that everything looked different too and that the cars weren't backwards.

The cars weren't backwards and I wasn't backwards and I thought that I was backwards because when you look in a mirror everything is always backwards and then I saw that Billy was frontwards 'cause he had his hand in his mouth and when I looked in the mirror it was the same hand that I saw when I looked straight at him and I leaned one way and in the mirror I leaned the other way backwards frontwards frontwards? frontwards?

I'm scared of the flies cause they might sting me and I don't want to get my eyeball stung so I'm not going to look at the mirror and look at the cars and the room frontwards when I can see it frontwards regular. It's just when when you look through the mirror everything looks frontwarder.

Mommie got tired of the mirror and the flies because when she would look into the mirror she would start to look scared and turn yellow.

She talked to Mrs. Plumb from next door and showed her the mirror and Mrs. Plumb got sick and started crying cause the flies didn't just get on her face. They were on all of her. I never saw so many flies before cause you couldn't see her face or her arms or her dress or her legs under the flies and Mommie saw me watching and told me to get out.

Twenty-eight

When I would stand in front of the mirror I wanted to go in and come out in the there place where the frontwarder world was but when I tried the glass would bend in and I got scared that I might break it and then the flies would get out but there weren't any flies. There never were any flies when I looked into the mirror and I don't care anymore. I am afraid that they are hiding from me for me to get me and then.

Mommie is here and looking at me.

"Howie, get out of your pajamas and put your clothes on. The Salvation Army is coming out to get that mirror."

Salvation Army coming to get the flies? The unbackwards mirror? that means there won't be any more flies to make Mommie get all yellow.

"I can finally get rid of that awful thing."

It's awful but it's like a window.

I'm afraid of the flies and I don't want to see the mirror 'cause yesterday when I looked into it I saw one and it crawled in front of me on the mirror and jumped and buzzed and landed on my eye and covered my eye in the mirror and I thought it might come after me and sting me because it tried to in the mirror. It hopped on my eye and I ran and the fly buzzed away by itself.

I'm afraid of the flies but I want to see the funny mirror again before they come to get it and make everybody unscared.

The curtain is still here and I can lift it over my head and stand under it in front of the mirror and I hear something like a bumble bee and I know it's the fly and it's coming back to land on my eye but if I don't let it land on my eye then it won't sting me.

It's so big and it looks like a big moth with its wings going like an airplane propeller buzzing an' it's over my eye! and it's going to sting my eye unless . . . my hand broken and glass crashing in my hair and blood and no hurt and water crying noise is falling and falling and my crashing mirror busted and the fly will get out now and

"Howie!"

Mommie is here and she won't let the fly get my eye and make the water come out crying wet hair and stings on my hand and the curtain is all over me. Mommie is taking it off but I can't hear her my crying is louder than her and there is the fly! It didn't get out and it's crawling on my eye in the piece of broke mirror but now there's two of 'em wanting to sting and sting.

THE DISTANT SOUTH

D. H. SMITH

Night is always in a hurry in the tropics. It slides over the earth like oil on water. In its travel case it brings the clashing stereophonic effects of animals, insects, and the unseen. The season of the wet monsoon puts night in an even greater hurry, as if it were trying to get out of the incessant rain; the constant, mildewed damp. This was one of those nights. He would remember it, this September night in 1962.

It was about 2000 hours when he put down his week-old copy of the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* and reached over and turned off the gasoline lantern. He carefully tucked in the mosquito net around his air mattress and lay back to think, then sleep. The rain was drumming on the tin roof of his hut, but he was used to it now, and it served to deaden the sounds of the gekaws and the other slimy things which crawled on the walls and in the trees. His mind ticked off the days remaining to serve in this "Nothing." Six months, twelve days, and four hours to go. If the last five and a half months were any criterion in this purgatory, he knew he had not seen the worst yet. This thought made him start mentally. Eight P.M. to bed, five A.M. to rise. Why? There was nothing else to do. An advisor whose advice is never sought is a useless, lonely man. He fell asleep feeling sorry for himself.

He was suddenly awake to silence. Why? He didn't understand the sudden awareness to his awakening. It was quiet except for the constant rain. A minute or two passed quietly, and he decided that his sub-conscious mind had played a trick on him, so he relaxed and closed his eyes. He came alert as he heard a distant shout, then a burst of machine gun fire, more shouts and then the sound of someone running toward his hut. He jerked back the net and jumped up to grab his pistol from the stool next to the cot. He clicked off the safety just as the screen door burst open revealing his American-trained counterpart, Captain Nguyen Can Tho, out of breath, very wet, and afraid.

