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Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

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Belles Lettres

*Eastern Kentucky
State College*

SPRING 1954

Belles Lettres

An annual anthology of student writing sponsored and published by the
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at Richmond, Kentucky.

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FOREWORD

In the hope of promoting literary efforts and encouraging worthwhile reading, we, the Editors of BELLES LETTRES, take pride in presenting this, the second issue of our twentieth volume.

THE LADY OF THE LAWN

H. E. RICHARDSON

I saw the woman in the afternoon
Walking on her lovely lawn
Between the early fallen leaves of September,
Watering her shrubbery.

The sun was bright in my eyes, but
I saw her,
Caught her eye in the glinting
And threw up my hand.
The day was so lovely—and—

She turned
Her dull, unfriendly back to me,
And watered the shrubbery
In the shadows of her house.

Was it some pain that made her turn away?
Was it a fear, or hating
Or sickness unabating
I never knew about, or
Did she care more for
The watering of her shrubbery in September?

There was a disappointment
That was sent with her strange torment
To me, and killed the gladness of the day,
And something was lost there forever.
O, she saw. She saw me I know,

And turned away from me
To see . . .
The wall, the webs, the mud around her shrubs.

Lady on the lawn,
Watering your lawn,
I wanted to call
To make you see; to shout: *When
Ten thousand years from now God's rain will fall,
And his plant will grow,
O, who will smile, or speak, or know—
Who will know us then?*

SONNET OF SPRING

ADA RUTH TAULBEE

The breeze of Spring whispered her coaxing words,
As she tripped merrily from winter's bed,
To all the little flowers and the birds:
"Awake my friends! I'm here! Let fly your dread!
No more you need to fear the chilling wind;
No more the fleecy snow will on you fall;
No more by icy rains your blood is thinned.
So come, let's join our spirits at a ball."
The birds with music all the air will fill;
All flowers who were sleeping in the earth,
As gaily clad as is the daffodil,
Will join the ball all filled with Springtime mirth.
Let every heart help celebrate this day,
For truly, Spring has come and come to stay.

LATE SUMMER

MARY JO CAMPBELL

The day was one of those hot, humid ones which come so unexpectedly in early September, just when summer seems to be gone. It was as if summer, saying goodbye for another year, had planned this day in order to leave behind a vivid impression of heat, moisture, and laziness.

The little boy scooted his bare, deeply tanned feet over the thick rug on the living-room floor and pushed the screen door leading to the porch open with one sweaty hand. The door banged loudly when he let it slam behind him.

The boards of the porch floor were hot under his feet. He walked a little more quickly over to the porch railing and swung his short legs slowly over it. He sat stooped forward on the railing, feet braced against the bottom rail, elbows on his knees.

The little boy sat on the porch railing of a farmhouse which was situated on a hill which was high enough to give a view, from the house, of the surrounding fields, and still low enough to seem close to these fields.

The sun blazed down on his body, and tiny beads of perspiration began to collect on his face. A trickle of sweat, running from the base of his neck down his backbone, felt like an insect crawling down his back.

When he looked up at the sun, he saw a rounded splotch of white heat against a deep blue sky. When he looked away from the blinding sight, he could see dark blue spots before his eyes.

The little boy took a sip of the lemonade from the glass he held, noticing that the once large cubes of ice in the glass had melted until they were but oval-shaped pebbles floating on the top of the liquid. He swallowed the last of the lemonade and rolled the tiny balls of ice over his tongue until they melted. Moving the tip of his tongue over his upper lip in order to savor the last of the cool drink, he tasted the salty perspiration which ran down his face and collected above his lip.

He glanced dreamily at the line of far-away hills stretched across the horizon and let his gaze wander across the hillsides, which were strangely blurred from his sight by a trembling, hazy wave of heat rising from the hot earth like steam from a boiling pan of water. A gigantic puff of white clouds billowed like smoke from behind the horizon somewhere, as if the scorching earth were burning far off in the distance.

Far off, the little boy could make out the lazy tinkle of a cowbell, and the sound of an automobile horn in the distance came only as a sleepy hum. He could hear no other sound, not even the song of a bird. It was as if the stifling air had silenced everything and driven every living thing to the cool shade of a tree, out of sight and out of hearing. The leaves on the nearby trees hung limp, but ready to be stirred by the slightest breath of air, if it were to come.

Directly in front of the little boy, down the hill, was a large field in which piles of hay lay in patches. At one end of the field, half a dozen men were pitching hay from the bristling, dry mounds in the field into a wagon drawn by two steaming, sweating, tired horses.

