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literary quarterly

Flamingo

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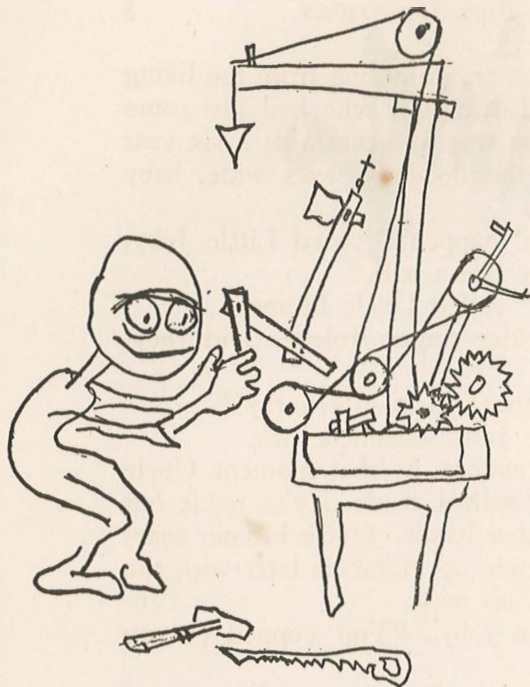
Flamingo

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Cover by Leonard W. Kitts



FIVE SIX --PICK UP STICKS

by TOM PICKENS

AUNT Martha Dickerson, plump and red as the apple in a roasted pig's mouth, dozed peacefully in front of the living-room window. From outside came the lazy sounds of a hot summer afternoon; the far cries of children, the insect-like whirr of a street-cleaning machine, a tired bird's song. She dozed on until the pain came suddenly in her hand, a bright, stabbing pain that felt like a rat trap snapping shut on her fingers. Her shriek drowned out all other sounds.

Aunt Martha stared incredulously down at her hand, resplendent with four fingers and a bloody stump where a thumb had been. Then she staggered to her feet, sobbing for help.

There was a palpitation of footsteps and the totem pole figure of Aunt Medea Dickerson lurched into the room. She took one look and promptly lost the little complexion her pale countenance possessed.

"Homer!" she cried. "Homer, come quick! It's happened again!"

The last, angular adult member of the family appeared.

"M'word, another one!" he said, gaping.

"Homer!" gasped Aunt Medea. "Get bandages, quick! Call the doctor! Call the police!"

"Yes, yes," said Uncle Homer, stumbling from the living room and nearly falling over Little Joby who had just come up from the cellar. Little Joby was six years old; a six year old pestilence. He stood in the doorway, eyes wide, baby mouth hanging open.

"Ooooo . . . did sumptin' happen?" cooed Little Joby, bouncing around Uncle Homer like a ball.

"Out of my way, squirt!" yelled Uncle Homer.

"Did somebody get anudder finger stoled? Did they. Huh?"

"Shut up!" screamed Homer. "I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, did they?" Little Joby screamed back.

Uncle Homer failed to answer. At that moment Uncle Homer's foot came in contact with a crude device made out of spools, match sticks, and rubber bands. Uncle Homer soared into the stratosphere. He came up moments later with the telephone table draped around his neck.

"Ya-a-a-a," howled Little Joby. "You stepped on my aw-to-mow-bile!"

"*Get the Holy Hell outa here!*"

Little Joby got, taking his home-made automobile along with him. He waited in the big front room that faced on the street until after the police and doctor arrived. Then he crept back to the living room door and listened to a policeman talking.

"I've heard of people stealing a lotta stuff in my day," the cop was saying. "One whack down-town used to snip hair off women, anudder usta go after their girdles. But this finger business, this is something else again!"

"Dear me," Uncle Homer sighed. "That's the third finger this family's lost. One for each of us. And it makes eight in the neighborhood. Probably it will be poor Little Joby next."

Little Joby got down on his hands and knees, peered around the corner into the room. He wanted to go in but one look at Uncle Homer told him it wouldn't be safe. He stood up and headed for the cellar. The excitement of people having fingers stolen was all very stimulating, but there were lots more fascinating things down stairs.

He switched on the cellar light and went marching down into the bowels of the house. He smiled a little three-tooth grin of pride as he approached his workbench.

Little Joby had made the workbench from an old kitchen

table, an abandoned ironing board, and a still functioning sewing machine, all discarded by his elders.

Little Joby placed his automobile on the bench beside a vast assortment of intricate gadgets which he had made. The fact that his elders had never bought him any toys had long since ceased to bother him. It was only when his own genius turned on him that trouble arose. Like the time the visiting circus had released a horde of massive balloons for advertising purposes, letting them float all over town. Little Joby had secured one and promptly proceeded, with the addition of a huge market basket, to make a one man blimp. He had taken a most wonderful trip across the countryside. He couldn't understand why his Uncle Homer had jabbed his burning cigar through the balloon when he had come for him that night, ten miles outside the city limits and resting very comfortably at the top of a big elm.

Suddenly Little Joby glanced at his six way wrist watch, then bounded out of the cellar into the backyard and flipped over the surrounding fence. The fence had stopped children twice his size but Joby went over it casually, using only one hand. He landed in the midst of a group of urchins, dirty-faced gremlins carrying new felled hunks of trees bigger than themselves. This was Little Joby's personal army, and while he was certainly not the biggest member of the ragged crew he was its chief by virtue of having pounded to a pulp those who had dared contest his leadership.

A council of war had been held with a gang from another neighborhood. A place and time of combat had been agreed upon. The time was now! Little Joby drew his army up in warlike array.

"Everybody all set?" asked Little Joby.

His army nodded assent.

"Can you handle those clubs I cut for you?"

"Yes," they chorused. "We'll moider them!"

"Well then," Little Joby commanded. "Hit the pavement!"

Little Joby's army spilled out into the street and started up the hill at top speed. The enemy appeared suddenly on its crest and charged down on them, volleying stones as they came.

The two armies met in the middle of the hill. Clubs smashed through air onto flesh. Whenever a head split open a lusty cry rent the air. Little Joby was everywhere, moving

from one side of the street to the other, urging on his outnumbered band.

One of Little Joby's comrades lay curled on the sidewalk, blood pouring from his mouth, a gash in his throat. Others of Little Joby's army were breaking out in a rash of bruises and slashes. Joby, however, had foreseen all possibilities.

Yelling for his embattled troops to hang on, Little Joby scaled a nearby wall, reappearing a moment later dragging a monster-sized slingshot behind him, a huge, crotched tree-trunk with sturdy inner tubes for bands. In his free hand he carried a great hornet's nest, the hole plugged with a cork, and sizzling ominously. Joby fitted the base of his slingshot into a niche atop the wall.

At that moment Little Joby's army began retreating. The enemy poured after them, shouting victoriously. Joby slammed the hornet nest into the sling and let fly. It hit the street directly in the midst of the enemy and splattered open. The enemy stopped, batted at the air with hands and clubs, jumped, howled, screamed, and then scattered pell-mell back up the hill.

When Little Joby returned to his house he thumped happily up the front porch stairs. All in all he considered it a very successful afternoon. He marched in to the living room where his elders sat moping, staring forlornly at their mangled hands. Aunt Martha looked particularly pale and wan. Uncle Homer had taken his bandage off only yesterday.

"Hi everybody," Little Joby said gaily.

"Scram, squirt!" yelled Uncle Homer.

Little Joby shrugged his shoulders and went whistling out into the kitchen and opened the icebox. Fies were for sissies, he thought, crushing two of them into one corner. He removed the cap from a glass of milk, poured it into a salad, then dived greedily into a mound of uncooked steaks.

After finishing he went down cellar again, took his boomerang from his workbench and went out into the backyard. Clemantine, the little girl from next door was waiting for him. Little Joby pretended not to notice her. Nonchalantly he balanced the boomerang in one hand, then heaved it and watched with apparent unconcern as it arched through the air and back to him.

"D'you just make that, Jo-bee?" Clemantine asked.

"Uh-huh," said Little Joby.

"You could make somethin' outa anything, I betcha!"

"Uncle Homer said God may have made a tree, but he damn well didn't make me."

Little Joby hurled the boomerang again. It sailed over the back fence, disappeared, and met an unseen object with a resounding '*thonk*'. The irate face of Joby's playmate, Gordon Parks, emerged from over the barrier.

"Yaw!" roared Gordon. "I'm going to kill you!"

