

MISSOURI VALLEY COLLEGE



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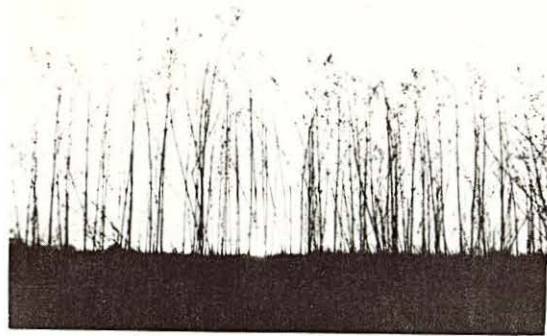
REFLECTIONS

MISSOURI VALLEY COLLEGE

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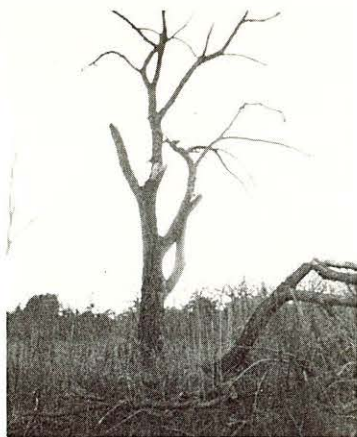
Simplicity;
lines of horizon,
curves of wind—
red and black
as day and night;
the sky
yellow and blue;
sea-tones
green and blue;
the earth
green and brown—
and somewhere
in this
the colors
of us

—J. Mueller

DANCE AND MAKE SOME MOTION

by Charles Gramley

Dance and make some motion,
some great flying thing that soars
and drags you with it.
Guide that heat and teach it what it is,
and who you are.
You are the master of yourself.
Rally 'round me,
hoist yourself,
and riot your own name.
Let it be cause enough to stir
that hot wild blood you feel
so eager in your head.



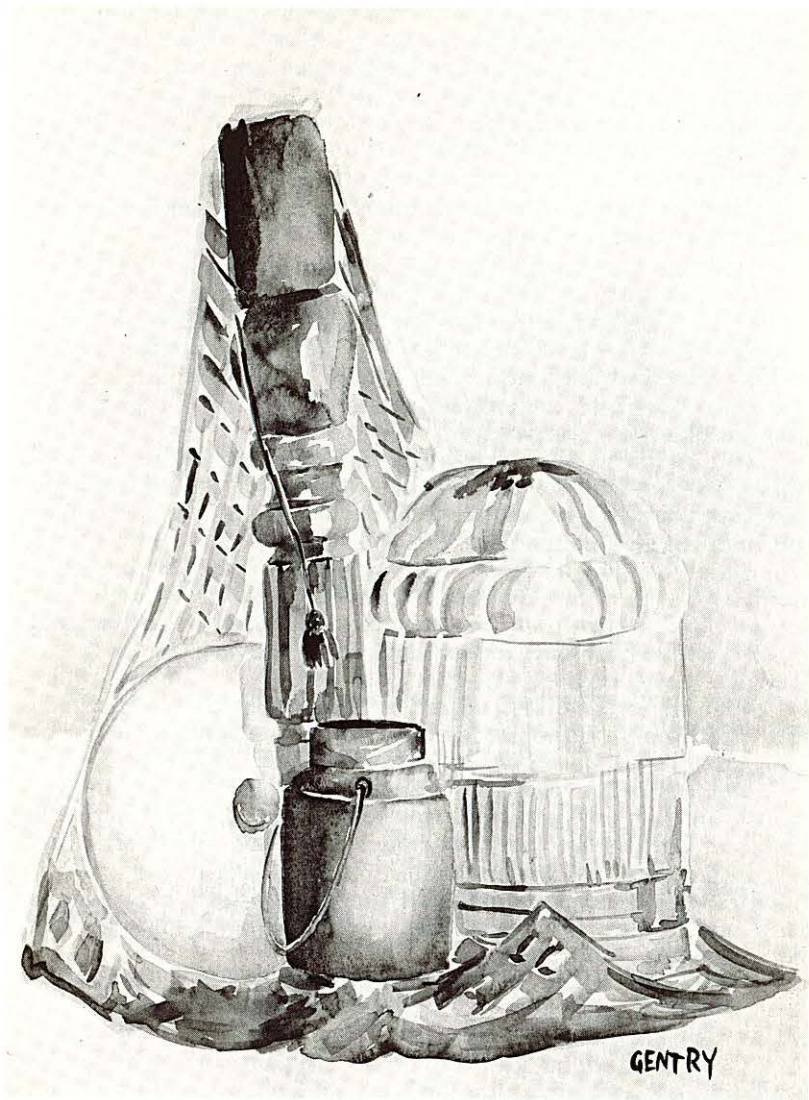
This wind blows down
the corners of my smile;
I remember friends . . .
we made boats
for crossing over;
we sailed in time
and stayed awhile
on the other shore.
Now we live another
and yet another life . . .
and now and then
I still exist
as memory
at a party.

—J. Mueller

GREEN WORLD

by Karen Durham

A window tinted with green
invites the small boy's nose against the pane.
Wonderingly peering into its world,
like people who look through rose-colored glasses,
he likes the effect:
his playground, the sandbox,
green with granules of jade,
and his spring-horse,
rearing a moss-colored back.
Seeing the world as a child,
in its emerald luster and lure,
a fantasy land where castles are built on green sand,
dreamer must wake from a mint-flavored world,
lest it be shatterable.



REUNION

by Charles McCabe

It was January 5, 1967, and T. C. Gloverton slowly wound his way through the hustling crowd of the Kansas City air terminal. As he entered the coffee shop, he saw another young man who looked lonely, seated at a table by himself. T. C. approached the table with the thought of finding someone to sip coffee with and talk to while waiting for the arrival of his three college buddies of five years ago. Their first reunion! He felt disheartened as he thought about it. But a promise is a promise, so here he was.

"Hi, ya, fellow. Mind if I join you?" T. C. inquired of the lone stranger at the table.

"Oh, no, sit down," the young man replied.

"Thanks. Waitress, bring me a pot of strong, black coffee." T. C. ordered as he took his place at the table. Lighting a cigarette, he relaxed, occasionally shifting his slender body in the uncomfortable chair. The stranger sharing the table with him didn't seem too anxious to talk, so T. C. smoothed his dark, gray-streaked hair nervously.

Although the Air Force uniform he wore gave him a certain dignity, he was not the same suave, handsome young man that had bade good-bye to his friends that memorable day five years ago when Clouver College at Clayton, Iowa, had presented them with diplomas. This date of today had been decided upon for a reunion for the four "campus charmers," as they were known. Come hell or high water, the four buddies would meet for their reunion. It was for that reason that T. C. Gloverton had arrived from the east coast earlier than the others. T. C. wondered if the other three, Charles, Lester, and Jim would remember the date, the time, and the place. They had corresponded very little.

Actually, it would be better for T. C. if they forgot, for he had been through hell—a living hell on earth. His rating as captain in the Air Force had been lost as quickly as it had been acquired. He wished the lovely women he had known could be wiped completely from his memory. Yes, the bitterness of the black coffee he sipped reminded him of the bitter experiences dealt him by life in the past five years. Memories can be pleasant as well as unpleasant.

"Mind if I talk to you?" Gloverton asked the table partner.

"Nope. Go ahead," replied the stranger who seemed to be lost in his own thoughts.

T. C. leaned back, lit another cigarette, and began relating his thoughts to this man who said he would listen. "I'm so damn anxious to see my college buddies I couldn't make myself stay away from our planned reunion. Yes, I'll admit I wanted to hide like an ostrich. But I haven't seen them for five years. Five long years, and I'm homesick as hell to see my old roommate, Charles Farmington. Short, chubby Charlie! Boy, did he

like to eat! He had a belly on him like a tub. Old blonde, keen-eyed Charlie was no campus cutie, but he sure was a favorite of the college professors. Why, he studied constantly—just ignoring pretty girls like poison ivy. I wonder if he ever found a gal that would give him a second glance. But you never can tell! Maybe he's married to the boss's daughter and is president of some big corporation."

"Yeah, that's usually the way things work out," replied the lonely looking young man.

The air terminal's loud speaker system blared—"Flight eight will leave in five minutes. Last call for passengers on flight eight."

As he refilled his coffee cup from the pot, T. C. thought how easy it would be for him to escape on flight eight before the others arrived. But no—he'd wait. He'd found that trying to escape from one's self was impossible.

Spying someone in the crowd of people, T. C. thought one face was familiar. Could it be Les? No, just mistaken identity.

"Let me tell you about another buddy," T. C. rambled on. He didn't care if his listener was listening or not—he just needed to talk. "Yes, Lester Jefferson—'politicking Les,' we used to call him. Why, he was the most conceited man at Clouver College. He always got himself elected to class offices. He was just a natural born politician, and a handsome devil, too. Played up to the girls—smiling to show his pearly-white teeth, kissing their cheeks. He'd do anything to get votes. I bet he would even betray his own grandmother if it helped him on election day. Boy, I'm surprised he hasn't run for President of the United States, yet!"

T. C. glanced at his wrist watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. They had promised to meet at four-thirty, so maybe they'd arrive on the plane from San Francisco that was due at the airport at four-thirty. The last he had heard they were all in the western part of the country.

"I hope they show on time," remarked T. C. to anyone who was listening, and slowly shifted his long legs that were getting cramped under the low table. "This damn coffee is killing me—I've got to have a drink soon—real soon."

"You don't look like the drinking kind," remarked the young man at T. C.'s table.

"Maybe I don't," replied T. C. "Boy, I sure hope my favorite pal, Jim McCarthy, gets here. Jim was a tall, lanky guy with brown hair and dark brown eyes that could charm water from a dry well. Wonder if he's still shy, or if the sports critics have made him have a big head? He had one big ambition—to be on the United States swimming team at the Olympics. Boy, could he swim like a fish. He had beautiful form. Good old easy-going Jim."

"Sounds like a nice fellow," volunteered the listener as he changed to a more comfortable position.

T. C.'s thoughts were interrupted by the loud speaker

system at the airport. "Attention! The plane from San Francisco due to arrive at four-thirty will be on schedule and is now circling to land."

Happy day! This was the announcement for which T. C. had been waiting. He arose with such force from his chair that he caused coffee to slosh from the cup. Rushing to the observation deck, he watched the passengers leave the plane. Yes—he could see his friends before they could see him. Would they still look like they did at college?

There they were—all three of them, thanking the stewardess as they left the plane. Emotion crept through T. C.'s veins and a lump seemed to grow in his throat as he watched. Quickly wiping a tear from his eyes, he rushed to greet them.

"Fellows, I was afraid you'd forgotten," yelled T. C. as all four were trying to talk at the same time—shake hands and slap backs. Yes, even a few manly tears fell.

"T. C., you good-looking devil," chided Les with his arm around T. C.'s shoulder. "You always said that the girls would fall for a uniform, no matter who was in it! So I see you outfitted yourself to be a lady-killer."

"Quit it Les," retorted T. C. "If you brought luggage, get it, fellows. Then let's find the men's lounge so we can talk and plan for some good times."

"Same old fun-loving T. C.," remarked Jim. "You've been here longer than we have, so be prepared to show us the town. No luggage, T. C.! Just the cases we're carrying."

"Well, here's the lounge, boys—so make haste and comb your hair slick because we're heading for the bar and some happy-time juice! Agreed?"

"Agreed," all answered in unison.

Within a period of minutes the Clouver College "campus charmers" were in the dimly lit bar at the airport, seated around a circular table with a bottle of booze in front of each of them. This was a surprising situation. Each looked at the other in surprise, for they had not been heavy drinkers while at college.

"Cheers! and bottoms up," offered Charlie. One swallow and their glasses were empty. Was this the same Charlie who had been the studious roommate of T. C.'s?

"Horrors!" thought T. C. "What has happened to all of us? They don't look the same and they don't act like the fellows I knew."

Small talk was exchanged at first between the four and bottles were fast becoming empty.

"Slow down, T. C., slow down," T. C. kept mumbling to himself. When he glanced around the table he realized how disheveled he and his friends must look. He realized how loud and boisterous they were becoming, for the bartender, as well as the others in the room kept glancing with disgust in their direction.

"Listen, fellows," mumbled T. C. "I have to confess something. See that damn bottle of liquor? I'm going to get rid of it

because liquor has ruined me. I was kicked out of the Air Force for drinking. This uniform is rented. Yes rented! Just so I could make a good impression on you."

He was growing louder my the minute. His chums tried to sit up straighter in their chairs, but found it rather difficult after so much drinking.

"We have a confession to make too, T. C.," spoke up Les, "We aren't anything but beggars. We had to borrow clothes, money, everything to get here. The bottle brought grief and poverty to all of us. My wife left me because of my drinking. Charlie lost his job as professor at that big university in California, and Jim would have made the Olympics, but liquor got him first. It's escape, that is what it is! Come on, let's give this rotten stuff back to that man over there. When I count three, everybody throw him their liquor. Okay? One—two—three—throw!"

Standing up, staggering towards the bartender, the four heaved their bottles toward the bartender, missing him, but smashing the background mirror.

Soon a full-sized riot had developed. Everyone in the bar was slugging the other. No, they didn't know why—just acting friendly for the sake of the liquor bottle. T. C. and his pals got on their hands and knees, crawled to the door, then standing as upright as possible, slowly staggered down the corridor.

"We're traitors to Clouver College and to ourselves," stated Charlie as they headed for the coffee shop. "Let's get some black coffee in us and really talk about the good old days. Perhaps we can even make some decent plans for the future. Yeah, maybe we can meet in a couple of years and not be in the class with liquor bums, but proud of ourselves. Men, we've lost our self-respect."

Seated around the table in the coffee shop with steaming cups of coffee in front of them, they were already acting self-respecting. Four young men in an airport coffee shop were realizing that without the past, there would be no present, and without the present there would be no future.