"Come fast! The Viet Cong are attacking; I need you. Quick!" Tho yelled between attempts to get his breath.

The advisor put down his pistol, snatched his pants and shirt from the top of his foot locker and pulled them on. When they were partially buttoned, he sat down and jammed his feet into the boots next to his cot without giving a thought to the slimy things which

might have crawled into them. He buckled on his pistol belt and grabbed his carbine as they bolted for the door. Just as they cleared the doorway, running into the dark rain, the first V. C. mortar shell exploded in the compound. The advisor and the captain threw themselves to the muddy ground just as several more explosions spread across the compound toward them. Confusion reigned in the compound as Vietnamese soldiers, their wives and children, and their animals ran for any cover they could find. Between mortar bursts, bugles and shouts could be heard in the wet darkness beyond the fences. Screams and piteous calls for help added to the cacophony inside the compound. Situation Normal—The thought in the advisor's mind above his fear was, "Now he wants my advice."

As far as he could tell no one in the compound had fired a shot yet. The V. C. were doing it all. Small arms fire now cut through the air over his head as he tried both to control his impulse for self-preservation and to help the frightened captain who lay next to him in the mud.

"Captain, where are your officers?" he yelled.

"I don't know; where do you think?" was the answer.

"Where is the radio?" the advisor called in disgust.

"In the shack over there. You work it; get help," pleaded the frightened Vietnamese.

"Let's go then," the advisor yelled as he started to rise.

"No, you go; I'll stay!" the captain called back timidly. The advisor grabbed the captain by his wet shirt and yelled, "You're coming with me, you little coward!"

He pulled the captain to his feet as they ran, crouching, toward the radio shack. A mortar shell beat them by fifty yards. The radio, the shack, and the chance to call for air support all went up in a loud, violent explosion.

The officers dove for the ground to avoid the concussion and the debris. The advisor realized, as he lay in the mud, that he was trembling. This was the first time he had seen combat. After a short wait, he raised his head in time to see a trip flare ignite in the air above the barbed wire entanglements that surrounded the compound fence. He heard a mine explode and a horrible cry as a V. C. lost his legs. The flickering light of the trip flare disclosed about twenty Viet Cong trying to pass through the barbed wire on the west side of the enclosure. The V. C. mortars had stopped momentarily, so he pushed himself to his feet and ran for the

machine gun emplacement on the west side about one hundred yards from where he had lain. The soft mud pulled at his feet and the rain continued to drench him as he sprinted. The firing of the V. C. increased as he ran, and in spite of the darkness he was sure that every shot was aimed at him.

The machine gun was stark and alone when he reached it. He grabbed a belt of ammunition and jammed it into the gun as he simultaneously jerked the bolt to the rear twice to load the weapon. He swung it on free traverse and began firing bursts of six rounds along the west fence into the darkness where he had seen the V. C. for that split second. The gun jumped in his hands as he traversed the weapon up and down the fence line. The belt ran out, and he was jamming another in place when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He lunged around and found one of his two sergeant-advisors standing there with two Vietnamese soldiers.

"I'll take it, Skipper," said Sgt. Black, as calmly as if they were in a training camp.

"Where is Sgt. Ennis?" the advisor shouted.

"Sir, he went to the mortar pits with five men; he'll open up from there in a minute," was the laconic reply.

The hoarse cough of friendly mortar fire punctuated the sound of small arms fire, and in a few seconds the bright metallic light from a magnesium-burning mortar flare lit the whole area. The advisor surveyed the area quickly. He could see V. C. on all sides of the area, some in the wire entanglements and others running toward the fences from the jungle's edge. There must have been two hundred of them. He also saw that the machine gun on the east side was not manned. He had to get there!

He clapped Sergeant Black on the back and took off running just as another mortar flare lit up the area, making him feel like the only actor in the spotlight. The V. C. mortar shells began to fall in the enclosure again. Some of them were white phosphorus incendiary shells. When he realized this he unconsciously thanked the Almighty for the rain. If those shells could ignite the palm-leaved roofs of the soldiers' huts, they would all be silhouetted and make perfect targets. The explosions were coming closer to him, and as he ran the mud was pulling harder at his boots. His momentum finally tripped him up and he sprawled headlong into a ditch which had about six inches of mud and water for a bottom. Another flare ignited as he started to rise, and he found that the ditch also contained several people cowering from the heat of the battle.

