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THE FLAMINGO

WINTER PAPER



COVER:

The Reading of the Cruiciable

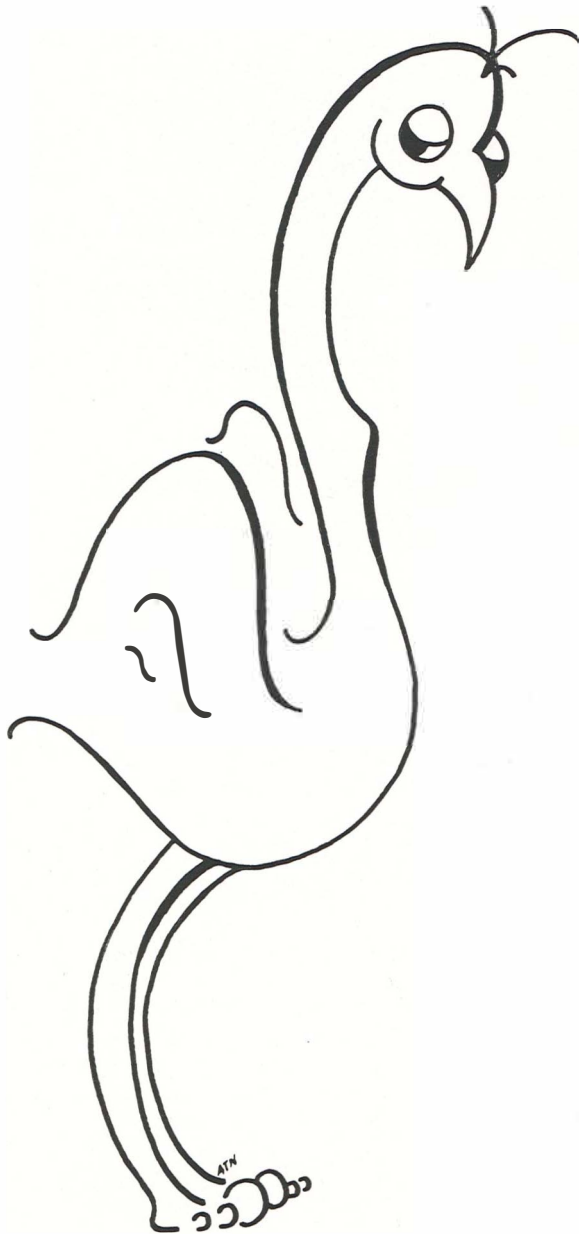
by bob eginton

THE FLAMINGO

OF ROLLINS COLLEGE

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Winter-Spring Issue



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THE PRISONER OF THE FOURTH WALL

robert grose



Like a dwelling, a stage setting moulds those who inhabit it and if there is no interplay between the setting and the actors the scenery becomes a lifeless perspective, paralyzing their action.

Hiding behind the mysteries of the proscenium arch, we of the theatre are prisoners to the people of the fourth wall. These people (the audience) laugh with us, laugh at us, cry with us, accept us, judge us, criticize us, hate us, believe us and question us, but whatever they do or say behind the proscenium can never escape them. Once we do, then theatre is no more.

So closely allied and so interdependent are the arts and crafts which find their common expression in theatre, that it is difficult to find anything which is essentially new in the technical phases of a production. In the time of Sophocles painted scenery was used. Hundreds of years later and to the present day we still use painted scenery . . . structural scenic units were used by the Romans and the renaissance originated painted drops, wings and border stage settings. Scenery can be moved vertically and horizontally and the Greeks had machinery for facilitating movement in both planes. Also the *ekkuklema*, a wagon to us, carried set pieces into desired areas of acting. The

periaktos, a revolving prism, devised by the Greeks, reappeared in the renaissance and is now used for wing masking together with revolving stages. The curtain rising from a well was first used by the Romans. All of these have remained essentially the same, except motive power for up and down operations which became hydraulic in the 1800s and in the 1900s electric. Steel has replaced wood and hemp and projected patterns have to some extent replaced paint. Since then little or no basically new scenic structural development has been made. This, however, does not mean that designing is just recreating but seeing how differently one can create that which is already established.

Now days as never before the job of designer a challenge. With new materials flooding the markets, designers can bring renewed life to old ideas. I as a prisoner of the fourth wall feel that at the present moment the theatre seeks and thrives on novelty as never before. Not only do I try new themes on old ideas but it is a pleasure to work with a director who does plays of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Schiller or Goldoni or whoever and gives them a new twist as well. As long as they are dramatically effective. Let the witches in *Macbeth* be Haitian voodoo priests, or

let Hamlet use a pistol. Or as in the case of the *Bad Seed* let the messenger replace the radio or let *Valkyrie* ride through the skies. What ever is done let's try something new and as a teacher once told me "If you want to do something different do not do it for the sake of difference alone. I have found delight in doing this whenever possible and to go one step further to provoke and test my audience of the fourth wall. As an example I use what I call conversational pieces, these I mix with the rest of a production as in the case of the recent *Romeo and Juliet*. In that production I very blatantly hung cooling racks on the mood curtain, their purpose: to hold drapery material. These are used by every housewife across the country to place hot food on, and are completely out of place and out of character as tie backs for material. It was most amusing to hear various comments and to find how many people accepted their new purpose without question, and on the other hand, the number who rejected and questioned it.

Whatever settings we may do, be they realistic, stylized, expressionistic, or abstract, be they exciting or be they dull, be they original or copies; we behind the proscenium are still prisoners of the fourth wall.

THE ACTOR AS ARTIST



arthur wagner

Gordon Craig, stage designer, author, son of Ellen Terry and a man of great influence on our modern theatre, said that acting is not an art form and that the actor should be replaced by an uber-marionette, a large mechanical figure which could be controlled by the director or stage designer. Craig claimed that anything that depended on chance could not create a work of art and that the actor always depended upon chance to achieve the necessary results. I deny this thesis and claim rather, that the actor is an artist who never depends upon chance, or inspiration if you prefer, but always knows exactly those elements which will inevitably bring about the desired results. The great actor must depend upon talent and technique rather than the moment of inspiration which may never show up in the short time he is on the stage. The technique should open up the road to inspiration.

Such a technique for the actor has been evolved and is the basis for the work of some of our most celebrated acting elements. Commonly known as "the method" it was first formulated by the great Russian actor-director-teacher Constantin Stanislavsky, co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky did not claim to have discovered something new but put into a systematized

technique those things which the great actors throughout the history of the theatre knew and used. Put into use in this country by the celebrated Group Theatre in the 1930's "the method" has been one of the most influential forces in the American theatre today, having its effect not only on actor but also on director, playwright, scene designer, in fact, anyone concerned with the theatre. The classes at The Actor's Studio in New York are "method" classes and a list of actors who have at one time been involved in the Studio would include the following important young American actors: Marlon Brando, Julie Harris, Eli Wallace, James Dean, Karl Maldin, Carol Baker, Maureen Stapleton, Kim Stanley, Kim Hunter, Shelley Winters and innumerable others.

There has been a great deal of misunderstanding about the Stanislavsky Method during the course of its history in this country. In the days of the Group Theatre every visitor to Moscow would come back with "the word" direct from Stanislavsky himself, and as many different visitors brought that many different "words." Stanislavsky's first book on acting, *An Actor Prepares*, was published in this country in 1936 and added to the confusion. The book deals with the beginning work alone, the internal technique, and people

thought this was the whole system. That it was not was finally brought to light in 1947 when Stanislavsky's second book on acting, *Building A Character*, was published and dealt with the external technique which had been sorely neglected by American actors to that time.

The actor trained in the Stanislavsky method says that the actor's most important function is the expression of honest human emotions instead of mechanically represented emotions. This technique of acting aids the actor in involving himself in the situation taking place on the stage as if it were really happening. There is no simulation of expressions of anger for this actor but only the real anger of the character he is portraying. However, contrary to much popular misconceptions about "the method" the actor also bears the responsibility of speaking and moving well so that his emotional manifestations are communicated in the clearest terms to his audience. Hence, both the internal and external elements of a performance are important. The internal comes first, and as soon as the character is developed from within the actor can concern himself with the externals of the part.

The actor's training in "the method" is intense and disciplined just as the

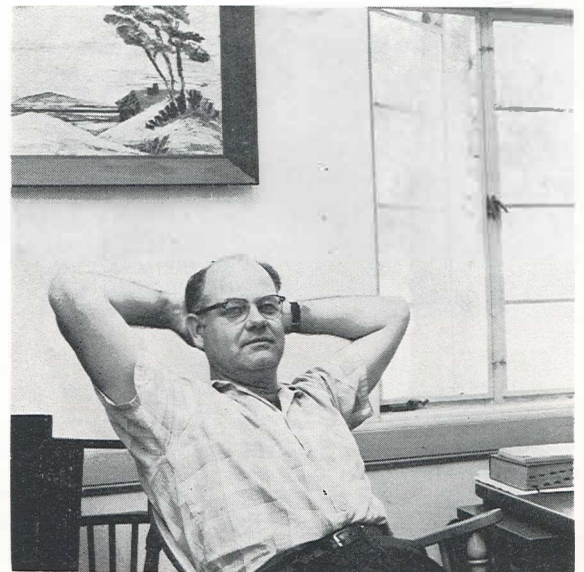
painter's or musician's. In the beginning he learns exercises to heighten his observation, concentration and sense of belief. These are "finger exercises" which the actor must continue to practice throughout all his career just as the pianist must play his finger exercises to maintain his technique. Then, the actor learns how to play the phy-

sical and psychological "actions" of his character. At every moment in the play he knows what his character is doing and why he is doing it. The actor must immerse himself in the period and milieu of the play in order to fully understand his character and a great deal of research work has to be done. While learning these elements of the internal

technique he develops his external technique by studying voice and diction, dancing, fencing and gymnastics. His object is to gain control of the instrument of his art, which is himself, both inner and outer. When he has done this he will become an artist.

THE FABULOUS INVALID

wilbur dorsett



Down through the centuries of our cultural history there has been a fabulous invalid in the arts. That fabulous invalid is the theatre. According to the critics and prophets, it has always been on the verge of dying, but despite some pitifully sick periods it never has died. It never will.

Movies and television constitute its newest and most formidable competition. The living stage, however, is still the parent organization. Many film and television plays are made from stage plays, not vice versa. There are, though, a few examples of adaptations from television to stage, such as Gore Vidal's *Visit to a Small Planet*, which is playing now on Broadway. Indeed, despite the shadow plays of the screens, the flesh and blood theatre is as healthy as ever.

The American theatre at this midway point in the twentieth century has some distinct characteristics: the predominance of "little" heroes, the lack of

really good comedies, the emergence of the musical play.

Gone are the days of classical and romantic playwriting in which the leading characters were "large" heroes: men of stature who were charged with noble purposes, encountered great struggles, and met high destiny. In our present age of analysis the tragedies are mainly realistic probings into the problems of "little" men. We must admit that John Gassner is right when he says of modern drama in *Treasury of the Theatre*: "Who shall say that it has not been heroic in the unassuming manner in which a great deal of common life is, and compelled to be, heroic?" In that respect contemporary drama is heroic. For the most part, however, it bespeaks pessimism and defeatism. It does not effect a healthy catharsis as do the stories of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* and *Cyrano* and *St. Joan*. Elmer Rice, a playwright himself, says in a *Theatre Arts* article:

"The heroes of today's drama, if they can be called heroes, are bewildered creatures floundering themselves with wishful fantasies, destroying those closest to them with a surfeit or a dearth of love. The recurrent themes of our plays are loneliness, rebellion, juvenile delinquency, emotional starvation, and terror fantasies." The protagonists are defeated when the curtain goes up and develop into being even more defeated when curtain goes down. They do not ennoble their final defeat by trying to fight back. At the end of such a play as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, we are dejected rather than refreshed: we are made smaller rather than larger. The leading characters in such plays have big problems, and many of them, but they themselves are "little" heroes.

Strangely enough, there is not an appreciable number of really good comedies in our contemporary theatre. This lack is felt keenly by all the producing

organizations that depend on Broadway as their source of supply—summer theatres, community theatres, college theatres. In searching for producible comedies, they find they are having to return to the old standbys. It is not that audiences don't want to laugh. They do! That is proved by box-office statistics (the all-powerful argument of statistics!). Comedies out-number all other types in the list of longest "runs" on Broadway, such top "hits" as *Life With Father*, *Harvey*, *Born Yesterday*, and *Mister Roberts*. The cause of this lack may be that comedy is the most difficult kind of play to write. Perhaps the new playwrights simply cannot think up any new ideas. They are not as fortunate as Shakespeare, who could borrow whatever plots he needed; unlike Shakespeare they live in a period of strict regulations on plagiarism. Perhaps our writers do not want to chance the pitfall of comedy in such an expensive gamble as our theatre set-up. There is nothing more tragic than a comedy that turns out not to be funny. A serious drama is safer; its reception is easier to predict.

On the other hand, this period of America theatre represents the ascendancy of the musical play. Our country has contributed to the development of theatrical entertainment only two original forms: the minstrel show, now defunct, and the musical play, now in its heyday. The musical comedy, also defunct, had merry little songs and color-

ful "production numbers" interpolated into its story to serve as spasmodic interludes. These numbers had little to do with the development of the story line. They seemed to be the result of the characters (or the playwright) thinking, "Now that we've talked for quite a while, we should stop and sing a song." In the musical play, however, the songs are an integral part of the story; they advance the dialogue, augment the characters and situations, enhance the mood. *Porgy and Bess* and *Oklahoma* were the first examples of this new form. They have been followed by, among others, *South Pacific* and *My Fair Lady*. This is the favorite type of stage presentation today. *Oklahoma* ran for almost ten years. Evidently *My Fair Lady* will run forever. (Whatever may be happening to the weather in Spain, George Bernard Shaw reigns mainly as the leading Librettist on Broadway.) The playgoers have decided that this new form—the musical play—is here to stay. It is a shot in the arm of the fabulous invalid.

The theatre was supposed to have died when the Puritans banned it in England in 1642, and when it went down under a blanket of Victorian sentimentality in the last century, when the movies learned to talk, when the Americans bought 45,000,000 television sets. Our present theatre, whatever its characteristics and developments may be, is still very much alive.



THE RESTLESS WAVE

libby daggett

"'Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless
wave . . .'" Brenda sang loudly. She
turned to her sister and said laughingly,
"Are you the 'restless wave' the song is
about?"

"Don't say anything to me, Brenda,
and for God's sake stop singing that
song." She turned and glared at her
sister. "In fact," she said through
clenched teeth, "why don't you just go
away?"

"Aw, come off it, Kath. You've been
home one day and you're already on
everyone's back. You're really in tough
shape. You're getting old, kid." She
made a great show of studying her sis-
ter's face and figure. "Yes, indeed, Kath.
A person your age should be careful of
what she does. I mean that one doesn't
go around breaking her engagement
when she is kicking twenty-four. Pretty
soon they're going to retire you from
the Navy, and then what'll you do? I
never dreamed that one of my sisters
would be an old maid." She sighed and
shrugged her shoulders.

Kath picked up a glass vase from the
table on which the wedding presents
were arranged. "Brenda, you better get
the hell out of here before I heave this
thing at you."

"Better not break it, Kath. You have
to send it back, you know." The slam-
ming of the door coincided with the
smashing of the vase.

Brenda sauntered over to the stairs.
Her hands were shoved deep into the
pockets of her khaki bermudas, the
sleeves of her brother's old shirt were
rolled above her elbows, her bare feet
were grass stained, and the cigarette be-
hind her ear was cocked at a most pe-
culiar angle. From their gold-leafed
frames on the walls, her ancestors glared
down at her disapprovingly. She leaned
over the banister and looked to see if
anyone was in the hall below. Seeing
no one, she straddled the beautifully
polished banister, which was of great
pride to old Mrs. Taylor, and slid down
the long, curving, mahogany rail.

"Brenda!" came the horrified voice of
the business-looking woman standing in
the arched doorway below. "Get down
from there at once! A young woman of
twenty does not go about sliding down
banisters." Brenda slipped off the rail
and kissed her grandmother's cheek.
"Yes, dear," she signed. And then asked,
"Have you seen John and Mark any-
where?"

"They are doing a job for me, and
they are not to be disturbed. As for you,
you are to go home at once and change.
I'm entertaining the members of the
D.A.R. and you are to pour." Brenda
wrinkled her nose in disgust. Her
grandmother paid no attention to the
gesture. "You have your orders," she
said. "Now go."

Brenda went. She walked sedately to
the door, and out onto the terrace. But
once out of her grandmother's sight she
started running. She charged around to
the side garden and straight into John,
who was in the process of coiling a
piece of copper wire. Both John and
Brenda went down in a heap. The cop-
per wire went flying into the pond.

"For God's sake," John groaned.
"Why don't you watch where you're
going?"

"Get off of me," gasped Brenda, "be-
fore you squash me to death."

John untangled himself from her and
rolled over on his back. "You clumsy
ox," he said. "What was the big rush
for? Is the old witch after you?" He
peered around to see if his grandmother
was there.