THE DIFFERENCE

by Kathy Herrin

The morning sun sifted gently through the window and fell warmly over her shoulders as Sheila Graham bent over the breakfast dishes. Her blonde hair shimmered under the golden rays and her eyes glistened as she paused, looking out at the somber Kentucky mountains.

How many scratches will there be today, she wondered. How many cut fingers and skinned knees will invade the Buckhorn infirmary? Worse, she thought, would anyone else come to her today as little Jimmy had come last night—beaten, bruised, and badly mistreated, longing only for a tender caress

or a softly spoken word. No, dear Lord, she silently prayed. No, no more.

Her heart lifted as she watched her own blonde, blue-eyed six-year-old come running toward the house. How glad she was that he was happy and healthy, and most of all, how grateful that she could give him a home and love.

It hasn't been easy for him, she reflected. He understood so little about poverty, about hunger and want. She knew how often he failed to see reason for her reprimands, when he tried so hard to be "one of the gang," to belong.

Tommy bounded in the door and stopped short, waiting for his mother's reaction. A cigarette hung out of the corner of his mouth.

"Tommy, you know better than that," she said. "Throw the cigarette away."

Tommy gazed steadily into his mother's eyes, a flicker of uncertainty barely weakening the corners of his set mouth.

"No," he replied. "Why should I? All of the other guys have them."

All of the other guys . . . Dear Lord, she thought, how can I help him understand?

Only a few of the bluish-yellow bruises remained on the arm Jimmy propped under his head as he and Tommy lay stretched in boyish luxury under the friendly branches of the Buckhorn children's favorite tree. In its shade laughter had echoed, tears had been shed, and dreams had been dreamed. Now, bathed in the brilliant sunlight, its mystical spell cast a shadow over the two figures deep in earnest conversation.

"Please, Tommy, you can help me," Jimmy pleaded. "Just once. My family needs food. Just until we can get some money."

Tommy's forehead wrinkled in gloomy despair as the burden of friendship weighed more heavily on his small shoulders.

"But Mama always said it isn't **right** to steal, Jimmy."

"But we need food. Isn't that more important? How would you like to be hungry? I bet you don't even know what it's like. And besides, you're just a chicken any way. You're scared stiff."

Tommy's eyes flashed angrily. Lapsing into troubled silence, his mind raced in utter confusion. Hunger, he thought. No, we have plenty of food. **We** have plenty of food! Of course! We can take it from my house. I'll show him I'm not afraid!"

"Jimmy," said Tommy, cautiously breaking the silence, "you can have my food. We have lots. Mama will never miss it."

Anxiously he watched Jimmy's reaction, as, this time, Jimmy struggled with his thoughts. Mrs. Graham had taken such good care of him. She had been so nice, so kind. Could he steal from **her**? But she'd understand wouldn't she? She'd know how badly they needed food, how much his family depended on him for it. Yes, she'd understand.

"All right, Tommy," he said at last.

"Now," urged Tommy. "Now, while Mama is being a nurse. We have to do it now."

Tommy's head pounded as he ran up the hill to the house, panting in his attempt to compete with Jimmy's longer strides. Reaching the porch, Jimmy waited impatiently for Tommy who hesitated at the kitchen door.

"Come on," insisted Jimmy. "I thought you said you weren't scared."

"I'm **not** scared," Tommy contended as he pushed by Jimmy into the room.

Ignoring the beat of his heart thundering against his chest, he opened the refrigerator and scanned the shelves. Near the bottom a half-carved turkey waited to be heated for the evening meal.

"Here, Jimmy," said Tommy, as he hurriedly tossed thick slices of the fowl into a sack he had grabbed from the counter. Opening the cupboard, he reached for the bread and handed it to Jimmy.

"Tommy, is that you?" Startled by the voice from the hall, Tommy stood transfixed, dropping a second loaf of bread as his mother came into the kitchen.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed as, clutching the food, the older boy darted through the door. Mrs. Graham's confused face turned to her small, blonde-headed boy whose eyes fell quickly to the floor.

"Tommy, what were you doing?" she asked.

His head bowed, Tommy intently studied his shoelaces. His mouth turned down in a frown as he wished with all his might that the earth would swallow him up.

"Tommy!" insisted his mother.

The blue eyes which lifted to the anxious face were wide with fear.

"Oh, Mama, I didn't want to do it, but Jimmy needed food, Mama. I told him it wasn't right, but he said I'd never been hungry, and I didn't know what it was like. Please, Mama, don't be mad."

Mrs. Graham sighed as she sank onto the kitchen chair. Suddenly all the infirmity emergencies of the day seemed infinitesimal to the problem before her now. She knew how to stop the tears from a bodily pain—a bandage, a shot, a dose of medicine and soon the discomfort would be forgotten. But this was different. Here stood her broken hearted little boy, tears threatening to escape from the fluttering eyelids with which he tried so desperately to control them. The prescription for healing a heart wasn't quite so easy, especially when it was one so young and dear to her.

"Tommy," she said gently, "we do have enough food, and we should be very thankful that we are not hungry as Jimmy and his family are sometimes. I'm glad that you wanted to share what we have with your friends. Sharing is a very important part of being the happy, understanding little boy that God wants you to be. I'm sure He's pleased with you, dear." Sheila Graham drew a long, deep breath before plunging more sternly into the

words she dreaded so. "But, Tommy, it's not right to steal. You knew that, and yet you helped Jimmy. I'm sure you wanted to help because you are his friend, but a good friend would help him **not** to steal, Tommy, a good friend would help him to do what is right."

She closely watched her son's face, hoping that somehow he would understand a little of what she had said, and praying that her great love for him could still be felt through the reprimands she must give. She deplored sending her little boy to his room. She wanted so to cradle his small trembling body in her arms and stroke his golden hair, letting his tears fall freely, assuring him that everything was all right. But this, she knew, he must work out for himself. A child's punishment is surely ninety percent for the parents, Mrs. Graham reflected as she rose to prepare the ham which was now necessary to accompany the remaining turkey for the family's evening meal.

Two weeks later all thoughts of the remorse Tommy felt for stealing were as far away as the clear blue sky overhead. It wasn't hard to forget that terrible day while the sun fell warmly on the earth's green floor beneath his toes, and a boy's thoughts turned to dreams of lazy mountain creeks and favorite swimming holes. Whistling his way to Jimmy's house, Tommy concentrated on the fat green frog he planned to catch at the river today. Yes, this was certainly a perfect day in a wonderful world made especially for barefoot boys.

Jimmy's house came into view as Tommy rounded the last curve in the dirt road. Even the depressing, run-down shack before him failed to daunt his jubilant spirit, although he couldn't keep from contrasting the picture of his own clean, comfortable home.

Stepping carefully on the shaky porch, Tommy stopped suddenly before the open door as a woman staggered towards Jimmy.

"Where's the food, I said. Damn it, answer me."

Jimmy backed against the wall.

"I brought all I could get, mother."

"**That's all!**" she jeered. "You ain't good for nothing. Hell, you think we can live on that, do ya'. We'll see who starves around this place."

Tommy gasped in horror as he saw her lurch towards Jimmy and strike him. Now unable to endure the scene a minute longer, he rushed to Jimmy.

"Please don't hurt him," he pleaded to the woman as Jimmy and his mother both stopped, too startled to continue the fight.

Then, picking up the near empty bottle, Jimmy's mother turned the full force of her anger on Tommy. "Get out!" she yelled, preparing to throw the glass container.

"Run, Tommy!" demanded Jimmy urgently to his young friend who stood rooted to the floor in unbelieving astonishment. Awakened from his daze by Jimmy's command, Tommy

bolted for the door and escaped in time to hear the bottle crashing against wood. He prayed that Jimmy had dodged as quickly as possible.

Tears blurred Tommy's vision as he ran, stumbling back along the dirt road on which he had come so happily only a few minutes ago. His wonderful world had suddenly turned upside down and had fallen, as the shattered glass, in a million pieces at his feet. He longed for the warmth and security of his own home—the good food from his mother's kitchen, the stories his father read to him each night before going to bed, his father's strong arms and his mother's gentle caress. The distance between his house and Jimmy's had never been so long. Would he ever reach home? As if in answer to a prayer, his feet found the path to the porch and his little legs carried him as fast as they would go into the friendly kitchen and his mother's arms.

"Mama, Mama," Tommy sobbed. "It was terrible."

"What was terrible, darling?" Mrs. Graham anxiously asked her son as she held his small trembling body close to her.

Out rushed a torrent of words in Tommy's breathless attempt to tell his mother all he had seen. Sheila Graham managed to piece together his jumbled thoughts into the story she had so sadly heard many times before from children in the infirmary who sobbingly confided in her warm gentle manner much as her own son had. The only difference, thought Sheila, is that those poor children must go back to face it again and again. She gave her son a tight hug and smoothed his golden hair as his searching blues eyes looked into hers.

"Mama, please help Jimmy," he begged.

Mrs. Graham managed a smile for her big-hearted boy. She was glad he was concerned about other people and proud that he wanted to share his own plenty with others. Only, she thought wistfully, if he could just stay out of trouble in the process.

"Tommy, your father and I are here especially for the purpose of helping all children like Jimmy and their families. We'll do everything we can. Right now, dear, **you** can help Jimmy."

"Me, Mama? How?" inquired the curious Tommy.

"By being that friend we were talking about. Friendship is more than just doing things together; it's understanding a person, and liking him although he has faults, as we all do. Even more, friendship is being so concerned about that friend that you will let nothing lead him into doing something wrong. Jimmy doesn't always know what's right, Tommy. You can help him."

Tommy's eyes lit up with his new importance. He looked up at his mother as she wiped the last tear from his face. How wise and wonderful she was. He reached to put his small arms around her neck and softly whispered, "Mama, I love you."

THE HIGHWAY HASSLE

by John Camp

"You know, Bob, I don't like this idea at all," said George Stevens, shaking the grey locks thinning over his ears, and straightening to look taller than the tapping cane he used to approach the mantle. He lit his pipe, then turned. "The commission will have trouble pushing that highway through without splitting this town. Just thinking about it makes me remember what my father talked about when Old Zion split over the building of a new church or repairing the old one. He said that the split was the worst thing that had happened to the town since it was settled."

"Well, Dad, I don't know that it is all that important," replied Bob Stevens, settling comfortably into the oversize chair purchased especially for his six-foot-three, two-hundred-pound frame. He paused, looking around at the living room he had furnished in authentic early American style. "We don't want to move out of this house. You've lived in it all your life and Ann and I have been here ever since we were married twenty years ago. But the highway relocation will only affect us who own houses in the right-of-way."

"Maybe most of the people don't live up here on North Hill. Their parents and grandparents did, though, and most of the old family homes are threatened. You'll see a large turnout tonight, Bob."

"Okay, Dad, we'll wait until tonight. Right now I hear Ann calling us for supper."

The Stevens' kitchen, where they ate all meals except when company came, was old-fashioned. It had no dishwasher, and garbage had to be carried to the can in the alley. Ann Stevens still cooked on the same gas stove that replaced the original wood-burning one. Despite these inconveniences, she wanted no changes. "Bob," she said as she was dishing the mashed potatoes onto her two young sons' plates, "how can we live anywhere else? This is home. I don't want another house with a lot of shiny new appliances. It just wouldn't be the same."

"I know, honey," replied Bob. "I feel the same way, and so do the boys. I'll speak my piece at the meeting tonight, and hope that the officials listen. Now hurry up. We only have an hour 'til it starts."

True to the grandfather's prediction, many people were at the meeting place, the City Hall. The Stevenses had to park two blocks away because all the closer spaces were filled. Everyone was hurrying to the largest room in the hundred-year-old building, the band-room on third floor. Fresh pain concealed the cracks in the plaster, and the floor had been buffed that afternoon. The windows were open and fans were whirring to try to cool the July evening.

The mayor arose from behind the head table and pounded

his gavel for attention. "Ladies and gentlemen, this meeting will now come to order. On behalf of the city of Flint Hills I welcome you to this public meeting on the highway relocation through our city. We are honored to have present Mr. Derby Johnson, our own representative on the highway commission who will present the commission plan at this time."

"Thank you, Mayor Connor," smiled Johnson, rising. "I appreciate this opportunity to offer to the citizens of Flint Hills the improvements that the commission has proposed for Highway 43 where it passes through the city," he began, turning to the map of the city on the wall behind him. He needed a pointer to reach the river at the top of the map. "The new route will take off from the existing Mississippi river bridge, right here, then follow the present highway for two blocks, and go through the ravine south of Lucas Street where I have put this black line. Can everyone see? Good. Finally, it will cut through this field west of Roosevelt and join the present roadbed about five miles out. In order to keep Flint Hills the great railroad, barge, and truck center that it is, we on the commission feel this improvement is necessary. This route will eliminate the trucks grinding past our hospitals and endangering the lives of the children who attend North Hill Elementary School which is right on the edge of the present highway. We hope that you will support the commission in this progressive move for the city."

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson," said the mayor, standing up slowly on arthritic legs. "The floor is now open for discussion of the question. Yes, Mr. Stevens."

"Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We all recognize the need to improve the highway route. But we also feel that the plan as presented by the commission will destroy one of the cultural attractions of the city, our beautiful 19th century homes and buildings. My house, for example, was built by my grandfather over a hundred years ago. I have restored it to the original state insofar as possible. The city would lose a City Hall that has served the interests of the community for a hundred years. Must we give up these and other buildings to progress? Could we not place the highway through the farmland north of town and bypass Flint Hills completely? Our neighbor down the river, Fort Howard, has done this very successfully. Has the commission considered this solution to the problem?" Bob sat down to the murmured approval of several persons in the crowded room.

