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The Flamingo

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Spring 1947

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# Flamingo



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# Flamingo

VOLUME TWENTY-TWO    NUMBER THREE    SPRING 1947

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# Flamingo

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## EDITORIAL

The past issue of *Flamingo* boasted the first poem ever written by Bill Shelton. As a follow-up on Mr. Shelton, we are proud to reprint from this month's issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* his \$1500 prize-winning short story, *The Snow Girl*. Bill, we hear, expects to begin his first novel next month. This in itself is commendable, in that he is about the only man among the dozens of novel-writing college folk who is attacking this massive feat after an absolute and successful training in the technique of the short story.

Within these pages the critics are cornered again, this time to hover like vultures over the corpse of literature. As this month's special, the spirit of Thomas Wolfe is being reheated by the major and minor demonic scribes of the campus.

In the line of experimentation we are also featuring a sort of symposium to the tune of world government, always a dynamic subject. Messrs. Waite and Rex, pro and con masters of the subject, have tossed ink-pots at each other at twenty paces for the edification of the world-builders at Rollins, rounding out the last edition of *Flamingo* for the 1946-47 school year.

D. P.





## THE SNOW GIRL

*A short story by* WILLIAM R. SHELTON

THE woman behind the doll counter was looking at me with polite exasperation, her long fingers tapping nervously against the package she had just wrapped. I wanted to leave; I knew I had tried her patience.

"Something else for you, Captain?" she asked, glancing at the clock.

"No, thanks," I replied, taking a step backward. "You're sure it will get there all right?"

"Sir, I've done everything I can to help you. The package is properly stamped; you addressed it yourself. There is no reason why it shouldn't get there. Would you like to test the wrappings again, sir?"

I smiled wryly and shook my head. She began putting away the dolls I had not taken.

"Just one more thing. You're sure, you're absolute sure, that this is a child's doll? I mean, it's not one a grown woman would use just for decoration? It is a doll a little girl would like to play with, isn't it?"

The woman didn't look up from behind the counter. For a moment, I thought she wasn't going to answer. Other clerks were covering their counters. The store was closing.

"Captain," she said finally, "any little girl would adore a doll like that, and so would a lot of grown ones. I like her myself, and heaven knows I see enough of them. When it comes to pleasing us, perhaps you know better than I that the line between child and woman is hard to draw sometimes."

I jumped—I couldn't help it. She had never heard of Mireille. She couldn't possibly know—

The clerk stood up and, seeing my face, smiled reassur-

ingly. "If it's for a child to play with, you haven't a thing to worry about. She'll love it!"

I thanked her and went out of the store. Dusk was falling, American dusk in an American city. I leaned against the front of the building, lit a cigarette, and filled my lungs with a great swell of relieving smoke. I felt free now; the simple act of mailing the doll had removed the last stubborn doubt. I watched the neon signs light up, the elevators flash up and down the buildings; for the first time in a great many months, I was home. There was my family. There was a train to catch. I could think about those things now. I started walking toward the station.

She would get the doll in about a month. It would probably go by boat to Naples; then by plane to the Corsican port of Bastia; then by Corsican mail bus to the village of Ghisoni. Perhaps she would see the bus struggling up the mountain, and watch it unload in front of the Romani Inn. Later she would open the package with small, quick fingers, and her face would glow with that radiant gratitude of hers which would be more eloquent, even, than the swift, delicately mouthed French words she would throw over her shoulder to Pierre, and Charly, and her mother. Once before, I had thought of her face like this.

Another pilot and I had flown some supplies from Corsica to our new base in Italy and had stopped for a few hours in Rome. We would be moving in a few days and I wanted to buy Mireille a present. In a small shop on a side street, I was shown a truly magnificent doll—a Swiss doll, the shopkeeper said. It had a plump, rosy face and wore a black satin dress with colorful, geometric embroidery across the front. There was no doubt in my mind that it was the perfect gift for Mireille.

The shopkeeper noticed my enthusiasm and asked me how old the child was. I stood before him, puzzled, unable to say, "She's eight," or "She's fourteen," or any other number of years. Finally, I shrugged and drew a mark across my chest, somewhere between my belt and shoulders. This satisfied him; I was satisfied with the doll, and the incident, for the time being, was forgotten. When we were once again in the air, headed toward Corsica, the doll was behind my seat. All the way across, I thought of Mireille's face when she opened the package.



I first saw Mireille one cold night when a jeep-load of us, as was our custom, drove the twelve miles up to Ghisoni to spend a quiet evening eating and drinking with Monsieur Dominique, the proprietor of the Romani Inn. On this particular night, there had been no singing coming up, and almost no talking; that morning, for the first time in weeks, we had lost a ship. Two ME-109s had sneaked in over the Alps to shoot down Leatherwood's plane, which was lagging after the violent turbulence above the Brenner had scattered our formation.

"Leather" was a quiet Texan, and I noticed it was the quiet ones who were missed the most. He used to drink with us for a while at the inn, then unobtrusively take his leave "to visit my family." When he rejoined us about midnight, his face always showed a remarkable and somewhat inscrutable refreshment. We noticed this, of course, and questioned him about the family, but he said little except to mention that there were children, and once he had pointed out the house to me.

On this night it was my purpose to seek out the family and deliver the news of his death. I left the others at the inn and walked down the single dark street across a temporary bridge to a squarish, rather cold-looking stone house perched at the very edge of the rocky gorge around which the entire village was situated. Candles and lamps glowed within the house, and I could see two tiny heads peering at me, like dwarfs, from the corners of the windows. They must have been watching the door of the inn up the street, as my approach in the darkness could not have been visible to them. Suddenly the two round silhouettes disappeared from the windows, and the next instant the door burst open.

Two figures raced down the shaft of light toward me. The leading one was a girl, with flying black hair and outstretched arms. I put out my arms to protect her, for it appeared her racing white legs would carry her forcefully against me. At the last moment she swerved, and her feet skidded to a halt in the gravel. The other, smaller figure, a boy, also stopped, then retreated into the darkness. The girl stood with her legs spread as they had halted, her arms clenched tightly across her chest, and her face turned toward me, so that it caught the full, yellow light from the open door. Large, unblinking eyes peered from behind hair that had

fallen unheeded down her forehead. Her thin face was as still as a painting, and her mouth was parted, as if complete grief had struck her instantly and had frozen there on her face. It seemed incredible that a child could so quickly grasp the motive of my visit. To her, at least, my message had already been delivered.

Her small face had not collapsed in grief; something held that pale countenance in invisible support. For a moment the burden of my mission, and the simple subject and predicate by which I had planned to discharge it, were forgotten. Why is it that the face in the coffin is often more beautiful than anyone can remember seeing it in life? This girl's face was as of death itself, yet was of a delicate fairness beyond that of the animated and volatile face of the living. When I finally turned, a woman stood in the doorway looking at me.

"Won't you come in?" she invited, with an accent and tone that were both gentle.

As she stepped aside for me to enter, I wondered if she were old enough to be the mother here. She supplied the answer herself; for, disregarding what certainly was a very natural curiosity as to the identity of her caller, the instant I passed her, her face was turned solemnly and apprehensively to the walk behind me, where stood the girl.

I was shown into a rather bare living and dining room, in which I was immediately conscious of the four empty spaces of the walls, which appeared to be of the same cold, unfinished stone as the outside of the house. There was a very old woman in black, bending over a tiny fireplace in the corner, and a tall boy of about twelve, standing expressionless by the center table. The mother, with the smaller boy, followed me in and indicated my chair with a gracious gesture of her hand, which was in no way apologetic, but rather, together with her erect carriage, gave me the impression that the circumstances of the family had not always been so meager.

