

# TOUCHSTONE

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Spring 1960

# TOUCHSTONE

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE

SPRING 1960

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# Just Before the Letters Started Coming

LARRY PATTERSON

Vesty heard the latch open behind him, but didn't look up from the suitcase spread before him on the bed. As the door swung wide, the curtains swayed at the window, cutting across the early morning light that streamed against the far wall. "Boy, it's time for chores; why you lollygagging up here when you oughta be washing the pails?"

Vesty slipped a picture, face down, into the suitcase under his starched white shirt. "I won't be doing chores this morning, Pa," he said without looking up.

"What you doing with them clothes?"

"I'm leaving," he said, glancing out the corner of his eye at the large figure behind him, standing with hands thrust into the bib of grease-stained overalls.

"What was that, you say?"

"I'm leaving. I've had enough." Vesty closed the suitcase and put his knee on the lid in order to fasten it.

"Leaving! Where'd you get such a damn fool idea as that?"

"It's not a damn fool idea; I mean it. I'm getting out—this morning."

Vesty heard a deep sucking breath. "That's crazy thinking! Now get yourself downstairs before I take out the strap."

"I'm too old, Pa," Vesty said, sliding his knee from the suitcase and standing to face the larger man. "You've worked my muscles hard; you can't stop me no more." His eyes met his father's, lingered a moment, then fell away.

"What you saying to your father, boy—you'd hit him?"

"It wasn't meant to sound that way," Vesty said, glancing up again. "Just don't hold me back, that's all."

His father moved a short distance to the window and fixed his eyes on the farmyard beyond the fluttering curtains. "You ain't never talked like this before."

"I tried, but you wouldn't hear me out."

There was a scraping of shoe nails on the wooden floor as his father turned. "Where was you figuring to go if I was to let you?"

"The cutting season ain't late yet; I'm going north and get in the harvest."

"Humph! What do you know about cutting on a combine crew?"

"I know enough about machinery," Vesty said. "I can learn what I need."

His father leaned back against the bedstead and folded his arms. "Two weeks, even a week and you'll be home like a beat dog. They'll break your back scooping and working you like that!"

"They'd work me harder'n you do?" Vesty took his wallet from the top of his dresser.

"What do you mean? I work an hour for every one of your own. I ain't asking you to do nothing more'n myself, and you're younger'n me too."

Vesty stuck his hands into his hip pockets and, with the heel of his boot, straightened the throw-rug beside the bed. "I ain't going to be young very long like this. I come up here at night so tired I can't think, and I get sick to my stomach when I see the sun coming up."

"Now we been through that before. I told you the work's just been piling up lately."

"Pa, the work has always been piling up. I don't mind it some of the time; but

even in the winter when I was trying to go to school, there'd be something to be painted or mended that took clear into the night."

Vesty's father dropped his hands to the sill behind him. "It's foolish, us arguing this way," he said, nodding toward the door. "Come on down to breakfast, and we'll settle all this while we're doing chores." He walked to the head of the stairs and started down.

Vesty took his suitcase from the bed and followed. "Don't think there's much more to talk about," he said.

"Ma, what do you think of a son who'd just walk out on his folks without saying 'Boo'?" his father said as he stepped into the kitchen. He looked back at the suitcase as Vesty put his foot on the bottom step. "Well, what do you think? You don't look much concerned."

The woman at the stove turned, holding her hands in her apron. "I knew he was going, Ralph," she said.

The big man's shoulders sagged and his lips parted silently.

"He told me. He said that after the wheat was in the bin, he was going away to work." Her eyes moved nervously from Vesty to the figure standing in the middle of the kitchen and back again.

"Why didn't you tell me?" The voice was husky. "Nobody tells me nothing!"

"I thought he should tell you," she said. "That's all."

"My whole family's gone against me. I work and break my back for them; and they brush me off. Boy, you could've said something a week ago. We could've worked it out."

Vesty took his denim jacket from a hook near the washbasin and pulled his cap down on his forehead. "It wouldn't of made no difference; we'd of just argued and fought about it."

"You have to eat something if you don't want to faint on the road," his mother said, pointing to a plate of pancakes on the table.

"No, I haven't got time." He scooped up a handful of bacon and a chunk of his mother's bread, then wrapped both in a sheet of newspaper. "I want to catch the produce truck when it goes by, and it's due pretty soon," he said, sticking the package into a pocket of the jacket.

"You won't even help with the chores so we could talk about it," his father said.

"Pa, I could help with the chores, but then there'd be something to load or something else to do, just like always, clear 'til after it was night again." He kissed his mother on the forehead. "I'm gonna write you a lot," he said.

Vesty walked toward the door, carrying the suitcase. The jacket was swung over one shoulder. His father stood there, leaning against the wall.

"I shouldn't let you go, but you're hell-bent on the hard way."

"You maybe write to me, Pa?" Vesty said. He had stopped at the door.

"Go on if you want; you'll be running home. I know!"

"After a while I'll come back."

His father took a hand out of one pocket. "Say you was to stay away. Might have to sell and get off, trying to farm it all alone."

"You won't sell, Pa. You couldn't leave here no more than one of those trees out there could." They stood motionless for a moment. "Well, 'bye!"

"Yah." His father turned to look across the kitchen.

Vesty opened the porch door to a morning breeze. The crisp air swept the heavy smell of food from his nose and sent tingling sensations along his bare arms and neck. He walked through a flock of chickens that had gathered to peck at the slop his mother had thrown out on the ground.



"Son, you got any money?"

Vesty stopped on the walk and turned to his father, standing in the doorway.  
"I got a little."

"Here. Twenty dollars. You take it." He held out his fist and opened it.

"Don't really need it, I guess," Vesty said.

"You gotta eat, and maybe you'll need it for coming back."

"When I get paid . . ."

His father shrugged his shoulders. As Vesty took the bills, the heavy hand closed on his finger for an instant, then relaxed.

"Guess I hear the truck," he said, backing along the stone walk. His mother was standing in the shadows of the porch.

Vesty waved the hand with the coat in it and turned. Across the stubble field, a cloud of dust rolled up along the road, and the sound of a motor grew suddenly louder. He broke into a trot down the driveway that divided the wheat ground from the feedlot. A steer started from a grain bunk as he swung the coat and shouted at the truck, that was now slowing down as it approached a mailbox at the end of the driveway.

## Dawn

GARY BENNETT

The fiery sphere  
Fights its way to the  
Tops of tall buildings  
To illuminate the lowest alley.  
Dew-steam rises from streets  
But lately cleared of yesterday's traffic.  
A few park spaces are alive  
With the motion of a bird-morning.  
And in his hut the native awakens,  
To face another day of yesterday  
And the day before yesterday.

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# Gleanings from the Press of 1860

from

*The Shoshone Times*

ROBERT HEPBURN

Many regular readers of the present series of articles have written to me expressing interest in the events of one hundred years ago as chronicled in the pages of that defunct but once admirable newspaper, *The Shoshone Times*. Accordingly, I combined business with pleasure last weekend and drove the one hundred and sixty or so miles through the heart of the scenic Kansas wheat country to the farming community of Shoshone Falls, down in Rooks county. In the archives of the Shoshone Falls library, I leafed through the surviving copies of *The Shoshone Times*. Although yellowed with age, they were in surprisingly good condition, in spite of the fact that the library had been almost gutted by fire in the spring of 1923.

Words cannot adequately describe the gratification I felt upon discovering that all of the eight copies issued in the month of April, 1860, were still extant. (*The Shoshone Times* was published faithfully, with little interruption, every Monday and Friday night from May, 1846, until its regrettable demise in January, 1932.)

I need not remind my sensitive readers that these venerable copies are priceless adjuncts to our woefully scanty store-house of recorded frontier life. It is with great pleasure that I present the following immortal excerpts from *The Shoshone Times*:

"On Saturday last, Messrs. R. S. Ludwig & Co. received by the nine o'clock stage-coach the finest and perhaps the largest stock of boughten goods ever received here so early in the season. Our broad stage platform was literally covered with boxes, barrels, bales, bags, and packages of all descriptions. Two passengers from the East also got off the stage, and we bid a hearty welcome to these newcomers in our midst. With the advent of Captain Osgood Finch and Mr. Norman Cockwell our population, you will be pleased to learn, has jumped to a total of one hundred and twenty-three souls. These two gentlemen are partners and will engage in the hunting of buffalo."—April 3

"Tragedy struck at our little town last Wednesday night in the form of a shooting accident at the Short Branch Saloon. Proprietor Albert M. Barnes said the incident occurred as the result of a misunderstanding which arose between Captain Osgood Finch and a cowboy from the Lazy Y ranch, James R. Grieve. The two men were apparently standing at the bar when Grieve turned abruptly to the captain and requested a light for his cigar. Unfortunately, the captain heard only what he thought was a request to fight.

"Mr. Cockwell, who witnessed the accident, said later that the captain acted instinctively when he shot Mr. Grieve and that under normal circumstances he would never have done so. Mr. Grieve did not suffer long, expiring almost immediately as the .45 caliber bullet passed completely through his heart and lodged in the bar furnishings behind the counter.

"Since the death was obviously accidental, no charges have been pressed against Captain Finch. Interment took place at 2:30 P.M. last Thursday at Boot Hill cemetery. Mr. Grieve left no known survivors, and burial expenses were borne by



a spontaneous collection made at the accident scene by Captain Finch and the sum of \$21.05 found on the deceased.

"Truly it can be said that what the good Lord gives, He can also take away. Only last Monday, this newspaper reported the fact that our town had gained in population. It is indeed a sad duty for it today to report a loss. Our sympathy goes out to the friends of the deceased and to Captain Finch who must feel acutely the dreadful outcome of his mistake."—April 7

"Mr. William Fenmore and party, who arrived in town today from Dodge City on their way to Coffeyville with a load of buffalo hides, reported seeing smoke from campfires, and other signs of Indian activities, about twenty-three miles west of here. His party was not molested, and it is our hope that our contacts with the aborigines will remain peaceful for some time; however, word has reached this writer that trouble seems to be brewing up north where the Sioux are reportedly active.

"Messrs. R. S. Ludwig & Co. received another shipment of goods today, before this paper went to press. The matrons in town will be pleased to know that it included several bolts of cotton-print material, and the children will be delighted, no doubt, to learn that several cases of dried fruit and candy are once more in reserve.

"Mr. Cockwell and Captain Finch set out yesterday with two wagons and four men to hunt buffalo. We certainly wish them luck in their endeavors, and hope for a speedy return.

"Mrs. Oswald Finklebine entertained at a tea at her home on Elm Street yesterday afternoon. The guests included Mrs. Dawkins, Mrs. Ludwig, Mrs. Barnes, Mrs. Howard, and Mrs. James. The ladies discussed many proposed civic projects, such as building a church, starting a whist club, and tidying the plots at the cemetery. A motion to put grass on the graves was tabled for the present because of the prohibitive price of seed."—April 10

"The town of Shoshone Falls has yet to recover from the visitation made upon it by the aborigines during the small hours of yesterday morning. Sheriff Samuel S. Dawkins has despatched his deputy, Mr. Oscar Jenkins, to Fort Leavenworth to report this alarming outrage, this invasion of the town's corporeal privacy, to the commandant of that military establishment, Colonel George Udderton. No doubt, this latter gentleman will bring the forces under his able command to bear sternly on the savages.

"Colonel Udderton gained some distinction two years ago at Yellow Creek, many of our readers will recall, when he led his famous cavalry regiment, the fighting 'Five Hundred of the Apocalypse,' in a glorious charge upon a large Sioux Indian settlement which was situated on the banks of the creek. Over eight hundred of the savages went to the 'happy hunting grounds' by the time the charge was over; and, to top his success, some two hundred more were despatched when Colonel Udderton's force met the men-folk of the settlement coming back from an extensive buffalo hunt.

"The events of yesterday morning in our little town point out the need for punitive action of the kind that Colonel Udderton is well-qualified to mete out. When good Christian lives, of the type represented by the majority of our honest townspeople, are threatened by the irresponsible actions of these evil, ignorant savages, then it is time for crusading action by the forces of righteousness.

"As there seems to be some confusion in the minds of some of our citizens concerning the events of yesterday morning, I shall recapitulate them as briefly as possible here for their convenience:



"At the break of dawn yesterday, at approximately 5:30 A.M., the town was rudely aroused from its sleep by the ingress of some three hundred savages, who appeared to be of the Sioux variety, mounted on horseback and lining Main Street from end to end. They made little noise and threw gravel at the windows of the residences to arouse the inhabitants from their beds.

"The leader of this savage mob, who manifested no knowledge of the English language, intimated through an interpreter, an unscrupulous looking aborigine who appeared to have some renegade white blood in his coppery veins, that there would be no blood shed unless the townspeople resisted a search which was to be made of their homes, their goods, and their chattels, by the savages.