He jumped to the ground, a hammer clutched firmly in a chubby fist. Little Joby carefully considered the situation, then streaked for the house, but Gordon's aim was quite accurate. The hammer skulled Little Joby before he made it. Joby somersaulted and came up rubbing his head. Gordon was laughing as he stopped to pick up a large rock.

The line of Little Joby's mouth became firm. He picked up the rusty hatchet leaning against the cellar door.

It was a long throw. Gordon had reached the fence and was scrambling over. But Little Joby's aim was unusually accurate. Gordon's head disappeared over the fence. The rest of Gordon settled back quietly beside the fence. Clemantine jumped up and down, shouting with glee.

It was Uncle Homer who answered the phone.

"Yes, Mrs. Parks?" he said. "Yes . . . Gordon! . . . my word . . . oh, my word! . . . I think the time has come when Joby and I should talk as man to man . . . Thank you, Mrs. Parks."

Uncle Homer dropped the receiver and plunged toward the cellar. His first impulse was to burst right through the door. But some inner impulse caused him to swing it open gently.

Little Joby and Clemantine were seated at the workbench, leaning forward intently, the bulb above them casting an oval of light over them and the neat piles of slender white objects. Uncle Homer crept closer.

Little Joby lifted one of the fingers from his pile, adroitly working an exposed tendon so the finger beckoned toward Uncle Homer.

Clemantine took some of the fingers from her pile and arranged them before her.

"One, two, three, on my knee," she chanted.

Little Joby gathered up several of his fingers and laid them out in an intricate design.

"Four, five, six, pick up sticks."

POEM BY MARILYN BRIGGS

Seeking completion
Finding none
Beauty enters
Leaving the outside searching
Truth surrounds
Leaving the inside pressing
Both together
The mind transcending
Man and woman
The other not filling
Weakened by body
Driven my mind
Raped by beauty
Torn by truth
Ruined by hope
Destroyed by love
Seeking completion
Finding none.

The pencil draws a line
Over and over the same curve
Until there is no more pencil
And other pencils continue
But there are no erasers
The line gets thicker
But not heavier
Blacker but no more color
It is always the same
Each line identical with the line before
The paper gets thinner now
But never goes through
Until a delicate hand
Saddened by the lines
Tears off the page.

64 - 40

"2 - 8 - 4, 2 - 8 - 4, calling Gremlin,
Gremlin tower. One engine out. Low on gas.
Have ambulance waiting. 2 - 8 - 4 calling
Gremlin. Go ahead, Gremlin."

A mere compedium of words, this,
Yet the words are poems —
And the name of this a poem,
The poem of 6440.
6440 was a radio wave length,
Also it was hope and sometimes the recipient
Of an epitaph, the last faint words before
The final melting of bone with metal.

*Gremlin — Homage — Oildrum,
Bangor — Coke — Crosby*
These were the American names,
The names of radio towers
On the torn airstrips at the edge of war.
These were the names that were called
And answered; announced the take-off at dawn;
Brought the planes in through storm, on fire,
Ailerons shot away;
The voice of a friend after the roaring silence
Of battle:
"Clear and number one to land."

*Snafu—Cheesecake—Hotdog
Main Street — Baker — Gremlin.*
"2 - 8 - 4, 2 - 8 - 4, calling Gremlin,
Gremlin tower. Answer please, Gremlin.
We are losing altitude rapidly.
Go ahead, Gremlin."

American names that were warmth:
*Exalt — Lanic — Upstream,
Jones — Junkcart — Foodshop:*
The names of home and letters and sleep:
Pisspot — Brooklyn — Heaven.

Not a poem but words,
Yet the words poems:
The poem of flying out of the storm
And battle, the long mission behind,
Calling and hearing at last
The beautiful poem:
"2 - 8 - 4, 2 - 8 - 4, from Gremlin,
You are clear and number one to land."

GORDEN B. CLARK



THE HIGH PILLOW

by A. L. DORSEY

AS it had been doing for innumerable mornings, the slumbering city was awakening. And, like most of the individuals of which it was the corporate body, the tired thing wished that it could merely stretch and, rolling over, go back to its dreams of the joyous night just fading away in the first probing rays of the rising sun. But time, the inexorable finger of destiny, pointed onward. Shuddering here and there, the city wakened itself gradually, and, paradoxically enough, its earliest signs of life were along the lower extremities. For, as any reluctant waker will do, who fears what he may see when his eyes are finally open, and he tests himself by straightening out his legs and experimentally wiggling his toes, so did the city stretch forth itself along the river and the river's edge.

On the river, a freighter, slipping down the misty channel to the sea, emitted one last mournful bellow that reverberated between the long, lonely warehouses and among the barnacled pilings under the greasy wharves. Fishing boats and farmer's trucks were being unloaded. Gulls circled. A rendolent breeze mingled pungent odors of fish and livestock with the almost imperceptible fragrance of freshly cut garden produce. And in the Palace Cafe, on the corner of Water and Bank Streets, Nick stood behind the counter, moodily munching on a toothpick. At the counter, his first customer sat meditating over a cup of coffee. Already the ubiquitous juke box sent its plaintive strains of "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire" throbbing out into the beginning heat.

If Lola, turning up Bank from Water Street, was aware of the dawning of a new day, she gave no indication of enjoying it. Walking hastily and purposefully, and unaware that

she was being watched or of the sounds about her, she came along the sidewalk in front of Nick's eatery. The French heels of her red shoes beat out a steady staccato on the pavement. Nick turned to watch her progress, a sardonic smile on his face.

Seeing Nick's movement, his customer also turned, and when she saw Lola she grinned suggestively and said, "Nice morning for walking, ain't it?"

Without removing his eyes from Lola's figure, Nick replied noncommittally, "Yeah, Emma, you're right."

Both watched her until she disappeared from their line of vision. Then, when they could no longer see her, they returned to their thoughts. Now, however, there was a difference. Both sensed a change in themselves, yet neither attempted to analyze it. The song from the juke box spun on, and although the words 'I've lost all ambition for worldly acclaim' permeated their pensiveness, Nick grunted to himself and turned off the hot water bubbling in the silex coffee maker. Emma began to whistle the tune softly.

Lola had reached her destination, two blocks from the Palace Cafe. There were only three flights of stairs to climb before she reached her flat. As she went up the front steps, she picked up a quart of milk on the landing.

Lola tiptoed into her apartment and went to the kitchen and placed the milk in the ice-box. Then she put on a pot of fresh coffee, lit a cigarette, and sat down at the shaky table to wait for the coffee to perk. Removing her tight shoes, she wiggled her tired feet. That felt so good that she rolled her stockings down to her ankles. Then, putting her feet on the opposite chair, she leaned back in her own with her arms crossed under her breasts. With the cigarette in one corner of her bright red mouth, she closed her eyes. The first thing she knew, her mind began to wander. She knew it would be impossible to relax until she had drunk her coffee and swallowed the small white pills. Moreover, it would only be then that she would feel the tension in her body die away. So, trying to escape the inescapable reality of her life, she thought about the love in her life. He was sleeping soundly in the bedroom.

She always repeated this little ritual each morning before she went to bed. She would recall those knowing looks in Margie's eyes and the words of advice that always accompanied them. Margie, the wise old girl, who said one night, "Yeah, yeah, I know, kid. It's love—true love. But it ain't for us,

you see. You've made a mistake, dearie, but it ain't one that can't be prevented from gettin' worse. Let me tell you how to get it off your mind."

Lola was nobody's fool. But never before had she found anyone to love with all her heart. She knew instinctively that this love would never end. Therefore, she would not accept this advice from Margie. Margie had figuratively washed her hands of the affair with a shrug of her bare, powdered shoulders. There were some additional words, however, that echoed in Lola's mind no matter how she tried to forget them:

"Listen, kid," Margie had concluded, "You'll be sorry. You'll be just a friend of mine who made the same mistake. Oh yeah, sure, he loved her for a long time, but there came a day . . . there came a day. Besides, what's it ever gonna get you? When you got somebody like that, you've gotta give and give. It'll become a habit with you, and then there's your *high pillow* . . . You know what that means, don't you, Kid?"

Lola knew. She also knew that this was her only chance at real love. "The kind of love they write poems about," she reminded herself in the loneliness of her heart.