I was disconcerted for a moment. Somehow I had expected to deliver my message to a man, one of those swarthy, robust Corsicans who could stand before a giant. Then too, I hadn't expected to deliver it in English. Just "*Lieutenant mort;*" and nod at the inevitable downward-spiraling interrogation the man would make with his hand.



I fumbled with my cap for a moment, and cleared my throat. They were all looking at me—the old lady, the mother, and the two boys. At that moment the front door clicked shut. The mother turned her head quickly. I glanced toward the hall and caught a glimpse of the girl who had met me on the walk. All I saw was a short skirt and a pair of white, slender legs that came together once, like crooked scissors, before they disappeared from view. Leatherwood might have compared the legs to those of a colt, long, bony, and fragile, but possessing, nevertheless, a transient grace.

There was a moment's silence, then the sound of a light shoe on a stair, then another. The sound of her climb followed in slow cadence. No one moved. There were two short steps at a landing, then eight, nine more steps, a pause, then a door closed quietly above us.

Somehow I got out my message. The mother only moved her hand to the back of a chair and replied that she would not tell the others, just yet. She poured me a glass of *Cap Corse*, and the small boy, Pierre, dug a few chestnuts out of the fire and offered them to me. I took my leave as quickly as I could.

Puzzled and vaguely disturbed I walked toward the inn. Once I glanced back at the upper rooms of the house, but the windows were all dark. The house, showing only a minimum of light about its lower regions, might have been a lonely ship one wonders about as it passes in the night.

When I stepped inside the inn, Monsieur Dominique, or *Papa*, as we called him, was explaining the virtues of his homemade pipes. His bushy, tobacco-stained mustache was the color of the fire. He walked over and gave me a pipe to smoke, and I knew by the way he pressed it into my hand that the others had told him. He was a simple, amiable man, trying his best to be entertaining. Later I questioned him about the family.

"They were originally from Lyons," he said. "Julliard by name. The father was a French Embassy clerk in Belgium when the Germans attacked, and one of the few real Frenchmen who never ceased to fight for France. He went underground and trained his family to work with him. Ah, they made a name among the Maquis! The young one, the girl, have you seen her?"

I nodded.

"Then imagine her boarding a train alone, with a tag around her neck asking for help in getting to Paris, and a small bag in her hand—full of explosives. That is the way they worked, through the children. He told me she accounted for two trains, both over a bridge. He is a rare patriot who risks his family so."

"They were lucky to escape to Corsica," I said.

Monsieur Dominique lifted his mustache with the stem of his pipe and spat vigorously into the fire. "Escape? No, not escape. They were ordered here by none other than General de Gaulle himself. Some papers or something the General wanted removed from France. They walked to Cannes and crossed at night in a sailboat. They were all like reeds when they got here; the girl almost died in the crossing. Monsieur Julliard was a sick man, but fighting was in his blood. You knew he was killed when the Germans invaded Corsica?"

"No—no, I didn't. I have wondered—"

Monsieur Dominique looked into the fire and hesitated, as one does before imparting the bitterest part of a tragedy.

"We all saw him die," he said slowly. "He was captured in the fighting on the plain where your field is. Later, with three other men, he was tied to the top of a German tank approaching our village on the road by the gorge. We were barricaded here, waiting. We held our rifle fire, but the bridge was mined. We were helpless, you understand; the mines were set delicately. To touch them would be the end. When the bridge exploded, the tank rolled into the gorge."

"You mean the bridge beside their house?"

"Yes," he answered. "They saw from the windows, *la mere, la vieille, et les pauvres petits.*"

"How does the family live, Monsieur Dominique?"

"Pension come at first, you understand, but now—" He spread his hands. "*Les Boches* do not pay."

"And the old woman, who is she?"

"That is difficult to say. She is no relation; I think she is a sort of tutor for the girl. She was with them through it all."

Shortly after midnight we told *Papa* good night and climbed into the jeep. We rumbled over the temporary wooden bridge and sped past the Julliard house. It was as dark as the rest of the village. I glanced back at it, then settled down



in my blankets. Had there really been a girl standing by the road, waving something in her hand?

"Wait! Stop!" I shouted.

I got out. I heard her feet racing down the uneven road, and then she was standing beside the jeep with only her white face and long, white legs showing at each end of a dark coat tucked in close under her chin. She hesitated, then stepped closer to the headlights.

Her lips were quivering from the cold, but her dark eyes were warm and lustrous. There was no trace of urgency in her manner, yet she seemed to implore us to some unnamed action. She made the barest attempt at a smile, thrust something into my hand, and stepped back into the darkness.

All the way down the gorge, in spite of the cold wind whipping in and out of our blankets, the scent of the lavender rose and wafted around the jeep. I had seen it growing behind the rocks on the southern slope of the gorge. Even in winter Corsica was, as Napoleon said, the isle of scent. The others smelled it too, of course. I wondered if they were thinking, as I was, that some forms of military ceremony had not quite caught up with the Air Corps. There was to be no rite such as the Navy or Infantry would hold if they had the time we did. In fact, there was never anything at all but an empty cot that didn't stay empty very long.

"What are you going to do with them?"

We were on level ground again, when Fitzsimmon's voice rose like a conscience from the back seat.

"What would *you* do with them?" I asked, turning.

"I'd throw them out next time we go up there."

It was two days later that we went back to the Brenner. They had had a big snow up there, and the clean white of the Alps had spilled all the way down to the river and the railroad, and had patched up all the black blemishes around the bridge. It would have been futile even to look for the wreckage. When we were directly over the pass, Grover, the navigator, launched the flowers in a paper sack as they do pigeons to keep the slip stream from tearing them up. The sack would rip open, and they would fall clear.

When we were about halfway home, he tapped me on the shoulder. "They're just now landing."

"What?"

"I say they are just landing. I figured it up on my slip stick. The tail gunner said the prop wash scattered them all over the sky. We were at twelve thousand angels. If they drifted down like paper, they're just now hitting the snow."

The next time we were going up to Ghisoni, I packed a few odds and ends in my pockets as I'd seen Leather do. When I rose to leave the Inn, Fitzsimmons said he'd like to go along. As it turned out, all five of us wanted to go.

The family had just finished dinner. The mother, a perfect hostess, took our wraps and dispatched Charly, the older boy, for the company wine. The old lady in black began bringing in wood, and Pierre busied himself digging after chestnuts. The girl, barefooted and dressed in a short blue and white checkered dress, came up from the cupboard with an armful of glasses.

It was the first time I had seen her in good light. There was nothing about her face to suggest the hardships Monsieur Dominique had spoken of. She was thin, but her cheeks were flushed with color, and her eyes had a fresh, warm vitality rather than the confused, hunted expression one might expect. As she walked around the table carefully distributing the glasses, a quiet smile of curiosity hovered about her lips, which broadened generously as she attended each of us who were seated. After she completed her circuit, she walked over and stood directly in front of Fitzsimmons and Grover, who were making warming motions with their arms in front of the fireplace. They both stopped swinging their arms and looked down at her quizzically tilted head. Suddenly she was laughing, a merry, lilting laugh that seemed to drive the cold out of the corners of the room, and brought an enigmatic smile to the old woman's face as she dumped a load of wood.

It struck us all at once that the girl was laughing at the contrast between her light cotton frock and the heavy wool jackets and trousers that Fitzsimmons and Grover wore. She plainly was not cold at all.

As her laughter died away she stepped over to the table and pulled out two chairs. Her amused brown eyes went from one to another of us. We laughed and, in a simultaneous gesture of response, brought out chocolate, gum, and canned peanuts from our pockets, making an almost embarrassing pile of rations in the center of the table. We looked at each other



sheepishly; everybody had brought something. Grover had even brought a loaf of white bread in a sack.

The family gathered around the table, and for a moment I thought we had made some serious breach of Corsican etiquette. Then the mother nodded, and the girl reached for the bread. Breaking it in her fingers, she passed it around, and we had to watch for a painful moment while they ate it as we would eat cake.

