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LITERARY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

For a number of years editorial staffs have endeavored to feature the word "Flamingo" in a number of interesting and original ways. The word has been scrolled, printed, turned upside down, put in one corner, and then another. In an effort to avoid writing it backwards, we have decided to write it in Chinese this year. And for those who are interested, the three characters mean "Pink water heron", the Chinese interpretation of "Flamingo."

And this has been done with at least a spark of reason, aside from what has already been said. Notice in this issue, there is a similarity in story motivation among several of the pieces namely, acknowledgement and admiration of forbears. I am sure the Chinese would admire this issue, since it suggests, that which is so much a part of their heritage, ancestor worship.

The Flamingo has always maintained a good literary reputation. The staff welcomes all short stories, plays, and poems, offering a prize of twenty-five dollars for the best. Please contribute frequently, and support it.

G. S. W.



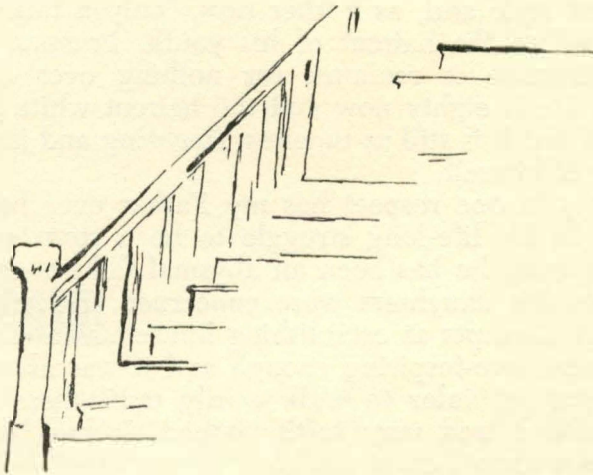
FATHER

BOODIE SYDNOR

Father has a Prussian haircut and will until the day he dies. Mind you, not a crew cut for that is a fairly recent style and, as Father says, "only a fancy-pants imitation" of the haircut of his youth. Prussian it was then, Prussian it remains, for nothing ever changes Father. He is eighty now and the haircut white instead of black but it is still as timeless, flaunting and jaunty as Father is himself.

Only in one respect has my Father ever been defeated. In his life-long struggle to be a stern and unbending man, he has been an abysmal failure—especially where his daughters were concerned. However, his frequent attempts at establishing himself as a disciplinarian were awe-inspiring enough and it was always the better part of valor to walk warily until these storms were past. I trod very softly indeed. It has been fifteen years since I crept stealthily up our front walk, late again, but I remember it painfully still. There were three guardian dragons to pass before I could gain the safety of my room. The third porch step that squeaked if touched by a forgetful foot, the door that creaked protest against my sneaking ways, and the misbegotten dog that marked in vengeful spite because he was too old to roam—inevitable one of the three betrayed me or all together formed alliance to squeak and creak and bay until I was doomed. There was nothing for it then but to stand my ground, for past and sad experience had taught me there was no help in flight. All too soon, Father, fulsomely clad in an old-fashioned, flapping nightshirt with square straw hat set belligerently upon his head, came deliberately and poundingly down the stairs muttering "Helle, Helle, Helle" at every step. I

never knew the origin of either Father's attire or exclamation, I only knew that this was the procedure for all latecomers. This was enough to know. Believe me, this was an affair that "age did not wither, nor custom stale." Father, nightshirt flying behind him, came to each new fray determined this time to chastize firmly the "insubordinate brat" and invariably returned upstairs with nightshirt trailing sadly after and with the solemn conviction that he had been too severe with his "erring lamb."



Father, because of his profession as a physician and his vocation as a "country doctor," knew everyone in our county. Also the whole county knew him and that he had a loud bark and no bite at all. Too many children in pain had left his firm and tender hands smooth away their hurt and too many women in midnight travail had looked trustingly through their suffering and seen his comforting face. Father sometimes said that he had delivered, splinted, or sewed up every cat, canary, canine and family in the country of Texas and there was much truth in his statement. He was not a saintly man, thank heaven. His was no bed-side manner and four-letter words came easily to his lips, but the most strait-laced matron only smiled at "Doc's" profanity, for they knew that what he said was meant to hide what he felt.

Not only Father's family, but all his patients and friends worried about his attire. Mother always said that Father deliberately made salesmen model clothes of too large a size so that whatever he bought would surely be baggy where Father was not. I found this trait endearing but a little odd since Father was in some respects an exceedingly vain man. I remember a well-to-do patient once refused to pay his bill and indicated that Father would hear from the "authorities" about the amount he had charged. Father had just begun to express himself as to "ungrateful patients and hoodlums sorrier than bat dust" when the Sheriff of the county called at our home one day. Very stern and forbidding of manner, he ordered Father to come with him at once. We were singularly unmoved (being a part of the plot) and Father was very upset that his family would see him in the clutches of the law with so little feeling. He served no arduous jail sentence—exactly thirty-six minutes in a barred but sunlit cell while a tailor made careful and painstaking measurements. You see, Father had not bought a suit in five years and, with some prodding by the "ungrateful patient," all had agreed that stern measures were necessary to get "Doc" to the "damned dress-maker," as he called the inoffensive little man. Father wore that suit for ten years, always with outward outrage and secret pride. It looked wonderful of him, of course, and Father knew it.

Neither was Father unaware that he was a tall, sword-slim, handsome, blue-eyed Celt. However, the most compelling thing about him was his voice. Father was not unaware of this either. He could have charmed blood from a thrice reburied bone when his vocal allure was given free rein, but this was no more the gift of nature, than the result of long practice. I remember once catching him in front of the bathroom mirror saying "prunes and prisms" over and over to his complacent, mirrored face. Belligerent and shamefaced at the same time he explained that he was merely practicing for his Mother's Day speech. This explanation had to be taken at face value, for everything about Father's fabulous Mother's Day speech was sacred. He made it in a different church of the county every year and great was

the demand for his presence for where Father and his speech were, there the church-goers were also. You see, in our county, Mother's Day was a greater occasion than Christmas and Easter combined. Father made exactly the same speech every year, everyone knew it by heart, and it always had the same devastating effect. He always began on woman-kind in general and every woman who heard that low, caressing voice felt that Father was making love to her alone. Young and old, no one escaped the spell, for if the defenseless males were not enraptured too, they had the good sense or enough protective instinct not to show it. Not even the family could remain aloof, but Father always lost me when "The Speech" began to take on the tone of Bryan's "Cross of Gold" oration in grandiloquence and sheer bomblasting. Father used a quivering voice and a flourishing handkerchief to equal effect when he reached the part about a "mother's tears being the diamond of love" and there was never a dry eye except mine in the church. To Father's everlasting grace he was never too carried away by his own eloquence to wink at me as if to say "Never fails, does it?"

