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THE FLAMINGO

Short Story Contest Issue



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Louisville, Ky.

The editors of the "Flamingo" present this last issue as a bulletin of the results of the short story contest conducted among the high schools of the United States.

It is gratifying to the sponsors of the contest to find in the stories which took first, second and third prizes, so high a degree of excellence both in style and concept, and a promise of future accomplishment necessarily surpassing the present achievement. It is interesting to observe that all three of the selections are notable for a basic delicacy and sensitivity of theme and treatment weighted and saved from precociousness by a vein of realism.

THE FLAMINGO

Short Story Contest Issue

SPECIAL EDITION

JUNE, 1936

Cedarwood and Satin

By BETTY LOU SCHOENING

First Prize Flamingo Short Story Contest

IT WAS cold in the room. There was no heat except from the big range in the corner. Fire gleamed red under the lifted stove-lids, but beyond a small circle of warmth, it was as chilly as if there were no fire at all. Emily bounced up and down on the spring couch to keep warm, and watched Pete on the other side of the room. Pete was reading a book. He looked queer bending over to see the pages. His suit was too big and he was hunched up in it like a scarecrow. Once he threw back his head to brush away a strand of hair that fell in his eyes. He scowled at her saying, "Quit that jumping, can't you?" She didn't pay any attention to him. She was making a rhythm out of her bouncing, making the couch creak in time with the swaying squeak of Grandma's rocking chair and in time with the moving shadows under it. Almost she could find words to fit the rhythm. They would come little by little, and then Pete would toss his head impatiently again or the kerosene lamp would die down a little and the shadows would change and the words would be gone.

There were two lamps, one on the table and one above the workbench, and the light from them was yellow and oily and the smell of kerosene was everywhere. None of the farm houses around here had electricity except the Comstocks, but Emily could look through the window and see their lights burn white and far, and she had seen the glitter-

where the clerks just pressed a button and all ing stores in Mainville on Saturday night, the lights flashed on at once. Now the flame flickered, and the words came stronger than ever.

"Old John Cornstalk. . . ."

Deliberately, it seemed, the hammer broke the rhythm. Its sharp rat-a-tat-tat sounded shrill and sudden. Grandma's rocker slowed, and the flame was still. Near the stove, bent over his bench, Dad worked, shavings falling on the thin knees of his dirty overalls. Beside him was a saw, on the other side of the bench, a hammer and a box of nails. And slowly the thing he made was taking shape. Emily stared at its outlines. The wood was smooth and fragrant, filling the room with the clean smell of cedar.

She quit bouncing and leaned over to look at the jerky movements of the hammer in her father's hand. "Rat-a-tat-tat!" "Old John Cornstalk. . . ."

Mother, sitting at the table, stopped sewing for a moment and looked too. Pete closed his book, keeping his fingers in the place he had been reading. His voice sounded almost as if he were talking to himself.

"Remember the time he wanted his corn-crib fixed," he said, "and gave the job to that company in Mainville? Remember how he

drove by here in his new car, sitting in the front seat like he was God Almighty?"

Mother didn't answer. She looked like a tree, Emily thought, rough and brown and twisted. She held the needle awkwardly, and her coarse shoes tapped the floor as she sewed. She was darning socks, straining to see her work by lamplight.

Over in the corner, Grandma's rocking stopped short. "That's no way to speak, Peter," she said. "That's blasphemy against the Lord. 'And the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh His name in vain.'"

Emily bounced impatiently. Grandma's voice irritated her. "Well it's true," she spoke suddenly. "He did sit up like God Almighty. Remember how he used to come to church every Easter in a new suit? And go up to offering first, so when everybody else went they could see the dollar bill he put on the collection plate?"

Dad said, "Hand me that box of nails up on the shelf, Pete. I got to get this done to-night."

Emily went over and sat down on the floor beside the workbench. The thing that was growing there felt smooth and hard, and it was not too deep or narrow. She took the box of nails from Pete and handed them to Dad, running his fingers along the edge of the wood. "Old Cornstalk," she said softly. She could picture him now, short and stocky and straight as the trimmed hedge, which made a wall of green around his garden. "Old Skinflint," she said, louder this time.

"Speak no ill of the dead." It was Grandma again, and her voice was a monotone like the squeaking of her chair. "John Comstock was a Christian man who served his maker. It don't make any difference what you say now. He's gone to his reward."

Pete frowned and put his book on the table. In the light his face looked even whiter than it was. "Looks to me like he didn't need to go any place for his reward. My gosh, he had chicken every Sunday and a whole room full of books. And the couch in his living room was made of solid mahogany."

Mother brushed some shavings off the table and hummed as she sewed. Nobody said anything, and the lamp flickered as if there were a wind. Emily went back to the couch and lay full length on it, and the hammer sounded twice as loud and the shadows made pictures on the walls. Over at the Comstock house now all the lights would be on and there would be candles in the front bedroom where John Comstock lay. And to-night when Dad finished and Bob Comstock had come with the sleigh and gone again, John Comstock would lie in the parlor, his face toward the light.

Mother was speaking anxiously, sewing steadily as she spoke. "You'll get it done to-night won't you?"

"No he won't." Grandma's words were a torrent of sound. "He's never made one before. He wasn't meant to make it." She rocked steadily, and the pounding stopped.

"It's a good job," said Dad. "A damn good job. Good enough for any Comstock."

"They should have bought it in Mainville." Grandma was insistent. "You never had a job from them yet. You never made a coffin."

Mothers' lips tightened and her motions were jerky. Pete stared toward Grandma's corner, a dull something in his eyes. Emily sat up frowning. Dad could make a coffin as good as any they could buy. He was a first rate carpenter, even if he couldn't farm.

"They couldn't drive to Mainville while the roads are blocked with snow," said Pete.

He spoke the words carefully, as if he wanted to say others. "Anyway, it's worth ten dollars when Dad finishes it."