Afterwards, when we had been amply served with wine, Charly brought out a guitar. He played "Down Mexico Way" and "Lili Marlene." Then Fitzsimmons asked Mireille if she would sing. Charly began "On the Bridge at Avignon." Mireille, sitting on a stool at our feet, looked into the fire through the first verse; then, barely moving her lips, she started to sing. The voice that had rippled so clean and pliant in laughter became low and resonant.

She sang to the fire, and with the fire. She sang accompaniment to the licking of the orange flame around the coals, and the incandescent caverns beneath. She sang to the quiet blue that hovered in the grooves of cedar, and to the lazy spiral of smoke that rose up to the night, and to the snow above the village, and to the stars.

It didn't matter, the title, "*Sur le Pont d'Avignon*." Throughout the first verse we stirred nervously in our chairs and looked at our knees. Avignon! The bridge at Avignon! We had a striking photo hanging in our bar that showed our "grands," our thousand-pounders, plowing into the bridge and into the Rhone. We made jokes about that song when it came over the radio. But when she started to sing we forgot all that. It was only the girl, and the fire, and the voice that drifted up with the smoke.

After that night our trips to Ghisoni became more frequent, and since there were always one or two new ones in our group, the family became well known around the squadron. We usually took bread and vegetables from our mess and had the evening meal with them. These occasions were always gay because of those invariable bilingual blunders which overcome even the most stringent reticence.

Mireille, in particular, took it in her head to teach us French. She was a tireless teacher. She could tell, as if by instinct, the meaning behind our faltering requests at the table,

which at her insistence were always made in French, or what passed for it.

I suppose I saw more of her than the rest, and when I returned from Rome with the Swiss doll, it was I who made the arrangements to have the three children down as guests of the squadron. From the moment they arrived in the tent area, they were showered with gifts of every description. The circumstances of the flowers, of course, were common knowledge among us, and Mireille received awkward but unmistakable gratitude. She was perfectly at ease with the small crew of men who followed her around from tent to tent. Her eyes had a way of exclaiming over each new gift, and she thanked each man personally, by his name, or by his rank if she had not seen him before. Sergeants, Lieutenants, and Captains seemed to expand with the promotion her soft-spoken French gave to their titles, and responded with unheard-of words like "honored" and "privileged." For once no one made a joke.

Occasionally we would go inside one of the tents, where Mireille's wide eyes wandered over the helter-skelter of personal possessions, and I noticed that invariably they came to rest on the few books to be found in each tent. Sometimes she picked one up and ran her fingers caressingly over its cover as if it were a smoothly polished piece of wood.

When Grover offered to show them the airfield, I went to my tent, carefully wrapped the Swiss doll with red cellophane, then replaced it under my bunk. I planned to save it till last.

That night in our clubroom, which we had built in a near-by stone barn, the squadron gathered for a last celebration. The party was a success from the start. Mireille sang again with the same quiet sureness she had had in her own home, and with the same extraordinary effect on her audience. Afterwards, when Charly and Pierre settled down to look at comic books, Mireille walked around the room studying the photographs on the walls. I was relieved when she passed the one of the Avignon bridge, which fortunately was untitled. She stood before a group photograph of the squadron, and I realized with a start that she was looking for Leatherwood. No one had mentioned him to her, nor had she in any way indicated that she thought of him. But as her glance came to



rest pensively on his likeness, I thought her eyes moistened for a second. I got the vaguely disconcerting impression that she regarded him with something more than fondness.

When she finally turned away, she walked over and took a chair near the radio. She sat very quietly, her long lashes almost concealing her eyes, her body swaying slightly in rhythm with the music. After a moment the Colonel walked over and, with a smile, asked her to dance. I was struck with the fact that he offered no condescension to her age. She rose eagerly, with instinctive decorum, as if she were indeed the lady his manner implied. They danced one number, then others were cutting in.

She danced with the quick, boxy step of the French and with a high amusement that rang out when she tossed her head and laughed. Her long, dark hair struck most of her partners just above the waist. That and her long, white legs were the only reminder that she was anything less than a woman. All eyes followed her movements. Remote and untouchable, she danced the eternal promise and expanded the tight hearts of those to whom she turned, as she often did, to bestow a radiant, guileless smile.

I stood to one side watching. I was very proud of the attention she was getting and pleased that I was responsible for her while she was with the squadron, but more than that, I looked forward to the moment when I would be alone with her and would give her the Swiss doll. I would drive her to the pink house where she was staying with the Red Cross girls, and give her the doll then. It would be the last time I would see her; we were flying at dawn to our new base—all but the rear echelon, who were taking the bombs and vehicles over by boat. The Executive had arranged to take the three guests back to Ghisoni after we left.

As the evening wore on, Pierre and Charly began to doze over their comic books, and Fitzsimmons packed them off to his tent. Gradually the room emptied.

Mireille stopped dancing long enough to tell each group good-bye at the door. Her face grew sad for a moment; then, as she began dancing again, she apparently had eyes only for her partner. She seemed on her soul's holiday of happiness.

There were only a few of us left when I went into the game room to get her coat. As I lifted the coat from the

ping-pong table I saw that it was the same heavy black one she had worn that night she thrust the flowers into my hand. Involuntarily, I held it out before me.

*What a small coat! It was the garment of a child!*

I stared wide-eyed at the coat for a long moment, then quickly threw it over my arm and strode out into the light. She was still dancing.

*Of course she was only a child!*

When she saw the coat on my arm, she stopped dancing and, giving a low, contented sigh, pushed back her hair from her shoulders and walked toward me. "I dance with you now," she said, holding out her arms.

I tried to smile casually, and shook my head. I still felt the impact of that enervating wave that had swept over me in the game room. I shook my head emphatically.

She dropped her arms, and a brief, unspeakable hurt welled up in her eyes. Then she smiled, and taking the coat from my arm, laid it on a chair.

I waited an agonizing moment while a war bulletin interrupted the music. Then we were dancing.

I held my head high, peering into the corners of the room as we turned, barely holding in my hands her small, warm figure. Everything I had seen her do, every English word I had heard her speak, everything Monsieur Dominique had said about her furtive life in France, flashed across my mind. The way she looked the night after Leatherwood went down, the way she looked at his picture, the way she danced. Everything followed a cascading pattern that belied, somehow, the modest dimensions of her coat. Vividly I remembered my hesitation, my inability to give an explicit answer when the shopkeeper in Rome asked me her age.

"Of course she is a child! Of course she is a child!" I repeated it again and again.

Driving in the jeep, I hardly dared look at her face; the night was too impenetrably strange, the stars too generous. She spoke not a word. Her head was thrown back against the seat, her hair playing like the shadow of leaves across the dim oval of her face. I drove fast. The jeep bounced crazily. Once I heard her laugh.

I skidded to a halt in front of the pink house. I had to touch her to help her to the ground. Her hand was not cold.



As I leaped into the jeep, I barely saw her arms reaching for me. I jerked to a start. Above the sound of the spinning tires, I heard her voice: "*Bon voyage*," it said, faint and uncomprehending.

When I pulled up at my tent, the doll fell to the floor of the jeep. I had forgotten it.

I carried it in with me, thinking I would give it to the Executive for her when the orderly woke us for the flight. But at five o'clock, after a night of fitful sleep, I couldn't bring myself to believe she would be interested in this child's gift, this doll; I had never seen her do anything that children do.

Logically, I had admitted during the night that I had never really understood her speech, and that immaturity is perhaps best established by the spoken word. I had admitted that children caught in a world catastrophe would mature quickly. But there was something else; these admissions had the frailty of logic. I packed the Swiss doll with my things. Perhaps in Italy I could send it by mail.