This is my Father, but these things that I have haltingly here set down do not even begin to take the measure of the man. I do not think it will ever be taken until Father mutters "Helle, Helle, Helle" up his last and steepest flight of stairs. Then, however, I think his worth will so well be gauged that wings of a suitable bagginess might be provided and a halo even might, if necessary, be altered to fit a Prussian haircut.



NICE TRY, “SCOTTY”

BILL McGAW

HARRY: Hi, nice of you to stop in. Make yourself at home . . . as much as you can, it's not too comfortable here in the “Death House”. Rather dingy, huh? Well, pull up a rusty bunk, and I'll tell you about it. That's what you came for, isn't it? It seems funny now, here in this filthy cell. And to think I had it all planned down to the finest minute detail. Say, have you got a cigarette? Just ran out. Say, thanks.

SOUND: LIGHTING OF CIGARETTE, SATISFIED EXHALING

Yeah, the perfect crime. A lotta people think about committing the perfect crime, but somehow they always overlook some very small detail which invariably causes their downfall. But, you see, my case was different, I hadn't done a thing wrong. Hadn't made a single mistake. I had committed the perfect crime. Nothing could go wrong, but it did. It wasn't my own blunder, but the hand of fate. Connie, the sound of her name, even, sickens me. Connie, the sweet, always right, nauseating Connie. Always nagging me, continually pounding at me . . . my job wasn't paying enough . . . I wasn't a good provider . . . she shouldn't have married me. Sounds like the same old pitch, doesn't it? I know, but it's true. Stinking domesticity. A wife that just couldn't understand . . . So, exit Connie. Although her departure was rather unimaginative, it was done with the least amount of bloodshed. How I did it, well, that doesn't matter so much . . . now.

The important factor in my case was time. It was mandatory. Say, maybe you haven't been following my case in the papers . . . my case wasn't without precedent, but it's conclusion, to say the least, was a bit ironic. My name is Harry Scott. I used to be about the hottest thing in radio newscasting around. My own show . . . 15 minutes, nine each night, everyone used to listen to my analysis of the latest world events. I had, by most people's standards, a pretty good deal. Got good pay, and I had a rather respectable position in life. Nothing to complain about at all. But one thing, Connie. The hate I built up for that . . . that, woman. You know, sometimes I actually think that she wanted me to kill her. No, no, it's true. I could feel it. She actually drove me to it. I remember the things I used to do to try to have our marriage. But the woman was the most unreasonable thing in the world. We fought like a couple of dogs . . . for six years . . . constantly . . . consistently . . . night after night. If I came home late from the station, accusations flew like leaves in a high wind. Why couldn't she have been more tender? More considerate? Lord, I wonder how I ever fell in love with her. You know, honestly, sometimes I can't remember anything about our honeymoon or anything about our marriage, except her ceaseless nagging. I tried, God knows I tried. I tried to love her, realize her shortcomings, but that woman was simply unreasonable. Say, gimme another light, huh? Thanks.

SOUND: LIGHTING OF CIGARETTE AGAIN,
FOLLOWED BY NERVOUS EXHALING.

HARRY: Look at my fingers, Sorta stained, huh? Guess I've been smoking too much lately Well, I didn't have to think about it long. The decision was made, and I knew if I was to salvage some happiness for Alice and me, I'd have to carry it through. Alice, now there's a gal. The understanding Alice . . . look, here's her picture . . . nice, huh? She was the one person that could understand me . . . give me the love and confidence I needed. Only with her could I find the feeling of really being wanted . . . of happiness. Well, anyway, the method and time are the things I had to concentrate on. I remember the day in the station, the day I first got the idea . . . my first plan for murder

MUSIC: UP AND OUT

HARRY: I decided that Tuesday night was the night I'd do it. But, somehow I had to convince Sam Segue, the engineer on my shift. I had to convince him to tape my show for me, my newscast. This would establish my alibi, give me plenty of time to drive home, and . . . do . . . the . . . job. I waited a couple of days until Friday . . . then a break came my way. (HE LAUGHS BITTERLY) It seems strange to call it a break, doesn't it? Well, I found a letter that was addressed to Sam Segue from the parole board. So, Sam was an ex-con! I knew that in the front office, if they got the information, Sam would be an unemployed engineer. I went to the control room just before noon, and . . . (FADE)

MUSIC: TYPE THAT MIGHT BE PLAYED IN A CONTROL DURING A DJ SHOW. UP & UNDER. RIDE MUSIC FAIRLY HIGH.

HARRY: Whadayasay, Sam, howzit goin'?

SAM: Pretty fair, Scotty, how's yourself?

HARRY: Not bad. How do you like working here, kid. You've been here a couple of months. You're probably used to it by now.

SAM: Like it fine. Very interesting stuff.

HARRY: Glad to hear it. Anytime I can do you a favor, let me know. I'll see ya kid. So 'long. (FADING AS IF LEAVING ROOM)

SAM: Thanks, I'll remember.

HARRY: Oh, say, Sam, I just remembered. There's a little favor you could do for me, if you would?

SAM: Shoot.

HARRY: Say, turn that monitor down a little, will ya?

MUSIC: UNDER EVEN MORE . . . THIS SPEECH WILL BE VERY MUCH POINTED

HARRY: Thanks. Listen, I . . . uh . . . I've got to go over to Glendale to a party . . . uh . . . Tuesday night. How's about making a record of my news cast that night . . . I sorta want to get away early.

SAM: No go, Scotty, you know the rules.

HARRY: You can do it for me, Sam, and I'll be back at nine fifteen, nobody'll ever know the difference.

SAM: No dice, I said I like it here.

HARRY: By the way? What was it you served time for, Sam?

SAM: What did you say?

HARRY: If old man Weiser finds out about that, you'll never be able to change a light bulb in this place, see?