And so she had kept him, and she was still keeping him on her high pillow. She would keep him there as long as he wanted to stay. Whenever he became angry and struck her in a fit of anger, she took it. That was the way it was. Usually, however, he was sweet to her. Often his affection was breathtaking, and Lola knew then that all the happiness she would need for the rest of her life was wrapped up in their relationship. Only deep in her heart did she know that Margie was right. But for now, and for as long as he would want her to, she fulfilled his every wish insofar as she was able. Because, as she knew, that was the only way to keep a high pillow lover.

Suddenly, Lola realized that there was something she had forgotten to do. Pausing to turn down the fire under the coffee pot, she put out her cigarette and walked noiselessly across the hall to the bath. Closing the door, she scrubbed the rouge and lipstick off her face, cleaned her teeth and gargled thoroughly. Then she went back to the kitchen. By now the coffee was perking fragrantly. As she was filling her cup, she heard Emma puffing along the hallway leading from the back bedroom. Lola got out another cup and saucer.

Emma rolled herself into the kitchen. "Mornin', Lola," she whispered hoarsely. "It sure is gonna be hot today. That

ol' sun is gettin' ready to bear down. Just look at me. I'm sweatin' already. Damn. And here I'm gonna drink some steamin' hot coffee." Then, as an afterthought, she added, "But I can't get started without it. Damn."

"Sh," cautioned Lola, pouring out two cups of the black liquid. "He must still be asleep."

"Yeah, I know. You busy last night?"

"Not very."

"Yeah? That's tough. You didn't forget me, did you?"

And Emma eyed Lola's large pocketbook meaningfully.

"No, of course not," Lola said. "Here you are." Reaching in the pocketbook she pulled out a bottle of whiskey and handed it to Emma as they both sat down.

Emma's perspiring face grew bright and dewy in anticipation. She deftly opened the bottle and poured a couple of shots in her coffee. Then, as she held the cup beneath her nose and sniffed, she smiled across the table at Lola.

Although Emma's face smiled at her, the eyes were accusing. Lola removed a stained wallet from her pocketbook and handed Emma some of the bills in it.

"God," complained Emma. "I'll say you weren't busy." And while she drank she counted the money. Then, rolling the bills into a thin, neat roll, she tucked them into her big sweaty bosom. With the back of a puffy hand, she wiped off the perspiration gathering in the hairs above her mouth.

Lola swallowed her sleeping tablets with a mouthful of coffee, finished another cigarette, then pushed back her dishes and arose from the table.

"Gonna turn in?" Emma asked.

"Yeah. Sure."

"Well, you better not forget to drop them shades. It's daylight now, and although he didn't go to bed till late last night, you know what that means."

"Okay," Lola whispered back over her shoulder, as she went through the hallway to her bedroom. "I won't forget." Cautiously opening the door, she went in.

Once in the bedroom, she stood looking at the sleeping figure sprawled across the bed. Then, as if making a sudden decision, she lowered the window shades and undressed quickly. Quietly putting on a pair of red silk pajamas, she softly slipped into the bed. In the sudden darkness she could hardly see him, but as she pulled him up close, he tenderly put his little arms around her neck and murmured dreamily against

her, "Oh Mummy, you smell so good."

"Shush, baby," she whispered in his ear, after kissing him on the cheek. "Go back to sleep now. See, it's still dark."

And now, out in the lightness and brightness of the new day, the din and the motion of the whole city gave evidence of its wakefulness. Up above the river, the heights were vibrant with life. And down along the waterfront, where, even in the foggy dimness, the spirit of the dawn had first become manifest, there was, as usual, the greatest conglomeration of sound and of life. Down at the market, to the accompaniment of countless screeching gulls, hawkers spied out their clamorous cries. On the water and docks, the teeming life of the river was in full motion. From the clear sky, the morning sun shone warmly in all its fresh glory. And in the Palace Cafe, to the background of juke music, Nick leaned over the counter to receive the bills that Emma removed from a roll just divided in exchange for a small envelope of white powder.

THANATOS

It really never mattered
That all the words I said
Came from a twisted tongue
And never from my head.
It really never mattered,
My angered words fell loose;
It really never mattered,
And yet they tied the noose.
And now that love is strangled,
Its lifeless form lies dead,
What difference could it ever make
If caused by tongue or head.

—Bill Frangus

--OR VICE VERSA

by DALLAS WILLIAMS

Linden Hall

Wednesday, the 12th

My darling George,

The stars are so dazzlingly beautiful tonight, I can only think, as I sit here by my window, of you, and that superb poem of Byron's with the line—do you remember it, my darling—"Bright star—am I as steadfast as you?" You know that I am, my darling, always and always, and I can think of nothing but you and the beautiful times we had this summer watching those same stars, and oh, I miss you so much I wonder sometimes what will become of me.

Your letter today made my day complete. You write such beautiful letters, George. The only thing was, I can't comprehend that you should mind that Roy sent me flowers on my birthday. Had I known the way you would feel about it, my darling, I never would have mentioned it. Except I simply wanted you to know how much more I appreciated your beautiful compact. It's so much more personal, my darling. I can never powder my nose without thinking of you and how much I love you. I shouldn't tell you this, but I sleep with it under my pillow, and kiss it the first thing when I awake in the morning.

I'm just existing for your next letter. I wonder if I'll last the two weeks til you come and see me. It'll be heaven, compared to all the studying I've been doing. I'd like to write more now, except I have to go study for tomorrow. I have to study so much, my darling, but I don't mind, when I know you are thinking of me. I can't get you out of my mind, so, just as in our song, I'll See You in My Dreams.

Yours always and always,
Janie

Linden Hall

Wednesday, the 12th

My darling Roy,

It is such a dazzlingly beautiful night, all I can do as I sit here by my window is think about you and all the beautiful times we had this summer, and how I miss you so. And then

I think of that superb poem—do you remember it, my darling—about the steadfast star—which, compared with me, my darling, shrinks to nothingness when it comes to being steadfast. That's because I miss you so.

Your letter today was so sweet, but why did you have to spoil it worrying about George? I've explained a million times that he's just a good friend, that's all. You must realize—don't you recollect all the dates I broke with him this summer so that I could go out with you?

And I merely mentioned the compact I got from him because I wanted you to know that he simply doesn't have good taste like you do. Nothing in the whole world could mean so much to me as flowers. Except you, my darling. Now every-time I see flowers anywhere I simply think of you and how much I love you. I shouldn't tell you this, but I sleep with one of the roses pressed under my pillow, and kiss it the first thing when I awake in the morning.

I'm simply existing until your next letter. It seems years until the three weeks from now when you'll be here to see me. I'd give anything if it could be sooner, but as I told you, I have so much studying now that it just can't be. In fact, I've been studying all evening until now, when I couldn't keep you out of my mind any longer. I keep thinking of our son—and so, my darling, I'll See You in My Dreams.

Yours always and always,

Janie

Linden Hall

Wednesday, the 19th

Dear Sis,

It was so good to hear from you. I was so glad to hear that you and Phil are getting along so well. So Joe finally lost out, eh? Well, that's the way it goes. The poor guy. I'll bet he's all broken up, but those things just happen.

Like I said, it was nice getting your letter. I haven't had any letters for a week, and I just can't understand it. I was getting one practically every other day from George and Roy, and then all of a sudden, bang—they stopped. I just can't understand it. They're both coming to see me—well, not together—but the next two weekends, and their letters have been so sweet right along.

They're both such lambs, I almost felt mean sometimes writing to them both, but like you always say, a girl's got to be practical. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything to George

about Roy's present, and vica versa, but I thought it wouldn't hurt to try the old jealousy angle. Maybe I overdid it.

But I can't understand it. I'd been writing them such nice letters. Especially the last ones—I was really in the mood. You know—lots of stars and all that junk. I almost felt a little dreamy myself when I stuck them in the envelopes. The envelopes! Oh my god, so That's what happened! What'll I do? Do you think they'll understand? No, I guess they didn't. If you happen to see them, could you sort of explain? Please write back right away and tell me if they're real mad or what. I can't understand how I could ever make a mistake like that. Be sure and write soon.

Janie

P.S. Would you mind sending Joe's address when you do?

In the balcony I sit
And watch the leading lady
She cries and I wonder what she is thinking
The years go and I note their going
She prays
I stand afar
And think of the poetry in her prayers
Sometimes she touches me
But only insignificantly
She is not real
My lady has the lead and plays it well
So well, in fact, that I wonder
How I can sit in the balcony
And watch my life on the stage.