It was even worse in Italy. She seemed to have lived too much for a child, to have left unsaid the constant, meaningless chatter of children I had known. Finally, fearing someone might discover the doll and ask questions I could not answer, even to myself, I gave it to a little girl in Fano.

My orders came to go home. With another pilot, I was to fly a war-weary plane to the rotation depot in Naples and transship to the States. It occurred to me that we could go by Corsica and land, that I might go to Ghisoni and see her and convince myself once and for all that she was merely a child.

When we were airborne, I put it up to the other pilot, mentioning something about seeing the island for the last time. He was willing, but I knew I could never land without having to tell him the whole story. I decided to go anyway; I had to know.

Corsica was under a blanket of snow. We passed over the bleak, unbroken whiteness of our old field, then saw the snow-hooded village sitting like a cornice on the mountain ahead of us. We circled low over the cluster of dwellings, and on the second time around, I saw the family standing in the snow. To one side, beside the old lady in black, I saw Mireille. Her foreshortened figure looked like a tiny tree. I was glad she looked small. I could barely see her hand stretched out toward

us from her dark coat, and her bare legs implanted in the snow. I changed the prop pitch several times, roaring the engines. Suddenly she was jumping up and down, waving both arms in recognition. I raised my eyes quickly; I had seen all I wanted to see. I looked across the Ligurian Sea. Squall patches feathered up its surface all the way to the distant mountains of France. To the east was the jagged coast of Italy. I headed the plane toward home.

Somewhere in Europe, there may be children who have lost their childhood to war, or by-passed it, leaping, as it were, full-blown to a form of maturity, but this girl below me was a child, a young girl hardly in her teens. I was free.

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### SMALL BLACK CRICKETS

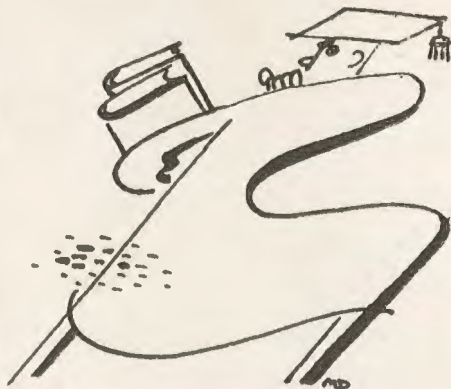
*Small, black crickets came hopping from the thickets  
Came hopping 'round the cold, stiff man  
Where he lay with a wide moon spray  
Lighting up the blank dead-pan  
With a phosphorescent glow, but the crickets didn't know  
It was poor mad Dan.*

*Poor Dan Hacket forever raised a racket  
And swore that crickets were the dead  
Poor damned souls that paid the sinner's tolls  
By being turned to crickets, he said—*

*That roamed the earth at night in search of something white,  
Hoping that they might find a body just dead  
With the soul intact that they could extract  
And make into a cricket,  
A small, black cricket.*

—Winston R. Henderson





## THE SUBJECT:

DR. EDWIN GRANBERRY—Professor of Creative Writing

The talent of Thomas Wolfe—one of the greatest potential talents in American fiction—was interrupted before his full power had yet been realized. Some of his finest writing appeared in a piece called *Child by Tiger*, an excerpt from his greatest novel *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe was better in his realistic rather than in his “purple” passages. In spite of the tragedy of untimely death, there can be no question that he, indeed, was a dominant force in American literature.

BETTY MILLER DAVIS—English major, Rollins College

When a writer’s *personality* is a subject for controversy, something is wrong. The failure of this self-styled Samson is primarily a lack of the shaping intellect. In Thomas Wolfe formless emotion never becomes form-al. He could not or would not control his ravings. The titles, *Of Time and the River* and *The Web and the Rock*, indicate grand conceptions, but he was constantly deflected from executing his designs. Wolfe himself called them “books”, not novels. Whole sections of these expanded notebooks could be switched without loss in continuity. Yet when he turns from autobiography in *You Can’t Go Home Again*, his locks are shorn.

His attempts at satire are unbelievably clumsy. His characters finally drown in the verbiage. Some of his faults are shared by “greats”: Stendhal in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and Joyce in *Stephen Hero* and *The Portrait*. (I expect to be guillotined for this last.) His insistent naiveness is irritating. “If he had lived—”?



## THOMAS WOLFE

MR. CHARLES A. STEEL—Rollins College English Department

Strictly speaking, Thomas Wolfe was not a writer at all; he was a stage that most writers pass through. He can best be appreciated by looking at two other writers, Keats and Swinburne. One usually feels sorrow that Keats died at the age of twenty-six; one sometimes is horrified that Swinburne lived into the Twentieth Century and did not die in 1867. I shall continue to read *Look Homeward, Angel* and shall never read again the later work. Wolfe’s one great novel is a tribute, not to himself, but to Aline Bernstein and Maxwell Perkins, his editors. Anyone who questions this last statement may take a look at the original manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Like Peter Pan, Thomas Wolfe was an unpleasant little boy who didn’t grow up.

DAN PAONESSA—Editor, FLAMINGO

To take Thomas Wolfe as a purely quantitative writer is a great mistake. No writing machine would take three years to turn out a first book, and throw out the second. No writer worked as hard as Wolfe, rewriting and polishing the thousands of pages of manuscripts he turned out. He was no novelist; he was always quite careful to call his published works not novels but *books*. In reality the writings of Wolfe are one massive book, unbroken and continuous, slashed by the blue pencil of his editors for public consumption.

It is impossible to understand or judge Wolfe by reading only one of his books, as it is impossible to comprehend Proust from one volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Wolfe began at the beginning and ended at the end; and his summing up is contained in the beautiful and poetic *You Can’t Go Home Again*—one of the great books of America, written by a great American prophet.





# S O U T H



*A sketch by* WESLEY DAVIS

**C**AIN'T very well smoke that thing 'thout lighten it, can I?" Shorty had rolled the cigarette into a shape that looked tailor-made. He admired its shape for a moment and then pinched the ends together to hold it. He fumbled thru his pockets. Bennie had already got up when Shorty jerked his thumb toward the house and said, "Run to the kitchen and tell Aunt Sallie to send me a match."

When Bennie came back with a stick-match from the kitchen, Shorty quit hammering on the clincher-rim and sat down on the half-inflated tire to smoke his cigarette.

"Did see a man smoke one once 'thout lighten it." The man paused to let the riddle register on the small boy's mind. When he saw Bennie's face start to frame a question he smiled a little and continued—

"Hit was lit for him. Nigger. Cool nigger. Don't see many cool niggers, but whin you do find one, there ain't no man kin hold a candle to him."

Shorty drew hard on the cigarette and then closed his mouth and looked at the boy. After what seemed an eternity he let the smoke out slowly from his nostrils. He looked at the cigarette where the fire had eaten a long jagged curve up one side.

"God-damned cheap paper they're putten out with this smoke tobaccah.

"Yuh see, Bennie, this nigger'd attacked a white girl and weighted her body down under a log in the edge of a lake. But her skirt-bottom floated up and told on him. They tied him to a fat-pine stump and poured kerosene on it to start it. One of 'em ast him if they was anything he wanted and he said a Camel cigarette. But whin the fellah put it in his mouth, one a the others struck a match and throwed it on the stump. Hit blazed up, and he lit that cigarette from the fire on the front of the overhall jumper he was wearin'. The last I saw of it, he'd smoked it down that fur." Shorty used his thumb to measure off about half of his forefinger.

"I was standen not further than from here to the shed there from him."

"How did he look whin he was burnin?"

"Couldn't tell much. Lightered-pine makes a hell of a black smoke. His face was soon hid, but they was all talken about that cigarette in his mouth."

Thumping it with his index finger and thumb, Shorty sent the butt of his smoke whirling thru the air. Bennie followed its course with his eyes, and automatically marked the spot where it bounced and rolled on the white sand. His bare feet knew the effect of a live cigarette butt. Shorty was on his knees again over the tire, machine hammer in one hand, tire tool in the other.