A ten dollar job! That's what they were all thinking really. That's what filled the room with such a tense feeling. Emily kicked the couch with her heels and watched the red fire flicker in the stove. Ten dollars. Ten dollars could mean food; plenty of common food in North Dakota for ten dollars, even if prices were higher than they had been. It could mean warm clothes and covers. It could mean medicine and a bed for Stephen—medicine and a bed!

From the other side of the room came a low, whimpering cry. Like a puppy, thought Emily, or an animal of some kind. That's what you'd think would be lying in the folded blankets stretched across two chairs—an animal that would whimper that way, in little short gasps.

Mother laid her sewing on the table and walked over there, and Emily watched with a dull ache in her heart as she pushed the blankets aside. He was so little, Stephen was, and his light hair curled a little bit around your finger. Emily brushed it every day, and if he were stronger it would be shining and wavy. Mother picked Stephen up, and Emily's heart hurt even more when she saw the baby's head sort of hung over mother's arm. He didn't even look up, and his face was grayish white.

"Stevie," she said softly, "Stevie, smile." He looked up a little, but he didn't smile. He'd be such a cute baby if he weren't sick, thought Emily. Cute, and smart too. He wasn't two years old yet, and before he was sick he could say, "Mama" and "Em'ly," and cry "Ba" when he was hungry.

Mother bent over him and said, "Hungry, Stevie?" Dad's hammer was still for a minute, and he was looking over at them, anx-

iously. Pete was looking too, and his face was shadowed. Grandma's rocker was never still. Stephen had stopped crying, but he didn't make any sound, or even look at the bottle of milk that mother took off the stove and gave to him before she slipped him back under the blankets.

"He's not hungry." It was Grandma. "It ain't natural he should be that way—never eating or taking any notice. That child won't live, Mary."

"Don't say that." Emily couldn't help the terrible feeling of fright that Grandma's words gave her. "It's a lie!" She bent over Stephen and touched his hair. It was so fine—and it did curl. When she straightened the curl it snapped back again. And his skin was soft. "Drink your milk, Stevie," she whispered. The wall against which two chairs were pushed to make a three sided bed for the baby, was cold. "Can't we put him on the bed for awhile, mother?" she asked.

"It's no use," answered mother. "We'll just have to move him back there again. I had him on the bed all day, but I want him to go to sleep here."

"He's warm enough," Pete said. He sounded as if he wanted to believe it.

But it was cold against the wall and Stephen's thin fingers relaxed and the bottle slipped down. Emily stayed there, kneeling on the floor to watch him, and once he opened his eyes and looked at her. His eyes were so pale and so large. Funny for a baby—tired and old looking. "Drink your milk, Stevie darling." The hammer was pounding again.

John Comstock's little grandson had a real nursery, blue and white, and a nurse in a stiff white uniform. Stephen's eyes were closing, and his eyelashes were pale golden at the ends. John Comstock's little grandson had straight brown hair; Stephen's hair curled

around your finger. The bottle was slipping down into the blankets.

Emily felt stiff from kneeling on the floor as she stood up. "Daddy," she said, "will they give you a ten dollar bill or ten ones?" She had always wanted to see ten dollars all at once.

Dad didn't answer he was working hard. There were wrinkles between his eyes as he worked.

Pete was shaking a box of nails absent mindedly, and they rattled in time to the pounding. "They'll give us the money anyway," he said, "and we'll go down and buy groceries." His voice was unexpectedly bitter.

"Well," said mother sharply, "a person would think you didn't want groceries."

Pete didn't say anything, but Emily knew he was thinking of all the books he would like to have, and the paper to write on and everything like that. He had told her about them so often, and he couldn't understand why she didn't want books and nice clothes as much as she wanted things for Stephen.

"We could get a bed for Stevie," Emily suggested.

Mother shook her head. "If we just get enough food so we don't have to go on relief for awhile, your father will have the doctor for Stephen again and pay him in the spring," she said. "Maybe if there's some wood left over, Dad can make a bed for him."

There wouldn't be though. There would be just enough for old John Comstock. There wouldn't have been this fresh smelling, clean edged wood if John Comstock hadn't planned to have two huge cedar chests built for the hall. He would have kept linen in them, perhaps—white linen against deep, reddish wood. And yesterday Bob Comstock had brought it over in the sleigh, saying, "See

what you can do with this. We'll have to have some sort of a coffin. There's a road cleared through to the cemetery but we'd have a devil of a time getting to town on snowshoes, and the horses would never make the drifts." But there would be just enough cedar wood—with a few bits left over maybe—little bits that Dad would whittle into shapes.

Emily frowned and picked up a shaving. When she straightened it out, it snapped back again, like Stephen's curls. She stretched it out and snapped it back, over and over again. Back in the corner Grandma was saying, "Well, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. They're having a funeral service for him tomorrow, Mary."

Dad hit a nail wrong and it bent over, so he had to pull it out. "What the hell do we care about his funeral?" he said through clenched teeth. "He's dead ain't he? What the hell—." His voice subsided into muttered grumbling. Grandma rocked protestingly. Pete grinned.

"He sure is dead," he said. "He wouldn't be giving us this job if he was alive. Old skinflint'd probably make it himself."

Mother put her sewing away. She moved awkwardly, and her shadow followed her on the wall. Sometimes Emily was afraid of shadows; Mother's, irregular and bent, Dad's, thin and ghostly; all of them black and strange, almost more real than the people they belonged to. Even her own, small and loose, bouncing behind her on the wall, was frightening. She was on the couch again, and she drew back away from the shadows.

Mother said, "I'll sew the lining now, if you'll give me the measurements. It's beginning to look real nice."

Daddy gave her a piece of paper. "I wrote it down the way they told me," he said.

Emily went to the closet to take out the cloth.