"The interpreter, whose name, he said, was Joseph Swiftbird, informed Sheriff Dawkins, who represented the town in this strange parliament, that his party under the leadership of Chief Patient Hand was seeking two wagon-loads of buffalo hides and the six men who were accompanying the wagon. These six men were being sought by the Indians, he said, because they had that which did not belong to them. No one else would be harmed, unless he deliberately sought to hide or protect these fugitives or the stolen property.

"The descriptions given of the wagons and men seemed to fit those of Captain Finch and his party who had set out last Sunday and who had certainly not returned to Shoshone Falls since that time. This, the savages proved to their own satisfaction, but only after an extensive and thorough search of every building in town. Nothing was taken of any consequence, save for two cases of whiskey from the Short Branch Saloon, and three bolts of cotton-print material from Messrs. R. S. Ludwig & Co.'s store.

"The barbarians left with these spoils much more noisily than they came, as much of the contents of the two cases was consumed prior to their departure. The noise and din of the galloping horses and the fiendish ululations and shriekings of the departing savages are sounds not likely to be heard again on this side of the Inferno. One can only conjecture, and shudder with dread, at what consequences these infernal sights and sounds will have had on the yet unborn children of our town's mothers-to-be. The last savage to leave was the one who had acted as interpreter, Joseph Swiftbird, and he stopped his horse just long enough to shake a whiskey bottle under Sheriff Dawkins' nose and tell him that they would be back to destroy the town and all its inhabitants if it tried to harbor, at any future date, those 'fugitives' from their hellish parody of justice.

"Perhaps some day someone will explain the odd quirks of the Godless aboriginal mind; but, for the present, the enigma must remain. I am personally at a loss to explain their actions of yesterday and their motivation in pursuing and persecuting the party of buffalo hunters led by Captain Finch. Perhaps time will tell. I only hope that, in the next issue of this paper, I can print the good news that these savage wretches have met with the hard justice that they deserve, and that the survivors have been scattered to the four winds. I hope also that Captain Finch's party will escape the horrible destiny that these heartless wretches have so fiendishly in store for them. It may be of some comfort to remind the citizens of this town that in all dealings with these savages we have the strong element of God-fearing Christian righteousness on our side."—April 14

"Construction is well under way on the Church of All Faiths at the corner of Elm and Chestnut, and the site for the proposed schoolhouse has been cleared a block north of the Short Branch Saloon, on Olive Street. Deacons for the new church have been selected. They are Messrs. Dawkins, Ludwig, Howard, Finklebine, and James. Letters have been sent to various seminaries in the East, soliciting candi-

dates for the position of pastor. As soon as he has been chosen, *The Shoshone Times* will present a complete history of our new spiritual leader and a description of the duties he will be expected to perform for the community.

"The progressive attitude of this town is reflected not only in the quick response of its citizens in seeking responsible positions as church leaders, but also in vying for positions on the school board. Although the school will not be built for five years, because of a lack of funds at the present time, the board will be able to sit the instant the structure is completed and occupied by the children of Shoshone Falls. The board members are Messrs. Dawkins, Ludwig, Howard, Finklebine, and James.

"The present list of children who will be ready to attend school when that structure is built is made up of the following names: Rawleeta Dawkins, Raymond Ludwig, Dorothy Ludwig, Arthur Howard, Samuel Howard, Jesse R. James, Donald Finklebine, Alexander Finklebine, Forest R. Finklebine, Aaron Finklebine, and Matthew Finklebine. Undoubtedly there will be additions to this list by the time school starts and this paper will be happy to bring the list up to date at that time.

"Inquiries have been mailed to the board of education in Coffeyville in regard to the acquisition of a suitable school teacher. Efforts have been made to make this position as attractive as possible. Several among the school board members have indicated a willingness to offer the successful candidate part-time jobs at their various establishments to augment the teacher's room and board which will be provided him in return for his services. Mr. Ludwig indicated he could use a man with a strong back in the evenings to do heavy work around his general-merchandise store, and Mr. James indicated that he could use a man to help him in his funeral parlor from time to time.

"The citizenry of Shoshone Falls will not have forgotten the Indian raid upon their town last Thursday, nor are they likely to for some time. I am happy to report a sequel to that event. In response to our request for protection, Colonel Udderton, at the head of his famous regiment of horses, was nearing the outskirts of Shoshone Falls last Saturday afternoon at approximately 4:30 P.M., when two covered wagons, heading east toward town at utmost speed and pursued by a horde of howling savages, were sighted.

"The 'Five Hundred of the Apocalypse' gave chase immediately and succeeded in dispersing the Indians to all points of the compass. Since the cavalry horses were somewhat tired from their long day's ride, Colonel Udderton did not order his men to pursue the fleeing natives too far, and he ordered his regiment to regroup. 'Save your wind!' he is reputed to have shouted to his battle-lusting men. 'They'll keep for tomorrow!'

"The wagons were those of Captain Finch and his buffalo-hunting party, and the gallant 'Five Hundred' made a very colorful and glorious picture riding into Shoshone Falls with the two arrow-riddled wagons at its head. I fear that the sight of those blue uniforms, riding in proud military triumph down Main Street behind the objects of such cruel and unreasonable persecution by the savages, has lost us half of our young men in enlistments and half of our young ladies in love affairs!"  
—April 17

"We bid a hearty welcome to Shoshone Falls' most recent citizen, Osgood Finklebine, who was born yesterday morning, Thursday, at 3:20 A.M., to Mr. and Mrs. Oswald Finklebine. Both mother and son are doing well. Mr. Finklebine, however, has been ordered to remain in bed for a few days because of a severe headache. We trust that Mr. Finklebine, one of our more prominent citizens, will be up and around again in a few days.

"A farm hand, Hank James, was apprehended in the Short Branch Saloon last Wednesday night by Sheriff Samuel Dawkins on a charge of using obscene and offensive language. The prisoner is to remain in the city jail for ten days.

"Many of the townspeople have indicated interest in learning the full facts behind the hunting exploits of Captain Finch and party; accordingly, I interviewed that worthy gentleman who was gracious enough to sell me this account of his party's exploits, subsequent to its departure on April 9th, at a reasonable price. The following, which will be the first of three installments, is in his own words:

"As you are no doubt aware, having so kindly brought my activities to the attention of the public before in your excellent newspaper, Mr. Cockwell and I set out on our hunting expedition, accompanied by two wagons and four buffalo skinners, last April 9th.

"We proceeded in a westerly direction, having heard that buffalo were to be had for the taking about fifty miles out in that direction. We kept a wary eye open for Indians, because you can never trust those aborigines at any time. In my estimation, the only good Indian is a dead one. I remember one time, when I was in the army, I had a gold watch stolen from my person as I slept in my tent. An Indian took it, although he had to creep past two thousand sleeping infantrymen to do it. It shows just how adept they are in the art of thievery. I know an Indian took it, because no man in the regiment would have had the nerve to steal anything from me!

"As I was saying, Mr. Cockwell and I acted as scouts ahead of the wagons to ensure that our progress went unnoticed as much as possible by the aboriginal scouts. We proceeded in this fashion until we were approximately thirty-five miles from Shoshone Falls and in our second day of travel. About four in the afternoon, we almost stumbled head-on into an Indian encampment, which was located along the thickly timbered banks of a creek.

"Moving as quietly as possible along the shallow creek bed, we retreated some distance downstream until we guessed that we were safe from all save a chance discovery by the savages. We at first intended to wait there until darkness would allow us to skirt the encampment, but Mr. Cockwell and I decided to examine the camp more closely before we left. Accordingly, we crept up to the edge of the "village" on foot, and took stock of the aboriginal living-quarters from the comparative security of a dense thicket which lay about two hundred yards from the nearest tent, or teepee, as they are called. We marked the rather peculiar fact that there was not a horse to be seen in the encampment. There were no young males to be seen either, only squaws and children and two or three old males who were most unlikely to give us any trouble in the event of our discovery.'

"Captain Finch's account of his adventures with the Indians will continue in Monday's issue of *The Shoshone Times*."—April 21

"The inhabitants of our progressive community will take pleasure in learning the outcome of the annual rummage sale conducted two days ago under the auspices of the leading matrons of Shoshone Falls. Mrs. Oswald Finklebine, chairman of the ladies' Sale Committee, has informed this newspaper that the sum of two hundred seventeen dollars and sixty-three cents has been realized from the sale of unclaimed effects which had accumulated over the past twelve-month in the Coroner's Office. The proceeds will go toward construction of the community church. Credit must be given to the foresight of the founder of this event, Coroner Winthrop P. James, who initiated it twelve years ago soon after his arrival in Shoshone Falls from his erstwhile home at Dodge City. We can be justly proud of our leading citizens; it is by dint of their earnest and imaginative efforts that our town can look forward



to a bright and shining future. Our hats are off to all concerned with the success of this most recent of our rummage sales.

"The following is the second of three installments which this paper will print in regards to Captain Osgood Finch and party's escape from the Indians:

"It was while we were crouched there in the thicket, taking stock of the Indian village and its inhabitants, that it dawned upon me what a wonderful opportunity lay before us. I communicated my thoughts to Cockwell, who concurred completely in the plan that I laid before him. As darkness fell, we hastened back to the wagons and informed the men of our intentions; and, their proving quite agreeable, we rode boldly into the heart of the encampment, out of the dusk and into the dim lights of their campfires. I need not describe the consternation of the savages there; suffice it to say that most of them took to their heels and fled to the hills, but not before we had rounded up some twenty-five of the less active ones. These we set to work immediately, striking their skin tents and loading them onto the wagons.

"We encountered little resistance whatsoever, except for a rather feeble attempt by two or three toothless squaws and two old men who attacked us with crude clubs. A few blows from our rifle butts in their faces removed the last vestiges of antagonism from these savages, and our wagons were soon loaded to capacity with prime buffalo skins.'"—April 24

"The Wednesday stage has brought a supply of Virginia tobacco to replenish the exhausted stocks of Messrs. R. S. Ludwig & Company. I am sure that the menfolk of this community will rejoice with me in hearing this news. It is sometimes easier to do without food than this strange weed which offers such enjoyment in the way of quiet relaxation during a man's spare moments.

"The following is the last of three installments regarding Captain Finch's account of his party's flight from the Indians who were so violently active earlier this month:

"Although we left the Indian encampment in great haste, we took particular pains to cover our tracks and attempted to return to Shoshone Falls in an even more careful manner than we had on the way out. We could not travel as swiftly as before because of our burdens, but we made fair progress, nevertheless. We were within three miles of town by the time the howling pack of savages caught sight of our wagons.

"I feel reasonably certain that we should have made it into town safely under our own power, but I must confess we were all extremely pleased to see the cavalry appear when it did. I think that it all goes to show that the good Lord looks after His own. I feel that we shall all be better Christians after these events. I know that I shall. I would like it to go on record that I am herewith contributing the sum of two dollars to the new church in town as a gesture of my appreciation of the Christian ideals and the spiritual life. In this rather savage part of our fair country, a little religion can go a long way.'"—April 28

# Rhythm Tree

IMOGENE E. LAMB

Rhythm Tree, I see thee bend  
In the scherzo of the wind,  
Making jestful melody  
Of thy graceful symmetry.

Rhythm Tree, I watch thee bow  
To the raindrops, and avow  
No grand ballet could ever claim  
Thy harmony with art and fame.

In timbre limb I know a suite  
Of sun and song and dance discreet,  
Where once I witnessed vain rebuke—  
Tortured, tangled, destitute.

Once thou fought heedlessly the hail,  
Finding strength to no avail,  
For it was not within thy might  
To quit the elements of night.

Then, Rhythm Tree, when thou discerned  
The sky is steep, the storm unearned,  
Thy gold chorale of peace began  
To calm the fighting heart of man.

## Witch-Winter

IMOGENE E. LAMB

Witch-Winter whips the wind away  
And cracks her glassy nails on icy earth,  
Splinters lips on satin streams,  
Then lays her cheek to silvered stone,  
Deluded by a world she cannot own.

But she *will* have her world—  
Those swollen streams,  
That velvet earth summer caresses  
With dimpled finger-tips of mirth.

Ah, Greedy Girl—

In an avaricious grasp  
She burnt her frigid fingers on the sun,  
—And so, has gone.

# The Shore Is Shorn

DONALD D. ST. CLAIR

The teachers of Jefferson Memorial Junior High began to file past the flagpole and disappear into a breach in the wall of red brick. Principal Flint was one of the first to arrive. He came along the walk in long strides, surveying the red wall with a smile on his lips. Cutting across the lawn, his heels dug into the grass, the crushed patches of tangled green marking his tracks. As he stepped upon the sidewalk he stopped momentarily, stomping his black shoes on the cement. He frowned at the torn, wet blades sticking to the edges of his soles. He scraped them against the steel flagpole, leaving only a smear of green stain. Looking up at the wall of brick and mortar, he sighed, a smile again on his face; checking a round watch in his grey vest pocket, he disappeared into the building.