—Marilyn Briggs

CONVERSATION

"How's about Lana Turner?"
nice redhot bunsen burner
to really heat things
up
a fine boil
cockeyed turmoil
for god's sake just once
a good, honest fahrenheit-busting
self-
sizzle
no
dee-
co-
rous
untouchable lace and old smear-proof.

"And Clark Gable . . ."
a packaged
vicarious fable
for you
to moo
and munch a
mound—
or two
till the tumblings through
and your appetite is satisfied
O man! are you deified!
and is that rich
I'll go toss my ossified
hindquarters in a ditch.
"And a Bugs Bunny . . ."
Jeez, this gets funny
if rabbits have more than one virtue
I never heard of it
so when that celluloid
gets ecstatically
wrapped around your

smear-proofed misnomer
you find one more proclivity
and give me word of it
and there will be
a Whee!
new activity!
This whole thing is in the can
Lana's a woman
Clark's a man
Just fit the reels
start the wheels
and see how this
sen-say-shun
feels
with absolutely no damage
to nauseating

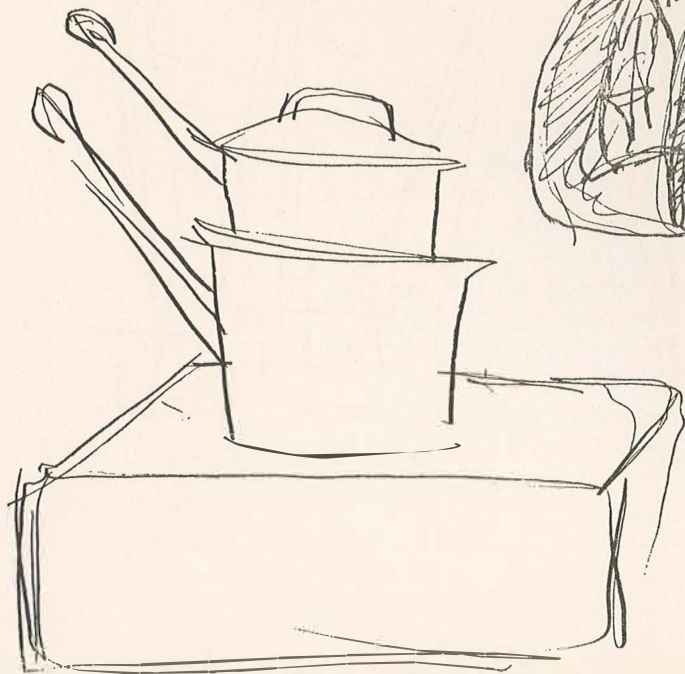
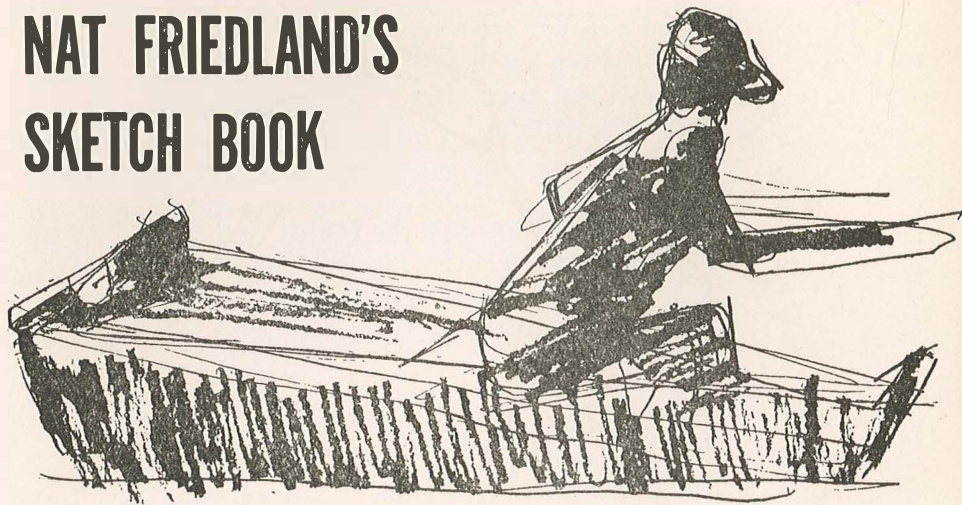
dee-
co-
rous
untouchable lace and old smear-proof.

—Roy Whidden

A mosquito woke me
Late last night
To teach me the strength
Of my anger.
Rebellious and cruel
I listened to the buzzing
And with all the force
Of two decades
Struck at it
And hit myself.

—Marilyn Briggs

VIGNETTES FROM
NAT FRIEDLAND'S
SKETCH BOOK



WHAT'S VANILLA TASTE LAK?

by MARTY ROSEY

PEARLINE was leaning over the washtub, humming "Ole Man River," and moving her strong black arms up and down in the mass of white foam in time to her humming. She picked up a faded sock covered with soapsuds and ran her hand through it from ankle to toe. Eyeing her bony finger sticking out at the toe, she shook her head. Still humming, she dropped the sock back into the tub. Her eyes seemed fixed on the white mass in front of her and even when she heard the door squeak, she did not look up.

"Ma, what's vanilla taste lak?"

Pearline looked up then to see her son, Sam, standing in the doorway. "What kinda question's dat?" she ask.

"I'se jest askin', Ma, 'cause I heared some people say it at de drugstoe."

"Sam Mills, what you bin doin' at de drugstoe fer heven's sake?"

Sam straightened his thin shoulders and his voice shook a little as he answered, "I had me some ice cream."

Pearline's fingers gripped the side of the tub and she said, "Chile, whar you git de money fer buyin' ice cream? You ain't bin out stealin', has you? I'se askin' fer de truth."

The small boy seemed to grow larger as he said, "No'm. I ain't bin astealin'"

Pearline interrupted, "Den, how you git dat money. 'splain dat to me."

Sam replied, "I was acomin' home from school an' I see'd ah nickle on de sidewalk. I looked 'round and der wan't nobody der, so's I jest picked it up. Den I thought 'I'se hungry' fer ice cream so's I go to de drugstoe. I walk in an' a man in a white coat done ask me what I'se wantin'. I tole him dat I ain't decided yet. Den he walk ober to some other boys an' ask dem what dey want. Dey ask fer strawbury ice cream. I bin watchin' dem an' whan I see'd what dey git, I ask fer strawbury, an' giv'd dat man in de white coat de nickle. So I ain't stole nuttin'."

Pearline put her hands back in the soapy water and started to hum again.

"But, what's vanilla taste lak, Ma?"

Pearline said, "Sam, if'in you dun had strawbury, why's you askin' what vanilla taste lak?"

Sam answered, "Cause after I git strawbury, one of dem boys said to me, 'Nigger, why'd you git strawbury?' an' I tole him it's 'cause I see'd dem git it an' I want some."

"Den dos boys dun de strangest thing. Dey walked out o' de stoe an' throwed der ice cream in de street. Dey walked back in an' ask dat man in white fer vanilla. Den dey laffed an' pointed at me. My strawbury din't taste good no mo' so I walked out o' dat stoe an' throwed it in da street. Dat's why I'm askin' what vanilla taste lak?"

Pearline slowly took her hands out of the tub, wiped them on her skirt, and walked over to the small boy. She patted him on the head and said, "Honey, vanilla ain't really much different from Strawbury, dey's jest a dif'rent color."

The flower with one petal removed
Is no longer the same flower
That petal — useless as it may be
Can never again attract the bee
Or blow with the wind
Or be the same to me.

—Marilyn Briggs

Life gives
But this, no more—
Today's experience,
Hopes for tomorrow, memories—
And death.

—Paul Bissell



BORROWER

by DEREK DUNN-RANKIN

I AM unpacking my stuff, when I look down and see Harry doing push-ups. "Say" he says, stopping all of a sudden, "Where did you get that honey?"

"What are you talking about?", I ask him.

"That tie," he says, referring to a yellow silk tie I have just hung up.

"Oh," I says, "that is just a twenty-five dollar hand painted which my sister-in-law gave me for Christmas."

"How about letting me borrow it?" he says, "I got a date tonight with a honey from down at the office and that tie is just the thing to clinch the deal." If that had been the last thing he borrowed we might still be room-mates.