"Yes," responded Mr. Johnson. "We considered the route you suggested. However, we felt that the purpose of the new highway should be to bring people into the city, or at least make it easy to get to. While this will be a limited access road, ample opportunity will be presented for the cars and trucks to get off of it and into the downtown business section. Much more

building and expense would be involved if the road were built north of the city because the highway goes south after Flint Hills, not north, and the access roads would have to be longer. And the initial cost of the land would be higher since the route you suggest would require the purchase of prime bottom land."

Other people rose to speak either for or against the issue, offering personal reasons to support their contentions. The owner of a trucking firm liked the proposal because deliveries to his business would be improved. Another businessman opposed it because his used car lot would have to be relocated. When the discussion was over, the mayor again addressed the audience. "The City Council will now adjourn to the council chambers to vote on the issue. We should have a decision within 30 minutes."

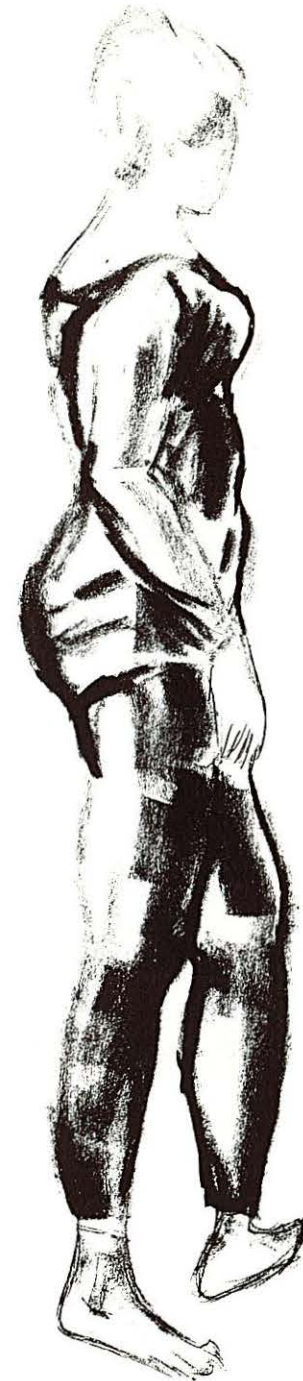
An excited buzzing arose. Everyone began talking to his neighbor, expressing his personal views of the subject. People walked on the creaking wood floors up to the front to talk with the commissioner or out into the lobby for a drink or a cigarette. They complained of the heat and discussed air-conditioning the City Hall. All anxiously awaited the City Council's decision. Barely half an hour later, the Councilmen filed back into the room. Everyone grew quiet as the Mayor stood up to speak. "By a five to three vote, with one abstention, we agree to support the commission's plan, recognizing and regretting the hardship that some of our citizens must put up with to put this plan into effect. If there is no further discussion, this meeting is adjourned." He pounded his gavel on the table.

Back at home, the Stevenses considered the meeting and its result. Bob spoke first. "I sure will miss this house. Everything in it brings back memories. That picture over the mantle taken on our first family vacation reminds me that Bobby almost fell into that canyon on the left side of it. I guess I'll think of the same things when I see it in another house, though. And this table leg still has the marks of Jimmy's first teeth on it. It will be hard to get used to it in another, too, but I guess we'll manage."

"You're right, Bob," said Ann. "We can't do anything now but accept it. This time it isn't the other fellow who is affected. It is us. We have overlooked them, but this house does have defects. It sags a little there on the north side. The old wooden beams are not as strong as they used to be, I guess. The most important part of the house we'll take with us, because we still will have each other."

"Yup, this old house is wearing out just like I am," said George. "And this old man needs some sleep. Good night, Ann. Good night, Bob."

"Good night, Dad," they replied, thinking about their future in a new house.



DARK AND DAMP

by Mary Shinkle

It could have been yesterday. No, maybe it was day before yesterday. Yeah that's it, day before yesterday. I had looked out the window for a long, long time and watched them clearing the streets. As the soft snow had kept seeping down, I'd wondered what good was it. People looked funny from the fifth floor. It was strange to watch people talking to each other and not hear them saying anything. And then my mother called me away from the window.

"Mom, I haven't been sitting here very long."

The window sill is cold. My seat is still cold in spite of sitting there. The air has been blowing in for years causing the window pane to be loose, and when the wind blows, it rattles. I always heard that window rattling. It seems like everything I have always had had a rattle, or started to have one after only a little while. My mother rattled more than anything, mostly at me because I wouldn't feel up to doing something. Tom, that brother of mine, always did everything so well. How could I?

It's funny how some people are born with everything and other people are born trying to live up to everything. I would just like to feel easy. Sometimes I feel like I am the wind that makes the window rattle. The wind must feel good when it blows against the window and makes it rattle. That's what I would like to be, free, free like that, then people wouldn't rattle at me. I could rattle at them, just like my mother rattles at me.

She's calling me again. "Son," she says . . . I wonder where the wind hides. "Son." . . . In caves I guess, in caves like this room. That's what this room is, a cave. It's white like a hospital. Hospitals are like caves, especially when I'm locked up in a room. "Son," she says louder . . .

"All I am doing is lying here thinking and don't ask me to think aloud right now." I heard my voice echo from the walls of the cave, but my voice didn't match it—wasn't white.

"Tim, what are you talking about?"

"Nothing, mother." I heard her from across the room. Where was she? How did I know? . . . She was nearer now.

"How do you feel?"

"Dark and damp!" I hope she understood, but she never did . . . couldn't . . .

"Tim, will you look at me?" she asked sternly, "I have something I have to tell you."

"Oh, you're finally going to tell me something," I barked, almost awake. "Is it advice you're going to give me? Yeah, I'll bet that's it. The only advice you've ever given me was to be like Tom. Tom's strong, Tom's smart, Tom's polite. Tom, Tom, Tom, I'm sick of hearing about Tom!"

"Your brother never talked to me like that!"

"My brother, my darling brother. It's like the snow that

seeps in to bury things. Tom buries me. I'll never dig my way out, mother. That's why I needed those shots in the arm. And then, after one, I couldn't get enough. It kept building and building. It's always been that way. And now, I've torn everything down again, haven't I? Dope was a shot in the arm in more than one way—and now everything's falling apart. This is the first time you've listened to me. But then, this is the first time I've talked, I guess . . . tried to. I used to try all the time, but that was a long time ago. Don't you see? Don't you know what it's been like? I'm Tom's little fool brother! I always was, I always will be. I hate him . . . I hate my own flesh. He's bigger and better and brighter and I would be lucky to have one thing, one talent he has. No, I don't want anything he has. I hate all that he is. I hate everything. I hate this hospital I'm in, I hate the doctors here, I hate myself, and I hate you too. You and your darling Tom are the ones that put me here. I should hate **you**, can't you see? Mother, you're crying and you've never cried for me before. Does the truth hurt that much? Didn't you know all these things were inside of me? I've tried to let them out before, but I've never managed. Does it make any difference now? I don't deserve tears. Tom makes you smile. I make you cry."

"These tears are for both of you, Tim," she sobbed. "I tried to tell you when I came in. Your brother Tom came to see you this morning."

"Oh, that's a laugh," I burst out wriggling my hands to the covers. "The first time Tom didn't do exactly what he said he would."

"No, son, he didn't make it." There was a long silence and I listened. "There was an accident. Your brother . . ." I heard her from far, far away . . . "Your brother is dead."

AGAINST DEFEAT

by Charles Gramley

Had these teeth in solid flesh been sunk,
I would have felt a joy
of stangled nerve that knows
when the end is the end.
But on the empty air they closed
and blew it back, stale and foul.
Fame was my goal, but more;
a certainty that life and I
had more than bonded breath between
the span that stretched beyond
the end.
If bitter gall has been the judge,
then it shall execute.

DECISION

by Anita Walker

Vera Majors busied herself in the kitchen preparing supper, while thoughts raced through her mind. As she turned from the cabinet, she saw the figure of her son.

"Mother," he said softly, not coming too near, "sit down for a minute. There's somethin' I've gotta say."

Mrs. Majors shivered as she slowly pulled a chair from the table. She had hoped and prayed that this moment would never come, but as she lowered her body into the seat and watched Gregg approach her, her fears suddenly became reality.

"I know that you won't understand this," Gregg began. "You never understood anything I did. I guess we both knew this would happen sooner or later . . . and now, here it is. I'm leaving."

Vera's eyes dropped quickly in defeat and anguish.

Making motions with his hands as if to reach out for the right words, Gregg continued. "It's not easy for me . . . please believe that. But I've got to make it on my own. I'm a big boy now, Mom, whether you want to face it, or not. What can I say? What can I do? I feel like a slob, cuttin' out on ya like this, but you'll just have to accept it. Can you see?"

Mrs. Major's brown eyes fixed upon Gregg's face, first in sorrow, then with glares of emerging anger and resentment. "I loved you. I took care of you. I brought you up in the best way I knew how. Now what? Good-bye. No thanks; no devotion; just good-bye. I need you. If you leave, I'm the same as alone!"

In a quick, sharp movement Gregg stood up. "When I graduated last year and you went through these same pleas pullin' at my sympathy, I listened. I didn't go to college, Mom. I stayed here to work, and give you a little more time to get used to my leaving. But you never planned to let me leave . . . at least not with your blessing."

"Just a little more time," Mrs. Majors whined, as she tugged on Gregg's sleeve. "Just give me time to make some plans, to get used to the idea. That's all. I never dreamed that you would go now, so soon. Please . . . Gregg, son."

Jerking away, his expression seeming to beg for consolation, Gregg shouted, "No! I won't stay. I want to get away; no ties . . . nothin'. Just a big, beautiful world, full of opportunities . . . chances to make something of myself."

As he turned from the kitchen to the stairs to his room, Gregg paused, then swung around. "I'm not gone forever. I'll come back for visits, and things can be like before. And, say, if I meet a girl, I'll bring her home, and you can learn to know each other, and . . . Mom, it will work out."

Vera Majors watched as he bounded up the stairs, two steps at a time. "Happy," she thought. "He's happy to be

leaving me." Her eyes filled with tears of self-pity.

Just as Gregg came down to the living room, suitcase in hand, Bill Majors, Gregg's father, staggered in the front door. He looked not unlike he usually did, when and if he decided to drop by his home. The dark-complexioned face held a beard of about three days, and his clothes reeked of liquor and cigar smoke.

"Why hello, son," he piped. "Am I ever glad to see my boy! You know, you're growin' into quite the young man. I always knew MY son would be a good one." Easing toward Gregg, feigning a smile and patting him on the shoulder, Bill Majors continued: "Ya look like yer in a hurry. Can't ya spare a second for yer old man?"

Gregg stared at the hulk of a man that stood before him. "What in the hell are you doing back here in this house? You have been warned to leave us alone. Drank up your gamblin' money, so you're here to beg off Mom an me? Well, damn you . . . get yourself out of here fast, before I . . ." Gregg's hand was raised, ready to fall.

"Now wait," Bill pleaded, "It's not like you think. I'm a changed man. I want to be your father, boy . . . a good father." His eyes focused beyond Gregg and he smiled the painted smile, once again. "Vera, honey, you're lookin' well," his flattering words began.

Mrs. Majors stepped back, horrified. In her mind she could re-live that moment, two years back, when her husband had come home. She knew that now, just as always before, he had come to them as a last resort, in his desperate plea for money—money for liquor, gambling, and of course, women. The fight and the police hauling Bill Majors away from the house those two years ago, was a sight too real, and too close to forget.

"Gregg," she screamed, "get him out. Get him out!"

Bill Major's act suddenly ended. He knew his plans for using sweet talk and apologies would never work now. "Leave me alone, boy! I mean it. All I need is thirty bucks, and I'm gone. You'll never see me again, understand? Now, ya gotta admit, thirty bucks isn't a bad price to get ridda yer old man."

"Mom," Gregg shouted, "get back. I can handle this now."

He seized the tall, hunched man by the lapels of his ragged suit coat. Shoving him against the book rack in the hall, he growled, "Get the hell out of here! I'm a big boy now. You're not coping with a woman and her little son . . . you're facing me. I want you to leave, just as quick as you can turn and walk out that door. And once you slam that screen, don't you EVER open it again!" He released his father, shoving him harder into the rack, before dropping his hold.

As Mr. Majors cursed beneath his breath, and made his way out the door, Gregg went to his mother's side. She drew him down to the sofa, and clutched Gregg's large hand. "Stay with me, son, stay . . . please stay." She cried, and Gregg could only

swallow hard, and feel a large lump in his throat. "You can't leave me," Vera pleaded.

Suddenly she sat erect, her eyes opening wide, her hand clamping tighter upon Gregg's. "He might come back! That's it, he might come back. Son, what would I do? I need you to protect me. You could stay, a month or so, to be sure he doesn't stagger in some time. He might hurt me, you know. Just some time, to get used to the idea of your leaving. Yeah then in a month or so, maybe I would feel safe enough for you to go. Yes? Protect me from him, Gregg. I need you."

Gregg jerked away from her. He got to his feet. "Forget it, Mom," he demanded. "It's just one excuse after another. Each time I get ready to pull out, ya think o' excuses to keep me around. Well, I've been tied to your apron strings for too long. As for HIM, that nothing you married . . . that was your mistake, not mine. If you were fool enough to marry a drunk, then to have a child by a drunk, you should have learned to live with and handle a drunk. I'm gonna start out fresh. And when I make my choice of a wife and all other decisions, I hope I can do better than you did. You were a fool, and now you must pay . . . but I'll be damned if I'll pay with you."

He kissed her on the forehead, turned, and walked to the hall. Vera Majors followed, no tears in her eyes, and watched as Gregg picked up his suitcase, hesitated, then pushed his way through the front door. She stood rigid as she watched him walk slowly from sight.