To the east along the paved street a car pulled to a stop under an old gnarled elm. The driver switched off the motor, looked to the left, then to the right, and then raised a leather-bound flask to his mouth. As he lowered it, his lips parted, baring nicotine-stained teeth which clenched as a shudder shook his body. He coughed loudly, a wheeze in his chest measuring the hack, hack of his cough. He lit a cigarette, pushed his hat back on his head and wiped his dampened forehead. Leaning heavily on the back rest of the car seat, he inhaled, held his breath, then released it, a geyser of blue smoke hissing through his lips. Abruptly, the man got out of the car, pulled the brim of his hat down over his eyes, shoved his hands into his trousers pockets and walked toward the flagpole.

To the west a city bus stopped by a yellow-painted curb. A small, thin woman of twenty-one stepped out into the morning sun with a stack of papers and books cradled in the crook of her arm. Her ash-blonde hair, gathered into a pony-tail at the back, bobbed and waved as she walked. Her eyes were an obscure blue, as if a white fog covered them. The painted nails of her fingers flitted nervously over the exam papers she was carrying.

At the foot of the flagpole her brown pumps stepped into a pool of shadow cast by the man coming from the east. She stopped.

"Good morning, Jeff," she said.

"Hi, Mick."

"Jeff, you look terrible this morning; are you ill?"

Jeffers chuckled to himself. "Ill? No, *sick* is a better word."

She looked at him, studying the blotches of white and patches of red that lay quilt-fashion over his face. "Go home, Jeff, if you're sick," she said. "The very i-de-a! They can get a substitute for you."

He chuckled again, his eyes softening. "Ah, Mick, you have fine passions, but your medical knowledge is sadly lacking."

"Are you sick—really?" she asked.

"Really! I'm *very* sick," he replied, laughing as he said it.

"Oh, really, Jeff, I'm never sure if you're serious or not. What's wrong with you?"

Jeffers bit his lip and squinted his eyes as if in deep thought. "Well," he began, "I think it's *liver* fever. I caught it a long time ago, and the frigid climate here in 'Flint's pond' has made it worse."

"Oh!" she replied with disgust in her voice. "Cut it out. You're just making fun of me."

"No, I'm not," said Jeffers seriously. "I've got a *cold*; that's all—a bad cold."



He threw his cigarette away, looked at the school building and turned back to Mickie. "Come on, Flint will be waiting up for us."

As the two of them walked into the main office, the eyes of the people in the room fastened upon Cynthia Mickie. Jeffers followed their gaze to Mickie and then back to the staring people. He looked first at one, then the other. Mickie walked to her mail-box, picked up her key, shifted her books and papers to her other arm and started out of the room. Jeffers leaned on the water-cooler with a cup of water in his hand. Sipping at it, he peered over its rim at Flint, the principal.

"Oh, Miss Mickie," said Flint, clearing his throat and pulling at the rim of his glasses.

"Yes?" replied Mickie as she turned around and faced him.

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about the Montoya boy in your homeroom?" Flint polished his glasses as he talked.

"What do you mean, peculiar?" asked Mickie.

"Well, we all know he's a very *disturbed* child," said Flint, replacing his glasses and blowing his nose.

Mickie looked nervous, the white mist floating over her eyes again. She looked at Cowbane standing in the corner. He was staring at her and she turned away. "Well, I don't know," she replied, her eyes shifting obliquely to and from Cowbane.

"Hum," grunted Flint. "Mrs. Montoya just called and told me that little Davey didn't come home from school last night."

"Oh, that's terrible!" cried Mickie. "You mean they haven't found him yet?"

"No, his mother said to call if he showed up for school," said Flint, clucking his tongue and shaking his head. "Those Mexicans out there in Tin Can City are certainly strange people."

"Have they called the police?" asked Mickie.

"No, that's the way the Mexicans are," said Flint. "They're just unconcerned—life doesn't mean as much to them as it does to us."

"They might not have called the cops," said Jeffers, filling his cup again, "but you can bet that all of Tin Can City was up last night looking for him."

"You look as if you were up all night yourself, Jeff," said Ted Cowbane. "Were *you* out looking for him?" Cowbane grinned.

"No, I wasn't," said Jeff, looking over the rim of his paper cup. "I might have, if I had known," he said with eyes narrowed and set. "That's the difference between the clean white collars on Mortgage Hill and the Tin Can crew. Mortgage Hill calls the cops, but never thinks of losing any sleep."

Flint pulled out his handkerchief and blew his nose again. "Yes, yes," he said. "If any of your students have seen the boy, Miss Mickie, please tell me."

"Certainly, but shouldn't someone call the police?" asked Mickie.

"Mr. Flint has already done that," said Cowbane.

"Oh," said Mickie. "I'll let you know if any of the kids know anything." Shifting her books, she walked out of the room. Jeffers threw his cup in the wastebasket and followed her.

Flint watched him go, his forehead folding into creases. "What *is* the matter with that fellow?" he said to Cowbane.

Cowbane lifted his foot onto a chair and leaned his elbow on his knee. "I think he has another one of his colds."

"You mean . . . ?"

Cowbane nodded his head. "I got a good whiff of it as he came in the door."

"Tch, tch, tch, what a terrible example for the children! I've talked to him about his colds," said Flint. "He just laughs and says that it's the cough syrup his doctor

gives him. He says he has the 'muck fever.'" Flint cleared his throat. "What were you telling me about Montoya?"

"Well," said Cowbane, "the other day during the noon hour, I heard some boys snickering outside my window; so I looked out and there was Davey right in the middle of the pack saying a poem he had made up. . . ."

"He's a good writer of poetry," said Flint. "He won the state contest last fall."

"This wasn't so hot!" said Cowbane.

"Was it a *dirty* poem?" asked Flint.

"It was about me," said Cowbane. "It went, 'Ted Cowbane must lie like a pig in a sty.'"

"He didn't!"

"Yes, but he regretted it," said Cowbane. "I went out there and slapped him good—then I took him into my room and used the paddle on him."

"Good for you," said Flint. "That's just what he needs."

"That's what I thought."

"I was of the opinion," said Flint, "that the other boys picked on him . . . you say he was with a group of boys?"

"Yes, but that was because they liked the poem—not him." Cowbane looked at the school clerk and then nodded his head for Flint to come closer. "Do you know why the boys pick on him?"

"No," said Flint, walking closer.

"Well, if you remember, we put Davey in Mickie's class because of his high I.Q."

"Yes, of course," said Flint, moving between Cowbane and the clerk.

"Davey has been the only Mexican from Tin Can City in her class. The rest are all from Cinderella Heights," said Cowbane.

"I had never thought of that."

"That by itself isn't so bad. But since the beginning of the term Mickie has been *mothering* him. Every time the kid whimpers she comes running."

"That's bad," said Flint, shaking his head sadly.

"Because she babies him," said Cowbane, "the other kids in the class hate him. His Mexican friends know he's in a high class and the teacher's pet so they tease him—they call him a 'gringo's baby.' Mickie has just ruined the boy."

"I've always had doubts about mixing the children—this is too bad," said Flint. "I wish you would have mentioned this before. . . ."

"Well, you know how it is, Mr. Flint. Mickie is a *nice* kid, and young. I didn't want to cause her any trouble."

"Sure, Ted, I know how you feel."

A parent came into the office with a lunch pail. She handed it to the clerk, asking that it be given to her son. Flint walked up to her, said hello, and assured her that her son would get his lunch; that he, Flint, would personally give it to him. The mother thanked him and left. Flint turned to the clerk. "Check and see whose homeroom the kid is in, and take it to his teacher."

"Yes, Mr. Flint," said the clerk.

Flint motioned for Cowbane to come into his private office. Cowbane took his foot off the chair, leaving a smudged outline of dust and grime on the wood. "I'm afraid that Mickie is not a very stable person . . .," he said, shutting the door behind him.

Down a long corridor in a classroom, Cynthia Mickie sat at her desk, a sheet of paper in front of her which she tapped gently with the rubbered end of her pencil. As she sat staring at the words, Jeffers came into the room with a glass in his hand.

"Would you mind if I fill this? My water fountain doesn't work."

"Sure, Jeff, help yourself."

Jeffers shifted his glass to and fro to catch the water that came in spurts out of the spigot. His hand shook unsteadily. He came over to the desk, pulled a round tubular glass from his coat pocket, extracted two white disks, and dropped them into the glass. He sat down in a near-by chair and watched the dancing, foaming disks dissolve in the water.

"Jeff, I'm worried about Davey."

"That's bad," said Jeffers. "Wait until you have something to really worry about."

"He's such a sensitive boy."

"Look, maybe it's you who's sensitive," said Jeffers. Swallowing the liquid in three gulps, he shuddered convulsively, making a vicious face as he finished.

"He's a strange boy; some of the things he says—and writes—frighten me," said Mickie.

"When you've reduced life to lowest terms, you'll get over that," said Jeffers.

Mickie's cheeks flushed red above her lips, which began to quiver. "I'm in no mood to hear about the wretchedness of men."

"Don't get excited. All I meant was that you're going to have a nervous breakdown if you insist upon worrying over every problem in this school. There's enough here to send God to a psychiatrist."

"Someone's got to worry about these kids," replied Mickie.

"Okay, go ahead, be different," laughed Jeffers.

Mickie looked back at the paper in front of her. "Yesterday morning during homeroom period Davey had his head down writing. I went up to him and asked what he was doing. He slid his arm over the paper so I couldn't read it." She held up the paper in front of her. "At the end of the hour he went by the waste-basket and threw it away."

"Is that serious?" asked Jeffers.

"I dug it out, later," she said, ignoring Jeffers. "This is what he wrote—

I stood and watched a snowflake  
Come tumbling to the land,  
Tumbling, tumbling into my hand.  
It was so worn and weak with strife,  
And when I breathed on it one harsh breath  
It took away its life."

"Kids are always writing stuff like that," said Jeffers. "Death is a new and mysterious thing. . ."

"But that's not all," said Mickie, her lips trembling again. "When school was over last night, Davey came into my room in tears. He was so upset that I could hardly understand him."

"Mick, you're getting too involved with these kids," said Jeffers. "Be reasonable."

"Be *reasonable*," Mickie spat out the words. "How can you be reasonable—just ignore the whole thing—forget it? Is that what you mean?" The vague mist drifted over her eyes; Jeffers shifted uneasily in his chair.

"I only meant that getting upset isn't going to solve anything," he said, soothingly.

The scarlet tinge in her cheeks faded as she suppressed her emotion. "Someone has to care," she said flatly.

"It would be nice," said Jeffers. "What was Davey crying about?"

"Something that happened in Cowbane's English class," she replied. "They were reading Thoreau's *Walden*. Cowbane asked Davey what was in the pond. Davey told him that there was water in Walden Pond. Then Cowbane ridiculed him, the class laughed at him, and the more Davey tried to explain what he meant the more they laughed."

"Was that all he was crying about?" asked Jeffers.

"It's not just that," she said. "It's *that* piled on top of everything else. Cowbane has picked on the kid ever since I caught him shaking him by the hair. Cowbane called Davey a liar; he had him in his classroom—I saw him; he had hold of his hair." Mickie had her fist closed and was shaking her arm, with a scowl on her face. "'Tell me who threw that stick,' he would say—then he would grab his hair and shake some more."

"I remember," said Jeffers. "Then you rushed in where angels fear to tread and gave Cowbane a piece of your mind. When you told Flint, he hemmed and hawed, and Cowbane had an excuse for catching Davey every time he turned around." Jeffers sighed, exasperated.

"I think Cowbane purposely picks on the boy," said Mickie.

"Of course he does. That's what I've been trying to tell you," said Jeffers.

"Davey has been deathly afraid of him. Just the other day he passed out on the playground. I know it was because he was afraid to go into Cowbane's classroom."

"The boy has other problems too, you know," said Jeffers.

Mickie began doodling on her desk calendar, ignoring what Jeffers said.

"Then he worked him over when he caught him saying that poem. Cowbane had Davey in a chair thumping him on the nostril with his finger, like this—" Mickie dropped her yellow pencil and began catching her middle finger against her thumb and letting it fly. "That was awful. Imagine . . ."

"After you have imagined the worst in man, it doesn't look so bad," Jeffers muttered to himself.

"And what does Cowbane know about literature anyway! He's a coach—what's he doing teaching English?"

"What do I know about algebra?" laughed Jeffers. "I have a Master's degree in literature."