This story, as you may gather is about, Harry, and I am writing it because I think somebody else should know what he was like underneath what the rest of the world saw. Harry was quite an authority on dames and maybe that is why he is not here today. Harry was not his real name, but according to my book it says not to use his real name as his relatives might object to what I say even though it's "as true as a five dollar bill" as Harry used to say.

It fell that Harry and I roomed together which gave him plenty of time to wear my ties and shirts also occasionally a saw buck of mine.

It happened the first week I was at the plant I had a buck on a baseball pool and who should win the pot but the same guy that cured me of playing the dominoes in the Army, I mean Harry. The only difference was that it was seven-hundred and fifty bucks then and this time only fifteen. Well I tell him what I think of his jinksing my luck like that and

then suggest that maybe it is a good thing after all as I would not have a bank balance now if he had not cured me of riding my dough on the dice in the Army.

It is five o'clock so Harry suggests we have a cup of coffee and talk over old times. I agree and the next thing I know he is telling me about his job in the front office and this little two room apartment for which he is only paying fifty a month which he is willing to split with me fifty-fifty. Right away we are going down to my hotel to get my trunk and check out. Harry grabs a taxi and we go down to the apartment, the same from which I am now writing this story. And if I ever have another room-mate I hope I kick myself. I pay off the cab, because Harry is already at the steps and the driver does not look like the patient type.

The apartment is not bad for twenty-five a month if you don't mind falling plaster. Besides I am kinda happy to get out of that crummy hotel which was costing a dollar a day anyway.

After Harry finishes his push-ups and knee-bends, we go down to Mike's place on the corner to chow up. We both order the dollar special and spend most of the time talking about the Army and the plant, and Harry gives me the low down on how the place ought to be run. Which according to him is the way it will be when he is bossing the show. After the pie and coffee I wait for him to make a move for the check as I figger it is his turn after the two bucks I shelled out for the taxi. I don't have long to wait, "Grab the check Joe," he says, "I'm gonna be kinda broke till Saturday."

Where he got the money to take his girl out that night I couldn't tell you, as he didn't hit me for any spare change until lunch the next day. One thing about Harry he always borrowed things he never just asked for them, but I still haven't got that tie back.

We had been living together just two weeks when he fixed me up with a double date. By this time I knowed that it was a good thing not to carry around no spare cash in my pockets. And to eat alone when possible. I wasn't too eager to go out on no double date but Harry said he had already got fixed up with this Barbara I had been seeing him wasting his lunch hour with and had promised that I would go along to keep her girl friend company. I wasn't going to have any part of it especially as I hadn't met the girl friend who's name

was Joan. But he said if I didn't it would crum things for him as Barbara said Joan had to come along too.

Harry had rented a blue convertible from a cousin of his for ten bucks. "We'll split fifty-fifty," he says, "and if you don't like this Joan I'll pay the whole thing, only give me twenty now as I had to pay cousin some dough I already owed him to get him to lend us the car." I had not even opened my pay envelope so what could I do- I gave him the twenty.

The short of it was that we both get dressed up and go to the girls' apartment to pick them up, the plan being for us to take the girls out to a movie and then back to the girls' place for a bite to eat—or something. If things was working out all right I was to say I had left my watch at the show and take Joan back to look for it and then take my time coming back so as to give Harry time to operate.

Maybe I should tell that this Barbara was a real dish, I mean not at all hard on the eyes. I had noticed that she knew how to get the most out of a sweater even when she was just leaning against the doorway and talking to Harry and those blue eyes and blond hair weren't faked either. Half the guys in the plant had tried to make time with her but she wasn't giving any of them a tumble, she wasn't snooty, but she wasn't tumbling either.

Well we picked them up in the convertible and Harry says, "You wanta drive Joe?" and climbs into the back seat with Barbara and Joan and I get in front. She is sizing me up and I am sizing her up and it looks like maybe we both think we been gyped, although personally if I looked like Frankenstein's half brother I don't think she would have any room to complain. Why is these dolls like Barbara always team up with something as homely as this Joan? Maybe she would not have been bad looking but she acted like she had just lost all her teeth or something cause she never smiled once all evening. What her favorite topic of conversation was I couldn't tell you because I tried her on everything from Danny Kaye to Oscar Levant and from baseball to dog races, but I didn't get a rise out of her once. I even tried telling her a couple of jokes including the one about the peglegged hockey player, but not even a titter.

Harry and Barbara in the back seat were not much help as he was monopolizing her conversation and she didn't have time to know more'n giggle back at him. And judging from the look I got in the rear-view mirror he was doing all right.

This Joan keeps trying to break things up in the back seat by asking Harry a lot of questions like how does he like his job and what did he do in the Army and saying how she bet he must of been a terrific soldier. Maybe she was smarter than I thought, because that sure is sure the best way to get Harry's attention.

Well we go to a drive in and see Betty Davis batting her eyes and I am sure wishing I was in the back seat with Barbara instead of Harry.

After the show Harry says let's go to the Palm Club and dance, and the girls chime in that it's a great idea, I would just as soon go home, but this is no time for me to say so, and we take off for the club.

The floor show is just over and Harry orders drinks for everybody and whips out my twenty dollar bill to pay. For a minute I think he is going to tip the waiter a buck but he has not gone that far overboard and leaves the plate clean as a whistle.

Joan has not improved any as company and as a dancer is about as encouraging as an ice box. Along about the third dance she reaches over and taps Harry on the arm and says he hasn't asked her to dance. Harry does the noble thing and I am left alone with Barbara. I ask her if she wants to dance and she smiles back and looks at me with those pretty blue eyes and says she'd love to. Man was it nice, she cuddled right up and even the music of the three hams on the platform sounded like Guy Lombardo. When the dance is over the girls take off to powder their noses.

Harry asks me how I am making out. "Swell," I tell him, "Can you imagine a gal like that having a hundred thousand dollars."

"What do you mean," he says.

"Just that I was kind of leary at first, but Barbara just told me it was true. For that kind of dough I can put up with her."

"Are you sure?" Harry asks.

"I guess Barbara didn't have no reason to lie." I tell him.

The girls come back to the table and Harry asks Joan to dance. Barbara does not seem too happy about this. Just then I realize that I have lost my watch probably at the movies when I hung up the sound gimmick and say I guess I better go get it right away before somebody swipes it and how about if she comes along. She kinda hesitates and I tell her that it

won't take five minutes and that we will leave a little note to Joan and Harry.

It is a lucky break that the gas gage was busted as the car ran out of gas just before we got to the drive-in. By the time we got back to the club it was closed and so we go back to her place to meet Joan and Harry. I have spent long waits in my life, but never in better company. It is 2:30 and Barbara is just about to call the police when they come in. They are both pretty well looped, but I think Harry the most plastered of the two.

"Isn't it wonderful," Joan sings out, "Harry and I are married. Tell them all about it Harry honey."

Barbara can not find much to say and she just stands there, so I congratulate them all over the place, and call a cab to take them to a hotel.

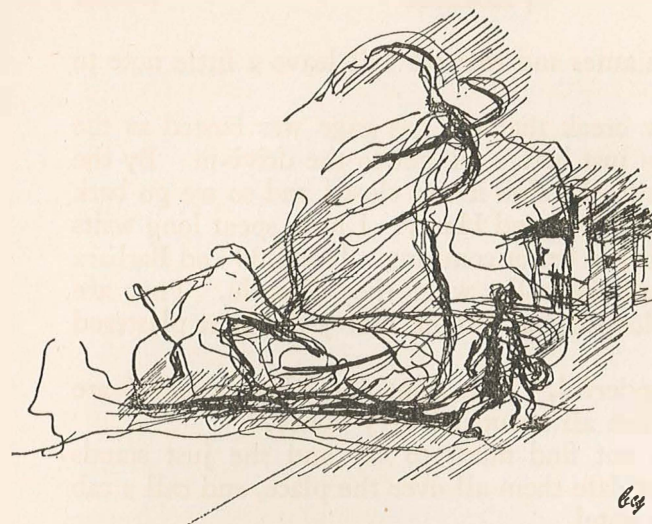
Harry must of found out the score the next day, because that's when he left for parts unknown. Joan was all broken up and blamed Barbara and since that didn't make them any to friendly she went home to her mother.

Well as Harry would say, "The main thing is just don't worry about it."