SAM: You dirty rat;

HARRY: Wanta play ball, now.

SAM: You've got me, you win, but I'll lay a million to one that you don't go to a party Tuesday.

HARRY: Listen, I want that recording made, and kept between us, do you understand. I'm here all night Tuesday . . . get it?

SAM: You're carrying the ball, sucker, and you'd better run fast if this smells like I think it does.

HARRY: That's my business, and nobody else's. Remember that. Now I'll meet you at 7:30 and we'll tape it then. And, Sam. Don't forget!

MUSIC: CONTROL ROOM MUSIC BACK UP
. . . . THEN OUT

HARRY: I didn't like to operate that way, but I had to. He agreed to meet me, and nothing more was said of the thing. He avoided me as much as possible the next few days, but that didn't bother me. I'd come this far . . . now there was no turning back. I spent the whole weekend at home, trying to appear natural to Connie. I was the same . . . so was she, repulsive as ever. I saw Alice Sunday night, same place. We used to meet at a small bar on the outside of town. Hank's "the finest drinks in town." She looked gorgeous as usual, and the highballs went down fine.

MUSIC: SNEAK IN VERY FAINTLY . . . JUKE
BOX MUSIC . . . A LITTLE DISTANT CHATTER

SOUND: MAN DRINKING HIGHBALL—LONG
GULP, VERY MUCH ON MIKE

ALICE: It's good to see you again, Harry.

HARRY: How do you think I feel? What a relief having one or two rusty-dustys without hearing 10,000 words about why I shouldn't.

ALICE: We've got to stop seeing each other.

HARRY: What are you talking about?

ALICE: Really. I remember a long time ago my mother said something to me about having a home of my own, and raising a family.

HARRY: Hold out a little longer. Something's bound to turn up. And you'll have that home.

ALICE: I hope so. I don't want to wait too much longer.

HARRY: To us:

ALICE: To us.

MUSIC: JUKE BOX AND CHATTER UP, FADE CHATTER, THEN FADE JUKE BOX MUSIC

HARRY: Alice would understand, I thought. It was for her. For Alice and me. Tuesday night at seven-thirty on the straight up, I walked into the station. Sam was waiting for me, and we taped the script. We were finished, I had a cup of coffee, and at 8:50, just as I was about to leave, John Weiser, our program director called up to see how everything was going. I said, "Fine 'n' dandy."

WEISER: (ON FILTER) Good, remember that promotional I gave you?"

HARRY: Check!

WEISER: O. K. See you tomorrow, Scott.

HARRY: Goodnight.

SOUND: TELEPHONE BEING HUNG UP

HARRY: That was a close one, what if he'd called after I'd left? I left the building at 8:58, ran down to Pete's parking lot . . .

SOUND: CAR DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING, ENGINE STARTING, ETC.

HARRY: And made for home, being very careful not to exceed the speed limit. As I pulled up in front of my house . . .

SOUND: DOOR OF CAR OPENING AND CLOSING, ETC., BRAKES ET AL

HARRY: All was dark except for a light in her room. Probably getting ready for bed. The time was 9:04. I took the dark gloves from my pocket, and put them on. Entered through the kitchen and started up the stairs as quietly as possible. Apparently she hadn't heard me, for there was no sound, but when I reached the landing I heard her call . . .

CONNIE: Who's there?

HARRY: As I stood there in the doorway, she looked at me in wonder.

CONNIE: What are you doing home from the station at this hour?

HARRY: I didn't feel well, thought that I'd better come home.

CONNIE: You weakling. Who's taking your 9:00 news?

HARRY: Jack Quillon As I suspected, she moved towards the bedside radio to check up on me. I knew then that I had to move fast.

SOUND: HURRIED FOOTSTEPS

HARRY: I whirled around, reached for her throat, and began to squeeze. There was no cry. She looked startled for a minute, and then, believe it or not, she started to smile.

SOUND: STRUGGLING AND STRANGLING NOISES

HARRY: I actually think that she was smiling at me Smiling! After a few minutes, she fainted, but I kept on squeezing . . . guess I lost my senses. After awhile, I let her go.

SOUND: OMINOUS DULL THUD

HARRY: And she was still smiling at me, even in death she was smiling. I stood staring down at her for a minute, and then, all of a sudden, I felt glad and free, relieved it was as if a terrible burden had been lifted from my shoulders. Even though I'd just taken a life, I felt . . . pretty wonderful. I messed up the room . . .

SOUND: APPROPRIATE FOR BUSINESS THROUGH FOLLOWING PASSAGES

HARRY: And broke open the strong box that she kept her money in, the box on the closet shelf. Then I threw the papers around the room, and took the money from the box, \$600, her life savings. The police would suspect robbery . . . I hadn't overlooked a thing. It took four minutes to get rid of that awful anchor chained to my neck for six years, and that's why I felt so light . . . so light, that I almost flew to my car. When I pulled into Pete's, it was 9:14. Just enough time to get across the street to the studio. As I walked in, I felt tremendously relieved and secure. And why not? The perfect crime. Had an airtight alibi, and there were no

finger prints or witnesses. It was evident robbery, probably some tramp. Sure, why not feel secure? . . . I made the door of the newsroom, having run most of the way, with scarcely any loss of breath. I went in.

SOUND: Teletype machine

HARRY: As I passed the A. P. teletype, a piece of copy caught my eye. My blood turned to water, my body to stone. There on the noisy machine was a flash. Only for earth shaking events does the Associated Press send out flashes. My heart sank as I read the stuff, "Tonight at 8:55 E.S.T. the battle ship Nevada was sunk by a combined attack of Russian air and sea power. It is believed that Congress . . . TELETYPE UP.

HARRY: I glanced up and saw Segue in the control room smiling, just like Connie he was smiling, and then he nodded towards Studio B. There was the president of the station reading the A. P. Flash.

SOUND: TELETYPE UP AND OUT

MUSIC: UP AND OUT

HARRY: Well that's it. Haven't got much more time. They'll be here in a minute. How 'bout one more cigarette? Won't be able to finish it. Thanks.

SOUND: MATCH AND THEN EXHALING

HARRY: It was nice of you to drop in. I appreciate it.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS ECHOING DOWN CORRIDOR COMING CLOSER AND CLOSER

HARRY: It makes it easier for me, you know, to talk to someone just before they

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS HAVE STOPPED, HEAVY METAL DOOR BEING OPENED.