Bob Comstock had left the cloth with the cedar wood. "We couldn't let him lie in a bare coffin," he had explained. "Aunt Ann sent this from New York a year ago to make dresses for Ma or the girls, and they never put it to any use." He was calm and casual as he held out the package. And the cloth, wrapped in tissue paper, was yards and yards of smooth, cool, satin. Emily unwrapped it now and touched it to her cheek. Cool satin, as cool as water against your face, and a million times softer. Pete whistled.

"I bet he never slept in anything as rich as that in his life."

Mother didn't pay any attention. She was figuring, her face thoughtful. There was cotton, too, wrapped in a separate package, to make a padding underneath the satin. Dad was smoothing the edges of the oblong box, smoothing and planing and finishing. The wood shone in the light.

Emily wraped a fold of the cloth around her shoulders. "It's so soft," she whispered to herself. "Satin soft dress for a princess."

"Damn it," said Pete, "he won't even feel it. He wouldn't know the difference if it was cheesecloth."

"Hush up, Pete," said Mother. She touched the cloth. "It does feel nice. Nice and soft." Her rough hands caught on the fabric. "If I could wear something like this once. . . ."

Across the room, Stephen stirred in his sleep. Emily caught up the cloth. It was so smooth. Stephen should feel it. His blankets were rough and woolen and coarse. She carried the cloth over to where he lay.

"Emily! Don't let him touch that. He'll get it dirty. Put it down on the table now and quit handling it."

Creamy satin on the dark table. "Never mind, darling," she whispered to Stephen. Mother was sewing with long stitches, fixing a lining with padding underneath. And old Comstock was dead and couldn't feel it. Down under the ground, all the shine would wear off the coffin and the wood would rot. And the satin would be stained and damp; it would rot even before the cedar. Dad was smoothing the coffin, touching it with his fingers as if it were alive.

"It's a good job," he said. "A damn good job."

"It means ten dollars," said Pete.

"Sure. We can buy some groceries for ten dollars. Potatoes and flour and stuff that will last. You kids can get along with the clothes you have till spring, and we'll make out." Dad was talking in a low voice, almost to himself. Spring, we can set in a crop; bound to have rain this summer. And with a couple more jobs. . . ." his eyes were dreamy, and he brushed a clear space on the floor around the coffin. "It shines real pretty in the light, don't it?" Well made; looks like it might have been bought."

Mother handled the cloth as if it were holy. She touched it gently. Emily watched the lamplight shine on it, and noticed the way mother held it—as if she never wanted to tack it into the box. Emily wondered a little why mother's voice was sharp when she said, "It looks like nothing but a home made coffin, Dan Mackley, and wouldn't old High-and-Mighty growl if he saw what he had to lie in?"

Emily kicked her heels joyously. "A lot of good his money does him now," she said. "Will they bury his gold watch on him?" She couldn't help asking. She remembered so well the shiny bright gold, and how when he had taken it out and put it to his ear, she could imagine its ticking. Round it was, and

there was a solemn little gold owl on the gold link chain.

"Sure," said Pete. It's a wonder they don't bury his library with him too. He never read it, and nobody else in the family will."

Mother was fitting the cloth and the padding inside the coffin. Up on the wall hung a row of blackened pans. When they got ten dollars and when the road was clear enough to get to town and buy groceries, mother would take down the pans and bake bread and cook potatoes the way she liked. Now they had to be sparing and eat mostly salt pork and bread, but when they got the money, mother could have a bright fire in the range and make coffee in the coffee pot, and for a while the cold would be gone and they would all be happy and laugh a little, and maybe Pete would take down his guitar and sing. And there would be more oil for the lamps, so the room would be light. They wouldn't have to be like the Shamleys and the Jasons and some of the other farmers who took their relief checks to Mainville every Saturday and had the clerks treat them like beggars. Dad would fix his tools carefully and gather up the shavings and left over bits and sit in the corner whittling. And sometimes there would be a lonely look in his eyes and he would say, as if he were answering someone who had asked, "Yes sir, that was a damn good job. More jobs like that and we'd be sitting pretty." And grandma, drinking coffee and eating dry toast in milk, wouldn't say anything, but her rockers would squeak, hell-fire, hell-fire, hell-fire, because Daddy had said "damn." And Stephen would lie against the cold wall and cry a little and not eat, and his face would get more and more gray, and John Comstock would lie on satin; and when the ten dollars was gone, he would still wear a gold watch.

"It isn't fair for him to be rich when we haven't anything!" Emily was startled by

the sound of her own voice. "It isn't fair for him to lie on satin after he's dead, and Stephen not to have a bed!"

"The last shall be first and the first shall be last in heaven. God will make all men equal according to their love of Him." Grandma's voice was like the wind, far away and ghostly. And Emily jumped off the couch.

"What do I care about God? I want Stephen to have a bed and medicine. I want Stephen to get well!" Even to think of Stephen not getting well, made her voice catch in her throat.

Pete had turned around and he was looking at her, smiling faintly. She knew he was thinking about all the times grandma had said it was a sin for him to sit and read and waste his life doing nothing. Mother said, "Ssh! Emily!" but her voice was absent minded, and her fingers were touching the satin lightly. Dad didn't say anything. He was tacking the lining carefully, his brows puckered, concentrating on his work.

But grandma's voice rose like the wind again, and her rockers were silent. "You listen to me, Emily, if the Lord takes Stephen it will be your doing. 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,' He said, and if you worship that boy like a God, the Lord will take him away." Her words trailed off, and before Emily could reply, Dad stood upright beside the coffin.

"It's done!" he said. "Look at it shine. They couldn't have bought a better one."

Pete frowned. "Looks to me like the old miser'll have to lie with his knees up. He's no giant, but I thought he was taller than that." Dad shook his head. He was smiling proudly. Emily had to respect him now more than ever before. The coffin was hardly rough looking at all, and it was satin lined. There was a hinged cover on it that hung at

the back. Emily couldn't see Grandma from where she was, but she could feel her eyes staring out from the darkness at the coffin.

Pete reached over and pushed it with his foot. "Well," he said, "here's where old Comstock will have his last ride."