That evening, Vera poured herself a drink, and crossing the living room to the phone, dialed. "Hello, Boone's Tavern? I wonder," she smirked, honey sweet in her mouth, "could you call a Mr. John Kelley to the phone? . . . John? . . . It's Vera. Busy, honey? What would you say if I met you in about about well"

MECHANICAL CLOCK

by Dorothy Merckel

Mrs. Brown turned down Elm Street. It was exactly seven o'clock. This was the hour when Mr. Smith always came down his walk to pick up his newspaper. The shepherd dog next door nosed near to sniff and Mr. Smith never noticed or nodded. But the elm trees stood tall against the morning sky and matched her trim figure tapping the pavement. Thirty years! The turn was at Pine and then to Main before going back home. Nobody had opened a shop at this hour and the world was hers for her walk.

Mrs. Brown liked this time of the morning best of all because she could plan the rest of her day. Today was Monday

and she had to do her laundry. She was always the first woman on her block to have her wash out on the line. For the past thirty years she hadn't missed. Mrs. Brown's mind raced with these thoughts as she walked down Elm. Glancing at her watch, she quickened her steps because she had to hurry home in order to finish on time.

When she reached the back steps, she ran to the kitchen, glancing apprehensively at the clock. She still had time because the first load was ready. It was possible and she managed to get, sheets first, then towels just as usual, blowing in the wind right at the fixed moment. Then came breakfast.

It consisted of the usual: two fried eggs, two pieces of toast, a glass of orange juice and one cup of tea. She never took much time because on Mondays she had to get back to the wash as soon as she had dried the dishes.

While she was drying the dishes, there was a quick knock at the door and in walked Mrs. Jones, her next door neighbor. "Well, I see you have your wash out first on the line again," smiled Mrs. Jones, her blue eyes dancing satirically. "We can even set our clocks by you because you always have your first load of wash out on the line by 7:45. What I really came over for is to ask if you would like to go shopping with me this afternoon?"

"Are you going that way?" asked Mrs. Brown, turning critical eyes on the blue jeans and slouched overblouse.

"I might. But don't you want to come?"

"No! I have to finish this work. I'll never catch up with myself if I don't."

Startled, her neighbor turned and quickly left the kitchen, slamming the door behind her. Returning to drying the dishes, Mrs. Brown thought, "I have to hurry in order to keep to my schedule!"

After hanging the dish towel in its regular place, Mrs. Brown turned to go down to the basement to get another load of wash. Her thoughts wandered as he walked over to the stairs. And the next thing she knew—there she was, lying on the basement floor. Grimacing with pain and telling herself how clumsy she was, she tried to get up, but it was useless. She lay, fuming and helpless, then heard a step on the stairs.

"Sarah! Sarah! Are you all right? What happened?" exclaimed Mrs. Jones as she got to her neighbor's side and looked at her white face. "Are you badly hurt? I must get you to a doctor."

Mrs. Brown's eyes opened and she saw her neighbor leaning over her. "Oh, my foot," she groaned.

"You just stay right there and I'll call the doctor," Mrs. Jones said excitedly as she ran up the stairs.

The doctor's verdict had an ominous sound to Mrs. Brown. "You must stay off that foot as much as possible and soak it in warm water three times a day."

"But doctor, I have to finish my washing today and tomorrow I always do my ironing and the day after that" She pounded at the pillows under her head as though they were an enemy.

"You heard what I said. In fact, you should try to keep off that foot as much as possible for at least the next two weeks. Mrs. Jones, I want you to make sure she does this."

"Yes, doctor," replied Mrs. Jones as she escorted him out the front door. "Now it's not all that bad, Sarah," she said softly, on returning. "You needed a rest anyway. You're not getting any younger, you know, and I think that schedule of yours is just too much for a woman of your age anyway."

"Thank you for all you've done," interrupted Mrs. Brown coldly. "Please leave now because I have some things to think over." On this note, Mrs. Jones left.

Thoughts flew thick and fast through Mrs. Brown's mind. "What am I going to do now? I'll fall so far behind in my work that I'll never be able to catch up. Why did I have to break my foot now?" she fumed, as she fell into a fitful sleep.

On waking a few hours later, she saw Mrs. Jones sitting at her side knitting. Her chair was close to Mrs. Brown's bed. As the patient stirred, she asked, "Can I get you some lunch now?"

"Please do. Oh, and I'm sorry for the way I acted earlier this morning. It's just that I don't know what I'm going to do with myself since I can't follow my schedule for a while."

"Why don't you take up knitting while you're resting?" smiled Mrs. Jones over the tray of lunch. "I like to do it in my spare time."

"But I don't have any spare time," interrupted Mrs. Brown.

"You do too," said Mrs. Jones. "I'll have to leave you now, but I'll come back later on and teach you how to knit."

"But . . . but," stammered Mrs. Brown as Mrs. Jones left the room. "I really don't want to learn to knit," she thought. "Or do I?"



Rick Bibby
Feb 67

AGGIE

by Louis Bloom

It was two days before Christmas when David took Aggie out of her little world of bubble gum, hop-scotch, and vitamin pills. The plan David had contemplated for three months would on this day become reality. In late October he had first seen Aggie at play in the school yard. He had followed her escapades of trick-or-treat on Hallowe'en, had watched her in a Thanksgiving pageant in her near-by neighborhood church. By December he had figured out the way he would make Aggie his very own, the way he would bring her life into a synthesis with his.

He arrived at the school ten minutes before the three-thirty dismissal bell. He walked around the empty playground and waited. The cold air nipped at his face, making him pull up his collar. Finally he could stand no more of it and went into the building. He stood in the long hall, listening to the silence that seemed to be everywhere around him. Aggie's classroom—which one was it? He knew it; he had been there before. Was it the one down on the far end? Must be. He walked slowly down the hall, hearing only the echo of his footsteps. In a few minutes, Aggie would be going home with him for Christmas.

It came like a thunder-clap, the sudden ringing of the three-thirty bell. It broke his trance of thought, as he stood looking into the classroom of happy little faces. Suddenly he saw Aggie's. She glanced at him for merely a second before she went to get her coat in the back of the room. Her eyes showed puzzlement, and David smiled reassuringly, wanting her to feel a closeness to her new-found friend.

The classroom door opened and David stepped aside, letting the flow of children pass by him. He gazed over the small heads in Aggie's direction. She had on her coat, and he could tell she was wishing her teacher a Merry Christmas. She held something bright in her hand. It had the glow of a small diamond. He couldn't quite make it out. She came out of the door. David stepped in front of her.

"Aggie."

She looked up at him.

"Your daddy wants you to come with me."

"Who are you?"

"I'm a friend of Daddy's."

There was a look of unsureness, and a tinge of fear in her eyes. David breathed deeply. He knew if she suspected him of anything this would be the time when she would run.

"Don't do it, Aggie," he said to himself, "don't run . . . Aggie, now you must be a good girl and come with me. I'm going to take you to see the Christmas lights."

"Is Daddy coming?"

"Yes, your daddy will be there soon."

He had to lie. He hoped, in the next few hours, he could establish trust. This is the way he had wanted it, and if this was the way it could be, he would feel the happiness of a childhood, his childhood, that had somehow strayed down a dark alley many years ago. If he could only convince Aggie that no harm would come to her, she could, through her little world of childhood, the world he ever-so-much had so longed for, place him in such a realm. The lights of Christmas, the mistletoe, the tree—all would suddenly spring to life and there would be Christmas spirit. If he could find that spirit here, if she could bring it back to him, in that way, then it would come with each season, with each year, and the life that had frozen over would thaw into living for a meaning. This is what David needed, and Aggie was his key.

They got in the car. David started it and backed out of the school parking lot.

"Aggie, my name is David. I want to be friends with you."

Aggie smiled. She looked at him for a long moment. Puzzlement and the fear had vanished. David smiled back.

"Do you want to see the Christmas lights down-town?"

"I got to be home before dark," Aggie said, "or Daddy may not let me stay up and watch Santa come down the chimney."

"Don't worry," David said. "Your daddy won't mind at all. He wants you and me to see everything."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure."

Aggie smiled.

"All right," she said.

They drove through the big city. It grew dark and the lights went on. They got out and walked by the display windows of some of the large department stores. There was a Santa in one, waving mechanically at the populace. A manger scene, lit in gold, in another, with the three wise men's heads rhythmically moving back and forth. Aggie giggled. Far down the street, the voices of the Salvation Army Christmas carollers boomed out of a P. A. system. David watched the little girl, oblivious to all going on around him. Only when she smiled, did he. When she questioned, he answered.

"Do you think Santa comes down chimneys?"

"Yes."

"How about fire poles?"

"Well, I don't know about fire poles."

"Maybe trees?"

David smiled. He held her hand, and squeezed it.

"Can I have a Hershey bar?" she asked.

"Even better than that! Would you like a soda?"

"A soda? What's a soda?"

"Oh, it's all gooey, with ice cream and everything."

"Ice cream? I love ice cream. I want a soda."

David took her to a shop on the end of town, where they shared sodas.

It was late when David brought Aggie back to his home. She had cuddled up to David during the drive and had fallen asleep. When they arrived, David took her in his arms and carried her into the building. He cautiously tip-toed up three flights of stairs to his drab little apartment. He unlocked the door and carried her in. He took her into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. He thought for a moment, then decided that he would bring his surprises into the room. He went into the kitchen and gathered together the presents, all gaily wrapped, and the small artificial Christmas tree. Tomorrow was Christmas eve. He would give Aggie the presents then, and if she liked them, he could always buy more for Christmas Day.

When he brought the gifts and the tree back into the room, Aggie was sitting up on the bed. She smiled at him.

"Aggie, these are for you."

"All those?"

"Yes, and the Christmas tree, too."

"But it's not really Christmas yet."

"Oh, that really doesn't matter. Would you like to open them now, or wait till tomorrow?"

"Well, maybe we can open some now and wait to open the rest tomorrow."

"All right. Why don't you choose any two that you want to open."

Aggie looked wide-eyed at the boxes. She chose two—one wrapped with a pretty red bow and shiny gold paper; the other, long and rectangular, had a green bow and little elves dancing on the paper.

Aggie giggled and kept smiling at David as she unwrapped the boxes. His efforts to please her were rewarded by her "oohs" and "ahs." A long, rectangular box contained a doll almost the size of Aggie.

"Have you got anything like that at home, Aggie?"

"Oh, no. I've never seen a doll that big."

David smiled, feeling a satisfaction for many years locked away in a dark part of his mind.

"Open the other one," he said.

Aggie tore at it with her hands, finally producing the plush teddy-bear. There were more "oohs" and "ahs". Then suddenly she grew quite serious.

"David, I already have a teddy-bear. Can't you give this to someone else?"

"D-don't you want the teddy-bear, Aggie?"

"But my teddy at home would be jealous if I had another bear."

David thought of the grim reality of her home, her parents, who by now must have the whole police force out after them.

"Do you think teddy would mind if you slept with my bear for just one night?" he asked.

"Well, I don't think he'd mind **too** much."

"Then I think you and teddy had better think about sleep. It's getting pretty late."

"Okay. What are we going to do tomorrow?"

David hadn't thought about that. All he had really wanted was to watch her, to observe her playing with these toys, transfixed in her own happy world.

"Maybe we'll go to the zoo."

"To the zoo? But don't the animals have a Christmas holiday, too?"

"I don't think so, Aggie."

He went to the closet and brought out a pair of pajamas he had bought for the occasion.

"Here, you'd better wear these tonight."

"Oh, they're pretty. Doesn't the teddy-bear get something to wear, too?"

"No, I think teddy will be warm enough the way he is. Here, you take these into the washroom and teddy and the dolly and I will stay here and wait till you change."

"Okay," she said. "Now don't you move, teddy. I'll be right back."

She giggled and went into the washroom. She came out in the red-checked pajamas. David helped her to get into bed, pulled the covers up.

"You do this just like Mommy."

He smiled. "Yeah. Just like Mommy."

Suddenly she reached up and put her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you for teddy and dolly."

David swallowed hard. It was as if a part of him that had been dormant for a time too long to remember had suddenly been awakened. He smiled, "All right now, you sleep well with teddy and dolly. I'll see you in the morning."

"Okay."

He turned out the lights and walked into the living room. He made a bed for himself on the couch, turned off the lamp, and lay down. Everything was so quiet and peaceful, a remnant of a Christmas many years ago came back to him. A little boy in a bed with a doll and a teddy-bear, and all the other years that had passed since then, all the years of darkness and loneliness vanished. All he saw was his youth in that of the little girl, asleep in the next room. He stared out the living room window and watched a few passing cars and a neon sign blink on and off the words "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."

In the morning when David peeked into the bedroom, he found Aggie already up, playing with the toys.

"Teddy, dolly, say good morning to David." And in a deep, mocking growl, she said, "Good morning, David."

"Good morning, Aggie. Did you sleep well?"

"Oh, yeah. And so did teddy and dolly. When are we going to have breakfast?"

"Right now, if you want. Do you like corn flakes?"

"Sure. Do you have a vitamin pill?"

"A vitamin pill?"

"Yes. Every morning I always have a vitamin pill."

They ate together. David felt the satisfaction that he had last night when they were at the soda shop. He felt a purpose to eating, a reason why he should have the energy to keep going. After breakfast Aggie went back to the bedroom and David followed.

"Let's open the rest of the presents now, Aggie."

There was no answer.

"Don't you want to see what else you got?"

Still no answer. Finally she looked up at him.

"When am I going home?"

David knew this question was inevitable. "But don't you like it here, Aggie?"

"Yes, and I've had a wonderful time, but Mommy and Daddy might be unhappy if I don't come back."

"But, Aggie, aren't we friends?"

"Yes, we're friends, and maybe because you've been so nice, Mommy and Daddy will let you spend Christmas with us."

"No, Aggie, you don't want to leave."

"I've got to go."

David saw that her eyes were brimming. She had started to cry.

"Don't cry, Aggie."

"I want to go back home."

"You can't go back home. You've got to stay here."