"What does he know about Walden Pond, I'd like to know. . . ."

Cowbane had stepped in the doorway of the classroom and stood quietly listening. Neither Jeffers nor Mickie saw him until he spoke. "Well, suppose *you* tell me what was in Walden Pond."

Mickie jumped as if his voice had been a gunshot; her cheeks flushed crimson, her lips trembled. Jeffers lifted himself from his chair where he had sat with his shoulders hunched and his chin resting on his chest. His eyes focused steadily upon the source of the voice. "Well, Cowbane, I think you've been in Flint's pond so long you confuse it with Walden."

The skin over Cowbane's cheeks tightened. "How's your cold, Jeffers?" he asked.

"It's worse, Cowbane," said Jeffers. "I think I've taken a chill from the wind that blows over the chunks of ice in Flint's pond." He smiled at Cowbane. "That's the correct answer to your question, isn't it—ragged chunks of ice with foaming scum clinging to them?"

"Speaking of the wind," said Cowbane, "when you came through the door this morning, I smelled something quite different." Cowbane chuckled to himself.

Mickie took a step toward the door where Cowbane stood, her chin quivering. "Get out! Get out of my room! I can't stand you! You . . ." she shouted, shaking her clenched fist at him.

Jeffers grabbed her by the arm. "Mick, Mick, take it easy." He gently moved between her and Cowbane. "I think you'd better leave," he said to him, as he led Mickie back to her desk. Cowbane drifted out of the doorway with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I'll go to the superintendent, I'll go to the papers . . . if he doesn't quit picking on that boy. . . ."



Jeffers gripped her by the shoulders. "Look, Mick, get hold of yourself. You can't do anything about it, nothing at all."

"Oh yes, and I will, if it's the last thing I do, I will."

"No you won't," said Jeffers. "Look, Mick, what kind of a world do you think we live in? It's no wonderland of truth and beauty. We live meanly, like ants—it's error on error, clout on clout."

"That's the way *you* think it is," she shouted. "It's not like that at all. What's right *is* right and I'll go to Mr. Flint. He's a Christian man, he'll do what's right."

"Sure, sure, Mick, he'll do his Christian *duty*—he has duty on the brain. Duty is a maggot in his head that eats up truth and beauty and secretes rotten drivel. Get hold of yourself and keep quiet."

Mickie began dabbing at her eyes, trying to control herself. Jeffers fell silent, dropping his hands from her shoulders, studying her. "I'll get you a drink of water," he said. Mickie began arranging and shifting books idly on her desk. She noticed dust on the wood, frowned, took a white cloth out of her desk, and began wiping the polished brown surface. Jeffers came back with her glass of water. "Here," he said.

As she took the glass, a buzzer sounded. Laughter, shouts, and the banging of locker doors filled the building. Before she could drink the water, two seventh grade boys came running through the door and slid to a stop in front of Jeffers.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Jeffers," said the shorter of the two—the one who had almost run into him. The boy looked at Jeffers with round excited eyes. "Gee, Mr. Jeffers, you look . . . are you sick, Mr. Jeffers?"

Jeffers sniffed and coughed slightly. "I have a bad cold," he said.

"Gee," said the short boy, "you have more colds than any man I've *ever* saw."

"Than you have ever *seen*, George," said Mickie.

George ducked his head with a sly grin. "That's what I meant, Miss Mickie—and Miss Mickie we seen *him*—Pete an' me here . . .," George said, gesturing at Pete, the taller boy at his side.

"Who?" asked Mickie. "Who did you see?"

"Last night—Davey—didn't we, Pete?"

"Yep, we seen him, George an' me," said Pete, nodding his head.

"Where did you see him?" asked Mickie.

"Well my dad sent Pete an' me here down to the golf course to get his hat that he left on the bench by the pond. My dad plays golf every evenin' an' he always forgets his hat an' Pete an' me here always has to go after it, an' when Pete an' me here was walkin' back—it was gettin' dark too an' we was walkin' by the pond bank an' somethin' moved under a little tree an' it sure scared me an' I started to run an' Pete here says, 'It's Davey,' an' then I got pretty mad 'cause he scared me like that an' I said to 'im, 'Davey, your dad's not a member of the club.' An' then I remembered he din't have no dad at all, and I told him that it was all right, that kids with no dads at all could play there any time—that's a rule I made up right there on the spot. An' then I ast him, 'what you doin' here?' and he din't say nothin'—just set there lookin' at Pete an' me here all hunkered up in the cold without any coat on an' then Pete an' me here got to feelin' kinda scared again—the way Davey was all hunkered up an' shiverin' an' lookin' at us an' everythin' an' then we started runnin' an' gettin' scareder an' runnin' harder." He stopped and looked at Pete who was nodding his head in agreement, brushing his hair from his eyes at every nod. "Then when Pete an' me here got in the street lights we started laughin' 'cause there wasn't nothin' to be scared of or nothin' an' when we got to the house Mom said, 'What have you boys been running for?' An' we said, 'just 'cause'—that Pete an' me here was havin' a foot race. An' then Pete here

said he had to go home an' I said I was tired an' I went to bed an' the folks was watchin' TV anyway an' we just forgot all about it. An' Pete an' me here din't think any more about it 'til we got to school an' the kids from Tin Can City told us about . . . an', an', gee, Miss Mickie, you don't suppose somethin' happened to Davey, do ya?"

"No, of course not," said Mickie. "You boys better hurry up; school is about to take up."

"Sure, okay, Miss Mickie. Gee, Pete an' me is goin' to feel mighty bad if somethin' did happen . . . ain't we, Pete?" Pete nodded his head very hard, spilling his straight brown hair into his eyes. "Come on, Pete, you heard what Miss Mickie said, let's go an' . . ." The two whirled and began to run.

"Boys, don't run, please," said Mickie.

"Sure," said George, "don't run, Pete. Din't ya hear what Miss Mickie said?" Pete nodded his head as they disappeared around the door.

Mickie turned to Jeffers. "I had better go tell Mr. Flint."

"Yes," he said. "I think I'll fix myself another Alka-Seltzer." Mickie walked out of the room. Jeffers pulled the leather flask from his suit coat, tossed a large swallow down his throat and replaced the flask. Then he filled the glass with water, dropped in a couple of disks, and walked into the hall.

Cowbane was standing down the hall glaring at the students. He caught a ninth grade boy by the arm, jerked him up against the wall and said, "Turn down that shirt collar, pull up those levis, button up your shirt—if I catch you with your belly button sticking out again, I'll take you down to the furnace room and teach you how to be a white man!" The boy did as he was told with a look of nausea on his face. "Now get going," said Cowbane, shoving the boy out into the center of the hall. As the boy walked past Jeffers, he sucked in his breath; the levis fell down to their customary perch. A few steps farther down the hall, the boy unbuttoned his shirt and when he rounded the corner he turned up his collar. Cowbane was looking the other direction at another boy. "Get over here, you!" he said to the new boy. "Pull up those . . ." Jeffers smiled and swallowed his fizzing Alka-Seltzer.

Mickie came bobbing down the corridor, her pony-tail swishing and flying behind her. "What did he say?" asked Jeffers, following her into the room.

"Nothing," she said. "He called the police. Mr. Flint is a good man; he understands."

"What did you tell him?" asked Jeffers.

"Not much," she said, "but enough. He'll do what's right."

"Look, Mick, Flint's a politician. He knows how Cowbane beats the kids around. He uses him. Don't let his administrative charm fool you. That's surface slush. He's nothing but hard cold ice at the core."

"No, he's not," said Mickie. "He even goes to my church."

"He sits in a different pew, too," said Jeffers. "This is your first year at teaching, Mick, and your first real experience with brute facts. Take some advice—from a veteran. . . ."

"You're bitter, Jeff. Just because you've had a few bad breaks."

"Okay, so I'm bitter. I had a pound of steel taken out of my legs in Germany, two-thirds of my stomach cut out on Madison Avenue, my heart petrified in the public schools, and now I'm trying to hold onto my sanity. There's only one way to do that and that's by using your head. Mick, there are three choices: keep your mouth shut, join Flint's odd-fellows' society, or stand up and let them roll over you."

"No, no, Jeff, it's not like that."

"Mick," said Jeff, "do you remember Thoreau's railroad ties?"

"Yes," she said.

"Today, men are like those ties. They're sleepers, very sound sleepers; the rails of modern madness are laid upon them. They're tamped down with the sands of ideology. Don't wake them up, Mick, let them sleep. You'll upset everything if you try, and you'll end up being sand-bagged yourself." Kids were coming into the classroom and gawking oddly at Jeff. Mickie frowned at him and nodded at the students. Jeff became aware of them, coughed, and walked out of the room.

Just before the buzzer signaled the noon lunch-break, Mr. Flint's voice came over the public address system asking all the teachers to assemble in the women's faculty room. As the students filed out of the rooms all the teachers stood by their doors, supervising. The students were filing military style in two columns down the hall to the lunch-room. Cowbane stood in his usual place yelling commands.

Jeffers followed the last student and stopped beside Mickie.

"What's the meeting about, Jeff?"

Jeffers shook his head. "I don't know. Say, Mick, before you lock your door, let me fill my glass." Just then two elderly teachers from the far end of the hall came by them, whispering. Jeff glanced at them and said to Mickie, "There goes the steering committee—must be a big deal."

As Jeffers turned to go into Mickie's room, Cowbane came pounding down the hall. "They found him," he said to Mickie. Jeffers whirled around, responding to the tone in his voice. "In the pond," said Cowbane. "Dead." He threw the words over his shoulder. They watched him march down the hall, his white athletic socks around his thick ankles flashing against the green floor.

"Dead?" said Mickie. "Did he say *dead*?" Her face grew pale, water gathering in her eyes, her lips trembling.

"Now look, Mick, don't jump to conclusions. Remember what I said. . . . Are you listening to me?"

"He killed him," she said.

"Who killed him?"

"Cowbane, Cowbane," she said in a low voice. "He killed him."

"Don't be ridiculous. Now Mick, snap out of that. You can't go around saying things like that. You don't know anything about it." Mickie had clenched her teeth and drawn her mouth into a straight tight line. She began to walk down the hall. Jeffers moved by her side, talking to her. She wasn't listening. As they approached the office on the way to the faculty room, Mickie stopped abruptly.

"You go on," she said to him acidly; "I want to pick up my mail and wash my face." She walked into the office and up to the row of boxes on the wall which held envelopes and memo sheets. Taking the papers from her box she turned and disappeared into the washroom annex. Jeffers flung out his arms, hands opened hopelessly, and let them fall carelessly back to his sides. "I tried," he muttered with a shake of his head.

When Jeffers came into the faculty room, the meeting had already begun. The superintendent and his assistants were sitting to the left of Flint. Cowbane and the two ladies who had passed Jeff and Mickie in the hall were sitting to Flint's right. Over all hung a portrait of the founder of the school, whose long nose pointed down at the superintendent, who sat with his hands folded beneath his rotund abdomen. The superintendent's head sat steaming red on his body, which resembled an old pot-bellied stove with only two legs and a prop of a chair to keep it upright. He was throwing glances in the direction of Flint, but he was slightly crossed-eyed, causing the teachers around the principal to shift uneasily in their chairs.

Jeff took a chair at the end of the long table and near the door he had just come through. Flint had been asking questions about the Montoya boy. The shop in-

structor was telling how odd and strange the boy was, and recalled all the breaches of discipline of which he had been guilty in the past. The principal nodded his head eagerly at every remark that suggested abnormality. Jeffers covered his face with his hands and muttered, "The wind that blows, is all that anybody knows."

Flint heard the muttered words. "Did you have a comment, Mr. Jeffers?"

Jeffers jerked his head from his hands as if surprised that he had been talking. "I was just thinking out loud," he said. "I just thought that the *real* cause, nobody knows."

"No doubt you're right, Mr. Jeffers," said Flint, "but we're his teachers, and we're *supposed* to know. There's a city detective and two newspaper reporters down in the men's faculty room waiting for the *reason*."

"I see," said Jeffers.

The superintendent cleared his throat, "You're all aware that this is a very serious matter." He paused and looked around the room. "We all must be very professional about this; many questions will be asked. We can't have any *loose* talk; the newspapers like to . . ." His voice trailed off, merging into a severe frown on his red face.

"I hope that we are *all* aware of this," said Flint. The teachers began to nod their heads in agreement. "Have you had any contact with the boy, Mrs. Simpson?" Flint asked a woman in a nurse's uniform.

"About a week ago the child had a convulsion on the playground," she said. "It had all the earmarks of an epileptic seizure; of course it could have been hysteria, but . . ."

"I'm glad you brought that up," said Flint. "Yes, epileptics are often suicidal." The nurse nodded her head in affirmation.

