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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allied Fashions</td>
<td>425 North Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Students’ Store</td>
<td>Montana State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drs. D. R. and L. R. Barnett</td>
<td>129 E. Broadway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedord Implement Co.</td>
<td>.618 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brest’s Market</td>
<td>1801 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimney Corner</td>
<td>.540 Daly Ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Cleaners</td>
<td>.612 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins Texaco Service Station</td>
<td>S. Higgins and 6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairway Drive-Inn</td>
<td>Highway 93 and Middlesex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fender’s Super Market</td>
<td>2401 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frazer’s Meat Market</td>
<td>S. 6th West and S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansen’s Ice Cream</td>
<td>.519 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. O. Bell Co.</td>
<td>.605 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Bakery</td>
<td>.529 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen’s Furniture</td>
<td>.135 W. Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken-Mar Cleaners</td>
<td>2330 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy’s Furniture</td>
<td>Higgins and E. Pine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana-Dakota Utilities</td>
<td>.121 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana Power Co.</td>
<td>Masonic Temple Block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missoula Hairdressing Parlor</td>
<td>.137 W. Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missoula Laundry and Dry Cleaning</td>
<td>111 E. Spruce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missoula Mercantile Co.</td>
<td>Higgins and Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missoulian Publishing Co.</td>
<td>.502 N. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Note</td>
<td>.614 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orvis Music House</td>
<td>135 E. Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw Shoe Service</td>
<td>527 So. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stork Nest</td>
<td>Hammond Arcade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrasher Heating Service</td>
<td>.612 S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsity Barber Shop</td>
<td>S. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. C. Ward and Son</td>
<td>.321 N. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yandt’s Men’s Wear</td>
<td>.403 N. Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Cab Co.</td>
<td>116 W. Front Street</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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SPRING 1949 Volume 7

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CONTENTS

A Home for the Conquering Heroes, by Patrick Connolly......... 1
Abigail, by Irene Turli ........................................... 8
The Cottonwood, by Larry Kadlec .................................. 11
Race Prejudice: Mississippi and Montana, by Bill Rogers ........ 12
Wait for Me, by A. E. Pederson ................................... 14
As a Friend Betrays ..., by Mary Fran Law ......................... 18
How Much Rube? by Harry C. Nelson............................. 19
The Adventures of Peter Rabbit, by G. Newton Buker............. 27
Poems, by David Perkins ........................................ 30
The Seventh Post, by Reid Collins................................. 32
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Mrs. Bluebonnet lived on a quiet, tree-lined street, a short distance from Fairwealth College. Since the death of her husband, she had lived comfortably alone in the big house, spending long hours rocking in the chair by the window, gazing intently at the leaf-blown street.

When someone passed, she would stiffen in the chair, stop rocking, and then she would lean forward until her nose touched the curtain. Her mind would rumble with names, places, long-past incidents, and she would murmur to herself, "Now, where can she be going?"

If a stranger walked by, her nose would touch the window, and her mind would groan as it desperately attempted to attach this stranger to a name, place, or scandal.

Every native of Fairwealth knew Mrs. Bluebonnet, every child was trained to say a pleasant "hello" to that short, dumpy figure, to that tight-lipped small face dominated by a wrinkled brow, horn-rimmed glasses, and dark brown hair that indecently ignored the wrinkles and the years.

Without knowing why, everyone referred to her as a "dear old lady" and a "pillar of the church." Indeed, she did rule mightily over the minister as well as the congregation. What was that young minister's name who had defied her? Oh, a long time ago. He had wanted to introduce a new hymn into the service, but when he, in his young baritone, began to sing, the congregation stood silently and nervously waiting for Mrs. Bluebonnet's trilling soprano to lead them forward.

Mrs. Bluebonnet, however, would not sing—her eyes said that only the old-loved hymns were proper. And as the brave new minister sang alone, the congregation shuffled awkwardly and knew that this young man would have a short stay in Fairwealth.