"If they wanted him to suffer tho', don't see why they poured kerosene on him cause he burnt awful fast. I wasn't much bigger'n you whin it happened, but I'll never fergit it. The way it smelled. I had to go off and throw up."

"Did he burn all the way up?"

"Near bout. Somebody said they fished his heart outa the ashes an' it was still beatin', but I never knowed whether to believe it."

"Uncle Henry told me about a nigger they burnt up there close to Atlanta, and he said the nigger ast for some corn bread. They give him two pones an' he et all of it. Then he ast for something to hold in his mouth, and they give him a piece of a broom handle that was layen on the ground close by. Whin they lit the fire, he bit it in two."

"Son, I believe Uncle Henry was handen you a line of bull. You mustn't believe everything you hear."

Bennie looked at Shorty's model T Ford car sitting on blocks, its four wheels in various states of repair, the hood off and lying on the ground near-by, the head off and the four cylinders gaping open like big black eyes.

"Are you gonna let us all ride in that car whin you git it put together."

"That's what the dammed thing is for, Son. To ride in."



## POEM

*Distrust a system mortared by fear—  
that edifice a prison is.  
The writing on the midnight wall  
Mene mene tekel upharsin  
instead the alphabet on sky inscribe  
inspired, breathed in the morning air.*

*And sunbeams swirling in a mote  
and coffee curdling with the cream  
and Martin sucking in the smoke  
and the stubs sizzling out in the cup  
though radio blows rings of fear:  
Mene mene, the time is near!*

*I saw the writing in the sky  
the metal plane went on before  
it was PEPSI-COLA on the blue  
lettered in white. Before the A  
was done, P wavered in the wind.  
I said, An awesome augury.*

*But Martin, here is morning coffee.  
Hours are left before the day  
must sizzle out in the cup of night.  
And PEPSI-COLA, quavering white  
(though distorted where the winds  
its widening letters dissipate)  
surely will arm against the night.*

—Betty Miller Davis

## POEM

*Better the lips be clay,  
The hands be dust,  
And the heart be muddied mold  
Better the dawn be strangled,  
The night be slain,  
And the glass of time be crushed.  
Better the vision vanished,  
The dream be dead,  
And nought be left but the carrion grave.*

*Better are these than living,  
For the gods reach out  
And tear at flesh not dead;  
And skies look down and leer  
At straining hands uplifted,  
And mock the weary, whispered prayer.  
For man alone and lonesome,  
Fleeing the knives of time,  
Strikes at the clutching shadows,  
And claws at doors forever barred;  
Till hope seeps out the breast,  
The spirit shudders and sinks,  
And the flesh grows withered and dies.*

*And the soul? Ah, the soul;  
Where then does it fly,  
Does it rise from the night of living  
To the land of eternal day?  
Or, like the flesh, does it falter,  
Does it falter and fade?  
Like the flesh does it sicken and stumble;  
Does the soul, like the flesh,  
Grow weary of living at last and die?*

—Stuart James



# POETIC FURY: A LOST ELEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE?

by WESLEY DAVIS

**A**CTUALLY the person who contends that contemporary writing is lacking in certain respects means that contemporary writing does not sound or look like what he is used to. When he says that a modern writer lacks poetic fury, he means that the writer does not write like Homer or Shakespeare, or Shelley or Tolstoy. He is associating the general quality with the particular way that this quality is demonstrated in the writings of certain men. Critics from Pope and Samuel Johnson to Eliot have felt called upon to warn the world against mistaking personal prejudice and cultural bias for universal truth. We are all familiar with the fact that accepted notions have sometimes been proved by subsequent history not to be best in the long run. Though it is offensive to our democratic indoctrination, even the will of the majority has at times appeared not good to subsequent generations. We must be careful in our dismissal of those things which seem to lack the qualities that we have been taught to look for. They may be, and probably are, there, the qualities that give a work of art its reason for being. However, the idiom may be different and the subject matter strange, at first. We must allow every creative artist the right to stamp with his individuality his work; to place emphasis on what seems important to him; to form a concept of himself and his generation, and envision the world of his immediate posterity.

Let's not deny to contemporary literature so vital an element as poetic fury, although it may not appear in the same manner that we are accustomed to finding in the classics. In our formal education we are impressed by Marlowe's "mighty line", the organ-toned magnificence of Milton's blank verse, the inspired heroics of Homer, Shakespeare's keen grasp of human nature expressed in superb poetry, and the profound passion of Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth. "Where are the great masters today? What contemporary can we place beside these? Where is the divinely inspired power of the past?

the passion? the beauty? the wild cry? the moral indignation and the wrath? the heroic concept of man and his potentiality? the singing and the gold? the POETIC FURY?"

Contemporary writers tend generally to suggest and imply rather than to state explicitly and directly. There is no attempt to lift the reader bodily into a mood or feeling. He is not blasted into submission by a thunder of furious language. The writer does not say: "Look here, now, poor mortal, I'm telling you that we all must die, that our stay on earth is brief and unavailing, that life is tragic and the grave the only sure thing: be sad, reader, bewail the spectacle of man on earth, god-damned or godless." The writer for the most part leaves to the reader the privilege of supplying his own conclusions. The stimulus is offered; the material is abundant for the reader's use, but he joins with the writer in achieving the final objective of emotional effect or mental activity. There is less violence, and more control. Is a poet less a poet if he is conscious of his art? In the final analysis, "poetic fury" lies within the poet or writer. It is not an external aspect of his work. The work is the instrument whereby we see the poet and the world, or more properly, the poet's concept of himself in relation to the world.

The Jewish Prague-born Franz Kafka, who died of consumption in 1924, left behind three unpublished novels which are at present finding their way into America. He is considered by many European critics the most interesting writer of his generation. In *The Castle*, we find a religious allegory similar to *Pilgrim's Progress* in that the hero in both cases is trying to work out his own salvation. In both cases it is necessary that certain moves be gone through without a hitch. The difference is that our modern religious hero is living in an age of skepticism, which makes his task immensely more difficult. Accepting nothing in the past as an absolute guide, the modern religious genius chooses and rejects, selects and discards, exhausts the present and projects his hypotheses into the future seeking his salvation. In the symbolism of *The Castle*, man's whole destiny takes the aspect of a giant bureaucracy controlled by human beings but so large that no one person or group can know how it operates or much affect its operation. Everything is governed by laws but the system has become so intricate that it has passed beyond human power to grasp. Everything continues and individual destiny is decided



by someone beyond the persons' knowing and the knowing of anyone he can know. At one point in his pilgrimage the hero tries to assert his rights as he sees them. A woman bureaucrat of very minor station, but whom the hero has been led to believe is in the know, scolds him, "You can do what you like. Your actions may leave deep footprints in the snow out there in the courtyard, but they'll do nothing more."

Economy of language, preciseness of thought, simplicity of expression, characterize this modern style. These do not lessen the power or detract from the terrible underlying significance of this passage which, taken in its full context, assumes awesome proportions. Its very simplicity gives it the striking force of a parable. In another instance in *The Trial* where the hero is on trial for a crime the nature of which he is never told by a court which is beyond his understanding and influence, we are given a sort of resume of his plight in the form of a parable. The defendant seeks refuge in a cathedral and the priest offers these words: "You are deluding yourself about the court. In the writings which preface the Law that particular delusion is described thus: before the Law stands a door-keeper on guard. To this door-keeper comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the door-keeper says he can not admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. 'It is possible!' answered the doorkeeper, 'but not at this moment'. Since the door leading into the Law stands open as usual, the man bends down to peer through the entrance. When the door-keeper sees that, he laughs and says, 'If you are so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From hall to hall, keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. Even the third of these has an aspect that I cannot bear to look at.' The man looks more closely at the door-keeper with his furred robe, huge pointed nose and long thin Tartar beard and decides he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The door-keeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed in and wearies the door-keeper with his importunity. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the door-keeper. The

door-keeper accepts all, saying however, as he takes each gift: 'I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone.' In the first years the man curses his fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. He grows childish and since in his prolonged watch he has learned to know even the fleas in the door-keeper's collar, he begs the very fleas to help him and to persuade the door-keeper to change his mind. Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams immortally from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies all condenses into one final question. The door-keeper has to bend down to hear him, 'What do you want now?' asks the keeper. 'You are insatiable.'