"No," Brenda panted, "but I'll bet
she's watching from the window in the
solarium." They both turned toward the
side of the house. Sure enough, there
was Mrs. Taylor looking down on the
scene with her most distasteful glare.
John turned back to the fish pond
which was half full of mucky water. In
the middle was a marble fountain on
which little marble cherubs danced
about, their heads tilted back and their
mouths open. The fountain was not
working which was just as well, for

leaning against it and looking somewhat
unlike the little cherubs was Mark.
The copper wire tastefully twined about
his head and shoulders.

"That was a very clever catch, Mark
dear," Brenda laughed. "You look al-
most angelic."

"Why, thank you, love." He smiled
nastily. "We've been practicing that
particular play all morning. We are go-
ing to entertain the dear old ladies with
it at the tea." Mark climbed out of the
pool and strole over to where she was
kneeling on the lawn. He lunged at her
and down they went, laughing and yell-
ing. "Mark," Brenda squeaked, "You're
all wet . . . You're hurting me. John,
help!"

John slowly rolled over and contem-
plated the squirming figure of his sis-
ter. With seemingly great effort he
reached over and pinched the part near-
est to him. A most unlady like word
issued forth from the other end of her.
John lay back and sighed. "You'll have
to speak louder, sister sweets, I can't
hear a word you're saving."

"I said," she croaked, "that you are
a . . ."

"Brenda!" came the voice again. From
the terrace, Mrs. Taylor gazed down
on the three prone bodies. "It isn't," she
quipped, "necessary to repeat that word.
And you, sir," she said looking at Mark,
"may get off of my granddaughter at
once." Mark jumped to his feet; Brenda
lay on her back panting, and John just
rolled over and muttered something to
himself. The old queen stiffened. She
fastened her steel blue eyes on John
and said in her most regal manner, "I
am not what you just called me." John
made a dubious sound in his throat and
glanced at her. "I wonder," he said
through his teeth. But she didn't hear
him and he turned back to the pool. He
studied it for a moment. "Why don't
you have a plumber come and fix the
fountain?" he gripped. "Hell, I don't
know how to make your damn cupids
snit." He reached out and smacked one
of the cherub's bare bottoms.

"Don't be vulgar, John," she snapped. "I expect you to have that pool cleaned and the fountain working by the time the tea starts." She whirled and stalked back to the house. Stopping at the door, she turned and addressed herself to Brenda. "Get up from there at once, and take yourself home. I want you back here as soon as you have dressed." She turned back to the door and swept inside.

Brenda got up. She pushed a lock of auburn hair from her dirt-smudged but lovely face, and swore. "Hell," she pouted. "I'm looking forward to this party as much as I am to my funeral."

At the word funeral John looked up. "You behave yourself around those women. Just remember that everyone of them is a prospective business venture. They'll all be dying soon, and I want to be around when they do."

Brenda made a face. "God, John, you're morbid, everytime I look at one of them I see 'em laid out on a slab with you hacking 'em up, and measuring 'em for the casket."

"Well," John shrugged, "that's my business. We have to cater to them before they die, so that we will get them after. 'Say,' he said, and his eyes lit up. "Did I tell you that Mrs. Porter was in yesterday looking at coffins? She picked out the most expensive one in the place. Two thousand bucks worth of box."

"Swell!" I've always wanted to go pick out my casket," Brenda said sarcastically. She glanced up at the house and saw Kath in an upstairs window. She waived, but Kath turned away and disappeared. Brenda frowned. "What do you think about the way Kath is acting? You know she is dead serious about calling off the wedding."

Mark looked up from the pipe he was cleaning. "Don't worry, Brenda," he said. "Kath is just getting scared. She'll come around if you give her time." He twirled his wrench and went back to work.

"Sure, she'll come around, but when. The wedding is a week from today. That doesn't give her much time for messing around deciding whether or not she is going to get married. What does Cal have to say about things?" she asked.

"Why don't you run on home and change before the duchess comes out here again," John said. "Let us smart people handle things." He gave her a shove toward the arbor.

"All right you fakes. I'll see you all later." She skipped out of the garden and down to the driveway where her car was parked.

By four o'clock the tea party was in full swing. Old dowagers of every description were milling about the downstairs rooms and the terrace. From her position behind the magnificent silver tea service, Brenda could see her grandmother talking with Mrs. Porter. They were discussing John. Mrs. Porter was obviously most impressed with him. She was at the moment full of praise for his manners and gifted personality. "Why, Blanche," she crowed, "he is such a charming young man. The other day when I was in the chapel to look at caskets, why he was most friendly. He showed me all that there was to see, and just made me feel right at home." Brenda couldn't help grinning at the image that last remark conjured up. She could see John, his wide enchanting smile, the dark eyes twinkling in his tanned, good looking face, steering Mrs. Porter's rather large bulk about the chapel; opening caskets, pointing out the special linings, the different grains in the wood, the beauty in each one. John was a business man through and through. He played up to these old ducks in every way. "If they only knew what his true opinions of them are," Brenda thought. "If they could only hear him when he's with us."

But, nevertheless, he had them all lauding over him with praise, each one thinking that she was his favorite. Brenda liked to hear them praise John. It made her all the more proud of him. She really all but openly worshipped her brother and sisters. All of them she had to admit were pretty nice. Even Kath was fun when she set her mind to it.

Brenda straightened. "My goodness, I'd forgotten all about Kath," she breathed. Mrs. Taylor looked over at her. "What was that you said, Dear?" she asked.

Brenda looked startled. "Oh, Grandmother," she said. "I guess I was just talking to myself. Have you seen Kath this afternoon?" Her grandmother nodded toward the staircase. "I believe that Katherine is upstairs in the sitting room with Calvin."

Brenda's eyebrow went up. "Are you sure that Cal is up there with her?" she asked.

"Of course I'm sure. I let him in myself. They are up there opening wedding presents." Brenda looked at her with disbelief. Mrs. Taylor just shook her head and walked away. "Rather strange child," she said to Mrs. Porter. "She takes after her mother's side of the family."

Brenda grinned at the tea pot. "Yes, indeed," she whispered, "I'm almost as

strange as she is." But her mind was drawn back to Kath. It was obvious that her grandmother had no inkling of the mess things were in. Here it was a week before the wedding and Kath suddenly decides to be difficult. Last night she had made a very dramatic speech to the four of them—John, Mark, Cal, and Brenda—in which she told them that the marriage was not to be. "I have thought this over very carefully," she had said with the necessary pauses and inflections, "and now it comes to this. We all know what positive boobs men are. We know that they are stupid, childish, but above all, faithless and incapable of loving anyone." She swept her arm in a gesture that took in the occupants of the room. "The three of you," she said, pointing a small manicured finger at each of the boys, "are no exception. Especially you." And she wagged her finger at Cal. Cal had been sitting there taking it all as a huge joke. Now he stretched his long legs, shrugged his massive shoulders, and shook his head in agreement. "Yup," he nodded, you're right. Never loved you for a minute. I was marrying you just so I could have your cute, little wave's hat. I collect waves' hats." He tipped his head back and smiled his crooked grin.

She shook her head furiously, and her sad eyes filled with tears. "I know you do, and that's what I mean. All you Flyboys are the same. Just 'cause you're out of the Navy now doesn't mean you have changed any. I wouldn't be able to trust you for a moment." She brushed the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. Cal jumped to his feet and collected her in his arms. "Good God Kath," he cried, "your not serious are you?"

She pulled away from him, and started toward the door. "I most certainly am serious," she sobbed. "I've been in the Navy reserve since my freshman year at Duke, and I've been a lieutenant j.g. for one and a half years. I've known for all that time just how you pilots acted, but I was dumb enough to think you were different from the rest. You're not though, are you?" She was screaming now. "I don't want to be one in your multitude of . . ." The slamming of the door drowned out the last word.

The four of them stared at each other in wonderment. Brenda climbed off Mark's lap and crossed to the window. She could see Kath getting into her car. The car lurched forward, sailed down the drive, and was gone.

Brenda turned back to the three boys. "What brought that on?" she asked.

Then looking accusingly at Cal, demanded, "What did you do, or say to her?"

Cal shrugged. "Honestly, Brenda, I just don't know. I really don't think I did anything. I met her out at the base as planned. I was even a little early. After the plane came in, I stopped a minute to talk to the boys who brought her up. The three of us had been roommates at one time in Washington, when I was stationed there. Well, anyway, we started back here very shortly after that. She acted sort of funny, but I figured she was just tired after the flight and all. Then when I asked her about the flight up and what the boys had to say, she really got tee'd off."

"How do you mean?" John cut in. "What did she do?"

Cal shrugged again. "Oh, she started swearing like a farmer, and said that they had plenty to say . . . By God!" he grinned, "I'll bet I know what happened. Listen, I'll see you all tomorrow." And out he went.

Well that was last night. Now Cal was upstairs with Kath. Brenda strained her ears listening for some sounds of battle coming from up there. But the only noise she heard was that of the Daughters of the American Revolution bidding their fond farewells. She left the table and went into the pantry. John and Mark were there, leaning against the counters, each stuffing petit fours into his mouth between draughts of beer. Brenda took the beer can from Mark and drained it. She raised her eyes toward the ceiling. "What's going on up there?" she asked.

The boys grinned, and nudged each other. "Come on up and see for yourself," Mark said.

The three of them crept up the back stairs to the second floor. They padded down the hall to the door of the sitting room and stopped. Brenda opened the door just a crack and peeked in. From where she stood, she could see Kath sitting cross legged on the floor, leaning back against Cal, who knelt

behind her. Tissue paper was strewn all over the rug, along with white ribbon and silver-belled wrapping paper. She was holding up an andiron and laughing. Cal leaned over and kissed the back of her neck. "Just what we need in our fireplaceless apartment," he whispered. She turned around and kissed him. "Absolutely," she sighed.

Brenda closed the door softly and went over to the curving stairs. She and Mark sat down on the top step. "What happened to bring that about?" she asked.

"Hell, it was very simple really," Mark stated. "Kath had been hearing some pretty raunchy stories about Cal from those fly-boys. I guess she got sort of worried. It killed her faith in mankind for a short while."

Brenda took his hand. "I can see why it would," she answered, nodding her head in agreement. She peered around Mrs. Porter's large waist, steering her towards the garden door.



THE CASUAL ONE

libby daggett

The other day, my sister, Brenda, read a story to me. The Story was about a little girl who lived with her governess in a great, big old hotel. My sister said that I was a duplicate of that little girl. I didn't know what that word, duplicate, meant, so I asked her. She said that it meant that I was just like the little girl.

Well, I just want to start off by telling you that I'm not at all like her. She was only six. I'm seven and quite a bit older than her. Besides, she lived all by herself with somebody call Governess, and I live with my father, and mother, and sister and brother. I have another sister, only she went and got married so she doesn't count anymore. I also have a little cat who sleeps with me under the covers. She's scared of my father's dog. He really is everybody's dog, but Mother gave him to Daddy first. He is great big, and black, and there is a place in Canada named after him. Labrador or something like that. He snores something awful. He sleeps with my sister. She is twenty-one. My brother is twenty-four. I said that he sleeps with my sister. Well, he does, only he doesn't sleep under the covers with her the way my cat does with me. He sleeps beside her bed. He's almost as big as the bed. She says she doesn't mind it when he snores. She says it reminds her of her roommate last year at college.

So, you can see that I'm not like the little girl in the book. Not exactly anyway. She seemed to have fun getting into trouble and I do, too. My trouble is more fun, though. It's much nicer to bother people you really know. That's what this story is about. How I bothered Brenda once. I always bother John, too, only this time I didn't. (John is my ugly brother. He really isn't ugly at all, but that's what Brenda calls him. When she wants him she'll say, "Hey, Ugly!" and he'll say, "What do you want, Stupid?" She isn't stupid just like he isn't ugly. The reason I know she isn't stupid is because she has a gold dangley thing that has OBK on it. I don't know what it means, but she got it at college, and Mother says you have to be awfully smart to have one. She has one, too.)

Well this "damn" story began last

year. I used 'damn' cause I like the word, only I'm not allowed to say it out loud. John says it all the time, but if I say it I get hit. Nobody said that I couldn't use it when I wrote a story, though. Of course, nobody said that I could write a story. Though I'll probably get swatted for writing this. Oh, well, Brenda is always saying that she is willing to make sacrifices for her writing career. Well, so am I.

Last summer, when I had just turned seven, and before Brenda got engaged, but after my other sister got married, my name appeared in very big, red letters in Brenda's little, black book. In this book she keeps a list of people that she's mad at. I'm always in the book, only not like I was then. I even saw my name. MARY K. TAYLOR, just as big as you please. Why my name got there is sort of like this.

It all started one afternoon when I casually said, "Brenda, are you going out again tonight with Mark?" I'm very casual.

Brenda didn't even look up. "Yes," she said back. "I'm going out tonight with Mark." I was upside down in Daddy's big, old, green chair watching her put on nail polish. "Where are you and Mark going?" I asked, again being very casual.

Again she gave me a straight answer. "We're going to the movies." She made a crazy face as she put the polish on her right, little finger. She looked sort of like a witch where I was upside down in the chair.

"Are you going to the drive-in?" I asked somewhat eagerly. I myself like drive-ins. I like to watch people in the other cars. Once I asked Brenda if she watched other people when she went to the drive-in. I never did find out 'cause she never answered me.

Brenda kept right on doing what she was doing. I suppose we'll go to the drive-in," she said. "We can get in free there."

Things were going just fine. I pressed my luck with one more question. "What time do you think you'll be home?" If she answered this question then everything would be all right. I sort of held my breath waiting for her to say it. It was just too much. She looked up

(down) at me funny like. "About two, why?"

Well she almost had me there. But I'm pretty quick at making up things, so I said real fast, "It's my cat. She goes out my window at exactly twelve o'clock, and she always likes to come in at just two o'clock. She doesn't like to come in at any other time. She also just loves being let in by you. She thinks you're so sweet." And with that, I flipped over the chair and ran down to Mother's room. She has a phone in there, and I can talk on it without anybody hearing me.

My phone call was very important. I had to call up my best friend Sarah. I had to tell her that she would be able to come and spend the night with me. She asked me if it would be like the last time. I told her that it would be, but that she would have to pay me a dime again. She was very excited. I knew she would be. She just loves to come to my house.

Well, it was just about two o'clock when the alarm went off. It scared us both something awful. I don't very often have an alarm clock going off at two o'clock. Most of the time it's only about twelve or one. When it's as early as that, I can usually stay awake. I can always stay awake when I have something to wait for, and last summer I always had something to stay awake for. I always waited for Brenda to come home. Oh, she didn't know it, but I did. That's just what Sarah and me were doing. That's why we set the alarm. So that we'd be awake when she came home. We were, too.

Sarah and me, we snuck out of bed and crept into John's room. Our house is built all on one floor. John and Brenda's rooms are in the front and from their windows you can see what's going on in the driveway. What I mean is that you can see the cars parked in the drive, and you can see what's going on in the cars. We were always very interested in what was, or what would be going on in the car.

Brenda was right on time. Just about two o'clock a car turned into our driveway. We could see the lights way down at the entrance gate. At first I was almost scared it was John, only I should-

n't have been, 'cause Daddy's always saying that John never gets in 'til the crack of dawn. I just knew that two o'clock wasn't dawn. Well, anyway, it wasn't John 'cause all of a sudden when the car was about halfway down the drive, the lights went out. Mark always turned the lights out. It was better that way, I guess.

You know, some kids aren't as lucky as me. Not everybody's sister goes out with a guy who has a brand new car with the top that goes up and down. The top was down, and Sarah and me were getting all gigley just waiting for them to kiss. Only, of all the stupid things, they didn't. They just sat there. They were sitting pretty close together, but we sure couldn't see anything. So, Sarah and me padded down to Brenda's room. We stood up on her bed and peeked out her curtains. Well, honestly, they weren't doing a thing. I was afraid Sarah would feel she wasn't getting her money's worth. Usually it was worth ten cents, but not tonight. They just kept sitting there talking.

It got pretty boring after a while. Sarah and me were almost asleep again. Finally, I got so that I couldn't stand it any longer. I poked Sarah, and we started back into my room. It was then, that we heard the car door slam. We jumped back up on the bed to see what was going on. Well, Brenda and Mark were getting out of the car, and were walking around to the back lawn.

My room has a great, big window in it, and from that window you can see the back lawn and everything. Sarah and me ran in there and looked out that window. We couldn't see much though. Brenda and Mark were way down on the point. Sarah thought that maybe if we turned on the light in my room that we might be able to see better. I turned it on, but that was worse. We just couldn't see at all.

I guess, though, that with the light on they could see us. It wasn't long before all of sudden something knocked on the window. Boy, if you think that didn't scare us. We dove right into bed and hid under the covers. I peeked out just once. Oh, it was awful. There was Mark and Brenda standing right in the window. I stuck my hand out and flipped off the light. By that time me and Sarah were laughing so hard that the old bed was shaking.

After Brenda and Mark had left, we got out of bed, still laughing like fools. We went back into John's room, because we guessed that Brenda was about ready to come in. Now, when they'd get on the doorstep, that was usually the best time of all. Only from where we were we couldn't see them there. The only place

you really could see good from was the skinny window in the front hall. It's one of those windows that starts from the floor and goes up as high as the ceiling. It's not very wide, but if you got placed real good, you could see. The trouble was though, that to get placed right you had to get around the corner, around a table, and into the good corner. You had to be able to do all this without them letting them see you.