"And you made it, Dan!" Mother smiled a little. "Ten dollars—" she began, and stopped.

Suddenly everything seemed to be listening, as the wind whistled and the snow slapped the window panes. In the distance, coming nearer and nearer, Emily could hear the sound of harness bells. Silver sounding, they were, bringing noise and a kind of ghostly gaiety to the quiet hill. Driving the sleigh would be Bob Comstock, red faced and square, she knew. He would stop in the yard with a flourish and tell them the news from home; how Aunt Ann had telephoned from New York and Reverend Clauson would speak at the service. Emily laughed to herself, thinking that while Reverend Clauson was saying, "John Comstock was a good man, a God-fearing American citizen," John Comstock would lie there in the cold country church in Dad's coffin—their coffin.

"Well, here they come," said Pete. The bells were louder. They stopped in the yard, and heavy feet stamped up the porch steps. Dad on his work bench, one hand resting lightly upon the box. Wide, and not too deep. Warmly lined. When the door opened, Emily lifted Stephen and held him so the wind wouldn't blow on him. Grandma had inched her chair almost to the edge of the shadows, and Bob Comstock's fur trimmed coat brushed coldly by her. He said "How do," to everyone at once, and began talking in a loud, hearty voice.

"Of course," he said, "if it hadn't been for the storm we'd have had the funeral in the city. Father would have wanted that prob-

ably, but as it is—and mother has been ill ever since—there's nothing to do except make the best of. . . ."

Making conversation to cover up the difference between his thick coat and this threadbare room. Thinking probably, "My God, what a place; what a bunch of people!" Talking with forced cheeriness for poor folks who didn't pretend any more, but just sat and watched him with hungry eyes. Emily drew back in resentful silence as John Comstock's son passed her.

He looked at the coffin and dad watched him anxiously. "It's a professional job," Dad explained, hovering over his work.

The young man nodded impatiently. Pete turned his back and opened his book again, but he didn't turn the pages, Emily noticed.

"It's good enough," Bob Comstock said. "More or less of a makeshift, but it'll do. Mother was afraid we'd have to put him in a packing box. She wanted a coffin of some kind."

Dad frowned and fingered the satin.

"Well," Bob Comstock's voice was calm and assured, "I'll load it in the sleigh. You," he pointed to Pete, "give me a hand here." Then suddenly he paused, and his eyes slid along the smooth surfaces. "Say, wait a minute!" he said.

Pete had risen and Dad was putting the cover down, but there was a strange expression on Bob Comstock's face. "Look here," he said, "what were the measurements for that?"

Dad fumbled in his pockets for the paper and Emily shook the blanket on the couch, but it was mother who found it, tucked into her sewing basket. "Here it is," she said.

"Those are exactly what I used," put in Dad eagerly, and he clasped and unclasped his hands as he watched Bob Comstock read

the written instructions. For a whole minute there was no sound except the distant wind and then the young man shouted, "You took them down wrong! You're over six inches, possibly seven, off. It's too short!"

"My God!" breathed Pete, so softly that scarcely anyone heard. His book slipped to the floor and he looked at Mother, neither of them saying anything.

Six or seven inches! Emily looked again at the coffin. It was small—small enough for a child almost. Again she pictured John Comstock—short, but straight and well built, wearing a gold watch. The fire flickered in the stove and flashed on a row of blackened pots and pans hanging above the stove. Dad stood, thin and bewildered, beside his work bench. "I wrote them down the way you said," he insisted, "I had them all down on the paper."

Bob Comstock rose abruptly. His expression seemed to show that he was tired of poor people, and defeated eyes watching his fur trimmed coat. "Can't help that," he said briskly. "Can't possibly use it. We'll make out some way—maybe we can wait until they clear the roads." He drew a blue slip of paper out of his pocket. "You see, Mr. Mackley, here are my measurements, correct, just as I read them to you. An unfortunate mistake."

Pete stood up, slowly straightening his shoulders. "I'll give you a hand out to the sleigh with it then."

Bob Comstock shook his head. Emily hated the carefully restrained impatience in his manner, and the magnanimous smile on his mouth. "Never mind," he said. "There'll be no use for it. You'd better keep the wood for your work."

No use for it. Satin lining and fragrant wood. He was going to the door, stepping out into the cold air, leaving the gray room

behind. No ten dollars. No light, not for a long time, only coldness and people with drawn, white faces staring at each other in the lamplight. "Old John Cornstalk—" the words came again, but now they were mocking her. Small. Too small. Nobody said anything because there was nothing to say. Only Grandma, her rockers chanting, "You weren't meant to make it, you weren't meant to make it . . .," and the sound of bells, clear and musical as the sleigh drove out of the yard.

Pete moved restlessly and his voice was dull. "What the hell can we do with the thing?"

Mother shook her head. She put her face down on her arms, and her rough hands played with a tiny scrap of left over satin. No one looked at Dad standing alone beside the coffin. His shoulders were slumped, and his hands were hanging at his sides as if they were useless things.

Across the room Stephen stirred in his sleep and began to cry in a small, gasping voice. Emily went over to him quietly and lifted him up. The wall seemed colder and the chairs were hard. Everything in the room was dull and sad and cold. Only one thing gleamed warmly, and all the light seemed to center about it—the satin lined coffin, remote and faintly disdainful, and much too fine for the room.

Emily put Stephen back into his blankets. Slowly she walked over to the coffin. She put her finger on it gently, and rubbed the smooth surface. She turned to Pete and spoke thoughtfully, forming the words in her mind as she said them.

"It's soft," she said, "And it's warm, and it looks nice. Doesn't it look nice near the stove, Pete? Right there, with the cover hanging down at the back." Pete scowled and tilted back to see her face, but she was

touching the box again. Then she turned and slowly walked across the room. She stood for a moment, looking down at Stephen. Carefully she lifted him and walked over to the coffin. Now it seemed proud no longer, but the friendliest thing imaginable—protection against night and cold and everything—even death. Grandma saw her and looked up sharply.