'Everyone strives to attain the Law,' answers the man. 'How does it come about that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?'

"The door-keeper perceives that the man is at the end of his strength and that his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear: 'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for *you*. I am now going to close it.'"

One may search the wonderful Bible of Judaism and Christianity, the sublime teachings of the great Buddha, the Koran, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Melville, Goethe, and other seekers after spiritual truth, and find few passages to surpass this modern parable. True there is no Captain Ahab, braced on his wooden leg in the tossing bow of the dory, hurling the long harpoon into the shining mass of the great white whale, and hurling magnificent curses at this thing which symbolizes a destiny that he cannot understand except to hate it and curse it and die fighting it. No! In this modern *Trial* a little better than average white-collar clerk is faced with the task of accounting for his very existence on earth. In the passage quoted above we are given a brief but terrifying impression of his problem and what is apt to happen. The theme is man's destiny and the helpless fury which torments the soul of the author is passed on to the reader by means of one the simplest, oldest, and most effective techniques: the parable.

Since time began many poets have despaired of their own



age and time. In fact a study of poetry is almost a study of rebellion. The poet is ever conjuring for himself a better world, looking to the past, the future, or into the vast stretch of his own imagination. "We look before and after, and pine for what is not. Our sincerest laughter, with some pain is fraught!" cries the romantic Shelley. "O! for a draught of vintage cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth," sang Keats with more than sensuous implications. "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour; England hath need of thee; she is a fen of stagnant waters." "The world is too much with us late and soon. Getting and spending we lay waste our powers." Here we see Wordsworth hating his own time. And Christ, in a fit of indignation, cursing his generation. "O! ye generation of vipers!" Despising Philistinism, loving passionately the underdog, commanding, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Has this sort of expression of poetic fury vanished from contemporary poetry? T. S. Eliot has shown our age as a spiritual "Wasteland" with modern man roaming the earth seeking a spiritual home: "We are the hollow men. We are the stuffed men: Leaning together, Headpiece filled with straw."

"The world revolves like ancient women, Gathering fuel in vacant lots." "This is the dead land. This is the cactus land. Our voices when we whisper together are like wind in the dry grass." "I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas."

And in protest against his final destiny the modern poet in a carefully controlled rage, "For I have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, I have measured out my life in coffee spoons . . . But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed, Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, I am no prophet—and here's no matter; And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, And in short I was afraid."

Eliot is probably the most talked about poet of the century, and nothing that I can say would add to or detract from his worth. We can safely say that he is no Shakespeare "warbling wild" nor is he an "artful Addison". He gives us no Lear roaring in the storm outdone by insidious forces far less magnificent than himself. But he is not an academic Spectator. His poetic sensibility is not only aware of the forces of the indus-

trial world, but fearful of them: fearful that the individual soul has lost its identity in complexity and the faithlessness of our time.

In spite of our Eliot, Kafka, Connelly, Faulkner, T. Wolfe, Shapiro, and a host of other creative artists, there are still the reader-critics who look backward and yearn for the noble simplicity of the ancient and classical masters, not realizing that it is as nearly impossible for the genuine artist to write in the same modes as the classicists as it is for the nuclear physicist to work with the theoretical and practical tools of Newton or the medieval alchemists. It must be remembered that our age has been complicated by more revolutionary discoveries than in all previous history. We live in a world of constantly shifting concepts and values. Few things in our minds today are sharply defined or clearly delineated. It is difficult, nearly impossible, for the writer today to take the side of good and lash out furiously against evil, because good and evil can no longer be neatly classified and set in epic battle against each other. Ours is a questioning age: skepticism is our god; dogmatism, our devil. Can we take a violent stand, unrestrained, when the seed of doubt is always with us? Our vast increase of knowledge has taken us to the point where we know nothing for sure! Poetic Fury! The wild cry against wrong, misery, suffering, tyranny, bigotry, persecution; the indignant shout of the one against the many; the individual soul in torment; the Spartan struggle against Thermopylean odds. Is it missing in contemporary literature? Certainly not! Only refined, intellectualized, tempered and hardened and channeled by Darwinism, Freudianism, electronics, total war, pragmatism, Hegel, Marx, Proust, William James, industrialism, liberal education. No poet today can flap the wings of his inspiration and crow from the fence of his private world with the assurance and un-selfconsciousness of a game cock.

The writer today, in order to be taken seriously, must take cognizance of the multitudinous facets of present day learning. He is not permitted to sit and contemplate his navel like the Buddha. He has to try to write intelligently about a world more complex and varied than ever dreamed of by writers of previous times. A literature to match this sort of world must be infinitely subtle. Most modern writers have thrown away the blunderbuss and have substituted the surgeon's kit of fine-edged tools.



*Discussed by*

DR. ALEXANDER WAITE

*Professor in Psychology*

MR. CHARLES REX

*Instructor in Music*

*The Question:*

*Do you think that a practical,  
workable form of world government  
can be obtained?*

REX: I believe that world government *is* very necessary and should be the dream of every straight thinking citizen. But, at the same time, in trying to accomplish world government, many factors are in danger of being overlooked. One is that while we think we are dealing with nations, we are dealing only with individual leaders of nations or their representatives, with their individual idiosyncrasies and personal prejudices.

WAITE: What you are implying is that the representatives of nations need to operate under international law, isn't it?

REX: Yes.

WAITE: You are emphasizing the point that international law *is* necessary and that we need a world government to keep nations from going to war with one another. Isn't the real problem that we need a world government to safeguard all nations from aggressor nations? We have two kinds of social institutions—those which arise from the habits and attitudes of men into established ways of doing things and those which are deliberately created to serve some need of man. We must believe that we can create an institution, such as a world government, which will enable us to prevent wars between nations.

REX: That's certainly true, but I would like to bring out this point. Though the American people seem to have no definite plans for world government, actually they do: it is their form of government with America taking the leadership.

WAITE: The United States *must* take the leadership—based on a clear purpose to abolish war between nations. Our American form of government is based on a philosophy of the nature of man. Our governmental structure is just our way

of realizing a way of life for man. It is a means, and we have provided in our constitution a way of changing it when the needs of men require it.

REX: But, I maintain that leadership by America would be dangerous, in that a nation like Russia may resent any such leadership since she may covet it for herself. Russia is proving herself uncooperative and America is fast becoming unprepared for the use of force or defense.

WAITE: Well, of course, we can't set the American government up as the perfect example, but I do think a world government can profit by the mistakes the United States has made. In our society we think government should serve man and preserve for him certain "inalienable rights." In other societies, man is regarded as the tool of the state. In my opinion a world government is possible only with our philosophy—"government exists to serve man."

REX: But don't you agree that it's extremely unlikely Stalin would be willing to become the senator from Russia in a world senate when at present he has only to reach for a telephone set to set in motion machinery that may make more secure his position as dictator?

WAITE: You are speaking of an authoritarian leadership. There are other kinds. There is the kind of leadership which wins other people by reason of their belief and confidence. Our leadership should create confidence in other nations so that they will join with our efforts to create world government because of their own beliefs in it and in us.

REX: In our thinking of a world government of nations we must not overlook the psychology of the individual and we must be prepared to use force.

WAITE: I'm glad to see you're not entirely against world government.