Me and Sarah, we knew how to do it. We'd get down and crawl on our stomachs. We'd wiggle around the corner, then under the table, and finally into the other corner where we could see good. Well, that's what we started to do. The only thing was that we could hear what they were saying outside, and it got so funny that we just couldn't stop laughing. There we were, Sarah and me, rolling around under the table laughing and snorting something awful.

That sort of did it. I guess they could hear us, 'cause all of a sudden the door flew open and Mark came in. He

reached under the table and just pulled us right up from under there. He was grinning at us, but Brenda sure wasn't. She looked real fierce.

Well, then, I don't know why I did what I did next. Honest, I really don't. It just sort of happened. I looked at Sarah and I said in a real sickening voice, "Mark, Dahling!" and she looked at me, and in the same way she said, "Brenda, Dearest!" and then we made kissing noises. Mark, he just started roaring with laughter, but Brenda looked like she might be going to cry. She was all red in the face and her teeth were making a sort of grinding noise. As for Sarah and me, we just sort of dangled there. Sarah was hanging from Mark's left hand, and I sort of hung from his right hand, and that's just about the end of the story. Except, of course, that Brenda was horribly mad at me, and she wouldn't speak to me for a while. But, then, John always says that something like that is "no great loss!"



OUTSIDER

dick o'loughlin

I'm John Gordon, twenty years ago I was one of the one hundred and fifty freshmen who got here that hot, mucky Monday afternoon in September. Upon arriving at my dormitory I was assigned a room on the second floor with Hal Sanks.

I timidly entered the room and introduced myself to my roommate. Hal's face broke into a politician's smile and a cordial welcome was extended.

"I hope that bed will be satisfactory; if not, I'll be glad to change with you," said Hal. "We might as well get the formalities over with. I'm from New York. Where are you from, John?"

"Brockton, Pennsylvania," I replied in my timid and somewhat nervous voice. "I went to the Brockton Consolidated High School. Where did you go, Hal?"

"I prepped at Groton for four years. You see, it's sort of traditional that all of the men in our family go there. Most of my friends stayed up East and went to college, but because of my health I decided to come here. You'll have to excuse me now, I've promised these guys over at the Tau Omega House I'd meet them for cocktails."

"Sure, Hal," I chirped in. "I'll see you later."

I thought to myself that I had never had a cocktail in my life and only a couple of beers at the American Legion picnic last summer. I guess I might as well forget about unpacking right now. I'll do that tonight. Hell, I might just as well go and find Hal and those friends of his.

I left the room and started on my first journey away from campus and a new aspect of college life; which was to find the one and only bar in town. The first stranger I asked gave me a surprised look and pointed down the street.

I was becoming increasingly nervous as I neared the modernistic and for-

biding looking plate glass door. I hastily entered the dimly lit room. It seemed like an hour till my eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness. In reality it was probably just a few seconds. I felt like a real dunce, just standing there and squinting around the room. At last I saw Hal in a corner booth with three older looking boys. I hoped that I looked as relaxed as I knew they were. My roommate quickly glanced my way and then resumed his conversation as if he hadn't seen me. As I neared the table Hal gave me a very cool welcome, hesitantly introduced me and asked me to join the group. As I sat down the conversation picked up again.

"What will you have," questioned the waitress.

I looked around to see what the other boys were drinking. "I'll take one of those yellow-looking drinks with the chopped ice in it," I replied. I wonder how much these things cost? Sure hope they're not more than a quarter. That train ride down had cost me more than I had anticipated, I thought to myself.

As the waitress was putting the drink down in front of me she said, "That will be one dollar please."

The other boys weren't paying any attention to me so they couldn't see the surprised look that came over my face as I reached into my dungaree pocket for the money. I tried to appear as if I was quite used to doing something like this. The waitress just stood there and stared at me. I guess country boy was written in big red letters across me. I took out my eight remaining dollars and placed one on the outstretched tray. She still stood there staring, then abruptly turned on her heel and went back to the bar.

My roommate was telling Drexel Worthington about the place they had rented last summer in East Hampton.

"Where's East Hampton?" I asked.

"Oh, it's just a cluster of small cabins near the tip of Long Island," said Drexel with a sardonic smile on his face. "You know, nothing very special, most of the people fish for a living out there."

That got a big laugh all around the table. It sure didn't seem funny to me. I naturally laughed too. Though I didn't have the slightest idea what everybody was laughing about. If it was good enough for the rest of them to laugh at, it was good enough for me, so I decided.

Hal and Drexel were in a pretty involved conversation about the Hamptons', so I tried to strike up a conversation with the other two boys. They didn't seem too interested in answering an inquisitive freshman's questions so I went back to listening to Hal and Drexel.

They kept talking about debutantes and the pros and cons of different parties they had attended. I made a note to write mother and find out if Brockton had an Infirmary Ball, and if they did how I could get invited to it.

One of the boys who hadn't said much all afternoon said, "John, tell me about the last party you were at."

All of a sudden I started to feel embarrassed. It suddenly dawned on me that these guys with their close cropped hair and Bermuda shorts were no more interested in hearing about the American Legion picnic than the man selling pecans at a Stuckey's stand on U. S. 1.

I looked around the table at all the stereotyped faces staring at me. I then made what seemed like the biggest decision of my young life.

I told the story of the picnic and how much I had enjoyed the potato races, bingo games and square dances. I didn't give a damn what kind of parties these guys went to; as far as I was concerned you just couldn't have a better time than at an American Legion picnic.

After I finished telling the story there was a dead silence. The slamming of my glass on the table seemed to waken them again. They all turned and looked at me as I rose and went out into the mucky but now bright sunlight.

THE PICKPOCKETS

clark warren

CHARACTERS

STEVE DINO_____a young man of about thirty.

MA DINO_____his mother—nearly sixty.

ALICE_____a pretty young thing of twenty-five.

OFFICER_____a rookie cop—determined to make chief someday.

SCENE

The living room-kitchen of a small, two room, furnished flat. It's a cold, gray day—late afternoon—in December.

Up stage center there is a hall and the front door. In the hall, right, a closet, and to the left, a hat rack. A table Christmas tree with strings of red and white beads left of hall. A bar set up on a table left corner. A lamp next to the bar. Left wall, center, a false fireplace and just down stage of that, a chair against the wall. In front of the fireplace are an easy chair, a footstool and a small table. Center stage is the kitchen table covered with an old oil cloth tablecloth. There are four chairs around it, two up stage, and one on either end. A sink up right with a window over it (no view—just the brick wall across the alleyway) and a cabinet under it. There is a dumb-waiter in the up right corner of the right wall. Stove (cabinet over it) and ice box are the remaining necessities. The phone is ringing.

STEVE DINO enters. He is dressed conservatively, inconspicuously, in a heavy overcoat, felt hat, and a dark woolen scarf. The set of the chin, the square jaw, the breezy self-assurance, must bring about in the audience a certain fascination toward him. His husky voice is grinding out his slightly off-key version of "Jingle Bells."

He closes door and starts to take off hat when he hears phone. He goes to the phone, on the corner of the bar, and picks it up.

STEVE: Hello, Merry Christmas. (Pause) Sorry, there ain't no Kine here . . . No, no Sam Kine either (Pause) That's O.K. Yes, I . . . (Pause) Merry Christmas anyway. (Hangs up.)

He goes to the center table and stops. Digging into his roomy coat pockets he hesitates and, bringing his hands out empty, he goes to window and pulls down the shade. Back at the table, he dips into the coat again and brings out, one by one, five gold watches, some dangling from chains, two men's leather wallets, and a multi-colored silk scarf. He examines his loot with great deliberation and then, scooping it up from the table, he walks to the dumb-waiter and puts it all inside. He raises the shade, looks out, and then with another chorus of "Jingle Bells" he heads for the hat rack. This pantomime should be done slowly,

each point carefully made so that there can be no doubt that this fellow, whom we must grow to like, is a thief, more precisely—a pickpocket.

He goes up to the hat rack, puts hat, overcoat, and scarf on the rack, and crossing down right he takes off his jacket and goes into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

Enter MA and ALICE. Ma is a short, heavy-set woman in her late fifties, with snow-white hair and a ruddy complexion. She wears no make-up and is dressed in a faded house dress over which she wears two sweaters and a comparatively thin overcoat. A ragged scarf covers her head and woolen mittens complete her outfit.

ALICE is a well dressed, carefully groomed girl of about twenty-five. She is short, blond, and rather pretty.

MA: (Showing ALICE in and closing the door behind her, moving DC) It ain't much but we call it home, you know. Just like they say—be it ever so humble, there's . . . here, let me take your coat.

MA: Sure, honey. Anythin' you want. Your're the chief. That's what my husband used to say. "Your're the chief." Just like that. "You're the chief." Gee, that's a beautiful coat. (takes off mittens and scarf).

ALICE: Thank you.

MA: (Crossing to hat rack) Yeah, it's cold all right, but you get used to it after you get as old as me. (Hangs up coat).

ALICE: (Smiling) Oh?

MA: (D.C. . . . far off) Sure. You get used to it. (Pause . . . then breaking it) Oh! Sit down. We don't have company much. (Laughing) I'm no Emalie Postum, you know.

ALICE: (Laughing and sitting U.R. chair at table) That's quite all right, Mrs. Dino. (Looking up at her) It's been a long time, hasn't it?

MA: Since you was Steve's girl in school? (Alice nods) Yeah. You got along good, huh?

ALICE: We were good friends.

MA: Yeah? Steve always was a lovable sort of bum, you know.

ALICE: Pardon me?

MA: Just an expression. It sure was coincidental you bumping into me today. I'm sure . . .

STEVE: (From bedroom) That you, Ma?

MA: Well, it ain't Santa Claus. (Ma laughs at Alice)

STEVE: Ma, this holiday is better . . . the crowds and all. Wait'll you see the stuff I picked up. Not as bad as . . .

MA: Come on in, you old blabber-mouth. We got a guest. Don't you know you shouldn't shout?

STEVE: I ain't shoutin', Ma.

MA: (Shouting) You ain't . . . (Opening door and seeing him a foot in front of her . . . quietly) You ain't shoutin'?

STEVE: Nope.

He is wearing a sweater over his shirt—no tie.

MA: (Stepping aside) Steve, you . . .

STEVE: (Seeing Alice and crossing to her) Alice!

ALICE: (Rising and holding out her hands) Hello, Steve.

STEVE: (Taking them in his) Well, how the hell are you?

ALICE: (Smiling) Fine. And how (with a grin) the hell are you?

STEVE: Great. (Looking her up and down) Great! How did Ma find you?

MA: She just bumps into me on the street. Just about bowls me over. We was just sayin', it sure was coincidental her bumpin' into me.

STEVE: What are you doing now? Why are you in town? Are you . . .

MA: Hey, why don't you children sit down? (To Steve) Where's all the manners I taught you, nut? (Getting coat from rack).

STEVE: Good idea, shrimp.

Steve seats Alice in up right chair at table. He sits at R end of table.

MA: (Mock indignation) Shrimp, is it? Well! Just for that I'm goin' to leave you two for a while. I got some things to do.

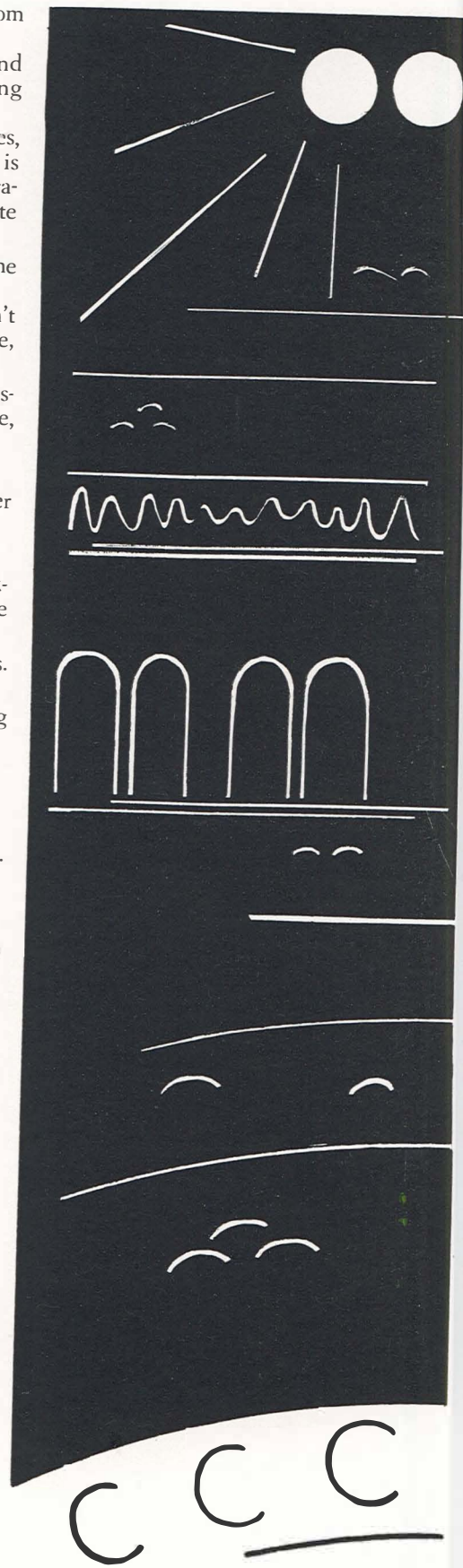
STEVE: You don't gotta leave, Ma. Stay and listen.

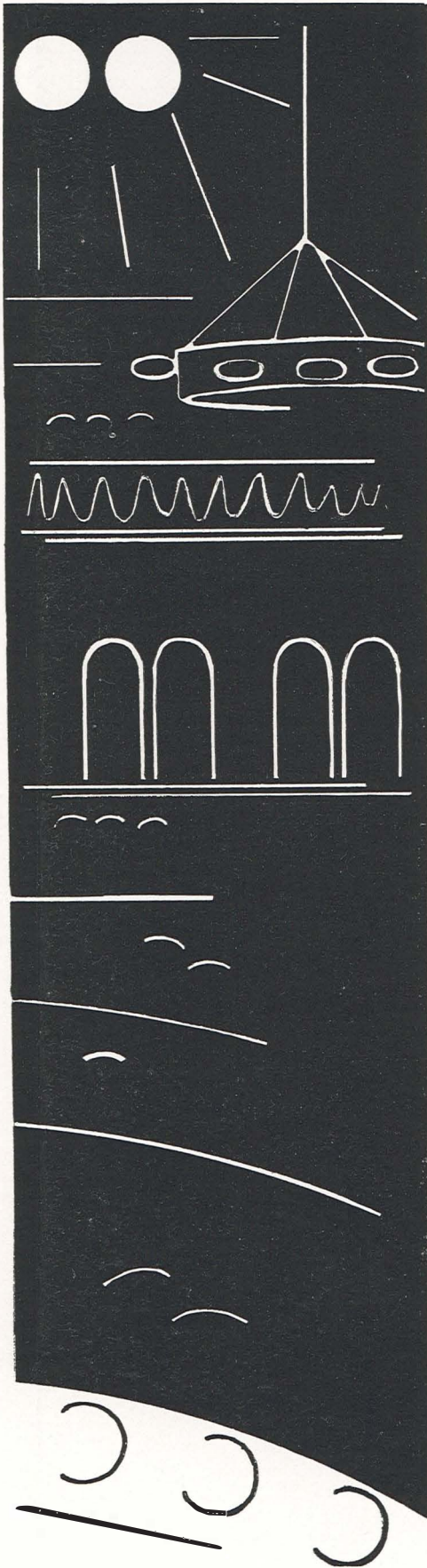
MA: (Putting on things) You got lots of talking to do. You don't want me.

STEVE: Sure we do.

MA: Listen here, I know when two people should be alone. Anyways I got shoppin' to do. (At door) I'll be back in a while.

STEVE: (Loud to Alice) How do you like that? Doesn't even say goodby.





Where's all the manners I taught her, that's what I'd like to . . .
Ma moves down to him and kisses him on the head.

MA: Goodby, you bum.

She turns quickly and heads for door.

STEVE: (Laughing) You win, Ma. Goodby.

Door bangs shut—

STEVE: You wouldn't know it, but we get along pretty good together. Now what's new. Fill me in.

ALICE: Where should I start?

STEVE: Are you married? (She shakes her head) What are you doin' now?

ALICE: Nothing really. Just odd jobs.

STEVE: How odd?

ALICE: Oh, typist . . . ah . . . worked in a nursery and believe it or not, I was secretary to a man who manufactured men's underwear.

STEVE: (Laughing) No!

ALICE: (Holding up right hand) Scout's honor.

STEVE: You haven't changed much.

ALICE: Neither have you.

STEVE: Don't believe it. (Quickly) Say, how's your brother?

(An unaccountable pause)

STEVE: What's Bert doin' now?

ALICE: He's fine.

STEVE: What's he doin'?

ALICE: Bert?

STEVE: Yeah.

ALICE: Policeman.

(Another pause)

STEVE: (Smothering surprise) Oh.

Alice stands and takes off her coat, looking around for a place to hang it.