Many ministers followed that brave young man, until Reverend Cantrell, immediately upon arrival, became aware of Mrs. Bluebonnet's entrenchments, acknowledged them, and settled down to a long stay in Fairwealth.

All through the long war, Mrs. Bluebonnet donated time and energy to the war effort. She knitted prodigiously. Sock followed sock, and her thoughts seldom strayed from the boys over there. She thought of them as clean-cut American boys, fighting bravely, dying silently for Christian ideals. Her mind played with heroic battles and brave deeds. She wished she had a son to send to foreign shores.
The war ended, and Reverend Cantrell announced from the pulpit that every citizen should contribute to the rehabilitation of the returning soldiers. Many of them would attend college, and since Fairwealth College could accommodate only a few hundred, and G.I.'s would swell the usual enrollment to an unheard-of number, it was the congregation's duty to open their homes to these boys.

Mrs. Bluebonnet was, at first, reluctant to sacrifice the privacy of her home. But she considered it carefully and realized that it was her Christian duty to open her doors to the war-weary. The two upstairs rooms had been shut off for years. They were impossible to heat, but she could clean them, and the boys would be grateful for a place to lay their heads. She would turn her house into a home for the conquering heroes.

Three young men moved in. And in the weeks that followed, she felt uneasy as she watched them running in and out of the house, throwing her way a quick "hello." All of their actions seemed strange. Time appeared to have no meaning to them, for often they would leave the house at eleven o'clock at night—now where could they be going?—and they would return at three and four in the morning. She would lie in bed and listen to their soft laughter and voices as they stumbled up the darkened stairway, but it was impossible to distinguish words. And in the daytime when they came into the house, she would, from her rocking chair, attempt to draw them into conversations, but they would only smile, nod, and hurry up the stairs.

She had planned that they would gather with her around the piano to sing hymns, but when she had suggested it, they replied in a body, "Sorry, Mrs. Bluebonnet, but we have to be going."

It was most upsetting. For some reason they did not wish to be rehabilitated. But, in her own way, she grew to know them better. After the boys left for school in the mornings, she would climb the stairs, clutching a dust mop—a legitimate excuse—and enter their rooms. After a quick glance out of the window, she would read their opened mail.

Most of the letters were from relations, mothers and sisters, and as she read, her attitude changed. The letters consisted mostly of commonplace things and events, and the boys, in her mind, lost their mystery. They were no longer strange after effects of the war, but were quite ordinary human beings.

Armed with this new knowledge, she became bolder in her approach. She told them that they often made too much noise in their rooms, and she hinted that she did not approve of late hours. When they did come in late, she coughed loudly to let them know that they had disturbed her rest.

One evening the three of them came downstairs. The redheaded one, the boldest one, was the spokesman. He said, "Our rooms are always cold, and there never seems to be any hot water."

She just smiled sweetly, rocked back and forth, and told them that she had one of the finest homes in town—everybody knew that—and if they really didn't like it—

When she told them that, and so nicely, they looked a little bewildered, mumbled, something, and went back upstairs. She thought that they were very unreasonable. Imagine complaining about her home, and anyway, they knew, as she knew, that housing
was very limited in Fairwealth. Besides she was too lenient with them.

Now on Saturdays or Sundays when they slept late, she would cough gently outside of their closed doors, rattle the doorknobs, and when she heard them stir, she would call gently, "Boys, I want to dust in there." She firmly believed that it was a sin to sleep the day away.

One evening as they were going out, she stopped them at the door. She said, "Boys, you know it costs something to run this house.. I have to raise your rent."

And she smiled sweetly, but to no avail, for they answered her with sullen looks, and stomped out of the door. They returned late that night, slammed the door, went into her parlor, turned on the lights, and then one of them boldly began to play the piano. And all night long they sang loud vulgar songs. She lay in bed too terrified to move.

In the morning after they had gone to bed, she slipped notes under their doors asking them to leave. She did not allow drunkards in her home.

After that experience she considered shutting off the upstairs, but the added income did help; besides Reverend Cantrell would never understand, and there must be some deserving young men.