The little boy watched the men, seeing them as tiny miniatures of themselves, sweating and straining in the sun. They bent their backs almost in unison, jabbed their long pitchforks into a diminishing stack of hay, straightened, and jerked the forkfuls of hay so that the hay seemed to almost fly the two or three feet into the wagon. The men made these motions rhythmically for several minutes and then, one by one, stretched their cramped, aching, sticky bodies, wiped their grimy forearms over their sweating brows, and leaned on their pitchforks for a moment's rest.

One or two of the men glanced at the sun hopefully, but, seeing it could not be more than one o'clock, began the process of scooping hay into the wagon again. The rest of the men sat down on the parched ground and leaned gratefully against the hard wagon wheels. Then, slowly, they forced

themselves to get up and go back to the monotonous bend, scoop, throw, bend, scoop, throw, of their job.

Perching comfortably on the porch railing, the little boy watched the men work for a few minutes, then swung his legs back over the railing onto the porch, and lazily shuffled back into the house for another glass of lemonade.

AT BREAK OF MORNING

JANE PAYTON

The first faint sigh of morning moves across the sky. A bird's clear trill breaks the stillness. The lake is still, too.

As you walk slowly through the meadow, you stop to examine the green blades of grass, each one with its own burden, a tiny dewdrop.

You climb to the top of a small rise and seat yourself on the uncomfortable coldness of a flat rock. You raise your eyes to the gigantic mountains that surround you, magnificent but rocky, pointing their strong spires to the deep blue sky.

You hear a loud, smacking splash and you turn quickly to see ripples widening into larger circles. There is another splash and this time you see a flash of brilliant scarlet twist above the water for a split second before disappearing into the icy blue-green depths. The lake is now fully covered with rings, but soon is calm again.

The sun has reached you now, and you can feel its friendly warmth touch your face. There's a sassy little chipmunk blinking his beady eyes at you from a safe distance. You find a forgotten peanut in your pocket and throw it to him. When he is finished nibbling on it, he flashes his little tail up in quick thank-you and scurries away to be about his morning's business.

You feel wonderfully free and happy. You want to sing at the top of your voice, to leap up the mountainside, or to run plunging into the cold water of the lake to swim like a fish. Your heart and mind are overflowing with the wild beauty and splendor of the scenes just witnessed.

Suddenly a human voice is heard calling, "Hurry up with the firewood! What's keeping you? We're starving!" You are brought back to earth with a jolt and you hurriedly start looking for pieces of wood for the fire. Still, the wonderful feeling is not completely lost, and awhile later with a load of wood in your arms, you stand looking toward the mountains, reliving the wondrous, awe-inspiring spectacle. Then, turning, you walk slowly back to camp.

QUIETUDE

JOAN SCHOLLE

I like the quiet after a storm.
The clear, rain-washed morning
Is like a silent prayer of gratitude
After the bombastic cannoning of Thor.

The rain-soaked branches bow their heads
As the morning sun pronounces the benediction.
The grateful flowers raise their heads
And bask in the warmth of its rays.

At last the spell is broken.
The birds begin their ceaseless chatter.
The sounds of the city swell to a great crescendo
And the silence that was, is gone.

KALEIDOSCOPE

RUTH HULKER

Skates.

Whirling and spinning against tortured sidewalks,
Singing a song that sounds like Spring,
Yet it is a song like no other in the world.
Children's voices—leaping, strident
Create an inimitable, eternal melody;
Hopscotch, a neat and geometric pattern;
Skip rope, a swing and ageless rhythm.

I am not a singer;

I am not a musician.

Yet I would like to sing this song again

With the magic, the freshness, the innocent sadness,
and a glory never repeated.

Trying to touch branches,

Stepping over cracks in sidewalks to avoid a maternal
tragedy,

Wading in rainy gutters,

Struggling with snowsuits,

Preoccupation with marbles and a ring of dust—

Are things I can repeat, and do again,

But not to the same tune.

IT WILL LEAVE

WANDA SMYTH

It will leave—

That feeling of bitterness and sweetness;

A mysterious magic that intoxicates;

The whisper of a world never embraced.

It will fade and disappear

As a fog under summer sun

Evaporates from mist into—nothing.

I need not think or be melancholy

Because I have stood here before

Not dreaming, but sad, knowing I

Dare not.

Smile, my dear, and keep your eyes

Bravely, firmly away from the little Memories—

The way the honeysuckle perfumed the air;

The words—unimportant words—over coffee;

A butterfly on your shoulder,

Flying carelessly as the dreams

Of someone I know.