STEVE: (Standing) I'll do it.

ALICE: No, let me.

Coat off, she reaches into its big, floppy pocket, senses Steve looking at her and quickly takes her hand out. Going up to the rack . . .

ALICE: It wrinkles too easily.

STEVE: O.K. by me. Nice coat for a girl out of work.

ALICE: (Hanging coat) Now just what do you mean by that?

STEVE: Nothin' really. Just thinkin' out loud.

ALICE: Well, once it was a dirty grey so I had it dyed like that. Looks almost new, doesn't it?

STEVE: Looks real nice. (He indicates chairs and they sit again) Policeman, eh?

ALICE: That's right.

STEVE: An officer?

ALICE: (Shaking her head) Patrolman.

STEVE: Oh. They don't make an awful lot of money, do they?

ALICE: What do you mean?

STEVE: Well, they don't make enough to support two people, do they?

ALICE: No. I don't suppose they do. What are you getting at?

STEVE: (Looking back at coat) Nothin'. How did you say Ma met you?

ALICE: I didn't really. But like your mother said, we just bumped into each other on the sidewalk. I guess I wasn't looking where I was going or something because I nearly knocked her over.

STEVE: Crowded this time of year.

ALICE: That's right. (Smiling) Why, on one block I must have sideswiped seven or eight people and shouldered a dozen more.

STEVE: (Chuckling) Sounds like football.

ALICE: If you were my size it would feel like football. Every night I check myself over for bruises.

STEVE: Say, I feel like a drink. How about you?

ALICE: Well, I don't know what my scout leader would say, but (with a grin) yes, I'd love one. Can I help.

STEVE: (Crossing up left to bar) Naw. I'm the greatest bar-keep this side of the Rio Grande. Just watch.

Alice starts looking for something. She sees dumb-waiter, goes over, reaches for the door and . . .

ALICE: I'll get the glasses.

STEVE: O.K. (He looks over—starts) No! Under the sink. Under the sink. That's the dumb-waiter. It ain't used no more so we keep it closed 'cause it's a

sound trap. Carries what people say all over the building.

ALICE: (Slowly) I'm sorry.

She carefully opens cupboard and takes two glasses.

STEVE: That's right.

They bring things down to center table. Dumb-waiter still partly open.

Alice is puzzled, curious. Something is wrong. Long pause.

ALICE: I didn't mean to get you excited.

STEVE: Forget it.

ALICE: (Indicates bottle) Scotch?

STEVE: (Affecting drawl) Yes, ma'am. This saloon's noted for its wide selection. You can *choose* whether you'd like your drink in a small glass, a juice glass, a jelly glass, a coffee cup, or a soup bowl.

ALICE: (Laughing) Do you have any medium glasses?

STEVE: Well ma'am, I just happen to have two medium glasses right here. Allow me.

He pours. They sit, Steve up left at table, Alice next to him. During dialogue they drink faster than is wise.

ALICE: What are you doing now?

STEVE: Me? Oh, . . . I have a pretty good business. I'm my own boss, no set hours. Sort of . . . a . . . pick-up and delivery service. Want some salted nuts?

ALICE: What do you pick up?

STEVE: (Pause) It's different every day. Radio parts, dresses, all sorts of stuff. You know, men's underwear . . .

ALICE: (Trying to be serious) Oh you . . .

He takes her hand in his. She pulls it away.

STEVE: What's the matter? Too salty for you?

He wipes his hand on the napkin.

ALICE: (Trying unsuccessfully to keep from smiling) Oh . . .

Steve tries again.

STEVE: That better?

She nods.

STEVE: You know it ain't easy to talk to somebody you ain't seen for so long.

ALICE: Sometimes it's very hard.

STEVE: I'm doin' pretty good though, huh? (They laugh together).

STEVE: I never was much of a talker I guess.

ALICE: But that's what I liked, Steve. We could just sit in the car without feeling we had to make conversation.

STEVE: Yeah.

ALICE: And then you'd say somethin' silly and we'd laugh and . . .

STEVE: And your nose would start runnin' . . .

ALICE: Steve Dino, it would not!

STEVE: Sure it would. Whenever you laughed hard your nose would run. Whenever . . .

ALICE: You're horrible! (She laughs.) I never thought you noticed. Do you remember when I asked you why you brought your car to school, and . . .

STEVE: And I said, "I need it for accidents." (They laugh) Ya know, I used to try to plan all that stuff ahead of time. What I say, how I'd say it, just to make you laugh. (He grins) Crazy, huh?

A pause.

ALICE: Steve?

STEVE: What?

ALICE: Where do you deliver it . . . the dresses and things?

STEVE: (Taking his hand away) Hey! What is this . . . the third degree or somethin'?

ALICE: No, I . . .

STEVE: You'd think I was a . . . pickpocket or somethin'.

ALICE: (Subtle double-take . . . pause) I'm sorry, Steve. I just . . . (Smiling) Could I have some nuts?

As he holds out can there is a knock at the door. Pause.

STEVE: Ma wouldn't knock. Anybody know you're here?

ALICE: No.

Another knock—both stand.

STEVE: Who's there?

VOICE: Police.

Nothing happens. Then Steve steps toward the front door and Alice slowly edges toward the bedroom.

STEVE: Go in the bedroom and close the door. (She does so.) Come in.
Ma is standing in the door. She is wearing handcuffs. She is followed into the room by a young police officer.

STEVE: Ma!

MA: (To officer) There, you see?

OFFICER: This your mother?

STEVE: What happened, Ma?
She crosses left to him.

MA: It's a frame, son. They grabs me walkin' out of a store and finds a necklace on me.

OFFICER: It was stolen earlier today. Quite a piece, too.

MA: In my pocket. Worth two thousand dollars. It's a frame. Two thousand dollars worth of it . . . honest, baby, I never seen it before.

STEVE: Sure, Ma. Take it easy. I know.

MA: I walks out of this store forgettin' to pay for a necktie. Just a necktie, see, and when they searches me they finds this necklace.

STEVE: All right, Ma. It's all right. Can I take a look, officer.

OFFICER: No dice, Mac. This stays on me. (Patting inside coat pocket) Come on, lady, let's go. You comin', Mac?

STEVE: Yeah, Just a . . . (Idea . . . looks slowly to officer) Has it been snowing out?

OFFICER: Just a flurry.

STEVE: Thought so. Coat's wet . . . bad for the material . . .

OFFICER: Quit stallin'. You comin' or not?

STEVE: I could tell it was snowin' because there's . . . just let me . . .
He walks slowly to officer and brushes now and water off coat, his back to audience.

STEVE: Ruin your press that way, you know.

OFFICER: Yeah?

STEVE: Sure. It doesn't take much. There . . .

Steve backs to left as though to survey his work. His upstage hand is hidden to both officer and audience.

STEVE: My poor old mother is pretty shook up about this, officer. Maybe you can explain what was supposed to have happened.

He stands with hands behind him "at ease." Swinging from his right hand we see a long string of pearls. He is shaking and waving them, trying to get his mother's attention. Ma, although also facing up center and slightly in back of her son, is staring at the floor, listening to the officer.

OFFICER: It's simple. She started walking out of a store without paying for a necktie. The floor walker stopped her and called me. We had her searched then, see, and found this (patting coat again) necklace in her coat. Well, I could tell right away it wasn't a phony so I called the station and they said it was stolen this morning. Now, let's go.

On "necklace in her coat" Ma looks up and sees pearls. Stunned only a moment, she moves to Steve and takes them from him, turning down stage and away from the officer as she does so.

STEVE: Wait a minute. You gotta have evidence to drag Ma in. Either I see it or she don't go.

OFFICER: Get off your horse, Mac. There's more of us out front, you know. Give me any trouble and they'll be up here in five minutes.

STEVE: (Crossing right) I ain't givin' you any trouble, only you know's well as I do, without a necklace there's no case.

OFFICER: Ah, come off it. I got the necklace (Reaching in pocket) so there's nothing to . . . look of horror . . . then panic as he goes into one pocket after another.) All right. All right, hand it over.

STEVE: Huh?

OFFICER: Hand it over!

STEVE: Hand what over?

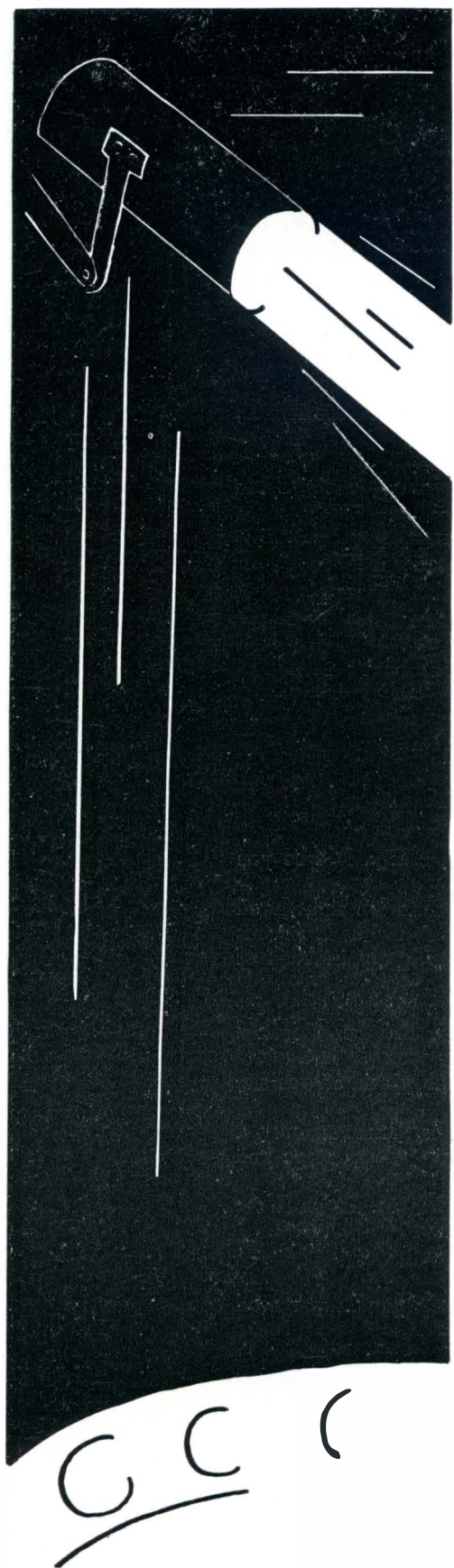
OFFICER: (Crossing right to him and grabbing his arm) You know damn well what! Let's have it.

Ma, free from the glare of the officer, searches frantically for a place to hide pearls, under the easy chair, in the fireplace, on the lamp, none will do.

STEVE: What are you talking about?

OFFICER: The necklace. Give it here.

STEVE: I don't got a necklace.



OFFICER: (Shaking him) I said give it here.

STEVE: I said I don't got a necklace.

OFFICER: (Roaring) You give it to me or you'll regret it.

STEVE: (Lightly) Are you sure you had it when you came in?

OFFICER: (About to break him in two) Why, you . . .

STEVE: (Breaking away . . . loudly) That's enough. (Pause . . . quietly) You lay one finger on me and I'll sue you and your whole force ragged. One finger and you won't be worth a cent. Not one red . . .

OFFICER: (Controlled) I'm gonna search you.

STEVE: You think so? Where's your warrant?

OFFICER: (Up a tree . . . reluctantly) All right, Mac. I'm new at this game, but if you think you're gettin' away with this, you're crazy.

Ma still frantic. Suddenly an inspiration. The CHRISTMAS TREE! She drapes pearls around it. A perfect trimming. Officer turns around catching her off guard. She laughs self-consciously and holds out her handcuffs. He unlocks them.

OFFICER: In five minutes we'll have fifteen men here to turn you and this place upside down. And don't try to leave . . . I'll be watchin' the door. (He turns, nearly knocking tree over.) We'll find it.

He stomps to door, exits, and slams it behind him. Ma and Steve start laughing.

ALICE: Poking her head out of door) Has he left?

MA: (Crossing to her) Alice, honey. (Bringing her into room) Just a big misunderstanding. Poor kid, you look scared to death.

ALICE: Not at all. What did he want? Whom did he want to see?

STEVE: A mix-up about Ma, that's all.

MA: Yeah. Craziest thing you ever heard.

ALICE: About your mother?

STEVE: It's all right now. Nothin' to worry about. Ma, where's . . .

ALICE: What did the police want?

STEVE: Just routine. What did you do with the . . .

ALICE: Routine? With your mother?

MA: Well, no, child, of course not. It ain't even worth talkin' about. Now stop thinkin' about it.

ALICE: But . . .

STEVE: Have some nuts. We can't just leave them. They'll go stale.

ALICE: I'm sorry, but it's getting late. I'd better leave.

ALICE: (Quietly) I'm sorry.

A pause.

MA: Sure, honey. We understand.

ALICE: (Putting on coat) I hope you don't think me ungrateful. It was sweet of you to invite me here, Mrs. Dino.

MA: We only wish you could stay longer. You could have helped us with the tree, there. Wouldn't that have been fun, Steve?

STEVE: Uh-ha. Ma, where did you . . . put . . . the . . . (Slowly the light dawns . . . a broad smile) Ma, you're a genius.

STEVE: Maybe I'll . . . we'll see you again?

ALICE: Yes . . . (Long pause) That would be nice.

MA: Well . . .

STEVE: It's too bad you have to go.

ALICE: Isn't it? (Breaking it) Yes, I . . . have to go, don't I? (Standing her ground but smiling) I'm sorry I have to (Sneaks a glance at pearls) run off like this. I wish I could stay longer.

Another pause.

STEVE: Alice, . . . (Handing her pearls) here's a present . . . from Ma and me.

Neither Ma nor Alice can believe their ears.

STEVE: (To Ma, nodding toward door) In five minutes.

MA: (Suddenly understanding) Oh, dear. Take them.

ALICE: You're giving this to me?

STEVE: Sure.

MA: It's only glass.

STEVE: Sure, glass.

ALICE: Do you know what you're doing?

STEVE: 'Course. (smiling)

ALICE: And you're giving me this?

MA: Sure, Merry Christmas. (Alice pockets pearls)

ALICE: Well, then, all right. (She walks to the door and opens it. She turns, smiling.) Thanks. (Then hurries away.)

STEVE: (Calling after her) Use the back way, the back way. He closes the door.

MA: Do you think she heard you?

STEVE: Aw, police won't give her any trouble. (Crossing to Ma) All right. How'd it happen?

MA: I don't know how it got there. Honest.

STEVE: Tell me, Ma. Come clean.

MA: I told you. I don't know.

STEVE: Ma, I'm surprised at you and I'm ashamed, most of all, ashamed. Ma, you got caught.

MA: Steve Dino! Stop talkin' to your mother like that. It's not true what they said. I told you what happened and that's the way it was.

STEVE: O.K. You're the chief, Ma. You're the chief . . . just like that.

Pause.

STEVE: (Brightly) Ma?

MA: Yeah.

STEVE: Ma, you was tremendous puttin' them pearls on the tree. Real tremendous.

MA: (Laughing) I was, wasn't I? Yeah. (They are both laughing)

STEVE: The look on that policeman's . . . hey! They'll be up here any minute. We got a lot to do.

Steve takes something from the dumb-waiter and puts it in his pocket. He then raises dumb-waiter to the top floor. Lots of action and rush. Ma cleaning up table.

MA: It just sort of come to me, see (She puts bottle on edge of table) Put this away, will ya? In a flash it comes to me. The Christmas tree I thinks. That would be a place he'd, Steve, would you put this back on the . . . thing there. (Bottle on bar) That would be a place he'd never look at twice. (As Steve picks up bottle) You want some peanuts?

STEVE: No thanks. (Puts bottle away) I sure can eat them things though.

MA: (Clapping on peanut cover and putting them away in cabinet.) You got all the stuff hid now? Everything put away?

STEVE: Yeah, all set.

Steve sits in easy chair and picks up magazine, flipping pages.

MA: (Unbuttoning her coat) Seems like it's getting warmer in here.

Silence. Both uneasy.

STEVE: We got any magazines I *haven't* seen? (He drops magazine on table . . . pause) Someone could make a fortune writing a story where the bad guys are the police.

MA: They're only doin' their job.

STEVE: Sure, but to keep us waitin' like this.

MA: Maybe they ain't comin'.

STEVE: They'll be here all right. (Getting up) But when?

Ma is taking off her kerchief. Steve crosses to her.

MA: Well, guess we have to wait, that's all.

Steve takes kerchief from her, moves to wastebasket, and savagely throws kerchief into it.

STEVE: (Loudly) That's right.

MA: (Crossing to him) Steve, what are you doin'?

STEVE: You saw me.

MA: What's the matter?

He reaches in his pocket and takes out the multi-colored silk head scarf he took from the dumb-waiter. He fixes it on her head.

STEVE: Merry Christmas, you lousy crook.