It sure is nice to be living alone again and I got some good news the other day, it seems the rent here is only forty a month. That louse, Harry, was pocketing the other ten.

Between the sleepy vines of summer
Slides escaping spring's lost pleasure,
Slipping under leaves of last year's clothing,
Softly hiding in the dark warm memory
That humus breathes beneath the leaves.

—Hall Tennis



OLD JOE

by ROY WHIDDEN

DR. Hobson strode briskly down the gravel road. He carried his hat in one hand to let the night wind ruffle his hair. He listened to the steady swish and sigh of the surf and rather fancied that the sea harmonized with the wind in the palms to form a nostalgic refrain. He was fond of the sea and as he walked along, he quoted to himself a little snatch of verse which he had written: "The sea, the sad, solemn sea."

The whole atmosphere of East Dog Key fitted in perfectly with Dr. Hobson's desire for the color of a tropic setting.

"And this rather petulant, stormy night," he murmured to himself, "is just my meat. It intoxicates one's imagination."

Dr. Hobson slapped his hat against his thigh in sheer appreciation of the elements.

"Good evening," old Valdez said to Dr. Hobson.

Dr. Hobson started from his preoccupation to notice Valdez filling up a cane chair with his 250 pounds. Only half-visible in the moonlight, Valdez smiled a pleasantly evil smile and motioned with one hand lying on his Buddha-like belly for Dr. Hobson to join him.

"A very good evening to you, sir," Dr. Hobson said. He noted quickly the sea-beaten exterior of the building, the lop-sided sign over the door which said, "Valdez Tavern," and the pungent smell of rum and rye which drifted slightly through the door.

"Won't you join me inside for a toddy?" Valdez said. "I find this wind pleasant but bad for rheumatism."

"I'd be delighted to join you," said Dr. Hobson, eager for the opportunity to talk to a native East Dogger.

Valdez pulled himself out of the chair with a groan and led the way inside. Sea-shells strung on cord formed a curtain across the front door. The interior of the tavern was dimly lighted. A long mahogany bar ran the length of the room and small rattan tables and chairs filled the floor space. Heavy, mahogany ceiling beams were draped with nets and large, deep-sea rods. The floor was scrubbed raw-clean as if with a holy-stone.

Dr. Hobson noticed with great pleasure that the bar had none of the usual trappings affected by many such places. Everything in the tavern was for use and evidenced signs of use.

Old Valdez moved behind the bar.

"What will yours be, my friend" he asked. "I take a rum punch or two about this time every evening."

"That will be excellent," Dr. Hobson said. His quick eyes were exploring and found two unusual things. Centered over the mirror on the bar was a portrait, life-size, of an extremely lovely young woman of Spanish type beauty. At the far end of the room, a large knife with a slightly curved blade was imbedded deeply in the door.

Dr. Hobson stored these items away carefully in his memory for future reference.

Valdez placed two tall, opaque glasses between them on the bar.

Dr. Hobson sipped at his punch. Valdez rested his elbows on the bar and lighted a black cigar after rolling it around his mouth.

"I'm quite glad you invited me in," Dr. Hobson said. "As a matter of fact I'm writing a book based on East Dog Key and am down here for the color. This is really the most interesting spot I've found on the island thus far, you know."

"Yes, I know," Valdez said. "Quite a few writers have been interested in my tavern and its history."

"I was just noticing the . . . uh . . . very lovely, young woman in the portrait. Really quite beautiful."

"Yes, lovely, but a malicious wench," Valdez said.

"Oh . . . uh . . . really?" Dr. Hobson stammered. "And the knife imbedded in the door. It looks as if it might have been there for some time . . ."

"It has. If you like, I'll tell you the story," Valdez said.

"I'd enjoy it immensely and it might be of great help to me in my book."

"You won't believe me, though," Valdez said.

"The true facts are always the most fascinating," said Dr. Hobson.

"Exactly," Valdez said and perhaps smiled into his rum punch.

"You see," Valdez began, "some twenty odd years ago I bought this tavern sight unseen and moved to East Dog Key. The local people had the idea that this building was inhabited by an evil spirt which liked to play the nuisance with people whom it disliked. The idea didn't particularly bother me since I have second sight."

"Second . . . sight?" Dr. Hobson's eyebrows raised slightly.

"Of course," Valdez said. "My mother had it. It's quite natural you see."

"I see." Dr. Hobson smiled a conquered little smile.

"I became rather fond of the old ghost," Valdez continued. "Oh, yes, there was one. Never bothered me a bit, though. In fact, he, or it, came in rather handy at times. Drew the tourist trade in droves. Quite an obliging old soul. I called him 'Old Joe.' I saw him occasionally, but he was generally quite shy about showing himself. Rather much of an old toper, too. Used to drink the customer's drinks, toss glasses around, move tables and sing occasionally."

"Sing?" Dr. Hobson asked in amazement.

"Oh yes, he usually sang somewhere in the vicinity of that third beam in the ceiling."

Dr. Hobson looked ceilingward quickly.

"An odd thing that singing. Especially on windy nights, like tonight, when the elements are playing a lugubrious sort of harpsichord sound. It sounded as if the spirit were trying to say something. Never could make it out, though."

Valdez took a deep drink and continued.

"I married Maria—the girl in the portrait—a year after I came here. Beautiful young thing, she was. But, full of hell-fire. The life here was too quiet for her, and perhaps I was a bit too old for her. She and I got along just like whiskey and soda for the first year and then one night she and Old Joe tangled. That's what made me suspicious of her,—her fear of the poor old thing. But, he nearly frightened her to death."

"I should imagine." The glass in Dr. Hobson's hand shook very imperceptibly.

"Ho!" Valdez laughed and slapped the bar, "I remember she was sitting right where you are. I mixed her a drink and set it on the bar. She was talking to a young artist who, at the time, was painting that portrait. When she picked up her glass, the drink was all gone and Old Joe set up a racket in the ceiling and started tossing the fishing gear down on the floor. Poor Maria went white as a sheet and threw her glass at the mirror. There, you can see where it hit and cracked the mirror."

Dr. Hobson looked and saw a lop-sided image of himself centered on the cracked mirror.

"Well," Valdez went on, "I knew that Maria had been seeing this young fellow quite often, but I dismissed it merely as the desire of youth for youthful company. Unfortunately, it was more than that. And my hot-headedness almost caused me to ruin my life."

Valdez paused to relight his cigar.

"Do go on!" Dr. Hobson said.

"I came in late one night after taking out a fishing party. It was raining devil's knives and the wind blowing up for a squall. Everybody with any sense was in bed. I came to the tavern to have a toddy to take away the chill. I found them here, Maria and the young man, in an unquestionably compromising position."

"They were in . . . uh . . . each other's arms?" Dr. Hobson interrupted.

"Sir, they appeared to be lashed together and secured with a bowline."

Valdez sighed slightly and sipped from his glass.

"The very memory saddens me even after these many years. I see the abominable sight yet. They were exactly in front of that door."

Valdez pointed to the door. Dr. Hobson eyed again the knife imbedded in the wood.

"Needless to say, I was insane with fury. I grabbed a bottle, smashed it on the bar and went for them with it. Half-way across the room, behind where you are now sitting. I was suddenly frozen in my tracks."

"Perhaps a subconscious realization . . . an admonition," Dr. Hobson said breathlessly.

"No—an impenetrable cold wall of something which ar-

rested the impetus of my body completely."

"Amazing phenomenon!" Dr. Hobson muttered.

"Then, Maria screamed an ungodly yell of pain and fear. That very knife was quivering in the wall. It sliced over the top of her shoulder and was imbedded in the wood. And I was held helpless against that wall of nothingness. Old Joe set up a racket, turned over a table and threw a bottle against the wall, barely missing Maria's lover. That did it. Those two got that door open and ran out of here like fish scampering before a shark. That was the last I ever saw of them."

Valdez tipped his glass up and drained it.

"Will you have another toddy with me, my friend?" he said. "It gets rather lonesome here on stormy nights. I find it pleasant to have someone to talk with."

"Yes, I think perhaps I could use one," Dr. Hobson said.

Valdez put ice and rum in a large mixing glass. He went to the end of the bar and switched on a small radio. A lively Cuban rhythm filled the room. He returned, poured the drinks into glasses on a tray and, carrying them, moved to the end of the bar.