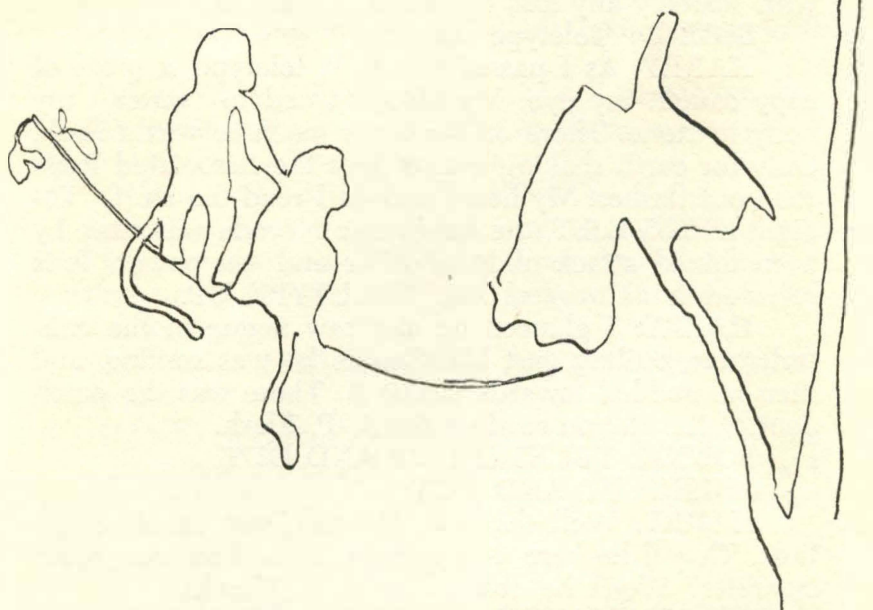
HARRY: Hi, Warden, be right with you. Well, thanks again for dropping in. Perhaps we'll meet again somewhere in another world, maybe, down there One more drag.

SOUND: LAST PUFF, CIGARETTE BEING GROUND OUT

HARRY: O. K. Warden.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS, DOOR CLOSING BEHIND HIM, FOOTSTEPS GOING DOWN HALL.

MUSIC: FUNERAL MARCH, TRY TO SNEAK IN WITH CADENCE OF FOOTSTEPS, UP & OUT.



THE IRRAWADDY INCIDENT

RUSS STURGIS

Once upon a time there was a monkey named Squash who lived in the tall timber that lines the east bank of the Irrwaddy River north of Rangoon. He was a normal monkey in most respects; he enjoyed hanging by his tail, picking fights, and biting his wife, Helen. Squash was happy enough to amuse himself with the latter but he found that he couldn't be one of the fellows unless he participated in the other monkey-shines.

Squash had one peculiarity; he found at the tender age of four months that he couldn't eat bananas because he was allergic to them. He recalled vividly the three months of his childhood that he had stayed in his bamboo bed with the hives while his mother had

administered the calamine lotion to his feverish, hairless tail. Since that time he had developed a deep passion for the apricots that grew in abundance near the Irrawaddy. His friends thought he had "slipped his mooring" a little because of this but he had to eat something and they finally were reconciled to the oddity.

Now all went well until the year of the great monsoon. It rained for a month and a half without let-up and the water got so high that Squash had to take Helen to a taller tree. As a result of the monsoon rains the Irrawaddy River went on a rampage and swept everything along its banks into the turbulent, brown water.

When the rains ceased and the flood ebbed, Squash went to the river to see how his apricot tree had fared; a wave of sheer, cold horror gripped him when he beheld the total devastation that the floods had reaped. The apricot trees were gone; Squash figured that they may be headed for Sumatra by now. He sat down to think; he always thought better in a sitting position with his chin in his hand. The only other apricots in the area belonged to a wealthy three-toed sloth who lived on the mountain across the river. These, Squash new, were high enough to be untouched by the flood. Usually it is a simple thing indeed to outsmart a three-toed sloth but this sloth, Gengis Kubli by name, was a sloth of a different color. He was blue. Gossip had it that this was due to his steady diet of apricots of the mountain variety. At any rate Gengis Kubli was no average, run of the mill, three-toed sloth; he was lively, energetic, and had four toes. Being wealthy, Gengis could afford to protect his interests; he had a pygmy elephant named Norris as general overseer of the apricot grove and Squash remembered the last time he had tried to monkey around with Gengis' grove. Norris was working on the cultivator when he saw Squash inside the wall and told him to beat it or he'd throw a monkey wrench at him. Squash mistook "wrench" for "wench" and thought that sounded like fun so he stood there just long enough to catch it over the left eye. Norris had almost squashed Squash that day.