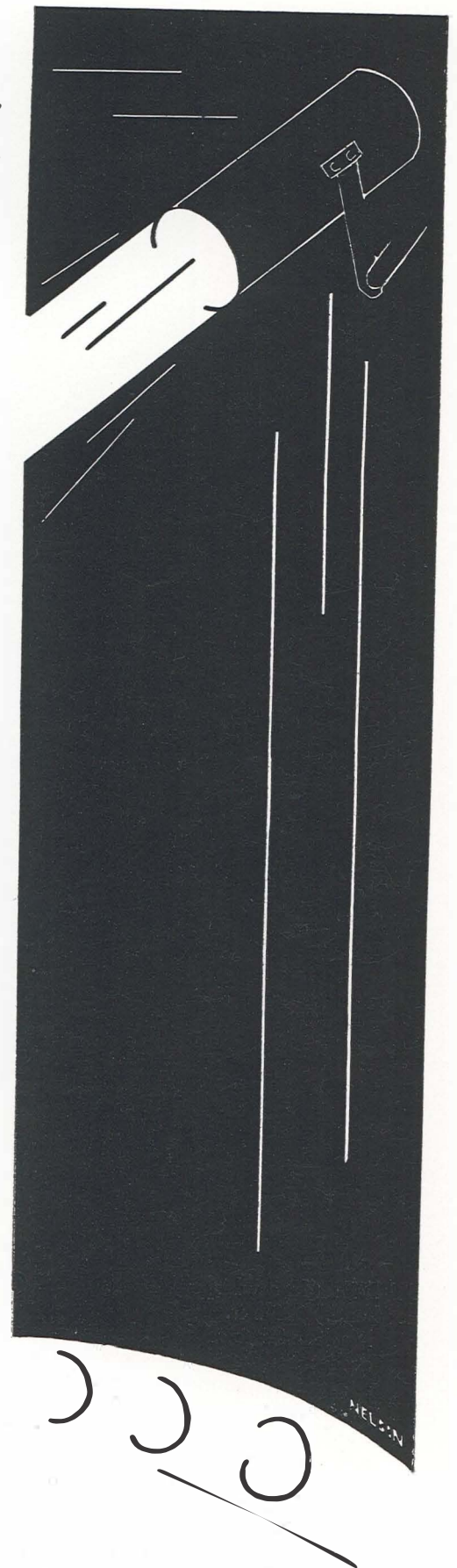
She is touched. She fishes in her pocket and pulls out a gaudy flowered necktie.

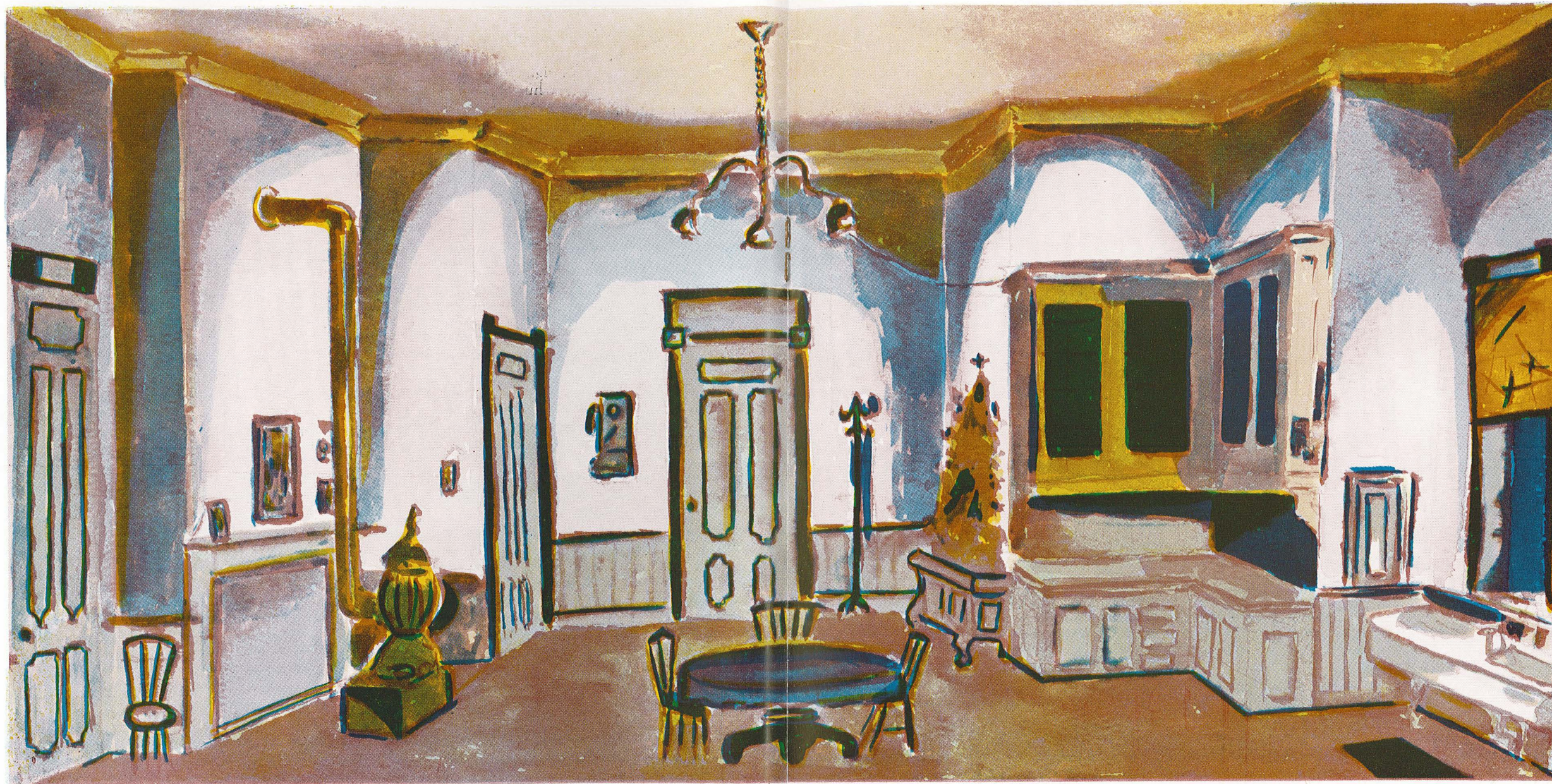
MA: Merry Christmas yourself, son.

STEVE: (Eyes down . . . quietly) Thanks, Ma.

A pause.

MA: (Gruffly) I suppose you want to kiss me now. Go ahead, get it over with. He plants a wet one on her already damp cheek. They look at each other, smiling. There is another knock at the door.





Designed by Sid Burt
and
executed by Bob Grose

STEVE: (In a whisper) That's them! (He takes off her scarf and thrusts it into her hand.) Hide it.

Ma hurries toward the bedroom, nearly enters, and then, remembering, dashes back and grabs necktie from Steve. She scurries into bedroom and there is another knock at the door.

STEVE: Hurry up. (Loud) Just a minute.

Finally Ma comes out and poses with apparent indifference as Steve opens the door and steps back into the room, expecting to be trampled to death by a mob of police. In the doorway stands the young officer alone. Pause.

OFFICER: May I come in?

STEVE: (Puzzled) Yeah . . . I . . . I guess.

OFFICER: (Stepping into room) You folks'll be glad to hear we caught the real shoplifter red handed. You ain't accused of anything, lady.

MA: You caught him?

OFFICER: Pockets full of stuff reported missing. The stolen necklace, too.

STEVE: The necklace!

MA: The one you said I stole.

OFFICER: Sure looked like it, lady.

STEVE: Who was it?

OFFICER: A couple of the boys downstairs recognized her. She'd been picked up before, and all the junk she had in her pockets clinched it.

Ma and Steve ask simultaneously . . .

MA: Who was it?

STEVE: Who?

OFFICER: Didn't get her name. She's used several though. Shame, you know.

Such a cute little blond. Looks don't mean much, I guess.

STEVE: Recognized her downstairs?

OFFICER: That's what I said. We was goin' up when she comes tearin' down, nearly bowls Mike over. Mike's one of the . . .

MA: She was comin' down?

OFFICER: I swear if you two'd listen you'd save a lot of time. Yeah, she was comin' down the stairs when we got in her way. Two of 'em recognized her and . . .

MA: (To Steve) Alice!

OFFICER: Huh?

STEVE: Nothin'.

OFFICER: Oh. Well, sorry to have given you both such a hard time. Still can't figure it out. Anyways, Merry Christmas.

He stomps out and slams the door. Both just stand facing the door for a long time. Finally, Steve turns front.

STEVE: (Shaken . . . stunned) Yeah. Merry Christmas.

Ma moves to him and puts her arm around him, as the curtain falls.

TRANSITION

tom dibacco

Eight-year-old Janie Martin was receiving her first Holy Communion today. It was a beautiful Sunday in May, and all the Catholic people of the 439 inhabitants of Melville were present at the eight o'clock Mass in order to witness the occasion. Even old Mrs. Williams, who came as often to church as an Episcopalian to a Quaker meeting, was sitting in the back row.

By five minutes to eight, the entire church was filled. John Lammon, the photographer for the *Melville Weekly*, leaned his unshaven, acne-scarred face on the wall next to the first pew on the left. Every so often, he'd place his camera on the floor, take out his red-checked handkerchief and wipe the perspiration from his brow. John wasn't a Catholic. In fact, the only place he visited on Sunday morning was Simpson's Bar on the outskirts of town.

Janie's parents were sitting in the third pew to the right of the center aisle. They occupied the two end seats. They had lived in Melville all their lives, gone to school together, and married after Bill finished his training at Wall Business College in Lipton, a town ten miles north. Bill was a salesman for a hardware firm in Melville, while Millie, his wife, occupied her time taking care of Janie.

Janie was Bill and Millie's only child. They were proud of her and they had reason to be. Janie was as fine and intelligent a child as you'd want to see. She had skipped the first two grades at St. Mary's elementary school and with her poise and beauty, had won three child beauty—and—talent contests. Bill and Millie had brought their daughter up well.

The organ began playing precisely at eight, and all the congregation rose as the procession of white-clothed children began. It was some sight to see. Their little faces were as radiant and angelic as those of the statues that stood near the vestibule of the church. Mothers and fathers alike took out their handkerchiefs at regular intervals. Some of the prouder ones pretended to be blowing their noses.

And then Janie came by. It made me feel funny inside as she walked past my row. She looked too perfect, too poised for a child her age. It reminded me of . . . my Diana when she was eight. How well I remember her first Holy Communion. It was twelve years ago, and by golly . . . it was twelve years ago to this date, May 12! Babs and I were just as happy then as Bill and Millie were today. I remember what Diana said to us after Mass that day. She ran up to us, hugged Babs and me and said, "I really love God, daddy, just as Sister Mary said I would!"

Father O'Connor finished the Fore-Mass and stepped up to the rostrum. He read the Epistle and Gospel slowly, looking up every now and then to see if

everyone was listening. He put aside the Missal when he was finished, placed his hands firmly on the lectern, cleared his throat and began.

"It is not necessary for me to go into great detail over the Sacrament which our young people will receive in a few minutes. God will come into the hearts of every one of these children today, just as He came into your hearts years ago."

John Lammon wiped his brow again.

" . . . true, your children will play a large role in this ceremony today, but it is up to you, the parents, to see that they continue to receive Our Lord, to continue to carry out the beliefs presented to them by their catechisms, such as to 'know, love and serve God.' Our Lord gave you the most treasured gift in the world, a child. A child is the most valuable possession because it is fresh from the hands of God. You may be compared to night watchmen in a warehouse, for it is up to you to protect the products of the Maker from outside forces and evils."

Mrs. Williams leafed through a copy of the *Sunday Visitor* which someone had left in her row.

"See that their souls," continued Father O'Connor, "remain as white and clean as the garments they are wearing today. I pray that God will be with you in your task. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, amen."

He walked back to the center of the altar and began the Credo. Soon it was time for Communion. Sister Philip Mary and Sister Phyllis Ann signaled the children to come to the Communion rail. Two by two they came, kneeling, lifting their heads, opening their mouths, and walking with folded hands to their seats. Handkerchiefs were again noticeable. I even took mine out of my pocket. I wish I could get rid of this cold anyhow!

Bill squeezed Millie's hand as Janie started for the altar. Janie appeared as serious and as pious as a Nun receiving the Blessed Host. Janie's head pointed toward the floor as she walked back to her seat. Then she placed her face in her cupped hands and moved her lips in prayer.

I waited outside after Mass to see the children parade out. Janie, spotting her parents, put aside her lady-like poise for the time being, and ran to where Bill and Millie were standing. Her little arms grasped a side of Bill and Millie's shoulders. She said something, but I was too far away to hear it.

"Hey, Pop," yelled Diana, who had just come to pick me up in the new Cadillac her boyfriend had given her, "hurry the heck up. I'm already ten minutes late in meeting Tom at the beach. He'll shoot me."

"I'm coming, dear," I said as I watched Janie, Bill and Millie walk hand-in-hand to their car.



THE MORNING WE WENT COON HUNTING

jack sutton

I 'spect some city folks ain't even heard of a coon, or think of them as little furry things that washes its food real clean and climbs trees. But that ain't all—a coon is a fighting little scound'l. I mean they's coons and they's coons, and if you tangle with a mean coon on his own grounds and terms, you've got a fight on your hands.

We got two good coon dogs name of Brownie and Jack, and you ain't ever seen two dogs love to hunt a coon more. But I've seen them lose coons when they tangled in water deep enough for the coon to grab their heads and pull them down and half-drown them. You got to hand it to them—a mean coon is a fighting coon, and he don't give a damn for nothing. Now, speaking of mean coons, let me tell you about a prize 'un we got one morning 'fore day 'long in late November.

It was mighty cold that morning and I was doing a piece of sleeping curled up under about six quilts, when Papa come in and turned on the lights and pulled the covers off me to make sure I'd get up and said, "Let's go, boy. Old Brownie's trailing and by the time we get there he'll have that coon treed."

Now at that particular time there warn't nothing could have interested me less, and I just laid there hoping he'd go away.

"Get up, boy, old Brownie's getting hot on the trail. Don't you hear him?"

Now he knew damn well I couldn't hear old Brownie no matter where he was, and me in the house, but I saw it won't no good hoping he'd go away, so I grunted something and swung out of bed. When my bare feet hit that cold floor I was wide awake and grabbing for my clothes.

He went on out and I dressed and stumbled on through the dark house to the back porch and bent down over the overflow and dashed cold water in my face and rubbed it into my eyes and dried off and went out into the yard where Papa and Lon, our colored tenant, were putting the axe and cross-cut saw and lantern and shotgun in the back of the old pick-up truck.

"What'cha want me to get?" I asked.

"Nothing. We got it all," Papa said.

"What'sa matter, Johnny-boy," Lon laughed, "youn ain't cold, is you?"

I looked toward him, but all I could see was eyes and teeth. It was cold and dark that morning.

"Damn right I am! What time is it?" I yawned.

"'Bout fo'," he said.

I cussed a coupla good ones to myself. Getting me up before day on a school morning to go hunt some stink-

ing coon that if I had my way would be in bed right now, just the same as me!

Papa finished trimming the wick on the old lantern and we crawled in the truck, with me sitting in the middle. There won't be no heater in the truck, and the one in the middle was best off. Papa stomped on the starter and raced the cold engine and rode the clutch until the old truck strated moving and I gritted my teeth and felt sorry for the old clunker and reached out and pulled the choke out and the old thing ran better, and we headed out toward the highway.

We left the highway 'bout a mile down the road by Mr. Clifton's, and turned into the two sandy ruts that led down to the Marl Hole. Lon ran his window down and I could hear old Brownie to the right of the ruts and that meant he was over in the river low grounds and that meant tramping through muck and icy water and I cussed old Brownie. Fifty yards to the left and he'd have treed on dry ground.

"Oh hello," Papa said, "ain't he treed over by that old Black Gum tree?"

"Yessuh, somewheres over theah," Lon said, peering out the window into the city blackness as if he could see old Brownie.

Papa worked his mouth a few times and rolled down his window and bent out and spit snuff juice and rolled up the window and wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand and looked over at me and started grinning and said, "If he's treed in the old Bla' Gum on Clifton's land, be damned if you boys ain't got a job on your hands. That old tree's 'bout as thick through as I am tall," and he looked at Lon and laughed and together they laughed and looked at me, but I sure as hell didn't feel like laughing and made a wry face and they laughed again.

Papa stopped the truck and we got out and unloaded and I carried the axe and lantern and we crossed the fence and waded through the low grounds, cracking ice as we went on. Old Brownie was baying a little once in a while to let us know where he was, and Papa stopped and cupped his hands to his mouth and hollored, "Hoo-eeeee, speak to him, Brownie," to let him know we were coming, and Brownie bayed a few times in a row to let us know he heard us, and we went on through the black, sucking swamp-ground that nearly pulled your boots off every step you took, and dodged under and around briars and vines and through briars and vines and stumbled over cypress knees and roots and vines and fell in briars and ran into thorny

bushes and it sure was a' aggravating place to tree a coon.

"Here he is over here," Papa said, and I shone the lantern in the direction and he pointed and there was old Brownie hunkered down by a tree 'bout fifteen feet high with the top broke out, and old Jack was trotting around the tree in big circles just in case the coon had jumped from the tree trying to fool the dogs. Papa walked over to Brownie and scratched his ears and stood there looking up at the old hollow tree. Down at the bottom of the stump was a big hole dug among the roots up into the tree, and up the tree 'bout two feet from the top was another hole about a foot wide. Papa turned away from the tree and looked back at us and said, "He's here, boys. Johnny, you look around for something to make a fire with, and Lon, you come over here by the tree and don't you let that coon jump out."