Smile, my dear, keep your eyes

On the sun, the shadows you find not there.

Hear the melody of a new song.

Learn a new language, that of no return.

It will leave as before, you know.

But for this moment in eternity,

I confess, I do love you so.

“COME LIVE WITH ME”

(NEW STYLE)

With great distress your voice I hear,
Unlike fond dream which I hold dear.
True love is not feeble minded.
But for the sane and so inclined.

Ere sets the sun this day is done,
And maids who tarry to be won
May rue the day proposal hied,
For time can never be denied.

Begin today your place to make;
Old hags do rare of bliss partake.
So if perchance more of you thought,
Come live with me and be my love.

'Tis sad but true the seasons change,
Yet those who live their sleep must claim.
To wake anon and start afresh
Is act for those whom God has blest.

Life without aim holds nought but woe,
Your future safe within I'll hold.
Mere words will not this problem solve;
Come live with me and be my love.

L'ALLEGRO

MARY ELIZABETH JOHNSON

O elf of mystery, sprite of song,
Come skip to me, for you I long.
With lights that show the pulse of night,
With sounds that dance to rhythms bright,
With crowds of folks and one best friend,
With spangled sky and crisp clear wind,
With thoughts of “now” this hour I'm free.
O elf and sprite with these thrill me.

A dress of red I hope might flatter,
But take away that serious matter,
Then let me hear the trumpet climb
To form a scale that is sublime.
My wish for these I now express,
For these will bring me happiness.
It's rush and whirl that I enjoy
And joke and prank by girl or boy.
Not fun that comes by pure creation
Nor laughter by an invitation,
But love of life, and lives of giving,
And lives just filled with love of living.

O elf and sprite, give these to me,
And I will ever worship thee.

THE WIND OF LIFE

JEAN H. BELL

The wind of life is passing me.
It shouts as it goes by.
The wind of life is passing me.
Listen! Do you hear its cry?

I would not listen to its tales
Of what my life could be.
No! I would not listen,
And so the wind passed me.

Now that my life is over
And the past is dead despair.
I think of the silent wind
Whose voice I would not hear.

A DROP OF LIFE

DON SCHAEFER

She was there in the same booth, in the same drugstore where we had had our coffee many times together. It was the morning after graduation, and the big bold hands of the clock behind the soda fountain announced to all eyes that it was 10 o'clock. I first noted her tan knitted dress as it folded from her form; her shoulders cringed around her head against the red leather-backed booth; and she leaned back from the black sounding board in this position with her hands consoling each other. Everything seemed the same—or was it? The same people were doing their same insignificant chores, but they seemed less void to my senses than they had ever before. As I approached, her radiance enveloped the atmosphere as her brown beaming eyes emitted glittering silver rays that overflowed into all the room and ebbed back, becoming more intense as I—with measured steps—drew nearer. I knew then that these four years of college life had not wet down the purity and goodness that she possessed.

However, as I sat down across from her, the dampness was there as we sat, mutely becoming preoccupied—with each other and the future. Rain and sun hugging each other and yet each struggling to have the day—this was the situation. Our coffee came. What a vile liquid to drink—but peering into it seems to relieve the mind, or rather the eyes, from facing the facts. The music that came over the speaker singed our hearts as the words pierced our brains—how true and effective were those little three- and four-letter words in stirring our emotions.

The song ended and there was laughter, shuffling, and horseplay within the confines of the other booths. It annoyed both of us, and quickly out of the corner of my eye I caught a glancing, floating spark which she hurriedly hid by lifting her cup. Having been, myself, fidgeting and fingering the handle of my cup, I ashamedly, sub-consciously, repeated her act. The coffee cooled so fast as it passed by my internal twisted organs that I could not collect my thoughts—the warm liquid was only a seemingly momentary release.

There we were, each knowing how bottomless the infinite number of days ahead would be. Why can't we?—we love each other! But only God knew the answer. We were crippled with the situation, not knowing what to do with expansive yet compressive seconds. The church clock on the other corner then chimed once; it was time for me to leave for the train station. Our eyes met like the golden sun's rays peeking on an overcast day, and we knew—we understood—that this had to be. We searched each other's lips

with our eyes for the fated farewells, and realized each again that we understood. I, rising awkwardly, turned from the sunset and gazed at a hue that to me was a conglomeration. I walked away slowly, hesitantly, hoping that some day—praying that some day soon—I would see the lovely sun rise again.

“Ten cents,” the cashier said. “Ten cents!” Already one particle of my dusty sleep was gone and here I was—amidst life again.