Thirty-two

Nearest to him was a woman squatting in the mud, two small frightened children clinging to her wet skirts; in her arms she held a baby who was quietly and busily nursing at her breast. He had never seen such a look of fear as that which the woman had on her mud spattered face. The bright flarelight made her staring eyes seem about to pop out of her head, but the baby in her arms was the picture of contentment. He glanced at them for only a second before he sprinted the last fifty yards to the silent machine gun, the defender of the east fence.

He had it firing in less time than the other one, but not a second too soon. The enemy were almost to the fence when his first burst began to bite into their bodies. The V. C. mortars were seeking the machine guns now, and the Vietnamese mortars, under the command of Sergeant Ennis, were seeking the seekers. The crunching explosions of the high-angle shells drowned out the screams of the V. C. who were dying in the barbed wire from the machine gun fire and the anti-personnel mines that were exploding there. Confusion was still rampant, but he knew that the situation had changed when he heard the machine guns open up on the north and south fences. The Vietnamese had snapped out of their confusion; they were at their posts. The advisor felt relief flood through his fear. Then he heard someone splashing through the rain and mud behind him. He jerked out his pistol as he spun around to meet the threat.

Captain Tho and two of his men were running toward him shouting. Tho jumped into the emplacement and yelled, "We must stop; we are few; they are many. We must save our lives; they want only our weapons; they will not kill us!"

The advisor was stunned at this. To surrender had never entered his mind.

"We will not stop. We're licking them. Can't you see that, Captain?"

"I say we stop. They will send more, and if we kill more, they will kill us! You cannot get air support! You have failed! I will give up now and save lives here," the little captain shouted determinedly.

The advisor swung his pistol with all his might. He felt the hair against his hand as the metal came in contact with Tho's head. The post commander dropped into the mud like a poled steer. The advisor turned to the job at hand with his machine gun and con-

tinued the slaughter of the screaming, howling enemy that were trying to overrun his post.

As the greyish dawn slowly pushed the night westward under the low clouds, its gunmetal glint began to reveal the carnage that lay inside and outside the fence. The V. C. had stopped shooting at the first sign of dawn. The advisor had fired at everything he saw moving beyond the fence as the enemy tried to remove their dead and wounded from the brightening scene. Suddenly it was quiet, and as the silence fell upon him he realized that the rain had stopped. He stood behind the silent machine gun, searching the ground between the fence and the edge of the jungle for a target, but nothing moved out there. Then he heard someone shout behind him. It was a victory cry, a cry of relief, not of fear or pain. He turned and saw his two sergeants, veterans of two other wars, splashing through the mud toward him.

Black shouted to him, "Skipper, they're gone. You've done it!" Ennis was laughing and talking, and the advisor felt a great sense of relief come over him as the three hours of pent-up tension and fear drained out of him. He began to laugh and shake hands with his sergeants. All over the compound people were beginning to move about. He could see the woman with the baby and the small children as she kindled a fire to cook a breakfast for her soldier-husband and her children. Her man was standing nearby having a wounded arm bandaged by another soldier. "Does normalcy return so quickly after a visit to hell," he thought as his laughter subsided.

"You'll get the Silver Star for this, Skipper," Black said. "You saved this place."

"Look! Here comes our gallant commander, Captain Tho. He must have hit his head diving for cover," Ennis cut in.

Captain Tho was marching toward them with an eight-man squad in full battle dress with rifles at port arms. When he was about ten feet from the three Americans, he halted the squad and quickly gave another command. The two leading members of the squad splashed up to the advisor and grabbed his carbine and pistol before he could react or resist. Tho pulled out his own pistol and pointed it at the surprised advisor. Tho came smartly to attention and spoke loudly in Vietnamese to all who could hear him. When he had finished his speech, he turned to the three anxious Americans and said, "I will translate."

Thirty-four

“Captain Ralph Johnson, you are under arrest for mutiny and assault on the commanding officer of this post. You will be held in your hut until you can be turned over to your American superiors for punishment.”