I gathered up some broom straw that grew in clumps and broke off some dead limbs from an old tree and dropped it all on a little rise of land 'bout twenty yards from the hollow tree. I put the straw in a big pile and put some of the smaller sticks on the straw, and laid the bigger limbs in a pyramid on top. I unscrewed the cap from the base of the lantern and tipped it over so a few drops of kerosene would spill on the broom straw. I lit a match and stuck it to the straw and watched it blaze up quickly into yellow and orange and red and blue flames. The smaller sticks caught, then the bigger ones, and the fire grew warm and big. I sat on my heels and opened my arms to it.

Across in front of me was the river. I had seen it many times, but on this dark and still morning, with the dancing, prancing, flickering firelight throwing strange and ugly shadows across it and the willows on the other bank, it seemed something I had never known before. We didn't seem close.

They's a feeling between a man and his river, a kind of feeling that seems shared, kind of like 'tween a man and a dog, or a man and his plow mule, 'tween a man and his land. It's a good feeling, a comfortable unspoken familiar feeling, a feeling like you're both giving and taking. Lot of folks might not think that's so, might call on you to point to evidence of it, and you can't, but it's there. I've felt it, and I've sensed it about Papa, standing on the banks and looking down at it.

But that day the river just moved on down its banks, quiet and strong and unstoppable. A forceful river, standing up to anything and always getting its way, one way or another. Watching it

A CLAW IN YOUR EYE

john hicky

made you feel kinda scary and small, knowing here is something you can't stop, something you can't hurt, that is stronger than you or anything you can do to it. Obstacles make no mind to it, it'll just go over or around them, defiantly moving always at the same pace, moving always to the sea.

"Here, boy, take the gun and stand over here," Papa said, poking my shoulder, "and if he shows his head, you shoot him."

I took the gun and stood up, slowly stretching my cramped legs. It was almost day. It was lighting up behind the stump, and I could clearly see the ugly old amputation. The fire won't nothing but a few flowing coals. I slung the gun from the crook of my arm and watched while Papa told Lon to cut a big limb and job up in the stump and poke the coon out. The dogs stood by nervously watching us, and waiting.

Lon leaned over and stuck the end of the limb up the hole in the butt of the tree, and pushed it in 'till all he had left was a hand-hold, and started jobbing it up and down. He stopped and said, "Reckon it's in the wrong hold," and wiped his forehead. I saw a quick movement in the hole near the top of the stump and hollered, "Look out, Lon!" and about that time Papa hollered, "Look out, Lonza, that coon's fixing to jump on you!" and Lon already was bowed over in a crouch and was moving in a mighty quick half-circle away from the tree, when just about at the same time that coon sailed out of the stump and Lon dropped face first in the muck and the coon lighted 'bout four feet from him and was already turning around toward Lon, and Lon leaped up from there and made a quick grab at the pole he had cut and grabbed it 'bout half-way and swung it back and lashed out at that coon and caught him right alongside the head with a clean-sounding "whack" like when you're splitting logs and the coon lifted a littel in the air and turned 'bout two somersaults and landed in the muck 'bout four foot away and didn't move a muscle.

Lon reached over and poked him with the pole but that coon ain't moved. He picked him up by the tail and brought him to Papa and dropped him on the ground. Papa poked the coon with his toe and grinned and said, "Uh, huh, he's a big 'un. He'll make a mighty fine mess for dinner, won't he Lonza?" and Lon grinned and put him in a toe sack and said, "Yes suh, he

sure will," and swung the sack on his back and we started for the truck.

We put the sack on the floor of the truck and we climbed in and I put my feet on the sack to keep them warm and we headed back toward home. I was thinking about some fried ham and scrambled eggs and hot, strong coffee for breakfast.

We hadn't gone far 'fore I coulda sworn I felt the sack move, but I figured it was just a bump in the road, and didn't say nothing. We went on a little further and I saw the sky to the East was just beginning to pink a little, and that meant the day would be clear and sunny and that damn sack moved and this time I knew it won't no bump, and I said, "Gran Daddy, this coon's alive."

Papa worked his mouth a few times and rolled down his window and lent out and spit snuff juice, and rolled up his window and wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand and laughed and said, "Be damned if that coon's alive! Lonza's done knocked him in the head and laid him out," and Lon giggled and said, "You ain't need to worry 'bout that coon. He ain't gonna move no mo'." and they laughed and I didn't say anything.

'Bout a minute later he humped his back and this time I kinda pressed down with my feet and when I did I thought that coon was going to come out of that sack sure enough! I lifted my feet real easy and put them on the dash board, and Papa and Lon saw me and laughed, but I didn't say anything because I could see the house and I figured I could last that long.

We pulled up in the yard between the pecan trees and the stovewood pile and Lon opened his door and the first damn thing out of that truck was that coon, mighty alive and mean and mad and ready to fight. The first animal to see that coon was the old tom cat, who streaked out from under the house to see just what the hell this thing was and when he saw what it was he streaked back under the house.

'Bout that time old Brownie was out of the back of the truck to see why the cat was acting so foolish, and he rounded the front of the truck and saw the coon and put on his brakes with all four legs stiff and stretched in front of him, but he didn't have a chance to speak to the coon because all of a sudden all of them little rabbit-running, egg-sucking Beagles and Fices came out of nowhere and made a circle around the coon and soused into him.

Well, the coon looked over his shoulder at a Beagle snapping at his heel strings and at the Fice on his back trying to get a mouth full and at the Beagle in front snapping at his head and I swear that coon didn't make more'n four or five moves and all of a sudden every one of them little dogs was standing 'bout three feet away and looking at him and being real quiet. The coon shook his shoulders and settled his fur in place and gave them a sweeping glance and started shuffling toward the rear of the truck.

I reckon by this time Brownie had figured this ring-tailed boy won't for no children, and he and Jack sailed on the coon just like there won't nothing but business on their minds. Brownie took the head and Jack the tail, and they caught the coon off guard and down he went and I figured the end won't long so I stepped out of the truck and stood between the fight and the stovewood pile so I could break the dogs off when I figured he was good and dead. Well, the next thing I knew the coon was standing on his hind legs and had his claws wrapped about Brownie's head and looked like he had 'bout half of Brownie's nose in his mouth. Brownie shook and finally broke the coon off him and backed away a few feet and Jack looked up to see why it was so quiet and the coon took a swipe at his head with his left hand, and Jack backed away mighty fast and him and Brownie stood there and looked at him and the coon looked at them and shook himself and turned around and shuffled toward the hog pasture and straight at me and I didn't think too much of that and turned around and made two kinda quick moves and I was standing on top of the stovewood pile and the coon shuffled on past and lent his head over to one side and cocked his eye at me and crossed the road and went on through the wire fence and across the hog pasture making the hogs get out of his way and disappeared in the woods toward the creek low grounds.

I looked around and saw Papa standing by the truck tail-gate looking across the hog pasture and Lon was standing a few feet away looking across the pasture and holding the the empty toe sack and I climbed down off the stovewood pile and went to 'em and Papa looked at Lon and said, "Be god-damned if he won't a mean 'un!" and Lon shook his head and said, "Yes, suh, he sure was!"

I saw a man jump off a building, and I wasn't surprised. The other day a woman threw herself in front of a subway; that didn't bother me either. Funny, but none of these things mean anything to me. And yet, I know that I'll join them; I'll do the same thing they've done. I wonder if it hurts to die, hurts for long, I mean. But let me start at the beginning.

This afternoon was the end of the fourth week that I'd been on the wagon, and I felt pretty good about it. I came out of the office and headed for the subway. O'Tooley's bar is between the office and the subway. I knew I shouldn't go in, but I had stuck it out for four weeks and I figured I had proved to myself that I could stay away from the stuff if I felt like it.

The usual crowd was sitting at the bar, the same guys that went home on the subway every afternoon and always stopped off at O'Tooley's for a cold beer first. I knew they'd rib me about coming in, but I didn't care. Frank Mitchell sat at the bar, and the stool next to him was empty.

"What d'ya know! Look who's here. George Pritchard, the president of Alcoholics Anonymous. Sit down, George, have a drink—if you can take it."

I sat down on the leather stool and ordered a beer.

"Why beer, George? Why not a man's drink, something that will put hair on your chest?"

I thought, "How trite you are, Frank? You're as trite as hell. I think I'll kill you, Frank. It wouldn't be very hard. All I'd have to do is break this beer glass and cut your throat. One clean sweep and it'd be all over."

"Don't drink that too fast there, George. Real slow for beginners."

Frank has a very fat face. You know the kind, his jowls look like the jowls of a St. Bernard, and they shake like hell whenever Frank laughs. I started thinking about how it would be easy to kill Frank. "God, you'd bleed a lot, Frank! You'd bleed enough to cover this whole room."

"Gotta be going, George. Say hello to the wife for me."

"Sure will, Frank, sure will."

I drew figures in the mist on the beer glass for awhile, and then grabbed it by the base. An empty beer glass is real light, and so I swung it down across the edge of the bar. There was a jagged piece of glass left in my hand. It would have been just right for Frank's throat, but Frank was gone. I fondled the base for awhile, just staring at it, and thinking about how there were so many fat guys with fat faces like Frank.

Bill Mathews sat down next to me.

"Going to the fight Wednesday, George?"

Fights? Bill is an animal. Nothing but an animal. No appreciation of the finer things in life, art and all that. The biggest thrill he gets is watching some guy get beat up.

"No."

Bill laughed. "Wife again?"

I didn't say anything.

"Must be rough. Till she cracked down, you used to be the biggest fan I ever saw."

"Yeah."

The bartender came over and looked at the mess I had made on the bar. He was a big negro. He was new in the bar and I had never seen him before. I wondered how many punches it would take to knock him out.

"I'll get a new glass if you like, Bud."

I thought about how it would feel to

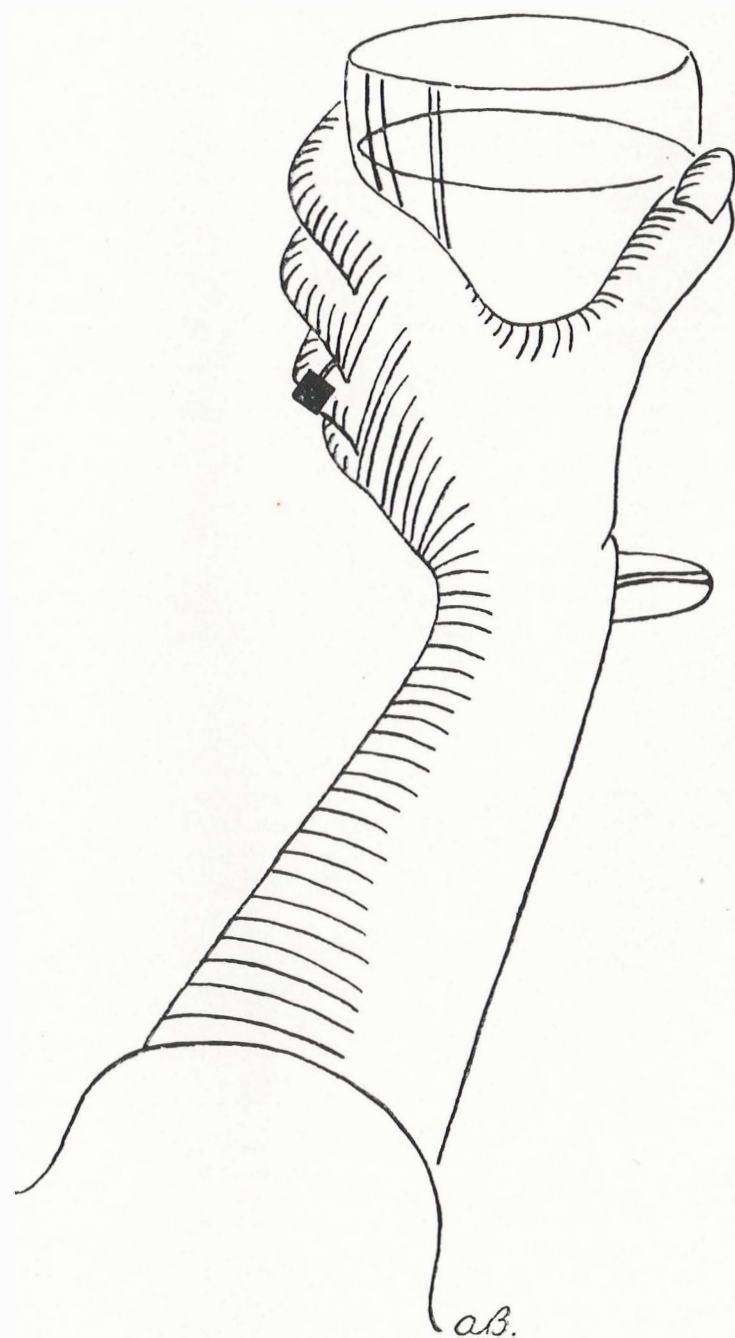
smash my fist into his sweaty face for awhile. "No thanks, I don't think I want any more. I'm sorry about the glass. I didn't mean to break it, it just slipped."

He knew as well as I did that it hadn't slipped, but he didn't say anything. I knew he wouldn't. I got up from the bar, turned to look around, took a hitch in my pants, and walked out. Just like that I walked out.

It was almost time for the five o'clock subway uptown. I had to hurry to the subway entrance. Hell, I didn't have a dime. The money changer wasn't looking so I ducked under the turnstill. I straightened up quick, and looked around. No one had seen me, but I didn't care whether they had or not.

The subway was on time, but it was crowded. More damn people take that subway uptown. I knew I'd have to stand up. I always ended up hanging on to the strap. But I didn't mind standing up. I was used to it.

There was a little guy with a bald head and glasses sitting down right in front of me, reading a paper. I figured I'd reach down, grab him by the collar and throw him out of the seat. What could he say? He'd probably be so scared, he'd get off at the next stop. I thought how funny it would be for awhile, and then started to read the ads on the side of the car. You see the same one on every subway. A guy modeling a shirt. He has a patch over one eye and is as distinguished as hell. He looks very sophisticated, but you know from the patch that he can take care of himself. That patch sure does a lot for that guy. I started wondering how he got it. Maybe a brawl, or maybe on a hunt in Africa. A lion might have gotten him. Christ! a lion clawing you



right in the eye. Must've hurt like hell.

This was my stop. The seventh one from where I got on. I climbed the stairs out of the subway, and started walking toward my house. There was a bunch of kids standing down the street. They were all about seventeen and looked pretty tough. They looked like one of those gangs you read about in the paper. I wondered what I'd do if they jumped on me. There were five of them, but I guessed I could take care of them. They were pretty big, but I had the experience, and I guess experience always wins in the end.

I crossed the street. I didn't have to cross that far up, but there were no cars around and I wouldn't have to wait for the traffic. A little kid ran out of one of the houses carrying a baseball glove. He came out the door running as fast as he could, and fell flat on his face. He went back into the house crying; the little brat probably ran to his mother and hollered about how he had fallen down, and gotten a boo-boo. The old lady probably told him to get the hell outside and play. Probably told him the old man was coming home for supper and she didn't have it ready yet. If he didn't go, ten to one she clobbered him.

I climbed the stairs to the flat and I could hear the kids yelling already. First they'd yell, then my wife'd yell back. It'd go on like that all night. What the hell can you do about it? I thought about clobbering all of them. You know, smacking them all, even Mary. That'd shut them up for awhile. Then I wondered why I went in at all. I thought about just taking off, forgetting the whole thing. I could head down to Mexico or somewhere, and find myself a real woman, a woman who

could satisfy me. One of those Latin furies.

I opened the door.

"Well it's about time, George. It's about time. What happened this time?"

She came up real close to me. I thought about grabbing her, tight, and kissing her until I bruised her lips.

"You've been drinking again!"

"Only one beer, Mary, that's all. I stopped for a minute with the boss. He offered me a drink. I only had one beer."

I thought about how great it would have been to have come in drunk, really blind. Then when she smelled my breath it would have knocked her over.

"George, your dinner is getting cold. How long do you expect me to keep it hot?"

Mike came in. Mike is seven, and is a spoiled brat.

"Did you bring me anything, daddy?"

"No, I didn't!"

Mary said, "You don't have to holler at him, George. You can speak in a nice gentle tone of voice."

The kid was screaming.

I went into the bathroom to wash up for dinner. I looked at myself in the mirror. I thought about how sensitive my face looked, almost poetic. I guess I knew then why all the great poets in the world committed suicide. There was a razor sitting on the top of the sink, and I thought about how easy it would be to cut my throat. That was the answer. Real quick and easy. So now you see why other people committing suicide doesn't bother me. I understand why they do it, and how after awhile it gets easy to do."

Mary hollered, "George, if you don't come out of there this instant, I'm going to throw this food out."

MY YOUNG LOVE

My young love hung herself
In a green old oak tree,
Because she'd lost me.
Her face is like a moonstone,
And her pretty toes dangle down.
When the fresh breeze blows
She rubs against the hoary brown trunk
The way she'd rubbed against me.
I watched her sway in the tree
For a long while, until,
The evening, dying,
Coughed blotches of red across the sky.
Night drably wiped it up with a grey rag,
Leaving only the whorled, cold stars,
So very far away,
Like her and me.