"This may explain why he did so poorly in gym," said Cowbane. "I noticed him one day when Harry here," he motioned to the physical education instructor, "was trying to teach him the jumping jack. We spent a lot of time with him. The boy must have had an injured nervous system. His reactions were just opposite to a normal boy's; his legs would fly out when they should have come together. He would always end up by falling down."

"Mr. Cowbane has spent a good deal of time with the boy," said Flint to the superintendent. "He saw that the boy was badly maladjusted, and has counseled him privately on numerous occasions. Really, he has taken a personal interest in the boy from the first."

"You see," said Cowbane to the superintendent, "his homeroom teacher is young and inexperienced and has had the usual problems of adjustment. I had Montoya in English, and saw from the start that he was having troubles. I felt sorry for him, and tried to help him."

"We have all tried to help him," said Flint, "but there's a limit to what we can do, especially with Mexican children. Their home life is so bad that we just can't accomplish much." He lowered his head.

"I think we know all we need to know," said Flint, raising his head.

"By the way, have we heard from his homeroom teacher?" asked the superintendent.

"Miss Mickie, would you like to add anything?" Flint looked about the room. "That's funny, I thought she was here," he said sententiously. "Does anyone know where she is?"

"She went in to get her mail," said Jeffers.

"Her mail?" said Flint, with a note of anger. "Would you go and get her, Mrs. Simpson?"

"I think you'll find her in the office washroom," Jeffers said to the nurse as she went past him.

Flint began reading a statement for the press. It described the immense shock to the school, expressing the grief felt by everyone over the accident, and concluded with a hint that the boy had been disturbed enough to do almost anything. Mickie burst into the room, followed by Mrs. Simpson, just as Flint finished reading the statement. She stopped by the table to the left of Jeffers, hate crackling like electricity from her swollen red-rimmed eyes.

A lull of uncertainty descended upon the room, and as a weathercock switches cautiously this way and that to find the direction of the coming blast, so the eyes and attention of the people moved to Mickie, then to Cowbane, to Flint, and then back to Mickie.

"You killed him, Cowbane!" shouted Mickie, holding out a crumpled piece of paper.

"Miss Mickie!" said Flint, frowning severely.

Mickie turned to Flint. "He killed him, Mr. Flint; he's beat him, shaken him by the hair, slapped him, made fun of him, laughed at him—now he's killed him." Cowbane's face bleached white, his eyes glazed, his mouth stretched into a sneer.

"Miss Mickie," said Flint harshly, "stop saying such nonsense." Flint jabbed at the rim of his glasses with his left hand and glanced quickly through his parted fingers at the superintendent. The superintendent was studying him with lowered eyebrows, his disgust showing through the lack of any expression on his face.

"You want to know the *truth* about Davey's death?" asked Mickie in a thin strained voice. "That's the truth; Cowbane killed him, piece by piece, day by day. Here! Here's a letter that . . ." her voice ebbed into a whisper, "that Davey wrote, just before he . . ."

"Miss Mickie, it was an *accident*," said Flint, icily.

His voice washed over her face, sweeping away her determination. She stood precariously on her feet, horror nudging hate out of her words. "Mr. Flint, Davey wrote me this letter; it just came in the mail. Listen to what he . . ."

"No!" boomed Flint. "You listen to me. I want to hear no more of such talk—not a word, to me—or anyone else. Is that clear?"

Mickie gaped stupidly, "But Mr. Flint," she pleaded.

"You're young, Miss Mickie," said Flint. "I've known Mr. Cowbane for a long time and he's one of the best teachers we have. I *know* that you dislike him, but this is no place for you to settle a grudge. Keep your private life out of school affairs." Flint's words were a mixture of threat and anger. They were sharp with the ring of authority, spoken as if they were directed at a belligerent student. The room settled into a portentous, timeless silence.

A twitching motion began in Mickie's hands. The taut muscles snapped as if clipped by an invisible knife, causing her fingers and arms to vibrate. She dropped the letter on the table by Jeffers and then pressed her hands against her face. For a moment, the movement in her hands stopped, then the skin about her throat and neck rippled like a smooth lake when the tongues of crossing winds lick its surface.

Flint's stern manner softened as he watched her. "Now, Miss Mickie, don't take it so hard; I know it's been a shock to you—we understand. I think you had better lie down for a while." He looked at the nurse standing just inside the door. "Why don't you take her to your office, Mrs. Simpson? Perhaps a sedative would help." The nurse came up to Mickie, took her by the arm and patted her affectionately on the shoulders.

"Come on, honey," she said.

As the nurse led her out of the room, Jeffers' attention fixed on the letter Mickie

had dropped. He picked it up. Smoothing out the creases and wrinkles in the crumpled paper, he began reading the scrawled, irregular writing.

"Would you please give me the letter, Mr. Jeffers?" said Flint.

"I haven't finished reading it," said Jeffers.

"Mr. Jeffers," Flint's voice rose a little. The teachers in the room squirmed in their seats. Jeffers continued reading as if he hadn't heard the principal. "Mr. Jeffers . . . give—me—the—letter."

Jeffers raised his eyes slowly, locking his gaze with the principal's. "I think I'll keep the letter, Mr. Flint."

"Keep the letter!" shouted Flint, jabbing at the rim of his glasses. "Look here, Jeffers, who do you think you are? Give me that letter."

"No," said Jeffers flatly.

The superintendent rose from his seat. "Jeffers," he said, "hand over the letter or hand in your resignation."

"No," said Jeffers. "You fire me." The superintendent turned and glared at Flint.

"Before you fire me, maybe I should read you *my* letter." Jeffers looked down at the paper in his hands. "'Dear Miss Mickie,'" he read, "'I love you, but that's not enough. I can't take it any more. I would like to slap every smart-aleck in the world, everytime they go around bossing you, slapping you, shaking you, laughing at you. I would like to run away too, far away from this stinking place and be somebody. But I won't. I'm just no good, I guess, I'm just a nobody. And, Miss Mickie, I still believe there's water in Walden Pond. It's fed by underground springs, it comes and goes, and nobody knows when it will rise again. And when the water is low, weeds grow upon its shore, but it has a right to a shore, and from time to time the water rises. It licks its lips and the shore is shorn. I'm going to prove there's water in Walden Pond. Love, Davey.'" Jeffers looked up at Cowbane as he slid the letter into the inner pocket of his tweed jacket. "You know something, Cowbane; I thought that pond had gone dry myself, but I've changed my mind. There *is* water in Walden Pond, after all." A smile spread across Jeffers' face as he finished.

"Jeffers," said Flint, "give me the letter, and I'll forget all about your colds."

Jeffers' eyelids lowered as he rolled his head back; laughter bubbled in his throat. "Funny, it's real funny, Flint," he said. "I think you're about to catch my cold." He got to his feet and slid his chair aside. "I'm going to give this letter to the reporters."

"Jeffers, remember your professional commitment," said Flint.

"Don't remind me, my stomach has been bothering me as it is." Jeffers smiled at Flint. Reaching into his inner coat pocket, he pulled out the leather flask. "Here," he said, laying it on the table. "If you catch a chill, use as needed." He slammed the door hard behind him. As he walked down the hall to the men's faculty room, Jeffers began to whistle, then he hummed, then he sang, "It takes a gang of men, for every mile of sleeping men—it takes a gang of men; it's a sign that they may get up again."

## “Ma Belle Dame—Merci!”

ROBERT HEPBURN

Long ago and far away,  
So long, so far, I cannot say  
How time and space diffused so much  
To let pure fact with fancy touch  
And merge and coalesce as one  
Called Phantasy in the modern tongue,  
There lived a lovely faerie queen  
In the depths of a forest ever green  
Who pined away on the emerald sward  
For rhyming Thomas, her lover bard.

At last there came along one day  
A lecher singing a lusty lay  
Who looked like Thomas to the lady fair  
After half a century of waiting there.  
She forthwith to his arms took flight  
And struck him mute with her delight  
And led him off with a whispered breath  
To speak not a word on pain of death.  
Then off through the forest the twain did go  
A lecherous smile and a maidenly glow.

For seven years they lived as one  
In the spirit of Maytime under the sun  
Until one day the lusty wight  
Had drunk his fill of her delight  
And stood at the edge of the haunted wood  
To take farewell of their lovely brood  
Of four young lechers and three young elves,  
Seven young images of themselves,  
And spake at last in their company,  
“Au revoir, ma belle dame, et—merci!”



# The Rent

ROBERT JOHNSON

Frank Marion lay on his back, his arm over his eyes, shading them needlessly from the sun that had left the window two hours previously. Only a dirtied grayness managed to penetrate the lonely window in the wall next to his bed. Around the window, overlaying the large pink flowers of the wall paper, reddish-brown water stains formed an iron frame. From his position on the bed Frank could, if he removed his arm, look through the window and see the antenna-sprouting roof-line across the street, defined like a dimly lit shadow picture. He didn't remove his arm, not even to see the mid-March twilight which would quickly lose itself in night.

He heard a soft apologetic knocking on his door, but didn't alter his position. Again he heard the knocking; this time a little louder, but no less apologetic.

"Come in," he muttered.

The door opened, then closed, admitting an elderly man of medium height and careless dress. The old man sniffed audibly, inhaling the musty smell of well-used air and dormant humanity. Squinting into the growing dimness he looked first at Frank, then at the straight chair in the corner. Frank removed his arm and looked at the man.

"Hello, Mr. Konowski," Frank said indifferently.

"Hello, Mr. Marion. Mind if I turn the light on?"

Frank shrugged, so Mr. Konowski reached back and clicked the switch, lighting the solitary bare bulb in the ceiling. Frank closed his shocked eyes and began working experimentally at getting them used to the light. Mr. Konowski glanced again at the chair.

"Sit down, if you'd like."

Mr. Konowski went to the chair, looked at the thick dust which had settled upon it, leaned over and puffed weakly at it, and sat down stiffly, crossing his legs. He coughed.

"Guess you know why I've come."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Well, damn it, Mr. Marion, what c'n I do? I just take care of the place, ya know."

"Nothing, I guess." Frank rolled over, turning his back toward Mr. Konowski.

"Ya know I ain't got nothin' against you, dontcha?"

"Sure. I suppose not."

"Your rent *is* a month and a half overdue, and ain't I covered for ya?"

"Yeah . . . Thanks, Mr. Konowski. I know this is hard on you."

Frank glanced out of the window into the night, too late to capture the transient twilight.

"How much do I owe?"

"Well, for February and March you owe fifty dollars. But if you c'n pay for February I could prob'ly cover for ya again. You *do* know how it is, dontcha?"

"Sure. I know."

Mr. Konowski sat with his head lowered, staring at his interlocked hands, wrinkles forming in his brow. He blinked his eyes rapidly several times and ran the back of his fist over his right eye. Lifting his head he gazed at a picture on the dresser. It was of a middle-aged man with slightly graying hair. Frank had rolled back over and looked at the slumped old man.

"You know he's dead," Frank said.

"Yeah . . . I know."

"Did I tell you about the fire? How he and my little brother got burned and all?"

"Yeah. You told me."

"When?"

"About two months ago, I guess."

"Two months . . . We never did have much money, ya know, and, well, she's doing washing and sewing and things now. I got a letter from Mom yesterday."

"That right?"

"Dad never did lay aside much. Not for insurance or anything. He always said, 'What's the use of saving for a rainy day when there's a good chance you'll die before it rains?' I can't blame him, though. We always had a lot of fun."

"You really liked your pa, didntcha?"

"He put me through school and everything . . . that is, until now. Where can I go, Mr. Konowski?"

The old man rested his head in his hands, tapping his right foot gently in the dust on the floor. He coughed quietly into his hands.

"Have ya tried finding a job?"

"Ever since I dropped out of school."

"Maybe ya oughtta go home."

"I can't. Don't ya see? Mom is having a hard enough time, and I couldn't find work there either. No, I can't do that."

"But . . . but, you can't stay here. Mr. Shelby asks me almost every day what I'm going to do about you. I gotta do somethin' or I'll lose my job. I'm old, Mr. Marion, and I ain't got much money. I couldn't get another job, ya know."

"I know, Mr. Konowski. I'll leave. Can I stay tonight?"

"Oh sure, sure, Mr. Marion. Maybe somethin' will turn up tomorrow."

Frank lay absently winding his watch. When he had finished he looked at it. Eight o'clock. Mr. Konowski watched him, his brows knitting. Slowly Frank pulled the watch over his hand. He held it up and looked at the face, which was black with gold numbers and hands. Cautiously he stretched the band, being careful not to overstretch it. After he had put it back on his wrist he closed his eyes. Mr. Konowski labored out of the chair. Frank looked up at him.

"Just a minute, will ya, Mr. Konowski?"

Mr. Konowski remained standing, but did not move toward the door. Again Frank took off the watch, this time looking at the inscription inside.