And then, as the tired eyes of the group in the muddy, grey compound watched, and before his ancestors whom he believed to be always watching him, Captain Nguyen Can Tho, District Commander, Army of the Republic of Viet-Nam, calmly placed the muzzle of his pistol to his bandaged, dishonored head, squeezed the trigger, and joined them.

SOMETHING GREAT

MICHAEL McCLELLAND

The black face stared at her, and the white teeth were clamped together in fear or anger—she knew not which. She held out her hand and hardly noticed the contrast as the black fingers intertwined with her own. “I’ll help you,” she said slowly in her best Peace Corps voice.

“Carmen, answer me! Will ya?”

Suddenly she was pulled back from the heart of the jungle in a matter of seconds and looked up to see the flushed, angry face of Ginger.

“I’ve asked you three times what I should wear tonight and you have yet to act like you hear me.”

Ginger had raised her voice until it sounded more like an angry pig’s screech than the voice of an attractive girl of twenty.

“Oh, wear the pink one. It looks so good with your tan and Bill has always liked it.” As she talked, Carmen moved from her relaxed position on the bed to the chair at attention in front of the mirror.

Appeased, Ginger dressed and hurried downstairs to meet her date.

“Right in the middle of my plans,” thought Carmen with some irritation. Yet she had to admit that they were more daydreams than plans. She combed her fashionably straight hair and thought about herself. “Here I am a senior in college, graduation just two weeks away, and I don’t know what I want to do with my life. I could teach, but that’s so dull. I want to do something great.”

Thirty-five

The bright lights blinded her as she accepted the prize for the best novel of the year. The dignified black suit and hat did not hide the fact that she was very young. With the cold metal of the award coming through the expensive leather gloves, the slender, shapely body stepped up to the microphone, her mouth beginning to form her acceptance speech.

Aware of the vacant green eyes staring at her from the tan face in the mirror, Carmen slammed down the comb and seated herself at the desk. Above, a blue uniform, a handsome face full of even white teeth, and luminous brown eyes smiled at her from the picture frame.

“And what about you, my dear Mark? What will I say when you come with that precious bit of carbon for my left hand? Can I make you understand that I must do something great? Can I make you understand that I must be something satisfying, something great? I can’t be just your wife and grow old as many of our married friends have before they were twenty-five.”

The suspense caused the crowd to lean forward with half-open mouths as the well-known actor opened the envelope:

“For the best performance of the year—Miss Carmen Marsh.”

Rushing down the aisle to grab the brassy, nude male statue, Carmen was aware of thundering applause. Her white gown clung to her figure and the crystal beads sewn near the hem made a soft click as her long legs made even larger steps in her hurry.

“Best actress of the year. The world is looking at me now. This is something great.”

Was Mark’s smile ridiculing her silent daydream? Never—for he didn’t even know of it. Carmen picked up her pencil and began writing her last paper for English class with something less than the white-hot heat the professor had requested.

Almost before Carmen was aware of it, certainly before she had time to bask in its academic sun, graduation came and with it came Mark and his ring, and disappeared to that realm known as memory. As Carmen sat on the floor of her room unpacking boxes, she tried to remember how she felt when she first touched the crimson leather covered diploma. Proud—yes—but not the same thrill she would have felt had it been a sweaty black hand begging for help, a wood and metal novel award, or an Oscar with folded arms. Of this she was very certain. As she lifted a plastic bag full of lavender, pink, and green plastic hair rollers out of a box, her

eyes stung as they found the diamond on her hand. The ring seemed to pinch her slender finger, and she removed it to hold it between two perfectly manicured nails. She thought of Mark's eager anticipation as he slipped it on her finger without a word. What could she do? He had been home for two hours—two hours after six long months—why he seemed like a stranger.

"What are you doing with your ring off? Don't you know I put that on your finger for keeps?" Mark took the ring from her and slipped it back on her finger with calm assurance. Putting the bag of rollers on the floor, he reached for her and kissed her possessively.

"Please, Mark, I have to unpack."

"Later, honey."

"No, now."

"Why?"

"Mother's orders."

"Huh—Mother-in-law trouble already."

Securing her long hair behind each ear so she could see what she was pulling out of the boxes, Carmen said, "What do you think about my job teaching at the high school for the summer session?"

"I thought you didn't want to teach. You said it would be too small." Mark stared at a book entitled *Beauty Tricks and How to Apply Them* that he had rescued from the depths of one of the boxes.