— robert eginton

THE BRIGHT SUNLESS SEA

The Bright Sunless Sea
Deep as a cup of Ceylon Tea,
Petulently white, waves
The gory green seaweed into caves.

Then we on the beach for a day,
Look away to the sky,
The same without flame:
God-bright blue blended with midnite dark,
Or fire of any kind which would leave a mark.

I asked the red-faced Ascetic,
If in the beginning no mind
Was paid to the overall design?

He said it was just the Law of Chance
Spun into a ludicrous dance
And the footsteps which remained
Were the Bright Sunless Sea.

—robert Eginton

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in April. Finley Smythe lay sprawled across the bed, one boot touching the floor. He was talking about his trip to Cincinnati. John, his younger brother, sat crosslegged on the barren floor, a cigarette hanging on his lip, curling smoke about his eyes, drifting blue through the room. Occasionally John would cough and water would come into his big brown eyes. Lola, Finley and John's mother, would come into the bedroom, wiping corn meal off her hands, and then back into the kitchen, and then back again, this time peeling a potato, and wiping her hands on a greasy sack-like apron. She kept saying, "Finley, you won't listen to me. I can't tell you a thing. I don't know what makes you like you are anyhow. I don't know what will happen to you. It's a wonder someone didn't knock you in the head." Finley would act like he was going to throw a vase or something, and she would go mumbling back into the kitchen.

John crushed his cigarette on the floor and asked Finley if he liked his little trip. John was a subtle little bastard.

"Hell, no," said Finley, sitting up on the edge of the bed and rubbing his hands through his tangled mop. He had laid around all day. "I went as far as Richmond by train. God, did that box-car stink! Inside it was dark, splinters all over the floor, torn cement bags, lime, pieces of leather, and the smell of rusty steel. I sneaked into the damn thing in Asheville. I liked its iron-brown color, and across the side in big white letters it said: 'route of phoebe snow.' Snow hell! I thought I would smother to death. I met a nigger in Cincinnati who told me about his getting locked in a box car. 'The door closed like a shotgun when the diesels jerked,' he said. 'Then the engineer sidetracked my car at some hick factory town and I had to sit three days in that damn black thing before some lousy workers opened it. They were loading boxes of light bulbs. They looked at me sitting in the corner like they thought I was crazy and one started to run for help. I remember he said something about look at them eyes.'"

By now it was beginning to rain outside. It splattered the creek that ran by the Smythe house like a thousand bullets. The creek already roared as it cascaded over the rocks because of the snow that had melted farther up the mountain. Mrs. Smythe called Finley

and John to supper and they ate pickled green beans, cornbread, meatloaf, and coffee. The rain made everything dark. The creek roared louder, and the tar paper roof began to leak. Finley placed a bucket near the table to catch the leak. He looked out the window at the creek and told his mother not to be afraid. "Maybe it will wash this damn shack away this time," said John. "The old man has never fixed the roof, or painted it, or put rugs on the floor. Just as fast as you put in a new window light, or something, the — — — comes home drunk and throws a bottle through it." Little John sat picking his teeth. "Why don't you talk that way when he's at home?" asked Finley.

The rain became steady and it began to get dark. Finley went outside and saw that the creek was lapping at the log bridge which led across the water to the outhouse. He thought he saw a rattlesnake struggling in the brown water. "It's going to rain all night," Finley murmured. He hurried inside and told John and his mother that they could not sleep there that night. "God, you're smart," said John. Finley only looked at his small, cigarette-stunted, tough, hardened little brother. This was nothing new. Many times they had had to leave home when their father came home drunk. They always went up the cove to Mrs. Thompson's house. Sometimes they took their schoolbooks. At the Thompson house Finley and John would try to study for school the next day. Mrs. Thompson always made them a pallet on the floor. Finley thought of how he shivered and how lonely he got during cold winter nights. He remembered how Mr. Thompson said that somebody ought to take Ed Smythe

out and string him up, and that he would himself if he weren't too old.

So Finley and John took Mrs. Smythe bundled up as best they could and started out into the rain. John took one last look at the little four roomed shack, and saw the muddy waters beginning to creep around the locust posts which supported all the Smythe belongings. It was still raining. Finley felt sorry for his mother hunching forward as the rain pelted her face. She was wearing an old blue kerchief. "Thank God I never had any girls," he heard her mumble as they slipped and slid their way along the muddy road toward the lights in the distance. Behind his back, Finley could hear the creek gnashing its teeth. He never looked back. "Why to hell is daddy not here to help mamma? I hope, by God, that he has to sleep out in this rain." Finley thought these things, but somehow he didn't believe them, or he wasn't sure. His heart bled everytime he thought of his father's face, and how he went around in dirty ragged pants, doing odd jobs: digging wells, pipe fitting, cutting wood, driving a bull-dozer. He thought of how his father looked everytime he lost a job, and how it was harder for him to get work. Finley took his mother's arm and helped her along the road. He pretended not to notice that she was crying. The lights from the Thompson House shone in the distance.

Sometime during the long night it stopped raining. Finley awoke before daylight and hurriedly put on his shoes to go down to the creek. As he crept out the door he saw John lying by the fireplace asleep. Outside everything was clean and fresh like a new washed ba-

bill pace FINLEY



by. Finley could not hear the creek. Everything was so quiet. He began to run. In the morning darkness Finley could barely see his house. When he got closer, he saw that there was a scum on the first two planks around the house like where a giant snail had crawled. The water had been that height. "This poor shack takes a beating," he thought to himself. He saw the trees washed around the house, the mud and silt, and knew that there was work to do. He did not go into the house. Somehow he thought that his father might be in there asleep. Or maybe he had vomited on the bed and was lying in it. So he trudged back to the Thompson House. Mrs. Thompson would probably give them breakfast.

The Smythes wasted no time in getting back to their house. The water had soaked about six inches of the house. By now most of it had seeped out through the floor, leaving sand and mud and an occasional puddle of water. Finley went out to look for the bridge. It was gone. "God, how did the house stay?" he wondered. The banks of the creek looked marvelously clean. New sand and rock glistened below the clear, cold water. The grasses along the bank had been swept forward by the swirling water as if a great comb had been dragged through them. Red mud from the hills clung to every tiny limb and branch. The morning sun was drying out the new washed world. It shone on the tar blackened roof, the rusty barbed wire fence far across the creek, and the little road in front of the house.

Finley was helping John pull away a small pine tree which had lodged under the house corner when he heard a car coming around the road. It was Ed, their father. "Well, I'll be damned! If it ain't the old man coming home," said John. Finley hadn't seen his father in over a month. Not since he had hitchhiked to Cincinnati. "I hope he's not drunk. I don't believe I can stand him picking on me anymore," thought Finley.

Red-eyed and muddy, Ed stumbled out of the car and into the house. His eyes looked wild, buried in his aging face. There was the print of a bottle in his hip pocket. He called Mrs. Smythe "dolling" and tried to kiss her as he stumbled through the door. Finley acted busy dragging some wet shoes out from under the beds, while John stood in the back door puffing a cigarette. He always rolled his own from a sack of Golden Grain. Ed asked Mrs. Smythe why the hell dinner wasn't ready. "Now, Ed, I don't feel like listening to

you today," she said. Sometimes if you didn't talk to Ed when he was like this he would go to sleep. Finley and John went out into the yard.

Standing where the bridge had been, they heard Ed's voice grow louder and louder. Finley trembled. John looked at him with fear in his face. Other kids his age were sitting in classrooms now. It was a washwoman's Monday morning, sunny and a soft breeze. "Finley!" his mother screamed. Finley burst into the house and found his father holding the blade of a pocketknife clutched in his hands. He had squeezed his hand together, and there was a little blood. "Why hell, Finley," said Ed. "Where have you been?"

"He's going to kill himself," screamed Mrs. Smythe. "Lord, I don't know what to do."

"Get the hell in the kitchen!" shouted Ed. "Finley, I'm a no good son-of-a-bitch. Did you know that? Well, I am. See this blood here on my hand. I killed a man with this knife one time. He slapped my mother. I was about your age, and I cut his stomach open before he even saw me. The fat bastard put his hand around mine as he screamed, and I jerked the knife out through them. I don't want you to be like me, son. Look at me, son. You don't want to be like me, do you? Listen to your mother crying. Don't ever treat a woman like that, son. Be gentle, son, I'm drunk, son. Go get me a cup of coffee."

The whole world seemed to be pressing about Finley's ears. There was no coffee in the kitchen. "There isn't any coffee yet," said Finley as he returned to his father.

"What's the matter with you, woman!" Ed screamed. "Yea, I know . . . You've been running around. Up the road. Down the road. Up the road . . . These children. Damn you! If it hadn't been for them, you would have left me. Come here, Finley. Why the hell did you go to Cincinnati? Leaving John to chop the wood, work the garden, and every damn thing. Give me your goddamned belt, you smart alec — — —!"

Finley shivered. A million times his father had come home and tried to beat him. Always Finley had run from him. One winter night Ed had been sober enough to chase him. Finley ran down the road towards town, two dark figures under a streetlight, and then through the dark, under another streetlight, and then into the dark again. Finley could hear the panting breath. His father carried a stick of stove wood. He had picked it up by the little Franklin

heater that warmed their shanty. Finally Ed stopped. He could run no further. Finley ran on a little distance and hid at the side of the road. He saw his father standing under the streetlight, his arms limp, holding a stick. Then the dark figure turned around and walked back toward the house. Finley went down to the yellow lights of the small town and slept in the bus station.

But today Finley was not going to run. "Ed, leave him alone," screamed his mother. "He hasn't done nothing," she pleaded. Ed still had the pocket knife in his hand. He was surprised that Finley didn't run. "You think you're a big boy now," snarled Ed. Finley grabbed his father's wrist, trying to get the knife. A hand came down on Finley's nose, and he felt something warm streaming across his lips and down his neck. The man and boy fell on the floor. It was still wet from the flood. Finley could not get the knife. With his free hand he tried to grip the blade, and pull the knife from his father's hand. Finley was scared. His hand felt like it was on fire. He kept thinking that this was not his father. And then, yes it was. Finley had never hit his father in all his life. He couldn't do it now. He looked at the drunken face. He was going to have to do something. His arm was tired holding the knife back. But he couldn't hit the eye, or mouth, or nose of his father. Suddenly Finley felt something shoved into his hand. Out of the corner of his eye he saw little John. It was a liquor bottle. His father's hand came down on Finley's mouth again. Almost fainting, Finley raised the bottle and came down hard on his father's ear. The hand dropped the knife and Finley staggered to his feet. Ed lay with an ugly gash over his left ear. "Why didn't I run!" groaned Finley as he bent down over his father, waiting for his mother to come and do something.

Mrs. Smythe bathed the wound in cold water. When Ed came to, he asked for his liquor. He felt in his coat pocket. "Who got my liquor bottle," he accused. Finley looked at his father and could hardly keep from crying.

"Now, Ed, I've just about got dinner ready. I've got some good black coffee," said Mrs. Smythe nervously. Finley wanted to go and put his arm around his father. But he couldn't. He didn't know how. Today when his father had talked to him about being like him, and not drinking, was the first time that Ed had ever talked to Finley like a father to a son. Finley just

wanted to go somewhere and cry. Ed staggered into the kitchen, coming up behind Lola, he put his arms around her, and burying his head against her neck he laughed, "Lola, dolling, did you hide Eddie's liquor? Fix me a place to eat over there. I'll be back in a minute. Save me a cup of black coffee, will you?" Ed stumbled out of the house and into his rattletrap of a car. "Lord, Finley! He's going after some more . . . but he doesn't have any money," said Mrs. Smythe. The old car and the aging man rattled into the noonday sun.

Later that afternoon Finley and John were out in the yard, chopping some locust logs to lay across the creek. A little red-headed girl came running across the field from the nearest house. She was holding a doll. "Finley, your daddy is dead," she said. "My daddy is coming down here in a minute."

The neighbor came and put his arm around the two boys. Mrs. Smythe came out into the yard. "I got a phone call," the neighbor said. "Ed met head on with a car on the Asheville highway. The driver of the other car died instantly, too. He was a salesman going home to his wife and two kids over at Knoxville." Nobody cried. Mrs. Smythe looked back through the hard years, and saw Ed on a moonlight night, how he held her against the honeysuckle vines, and whispered, and all the trees said, yes, yes, yes . . . She ran into the house. Finley remembered the gash over his father's ear and his lying on the floor. "Oh, why didn't I run today?" he thought. The sun was coughing blood in the west, and farther up the creek, cowbells were tinkling in the quiet April evening.

Later that night Finley lay sprawled on the bed, one scarred boot hanging over the edge. He and John were talking about their father's death. John had gone and seen the wrecked car. He was a gritty little bastard.

"The motor was knocked into the front seat," said John. "Oil and blood were all over the highway. I saw the old man's brains dried on the windshield. But I don't understand how he got into the other man's lane. The highway was perfectly straight. The paper said that a steering rod broke. Steering rod hell! They said that because they knew it wouldn't do anybody any damn good to sue daddy. It's funny. He always said that when he went he was going to take somebody with him. That man he knifed when he was a boy wasn't enough . . . Finley, do you know what I think? I think he passed out and the car just swerved over. He

was dead as hell when he hit that car. He always complained with his heart." Finley lay on the bed staring at the fly specked ceiling. It looked like brains up there, specks, specks, specks. Finley wondered what that blow over the head had done to his aging father. "John, get the hell out now, will you, and go tinker with your motors. My head feels like its bustin' to pieces." John went into a backroom and started fooling with an old well pump. Ed had taught him a lot about motors. John tried to hold a cigarette in his mouth and squint through the smoke at a part as his father always did.

Finley lay on the bed alone now. He knew that he should get up, walk around, talk to his mother, do anything but lay in the shadows of the evening. But he couldn't. He had sat up with his mother all last night. He was sleepy, and still he couldn't sleep. He was cold and shivered, but finally he drowsed away. He dreamed a million dreams. He saw a little red-headed girl come to him. She took his hand. "Finley, come and look," she said. She took him to an old abandoned well. It was covered with hickory logs. She bent down and stared down into the well through a crack. "Look, Finley," she said. Finley looked down through the darkness and saw bluish green water. There was a big eye floating on the water. It was his father's. Finley lay moaning on the bed. The bottoms of his feet burned. Flies crawled in his head. He could not breathe. A hand clawed at his stomach. His eye exploded, and he covered his face. He felt blood on his nose. Good God! His flesh was crumbling down like pants that fall limp at the floor. He seemed to be standing in a glob of yellowish trembling substance, a bobbing eye, fingernails, toenails, and a tuft of brown hair. He saw his father's brains on the windshield. Finley lay sweating on the bed. In his dream he fled for many days and came to a desert mountain. Black, narled shapes beckoned for him. He fell rolling on the ground to hide his face. Then he came rolling on to a darkened street. He had seen it before, somewhere. The cracks in the sidewalk arose knifelike to trip him down, and then fell sinking in the ground behind him. Finley saw his father lying at his feet, a gash over his ear. A million pale worms twisted and squirmed in the green night. And with one last effort, Finley managed to scream, and wake up. He felt that if he couldn't have screamed he would have died. At the sound, his mother

came and put her hand on his brow. "Shhhh. Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Thompson are sitting in the front room with me." Outside the window, a leafy oak waved to and fro, beckoning eerie brown shadows on the bed.

The next day, Tuesday, Ed Smythe was buried. Finley knew that he must support his mother and John. The neighbors would go back to their kitchens and jobs and pulpits now that Ed was buried. While alive, Ed had always tried to beat Finley if he gave any money to his mother or John. "I'm raising this damn family," Ed always said. And he kept them from straving. Finley was lanky and healthy. John was little, but he had smoked cigarettes from four years of age. And he was just naturally small like his father. The rebellious little bastard had always cursed about having to eat pinto beans every day.

Finley lay about the house in a nervous stupor for a week or more. Finally he was sick and tired of his mother's taking in laundry, "washing them damn nigger clothes." He hated to see her gathering firewood on the hillside. But she was always cheerful. "Poor people have poor ways," she would say. Anyway, one evening Finley came in and told his mamma that he was going into the marines. "It's all I can do, Mom. I can't get a job in this hick town. The factory hires only boys whose fathers work there. But the marines have a job for me. That recruiting son-of-a-bitch gave me this stuff about our 'own Mountaineer Platoon.' Said we mountain boys would stay together as a unit. Hell fire! How stupid can you get?"

Finley felt awkward when his mother hugged him the day he was leaving. The Smythes were not a kissing family. She was trembling. Hurriedly she kissed his cheek. Her lips were wet. She asked Finley if he wanted anything to eat before he left. "No," said Finley. He saw the apple tarts on the table. She had made them especially for him. She followed Finley to the door. Motionless she stood in the door. As Finley stepped into the road she lifted her apron, and sort of lowered her head. "Don't drink, son," Finley heard her say.

Finley walked down the dirt road toward the little town and the bus station. He stared at the ground. He heard the last murmuring of the creek as the road turned. The noonday sun was hot; and blackberries were turning red along the road bank.