"Here. Do you think this will be enough to cover February's rent?"

Mr. Konowski looked at it, carefully reading the inscription. He rubbed both eyes with the back of his fist.

"I'm sure this will be enough for February *and* March, Mr. Marion. But do you want to give it up?"

"Thanks, Mr. Konowski. Maybe I can get a job this week. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mr. Marion. I'm sorry."

Mr. Konowski opened the door to leave.

"Would you turn out the light, please?"

As the light went out Frank rolled over toward the window and gazed into the night.

## Rebirth

ALAN CAMPBELL

Yesterday I walked in the places of my childhood.  
I looked at trees now ten years older,  
And walked down paths my younger feet had trod.  
I saw the lake, its dam still there  
Over which still rushed its frothy coolness.  
I smelled almost-forgotten fragrances my nostrils did remember,  
And saw the fields in which I once had run.  
My skin was touched by winds from younger times.  
I was there with all these things  
And noted sadly that the sun had dimmed  
From what I had remembered.  
I looked at the earth and sky and saw  
That they, timeless, were now a little older.  
Yet there, 'midst all I had departed,  
That was gone, forever gone, from out my ken,  
Were others, younger now than I;  
Tasting of it all, and laughing—at its newness.

# The Pagan

ALAN CAMPBELL

'Twas at the time when I,  
As other druids primiginous,  
Prepared my gift to Beltane's fire,  
To her awful unseen impetus  
Which sounds the growing pulse  
That's only checked by sacrifice,  
That demands an omnitude's expense  
Of the Opening Mysteries' crushing price.  
So I upon Spring's altar laid  
The sacrifice of me I'd made.



# Liberty

KEITH PETERS

The huge aircraft carrier creaked quietly with the rolling water. Two sailors made their way down the gangplank and walked along the dock. Giant cranes cast grotesque shadows on their white uniforms.

"Fifty-two days at sea," Don said. He took off his white hat and pushed his blond hair back from his forehead. "Boy, I'll be glad to see those Oriental women."

"It's about time we got off this rustbucket," Fred said. He was tall and wore his white hat cocked over one eye.

"Where're we going first?" Don said.

"Relax. We'll just walk around and see what happens. There's no hurry, now that we're here."

They showed their liberty cards at the gate and walked out into the streams of people pouring down the narrow sidewalk.

"Where're all these people going in such a hurry?" Don said.

"Don't know," Fred said. "I've always heard the Orientals had a slow-moving life, but ever since I first saw them, they've always been in a hurry. Talk fast, walk fast. Maybe it was the war and occupation that changed 'em."

The street was lined with shops. Brightly-colored signs were hung everywhere, with an English word sometimes sandwiched in between Japanese symbols. Girls with tight skirts and quick smiles dotted the seething crowd. Most of the women were dressed in Oriental clothing.

"Say, Fred, what makes those girls' faces so white? Don't they ever get outside?"

"Those girls over there? Huh; not very often. Most of them do their work at night. Besides, the Japanese women use a makeup made from some kind of ground-up eggshell or somethin'."

They passed by a large store, its windows stuffed with things. Glossy silks were draped around clocks, jewel cases, and fishing rods. Fred hardly glanced in the window, but Don stopped and peered in the glass, getting close to it so he could see past his reflection.

"Let's go in here and look around for a while. I've saved a hundred bucks to spend over here and I might as well start now. I'd like to get Dad a fishing pole and Mom one of those kimonos. Maybe a bracelet for my sister, Roxie."

"Okay," Fred said. "But be careful what you buy. These Japs will sell you anything for silk. You can't trust 'em as far as you can throw 'em."

One opened the door and a music box tinkled the melody to "Quo Minen Sai." The walls of the shop were lined with shelves and nearly all the floor space contained counters. Fred walked down one of the narrow aisles and stopped by a counter covered with rows of neatly folded scarfs. He picked up one that was studded with girls and studied it carefully. Don walked around the shop slowly, his eyes wide and busy.

The man at the back of the shop came up and stood beside Don. His back was bent and his head twisted at a peculiar angle.

"Please help you, Joe?" the man said. He spoke in a tired voice.

Don turned to face the old man. His eyes bulged and he stepped back from the Japanese. The old man's face was a mass of red bumps and scars. Don stood there and stared for several moments.

"Yes," Don said. "I-I was looking for some silk kimonos." He fastened his gaze on a stack of fishing rods behind the old man. "For my mother."

The old man nodded. "Follow, please."

The hunched figure moved slowly. He selected several garments from a rack. His outstretched hand shook as he reached for the clothes. The hand was bloated and scarred and there wasn't any hair on his wrist. Don looked pale.

"Please," the old man said. "What size?"

"Oh. Size. I don't know," Don said. "That one looks about right, I guess."

"Sorry you forget size. Maybe you wait to find out size before you buy?"

"We're only going to be here for a couple of days," Don said. "I'll take one now."

The old man bent his stooped shoulders in a nearly imperceptible bow. "This one very good quality," he said. His scarred hands glided over the smooth material. "Only best quality silk."

"I think I'll take it," Don said. He turned and his gaze wandered back to where Fred was standing. "How much is it?"

"Thirty-six hundred yen. Very good price."

Don flipped the front of his white jumper back and jerked out his bulging wallet. He started to thumb through the worn leather billfold and then hesitated.

"Say, Fred, come here a minute, will you?"

Fred tossed the scarfs in a heap on the small counter and sauntered to the front of the shop.

"What's your trouble?"

"No trouble," Don said. "I just wondered if this stuff was real silk, that's all."

Fred looked at the old man for the first time. He turned away and disgust pulled at the corners of his mouth. He grabbed the kimono on the side opposite the edge that the old man was holding. He surveyed the cloth with a practised eye, running his thumb over the garment. Fred frowned and put the cloth to his cheek. His eyes glinted with cunning.

"This stuff isn't silk," Fred said. "How much did he want for it?"

"Thirty-six hundred yen," Don said.

"Ten bucks. Hell, this stuff isn't worth half that," Fred said. He turned to the old man.

"We don't want it. This isn't silk and you know it."

"Sorry," the old man said. "This real Japanese silk."

"Yeah, I know," Fred said. "It always is. Let's get out of here."

The old man patiently stood by the sailors, holding the garment outspread in his hands.

"You no understand. Real silk. Very good stuff. Good price."

"Let's up anchor," Fred said. "I told you these Japs would sell you anything for silk."

"Yeah," Don said. "I didn't think it looked real."

The two sailors stalked out of the shop. They slowed down only when they were a block down the street.

"Did you see his face?" Fred said.

"What a mess," Don said. "I've never seen anything like it. What a mess."

"He must have been caught at the edge of an A-bomb blast," Fred said. "Let's go have a beer."

Don nodded and lengthened his stride to keep up with Fred's churning legs.

"I want to show you these Oriental women," Fred said. "We'll have a ball."

"Okay," Don said. He grinned and his blue eyes crinkled.

"Let's take this alley," Fred said. "I know a good place down there."

The two sailors moved down the narrow alley, their white uniforms glistening against the dirty and twisted buildings.

"What's that stink?" Don said. His nose wrinkled and his eyes nearly closed.



"Oh, that. That's the Jap honeypots. Over here they don't have much plumbing. So they put the stuff in those things called honeypots. Every once in a while a honeywagon comes around. The damn Japs don't waste a thing."

Fred walked ahead of Don and stopped before a small door set in a board wall. He knocked and the door was opened by an old woman. She was short and fat, her dark hair greased back in a knot. She bowed, smiling as she did so, her heavy cheeks nearly concealing her narrow eyes.

"Mama San?" Fred said.

The fat woman smiled and bowed again. She beckoned to them. The room was dark and small. Several tables were scattered about the warped floor between bamboo mats. A jukebox groaned at them from one corner. Four Japanese girls sat with heads together, talking in singsong voices. The sailors dropped in the tipsy chairs.

Fred pointed to the girls and held up two fingers. The fat woman smiled. Then Fred held up two fingers and made a pouring motion with his hands, throwing back his head.

Mama San said something to the girls. Two of them got up and walked over to the sailors. Their faces were white with splotches of pink painted on their cheeks. They wore tight skirts and walked with mincing steps. Don took off his white hat and stood up when they approached. Fred sprawled out, pulled a chair towards him with his foot, and propped his lean legs on it.

"Sit down, girls," Fred said. "My name's Fred and this is Don."

The Japanese girls took their places gracefully.

"Hi," said the one with the flat nose. "My name Toki and she"—pointing with her finger—"named Sat Sen."

The fat woman came and set the bottles on the table.

"Please," Toki said. "Drink, too?" She pointed at herself and Sat Sen.

"Sure," Fred said. He held up two fingers and the fat woman smiled and left. Fred tilted the bottle and the beer gurgled in his throat. He set the empty bottle down with a thud.

"You from *Midway*?" Toki said.

"Yeah," Fred said. He crossed his legs and rolled the empty bottle between his hands. "If you want to know anything about ship movements, just ask a Japanese girl. They'll know every time."

The girls smiled at each other. Mama San brought another bottle and placed it in front of Fred.

"Want to dance?" Fred said. He reached over and grabbed Toki's hand.

"Okay," Toki said.

Fred sauntered over to the jukebox and shoved some change in the slot. "Sometimes I'm Happy" blared through the room. Fred pushed Toki around the floor. After a while his hand dropped down to her leg. She giggled.

Don sat quietly at the table. Sat Sen slid her chair over next to him.

"You young. Been in navy short time?"

"Oh, I've been in quite a while," Don said. "A year and a half."

"First time to Japan?" Sat Sen said. When she spoke she tossed her head, the bun of hair bouncing in its blue ribbon.

"Yeah," Don said. "I want to get some clothes and stuff for my folks."

"That's okay," Sat Sen said. "Very good stuff here in Japan."

"They might have," Don said. "But some guy tried to sell us some other stuff for silk a little while ago."

"Too bad," Sat Sen said. She dropped her eyes. "Tomorrow you find good stuff."

"Yeah," Don said. "I'll look around a lot tomorrow."

He picked up the bottle and drank slowly. Fred came back to the table. He slapped Toki gently on the buttocks. She grabbed his hand playfully.

"Come on, Don," Fred said. "Why don't you ask Sat Sen to dance?"

"I was just going to do that," Don said. He looked over at Sat Sen. She nodded slightly and got up. The Japanese girl took Don's hand. He led her to the center of the floor by the jukebox and they started to dance. Once he stepped on her foot and excused himself awkwardly. Sat Sen gave him a smile and held him close to her, guiding him expertly about the floor with her body.

"Toki and I were just talking about going to bed," Fred said. Don helped Sat Sen seat herself. "Weren't we, little Japanese doll?"

Toki giggled and put her slender hand on Fred's knee. "American sailor okay," Toki said. "How about young one?"

"Hell, Don, let's make it," Fred said.

"Sure," Don said. "Let's have a ball."

Fred held up six fingers. Mama San brought a metal tray filled with bottles. Fred took the tray and pushed himself out of the chair. "Let's go, doll," Fred said.

Toki led the way to the back of the room and disappeared through a small door covered with a green curtain which was frayed at the bottom.

"Young one ready for good time?" Sat Sen said.

Don gulped a bottle of beer and sat up straight. "Sure," he said. "Anytime you are."

The sun was dipping below the buildings when the two sailors came out of the door and walked down the alley. Fred placed his feet squarely down on the ground, as if he expected the earth to roll beneath him. Don staggered along behind him, using the wall to support himself.

"Well, how do you like Oriental women?" Fred said.

"What a ball," Don said. "Now I know what you mean."

He caromed off one wall and his foot struck a metal barrel. The barrel was empty and the sound shimmered down the alley like a gong announcing the return of two heroic and successful hunters.

"Damn it," Don said. He stopped and rubbed the toe of his shoe. "Yeah, I tell you, Fred, it was a ball."

"What a body that girl had," Fred said. He slapped Don on the back and sent him lurching toward the other side of the alley. "I told you this was the place."

Don laughed loudly.

The sailors emerged from the dark alley and drifted down the street. Their white uniforms were wrinkled and soiled. The crowd surged around them.

"Hey, navigator," Don said. "Keep me on course. This damn sea is getting rougher than hell. Let's head to port."

His hands grasped an imaginary wheel and his arms tensed as he wrestled with the raging storm.

"Aye, aye, pilot," Fred said. "Hell, you can't even keep a deck clean, let alone pilot a ship."

"Oh, hell, Fred. Have a little fun, will you?"

"I figure on having a lot of fun before we get out of here. Let's make it back to the bucket now, though. Gotta save some bread for tomorrow."

"Yeah, that's right," Don said.

They staggered through the naval base gate. Don fumbled for his wallet. He dug out his pass and then flipped the billfold open again and stared at it.