EFFECTS OF SPRING

MARY MCCALL

It's like spring today.
The sun is shining
With that glare of brightness;
The atmosphere is fragrant
With freshness.
There is a mystical, inexplicable something
That disarms,
Takes my ambition,
And leaves me dreaming.

I become arrogant,
And I defy God.
“I will not work!”
I say.
“I know that I have set my goals
And that I have prayed for help,
But I cannot do it;
I am human.”

Man—how vain he is!
He aims;
He strives;
He prays;
He starts his task.
But that is not all.

Then spring—
That frivolous, important thing—
Comes, disarms, and leaves him
Engrossed in dreams,
Not ambitions.
He stops.
O frail man,
O frail man—
Yes, he knows
That he is frail!

INTERLUDE

WANDA SMYTH

“What am I doing here? I had to come—just for a moment. Please, please. Don't let me disturb your meditation. Don't let me intrude.”

“You are not intruding, my dear. Sit here beside me on the stone bench. Here—”

“No. No, don't. Don't touch me. I don't want to sit down!”

“Then, would you like to walk around the garden. The flowers are blooming and—”

“No. No. I don't want anything—really. I just came to—to look—to

look at the garden, at the church. Oh, I can't explain why I came. I just had to—"

"Would you like to go inside the church? It will soon be time for evening prayer."

"No!"

"Is there something wrong? You never come here anymore, but you said that you had to come today. You seem disturbed."

"No, Father. —It seems odd calling *you* that, but it is appropriate now, I guess. Don't be patient with me. Don't keep trying to console me. Don't talk even. I had to come, but I don't want to pray."

"There is something wrong. Can't I help you? Tell me, please."

"No. Please go on with your meditation. I don't want to intrude. I always have."

"How silly. You belong here. How could you intrude? Your problems are mine, my dear."

"How could I intrude!—No, no. I guess I couldn't—really. Don't let my problems be your, not any more. Oh, it isn't important. Let us just be silent for a moment and watch the swallows make shadows against the brown of the stone church. See the black and white cattle grazing over there in the distance near the horizon. We can fill our souls with the eternal beauty of the flowers the good ladies of the church planted in the garden. Must we talk? I had rather just watch the sun set and feel the chill of evening move across the garden. Can't we find beauty and peace in the fading light as it slips away and darkness moves in to become king? Let's just be silent—and remember—just for a moment—"

"I must go now. Thank you, Bill—Father."

"Go! Aren't you going to stay for evening prayer? You have not been for so long—"

"I must go!"

"What is wrong? You are trembling. Why, Luana, you are crying!"

"Am I? Don't bother about it. I am sorry I intruded for a moment. Please don't be concerned. Just try to understand as I have been trying to understand for the past months. Don't frown so. I had much rather you would smile as I leave."

"You are going, then? Luana, look at me. It has to be this way. We have been through this all many times before. Please, you do understand now, don't you?"

"I understand, Father. It is all right—now."

"Luana, may I pray for you?"

"No!—Yes, pray for me."

"And you will come back into the communion, and for confession soon. May I expect you for morning prayer on Sunday, perhaps?"

"Perhaps. Goodnight, Father Goodbye."

SPRING MEMORY

DONNA MINCEY

Like a fleeting sigh
You passed by me one day,
Just a scented touch
Of warm and flowery May.

You were a little breeze
Who fluttered down my street,
And dropped a purple bunch
Of violets at my feet.

I stooped to lift them up
From my freshening lawn,
But then, like a lovely dream,
They—and you—were gone.

WHY

MITZI MUELLER

He led them over ground where blood's dark stain
Spoke mutely of the wounded and the slain.
He led them through the weary days, the nights
More terrible because they had no lights.
A soldier just as they were, at his task.
Their leader. Why? Nobody stopped to ask.
Philosopher? No more than you or I—
An average man, and as such, had to die.
But there were many like him; they remain
And lie there, too, beneath the sun and rain.

His eyes, grown weary with the stress and strain,
With seeing men in peril and in pain,
Accustomed to the dirt and smears of war,
Looked homeward often, thought of friends afar.
His dreams, like theirs, of sleepy summer time
When all the world had reason, Life had rhyme.
Of winter walks, and fireside's cheery blaze.
Of springtime, and its laughter-laden days.
He sees them, but he sees them yet in vain,
For battles must be won—lost—won again.