SNOW PIECE

mmcii

The shrill whistle of a morning freight from Augsburg woke Ingeborg Bronson from her sleep. It was the 8:07 and for the past three years it had served Ingie as an alarm clock. It was never late.

She stretched, yawned and sat up quickly to the sound of several accompanying creaks from the old brass bed. She looked out the window across the meadows. It was good that her room was on the top floor. She could see beyond the roof tops and telephone cables all the way to the Munich freight yards, where the beautiful white clouds of smoke and vapor were pushed high into the air and then floated across the yellow fields.

A trolley grinding its way around the corner just below the window snapped Ingie out of her reverie. The conductor yelled, "Partzivalplatz!" and rang the bell a few times. Then the sound of the steel wheels gathering momentum faded off down the street. She shivered, rubbed her arms and threw the blue cover off. This was a very important day. There was no time to waste. It was November, the air was already cold, and the rent was due the next day.

As Ingie crossed to light the stove she felt the floor boards sag and rub against one another. It was as though someone was playing with her feet through the thin soles of her slippers. The landlord

promised to bring a new carpet in a few days, but that had been weeks ago and she had not dared to go to him because of the rent. In the beginning she didn't mind, but now the floor creaked wherever she stepped and the room looked so bare. If only she could have some good luck again. She would pay the back rent and perhaps even get a new room, one of the big ones in the front, like the girl who lived with the American sergeant. Well, maybe it would be better just to get a new carpet. If only they didn't make you show the date on your yellow card. Food and medical inspections took so much and those State Doctors had such cold hands. The last man had been five nights ago and tomorrow morning was the landlord's deadline.

The sulphur hissed and in a second the stove crackled with orange flame. It would all work out. It always did.

On a table a stale bun and some ham rested in a white dish. As she ate she wandered to the mirror. It was a large old-fashioned mirror held to the wall by a heavy wire. It leaned out at an angle so that you could see yourself in it if you were in bed. From the side it looked like a badly hung painting. A girl had told her once that they liked to look at themselves. Sometimes she would look across the room and wonder how it would sound if the silver glass came crashing down on the marble washstand. When they were drunk they would brush against it and it would scrape back and forth along the wall like a clock's pendulum. There was a curved white line that had been cut into the faded green wallpaper. When the mirror hung straight the line was the same length on either side.

There was some beer left in a bottle on the window sill. She put what was left of the ham and bun in her mouth and drank until the bottle was empty. Across the meadow the billowing steam trails vanished in the cold blue morning sky.

Ingie slipped the small black sequined hat on her head. The bath water had been hot and she felt fresh and clean all over. Her blond hair really looked as though she had been to the beauty parlor and there had been a few drops of perfume left in the bottom of an old bottle. It was going to be her lucky day. She could feel it. She snatched her umbrella from the wall hook and went down the five flights of stairs humming. "There'll be money in my pockets tonight" to the tune of a lullaby she had known as a little girl.

There was a small crowd at the trol-

ley stop. Most of them were housewives going to their morning shopping. She knew better than to stand close to them. They would only sneer at her clothes and move away from her heavy perfume.

They were always like that. Many of them had done the same thing after the war, though. There must have been thousands who walked the streets and did it just to keep warm and to get some food. The older women weren't so bad, but the young ones with the haughty looks, like the little redhead in the tweed coat who watched her and pretended to be shocked. They would look at the French umbrella as though it were a weapon. Ingie wasn't fooled. They were the ones most recent to it. She knew the kind. A beer festival in another city, find a little business-man and make him think it's the first time, then marriage and then they were respectable wives. The redhead lowered her eyes under Ingie's stare, but still it was there. Their faces could never hide it. She had been around too long.

As the street car came to a stop, some American soldiers who had been waiting in the weather shelter walked toward the car that Ingie was getting on.

"Man, it cools off fast over here."

"Coupla cognacs gonna fix you up fast too, man."

"Look man, it's beginning to snow." Ingie had her foot on the step when one of them, a black, tried to help her up by the arm.

"Here go, Queenie."

She shook his hand off violently and stepped inside the car.

"Man, she must think she's some stuff. You see the way she done my hand?" Their laughter followed her as she walked down the aisle and all the way along the Leopold Strasse she could feel the eyes of his laughing black face staring at her. The other passengers looked her up and down, the women smirking when they met her stare, the men coughing or turning nervously away. She had been with GI's sure, but never the blacks.

The streetcar passed the Lembachplatz and vibrated to a stop. Ingie stepped off and turned her coat collar up around her neck. On the other side of the traffic circle gay lights and Christmas displays were already in the windows of the Kaufhaus. It was good to see the big department stores full again. It was good to see Munich happy once more with the motorcycles jumping in and out of the traffic and red-faced policemen in white raincoats blowing whistles and shouting from their platforms.

The red light changed and a crowd made its way across the street. Girls with red and green scarves tucked into the top of their raincoats laughed with pink-cheeked smiles and businessmen in long leather coats carried large impressive briefcases. Everyone walked briskly, and white vapor poured from their mouths as they breathed. The Karlsplatz fountain was framed in bare, black limbs of maple trees, and a fat old woman with an enormous muffler wrapped around her neck sold hot sausage and sauerkraut from a three-wheeled steamcart. Ingie breathed it in deeply. There was nothing better than this good German fragrance, nothing that reminded her more of other times in the years past when she was seventeen and the most beautiful girl in her village and her father had given permission for her to attend the officer's dance at the Luftwaffen Club in Munich. How exciting the train ride from Straubing had been! How clean and slim the young men looked in their uniforms, and how she fell in love when Leutnant-Pilot Krut Klaus had whirled her round and round and round till they waltzed on the terrace in the first snow of the year and kissed her with the snow flakes shining in his fine blond hair!

Perhaps this was the same old woman. She and Krut had stopped there so many times on their way home . . . on their way home . . .

Sparks flew from the wheels of a street car as it squealed and ground along the metal tracks.

"Oh, God! In flames over Swienfort!" she screamed.

"What's wrong with her?"

"What happened?"

"What was it?"

The crowd that had gathered watched Ingie as she walked away swinging her umbrella from side to side.

At noon she was standing in front of a big plate glass window near the Odeansplatz. It was a men's sporting goods store. The wind pushed her coat against her long white legs and she could watch anyone who turned to look at her reflection of the glass. It was an old trick.

Up from her a little way, near the corner, a young girl dressed in brown held an umbrella in front of her with both hands. She held it just below her stomach and at an angle so that it pointed out a little. As men would pass, she would raise and lower the angle with a graceful little motion and solicit them with a quick nod of her head. In-

gie watched a well-dressed old man approach the girl, hail a taxi with his cane and hold the door open for her. Why couldn't it have been Ingie instead?

Her feet were getting cold and another light flurry of snow had added a thin white covering to the sidewalk. It was lunch time and the best place now would be in the cafes and restaurants. She had a mark and twenty pfennigs in change. She was sure it would be enough.

Twenty minutes later she had spent half the money in a swank hotel restaurant. The waitress had acted superior and not one man had looked at her. A few blocks farther on she walked into a smart little Espresso Cafe. The waitress acted the same way, but Ingie was used to this. A little fat man looked at her while he paid his check, then looked at his watch and left the cafe in a hurry without looking back.

Soon two American soldiers came in and sat at the table beside her. They were young, nice looking and had trouble ordering in German. When they asked the waitress what the prices were, she smiled warmly and overcharged them.

"You pay too much," Ingie said to them when the woman had gone.

"What?" asked the soldiers.

"The woman. She speaks too much guilt."

"Well, I'll be!"

A few minutes later Ingie and the two American soldiers were walking merrily along the Leopold Strasse. She was going to show them Munich and they were going to pay.

It was the first chance in seven years that she had had to see all the old wine stubes and to drink and eat well, the first chance since the war ended. It was a wonderful afternoon and she liked the soldiers very much. The more they all drank the better her English became and by the time they were eating dinner, everyone was laughing and it was like old times when she was young, when all the young Leutnant-Pilots took her out and the headwaiters would say, "Good evening, Fraulein Bronson," and "How are you this evening, Fraulein Bronson?" Oh, the days, the wild wonderful days! Where had they gone? What would become of her?

"Well, Ingie, old gal, what's next?"

"What?" she shook her head.

"I said, what's next—where we going now?"

"I think Ingie's had too much to drink," said the other soldier.

"Nix, I not drunk," Ingie smiled.

"The way you were looking off there . . ." He leaned over and whispered in his friend's ear for a moment. "You see, we only got a little time left and, well, we'd like to get a girl."

Ingie threw her head back with a big laugh and drank a full glass of white wine. "Whatsa matter, you no like me?"

The soldiers whispered again.

"Hey, what's old bag, huh?" Ingie asked.

"It was sure nice of you to show us around Munich, Ingie, but we gotta go." He took twenty marks from his pocket and placed it on the silver check tray.

Ingie did not look up from her glass. The soldiers left and when the change came there was a little over four marks in the dish. She finished the bottle of wine and left.

The soldier bars were crowded and noisy. Young country girls with heavy smeared makeup sat on the laps of the soldiers and wore their caps. Everyone was drunk and Ingie could not understand what the little readheaded corporal was saying to her. He bought her a cognac and pulled her toward the crowded dance floor. Ingie could not dance the American way. It was too fast. The room reeled around and she fell into a table. There were shrieks of laughter and a fight started. She staggered to the bar, drank the cognac down and made her way to the door, bumping once into the wall.

The snow was coming down harder now. It was very cold and Ingie was not feeling well. All the drinking and the food. It was too much. And the money? She had not made any money.

Streetcar No. 21 ground to a stop and Ingie got on. Inside the air was stale and people coughed. At the next stop six university students got on. They were on their way out to Schwabing. They were drunk and all of them carried noisemakers and wore different-colored party hats. They started singing. One of them, a slim blond with blue eyes, sat down beside her and smiled. It could have been Krut, the handsome face, the clear blue eyes. God, it could have been all of them, all the fine young men she had loved, all the happy faces—in flames over Swienfort, over Bremen, over Nurnburg, over . . .

"Drink, Fraulein?" The student handed her a bottle of cognac.

She took a big swallow. It was warm and kept the tears back. The streetcar lurched forward in the snowing night while everyone smiled and sang drinking songs.

The students interrupted their sing-

ing to pass the bottle around. Ingie touched the blond-haired boy on the arm.

"You know," she said, "You know *Ich Bin Von Kopf Bis Fuss Auf Liebe Eingestellt?*"

"Ya, ya. We know" And they all sang with young drunken faces smiling down at her:

Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe
eingestellt
Denn das is meine Welt
Und sonst gar nichts
Das ist was soll ich machen
Und meine Natur . . .

She smiled up at them, blinked her eyes and took a last big swallow from the bottle. The students got off, but the sound of their singing rang in her ears long after the streetcar had pulled away.

It was two A.M. when Ingie reached the Partzivalplatz. She was the only one that got off. She was tired and her clothes were damp and cold. She leaned her cheek against the cold black bark of a maple tree and cried. There was no one in this world who cared. Time and the war had fixed all that. Snowflakes caught in her blond hair and turned to tiny drops of water. Long tears rolled down her cheeks. In the dim yellow light of the lamp post her whole face glistened.

She felt a dizzy whirling going on inside her head. Then from behind her she heard heavy crunching footsteps coming from the direction of the weather shelter. A large, strong hand gripped her shoulder and a deep American voice said, "Fraulein, I go home with you?"

She did not turn to look at the man, but slowly shook her head up and down. "All night, forty marks," she said.

"O.K." the deep American voice replied.

They walked across the street and climbed the five long flights of stairs. She did not remember to put the coins in the electric meter box as they came in, so they had to undress in the dark. She heard him bump against the mirror. It scraped back and forth for a few seconds. When her clothes were off she got into the brass bed. The room was very cold.

"You ready?"

"Yeah, Baby." The floor boards creaked as he moved toward the bed.

The inside of Ingie's head whirled once more and she tried to focus her eyes on the snow that had collected in crescents on the window pane. In the dim light of the street lamp it looked so

soft, so delicate. She sighed unconsciously and took several deep breaths. In the morning its sparkling whiteness would be covered by the dirt and soot of the city.

At seven there was a loud knock at the door. Ingie's eyes opened slowly. Across the room a neatly folded sergeant's uniform hung from the back of a chair. On the window panes the snow lay gathered in grey crescents. Beside her she felt the warmth of the man's body. She got up quickly, put her slip on, took thirty of the forty marks that lay on the table and opened the door.

The landlord smiled with surprise as she handed him the money. He said that he would have a new carpet for her that afternoon.

Ingie closed the door softly and walked to the marble washstand. Her fingers never turned the faucet. In the mirror she saw a heavy, muscled black arm move across the blue blanket and expose a heavy, muscled black shoulder. Then the body rose a bit in the bed and she saw the dark smiling face.

"How you like to be my steady-time, Baby?" the black face said.

Ingie stared at him for a long time in the mirror, then walked slowly to the window. The snow was already dirty and suddenly the room felt very cold. She looked at the neatly folded uniform with the big gold chevrons.

"Ya—I be you steady time—you like." She went to his outstretched arms.

An hour later the sergeant had returned to his camp. Ingie was lying in bed with her head propped up against one of the brass bars. The blue blanket was pulled over her chest, but her bare arms and shoulders were exposed. On the floor the sergeant had left behind a bottle of cognac and a package of cigarettes. In her hands Ingie held five twenty-mark notes.

She looked at herself in the mirror and listened to the stove as it crackled with orange flames.

Somewhere out on the clean white-snow-covered fields the 8:07 freight from Augsburg was pushing huge billowing clouds of vapor high into the cold morning air. Its shrill whistle screamed one long clear blast, but Ingie did not hear it.

The cognac made her warm inside, warmer than she had been in years. The sound of the cognac bottle and big silver mirror crashing down on the marble washstand still tinkled in her ears. She pulled the blue blanket around her shoulders, turned, and, with a smile on her face, decided to sleep for a little while.

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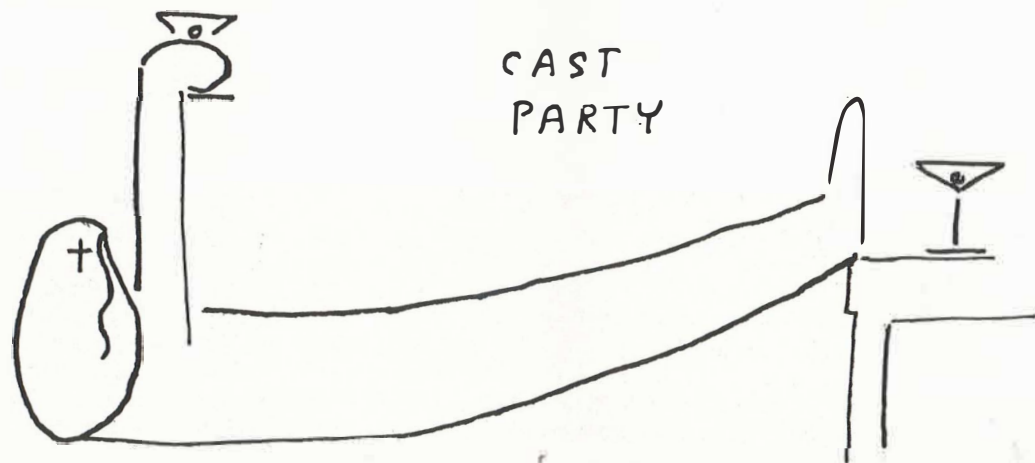
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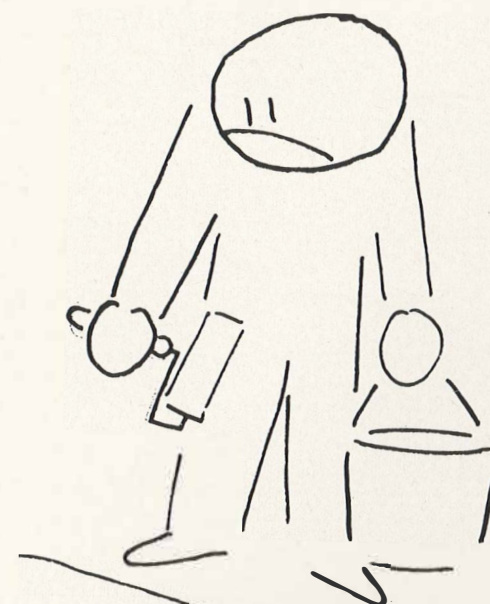
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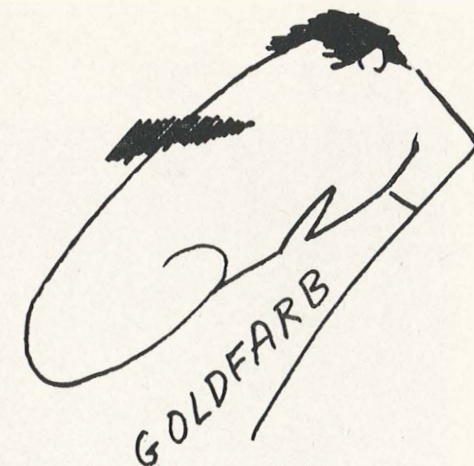
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