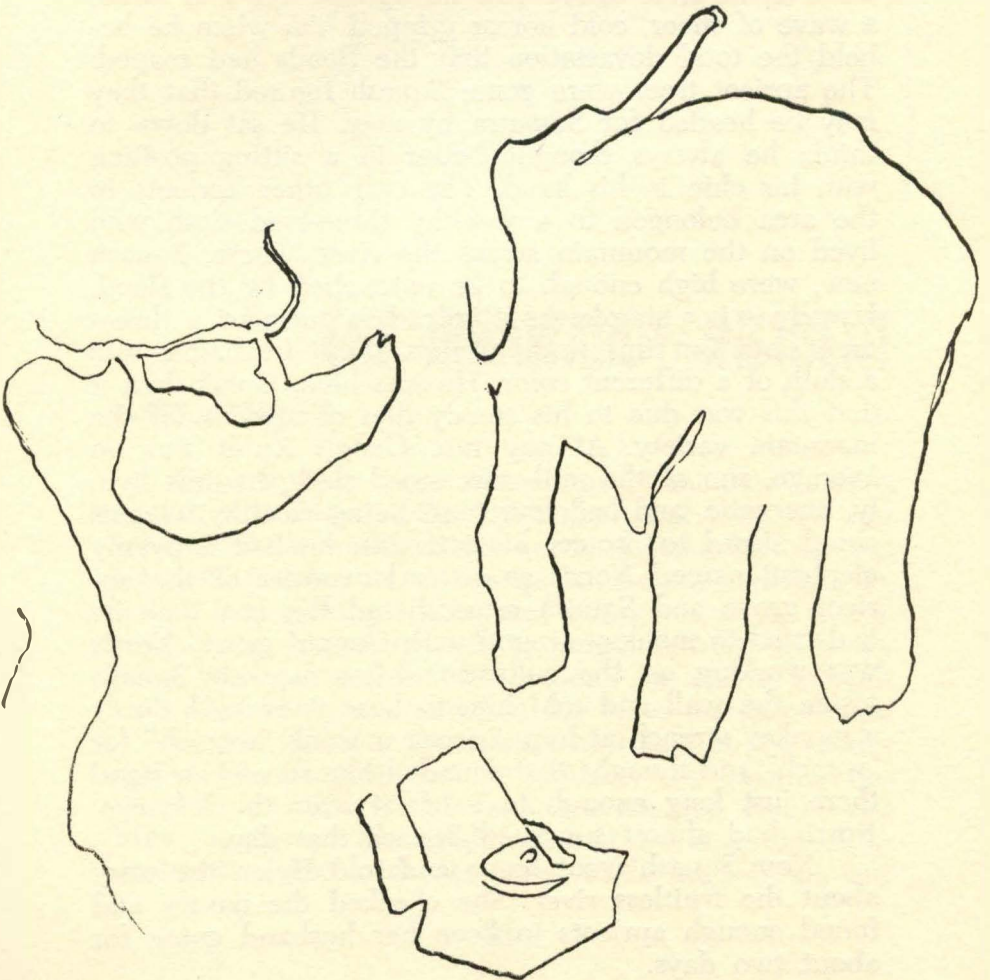
Now Squash went home and told Helen the story about the fruitless river. She checked the pantry and found enough apricots to keep her husband going for about two days.

"This," said Squash, "calls for action! Helen, fetch me my book."

He took his bifocals from their cameleon skin case and began browsing through the dog-eared pages of Burrows Handbook of Strategy and Tactics. A note on the flyleaf by General Wainwright caught his eye and he agreed with this fellow, whoever he was. It stated: "A feint on the left flank is worth two in the bush."

"That's it!" he cried and slammed the book shut.

Squash told Helen to bring the apricots and come along; he took the portable victrola, the records, and Burrows Handbook of Straetgy and Tactics. This was all they had in the world, which was more than some

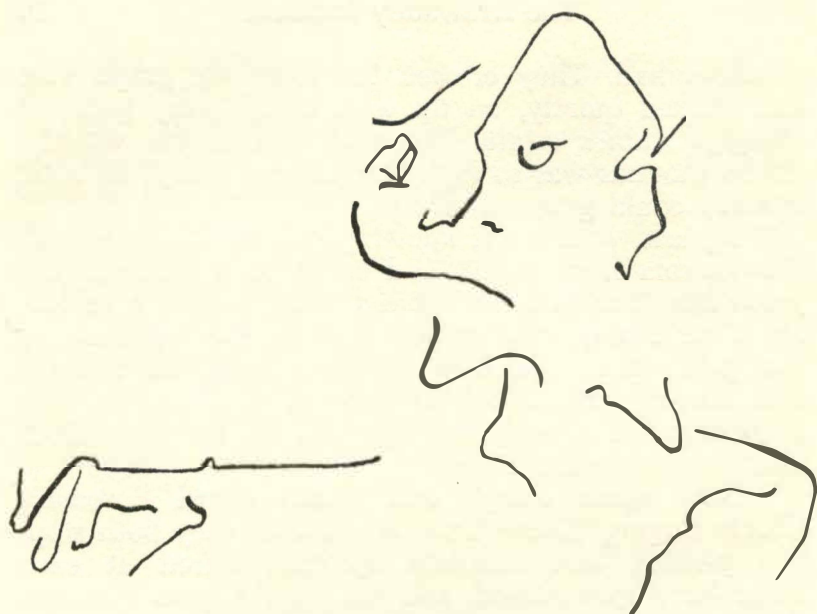


monkeys had. They crossed the river via grape vine and walked quietly, on tip toes, to the very gates of Gengigs Kubli's estate. The wall around the wealthy sloth's grounds was so high that no one except an agile monkey could gain admittance.

Squash, with a sly, knowing grin on his face, took the victrola from Helen and set it in a thicket, fifty yards from the gate. He wound it up, put on a record, set it for replay, and rushed back to the big bush by the gate where Helen was hiding with the apricots and Burrow's Handbook of Strategy and Tactics. The stage was set. Squash had his feint on the right flank and his two in the bush.

Now when Gengis and Norris heard Rosemary Clunie singing "Come On'a My House" they both stopped picking the mountain apricots, stared at each other for a split second, and ran for the gate. You see, they hadn't been invited out much since Gengis turned blue. Out through the gate they burst and down the trail in a cloud of dust.

It was then that Helen and Squash charged the open gate; they ran into the bountiful grove as if they were sent for and slammed, bolted, and barricaded the gate. Wainwright was right; Gengis and Norris got left. Squash heard considerable shouting of bad names and heard a strange noise that sounded like Rosemay Clunie being stepped on by an elephant. He climbed a tall *cocos plumosa* and saw the outcasts boarding a tramp steamer on the Orrwaddy bound for Madagascar. When they had departed Squash and Helen built over the house so that it was suited to monkeys; this constituted changing the handles on the bathroom fixtures and re-wiring with rigid conduit. This took a week and between jobs Squash ate apricots of the mountain variety; he woke up on the eighth morning feeling blue and Helen told him he was. Despite this (Helen thought he looked well in blue) they lived happily together in Squash Manor, as they named it, for many years.



ABSTRACT ABSTRACTIONIST

WILLIAM WALKER

Semeon Lennie Fitchshamp was a great artist and a great person. His fellow abstractionists (artists who paint in the abstract) loved him because of his genius. The children in his neighborhood loved him because he was kind and he gave them pieces of mushrooms, which he always carried in his coat or trousers pocket.

"I love mushrooms," he used to say. "They're so soft and lifelike. I always carry a mushroom or two in my pocket—I love to stroke them."

Semeon grew his mushrooms in the corner of his basement studio in Greewich Village. He was an authority on the subject and might have been a botanist had it not been for his overwhelming desire to express his artistic genius by painting abstractions.