"I want to go home to my parents."

David felt a sudden anger building in him, and it quickened into a rage. He felt he could stand it no more. He grabbed the doll from Aggie's hands and threw it against the wall. The head smashed into a million pieces. He turned and ran from the room, opened the apartment's outer door and went out. He didn't know where he was going, and didn't care what would become of Aggie or Christmas or him. He walked down the long street to a near-by park. He looked up at the trees and the lights they had on them. The decorations and beauty of the whole scene—everything seemed so dead and so mechanical, so completely through.

He saw some children playing in the park, a mother standing close by. When he stopped to watch the scene, she looked at him suspiciously. He pulled his collar tight up around his neck and walked on. He thought of Aggie back at the apartment and the rage that had built up in him. What if she had left, or called her parents? It didn't seem to matter any more. Just that last night, that one little image of hope, and then suddenly he realized that it really wasn't his Christmas Aggie was celebrating, and it really wasn't his life she was involved in. She was just plain and simple Aggie, and he was "messed up" David.

David realized what he had to do—what he should do. There was a phone booth nearby. He knew the number of Aggie's parents. He went in and made the call. He heard the usual frantic pleas, "Don't hurt my child. Oh God, please don't hurt her. We'll give you whatever you want."

David tried to explain. He tried to tell them that he never meant any harm to come to her, and that no harm would. He told them to be at the park near their house at five o'clock that afternoon. Aggie would be there.

He got out of the phone booth and started back to the apartment. Somewhere in the distance, church bells pealed and the voices of carollers were heard. They all seemed far away.

When he returned to the apartment, David was surprised to find Aggie still there. She had dressed herself and was lying on the bed, the teddy-bear in her arms. There were streaks of tears on her face. David let her sleep, and cleaned up the broken doll. He stood looking at her for a long time. She started to stir and then awoke.

"Aggie," he said, his voice quite unemotional, "I'm going to take you home to Mommy and Daddy."

She didn't say anything, but just stared back at him for a long second.

"David, why don't you have a family?"

David did not reply.

"Don't you have a wife?"

"N-no, Aggie, I don't."

"Well, then, why don't you get one?"

She grinned, and through all the torment of the situation, David couldn't help smiling at her impish delight.

They got in the car an hour later. Aggie had opened the rest of her presents and David had them in the back seat. He wanted her to take them home as a reminder of her little stay with him. They drove slowly along the city streets. It had started to snow and was already getting dark. Aggie took two items out of her pocket.

"What's that, Aggie?"

"Aw, just a piece of bubble gum. I like bubble gum, don't you?"

"Yeah, it okay."

"You want to split the piece? I'll let you have the joke, too."

David took half the bubble gum. "You keep the joke," he said.

She read it to him, and he laughed.

"I also want to give you this," she said.

She brought out a bright, metallic object, the one David remembered seeing her carry when she left the classroom the day before.

"What's that?"

"It's a little star I made in class. I want you to hang it on your tree."

When they reached the park it was dark. David drove by it. There was no one. He knew they had to be observed. He drove down a side street. No one followed.

"Where are we going?" Aggie asked.

David pulled into an alley. "We're going to park here and then I'll walk part way."

"Don't you want to meet Mommy and Daddy?"

"I'm sorry, Aggie. I can't meet your Mommy and Daddy."

They got out of the car. He took the presents and held them in one hand. In the other hand, he held Aggie's star. That star would be all there was to remember. Aggie grabbed hold of his coat and started to pull. There was some ice in the street.

"You like to slide?" she asked.

"Not like this. I'll drop the presents."

She went over to the patch of ice and started playing an imaginary game of hop-scotch. She slid down on to her little bottom, and laughed. David watched and the fear of impending disaster he knew could occur any moment seemed to vanish.

"Oooh," said Aggie. "Wheee. This is fun!"

"We'd better get going, Aggie. Your parents will be waiting."

As they walked those last blocks, they sang a carol together, out loud, and David was as joyous as all Christmas spirit itself could possibly be.

"It's Christmas Eve," cried Aggie. "It's Christmas Eve!"

"It sure is," cried David, and looked down at Aggie and smiled. "This is where I say good-by."

Tears formed in her eyes. "Why do you have to go, David?"

"Well, let's just say that we've had our Christmas together, Aggie. We'll see each other again."

Aggie looked up at him. He could tell there was a faint notion in her eyes that all was not right, and that Christmas this year had afforded her a somewhat different experience. She smiled and like a little lady said, "Merry Christmas, David."

"Merry Christmas, Aggie."

He put the presents down on the corner, knowing that she couldn't carry them herself. She said she'd bring her mother and father back to get them. He watched her walk slowly to the park. There was a faint siren in the distance.

They brought him into the police station, hand-cuffed. They found him to be a deviant who had committed several obscene, disgraceful crimes. They considered themselves lucky that he had not done worse to the little girl, and really couldn't understand why he had taken her in the first place. In the station a Christmas tree brightened the gray surroundings. When he was brought by the tree, David forcefully stopped and looked up at the top. "Come on," one of the policeman said.

"Do you need a star for the top of that tree?"

"A star?"

David pulled out Aggie's gift, and placed it on the tree-top.

I AM THIS KIND

by David Perkins

If I have left you scarred
by my mind's fault,
touch my scar
that gentle fingers have not rubbed away.

If I have misused promise in your eyes,
it is a triple loss to me:
your neglected giving,
my receiving, and my needing.

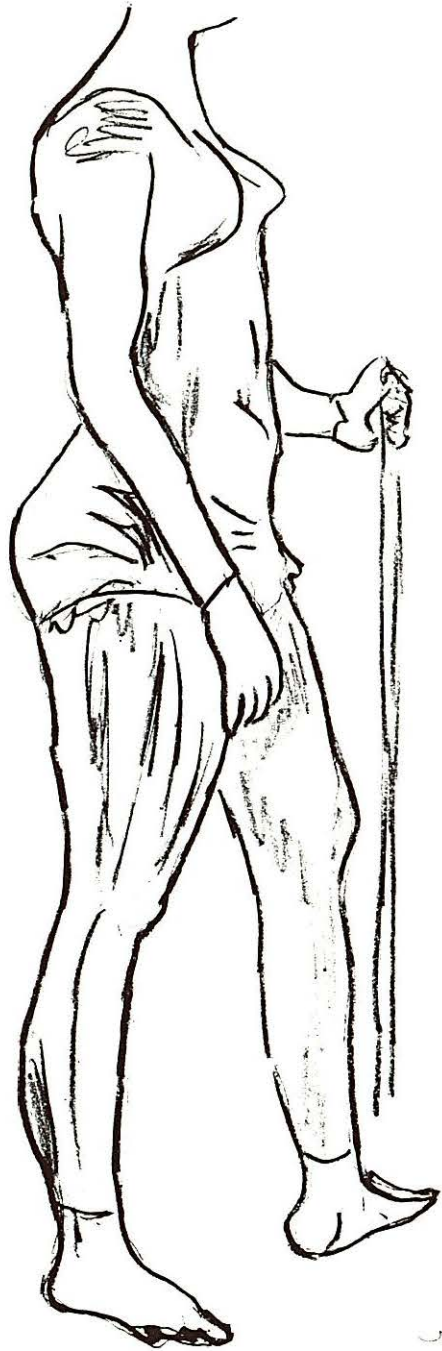
If I have lacked the trust
to test my heart and yours,
I sustain the greater loss:
my test, my need, my growing.

And if for me,
a last love you are commanding,
taking from my bearing
what you reflect by wearing,
for you no fault I find.
I am this kind:
remembering, cursing, stumbling, forswearing.

"TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW"

by Paul Thomson

Oh, present the undefinable instant
holding mankind in a slothful bosom
of procrastination.
Were it not for this,
man would surely realize his obligations.
That decaying brother,
YESTERDAY,
holds men ever behind it.
Stripping their will to progress,
it mocks them,
their every word depressing them further
into the waters of the
mentally dead.
But you, TOMORROW,
resurrector of man's spirit,
are the light of life.
From your glow we surely draw
strength to escape the bondage
detaining our imaginations.
To this end
we dedicate our
very existence.



YELLOW STREAK LEGACY

by Anne Tyner

The November wind swirled leaves around the feet of the three men as they walked towards the used-car lot. The wind seemed to irritate the oldest as it blew his overcoat against his legs, outlining his frame. The second, a younger boy, walked as though the wind were an enemy which could be eliminated at a given moment. With his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his red letterman's jacket, he strode along with his head up, enjoying the feel of the wind. The third was a slender, weedy boy, who wore glasses. The wind whipped his gray trench-coat about him and blew his shaggy blond hair into his eyes.

"Listen, Steve," began the older man, "I don't want you to think this car we're going to look at is a reward or anything. Sure, you had a good year on the field, but for a sportsman that's pleasure."

"Yeah, Dad. I know," the boy spoke up, "this car is just because I need one to . . ."

"Bomb around in. Everybody's who's a senior in high school needs a racy sports car," commented John Radford, the boy with the shaggy locks. "At least, Steve Travis, son of Jack Travis, all-American does."

Jack Travis eyed his son's friend with obvious distaste. "That'll be enough out of you, Radford," he snapped, and fell into moody silence. Soon, however, he was back to his hearty manner. "Listen, son, you just don't know how proud it makes the old man to know that you're following in his footsteps. Why, when I think of what a skinny little runt you were five years ago . . . and now, everybody looks at you and knows that someday you're going to be an all-star-all American, Steve boy. That's just the greatest feeling in . . ."

"Okay, okay, Dad! Knock it off, will ya? I was thinking like John said, it just wouldn't do for me to be running around in some battered old heap, so how about something sporty, like that one there? Man, look at her, just sittin' there waitin'." Vaulting over the chain along the edge of the lot, Steve left his father and friend to watch him as he rushed towards his dream car.

Sam Baker, the used-car salesman started toward Steve, his teeth gleaming in a take smile, his eyes lit with prospect of a young sucker to take this expensive piece of merchandise off his hands. "You interested in that car, boy? It's a little beauty, yessir! You'll love her. Wanna take a spin in 'er?"

Steve broke into the barrage of questions with "How much do you want for her?"

"It's a good looking car, Steve," called Jack Travis, joining his son. "Has it got room enough? Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Yeah, Dad, this is great. This car's got class."

"Class! Boy, you hit it. Wait till I get the key and we'll take her out for a spin, and you can see how she runs and how well the engine . . ." Still talking, the salesman hurried off to a small white building at the end of the lot.

"John, what do you think of her?" asked Steve, noticing that his friend was moving out of sight. "John, John, where are you?" he called.

"Look what I've found over here, Steve," called John from the other side of the lot where he was standing by an ancient yellow Plymouth.

"What a bum!" laughed Steve. "That car is really a mess. It had its day before we were even born."

John did not reply but kept staring at the car, Steve, falling silent, became engrossed in the shining yellow car, too. Slowly they walked around to the front of the car, and Steve whispered in awe, "It's got a face." And it did. The two gleaming headlights made eyes and the grillwork a wide gaping grin. The boys grinned back. "She's kinda cute, isn't she?" Steve asked, and John nodded.

John walked to the car's side, opening the door. The seats were upholstered in yellow with black-diamond design, which made him slightly dizzy. The old-fashioned steering wheel was the same yellow as the car's body and the dashboard had a built-in vase with a yellow plastic rose in it. Wordlessly John pointed to the interior. Steve looked, then turned to his friend in silent understanding. "That rose!" choked Steve. "That's real class, isn't it?"

Their silence was broken by the raucous voice of the dealer. "Here's the key, boys! Now let's give 'er a try."

"We'd like to try this one, if it's all right sir," said Steve in a respectful tone. "She's beautiful."

"What a joke!" laughed the salesman. "I'll remember that and tell the next sucker that some people thought that old heap beautiful." The dealer choked on his cigar as he doubled up with laughter.

"I'm serious, sir," said Steve with a firm assurance foreign to him. "This is the car for me. I don't even have to try her out. I'll just pay for her now."

"Okay, son. But you're making a big mistake. That car's a lemon, a real lemon. She'll run out of gas when you fill her up. She'll break down for no reason and be awful to handle. That car's a jinx."

"The key."

The salesman sighed and started to his office, remarking to Jack Travis, "You got a real nut for a son. I tried to give him a break, what with him being such a big athlete and all. But no, he's got to be a nut. Well, I warned him; that's all a man can do."

Jack Travis walked over to his son in amazement. "Is this

the heap you've picked out? Steve, you can have the red one. Don't worry about the price."

"I wasn't, Dad. This is the car." His father recognized the finality in his son's voice.

The next few days were spent in preparing the old car for her debut with Steve's friends. He polished her shining surface, tuned her motor, and chose a name for her, "Yellow Streak." Then, on the first day Steve was to take Yellow Streak to school, he got up early, dressed quickly, bolted his breakfast, and started out to pick up his friends at their homes.

"Hop in, John! We gotta get Tim, Bill, Hoe, and Gary and take 'em this morning. Doesn't she look good?" he glowed, waving hands at the car. I hope the guys like her, but it doesn't really make any difference. You and I know she's got something special. Something that doesn't stick out all over her when you look at her. I guess if she were a person you'd say it's quality."

The car filled up quickly, and Steve decided to show the guys what Yellow Streak could do. "We'll take 'er out on that new stretch of highway that hasn't been opened yet," Steve announced, as he pressed the throttle.

"This old car really can move," Tim said in amazement as they barreled along the newly-finished road.

"Yessir, this car's a real beauty," Steve agreed. "Why, she's just as good as new. Hey, something's wrong!" The car sputtered to a stop and the roar of the engine died as Steve pulled Yellow Streak to the side of the road.

"I'll see what the trouble is," Steve called, as he hopped out of the car and lifted the hood. "Start 'er up, John. I can't see anything wrong, but there must be some reason for this."