REX: Entirely? Quite the contrary. I simply feel that world government is not going to come unless more attention is given to the psychology of the individuals in power.

WAITE: But attention *is* being paid to individuals, and besides that, America has a great many nations on her side who think as she does. Also it's a little absurd to think a nation like Russia would want or could afford another world war. It's the will of the Russian people, not the will of Stalin, that would be the deciding force.



# JOHN

*A short story by* MARY MALTA PETERS

I SUPPOSE that John, growing up, had more of the town's interest focused on him than any other youngster in town. At first it was a cynical, knowing, attention; his father was the town bum and we quietly awaited his heading down the primrose path. His mother wasn't much help to him—she had been something of a beauty before she married Big John, and she never got used to not being supported at all, much less in the style her pa had managed.

Time John was about 13, all of us had changed our minds. He'd had a paper route for a couple of years, and the papers were always delivered and the bills were never mixed up, and he was about the cleanest boy I ever saw. Even his fingernails were clean.

He was a student, but he wasn't a leader. There wasn't any fire or brilliance about him; hard as he worked he never won any prizes or even made very good grades, but there was certainly grit in his soul, and a native integrity. I remember one time when he couldn't have been more than ten, and a pup got run over near where he was walking. He had been brooding over something, and hadn't noticed the pup until it was hurt. The man who hit the dog was upset, of course, and said John should have yelled. That really hurt the boy. He worried for weeks.

When he got in high school, he got a job as errand boy in Doc French's drug store, and gradually worked up to the soda fountain and sales end. After he graduated, Doc took him on full time and let him work up as fast as he could. The boy was ambitious and took a correspondence course in pharmacy, and it was slow, painful progress, but he passed the course and the state exams, and time he was 22 years old, he had actually amounted to something.

Old Doc French, now, was a kindly soul, shrewd as they come, but kindly, and certainly proud of John. Treated him like a son, he did, and after John's folks died, he even took him

under his wing. None of us were too surprised that when he died, he left the store to him. John was twenty-four then, and making good money.

Right about then, Ellen Forrest moved back with her little girl. Ellen had been a regular wild cat in her time, which was long gone, and she was still a mighty good looking woman. Her husband had been dead just long enough for her to run through his estate, so she coyly came back "home" to settle down and rear young Eleanor quietly.

And of course she met John and gradually convinced him that the years between them didn't matter. Everyone had something to say when John married her. Most of the fellows just shook their heads, but the women really had a field day. Reckon my wife boiled it all down when she exploded to me:

"That John Ransome must not have a grain of sense in his head, marrying Ellen. It's not so much the difference in their ages, although a man 25 has no business marrying a woman 35. She's such a soft, pitiful, helpless little thing, though—be pudgy fat in another five years. And that spindly daughter of hers. Honestly. Fourteen years old and still all feet. She has a wild expression in her eyes, too. I don't like the looks of this marriage. Poor John, supported that trifling family for years and as soon as he belongs to himself, marries this no-count widow. Sometimes I wonder about men."

"Now, Fanny," I told her, "It's not your affair. That Ellen's a mighty pretty woman and John's a fine man. And he loves kids. Wouldn't worry. It's their marriage."

Sure enough, everything seemed to go along all right. John's whole life was absorbed in his home and family. Ellen wasn't much of a wife, of course, the way some of us value wives, but she stayed mighty pretty, and even if she never lifted a finger to do any housework, I reckon she lifted her voice cause that daughter of hers really kept things spotless. She was turning into a right smart looking girl, too, that Eleanor. More like her pa, I guess, for Ellen was tiny, or at least short, and Eleanor, well, she was kind of tall.

She had good bones, though, and she carried herself mighty well. She wore a lot of these baggy sweaters and run-over shoes, and her hair hung straight down to her shoulders, but it always looked clean and shining. Her face always looked



clean, too—she just scrubbed it, I reckon, and painted her mouth a little. Even Fanny got to like the kid.

Ellen, now, began to get kind of heavy after a few years went by, but her hair was always curled and perky, and her face was painted so it always kept that pink and white baby look.

John, well, he stayed about the same. Got a few lines around his eyes, and his mouth got a little firmer, but his eyes stayed sparkly, and he smiled just as often. He made a lot of money, John did, in the first few years after he married. Fanny always claimed he had to work that hard to keep Ellen in paint, but I just figured he was born to work and couldn't help it.

At any rate, he sent Eleanor off to school with a fur coat, and some leather luggage, and I'll declare she was a fine looking girl, standing there waiting for the train. I was looking out of my window watching them, and when the train came in I saw she just put her cheek up to Ellen's in that silly way women do, and then she kissed John good-bye.

The next few years went by in a pretty big hurry—first thing I knew, Eleanor was graduating from college and coming home. A lot of us wondered if it would be for good, and Fanny said quite frankly she had looked for a diamond ring. There wasn't one, though, and from the looks of things, Eleanor didn't much care. I know my nephew put in a good many hours hanging around there, but she never would pay him any mind.

Then, all of a sudden, she just took off. Went to Chicago, I think, and started working up there. Next thing we knew there was a big spread in the paper about her marrying some young scientist who was revolutionizing one of the industries. John brought his picture around and showed us, and he looked like a mighty fine man. Had good eyes, and a strong chin.

John looked a lot older after that—and when Eleanor's son was born, you might have thought he really was his grandfather. John was only 36, but his hair had gotten mighty gray, and there were lines around his mouth now.

Ellen, now—she had really gotten fat. And for some unknown reason she decided to dye her hair red. She really looked pretty bad, but she pranced and fluttered and was just as coy as she had been when she and John first married.

Fanny used to stare after her when she went down the street, and then she'd put her hands on her hips and open her mouth, and I'd rattle my paper, so she'd just smile and shake her head. Ellen did look comical, though, she was so fat, and wore such fussy dresses.

The day she came into my office in pink chiffon, I just about fell out of my chair. I never saw so many ruffles in my life.

"Henry," she says, "I'm leaving John and I want you to handle the case."

"You're leaving John? What for?"

"Cruelty." And she stood there and looked me right square in the eye.

I looked down at some papers on my desk. "I'm not a divorce lawyer, Ellen," I began.

She stood up. "And besides, you're John's friend. Well, I'll find someone else." She smiled a little and walked over to the door. "I just wanted you to know that I'm leaving him."

I let her go, but I didn't much like the sound of things. I didn't see how she could hurt John much, in his business—all of us knew him too well. But his home was his real life, and if she was wrecking that . . .

I locked up the office and walked on home. Fanny brought me some cold buttermilk and then just sat there, sewing on a quilt and waiting. Finally I told her.

"Humph," she said, "Always knew that much fat was bound to get rancid after so long a time. Did he beat her?" She laughed a little.

"I didn't ask her. I'm pretty worried, Fanny. John's a mighty fine boy . . . think I'll wander around and see what the story is."

Sure enough, everything was just about as I figured. Ellen had been enough places so that the story was pretty well spread, but nobody would pay a mite of attention to her. It developed that for the past months John had hardly spoken to her; even when she dyed her hair he didn't seem to notice, and she just got fed up. I reckon that is cruel to a woman like Ellen, so used to flattery and attention, but I knew John had a reason and I knew he'd come around and tell me about it sooner or later.

It was later, considerably. Ellen finally went out to Reno



and got herself divorced—got quite a sizeable amount of alimony, too, and came back to their old house. John, of course, had moved down to Mrs. Crane's boarding house even before she left, and one day I saw him on the street.

"John," I started, and he seemed to come from a long distance to recognize me.

"Why, hello, Henry—haven't seen you in a coon's age."

"I know, son. Today I was looking for you special. Fanny's got a couple of fryers and we want you to help us eat them."

"Why, thanks, but . . ."

"Wish you'd come, John." My voice was merely friendly. I arranged it so.