"Don't do it!" she cried. "It's a bad sign. It's sign against God! It's sure death!"

"Emily!" said mother, "The satin—" and she stopped.

"It's a bad sign!" Grandma was insistent. "He'll never live till spring, Emily, mark my words. You'll kill him with your wickedness."

In Emily's mind, Grandma's words receded to an insignificant background for the song her heart was singing. Carefully and surely she walked across the room and bent over the shining box. Her whole self seemed somehow to be filled with warmth, and "Old

John Cornstalk" sounded through her brain, a triumphal chant.

Slowly she tucked the blankets around Stephen and pressed his hand against the smooth satin. He had stopped crying now, and he looked up at her; Emily thought she saw a faint smile flicker over his lips. Pete leaned over and grinned, and he looked less pale and almost happy. Mother touched the baby's hair and said, "Hungry, Stevie?"

The lamp flickered and gleamed brightly. It was almost out of oil, but it would shine this way until at last its flame would sputter and die. Far in the distance you could hear the mournful sound of the wind, and even farther, it seemed, the creak of rockers. Dad touched the coffin lightly and handled the hinges on the cover.

"A good job," he said, and there was the old proud look in his eyes. "A damn good job." Back of him on the wall, his shadow moved, thin and ghostly. Emily smiled at it bravely. Now she was not afraid.

The Feathers

By IRVIN STOCK

Second Prize Short Story

WILL YOU please let me have fifteen cents for the children's milk, Mr. Feather," Mrs. Feather said. Then she added, twisting her lips, "If you can spare that much for a lady who's *only* your wife. Remember my dear, I'll have to spend it all at once. The whole fifteen cents at one purchase. Can you stand it, Mr. Feather?"

Suddenly her voice changed. "Every hour of every day I have to come to you for money. Every day when the butcher brings the meat, I have to go into the store and ask you for money before the whole crowd. Even when I go down town with Rose or Ida I have to come begging to you. Don't you think they can't see how it is just as well as I can. Don't think they aren't laughing at me behind my back. 'Did you see Clara standing near the cash register and waiting for her husband? Isn't it just too funny?' I know what they say. And then you come over with that soft little smile of yours and act the martyred husband. Oh, it would be so easy! All you have to do is give me a certain amount every week, say twenty-five, and I'd never have to bother you a bit. The money goes anyway. It goes anyway. No! You're so afraid your—Oh, I'm sick and tired of it, that's all!"

Mr. Feather was exactly as tall as his wife, but where she was thick shouldered and solid, he was frail. He had long good-natured lips, large eyes and large ears. His hand was perpetually at his hollow-seeming chest (it looked as tho it were supporting it), and his skin was white and soft, flabby, tho now there were two red spots on his cheeks. The rims

of his eyes were wet. He stood up. With his thin, blue-veined hand he pushed his wife on the shoulder.

"Get away!" he said, "Get away!" His voice grew suddenly shrill. "Get away before I go crazy!"

"Why—"

"Oh, get away! You don't know what you're talking about. You don't realize. Have you asked about the store? Do you know how near we are to closing up? Clara! Now you come to me for money! Oh, just don't nag. Just leave me alone. All I ask is leave me alone."

That was in the afternoon and all the rest of the day there was a heaviness in the air, a quiet and a dullness, that seemed to come from Mr. Feathers in waves, and enveloped the rooms behind the store where they lived, the people in them. No one spoke of what had interested them before, of the weather, of nosey Aunt Harriet's new baby, of Lillian Harris, the friendly girl next door who was going to Boston on Sunday. No one mentioned that today was Helen's ninth birthday, nor noticed that she and Stanley neglected their piano lessons. There was something strange in the house. When they did talk, it was softly, as softly as when Stanley and his sister came home for lunch and found Mr. Feather taking a nap.

And Mr. Feather spoke to no one, but sat alone in the store, and stared at the grey ceiling. All the time there were the two strange red spots on his cheeks, which if he smiled to a customer, made him look ill. His eyes were red-rimmed and he had tiny

wrinkles all about them. When customers spoke to him, he rubbed his bald head and didn't understand. They repeated what they had said, more loudly. Then he said, "Oh, yes!" and he smiled and looked ill.

It was nine o'clock at night. Stanley, who was a year older than his sister, lay between crisp, clean-feeling sheets with his hands under his head. Over near the wall that had the window was Helen's bed, and her feet, sticking out over the side, were wriggling. Their bedrooms was above the street, and whenever an automobile passed, a patch of light flowed up Stanley's wall and across the ceiling. Stanley was watching this and thinking.

"What are you going to be, Helen?" he asked. His voice was soft and confidential. He never spoke to her of serious things except at night, for in the day-time she laughed at him.

"A teacher," she said, "because a teacher never has to get married, or wash floors, or do dishes, or—"

"I'm going to be a chauffeur."

"What?" she asked.

"I'm going to be a chauffeur, a *chauffeur*."

"Oh. But you're too young to know what you want." (Last week Mrs. Feather had said that when Stanley wanted his hair trimmed instead of cut short. And now Helen kept repeating it every time she had the chance. She was always putting on airs. Sometimes she made believe she was Stanley's mother and tried to make him finish his cereal, and eggs, and milk when he left them over.)

But Stanley pretended he hadn't heard. "I'm going to be a chauffeur. Harry Gommel's father has one with a blue uniform. And whenever Harry wants to go to the library, the chauffeur takes him.

He thought a while. Then he said, "I could be a chauffeur right now if I didn't have to go to school."

"Yes, but you have to know how to drive,"

Helen said. "You can't drive or anything."

"I can too! I know all about the gears and the clutch. Harry's chauffeur showed us the other day." He sat up in bed, and his hands grasped an imaginary steering wheel. "Look! First I push the gear down." He pushed it down. "Then I push it up on this side. Look! Then I push it straight down. Aw, you weren't looking." He lay down again, feeling hot and irritated. She wasn't looking one bit.