"Yeah, this heap's as good as new," taunted Tim. "If I'm late to school, I can't play in the basketball tournament tonight. The whole school will be down your throat."

"I've got a test first hour. If I'm absent it'll really make things rough for me, too," Steve retorted as he fiddled with first one and then another piece of the motor.

An hour later, a grimy and discouraged Steve crawled out from under Yellow Streak. "That dealer was right. This car's a real jinx," muttered Steve, as he aimed a kick at the bumper. As his foot hit the metal, the whole car began to shake, and Yellow Streak's motor began to purr softly. Steve stepped back in amazement, and then with a curse, jumped into the car and headed for school. But he was late; the test was over; and Tim was debarred.

"Steve, I told you you had to take this test this morning, that is if you had wanted the athletic scholarship. So, I guess you figure you can take it this afternoon . . . yes?" The coach broke off to speak to another teacher who beckoned him out into the hall.

Steve waited impatiently, smiling as though the thought of John's prediction that now he was finally going to have to

face up to things were past. But when the coach returned, he melted his confidence with a withering look. "Because of you and your car, we're going to lose a basketball championship tonight. Do you realize that, Travis?" Coach's voice bounced off the walls as he continued. "Over and over I've said that athletes have no business having cars. But no, hot-shot Travis has got to have a hot rod to show off in. You're not taking this test today, or any other time in the near future. You can repeat this course next semester."

"But sir, the scholarship . . ."

"You'll repeat the course next term. Is that understood? Now get out of here before I really lose my temper."

By the time things cooled back to normal, winter was well on its way, and Steve was pursuing his usual task of finding a part-time job. However, the one he had counted on in an athletic supply house had already been tentatively filled. He was disappointed, and begged the boss.

"Well, Steve, since you hadn't been around, I figured that you probably had your hands full with school this year. So I gave the job to another boy."

"Gosh, Mr. Harris, you know that I was planning on working for you." Steve's voice reflected surprise that his intentions could be doubted.

The man was silent for a long moment and then said, "Tell you what I'll do, Steve. I'll work this boy a few days, then fire him because he's too slow on deliveries. I guess you'll need the job to help you get to the U . . . won't you? Actually I'm doing the whole state a favor if you get on the team at college. I know you'll do a good job for me. Athletes learn self-discipline and responsibility early."

On the day when Steve was to deliver six dozen basketballs to a nearby town which was holding the state tournament, Mr. Harris waved him out of the yard, congratulating himself on such a worker. Then, still smiling, he went back inside to work on his accounts.

As Yellow Streak rolled down the highway, Steve sang along with the radio. He knew Mr. Harris was glad he had hired him, and he comforted his guilt feelings with the thought that the other kid couldn't have done as well for Mr. Harris, anyway. In the midst of his reverie, there came a well remembered noise. Yellow Streak sputtered to a halt.

Steve jumped out of the car, and opened the hood. Everything appeared all right. Suddenly he looked at Yellow Streak's smiling face, and he remembered his previous experiences. He aimed a kick right at her front tooth. Yellow Streak just stood there. Nothing happened. "You're a jinx, and I'm going to sell you to the nearest scrap heap," shouted Steve as he started up the road. Yellow Streak's toothy grin mocked his anger as he made for a booth to call his boss.

"Mr. Harris, I'm stuck. My car's about three miles up the road, and won't start." Steve's plaintive explanation did not

tune wires of sympathy. "You're where? You're what? I'll tell you what you are. You're fired! Part of your job is keeping that car in running order, then getting where you're sent. You've let me down after I fixed this job up for you. Just forget about it. I'll find somebody else, not a spoiled football player, either." With a bang, Steve's boss put down the receiver.

The loss of his job left Steve to a winter without any spending money. However, as spring began to appear in the budding trees, and warm winds, Steve's spirits lifted and like any other boy, he let his thoughts turn to lighter things.

"Please Jeannie," he said, one day after class, "all you have to do is to get Mary Lou out here and away from Bob long enough for me to ask her out. You know she'll go. After all, look who I am. Will you do it?"

The girl, who had been silent throughout Steve's appeal, nodded and started out of the school building, greeting John Radford as she went through the door.

"How ya doing, Steve?" asked John, as he straightened the yellow rose in the vase on the side of the teacher's desk.

"Great, John! Listen to this . . . Jeannie's going to get Mary Lou in here so I can ask her to the dance next weekend."

"Man, that girl is a real knockout. All the guys have been trying to take her out. I know . . ."

"That she'll go with me."

"Yes, because you're going to be a big college grid star and three fraternities are already after you. Right?"

"Right!" Steve smiled smugly as he smoothed his hair and straightened his shirt collar.

"I think Jeannie's kind of cute," said John. "If I were going to be in town, I'd ask her to the dance. I'd like for her to get to go. She's not just a run-of-the-mill girl. Of course, we're just friends, so I guess it doesn't matter anyway."

"Yeah, she's a nice enough kid. At least she's sure been great helping me out with Mary Lou. Hey, there's Mary Lou now. Beat it, will ya, John? I want to do this on my own."

When the weekend date arrived, Yellow Streak had never looked so good.

"This is going to be one of the best times of my life, Mary Lou, and of yours, too." Steve smiled as he closed the door after Mary Lou had walked around to get into his side of the car. They were soon in motion on the road.

"I hope so, Steve, I really shouldn't have broken up with Bob to go with you. But how could I resist when you asked so sweet?" Mary Lou batted her mascared lashes and smoothed her blonde hair as she settled into the seat.

"Oh, it will. I'll show you the best time of your . . ." The unmistakable sound of Yellow Streak's chronic cough broke into Steve's words as the car rolled to a stop at the curb. Cursing

under his breath, Steve got out and walked around the car. After a few moments, he returned to his date. "I guess she won't run, Mary Lou. It's just a couple of blocks to the school. It wouldn't take long to walk if . . ."

"Walk!! In high heels and my good dress? I know I should have stuck with Bob. You haven't even tried to fix this awful car. You just stand there and say it won't run. My aunt lives across the street. I'm going to go over there and call Bob. You've ruined my entire evening, Steve Travis, and I don't care if I never see you again." Her high heels clicking, Mary Lou ran across the street and into the door of a nearby house.

Steve sank down on the sidewalk and stared dejectedly at his car. Into his thoughts came a voice. "I'm sorry about the car, Steve. I live right here. Would you like to come in and call a garage or something?"

"Jeannie!" Steve looked up in surprise. "No, I guess she'll start when she feels like it. This has happened before."

"Steve, this may sound odd, but could I sit in her? I've always admired this car. I know it's silly, but she has a face and sometimes she almost looks alive."

"Well, sure!" Steve's voice carried a new warmth. "Climb right in."

"Oh, Steve, this is a wonderful car. And oh, a rose on the dashboard. That's just lovely!" As Jeannie spoke, Yellow Streak suddenly gave a jump and the motor started purring in her best manner.

For a moment, Steve stood staring at the car in amazement. Then he walked around the car and got in. "Would you like to go for a ride, Jeannie? We could get a coke or something, if it's all right with you." Jean's eyes smiled consent.

Much later that night, Steve hopped out of Yellow Streak in his driveway and walked slowly around her. Then stopping, he patted her hood. "You know, Yellow Streak," he said, "you've given me nothing but trouble since I got you. You got me in hot water at school, lost a job for me, and . . . made me grow up . . . You made me grow up!" Steve was suddenly filled with wonder at his discovery. "John and I were right about you all along. You really are something special. You've got class!"

In the brisk November wind, as the leaves swirled around his feet, he was joined by Rick, and the two boys stood looking at the old yellow car. "Yessir, Rick, I sure hate to give her up, but I can't afford to keep her and Jean and I like to walk, anyway. So if you'd like to have her, she's yours at the price I gave you last week."

"Gosh, Steve, I don't know." The other boy thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his red letterman's jacket as he considered the offer. "I don't know if she's what I want. You

know how it is when you're a big athlete, you gotta keep up appearances . . . She's a pretty old car."

"I know. But the way I see it is, we'll make her a sort of legacy. I pass her to you, you pass her to next year's star, and so on. Do ya see what I mean?" As the boy hesitated, Steve took him by the arm and led him closer. "You see her face, Rick?" She's smiling at you. And say, did you notice the rose on the dashboard?" Noting the boy's appreciation, Steve smiled and went on. "Yessir, Rick, you and this ole car are going to be real good for each other."

STATE CHAMPS

by Richard K. Davis

"O. K., fellas, take a rest," shouted Dave Poplak, coach of the Trentville Warriors. The Warriors were tired. It had been a long season. The big game was half over. The state championship was up for grabs.

Coach Poplak gazed over his bunch of seasoned veterans. There was Si Jonas, son of a millionaire banker, all-state basketball player, student council president, brilliant all-around athlete. Basketball was no chore for Si. Then there was Kent Bradley. That guy had taken some hard knocks. He was tough as nails. He'd been through the mill and come out on top. He was a scrapper.

The first half had been murder for the Warriors. The Seneca Golden Eagles had taken an 11-point lead before Si potted two from the corner. Six straight by Kent had made the score 11-8 and the Warriors had looked like a million. Then, something went wrong. Danny Doolan threw the ball away. Seneca's tiny guards stole the ball twice. The Warriors fell apart. Realizing the chance of a lifetime, the Eagles ran up the score. By the end of the half, the score was Seneca 49, Trentville 30.

Tangled thoughts ran through Coach Poplak's mind: What can I say? How can I pull them together again? Nineteen points behind. Gee whiz! These guys don't deserve this. "C'mon gang," he spurted. "This game's far from over."

All eyes shot toward the coach. What was he going to say? We chocked up. The coach knows that.

"You fellas should be proud to be in this championship game. Many teams would forfeit their two best players to be in this game," continued the coach. "We've been a little nervous so far, but we can shake it off, I know . . ."

Kent's thoughts went astray when the coach said that the team was a little nervous. How about the time when the cops had been after his dad? They'd taken him to the station and he'd had to lie to clear his dad of a petty theft charge. Kent was plenty nervous that time. But, he hadn't lied. He had done

what he thought was right and told the truth. His dad was found guilty. Kent's dad was never much good anyway. Yes, Kent had been nervous before. He knew what it was like. He'd scrap to lose his nervousness here, too. The Warriors could win this game. They'd come through.

Suddenly, Kent heard the coach's voice break his dreams. "This is the time we've got to come through. We've been through a lot of tough games this season and we've always come out on top. This game is no different. All right, fellas, that's all I have to say. Now, I'll call on Si to give us a couple of words."

Si's lower jaw fell to the floor. He was captain. He'd spoke at every half-time break before. Why was he nervous now?

"Thanks, coach," murmured Si, trying to find the handle on some words. "This is tough," Si told himself. "What would Dad do now? I've given speeches before. Gee! Where were the words that usually flowed so freely?"

Close memories sparkled in Si's mind. The race for Student Body President had been a tough job, too. He'd conquered that. How about the time he helped Kent to stay in school, despite Kent's mom and dad? Whenever Si was called on for honors, he'd always thank someone for making the honors possible. Suddenly, he was poised.

"We've been through a lot together, guys," Si heard himself say. "I'd like to thank each and every one of you for making this bid for the state championship possible. When I leave the field house tonight, I'll leave as a member of the state champions. I say: Forget the first half and let's murder 'em the second! Let's go, gang!"

The second half started with Kent dumping two straight baskets. John Yonker, small Trentville guard, stole the ball and scored on a break for two more points. The Seneca team was over anxious. They missed seven straight attempts. Si and Kent were there to take advantage and they cashed in with seven straight buckets and three free throws. Within three minutes, the Warriors were leading by four points.

Seneca's suddenly tired Eagles called time out. The Warriors scampered to the bench where Coach Poplak was standing with a satisfied look on his face. The crowd was in a boisterous frenzy. "Go, go, go!" shouted the Trentville fans.

Coach Poplak faced the five players one at a time and patted them each on the back. Si's and Kent's eyes met. They smiled and grasped hands. They knew they were the champs. They had come from behind. The fans knew it. The coach knew it. The players knew it. Through a rugged battle, with dogged determination and rapid-fire spirit, the Warriors had come out on top!



FALSE DAWN

by Charles Gramley

The pigeon-breasted moon settled on the ripped edge of the horizon
and left the stars to deepen the black of the sky.
The stars shot their pricks of light through my chest,
and I tried to find some way to walk,
but my eyes were like hooks that hung me on the smallest things.
From this I would not unloose myself except I had no choice.
The sun smirked grey against the black and the stars shut
and faded themselves away from unfriendly heat.
To get things done that grassy orb comes coldly for all its heat
across my sky, and runs its insolence back to earth.
I know it will bequeath me night
out of some benevolence that I don't mind;
but who can kiss the sun?

THE WEB

by William K. Atlee, Jr.

"Such a fantastic array of lines—intersecting, curving, weaving. They all seem to stagger out from that single point like an incredible, iridescent spider web, constructed about a perfectly symmetrical center. They appear to splay out with the intention of creating a specific image.

"Yes, strange that I didn't notice it before. It is the image of a woman clutching a child to her, imparting the warmth of her body and the protection of her encircling arms.

"It seems to have changed. It is not a woman; it appears to be a tree. That's what it is. I remember something about a tree. Now I've got it: 'Under the spreading chestnut tree the mighty smithy . . .' But I see no brawny smithy, just a bare, gaunt thing. It may not be a chestnut after all. For that matter, why should I discern a tree for certainly it looks more like a waterfall.

"I see it running over that shining bed, cascading down upon those somber, mammoth rocks below. It foams and froths against those stubborn stones as though to wash them clean, but it can't succeed; it will never succeed. I know it—for their darkness is too deep to be eradicated by this pure flow. They shall always remain mantled in that dusky hue.