"Oh, it'll do until I—well, until I decide." To herself she added that she must decide on that something great soon. I'll decide in the fall, she silently agreed with herself. Yes, in the fall—"Huh?"

"I said that I wish you would decide on the date for our wedding." Mark threw the book over his shoulder with obvious distaste and walked out of the room.

The ring gave her finger an extra hard pinch, and her eyes filled with tears. "I do love him, and I'd love to marry him in a few years after I've done something great. I love everything about him but I have to make the world, or at least a part of it, sit up and take notice of me. I want to make someone aware of Carmen Marsh."

"Hey, honey," Mark fell with a dull thud on the floor beside her, "I talked to my headmaster before I left the Academy and he says that after my year's pilot training in Georgia, I can practically be assured of being stationed in Europe the way we want. Just

think, we'll buy our sports car, an X-KE or maybe a Triumph, and go breezing all over Europe when I have free time. We'll see it all—together the way it should be. Won't it be great?"

"Yes! Oh, yes! Yes!" Carmen's voice got shriller with each repetition in her effort to be enthusiastic. "It will be—great." She couldn't help stumbling over the last word. Standing up and stretching her long arms above her brown-blond head, Carmen thought, "I simply must make some decisions and get myself straightened out. This isn't fair to Mark. It'll be better when everything's all decided in the fall. Yes, in the fall." With these thoughts she followed Mark out of the room.

Ordinary, dull. Nothing great. These are the words Carmen applied to her last three Monday through Friday weeks. Her classes were made up primarily of failures, or students who had flunked English during the regular term and had to repeat it during the summer to keep from falling behind the rest of the class. She dutifully prepared her lesson each night, but her preparation was often interrupted with dreams or plans for her future. Thus, her lessons were oftentimes not as interesting as they could have been. Still, even though she did try, the apparent dullness and uninterest of her students made her wonder about their ever learning or understanding. When her students did talk, they usually said things like:

"That's stupid."

"This ole English stuff's dumb."

"Aw, that stinks."

She spent her week-ends with Mark and dreaded each Monday the way a child dreads a trip to the dentist. It was going to be hard to leave him, and being with him was wonderful if it hadn't been for that vague feeling that continually haunted her—something great. She thought once of telling him that she just wanted to postpone their wedding but for six or seven, maybe more years? She could already see his proud, straight back as he walked away from her after such a suggestion. His pride wouldn't allow him even one backward glance. Once when she had tried to talk to him, they had argued terribly. Tonight she had tried again with no more success.

"Something great? Sure, but what? Don't be such a dreamer, Carmen!"

"Can't you understand, Mark, I have to do something great—something noteworthy, satisfying! Something that will satisfy me."

Thirty-eight

"No, I do not understand." And with the righteous anger of a young lover, Mark slammed out the door.

The next morning Carmen dreaded that prison of forced learning even more than usual. She dressed with something less than her usual care, skipped breakfast, and got in the car to drive to school. To make her outlook even worse, she was to teach her favorite poem and poet today, and as usual, they would not understand it, hence they would not like it. They would make their usual dour comments.

Walking into the room she was greeted with the usual remarks.

"There's old grouch."

"Ya think she really likes this junk."

"Look at that awful dress."

"All right, class, today we will begin our study of Walt Whitman and his poem "*O Captain, My Captain*."

As usual, Jerry, sitting in the front row, came close to throwing up as he grimaced for the rest of the class. He pulled at his glossy, black, Beatle hair, and stared at her with his round blue eyes effortlessly crossed. Then he put his head on the top of his desk, yawned, and prepared to go to sleep.

"Look at Jerry! He's taking a nap." The remark came from a freckled-faced girl too fat to ever make her head touch the desk.

"Let's take a nap too." A head of bleached blond hair looked around the room.

"Class, please be quiet. Jerry. Jerry. Jerry Hackworth!"

"What do you want?"

"I want you to at least sit up in your seat and open your book."

"I don't feel like it. I'm sleepy." He grinned showing even white teeth and resumed his semi-prone position.

"Oh, well," thought Carmen as she began reading the poem aloud. Then they discussed several of the words to make sure of the meaning, and she asked them to read the poem to themselves.

"Now, class, what does this poem mean to you?"

"Is she kidding?"

"Nuttin."