Outside the light-spotted street was alive with noises. Stanley could hear a car trying to start. Over and over the motor strained and raced, and finally there was a spurt and then the car began to purr steadily. Soon the sound faded away. There was a boy selling tomorrow's paper. "Mo'nin' American! Mo'nin' American!" And then a truck with a shrill rattle rolled by, and a patch of light flew up the wall and across the ceiling. As he listened to the street Stanley pressed hard and often on a make-believe clutch and pushed away at the gears. He did so know how to drive. And soon he grew tired of that, and, kept awake by the noises outside, he just stared at the ceiling. Little by little, he fell into a dream. He dreamed of the time when he, too, would wear a blue uniform. He would sit in the front of a big red car and he would step all the way down on the gas. That would make the car go very quickly. In his dream he saw his car speeding along at straight, flat highway. But suddenly it wasn't straight. It curved in and out. And suddenly it wasn't flat. It ran up a steep hill and down, and up another and down. He gripped the steering wheel so tightly in his dream that under the covers his hands clenched. There was a pleasant, warm excitement in his blood.

Just then he heard footsteps in his parents' bedroom (that was right next to his) and someone cautiously opened the door. It was his mother. She put her head in and the gleam that came with the door's opening

widened. Stanley watched her head and when it looked in his direction, he jumped up.

"Look," he said. "I'm awake."

"Oh, you are?" Mrs. Feather said. "Well, you'd better get to sleep in a hurry. It's half-past eleven."

"Helen's awake, too," he told her.

His mother entered and softly walked to Helen's bed.

"No," she said. "Helen's fast asleep. Now turn over on the other side and go to sleep yourself. Go on. Tomorrow you won't be able to lift your head." She went out, leaving the door open slightly. He heard her talking to his father. And then he heard shoes dropping to the floor. In a moment the light coming from the next room went out and Mrs. Feather appeared at the door.

"Go to sleep, now," she said, and she opened the door wide. That was so she and Mr. Feather could see into his room. She returned to her bed and Stanley heard the springs squeak.

But Helen *was* awake. He had just been talking to her.

"Helen," he whispered, "are you awake?"

There was no answer from Helen's bed, not even a stir.

"You are so awake," he said, and this time not in a whisper. "I know."

There was not a sound from her bed.

"I know," he went on, "I saw you." He was greatly irritated at her persistence. "Come on, now, Helen, don't lie."

At that moment his father appeared in the doorway. The light from the street fell full on his face and on the upper part of his body. There was a dull gleam from his bald head, but the light made his face haggard with shadows.

"Stop that talking," he whispered, and his teeth were clenched. It was as tho he were in pain and were holding back a scream. "Stop it now!"

"But she's awake."

"Stop it, I say! It's time you learned to do as you're told." He turned to go. Then he spoke over his shoulder. "If you wake her up, you'll get for once in your life, what you deserve."

Stanley looked at the ceiling while his father spoke. He made believe he had an itch and tried to scratch his back. He knew his father. His father only talked. And Helen *was* awake. Maybe she could fool some people, but she couldn't fool him. Then his father was gone, he waited a moment, then he crawled over in his bed to the corner nearest Helen and whispered again, "Helen, are you awake?"

At once his sister turned over, gave a little moan, and sat up. He knew it. The little liar.

"See? I knew it all the time."

The only sound from the next room was the abrupt squeak of springs. Stanley lay back, annoyed. And then, at the door, he saw his father's face, holding the light from the window. Mr. Feather said not a word. But he walked over to Stanley's bed and, blindly, with all his might, he struck him on the cheek. Again and again he hit him. On the head, on the shoulder, on the chest. His whole day's burden of anger he loosed on his son, while Stanley screamed with fright and pain. His mother ran in on her bare feet and tried to pull Mr. Feather away.

"Think!" she yelled shrilly, and the yellow street light gleamed in her hair. "Think what you're doing!" In her bed Helen, too, was crying with fear.

Finally, with a grunt, Mr. Feather, stopped. "Learn from that, boy!" he said. His voice was thick and hoarse, and his breath came short. Then, pushing Mrs. Feather aside, he walked back to his bed, fell in, and covered himself. He lay on his back, as his son had done, but he did not think. His mind was in a tumult and his heart beat so violently it seemed to be dashing itself

against his chest. His breath came quick and short and his body moved with its rythm. Every once in a while a patch of light flowed across the ceiling.

In the other room Mrs. Feather tried to console Stanley. She smoothed his hair back. She stroked his cheek. And she murmured "Now . . . now . . . now . . ." without ceasing. But he screamed, he screamed, and when his breath was gone, he sobbed. He would not accept his mother's caresses. He pushed her hand away and he turned toward the wall.

"I don't want you," he shrilled. "I don't want anybody!" And the bed shook with his sobs. There was a great, stomach-burning fear in his body.

At last Mrs. Feather rose and with a soft, "Now, now," went back to her bed. Then, Helen in Stanley's room became still and the only sound was Stanley's weeping. For a while Mrs. Feather lay without a word. Finally, not turning toward her husband, she whispered, "Like a *murderer*!"

He said nothing, but stared silently upward.

"You half-killed him," she said. "You half-killed your own son. My God!" Again she was still. Then, "What did he do? What terrible crime did he commit that he should be so punished? My God! How can a father beat his own son like that? We're not savages. We're not madmen. The world has grown out of such things." She took a breath. "Like a *murderer*!" she said.