"I also see an object beside the fall. There, lying upon

the ground. It is a book, an open book. However, though it is open, it seems to hide its secrets from me. All that I can perceive is blurred print and golden edged pages. I doubt that it matters. I feel, somehow, that it has been little read and even less, understood. Such a pretty book. It would look pleasant on a parlor table instead of lying beside this road.

"Road! It was a waterfall—wasn't it? Nevertheless, it is a road now. It must be, because I see it as such.

"Well then, it is a road; no, two roads—one narrow and the other wide. Where do they go? They must lead somewhere; all roads do—lead somewhere I mean. Why couldn't there be just one road? Two of them present a problem. If I were to follow one, I should have to neglect the other. How should I choose? Wide . . . narrow . . . The wide I think. The other being narrow must therefore be insignificant. Besides, the one of good breadth should be easier.

"It changes once more. I see many things of myriad shapes, unusual textures, and brilliant hues. Sparkling, glowing, shifting, vacillating, they present kaleidoscopic images of . . . of wealth. That must be what it is: the very essence of wealth distilled and offered here in all its beauty and elegance. Could there be a finer sight? It begins to fade, dissolve and slip from my sight. Must it?

"There is yet another figure in its place: a simple geometric shape—the letter 't'. What meaning has this? It is not a capital letter so I doubt that it is an initial. But what then? I cannot discover any meaning in it. Why, it does not even have any relationship to other things that I have seen; not to the woman, or the tree, the waterfall, the roads or the wealth. They are definite things of this world. I can comprehend them, but this is different. It has no relevance. It frustrates me. Be damned to this crossed thing!"

The illumination of the sun oozed through the brooding clouds and, for a moment, reflected from the fantastically cracked window pane, as from a stagnant pool. Within that moment the glass shattered and fell, allowing the doubtful light to focus unhampered on the corpse of a man. It was odd how he had stared at that glass through which the bullet had passed before striking him. He had stared as though searching for something within its structure—and died as though he never found it.



PICNIC

by Lona Brotherton

"I know it will be hard to support him, Father, but he's mine, and I want to keep him with me. I realize that you didn't like Rick, but still, Scott is your grandson. You don't need to keep reminding me that it's going to be financially tough." Susan drew her small frame as tall as her low heels would allow and stared at her father with stony blue eyes.

"If you'd finished college instead of marrying that fool-hardy boy, you wouldn't be in this predicament now." Sam Harding eyed the sandwiches on the sink and the wicker basket gaping open. His daughter was always planning picnics. "I'm telling you, you're young. You'll never be able to do anything unless you send him to a home."

"His name is Scott, so will you please stop referring to my son as 'him'!" Susan snapped.

"Damn it, he's Rick's son and you can't afford to keep him. I'll call him anything I damn well like." Her father stomped to his feet and strode to the window overlooking the back yard.

"As much as you'd like us to owe you something, you don't pay the bills around here, so just leave us alone. And keep quiet or you'll wake **my** son from his nap. He's only four and you know he wants to know you. Why can't you be tolerant?" Sue's voice broke and she leaned zealously over the basket realizing that her first statement was scarcely true.

Obviously avoiding this question, Susan Forester's father changed the subject. "Why are you packing that basket anyway?"

"I'm taking Scott on a picnic. You know how he loves the out-of-doors. Would you like to come?"

"Child, you can't take him on a picnic. You'll wear yourself out. It's impossible for you to keep on working like you do and then go out gallivanting around. Send him to a home, and do it now. It would be the best thing for him."

"Just leave me alone, and he's my son just as much as he was Rick's. What business is it of yours anyway? All you ever do is tell me how much of a burden he is. Just mind your own business."

"Damn it, it **is** my business! You're my daughter . . ."

". . . and Scott is your grandson."

"He is **not** my grandson."

"If he's not yours then I don't know whose he is. And please

be still. I heard Scotty get out of bed. He'll be coming in in a minute."

"What do I care if he hears me or not?"

"We'll discuss it later."

"He doesn't even know what we're talking about."

"Father, I said we'll discuss it later."

With a snort Sam Harding stormed from the room slamming the door as he left. Susan continued packing the picnic basket all the while thinking of her father's stubbornness and her own silly pride which refused to allow her to accept any financial help from her father. She justified this refusal by saying that she was not going to support her son with her father's money, especially since he insisted he hated her son. She knew too, that she must find another job or surrender Scott to a foster home as Sam had suggested.

As she placed the last apple in the basket, she turned and looked about the room. Scanning the walls, she was once again reminded of her monetary pressures. The drab apartment was impossible to brighten even with cheery curtains. Had her husband, Rick, remained in school, he wouldn't have been drafted and sent to Viet Nam. He had laughed when she worried about his safety. Now he was gone.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon what she considered the only ray of sunshine in a storm. Young Scott Forester stood in the doorway, blonde hair shining, and bright brown eyes still half-closed from his afternoon nap. As she held her arms out for him, Susan knew it **would** be best if she sent him to live with someone who could give him all he needed. The small-framed Scotty ran to his mother, embracing her about the neck and asked, "Are we going on our picnic now?"

Holding him tightly she softly replied, "Just as soon as we get you dressed."

Scott pulled away from her and scrambled into the bedroom, returning shortly with his clothes. As Susan buttoned up his washed-out jeans, she wondered when she would be able to replace them. His shoes, too, would soon be out-grown. If they could just hold out for another month or two, Sue felt sure she could catch up on her old bills and be ready to make a new start.

"Momma, is Grandpa going with us?"

Susan lifted the receiver on the telephone and dialed her father's number. Five rings and no answer. He usually responded by the second ring. She dropped the receiver back into place and shook her head at the child.

"Pick up the blanket, and let's go," she told him. Sue lifted the lunch and together they walked outside into the warm spring afternoon. Much to Susan's surprise, when she looked around she saw her father puffing away at a cigar and doing what she would term "sulking."

Scott bounced up to him. "Are you going on our picnic, Grandpa?" Sam glanced at the boy but made no reply.

"Won't you come, Father?" Susan made the inquiry knowing he would join them.

"Please come, Grandpa," begged Scott.

"Oh, let's go," Sam growled. "But I refuse to ride in that heap. At least ride in my car," he snapped as Sue and Scotty turned toward their car. So they walked to his newer model.

On the drive out of town, Sue began to think about her father. She was all he had left in the world. He had Scott, too, but he stubbornly refused to claim his grandson. She knew her father was lonely in his apartment, and that was why she had been so sure that he would come with them. Perhaps she was wrong in refusing his help. If he wasn't in such favor of sending Scotty to a home, help or no help, she probably would have swallowed her pride and turned a deaf ear to his I-told-you so's. Maybe he was right, though. Looking at Scott, Sue felt guilt pangs just thinking of giving up her son. But she thought again, maybe he was right.

"Look, Momma. They're pretty," Scotty said pointing to the beautiful sunflowers along the road. "Can we have some?"

"Father, will you stop?" Sue asked. "It'll only take a minute." Sam pulled over to the side of the road, indifferent to the whole matter. Susan quickly slipped outside and began to pluck the strong yellow blooms.

"I want to go," Scotty cried, moving toward the door. But it was too late for the car door had closed. Immediately Scotty began to cry softly. "Grandpa," he said. After receiving no reply he said louder, "Grandpa!"

"What."

"Grandpa, my shirt is caught and my finger hurts," he blurted out with tears streaming down his cheeks. "Get me out, Grandpa."

Reluctantly, Sam leaned over and grabbed the door handle. He swiftly opened it, releasing the tiny captive. Scotty had been pulling toward Sam, and when he was set free so suddenly he fell back on his grandfather's lap. Sam's first impulse was to put him back on the car seat, but he didn't. Scott directed his red and bruised fingers toward his mouth, but Sam stopped him by curtly saying, "You know your mother doesn't allow you to suck on your fingers."

Pushing his hand in Sam's face, Scotty said, "Kiss 'em."

"Do what?"

"Kiss my fingers and make the hurt go away."

"Wait 'til your mother comes back."

"It might be a long time, Grandpa. Please."

Sam tried to restrain the unfamiliar tug at his heart, but he couldn't bring himself to turn away. Instead he tenderly touched the boy's fingers. As soon as he had done so, Scotty, satisfied, stood up on the car seat and pressed his nose against the window. Before Sam could think about Scotty, Sue returned and Scotty cried, "I hurt my finger, but it's all right now."

"Oh?" came the reply.

"Grandpa made it well," Scott proudly announced.

"Oh!" she exclaimed with surprise.

"Come on, let's go." Sam offered little to appease her curiosity. No one spoke until she broke the silence.

"How about here? It's a pretty little spot." Without objections, Sam parked the car. While Susan and her father gathered what they needed, Scotty ran wildly into the open clearing. He continued to run and sing and shout until the picnic dinner was spread upon a piece of ground and ready to be eaten. Silence prevailed during the meal except for the babbling, excited Scotty.

Following the meal, Sue and Sam both lounged contentedly in the sun until suddenly Sam blurted out, "You never knew it, Susan, but you had a brother once."

"I what?" she asked, sitting up abruptly.

"He died when you were a baby. He was four." His eyes were following Scott. Then he lowered them and was silent.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"We loved him very much—your mother and I. He was taken from us suddenly; a truck hit him. He never had a chance."

A clap of thunder caused them to lift their eyes to the sky. Dark clouds were beginning to gather and lightning streaked the air. "Spring shower. I guess we'd better be moving toward home," Sam said.

Susan began to gather the basket and blanket. "Scotty!" she called. No answer. "Scotty!" she repeated, but again no reply. "Now where has he gone! I'd better go find him."

Sam placed their belongings in the car just as it began to sprinkle. Then he walked in another direction and also began to call for Scott. The rain was beginning to fall steadily.

"Father!" Sam spun around. "Hurry!"

Sam rapidly walked toward the sound of his daughter's voice.

"Father!" Sue screamed. As she came into sight, Sam began to run. Scotty's tiny form was lying motionless on the ground. A large branch, apparently just struck by lightning, held Scott tightly to the dirt.

"My God," Sam cried, "not again." He grabbed the branch and swiftly pushed it aside. Susan bent over the child's small frame and checked for physical injuries. When she wiped the dust from his face, Scott slowly opened his eyes.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"I don't hurt," came the reply. She turned to her father.

"I'll never send him to a home. Never! He is my life. If you had a son once, why can't you see that?" she inquired searchingly.

Sam picked up Scotty and replied, "I have seen Scotty for the first time today . . ." Then in a forced tone to hide any emotion, he bellowed, "You're my daughter, and Scott's **my** grandson, damn it, and you're going to take my help, pride or no pride. Now get a move on it before we all drown." With that he walked toward the car carrying his grandson.

THE GREAT GRANDMOTHER

by Kathleen Ruefly

"Jean, I can't understand you! You're a mother, the child is yours no matter what has happened to him. Kent is our baby!"

"Robert Artley, don't you use that name!" screamed Jean, tears in her eyes. "That name is meant for my son."

"Kent your son?" Robert yelled furiously. "Our son!"

"No," sobbed Jean, "my well son. That name is for my healthy son!"

Robert rose from the chair he had been occupying and stalked to the window of their typical living room in their typical suburban house on a typical street, Columbus, Ohio. He and Jean had been married three years. They had moved to Columbus two years ago to get away from the memories of families. He and Jean had been closely bound to his family, and it had taken a lot of determination for them to pick up their roots after Robert's parents died.

"But we've never been sorry we left," thought Robert to himself. Out loud he tried to reason with Jean! "Look, Jean, we've got to be practical. Sure Kent was brain damaged at birth, but it doesn't matter. He is still a living person, and a baby!"

Between sobs Jean shook her head in agreement, "I know, Robert, I know. It's just hard to take, to understand. What can we do? All the doctors say is that there is no help for him. Just put him in an institute!"

"An institute?" screamed Robert.

"Yes," answered Jean with a determined look. "We need a chance at life too, Robert. The two of us!"

This was not a new idea. All the doctors Jean and Robert consulted had recommended institutions for Kent, and they had finally convinced Jean that it would be best for all three of them. "So why should I hesitate?" wondered Robert. "What's holding me back?"

"Please, Robert," said Jean bringing him back to the present, "let's find a hospital for Kent."

"All right," Robert consented. He was beaten and no longer knew what was best. "Let the more experienced decide," he thought.

Jean hurried to call officials who would take the necessary steps for committing Kent, as Robert went to answer a knock at the door. When Jean returned Robert was talking with an old woman whom he had just asked to step in. The woman spoke fast.

"You don't know me, Robert, I've aged quite a lot since you last saw me. Besides you were too young to remember when I left your mother and father to their own life. Oh, I know you've heard the stories though. Some still say I disappeared because your father married at such a young age and I was hurt. Others say that I did it so your father could have the house and land. But the reason doesn't matter now. It was hard to stay hidden. Your mother and father did everything to find me, bless their hearts, but I was too smart for them. I did hate to leave you though. My, you were a little fellow! Do you remember the puppy you got for Christmas? What was his name? Jock! You remember Jock, don't you? How you loved that dog! Oh, come now Robert, don't look so shocked. You do remember your old grandmother don't you?"

"My grandmother?" gasped Robert. "But you-uh-she's been dead for years!"

"Dead?" the old woman laughed. "I don't look dead, do I? Not yet anyway. You see for certain reasons I had to leave your parents and go away for awhile. I liked being away so well that I moved into a large lonely house in Canada and just stayed. I've had news of my family brought to me all these years. I watched you grow up and start a family and I couldn't stay away any longer. You do believe me, don't you, grandson? I am Mrs. Cecil Artley, your grandmother."

Robert's eyes filled with tears. Many times he had asked his parents about the beloved grandmother he remembered from his childhood. Always the answer was the same, "She went away, darling. She won't be back." As he had grown older he had assumed she was dead, but he had never forgotten or stopped loving her.

"Grandma!" he cried as he took the little lady into his arms. Then he turned to his gasping wife, "Jean, this is my grandmother; it's been so many years!"