"It ain't got a meaning, has it?"

"Class, do you remember the late President Kennedy? Well, they read this poem at his funeral. Did it have any meaning then?"

Jerry slowly raised his head, then opened his book. "Hey, I liked him. And he was like this captain, huh?"

“Yes, Jerry, it was for him the bouquets and ribbon’d wreaths—for him the shores a-crowding. It did seem like a dream that he had fallen cold and dead.”

Other members of the class joined and soon there was a lively discussion in the room. Jerry was the one most interested. It seemed that he had stores of knowledge about the late President. The hour flew by, and much too soon, the bell sounded. Carmen seated herself at the desk as the class left the room.

“Miss Marsh.” She looked up to see Jerry standing there with one foot on the other and chewing on a thumb nail.

“I, I, well, I want to say that I’m sorry I’ve been so mean. And I really enjoyed that poem today. I mean it was really good. It seemed to come alive, to have some meaning for me personally. And well, from now on I’m really going to try to do my best.”

“Why, Jerry—that’s good.”

“One time I wrote some poems and they meant something to me. Would you like to see them? I can bring ’em tomorrow.”

“That would be nice too. Please do.”

“Ok, bye.”

“Good-bye, Jerry.”

Carmen hurried to a phone and dialed a familiar number.

“Mark, Mark. I have something to tell you. Something great has happened.”

THE SCAR

PATRICIA HAMBLIN

Margo peeked over the top of her magazine, focusing her eyes upon Connie’s dressing ritual. Leaning close to the mirror, Connie applied blue eyeshadow with her long, tapering forefinger. Then she gave each closed eyelid a gentle pat of powder. She darkened her crescent shaped brows with a slender eyebrow pencil. Looking over a varied array of lipsticks, she decided upon a light pink, which seemed lighter against her tan.

Margo helped her into her sleeveless dress which exposed most of her back. As Margo zipped it, she let her hand continue upward, rubbing across Connie’s soft, flawless skin. “You have such a nice tan,” she remarked, her gaze blanketing Connie’s back. “The contrast between it and the pale blue of your dress is simply delightful.” Margo sighed and slumped back into her chair.

Connie continued dressing, brushing her long blonde hair until it shone like tips of wheat in sunlight. She turned her head back and forth letting its softness pamper her shoulders.

The sound of the doorbell reminded her that she was getting ready for Barry. As their parents were dining with friends, Connie turned to Margo. She said nothing, but her eyes revealed a pleading look of helplessness that sought Margo's assistance. Margo's eyes darkened, and vertical lines creased the skin between her brows. She opened her mouth to voice refusal, but instead she grunted, "Aw, I may as well answer it. I don't have anything else to do," and she scuffed toward the door. "I know it will be Barry," she thought.

It was Barry. Flowers and all. He always thought of everything. As Margo ushered him in, she thought that he must surely be the living epitome of all fictional lovers. She wondered whether Connie really realized it. Apparently she did, for at this time, looking simply lovely, she fairly floated downstairs with the lightness and grace of Anna Pavlova. Barry went quickly to her, offering the flowers he had brought. Only a playful curl at the corners of his mouth betrayed his feigned sincerity as he lamented, "I meant to do the flowers no injustice, but my little princess is more lovely than they." Connie's cheeks tinted a soft pink, and her eyes filled with dancing light as she accepted them and Barry's light kiss on her forehead. They looked at one another for a moment, clasped hands, and proceeded toward the door. Realizing Margo was still there, they turned and told her bye.

Margo closed the door behind them, letting her forehead rest on it for a moment. She turned and faced an empty house that was too quiet and still and unsociable. "How many times has this happened?" she queried. "How many times have I found myself left alone in the overbearing quietude of this house? Only the timed striking of the grandfather clock reminded me of my actual existence. Once I didn't mind. It was a perfect time for reading. But tonight it's different. It really does matter. I don't want to be alone."

Margo slowly treaded her way back upstairs in the silent house. Even her footfalls made no sound on the thick carpeting. She went back to her room and picked up the magazine again. Stretched across her bed, she opened the magazine to read, but instead she covered her face with it. There were Connie and Barry again. He

squeezed her waist affectionately, and they looked at each other as though they were the only two mortals on earth. Their looks defied all the woes and evil of mankind. Their sensuous gaze expressed the hopes, the desires, the anguish felt by two lovers whose marital vows await in less than a month.