"Mushrooms fascinate me. When I create a new variety it's almost like my masterpiece—something like God must have felt when He created the Garden of Eden."

Semeon's hobby of growing mushrooms not only helped him to express himself horticulturally; they were his only food. He ate mushrooms for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and in-between-meals too, while going from his studio to the corner drugstore to purchase the materials for his abstractions. It is sad, indeed, that Semeon Lennie Fitchshamp's love for his mushrooms caused his early and untimely death. He died of mushroom poisoning.

Long before Semeon's death, he was reknowned as the world's greatest painter of "abstract abstractionisms". His paintings were hung in the Modern League of Artist's League, Grand Central Station, the Huntington Library, and the men's room in the Woldorf Astoria. He was the first abstract-abstractionist to interpret the libido and the first artist to capture, in cubism, the swarming noon-hour activity of a Drug fountain. In Semeon's own modest words: "If history shall be at all kind to me, I shall be known as the first artist of the rebirth of the Rennaissance."

My only meeting with him came about through the kindly arrangements made by my college art instructor, Bunnie Babble Waffle. We wrote Semeon, mentioning to him that I, a student of art, would be visiting New York soon and would appreciate the opportunity of seeing him at his studio. No reply was received, and we later learned that Semeon could neither read nor write. I finally contacted him by writing the field representative for a mushroom spore company.

I shall always remember, with a mixture of awe and nervousness, the moment I stood on the threshold of Semeon's studio.

"Mr. Fitchshamp?" I inquired, exercising my toes and nervously winding and unwinding my handkerchief about my wrist.

"What do youse want?" he asked me.

"I'm Leonardo Greco, from Snillor College," I replied. "I'm studying abstract art and . . ."

"Youse sure you not from the electric company?" he interrupted.

"Oh, no sir!" I beamed brightly. I've come on a pilgrimage for the sake of art to worship at the shrine of your canvas and your genius."

"Come inside," he said, pulling me into the room and bolting the door.

"Gotta cigarette?" he nudged me.

"Sure, Mr. Fitchshamp," I said.

I bowed and brought out a package from the pocket of my lumerjacket.

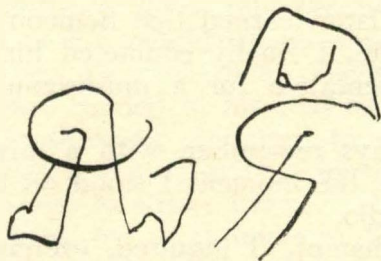
"This the only brand youse got?" he asked me.

My throat seemed dry as I stammered. "Yessir, I always smoke 'Tuber-Bacills'. I like their radio program—and 'Tuber-Bacills' are the only cigarette with the Latonia tobacco that produces noiseless smoke", I apologized.

"Never mind, they'll do," he said, as he accepted them and strutted to the other side of the room where a large canvas was in the process of completion. I tiptoed behind him to get a closer look.

"'Tuber-Bacills', phooey! Better that I should used Breakfast Cereal," he exclaimed as he tore apart the cigarettes and stuck the tobacco to the wet canvas.

"But, Mr. Fitchshamp . . ." I queried, "Why are you . . .?" I stopped. He was not listening. He was chasing after the angora cat from whose covering he snatched a handful of white fur. He then prepared a paste (by using a quantity of tooth powder and a solution of Vegetable Compound) and stuck the white fur to the canvas.



Mr. Fitchshamp backed away to better observe the painting and his new thrust. "Do youse think I ought to remove the belt buckle?" he asked me.

"Oh, no sir," I replied. "The belt buckle offers an interesting contrast to the tobacco and that pair of rubber heels. I think your painting is wonderful".

"Abstract-abstraction is the word", he corrected me. "I think I shall call it 'Courtship' because of its quality of tragic implication."

"By all means, I agree, Mr. Fitchshamp," I smiled.

"Call me 'Semeon'", he said.

"Oh thank you," I replied gratefully, flicking my handkerchief lightly across the toe of his shoe.

"It needs some little more red in the upper right-hand corner, don't youse think?" he asked me.

I started to reply that I thought "Courtship" needed no further improvement. He interrupted my ethereal thoughts.

"I'd better get another bottle of finger-nail polish," he mumbled. "Friendly Widow" will be the correct shade."

"Mr. Fitchshamp, I mean, 'Semeon'", I said "where in the world do you get the wonderful ideas for your abstract-abstractions? I mean, that is, how do you manage to conceive your divine creations?", I asked.

"The idea just came to me", he smiled widely.

"But, how can you be sure of yourself? That is, how do you approach the idea of creating a masterpiece?"

"I just walk up to a canvas and start abstracting. My genius always takes care of me. And, if it turns out that my creation is misunderstood by the mob, I just explain it to them. The explanation comes easy—I never plan anything. I just create", he whispered.

"But, don't you sometimes make some rough sketches first?" I inquired.

"Never," he said, scratching his armpit.

"But don't you ever develop a tentative concept of what you intend to produce?"

"Never, nothin", he smiled. "Did God have a blueprint for the construction of the universe?" he asked me.

"No, he didn't", I replied. "That is, I don't suppose he did", I said.

"Then why should I?", he replied.

At that moment, I became aware, violently aware, of the tremendous magnetism of Semeon's genius. Divine musings were swirling in my head. There was a glorious bewilderment and excitement caused by this contact with genius and the viewing of a masterpiece in the process of creation. My knees trembled and my hot forehead was moist with cool perspiration. I somehow managed to speak.

"Semeon", I said weakly, "your new abstraction is utterly wonderful. But how did you bring out the furrowed effect in the lower left-hand corner?"

"Diluted cream-cheese applied with a trimmed toothbrush" he answered.

"Toothbrush?". I exclaimed puzzledly, for I was puzzled.

"I never use conventional brushes, 'Be different' is my motto. 'To be different is to be creative.' Always remember that, sonny" he said, patting my head.

"But aren't art brushes easier to use?" I ventured.

"Phooey on art brushes", he said. He came closer and nudged me in the groin. "Do you remember my abstract-abstractionism 'Narsiccus; Love Forever'?" he asked me.

"Oh, yes sir! It won first prize in the Burpsa-Cola show last year," I reminded him.

"Painted the entire canvas with my right eyebrow," he whispered confidentially.

"But you have no right eyebrow," I said, looking closer at his face.