"Hell, Fred, I spent almost half my money. Almost fifty bucks. I forgot to get a kimono for my mother."

"Don't worry about it," Fred said. "You can get one tomorrow. Besides, look at all the fun you had."

"I don't know. My damn head's startin' to hurt. My mouth tastes like hell. And that girl. It wasn't like I expected."

"Hell," Fred said. The cranes painted black bars on his face. "You wanted something, you paid for it, and you got it. What do you want?"

"Oh, I guess you're right. Only tomorrow, I'm going to buy some stuff for Mom and the family."

"Yeah, we'll go out tomorrow," Fred said. He shook his head. "Be glad to hit the sack."

The sailors stumbled up the gangplank and made their way to their compartment just beneath the flight deck. Glen was sitting on his bunk, unwrapping a bulky package.

"There's good ole Glen," Fred said. "Hello, Glen. What you got in the package?"

Glen looked up. "You guys have really had the course, haven't you?"

"We had a ball," Fred said. "Drinkin', lovin', great time. Hey, that's a kimono you got there."

"Yeah," Glen said. "I met this Japanese girl this afternoon and she helped me pick it out. It's real silk."

"Real silk, huh?" Fred said. "Let's see it."

He lurched over and grabbed the kimono. He tested the cloth with his thumb.

"Hell, that's not silk."

"Yes it is," Glen said. "We went to a place recommended in that folder they gave us on the ship."

"You got taken," Fred said. "You should have been with us."

"Yeah," Don said. "We had a ball."

"Looks like it," Glen said. He walked out of the compartment.

"Let's turn in," Fred said.

"Yeah, my head's killing me," Don said.

## Riddle in the Thunderstorm

WILLIAM C. LATTA, JR.

I sit alone and watch the frantic light  
Of searing tracers through the southwest skies  
As white-hot wrath rips back the lids of night  
And blinks toward me with static-snapping eyes.

An angry mortar claps, then amplifies  
Its rage by pounding on the soundboard ground  
Until at last it rumbles down and dies  
And momentary silence falls around.

Now other fiery rockets hiss and pound,  
Advancing overhead and in behind,  
Surrounding me as though they would expound  
Some huge enigma to my groping mind.

But though I sense an innate fear, I find  
No meaning in this violence displayed—  
No gods, no chiseled tablets seen. Blind,  
I merely watch an aerial fusillade.

# Elegy

PATSY CAMPBELL

Death has come to you  
But you do not know it—  
Or why else do you stay here,  
Smiling sweetly at me,  
Laughing softly over our little jokes,  
Whispering our secrets in my ear  
The way you did before.  
I wish that you would go away,  
For when I reach out for your hand,  
I cannot find it—  
And yet you walk beside me  
Down rainy little streets;  
And at night  
You sit on the bed  
Waiting for me to come to you.

# Small Tribute

ANNE HASTINGS

It was evening and they sat around the ancient fireplace warming themselves from the cold, misting fog that had covered the harbor and now drifted around the inn. This was a grey, paint-naked Victorian inn whose life consisted of summers and the aging women. Its life, like theirs, was at an ebb, and the old ones loved the place because it kept out the world of tourists. From somewhere a fog horn sounded its muffled complaint, but it went unnoticed by the card players; all the women except the old Jewish woman played cards, and that she did not was only another of the things that separated her from the rest.

Mrs. Askonbaum sat near the windows in a white, wicker chair, reading the *Montreal Post*. With her cotton-stockinged legs bent to the angle of the chair and her feet square on the floor, she looked stiff and regal. The old Jewish woman was a serious, sad-faced old woman with tremendous dark, sunken eyes. Every evening, she asked, with a pained, confused expression, for her paper. She spoke with an accent unlike the usual ones of summer, and after she had come for the paper the clerks mimicked her with: "Do you shink I can have my papah now? Yesh, Mrs. Ass."

The young clerk sat at the desk attempting to look busy. He was a thin, muscular man with a pale complexion. His green, close-set eyes surveyed the lobby as he smoothed back a wave of his carefully combed hair. He had just graduated from college, and this was the job-in-between jobs. For the older clerk, this was his only job. He was here on the Maine seacoast every summer, and in Florida every winter. He was in middle age but the wrinkles on his forehead made him look older. He slumped in his ill-fitting suit, his great, wide hands resting his weight upon the desk. He gazed blankly about the room until his eyes rested on Mrs. Askonbaum.

"She's getting worse, that Mrs. Ass," said the older clerk. "Poor girl won't last another summer."

"Hmmm, yeah. Anyway, let's hope not for your sake, Art," the other answered, not looking up from his work. He took a deep draw on his cigarette, squinting as he did so.

"She's getting senile. Said today the fog is delaying her trip."

The other grinned. "Great— you say she's going back to Canada to be with the good, old Kanucks?"

"I doubt it. Where the hell would she *think* she was going?"

"Ha! For a broom ride. Where else?" and he laughed aloud.

It was eleven o'clock; time to close the lobby. The old ones were departing now to their fitful sleeps. As usual they exchanged polite goodnights, ignoring the Jewish woman, and as usual, she stayed and stood, hands behind her stiffened back, looking out the French windows at the fog.

"You ask her to leave, Art," pleaded the younger man. "I'll be awhile finishing up the accounts."

"Naaa, let's leave her alone this time. She's just a dying old woman now, and she knows it."

The other looked up from his work. A half-smile and frown were on his countenance. "Do I detect a note of sentimentality there, old fellah? Oh God, Art, you are getting soft!"

"Hell, no. I just don't see why she can't stand there half an hour more if it gives her satisfaction."



"But we can lose our jobs if the customers start complaining, and what you do for one old biddy you have to do for 'em all."

"Good reasoning, Roger. They teach you that at college?"

There was no reply.

"Roger, I'm sorry." He did not turn to address his colleague, but stood facing the windows, watching the night fog. "We shouldn't make fun of her. She had twice the education you've had—a Ph.D. in chemistry. And she's got a daughter in London doing research and a son here in Maine who's an M.D. She's seeing the ugly side for the first time."

"Didn't mean to knock her, Art. In fact, I'll forget it. More power to her. But, like I said, why don't you ask her to leave? She likes you. Tell her we're closed. She gives me the creeps." The man fumbled for another cigarette, his hands twitching a little as he did so.

The older clerk folded his arms and continued to look at the fog.

"Listen, Art. Are you going over there or do I have to?" He did not mean to be harsh, but he wanted to close the desk and be gone.

"I'll go, Roger. You going over and have a few beers?"

"Yes. And they close in two hours."

The older clerk came over to the Jewess and touched her lightly. "Mrs. Askonbaum, the lobby is closed now."

"Ach, I know, my boy. But just a little longer—I'll be going. There isn't much time left for me."

"Time, Mrs. Askonbaum? Time for what?"

She didn't answer him; she only gave him a long, penetrating, bitter smile that sent him back to the desk.

"She take the hint?"

"No . . . Yes . . . I think she's leaving."

"God. What a waste. It's a pity she isn't on the rejection list. And don't they have a policy about her people?"

"She's going now. Yes, they have a policy, but they didn't when she started coming. Nobody wants to be the one to tell her."

They watched her turn and lift the top part of her body with her hands, pushing at her chest. Then she nodded goodnight to the older clerk and shuffle-walked to the elevator.

By midnight they had closed the books and the younger man had left for the tavern in the next town. The older clerk remained in a chair by the fire. He loosened his tie and soiled shirt collar and slumped in the chair with his hands folded behind his head.

Half an hour passed, and the place was quiet except for the tick of the ancient clock and the occasional creaking of old floors burdened by a hundred years of summers.

Then he went over to the fireplace, put two logs on the smouldering fire, and waited. More minutes passed . . . and then he gave a little start. The foot-fall on the hall . . . He rose from his chair to greet Mrs. Askonbaum.

She looked up at him for an instant with the sleepless eyes. The circles beneath seemed darker and deeper. She smiled at him with less of the ennui of her day smiles, and shuffled over to the window.

"The fog has lifted a little, young man . . . and one can see the shore plainly in the light. And," she sighed with a rasp, "I am quite myself again, quite able to take care of myself now. You may go. And thank you."

"Goodnight, then, Mrs. Askonbaum."

She did not answer now. Her mouth was upturned in her sad smile and her hands

were folded in her lap. She sat in the white, wicker chair placed by the window where she could sit and watch the tide and lifting fog.

The clerk turned to go. He looked back at the fire and wondered how long it would be until it would go out.

## The Sylvan Wood Nymph

KEN KEEFER

The sylvan wood nymph

perched on her white rock

of Existence

Gazes into the reflection

of her sorrows

In hope that they

may vibrate sympathetically

with those of others.

# Between the Idea and the Reality

ART HOBSON

A boy is walking by night through lands of the desert.  
The world abounds with seekers seeking gold,  
Wavers waving flags and guns, shouters  
Shouting heaven and hell, but here are only  
The desert acres stretched out to a winking star.

The lonely boy walks on and now in a sudden  
Spark appears a stranger who speaks beyond  
All words, beyond all worlds yet to all worlds  
Who says—who whispers—but he is silent and see,  
He is gone: a star winks down on the boy.

By night there is time: in lands of the desert there is time.  
Time and—dawn! Sudden burst of day  
And sun standing at noontime flooding the mind  
With joy and flooding it with tears and saying  
"This is the hour for greatness; today you are One!"

Arms reach out to hold what lips are trembling  
To describe and then it is captured, is caged  
In words. Now loneliness is eased: the spark  
Will not be lost for ink and paper will preserve it  
Forever; the boy will not be lonely again.

Then the thought becomes a thing: a war,  
A nation, a love; the world is changed, the starving  
Are fed, a heart is moved to greatness: darkness  
Is gone, the winking star is hidden. But noontime  
Has an ending and man is there to witness.

The end comes neither with books nor speeches nor sound  
Of cannon, but simply with sleep and dreams and silence.  
Again the land of the desert and all that remains  
Is a star and a question: "Truth—where has it gone?"  
The star winks down. "Truth—was it there at all?"

As evening darkens, the boy makes an answer: "The moment  
Could not be caught by mind, the mind could not  
Be caught by words and even the words could not  
Be caught by men. The thing was a lie and truth  
If there at all was only there an instant."

Wind is blowing about the boy and sands  
Are covering his idea: the wind is piling  
The sands and only the wind can tell. The boy  
Still travels the lonely land seeking a stranger,  
Never to know the search is for himself.

# Dawn

ART HOBSON

Valleys of green and gold lie restless beneath the hand of God;  
Wind sifts down from the tops of mountains, and in the east  
A bar of crimson creeps over the earth.

Now stars have a dying, and the moon rests as a new dawning  
Slips through velvet pastures of night, bearing the seeds  
Which will blossom soon into day.

Heralds sing overhead while stalks of wheat  
Raise silent eyes into the distance, listening for the chord  
Of day's awakening.

The heavens are bursting with sun-shot anthems while all the earth  
Vibrates to morning's prelude: and suddenly, on the rim,  
The sun.

# The Fall

WILLIAM C. LATTA, JR.

—I—

Tony Rizotti, Joe Fabian, and me was down to the big empty lot on the corner of Seventh and Jackson. That's where we go sometimes to play war. After the Lyric burned down a couple of years ago, they come and hauled all the bricks and burned junk away. They half filled up the basement with a lot of the trash and a bunch of dirt. Since then, I bet we've dug enough holes around there to fill up the Liberty Tubes. We got us bomb craters and machine gun nests and foxholes all over the place. It's really the greatest now. Yeah, you oughta see it—just like my oldest bud Vic says Korea was. Well, anyway, as I started to say, we was all down there playing war, see? Tony, me, and Joe Fabian.

Well, Tony he went and got hisself wounded about ten minutes after we got there. He just kept crying over and over, "They got me, Bertie. Them lousy Commies got me, right here in my chest." He was really playing it straight, all right, what with his face all screwed up like that and all. He just laid there, pulling at his shirt and yelling, "They got me. Them frigging Commies got me."

Joe wanted to go for the medics, but I told him to stay put and watch out for Tony while I went. "You try and keep him quiet, and I'll go for help," I said. I didn't want to pull no rank on Joe, but I *was* the Sergeant, after all, and he was only a lousy PFC.

I picked up my Browning automatic and clipped six hand grenades to my belt. Then I started out through the enemy lines, since we was pretty near surrounded. I almost got mine before I had went thirty steps. All at once a Commie machine gun opened up on me from off to the left about ten feet. I flopped into a bomb crater and waited until they stopped shooting. Then I took one of the hand grenades off my belt. I pulled out the pin and counted up to ten to myself. Then I lobbed it over my head in the general direction of them Commies. I heard 'em scream just before the grenade went off. After the shrapnel quit flying around, I crawled out of the bomb crater real careful-like and inched my way toward them on my belly. It took me maybe two minutes to crawl over to where the grenade had went off. You always got to be careful for fear you might of missed a couple of them sneaking Commies. I hadn't missed none, though. There was about seventeen of them blown all over the place; all dead as hell. Just to make sure, I walked around, real calm-like, and shot each one through the back of the head with my Browning automatic.