"Grandson! It's good to be back," said the little lady through a choked voice. "And I **am** back. I heard about your little son the same way I've known all your activities and I want to help. I can help if . . ."

"Just a minute," interrupted Jean. "What do you mean? Do you think I can let a complete stranger come into my house and take over my son?"

"Jean!" screamed Robert. "This is my grandmother, our son's great-grandmother. I won't allow you to speak that way to her."

"How do you know she is your grandmother?" demanded Jean. "You were too young to remember what your grandmother was like."

"How dare you?" snarled Robert in a low voice. "How can you be like that? I would know my grandmother anywhere. You are not the same woman I married, Jean. You have changed; You've . . ."

"Now, Robert," his grandmother intervened. "You're not being fair or helpful. This experience is hard for your wife. We must work together to help your son. I know of a group of doctors that can help Kent, I believe that's the little fellow's name."

Jean stared at her, "Doctors?" she exclaimed. "Do you realize how many doctors we have had Kent to? Do you know what they say? Sit down, I'll tell you how hopeless Kent's case is." She indicated the sofa and flung into a chair opposite. "The doctors tell us that there is no hope for Kent at all. All they tell us to do is put him in an institute and try to make the best of our lives. And that's what we're going to do!" Jean finished.

Turning calmly the great-grandmother asked, "Do you agree with this, Robert?"

Robert lowered his eyes. He couldn't disagree with Jean. She meant so much to him, but he couldn't bear the thought of Kent left in an institute, alone and forgotten.

"You don't," the woman guessed. "Now you listen to me, Jean. I know you love Kent as only a mother can, but you just can't find a solution, so you've given up. I know it's true. And I also know that there is a good chance Kent can be helped. For years I have studied the problems and the advances made by men of science in the field of brain damage. A new method was found to treat these children. I contacted the institute that does this work and spent my entire fortune in support of it. Then news came to me of your son and I knew I had to give up my solitude and come to you two. Now you must let me take Kent to Boston to see these wonderful doctors. They can help him!" She finished, tears in her eyes because of the sorrow and hope she felt deeply within her.

"I don't believe it," said Jean who was starting to cry. "She just wants to steal our son from us!"

"Steal our son? My God, Jean!" roared Robert. "You want to put him in an institution!" He was sorry as soon as he said it because Jean was obviously in a state of distress. He looked at the woman who claimed to be his long lost grandmother. Suddenly she was no longer the stately figure of a wealthy woman. She looked haggard and terribly old, and her eyes had a strange look in them. As she started to speak, both Jean and Robert watched her and listened to her with a mysterious fever.

"I was young when I married, like Robert's father, and like you, Robert. I too had a child before I was married for too long. No, this child was not your father, Robert. The child was a girl,

a beautiful little girl, but she didn't grow. She was brain damaged, only then no one knew what was wrong. She was labeled mentally retarded, crazy, and all the other names given to an unfortunate infant in those times. It was quite a disgrace for a family of the status of my husband's and I was blamed for the child's birth. I heard them talking behind my back. I heard what the family said about this wife . . . their son! I couldn't bear it. I had loved my husband so much that when he suggested I allow him to take the child away I agreed. He took my little daughter that very afternoon. He rode off in the carriage for what I assumed would be a trip to find a place where she would be taken care of, but returned too quickly. If only he had taken longer I would have believed his stories about the family that took her in. Or if his hand hadn't been shaking. If I hadn't see all this, I never would have checked to see if his gun had been fired."

"Oh, God!" interrupted Robert as he held Jean's bowed head on his shoulder. The tensions and doubts they had both felt were suddenly released.

"For the rest of my life I punished myself for allowing my little daughter to be killed." The little lady's voice shook only once, but tears rolled down her cheeks and pain showed in her eyes. She had never told a living soul this story before. When it had gotten too much to bear she had run away to live alone. It had taken a lot of determination to come to Robert and Jean and to see this child.

"Come, Grandma." It was Robert who was speaking. "Let's go see Kent, he's awake now."

"Yes," added Jean. "He needs his great-grandmother."

THAT SKEETER BITE

by Karen Durham

When I wuz just a little boy, I used to go a fishin with my big cousin Jethro. While I was layin on my round belly on the cool dirt beside the beautiful Sac River, cousin Jethro always had to git sit before he started fishin.

Then he tries to move a big rock with his big toe to the water's edge. But it won't budge. Then he spies a big log, raises his foot to move it, but quits this idea in a minute, causin his eyes rest on a lighter soap box. This he puts in pursition, never titching it with his hands and he sets down. He draws a fishin worm from the pocket of his shirt, fastens i' ton the hook, and casts it in ther water.

Jethro says, "t's warm as fresh milk."

I answers (Some folks call me Little Mac), "Goin ter the County Fair next week?"

Jethro, he answers, "Yup. You'ens goin?"

"Nup," says I. "Ain't got no exter money." Then it happens.

Right in the middle of our talkin, a big skeeter bit Jethro

COLOR CHEMISTRY

by Jean Christensen

Right in the middle of our talkin, a big skeeter bit Jethro on his shoulder, right through his shirt. That bite, it start swellin and swellin. Jethro git skeered and throw his fishing pole down. Pretty soon, he's got a great big lump on his shoulder, bowt the size of a mushmelon.

At first Jethro tries to git the swelling to go down, usin tobacco juice. But it didn't do no good. So Jethro gits in a tither and takes off like a streak of lightnin. He runs all the way back to town—a distance of 'bout ten miles—in five minutes flat! He goes straight to ole Doc Winston's and gits some medicine. It didn't hurt ole Jethro none, but that big lump on his shoulder skeers him sumpin terr'ble. Old Doc gives Jethro sum Kickpoos Indian salve. He put it on the bump, but it didn't do no good.

Well, ole Jethro goes home to worry over his bump. Then it all started.

In the mail, he got \$1,000 that his ole Uncle Benjamin left in his will. But his luck was only just beginning. Early next day, he went fishing. In five minutes, he had landed a 30 pound bass. And Jethro, he was sure by now that this here skeeter bump wuz lucky through and through.

That week in his garden, Jethro gathered in some 100 pound watermelons. This warn't just ordinary watermelons, either. They were the sweetest and juiciest melons you ever et. He also grew 15 pound mushmelons, and big red maters, all of im weighin 10 to 15 pounds. People all over Cedar County begun to hear about ole Jethro's skeeter bump, and the luck it wuz bringin him. For miles, people lines up on the Sac River bank, fishin and hoping to git skeeter bit. Of course, all they got wuz a bad case of sunburn.

Next week at the County Fair, Jethro really scored big. He won the hog callin contest, the weight liftin contest and even the pie he had entered for Aunt Sadie won a blue ribbon. On the last night of the fair, the best lookin girl in Cedar County fell in love with old Jethro, and together Susie Mae and him won the square dance contest.

Well, after awhile, Jethro bein the lazy person he is, and not caring much for work, decides to go fishing in the same spot he got skeetter bit. So he comes and gits me, and we goes fishin. He sits down in the same place on the very same soap box and that very same skeeter came and bit him in the very same place through his shirt, right on that skeeter bump.

And the bump, it started gettin littler and littler. In five minutes, Jethro ain't got no bump at all and he goes home that evenin' with not so much as one fish. Then, right after that, his money had to go to the guvmint for past taxes; the maters were got by blight; and soon everythin war back to normal.

Ole Jethro missed his luck for awhile, but I think he wuz glad to get back to the usual. Bein lucky had brought too much work for him anyway. And I kinda like the old way, too. Course, Susie Mae didn't care for him when his luck went, but ole Jethro never did like girls much.

The first frost of winter had just set in and Kansas City, after a particularly pleasant fall, was feeling its effects rather thoroughly. At 5:30 in the evening, the Hillstead High School at 18th and Holmes was nearly deserted. A few students huddled on the front walk waiting for rides to pick them up. Occasionally a tall thin boy, or a short freshman girl came out of the library door, startled into awareness by the brisk November wind. Sandy and Marjie, senior at the school, sat on the library steps waiting for Jay, Sandy's boyfriend, to pick them up.

Sandy and Marjie had been best friends since junior high school days. In many ways they were almost exactly alike. Both dressed with good taste. Both were intelligent and the kind of students teachers like to have in class. They both had similar taste: They liked light blue and yellow, Andy Williams, pizza, mathematics, Emily Dickenson, and teachers who knew their subjects backwards as well as forward. They both disliked orange, Beatles, 7-Up, typing, Poe, and teachers who favored ability to memorize facts over ability to think. They had lived four blocks from each other since the seventh grade when Marjie had moved to Kansas City from St. Louis. And they had been best friends since the eighth grade when they had had Common Learnings B together. They were so much alike that they often did not even have to speak to communicate. There was, in fact, only one major difference between them: Sandy was a white girl and Marjie a Negro.

This fact had never bothered either of them much. At first they had had some deep discussions about the American racial problem, but they had soon tired of the subject and had settled down to being just good friends. Sandy had been certain Marjie's color was never ever going to make any difference in their relationship, that it just **didn't matter**. Marjie had agreed they could be best friends, but had cautioned Sandy not to be so positive that it wouldn't make any difference. "Eventually," she said, "it will matter." Now they had been best friends for four years and managed to ignore the color factor.

"Well, I still don't think it's right," Sandy's voice was low and even. "Mr. Michaels ought to explain valence more thoroughly before he tests us on it. Half of us have no idea what valence is."

"I know, but it's our own fault." Marjie's voice was a bit higher but just as calm and even as Sandy's.

"Well, I know that Jay doesn't"

Just then the sound of a horn interrupted their conversation, and when they looked up, they saw Jay in his 1957 Ford motioning them to get into the car. The two girls jumped up from the steps and raced, Sandy getting in first and Marjie sitting on the outside.

After a quick greeting to Jay, the two girls began talking again as they rode to Marjie's house.

"Marjie, I'm not sure yet whether or not I'll be able to come to your slumber party Friday night. I keep forgetting to ask my parents and when I do remember, they're either too busy or gone. I'll try to let you know tomorrow, though."

"Well, there's really no hurry, but I've invited twelve and Mama wants to know about how many to expect. It's kind of hard to plan food for twelve at the last minute."

"Yes, if there's anything I can do to help let me know."

"Well, if Jay wouldn't mind waiting for a minute, you two could drop me off at the store on your way home. I have a lot of shopping to do but I'd better let the kids know where I'm going first."

Jay spoke up for the first time as he stopped the car in front of Marjie's house. "Sure thing. We'll just sit and talk while you go in the house. It's right on our way home anyway."

"Gee, thanks a lot, Jay. I'd really appreciate it." Marjie picked up her books, and walked carefully up the sidewalk as though 17 years of experience had taught her that little brothers and sisters leave toys lying about almost anywhere.

Sandy gave Jay a big smile. "You know, you're really nice. I'm glad you get along with my friends."

Jay frowned slightly. "Well, I like Marjie okay, but I hope you're not going to that slumber party Friday night. I've got a basketball game and I thought you were going to come watch me play. I hope you don't prefer the company of a bunch of . . . girls to watching me play."

Sandy knew the reason for his hesitation and also that he had caught himself just time from saying "niggers" instead of girls. He wasn't really anti-negro but he did feel that she was hurting her reputation by being on such good terms with Marjie. He knew that if their friends at school ever found out she had spent the night at a slumber party at Marjie's house, they would start talking. He did not want to see her hurt.

Sandy was hurt, but she realized that he had reasons for feeling the way he felt. And besides, he wasn't the only one. Her father had reacted with shock when she had told him about the proposed party. He had tried to explain to her that it wasn't Marjie he objected to. It was just that the neighborhood she lived in was all colored and you never knew what to expect down there at night.

Even Sandy's mother, who usually sided with Sandy, agreed with her father. "Perhaps," she had said, "it would be better to invite Marjie here some night."

However, the final decision had been left to Sandy. If she felt it was wise to go and if she really wanted to, her parents had said that they would consent. Why, then, had she told Marjie that she didn't know, Sandy wondered. She had been certain Marjie's color would never make any difference, and now it seemed it had. There would have been no question if Marjie

were white; yet, Sandy thought that there should be no question now.

Marjie came out of the house and hurried down the steps to get back in the car. After a few Seconds' silence, Sandy brought up the subject of the coming test. "Why don't we three get together tomorrow afternoon and study for that chemistry test? I think we could all use some review on valence."

"That's a great idea," said Jay. "I think I understand it a little, but I'm still a bit unsure of myself. We'll have our tests back Friday, so Sandy and I can celebrate or cry together at the party Friday night."

"Well . . ." Sandy hesitated, and into the distance, "I'm not sure about Friday night. I just remembered my parents have a dinner party to go to on Friday. They'll need me to stay home with Randa and John. They want to go to the basketball game, and I guess I'll be elected to take them. Anyway, Jay wants me to watch him play. Maybe we'd better make it some other time. I'm sorry."

There was an awkward silence. Both girls knew that Randa and John had stayed alone before and could again. Marjie tried to smooth the trouble over. "Well," she nodded, "okay, maybe we can make it some other time. It doesn't really matter."

Jay stopped the car in front of the store; the two girls were both thinking. This was the turning point in their relationship. Marjie reached for the door handle and pulled her green coat tight around her neck. "Well . . . thanks for the ride, Jay." She dropped her hand into her lap and glanced at Sandy. "I guess I'll see you tomorrow. Good luck on that essay, Sandy." Then she started toward the door of the grocery store.

"Marjie," called Sandy, her voice soft and slow. Marjie turned. "Jay and I will meet you in the library at four, okay?"

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow. Maybe we can have lunch together," Sandy added, her voice almost a cry.

Sandy knew she and Marjie would probably never again be as close as they had been, but both knew this was really a beginning for them. Marjie had been waiting and knew that now she and Sandy had a foundation on which to build their friendship. The awareness of what made them different would strengthen rather than destroy their bonds.



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v.