"Something in the material. I think it must have been the etching solution I used," he replied tearfully.

"Never mind," I consoled him. "It'll grow back and you can always get a glass eye to match your left one."

"Yes," he said "science is wonderful, but I don't think I shall ever see as well with the glass one."

I held my handkerchief to his face while he blew his nose.

"Enough of that", he said. "Physical discomfort is a small price to pay for a creative masterpiece."

"Oh, yes sir!" I agreed, "And if your other eye fails you, you could teach at Sniller College, my alma mater. That way I could study under your direction."

"Teach? Me a teacher? Never! I vowed never to set foot in an art school again. Art schools are the scourge of mankind. I hate art schools", he chomped at me.

"But you studied at one yourself," I reminded him. "The Henna-Sienna Institute. I read that in Who's Who In Abstract America."

"Lies," he said. "Perpetuated by the psuedo-fine artists in this country who are interested in smearing abstract-abstractionism by linking my name with that school."

"Really?", I asked.

"Certainly", he said. "I attended the art school only six weeks. They said I had no talent, so I left. Would you believe it? They even suggested that I become interested in photography instead. So—I became an abstract-abstractionist.

"Without art training," I asked.

"Completely without. All abstract-abstractionists are free from the chains of formal art instruction."

"But Chadley Zsohlenkheimer, Maria Baconslab and Ernestine Kopernisheimer studied art—and look at the fine work they are doing now."

"Never heard of them", he replied.

"Chadley Zsohlenheimer is the number one designer of paper napkin borders. Maria has seventy-eight wall paper designs to her credit and Ernestine created the toilet bowl trade-mark for the 'Flushem Sanitary Corporation'—as well as being the rumored creator of 'Shmoe' and 'Kilroy'."

"Outrageous fakers, all of them", he said. "The very idea of doing art for money and then calling it art."

"It's wrong then, to do art for money?"

"Of course," he added. "Art for money is commercial art and all commercial art stinks. I never sell any of my abstract-abstractions. All art should be free—like the sky. Does God charge youse to look at the sky?"

"No sir," I admitted.

"Then, why should I charge?"

"But you have to have money for food," I offered.

"Food?" he stated. "I grow my own food—here in the basement. Come look."

Semeon led me by the cowlick to a dark corner. He lit a candle and pointed to a mound of fertilizer.

"Mushrooms," he said. "All different. All colors and shapes. Always surprises me. I never know beforehand exactly what's coming next. Reminds me of my abstract-abstractions. As for the mushrooms, cross-breeding does it."

"Breeding mushrooms?" I asked.

"Sure, by artificial insemination. My own secret. I'll never tell how I do it."

"They're lovely," I said squatting to observe a golden-colored one with a green arrow design on top.

"Wrigley-Copernicus", he beamed. "A favorite of mine. I get one every now and then."

"Is 'Wrigley-Copernicus' the scientific name?" I asked him.

"It may be. I named it myself," he said.

"It's beautiful", I remarked enthusiastically.

"You should have been here last week," he said, nervously pulling on the string with which he was enjoying a game of 'Jacob's Ladder'. "I got a blue one with a white star in the center and thirteen red stripes running across the top. I named it 'Independence'."

"A beautiful name", I said to him, and "patriotic, too."

"I meant to send it to the President, but I didn't know if he liked mushrooms. Anyway, I got hungry myself."

"You have a wonderful assortment", I complimented him, "but aren't you afraid that some day you may eat a poisonous one?"

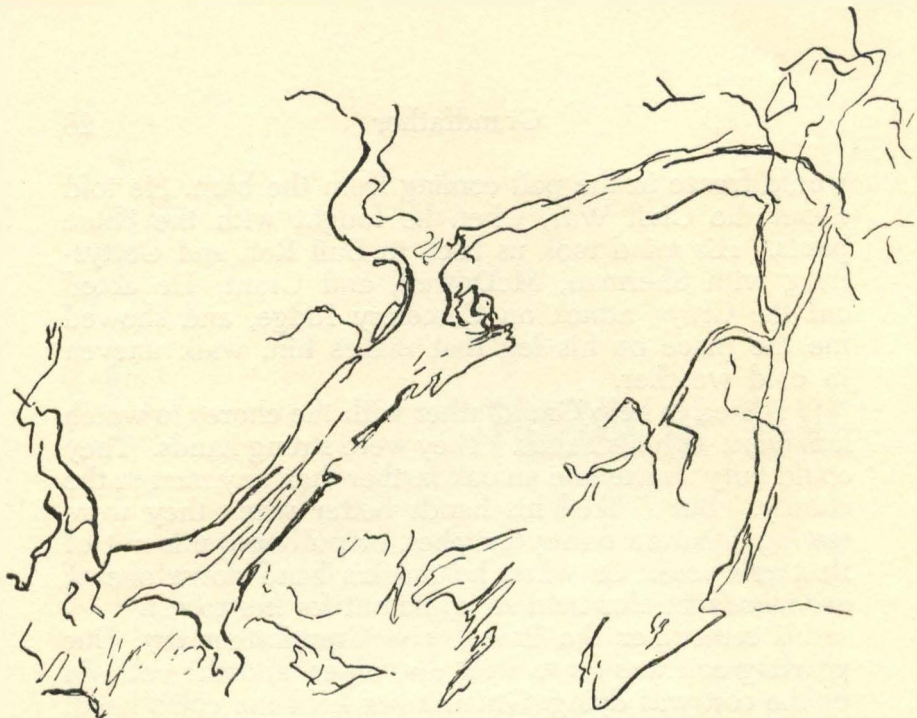
Oh, no', he tapped his chest. "I have a simple method of checking. The method itself is a secret. It involves the Ace of Spades and the position of the stars."

We left the darkened corner and I told him that I had to be leaving. Tears rolled freely about my cheek and neck as we shook hands and I made my farewell.

"It's been wonderful, meeting you, Semeon," I sobbed. "I shall always remember this memorable contact and the spell-binding awe of communing with a genius and his work."

He patted my shoulder as I turned and bowed my head. I blindly staggered from the room.

"It's been real", he called to me, as I wandered out into the street and lost myself in the teeming parade of ordinary people.



GRANDFATHER

ROBERT PECK

Once upon a time, there was a farm in Vermont, and on it lived an old man and a little boy—my grandfather and I. We were always the best of pals, whether we were doing the chores or I was sitting on his lap.