Just when I was finishing, I heard somebody scream for real. At first, I thought it was probably just Tony back where I'd left him and Joe. But it wasn't. This here scream come from up on the side of the building next to the empty lot. I looked up and seen this here guy hanging against the side of the building. He was a window cleaner and one of the belts he was using to hold himself to the window sill had broke, I guess. Anyway, when I finally seen him, he was hanging there by one strap. He must of bashed his head on the side of the frigging window or something, because he was just hanging there limp. I started to run like hell over towards the building, and then it happened. I guess I was almost underneath him. The other belt must of broke, too—at least that's what everybody said later on.

There wasn't nothing I could do. I just stood there and watched the poor bastard fall. It was real queer. He just seemed to float down, slow as hell. I seen his head

hit the window sill on the floor below, the sixth floor I guess, and then he done a crazy sort of a somersault the rest of the way down.

I don't know why I done it, but I remember putting my hands up to my ears like when somebody sets off one of them big firecrackers. I guess I must of closed my eyes, too, because I can't remember seeing him hit the ground. I knowed when he hit, though. The whole place sort of shook for a second or so.

I didn't even have time to think about it none, I guess. All at once I was crying like a girl or something and run over to where he was. I damn near fainted. No kidding, it was awful. His head was bent clean down under his arm like he was a pigeon roosting or something. His arms and legs was all twisted and bent around where they wasn't supposed to be. I don't mean it was just the way he looked that was awful, though. It was everything. I didn't even know the guy, for christsake, and there I was bawling my eyes out. I guess you must think I was crazy or something. I don't know what the hell was wrong with me.

The next thing I knowed was I was a block down the street yelling at this here cop. I can't figure that out either. I just kept yelling, "Hey, hey, hey," as loud as I could. I couldn't say another damn thing. I remember I wanted to tell the cop that some poor guy had fell, but I just stood there like an idiot and kept yelling, "Hey, hey." I kept pointing up the street and yelling. I just kept it up until the cop understood something was wrong and then I run back to the side of the building, with the cop right beside me. By then a whole lousy raft of people was jammed around the guy who had fell, so I sort of stayed back where they wouldn't see me like that. Anyway, I didn't want to see that poor bastard there on the ground anymore.

—II—

"It'sa gonna be noder warm one today, Meester Greene."

I had to stop in front of Luigi's newspaper and magazine stand and agree with him. Every morning since I began this beat, it's been the same thing. Always something about the weather, anything about the weather, in order to get me to stop. I knew just what he was going to say next.

"But it'sa okay by me, Meester Greene. It'sa make me tink a Napoli in summer when I am a boy."

If it had looked like it was going to be a cool day, it would have reminded him of a spring or a fall or a cool summer they had had once in Naples. I don't really mind Luigi. In fact, I sort of get a kick out of the little Italian. But, after all, I have a job to do, and I can't see how I can do it if I spend a lot of time talking to everyone on my beat. That's one of the things they teach you in police school: Establish respect for yourself and for your authority. Now I'm not one of those gung-ho guys who thinks everything has to be done according to the book, but I do think it's better not to get too friendly with the people on the beat. If people get to thinking you're a pushover or you're soft, they'll start taking advantage of you and there's no telling where it will all stop.

This is really a pretty good neighborhood. Mostly Italians and Poles who work down in the steel mills. No real trouble-makers, except for a few of the young punks who don't have enough to keep them busy. Once in a while there's a family fight when the old man comes home with a little too much under his belt. Otherwise, it's a pretty quiet neighborhood. But like I say, you have to let them know you won't stand for anything out of line.

Anyway, ever since I finished patrolmen's school eight months ago and got assigned to this beat, Luigi has been doing his best to get me to stop every morning. It's always the same thing—the weather, or if I like chicken cacciatore or fried scampi, maybe. He's a pretty hard guy to get past, but like I said, I don't believe



in getting too chummy with the people on my beat. I usually just agree with whatever Luigi says and then move on as soon as possible.

Well, I was about to walk away from his stand when I heard someone yelling his head off down the street. I turned around and saw this little kid running toward me. When he got close enough, I could see he was crying about something. I caught him by the arm and tried to calm him down, but he just kept gasping and shouting, "Hey, hey, hey." He was really shaken up and he kept pointing down the street behind him.

"Okay, kid, okay. Stop your yelling and tell me what happened." I shook him a little and even thought about slapping him to make him calm down. But I finally just turned him loose and ran back up the street with him. Probably just a family fight, I thought. The old man is probably slapping the kid's mother around or tearing up the place or something. By now, this was old stuff for me. It usually didn't happen so early in the day, but it didn't matter. I knew how to handle these cases by now. You have to go in and be rough from the start. Make them know you mean business. Let them know you are a policeman, not some old lady.

The kid stopped running when we got near an empty lot on the corner. He was still yelling, though, just like he had been and he kept looking over at me and pointing. Then, when we were past the last building in the block, I saw a big crowd of people standing near the side next to the lot. The first thing that came into my mind was that it was a street fight, so I raised my stick and moved in quickly.

"Okay, okay, let's break it up. Get back, all of you." You have to make these people know you mean business. "Do you hear me? Back up now! Break it up!"

I heaved my way through the crowd. Then, suddenly, I saw why they were there. For a second, I couldn't move. Some poor guy was crumpled up on the ground like he had just been hit by a fast freight. I just stood there and looked down at him. But I'm a policeman, I kept telling myself. I've got to do something. I can't let this one bother me, too. I don't even know who the guy is.

"Has anybody called a doctor?" I looked around and saw that Luigi was standing right behind me.

"Luigi, go down and get Doc Simmons. Then call an ambulance." I squatted beside the twisted body and checked for some sign of life. But the guy was dead. I straightened and tried not to look at the pile of broken bones that was all that was left of him.

"Does anybody know who this man is?" I opened my report pad and pulled out a pencil.

"Yeah. He's Angelo Giardello. He lives over on Arlington," someone answered. I put it down on the pad, just under the date and the location. That's it, I told myself. Keep calm. He's only another guy—and he's dead now. You don't even know him. Just put down the details. He's nothing to you but a statistic.

Find out how it all happened. Keep the crowd back. Give orders. Just wait for Doc Simmons, who isn't even needed now, except to make it all official. Just wait for the ambulance that should be a hearse.

For God's sake, don't look at him! Don't even think about him. He's dead, cold, unfeeling. Don't let it get you like the others did. You're a policeman, that's all. You're not supposed to feel. He's nothing to anybody now. Just put it all down on this pad in your hand: July 17; vacant lot, corner of Seventh and Jackson; Angelo Giardello, occ. window cleaner; . . . Now get the rest. Just write down the details.

"All right now, did anybody see this happen?" That's right, keep your voice steady.

"Yeah, I did." It was the same kid who had come to get me. He was standing on the edge of the crowd, looking down at his feet. No one else spoke.

"You stay here, son. All right, the rest of you people go on now. Let's break it up. There's nothing more to see here. Come on now, let's break it up, I said!" The crowd finally moved back, dividing into smaller, whispering groups. I let it go at that.

The doctor arrived, and after he had made his examination, I wrote down: death instantaneous: probable cause—broken neck; certified—10:45 a.m.; Everett K. Simmons, M.D. Just facts. Don't let your hand shake like that. You're doing fine. It doesn't mean anything to *you*.

Now I could hear the ambulance screaming its way toward us. No need to hurry now. He won't be comforted any by your hopeful noise. He doesn't even know what we know—that he's dead—that he's nothing any longer but a name on my . . . Oh, God! What's wrong with me, anyway? But I have to finish this. I have to take charge here, show my authority, put down all the details, keep my eyes off of him.

The ambulance stopped. I watched as the two men in white brought the chromed stretcher with wheels toward us from the gaping doors. They looked toward me, but before I could say anything, the doctor had told them he was dead. I managed to write down that the body was removed from the scene at 10:56 a.m., and then I turned away to question the boy who had seen the whole thing happen.

### —III—

I was sitting here, Angelo, thinking about the happiness six years ago when you told me you were a window cleaner who wanted to be an artist and I agreed to leave college and marry you and have your children and help you. I was remembering how I believed in you and laughed at my father's fears and turned my back to his objections and caused him, a great proud man, to cry. I had believed you really wanted that, Angelo—to be an artist. I was remembering how I waited and tried to encourage you and then cried a little, after a while. But it had only been a dream. Life was too great for you, Angelo. "But don't you see that we have to eat, Connie?" Had I complained, Angelo? Did I beg you to keep on cleaning windows—to make sure we had enough to eat? Do you remember, Angelo, how I believed in you and pleaded with you to try—to forget about our eating, that we would get along somehow? Do you remember, Angelo?

They came to the door and asked me if I was Mrs. Angelo Giardello and I wanted to say no, I was Constance Laurent and I hadn't always lived here, that I had once lived in a sixteen-room house and had had fourteen dolls. But I said yes and they stood there, not saying anything else, and I asked them to come in and what was the matter. It was you, Angelo, they said, and you had had an accident and had fallen seven stories and landed in a vacant lot and were dead. It had happened quickly and you hadn't had time to suffer any. You were unconscious when you fell, from hitting your head on the window frame, and they really didn't think you even knew you were falling. They were terribly sorry to have to tell me this and if they could do anything at all for me, just let them know and they would be more than glad to help out. And then they stood up and said they were sorry again and that I should try to remember that you hadn't really suffered, they were sure, and then they were gone, too. But I was still here, Angelo.

I walked over to our window, the window with the view that you had promised me before we were married. "We'll buy a little house in the country where we can paint. We'll have a whole acre of ground and a window with a view so you can stand and see the apple trees in bloom. And we'll have a garden and lots of children

to swing under the apple trees." Do you remember that, Angelo? I looked out and watched the heat dancing and shimmering above the tarred roofs below. I couldn't quite see the apple blossoms, Angelo, only the chimneys and the smokestacks above the mills on the other side of the chimneys. I couldn't quite see the children swinging, either, only a pigeon now and then stopping on one of the chimneys to find relief from the smoke and the sulphur in the air.

What had they said—you hadn't suffered? No, I'm sure you didn't. You weren't one to suffer, were you, Angelo? You left that for others. Becoming an artist would have meant suffering, wouldn't it? Where are my children, Angelo? The ones you promised me to fill the acre with swinging and laughing under the apple trees outside our window?

Hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus—hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Hail Constance Laurent Giardello full of emptiness thy misery is with thee cursed art thou among the pigeons and the chimneys and the smokestacks and the God-made heat and the man-made smoke. . . . Where are they, Angelo—my children? "We'll have them, Connie, wait and see. They'll come along when we are settled a little." That's what you said. But, Angelo, how long does it take to be *settled*? You didn't suffer, did you, Angelo? "They'll come, wait and see. Besides, we have each other, Connie." Oh, Angelo. Five years, Angelo. How long does it take?

How proud you were when you built the little window box for me and filled it with geraniums. They were nice, Angelo, and I almost loved you for it. But love comes with children, Angelo. Children and apple trees and gardens. I asked you what was happening to the geraniums. "Sulphur in the air, I suppose." Sulphur? Is that what makes them yellow and die?

You died, too, Angelo. They told me that. They said you fell seven stories. I can lean out here and look down and see how far you fell. Look, I'm dropping this geranium. It won't suffer, either. It really doesn't care any longer. It tried to live, but it couldn't be apple trees and children, so it died. I died, too, Angelo. You didn't know that, did you? I began to die the day we moved here. "Only a few weeks, until we get our feet on the ground," you said. Fifty-two weeks in a year, five years. Are your feet on the ground yet? Yes, I'm dead, too. From the sulphur and the tarred roofs and the smokestacks and the smoke.

They kept waiting for me to cry, Angelo. They didn't want me to cry, but they were waiting and they were a little disappointed when I didn't, so they left. I used to cry. I cried when I couldn't see the children and the apple trees. I cried when you were so afraid we wouldn't have enough to eat. Sometimes, I cried for the geraniums. They tried so hard, Angelo. You never knew I cried, did you, Angelo? That would have made you suffer. But I don't cry now. The geraniums are dead and I'm dead and I don't think things that are dead can cry. Only things that can laugh can cry, Angelo. You can laugh. Children can laugh the most. That's why they cry so much. Are you crying now, Angelo? No, that's right, you're dead now, aren't you? I'd almost forgotten.



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