"All right, Henry. I'll be there about six."

He walked on down the street again, back in his private world. Before he got to the house, Fanny and I had decided that something had to be done about him. His hair was white now, and he was thin and stooped.

So, after dinner when we bent over a game of dominoes, I began to talk to him about coming to live with us. He wouldn't listen for awhile, but Fanny and I finally broke him down and a day or two later he moved in.

He was certainly no trouble. Neat as a pin, he was—and quiet. Fanny and I got him to spend most of his evenings with us, instead of just staying in his room—and he gradually began to gain a little weight, and to hold himself some straighter. He got rid of that lost look in his eyes too, mostly, and some of the lines around his mouth.

I could tell, though, that he sat up many nights after we had gone to bed. Just sat, staring out into the night.

He had a lot to stare about, I guess. Ellen was having quite a time for herself on his money. She had bought a car, and another fur coat, and she had a maid. I never could figure out why she needed a maid, because nobody ever went to see her, but I guess she was too heavy to take care of the house, even if she wanted to.

Fanny saw her a time or two, in the drugstore, and said she had a funny look in her eyes, but we didn't pay any attention. Then, she died. There were a lot of whispers, but because the town thought so much of John, nothing ever came out.

Fanny and I wondered if John would go back to his house, now that his possessions and his money were his own again. Maybe not legally, but as far as the town was concerned. We didn't ask him, though, and he didn't say anything about moving.

Then one day he told me that Eleanor and her family were moving into the house. It seems her husband had a breakdown, and the doctors thought our climate and the quiet little town would be good for him. While John talked, the old lost expression came back into his eyes. "Do you suppose the town will wonder, Henry, if I stay on with you?" He didn't look at me, just stared out the window, and seemed to shrink a little as my gaze turned to him.

"Wouldn't think so, John. Young folks are supposed to be by themselves . . ." I watched him, and asked as kindly as I could, "Will Eleanor think it's peculiar?"

He tensed and his fingers gripped the window until the knuckles were white. "Henry," he murmured, "You see too much." After a pause, he went on. "I'm afraid she will, but I can't do it." He shook his head. "I just can't do it."

"Well, John, you're certainly old enough to know your own mind. You sure don't have to."

He turned then and forced his white lips into a smile. "Eleanor said that to me once, when she was fourteen. I asked her if she thought I should marry her mother—I didn't want to come between them, you see." He tried to laugh, but it was a barking sound.

I didn't speak, only waited. He stood there thinking for some moments, then his words came in a rush. "If I moved in with them, Henry, I might spoil things for her. I ruined her mother's life, that's enough." I very carefully did not speak or move. His voice lowered a bit, was slower. "Oh, I've been so ashamed, Henry, these years since the divorce. Poor Ellen had to take the blame from the town because I never had the courage to tell them it was my fault. She told them, but they wouldn't believe her. I never meant her any harm, it's just that I couldn't be any different.

"You remember how Eleanor left home so suddenly? That was my fault, too. Ellen had to send her, because of me. I—I fell in love with her, you see. It's funny, I never realized that I loved her, that way, until Ellen made it all so



clear to me. I had always just thought of her as my daughter, and when I stuck up for her, I thought it was because Ellen seemed unreasonable. But the longer Ellen talked, the more I realized that she was right: Eleanor wasn't my daughter at all, she was a woman only a few years younger than I, a fine and beautiful woman who was feminine in such an old-fashioned way, clear down under the surface.

"Naturally, as soon as I realized that I was in love with her, I was bitterly ashamed. I couldn't say a word. I couldn't deny it, and certainly I couldn't admit it. I just sat there and stared—and every time I saw Ellen after that I could only think of what she had said, and of Eleanor.

"As soon as Eleanor came in that night, her mother went to her room and told her she must leave . . . and why. I heard their conversation, I couldn't help it. Ellen's voice was so shrill, and Eleanor's was so quiet. She just said, 'You fool,' and Ellen—I think Ellen slapped her. Anyway she walked out of the room and slammed the door.

"Eleanor packed her things right away, and when she came back downstairs, I was still sitting there, staring into the fire. She smiled at me a little and then told me, 'I have time to catch the 1:15 train, if you'll drive me to the station.' I had to, of course, and I gave her some money.

"I never said a word to her. I didn't know what might come out, so I just kept my mouth shut. She didn't say anything either, until the train came in. Then she turned and put her hand on my arm and looked up at me and there were tears in her eyes. 'I wish it were true,' she whispered.

"Of course, I knew she was just mad at her mother. Then she kissed me goodbye." His voice broke, but after a minute he went on. "Henry, have you ever had a woman kiss you, and just had to stand there, when all in the world you knew you'd ever want was to hold her close to you for just a little while?" He turned and stared out the window.

"Of course, she left then, and I went on home. I really meant to be the same as I was before, but I just couldn't. I couldn't say a word to Ellen. I don't know how she stood it as long as she did. She tried to be gay and—and affectionate, and oh, she tried everything, I guess. But I couldn't even look at her. My guilt just pressed into me.

"When she told me she wanted a divorce, of course I had

to agree. I couldn't hold her any longer—not the way I felt. She tried to talk to me about money, but it didn't seem important. I told her she could have anything she wanted as long as she didn't bring Eleanor into it. I think that hurt her worse than anything else . . . there was such a confused expression on her face, almost confused. I guess it was just my own conscience that made me say it.

"I thought everything was settled, and over, but of course when Eleanor wrote and said that Tom was ill, it just started up again. I'm still in love with her, Henry, I can't help it."

I waited for him to say more, but he only stood there. Finally I said, "It might be easier for you to go away from here; you're still young."

He waved his hand in a weak gesture that stopped me. He sighed, then murmured, "It would be hard for me to start over, but I'd still be running away. I'd still be taking the easiest way. No, Henry, I have to stay here and try to find the courage to clear Ellen's name. I should never have let her take the brunt of that divorce. What a weak and miserable man you must think me; what a weak and miserable man I am."

With anyone else, I would have given advice, but I could not say anything to him. I could not think of anything to say.

Could you?

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### IN SEARCH OF PEACE

*Through all the ages men have bent their minds  
To learn what strength and peace it is that binds  
The cadent sea and sky. They've searched  
The Universe for one principle  
To rule their ways. In need of proof  
They dare not trust their hearts. But, build  
A mortared wall as protest to the sea.  
Or, finding this a false security,  
They ask that peace confine itself beneath  
A geometrically constructed roof.*

—Joan Leonard





# SONG OF AHAB

by DAN PAONESSA

## I

*From the depths of bottomless profundities have I looked;  
Through age-worn volumes have I sought—  
Girdling the globe with the sapience of men long since dust.  
With my books I have turned Argus,  
Studying and seeing with the eyes of a million prophets.  
Yet I have learned, O Colossus, that our puny lightning-  
flashes  
Only serve to expose a more massive darkness.*

## II

*Out of the yawning silence of the Gods  
The philosophers announce that they have heard a Voice.  
By calculating symbols of pen-scratching on paper,  
They create a chromium religion which says all—and explains  
nothing.*

## III

*How mean is this inconsequential mind  
Through which to sieve the immortal soul.  
How mean are its creations, which turn,  
Vulture-like, to feed on their creator.  
They reach like skyscrapers for the heat and glory  
Of the Sun, which fades below the horizon in a blood-red sky.  
And again they creep, catlike, in a tragedy of darkness.*

\*\*\* This text is set in twelve-point Caslon Oldstyle with titles in Modern Alternate Gothic, and printed on Kil-mory Book Text, a water-marked, antique laid book paper. The famous Caslon type faces today are precisely as Mr. Caslon left them in 1766. The cover and page layouts of this issue were designed by Martin Dibner. Printed at Rollins Press, Winter Park, Florida.\*\*\*