Other roomers came, but it was usually only a week until she wrote a note and slipped it under a door.

At present she had one student, Arthur Latcher. He was always pleasant, always quiet, but he, like the others, often stayed out late, slept until all hours on Saturday and Sunday, but when she coughed outside his door, or rattled the doorknob, he didn't stir, didn't mumble. He just gave one piercing snore, and then there would be no other sound. That did irritate her.

She would go downstairs, rock in her chair, and think about that odd man. He had not received any mail as yet. She knew nothing of his background.

However, one day a letter arrived for Mr. Arthur Latcher. It had been forwarded from 922 Lacey St. "Why, that's Mrs. Carlson's home!" flashed through Mrs. Bluebonnet's mind.

She took the letter up to Arthur and went back to her chair. After a few suspenseful minutes, Arthur came down the stairs and went out the front door.

She watched through the curtain as he walked slowly up the street. Then she got up, grabbed her dust mop, and rushed up the stairs. The envelope lay on the dresser. She picked it up and cautiously removed the letter. The girl who wrote it must have been his sister for it contained nothing but small talk about Arthur's hometown. Mrs. Bluebonnet was very disappointed.

The front door slammed. Quick footsteps sounded on the stairs. With surprising calmness, she inserted the letter in the envelope and placed it on the dresser. When Arthur entered the room, Mrs. Bluebonnet was busily dusting under the study table.

"Well," she said, "you didn't stay long."

Arthur laughed, "No, it's too cold for me out there."

Mrs. Bluebonnet dusted under the chair before she left.

It was disturbing. That letter hadn't helped much. She would rock by the hour, thinking of her roomer. "Why not call up Mrs. Carlson, and ask why he left her home?" She was delighted with her thought, and almost skipped
over to the telephone. She glanced up the stairs; good, he wasn’t coming. She dialed the number.

Mrs. Carlson’s worry-worn voice crept into her ear, “Hello, who is this?”

“This is Mrs. Bluebonnet. How are you feeling?”

A long sigh floated over the wire. “Oh, not too well. My back aches constantly.”

Mrs. Bluebonnet clucked in sympathy, and said, “Dear, that is too bad, but you know I have been having those terrible headaches again.”

There was a long pause. Mrs. Carlson finally broke the silence, and she sounded irritated. “Did you want something, Mrs. Bluebonnet?”

“Yes. It might sound a trifle odd, but I wanted some information. It’s about my roomer, an Arthur Latcher. Do you know him?”

The telephone line crackled, “Know him? I ordered him out of my house. He drinks. And Mrs. Bluebonnet, I simply do not allow any drunkards in my home.”

Mrs. Bluebonnet was obviously shaken. “Thank you, Mrs. Carlson. I’ll get rid of him right away—maybe tonight—certainly, he can’t stay here. And Mrs. Carlson—”

Footsteps clattered on the stairs—“I’ll call you back.” She hung the phone on the receiver. “Hello, Arthur,” she said.

Arthur smiled at her. “Is it any warmer out, do you know?”

“I don’t know, Arthur,” she said, smiling back at him, “I haven’t been out today.”

Mrs. Bluebonnet spent the weekend plotting the eviction of Arthur. She wished that he would come home staggering and sick, then in righteous indignation she could write him a cutting note.

But he disappointed her. He did go out, stayed late, but he came in so quietly that she almost didn’t hear him. He always went to school, studied hard, but she was convinced that the evils of drink would soon overpower him, and she daily studied his face for signs of dissipation.

Soon Arthur received another letter. Mrs. Bluebonnet spent several uncomfortable, rocking hours waiting for him to leave his room. When he did, she, in her eagerness to climb the stairs, forgot her dust mop.

The letter was lying on the dresser in a dainty blue envelope. It smelled faintly of perfume. It was neatly typewritten, but had no return address or signature. She gasped as she read:

Darling,

Why don’t you come to see me? Why do you ignore me? My worst fears have been realized. I went to the doctor, and he told me what I dreaded so much to hear. If you would come to see me, I know we could arrive at a solution. Please don’t leave me to face this alone.