With a groan he leapt from the bed and walked over to the window. "Stop talking for a minute!" He ran his hand across the top of his head. He heard his son moaning in the next room. Outside the noises had died down and the sound of it came clearly through the door. Mr. Feather looked out of the window and he noticed that it had begun to rain. He knew it by the gleaming streaks that cut through the lamp-light on the corner of Rose and Jackson Streets, and by

the drops that appeared on the window. Yet it conveyed no thought to his mind. His mind was empty, dull. But when a drop of rain from the open top of the window struck him on the shoulder, he suddenly remembered that he must shut the window in the next room or Helen would get wet. He breathed heavily and walked into Stanley's room. Dimly he saw the outline of Stanley's body on the bed opposite the door. Stanley had grown quiet when his father entered, but the bed still heaved with his sobs. Mr. Feather shut the window. Then, after hesitating a moment, he walked back to his room. But he did not go to bed. He went to the window again. He stood there and stared at the street.

Then, suddenly, for no reason at all, he thought of the pictures Stanley used to draw when he was very small. Little men with sticks for limbs, and animals and houses. And as he remembered, a lump came to his throat. He had put them all away.

"When you are a man," he had told Stanley, "I'll show you them."

And Stanley had become impatient. "How old must I be daddy?" he'd asked.

Mr. Feather had said twenty. "Twenty, Stanley. You'll have to wait a while."

At that the boy had stamped his foot. He'd said, "I want to be twenty *right now*."

A drop of rain fell on Mr. Feather's cheek and at the same time Mrs. Feather sat up and the springs squeaked.

"You'll catch cold standing there," she said. There was an uneasiness stirring in her. "Come on to bed."

But he hadn't heard. It seemed to him she was continuing her reproaches and he made no move. The thought of his son, the sound of his weeping, filled him with a vast, aching remorse. He placed a hand on the sill and leaned his forehead against the glass. He remembered how he had raised his hand to strike Stanley. He remembered the feel of his son's body against it. And at the

thought that Stanley lay in the next room hating him, a wave of fear thrilled his body. With sweating hands, he went through the door and into Stanley's bed. He lay down in it gently and drew the heavy, sobbing body of his son away from the wall, towards his own. In a husky voice he said, "Hello, big boy." And it yielded and moved, sniffing, closer.

He held Stanley close to him for a long

time. For a long time he lay there with Stanley's head on his arms, watching the rare lights on the ceiling, watching the rain. And when Stanley was asleep, he moved his arm gently out. Then, slowly, he got off the bed, and on tiptoe went back to his own. He lay down again and covered himself. He turned on one side and closed his eyes. But the rain had stopped and all the stores had closed on Jackson street before he fell asleep.

Of Such Substance

By JANE MAYHALL

Third Prize Short Story

ALL YEAR the world is the same, but in Spring it turns stranger. Unfamiliar smells touch a man as he walks familiar streets. Strange forgotten music swells in his ears till he feels that he must burst with the sound. The sharp-sweetness of rebirth is upon him and he feels the strength of muscle, bone, and flesh. The poisons of his life melt and are lost in the clean fragrance of a young earth. All the year he has watched the life outside rise and fall like an ageless river, but in the Spring he must return to it. He must recapture old decaying memories and make them young again; he must hear the silent echoes of his life grow loud in his youth. He has slept a fitful slumber and he must now awaken and recognize his brothers.

The thin ray of early Spring sunlight crawls on its belly through open doorways and sticks its long white nose into dusty corners. The increasing clang of morning traffic shakes the eardrum of the street. Men arise unwillingly from soft warm beds, shivering in the damp mist of sleep. School-boys growl in loud healthy yawns and blink stupidly like plump alleycats at the pulpy vapid sunlight. Swaybacked old women walk quietly along dim hallways and the thin edges of their mouths smile slyly. They remember, somehow, a new blade of grass, a leaf, a tree, an odor of some far-flung life and time.

This is the world of Isaac Baer, the proud Jew. This is the world of the living flesh and the senses, the world of the heart-beat and the voice. In his gray shop he sits and

sees nothing of this world, yet he knows it all. His hands may swoop wide like eagle wings and gather into him the breath, the pulse of moving, walking, tangible men. His eyes see into the eternal youth of their being. All day he sits in his shop, cutting deeply into granite and stone, depicting with his hands and chisel, images of death and cold secret immortality. For a long time he has sat within this shop selling shiny gray tombstones, and when he thinks of this, a great glorious burble of laughter breaks open his throat, for he knows there is no death, there can be no death. The stone itself is a symbol of life, of everlastingness.

Isaac Baer walks through the street, looking into fat gluttoned show windows. This is my street, he says. This is my street which has no trees, but is filled with sleek streamlined advertising windows and neon signs. As he passes, he sees his reflection in the long clean glasses. How beautiful I am as I walk, he says. How beautifully my arms swing, and my legs push forward. I need not watch where I am going, for I know the street well. My father knew this street and I know this street. I have sat with my feet in the gutter, feeling the curling mud water sift gently between my toes. I know this street well. And that was in the Spring, and I am in the Spring and I am in the Spring and there is neither beginning nor ending to either time.

He stops before a window. He sees an automobile, a bright lean creature, lying in silver stomach, eager to be away, restless for humming journey. A man says to Isaac,

"Yeah, it's a great invention."

"Invention! You call that invention!" Isaac screams. "You are a fool! That is art. The man who made that was an artist. He had the divine fire in his brain! He knew. My God, he knew what it was!"

All afternoon Isaac thinks about the automobile. Smooth . . . gliding . . . rolling . . . flowing . . . motion. I could have thought of that, he says. I could have done that. God! the glory, the triumph! If I could have been first! The glory of me!

He trembles at the idea of being himself the man who had created, and as the afternoon grows old, he is sick with warm brooding lust to display a might and power, to render with his hands and body the all-sufficient strength of his soul.

Isaac is living in the Spring. . .

All day he walks, feet striking the concrete loudly, but the echoing sounds faintly plopping among the street noises like the breaking of thin bubbles. The cling of a bicycle bell, scratch and wheeze of rusty pedals, voices thin and round, all in the pressing soaking warmth of earth and sunlight.

"Ya wanta git hurt?"

"Heck, yeah."

"All right, I'll hurtcha in a minute."

"The heck you will."