He wonders, though, as thoughts course through his brain,
What Evil made him brother unto Cain.
He ponders what the enemy must feel,
And wonders at the hardness of his heel.
How strange that man's great efforts go for war
With peace in second place. What fools we are!
Too late, too late. The time, the place is here.
So on with chaos, death, confusion, fear.
No time to think, hysterical, we cry,
And only stop to gasp and fall and die
With this, our final breath, our last refrain—
"Oh, God, don't let it all have been in vain!"

We see, we hear, we do not understand;
Are born of Man, and meet death by his hand.
We pray, in accents harsh with blame and doubt.
Please, God, oh, give us minds to think this out!

LOOKING BACKWARD

LOUISE GULLADY

It is amazing how, as we grow older, our memories of childhood come to us. Even the little things stand out in our minds, things which at the time were of little consequence. Often a person who has been asked to describe an incident out of his past, replies that he can't remember that far back but then a small spark of recollection will bring on more and more until the whole occurrence seems to have happened the day before.

That is how it was with me. I tried to think of something pleasant that happened to me in my childhood. To my surprise, the thoughts which came to me were not of unusual experiences but of every-day occurrences, hum-drum then but cherished now.

My childhood was spent on a farm. It isn't an unusually large farm but it is productively adequate. In my mental roving I thought back to those hot, sunny days when after some pleading my father would allow me to accompany him to the tobacco field for the afternoon.

Of all the processes involved in raising Kentucky tobacco, I liked best to go to the field when the golden stalks were being cut to be hung in the barns to cure. I would stand, often barefooted, and watch as the sharp tomahawk-like knives of steel were used to hack through the green, tough stalks. The warm earth together with the sound of leaves fanning the air before being speared onto a wooden stick created a sleepy atmosphere. Then I would sit in the shade of a big tree and watch the activity from a distance. The air was filled with many scents: rank tobacco; sweet blossoms of morning glory vines which were not completely conquered by the cultivator; fresh, clean alfalfa hay flourishing over the fence; sweat-filled shirts; rich, productive earth—clean, wholesome smells when taken all together.

This was before the tractor and truck took over the heavy farm work. The mule, stubborn but far from dumb, was used for the heavy wagons loaded with sap-filled burley. Often I would be allowed to “drive” the team between the rows of waiting tobacco as the hired men loaded it from both sides. Of course, the mules could have done what I asked of them without my guidance, and they often did. But weren’t they much older and more experienced than I? Nevertheless, I would sit on the rough wagon and swing my feet off the front of it, all the while proudly holding the reins. It was a pleasant feeling to sit there, slowly rolling over the plowed ground which had long ago become hard from the heat of the sun. The iron-rimmed wooden wheels left ruts in the ground which deepened as the load increased. The men, when they wanted the wagon to stop or move on, would say, “O.K., little boss, we’re ready.” It was wonderful, that feeling of responsibility that the child psychologist speaks of.

I was a very tired, very dirty little girl when I dragged one heavy foot after the other into the house after a long hot afternoon in the sun. The cooling breeze of descending night was a welcome relief, pleasantly relaxing to the tired muscles. It had been a strenuous day but a happy one.

Yes, the mind is an amazing thing, tucking away the little incidents with the big, the happy ones among the sad—to be recalled and enjoyed many times.

JET PLANES

MARJORIE JORDAN

Four gleaming specks form a silver diamond against the clear, unending blue of the sky. Higher and higher they go, climbing an invisible pillar holding up the sky. The spectator holds his breath and raises his head, higher and higher, until all he sees is the immensity of the sky and those impertinent silver specks brashly penetrating its long unviolated realm.

Suddenly the spectator swallows a deep gulp of air; the specks have separated. Slowly, so slowly, they break away from one another, and like slowly opening petals of a flower, separate and fall slowly to opposite directions.

Downward they glide, sliding down the curved sky as gracefully as skiers down a smooth slope. Faster and faster they drop, gaining speed; down, down, down, they come, as if they were but dull pieces of earth, scorned by the fastidious sky and hurled away in anger.

Suddenly the spectator jumps, startled. A whooshing roar engulfs him, and then, far in the distance, the silver plane streaks skyward again. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, from all angles the planes swoop down on the gaping crowds. They’re coming—they’re gone. There is a flash of silver, a momentary glimpse of a slender body and tapering wings, a roaring whine, and then the planes rush on, banking, soaring, climbing high back to their homeland.

They were only fooling, coming down to earth. They meant only to tease us, to laugh at the dull rustics bound to the dusty earth and gaping with wonder at the wild freedom of these new gods. Summoned home, the planes frolic together like children, happy and joyous in their home, the sky.