Margo slapped the magazine against the wall. "Here you go again!" she screeched, striking the floor with her foot. "You always think about the good things in Connie's life, or you're reading and daydreaming. Stop it!" She squinted her eyes and furrowed her brow. Speaking in the same slow and precise rhythm with which she paced the floor, she continued, "Why don't you face it, Margo? You can't go on living through the experiences of other people. *You* have a life to live!"

She crossed the room to the dresser, switched on the lamp, and faced herself in the mirror. There it was in all its ugliness—that sleek mass of tangled flesh that had been burned during childhood.

"Margo, this is the best birthday I've ever had," Connie stated. "Look, I have the candles that came off my cake and some matches too. I like to watch them burn. I can light one by myself." Connie lit a candle and held it up to watch. She decided to light another one; and while she was fumbling for the candle, she held the burning one against Margo's dress and ignited it. Margo watched the yellow flames begin to eat away her dress without realizing what was happening, until the hungry fire reached her arm. "Connie, Mother, *Mother!*" she screamed. She ran screaming from the room, instinctively searching for help. Her dress served as kindling for the flames, while the flesh beneath it absorbed the heat. When Margo reached her mother, her whole left side was aflame, and her hair was beginning to burn. Her mother tore the drapes from the window and smothered the flames with them.

Margo looked back into the mirror at the scar. She could not hide it. She lifted her left arm as far as she could, but it had grown so close to her body while the burn was healing, that she could hardly touch the top of her head.

Margo critically scanned every part of her face. Her dark eyes and long curling lashes were her foremost attributes, but her eyes always seemed to be searching for something. Her hair was cropped short. Her complexion was very light. She longed for a tan, but she knew it would only accent the scar. She smiled, and her full, moist lips revealed straight, even teeth. "Pearls inside a rose,"

she thought. She looked at the scar. The puckered and crimped flesh had the appearance of crumpled paper that had been wadded up and straightened out again. She picked up Connie's eyebrow pencil and traced the scar's edge. The dark outline made it look even more hideous. As she stared at the despicable mark, words of realization escaped concealment in her mind. "The scar looks exactly as I feel toward life. Both are ugly and hideous and spiteful. The scar has maliciously marked me. It deserves to be outlined in black, to have its ugliness reinforced. It has cost me my life. It has made me less than a person. *And it was Connie's fault!*

"Connie, who has a dark complexion accented by blond hair and blue eyes. Connie, who has all the friends and success, who is the agile dancer, and who is good at sports. The champion tennis player. Connie, who has Barry's love and proposal of marriage.

"By right they belong to me." Margo was talking aloud now in frenzied excitement. "I am the older, why should I have not had all these opportunities first? . . . Because I have this scar—where Connie burned me. People never look at me except to study the scar. They never talk to me unless they ask about it. Connie caused it all."

She looked back into the mirror. Her image stared at her as though it were going to make some reply. She gazed into its lusterless eyes. The outlined scar loomed before her. "I hate it! I hate myself, because I have to bear it. I hate Connie! Connie does not know the meaning of frustration or loneliness. Yet, she has caused all of my anguish and defeat through carelessness. Remember that, Margo, and don't forget it!

"Ah, this is more like it. I'm facing reality. Standing up to it. It's ugly and cruel. I know that. I'm not trying to escape the bitterness of life. I'm not dreaming."

Once settled in bed, sleep would not come for Margo. Her parents came in and called to her, "Is everything all right?" She forced herself to say the lying words, "Everything's fine."

"Why tell them the truth?" she asked herself. "They wouldn't understand anyway."

Much later Connie arrived. She heard Connie creep noiselessly into the room, undress, and slip into bed. Connie hugged her pillow and fell asleep quickly.

"If that doesn't beat it," Margo thought indignantly. "I've been

in bed for hours, just lying here wide-awake; she falls asleep in seconds. She makes me so *mad!*"

There was no comfortable position for Margo. She could not lie still. Over and over she turned her body in restless activity. "I am nothing. I am not a person. I will live in Connie's shadow no longer. There is only one thing for me to do."

Margo silently arose from her bed and tiptoed across the room to the closet. She located her brown leather belt and clutched it tightly in stiff, unfeeling fingers. She turned, went decisively to Connie's bed, and slipped the belt around her neck.