Here are the faces I know. I have not seen them before, but I knew they were there. This is the face of a negro who eats an apple, bright teeth moving up and down, long black misty-bearded jaw. These are the well-powdered faces of many women, the fragrant powdered faces jutting out silver in the light like new tea-spoons. Here are the fat silken joys of men who have eaten too much. These are the faces I know, I know.

From somewhere in the pale silence of evening comes the long tierd flutter of a boy's call. "Ehy Joe, ah-eh, Joe-eh!"

Come now, my brother, and let us sit before the artificial park-pool and talk of stars

which fall like homeless pond-lilies into the sad rustling waters. Let us write a poem to the budding and growth of geraniums whose bodies shall fill the earth with a bright red rolling flame. Let us tune our throats to the pitch of far-off moving willows, and the drip-drip of silver moon-milk as it sinks into curved hills and squared cities. Let us know all things, my brother, and in that knowledge be glad that we share the universe together and not alone.

At night he treads the dark on uneven pavements and looks in windows at strangers. Before I die, he says, I shall have tasted everything in life. There is nothing I shall leave behind. I will have it all. I will have the loveliness and flesh of woman and remember the cool piety of sainthood. I will touch sin with one hand and godliness with the other, and know that I possess them both. I have stunk with rotten tobacco; I have vomited poison whiskey; I have lived and loved in the senses; there are other things to have. I will have them. I will create a beauty so amazing that men shall fall down upon their knees before it. The voice of my ancestors will arise in my fingers.

He stands before a synagogue and the hungry weeping music of the organ fills his body with a passionate thirst and desire. He says, this is religion and religion is poetry and one is not without the other. The rabbi and his white beard is a poem. He is a Jew, and my father is a Jew, and I am a Jew. And so was Christ. And I am a Jew. And so was Christ. I am not a myth; he is not a myth.

I am an artist, he says. Shall I spent my life carving stone bookmarks to enlighten the living about the dead? And what is there to be known? What is there to be understood? A name. A date. What time? What day? Where were you interrupted and what were you doing with the gift of motion and heart-beat?

He walks back to his shop, hands aching with a hard tense want. He says, I will cre-

ate the face of a Jew, the greatest Jew of all times. I will put the surge and mass of the world into the face of Christ, the world he knew when his feet touched the earth and his hands touched the living. For he was all. He was the joy and the pain, the struggle and the peace, the noise and the silence . . . all concord, all discord.

Outside the footfalls of men pasing strike woodenly upon the still night. The crunch of a chisel, the tap of a mallet. Outside the yellowed silver of a street light falls across the pavements like the bass string of an old harp. Contour of a face on stone, of stone, in stone.

Across the street, a woman sits hunched over a piano. "Down the River of Golden Dr—ee—e-ams . . . Whang!" Oh softly whang into the night, sound and your fingers. Oh softly whang out your heart . . . "Golden Dr—ee—e-ams!" so that I may understand you and all men, so that I may work.

Oh God, let me weld with my hands that which I cannot speak with my mouth. Let this be miracle, let me be miracle.

Day is born in Blood-dew of a sunrise. Isaac has finished. Isaac leans back and listens to men arise from warm beds. It is perfect, he says. A long time he looks at the statue before him, as though to wrest out the core and soul of it, to tear it apart with all the love and hunger of a creator.

And at length there comes to him a knowledge, a slow bewildering knowledge which confounds and staggers his brain. This face before him, yes, this is the face of roaring trains, of Spring worlds weeping new seed and new life, of struggle, of peace, of concord, of discord. This is the thing he has meant to do. This is the face he has known and seen and believed. And this is the ear and eye and mouth of Isaac Baer, the proud Jew, the proud Christ!

The life outside rolls by like an ageless river. The Spring grows in its warmth. Inside Isaac Baer sits with the divine, with the deity, with himself.

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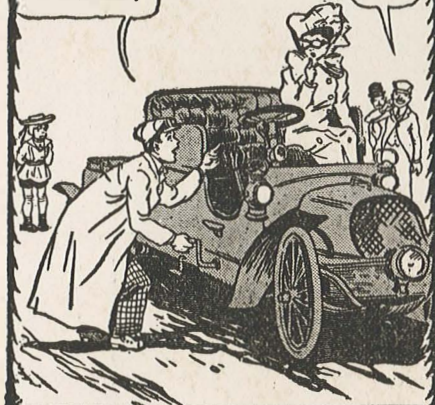
WELL, CHUBBINS - I LEARNED ABOUT MIX-UPS OF ALL SORTS YEARS AGO WHEN HORSELESS CARRIAGES WERE IN THE EXPERIMENTAL STAGE



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ANNABELLE - YOU DON'T KNOW IT, BUT YOU'RE ABOUT TO WITNESS THE MOST SURPRISIN' THING YOU EVER SAW! YOU'LL BE AMAZED!



GIT A HOSS!



AND SO - I BLEW UP MY CAR, LOST MY GIRL AND A CHANCE AT A FORTUNE - ALL BECAUSE OF A MIX-UP. BUT PRINCE ALBERT IS NO UNTRIED EXPERIMENT. ITS COMBINED RICHNESS FLAVOR, AND MELLOWNESS ARE EVERYTHING A MAN WANTS IN HIS TOBACCO

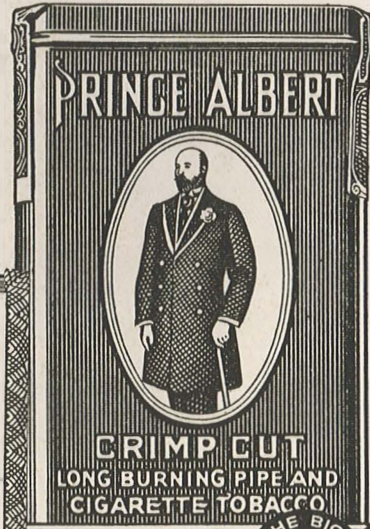


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