"Let us sit over here and get comfortable. It looks as if there will be just us two tonight. Most of the tourists won't venture out in a wind like this."

Dr. Hobson got up and moved toward the table.

"That lovely, bouncy music really relaxes the tension," he said. "You know, I could almost believe that this Old Joe, as you call him, really threw that knife. What an incredible story it will . . ."

Dr. Hobson paled, turned and headed quickly for the front door.

Valdez looked up from placing the glasses on the table as he heard the sea-shell curtain tinkle. He saw only Dr. Hobson's retreating heel.

With a slight grunt, Valdez sat down at the table.

He grinned an oriental grin of the eyes alone.

"I told him he wouldn't believe me," he chuckled as he picked up one of the three drinks and traced a finger pattern on the frosted glass.



CHURCH

by JIM ANDERSON

BOBBY listened to the drowsy drone of a large fly that buzzed around the window, and then he heard a mocking-bird singing from a hidden twig high in the leaves of the giant water-oak that grew outside the window. He shifted uneasily, and his eyes fell to his new shiny brown shoes. He hitched his thumb in his overall shoulder strap and admired them. He was proud of them because they were his first brown, low-cut shoes, and his father had given them to him for his twelfth birthday. Then he realized that he wasn't listening, and he brought his attention dutifully back to the sermon.

"But Peter, poor blind Peter," the preacher was saying, "blinded by lack of faith, said to Him: Lord, let us build three tabernacles, One to . . ."

"I wonder what a tabernacle is," thought Bobby. "The Holiness people call their church a tabernacle. Maybe that's all it is . . ." He realized that he wasn't listening.

"But Peter," shouted the preached "*impetuous* Peter, spoke too much. That's the trouble with most of us today, we . . ."

There she was! She had shifted her position. He could see the tip of her nose, and her hair as it fell around her shoulders. She was on the other side of the aisle, two rows ahead of him.

"She's the purtiest girl in this whole county," he thought. "I wish that she'd be going home from church and some one would grab her and try to kiss 'er. And I'd be following her. I'd grab out my knife and open it up and run up to them. It would be a nigger, too."

Bobby clenched his freckled hands and blew out his breath angrily. "And she'd be a fightin' him, and I'd grab him by the shoulder and reach around his neck with my knife and say, 'one more move and I'll cut yer head off'. And I would let 'im feel how sharp my knife was, and he'd drop his hands and back off. Then I'd say, Now Git! And he'd run away."

Bobby swelled his chest and drew his shoulders up tightly because he felt so brave and strong. "And then she'd ask me how come I was so near, and I'd tell her that I always followed her home from church. Then she'd ask me why, and I'd say to her: "Because I loved you ever since I seen you, when you first came here." Then she'd maybe even kiss me, and I'd take her home, and hold her hand all the way."

Bobby looked down at his hand with great interest, wondering how hers would look in it. He didn't think she would hold hands with him because there were little ridges of dirt around his fingernails, and her hands were always so white and clean.

The sermon ended and everybody stood up to sing "Beneath the Cross." Then the preacher gave the benediction, and Bobby went out so quickly that the preacher didn't even have a chance to shake hands with him. He ran around to the gate where he could see her when she came out. A lots of other people came out first, shaking hands and talking.

"That sure was a good sermon today," said one.

"Yes, and he said a mouthful, too, when he said that most of us talk too much," answered another. "Yesterday afternoon I heard old Mrs. Rogers telling . . ."

Here she came! But Joe Howard was with her! And Joe was all dressed up with a white shirt, and a tie, and grown-up white pants with a belt, and his shoes were two-colored brown and white. They were talking, and as they went by, Joe said something that made her laugh. She went with Joe over to the Howard's new Chevrolet, and soon Mr. and Mrs. Howard came out, and they drove off.

Bobby put his hands in his pockets and walked slowly through the gate, looking at the ground. He no longer heard the mocking-bird, and as he walked he scuffed his new brown

shoes in the dust. An old rusty tin can lay by the road side, and Bobby kicked it viciously. When he walked on there was a long cut across the toe of his right shoe.

"I wish Dad would buy us a new car," he muttered. "How come we can't have nothin' but a old beat-up Model A?"

DORCAS ACRES

by GORDON B. CLARK

THIS really isn't a story, though all the ingredients are here: Main character, Situation, Place, and Time. Perhaps this couldn't be told as a short story, would be better suited for a novel. Yet looking at it another way you can imagine it as a serial in a woman's magazine. Or possibly the reason that Miss Dorcas Acres broke the law actually isn't important enough to write about — just an odd fact out of a time now long since past.

However, let's try it as the story might begin if it were printed in one of the slick magazines, one with a cover that's very bright and very smart:

Until the day that Miss Dorcas Acres, fifty five and an old maid, broke the law, the inhabitants of the quiet Maine village of Africa had little to talk about. True, they had their memories, for in the days before the War Between The States the fame of Africa's clipper ships was known round the Horn, on the coral islands of the Pacific, in the fabled cities of the East. But the last ship had slid down the now abandoned ways on the river's edge the year the war ended.

Now, fifteen years later, the only sounds that come from the river are the sighs of rotting halyards swaying in the wind where the two four-masters slumber at their moorings; creaking about tiredly with the ebb and flow of the Atlantic tides, like old hounds leashed after their final chase.

But the day Miss Dorcas Acres broke the law the excitement was such that the people of Africa were

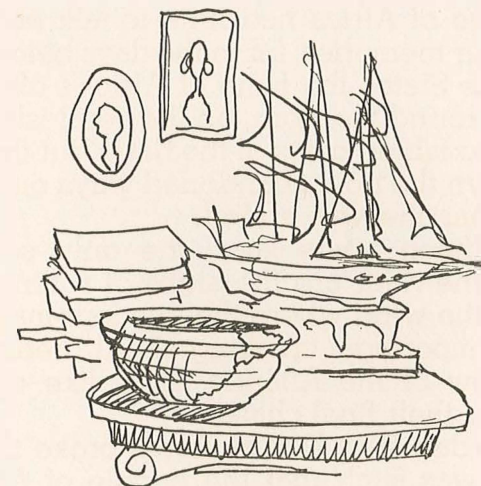
reminded of other days. It was like a ship-launching day!

There's a good chance that, having read this far, you would flip on to another story, wondering idly who'd be interested in reading about an old maid who lived seventy years ago and broke some law. Or you might say: "How quaint!"

That's the trouble with trying to tell about Miss Dorcas Acres in a short story. The real story isn't quaint at all. It would take a novel to explore the reasons, the things in her life, that made her do what she did. And to write that you'd have to dig into the past, get the feel of a small Maine village on a river near the ocean, know what kind of ships they built, what the men were like that sailed them — and what the women were like that stayed behind. You'd have to know a lot more about Miss Dorcas Acres than just the main facts. What did she think about? What was she like as a young girl of twenty when the young man she was engaged to sailed away as first mate — and was lost overboard in a gale rounding the Horn? And perhaps most important of all, you'd have to know the real meaning of that cracked, clay bowl.

Here are the facts. If anyone wants to use these and tell the real story of Miss Dorcas Acres, they're welcome to try.

It was, as Dorcas learned over a year later, just six months to the day from the time she last saw the man she loved until he was lost one dark night off the Horn.



She took it stoically, as was the custom, and as did her mother years before when her husband and ship went down in a typhoon in the Yellow Sea.

Dorcas would have had no trouble marrying. She was tall, slender yet strong, with dark hair which she wore long. Some said her gray eyes were inscrutable. Yet they could blaze and her speech had something of the flavor of wind and sea. Her father had once said she had a yard-arm voice if ever he'd heard one. Her's was a sharp, biting wit. Somehow a man wasn't so sure he was everything he thought himself after he'd talked with Dorcas a while.

She and her mother lived alone in the big, square house overlooking the river. It was topped by a widow's-walk facing seaward. Both Dorcas and her mother used to go up there with the telescope and watch the ships. When her mother died Dorcas stayed on alone in the big, white house.

Dorcas took to walking a lot. She used to take the telescope and climb the hills behind the village where the gray sweep of the Atlantic slid to the horizon. She would stand for a long time, looking down on the river, watching the ships working up with a rising tide, sliding more swiftly seaward on an ebb.

Dorcas had one favorite possession, which she kept on the wide fireplace mantel in the front living room. It was a ship model, a replica of the one on which the man she was to have married sailed away. Whenever, as the years passed, the damp weather sprung one of its minute timbers or its rigging went limp, she would take it to an old man in the village for repairs.