To look at grandfather, no one would guess that behind the stern New England frown was a gentle spirit and a warm heart. His clothes were as rough as the country in which he lived. His blue and grey work shirts, rough wool trousers held up by his wide suspenders, high boots, and old sweater—were as much a part of him as his hoary beard and old battered hat.

It was good to sit in his lap, after supper, and listen to him tell stories. He had the voice of a Roman senator, deep and clear, like the bell in the town church. His stories were always exciting, but with happy endings. But when he told the part about the witch or the giant, he'd puff right in your face, with his breath that smelled of flapjacks and coffee.

He used to tell about the cold winters we used to have,—the blizzard of '88, when you could drive a team over the fences on the drifts. And how the milk

would freeze in the pail coming from the barn. He told about the Civil War, when he fought with the "blue pants." His mind took us back to Bull Run and Gettysburg with Sherman, McDowell, and Grant. He acted out the Greys' attack on Cemetery Ridge, and showed me the place on his leg that makes him walk uneven in cold weather.

I liked to help Grandfather with the chores to watch him work with his hands. They were strong hands. They could bury an axe into an oak farther than any man in the county. But I liked his hands better when they were sewing a button on my britches, or pulling quills out of Rowser's nose. Or when he ran his hand down one of our mare's legs, or held an apple out for her to eat.

I remember the time I saw Grandfather cry. Our yearling colt was down with distemper, and the vet told us the colt was dying. Grandfather held the colt's head, and his eyes filled with tears, which crept down his ruddy cheeks and into his beard. But they weren't tears of a coward or a weakling. They were iron tears.

I was young at the time and couldn't understand why the colt didn't get up. And Grandfather told me that the colt had gone away for a long time. Then he sat on the harness box and took me up in his lap. He told me that, someday, he would have to go away too, and that I would have to understand. He said that, when the time comes, I'd go to live with Aunt Bess and Uncle John. And that I'd have to be a very good boy, and help them with the farm work.

I liked Aunt Bess and Uncle John. They took me to church in the sleigh, and gave me a dollar every Christmas. And Aunt Bess made awful good cookies, but I said I'd never leave Grandfather.

I guess that's why I cried when I stood between Uncle John and Aunt Bess at the funeral. I just kept staring at Grandfather's hands, the way they folded on his chest, so very still. Grandfather had on his blue suit, and Rev. Jenkins said such good things about him, and I was proud.

He had gone away to God, Aunt Bess said, and God would take care of him. So that's how I knew that God was like Grandfather, a big man, with a beard, who took care of people. And that is why, whenever I think of God, I think of my own Grandfather.



G. S. W.

FRIEND OF MINE

I remember a long time ago when I was about ten and I had a friend about the same age and every day we would meet each other after school. I remember once there was an old road about two miles from my house, and on this road there was an old ramshackle two story stucco house. The man who owned it had gone away to prison and the house had been left vacant for a long time. One day my friend and I were walking down this road and saw the house, and we knew the story about it. We picked up a lot of stones off the road, and we hurled the stones into the windows of the house and each time we threw we heard a great shattering of glass. After the first few minutes of doing it we looked around and then at each other. There was no one in sight. And so we threw more stones, hitting the window panes on the second story, and then on the first story, and then on the second, until finally we had smashed every pane of glass that we could see. I remember going home that afternoon after we had done all this and feeling a bit scared. But we came back another day and saw our damage and decided to take a great heavy pole which looked like a telegraph pole and ram the front gate which was higher than either of us. We did this and we broke it in, and then we went inside. We climbed in one of the windows we had smashed, and we looked around. There wasn't much inside and in a way we regretted what we had done. So we left without doing further damage. And this is the funny part of the story. As we were walking back that second day, we noticed an old man walking up the road towards us. He

was all bent over and in shabby clothes and had a walking stick to help him. He had a brown felt hat all moldy, and pulled down way over his eyes, and we saw this, and walked right by him, knowing that he was the man coming back from prison, and we were right because we found out later. We didn't go up that road again. But we did do something else that was a lot of fun. We knew about a small candy store down in the village that was always changing ownership. I don't know how we knew this but we did. We experimented one day taking candy out of this store without paying for it. And it worked very well. I would go into the store first, and then my friend would follow me in, as though he didn't know me. I would ask the girl behind the counter the price of some candy bar, and she would always go to the back of the store to find out. Meanwhile my friend would pocket a few bars, and so would I, all in the few seconds the girl was in the back of the store. We did this for quite a long time but we got tired of doing it so we stopped. And then there was something else that was fun. There was a man who was building a house down the road from mine, and my friend and I thought about building a house of our own. So every afternoon after school we went over to where he was building his house, and we took maybe a dozen bricks at a time. We took them back to the site of our own house and started building. We did this for several days and then one day the man suddenly appeared at our house and asked us where we got the bricks. We said we had stolen them from him, and he said that he would like us to bring them back. So we took them all back. I remember after that my friend was crying very hard behind his own house and I couldn't understand why. He had a wailing cry and it worried me. Apparently he was always getting into trouble, so his family said, and his father said that he was going to beat him with a stick, and that he couldn't play with me anymore. I felt very bad about that because my friend wasn't really bad, in fact he was very smart. He built small metal airplanes perfectly. He worked on them all day long sometimes. And he loved erector sets. He used to build cranes and he did all kinds of things with those sets.

I remember one day he sneaked over to my house when his family were out, just to show me an airplane he had made. It was red and cream colored, and it looked exactly like a real one. I remember looking at it and thinking how it looked exactly like a real airplane. And when he looked at it I knew he thought the same thing. And from then on that's all he did, but we were never allowed to see each other. And then one day he and his family moved away from the town, and I never saw him again after that. But I did get a letter from his family a long time after that saying that he had joined the air force at the beginning of the war and that he had been shot down off the coast of Italy and lost. I wrote a letter back to his family and it seems silly because it was such a long time ago, but the last thing they had ever said to me was that I couldn't play with him again. So all I could think to say was how sorry I was, and that, as they knew, we had been best friends. I said that I was glad in a way to know he had become a pilot, because I could remember so well his wanting to be, and how we had used to spend our happiest hours day after day at my house building those wonderful model airplanes