He said once: "For a long time after she lost her man everybody still called her *Dorcas*. Then one day, maybe she was about forty then — it was around the time they were having that trouble down at Fort Sumter — she came in with that ship. Somehow I knew she'd changed. I said: 'Hello *Miss Dorcas Acres*.' She must have known she wasn't Dorcas anymore. Just stood there straight and tall, a little hard about the chin, her hair with a gray streak in it, not smiling. After that whenever we spoke her name we always said it full: *Miss Dorcas Acres*."

During the war Miss Dorcas Acres rolled bandages, along with the rest of the women. Never was a mixer though — or a gossip. But sharp. One time in village meeting she practically blasted the selectmen into the river for wanting to sell some village property for a factory some person from New

York wanted to build. Malthus Murphy was the only one stood up against her. It was his idea.

"New York's the place for factories," she said. "And for people that want to stink up a place with them."

The village voted not to sell any land.

Right after the war people started heading west. Most of the young men left Africa. The village sort of cuddled down and went to sleep. That is, all except for Miss Dorcas Acres. She still walked by the river, telescope under her arm, walking strong as the wind, like she was twenty instead of almost fifty five.

It was a brisk fall day when she passed Fenimore Little sitting by the edge of the road on the outskirts of the village. He tipped his ragged cap and said: "Good day, Miss Dorcas Acres."

She said: "Hello, Fenimore," and would have passed on, but something about the despondent slump of Fenimore Little's gaunt frame caused her to stop.

Fenimore Little was six feet, two inches tall, and the village drunkard. He had been both for forty years and was sixty then. His father was Malthus Lemuel Murphy, eighty years old, still shoeing horses, and still proclaiming with increasing bitterness that Fenimore was a bastard. No one was sure and it didn't matter. Fenimore Little was one of the few people left in Africa who gave drama its quiet existence.

It is true that Fenimore seemed an odd son for Malthus to have produced. He had always been sickly, inclined to idleness and odd jobs that had a definite end. He had always kept a garden, but five years before he had taken sick and given that up. He grew thinner, coughed a lot, and except for a brief spell of energy making hard cider each fall, gave up all pretense of work. Talk had been getting around for some time that Malthus was getting pretty well fed up with having Fenimore underfoot and not earning his keep. There was no getting around the fact that Malthus was a hard man. Some even suggested that his parentage wouldn't stand too much looking into.

So Miss Dorcas Acres stopped and looked down at Fenimore.

"Anything wrong, Fenimore?"

"Malthus threw me outa house and home."

"You mean you can't go back?"

"Malthus said if I come back it's to the poorhouse I go

— even if he has to pay them to keep me there.” He sighed heavily. “No one cares about old Fenimore anymore.”

Miss Dorcas stared silently at Fenimore. Then she said: “You come home with me Fenimore. Everyone should have a friendly roof over his head. You can sleep in the room over the ell. I’ll go talk to Malthus tomorrow.”

Next day she went to Malthus. Malthus said no. He said it harshly and with evident relish, a bent callous of a man, sparks flying up about him as he emphasized his words with the strokes of his hammer.

“Let someone else buy his bread,” he said. “He’s no son of mine. If he comes back here — into the poorhouse he goes!”

Fenimore continued to stay on at Miss Dorcas Acres. He did odd jobs for her and it was only about once a week that she had to help him to his room and let him sleep it off. When the weather grew colder she bought him a stove and he fixed up his room all snug and comfortable.

The gossip started slowly but spread swiftly once it caught on. Naturally Miss Dorcas Acres didn’t hear a word about it until a delegation of village matrons called on her. Their disapproval of an unmarried man and woman living together under one roof, albeit the best roof in the village, could be summed up in two words:

“’Taint seemingly!”

Miss Dorcas Acres must have seen their point. At any rate, after a futile talk with Malthus, she made her decision. She and Fenimore were quietly married at the village clerk’s office. The village was content. Fenimore got drunk. And no one ever knew what Miss Dorcas Acres thought, that night, or any others, alone in her four-poster bed.

Fenimore caught a cold early the next spring. The cold turned into pneumonia and possibly Fenimore returned to God. Malthus didn’t bother to come to the funeral.

It was a week after Fenimore had been buried that Malthus called on Miss Dorcas Acres. He sat stiffly upright in her front parlor, keeping his watery blue eyes fixed on the ship model on the mantel while he talked in a hard, scratchy voice.

“I’ve been up to the capitol, Miss Dorcas Acres,” he said “Found out what I guessed was right. Law’s plain. When a man marries a woman her property becomes his. If he dies, there bein’ no children, his property goes to his nearest blood kin. I’m Fenimore’s father and can prove it. This is my house now. You can pay rent or buy it, one or t’other. But

it’s my house!”

Miss Dorcas Acres didn’t blink an eye. She’d been standing all the time Malthus was talking. She looked down at the gnarled old man for a long time. He didn’t look at her. Then she said:

“Murphy, I’ve known for a long time you were a bastard, but until this day I didn’t know how much a bastard a man could be and still live. Now get out of here!”

Murphy went. Next morning Miss Dorcas Acres had a talk with her lawyer. Murphy had been correct. The law was plain. It wasn’t her house anymore.

“Don’t worry,” the lawyer assured her. “It’s an old law. They been meanin’ to take it off the books. I’ll go up and see the governor this afternoon.”

“No,” she replied. “Law is law. I’ll handle this.”

Miss Dorcas Acres walked straight home from the lawyer’s office. She packed one small bag, carried it and her ship model and telescope out to the edge of the street. Then very calmly she set fire to the house. Afterwards, without any show of emotion, she stood on the street, completely ignoring the crowd, watching while it burned to the ground.

The circuit court had a special meeting to try the case of Malthus Lemuel Murphy vs. Miss Dorcas Acres. And in spite of the lawyer going to see the governor and the petition signed by everyone in Africa, the judge could do only one thing. Miss Dorcas Acres had pleaded *guilty*.

“Arson is arson, Miss Acres,” he said. “I’m sorry, but I’ve no alternative. I sentence you to four years in the State Penitentiary at Thomaston.”

They gave Miss Dorcas Acres a special room at the penitentiary. There wasn’t much else they could do. They tried to give her better food than the others, but she refused it, eating the same food from one of the same clay bowls as did all the other prisoners.

She spent only six months at Thomaston. The governor pardoned her the same day the state repealed the law by which marriage gave not only the woman but also her possessions to her husband. The day she left she asked if she might take the bowl she had eaten from during those months. They gave it to her.

Miss Dorcas Acres returned to Africa. Malthus was gone, having left the same day she had been sentenced. The villagers wanted to build her a new house but she refused to

let them, instead taking a room with one of the old families. Again she walked by the river, telescope under her arm.

On the dresser in her room she kept not only her ship model, but also the clay bowl, already beginning to crack. It was an incongruous thing, squat and ugly in the neat starched room of an old lady. But she dusted it carefully each morning, even before doing the ship model.

Miss Dorcas Acres died at the age of seventy five, only a few hours before the much heralded twentieth century came sailing proudly in from the Atlantic, lighting the snow-covered streets of Africa.

Two old friends and a doctor were with her. The doctor was pleased that it was an easy dying, though just before she died there was one thing that struck him as odd. She lifted one thin hand and motioned weakly towards the dresser.

"It's the ship," one of the friends said. "She's remembering way back then, when her young man was lost off the Horn."

A faint smile touched Miss Dorcas Acres face and she shook her head and continued pointing at the dresser, though the doctor had already picked up the ship model. He replaced it and picked up the cracked clay bowl and carried it to her bed.

Her fingers closed tightly about its rim but it was too heavy for her, carrying her hands to her body. For moments she stared at it, her head half lifted from the pillow. Then suddenly her head sank back, the fingers relaxed, and before anyone could grab the bowl it had slipped to the floor and smashed to pieces. But Miss Dorcas Acres never heard.

There you have the facts about Miss Dorcas Acres. But somehow they don't tell the whole story. Perhaps there is someone who can take this much and show what kind of a person she really was. Only one thing I'm sure about. The clay bowl is important. If we'd gone on reading the serial it would probably have ended with her asking for the ship model. But then it would be just a pathetic old lady clinging to the memories of a lost love.