Mrs. Bluebonnet was horrified. She trembled as she put the short note back into the envelope. “The beast! Out he goes!” She stood there for a moment. “Oh, why wasn’t there a return address!” It was irritating. She snatched up the envelope and peered at the postmark. Her eyes widened. It was postmarked Fairwealth! “A local girl!” Mrs. Bluebonnet hurried downstairs to sit in her rocking chair and mentally pass in review all the girls that she knew.

When Arthur came home, she leaned back in her chair and
glared at him. She was sure that the wrath that boiled within her would hurtle out of her eyes and strike him dead.

He smiled at her, balanced his books on one arm, and gave her a little wave, "How are you doing, Mrs. Bluebonnet?"

"Fine," she managed to mutter, "Of course, my headaches—" She remembered her indignation. "The beast!" she said to herself.

The following week there was another typed, unsigned note in a blue envelope.

Darling,

Please come and comfort me. If you realized how I cry at nights, I'm sure you wouldn't ignore my plea. I'm so lonely. And I can't understand your attitude. You aren't the boy I used to know.

I'm sure my mother suspects. She keeps asking questions. I can't put her off much longer.

Mrs. Bluebonnet was alive with curiosity. She went for long walks and studied each girl she met. She went into all the stores and scrutinized the shop girls. And at church she made a spectacle of herself. Busy with her quick glances, she forgot to sing, and the congregation wavered and stumbled over the familiar words. Only the red face of Reverend Cantrell brought her back to an awareness of her position, and then she threw back her head and released her highest and most piercing notes.

Safe in her rocking chair, she shook her head in disappointment. "Well," she would say, "It's really too soon to tell. In a month it will show." That was some comfort, for she would be the first to know the complete story. But in the meantime, what was to be done about that scoundrel who slept under her roof? Well, another month wouldn't hurt.

During the following weeks those blue envelopes came regularly. The pleadings became more and more intense.

The suspense was showing on Mrs. Bluebonnet. More and more she was forgetting the dust mop when she visited Arthur's room. But if Arthur suffered from anxiety, he concealed it well. He whistled constantly, in a most irritating fashion, and when he left for school, he always gave her a cheerful greeting. He studied hard, but still he would go out carousing on Friday and Saturday nights. The drunkard, the—!

Those notes became frantic.

Darling,

Mother knows. I had to tell her. But I can't name you. She has pleaded, begged, threatened, but I can't tell—that is for you to do. And I pray that you will come and stand beside me.

I begged Mother not to tell Father, but it is getting rather obvious, and I can't understand why he doesn't notice. I am thankful that he is going to Los Angeles on a long business trip, because if he finds out, he will force me to reveal your name, and then, I know, he will kill you.

But if you would come, then we could see him together. I'm sure we could make him understand. Darling, won't you help me?"

Mrs. Bluebonnet put the note back on the dresser. Her heart was beating rapidly. She turned slowly and then stopped.

Staring at her from underneath
the bed were two empty bottles. She stooped over, lifted the bed spread, and peered closely at them. "Beer bottles!" she gasped. "The beast! drinking under my roof." She picked them up with horrified fingers and held them straight out in front of her as she carried them downstairs. She put them in a paper bag before she buried them in the garbage.

"The beast," he said, and sat down to write a note, but she couldn't—not yet.

Now she went downtown with a vengeance. She frankly studied every girl, and the singing at church was carried on mostly by the weak voices of the children while their elders shifted from foot to foot, opened and shut their mouths, and wondered what had happened to their leader in song, the shrilling voice of Mrs. Bluebonnet.

But then, one Sunday, Reverend Cantrell boomed his voice out into the little church. The children, in amazement, watched him wide-eyed and followed their parents into silence. He sang alone. When he finished, he instructed the congregation to turn to page ninety-seven in the hymn book. "This is one of my favorite hymns," he said. "I believe we have neglected it. Now just follow me."

He began to sing, and one little girl joined him. The rest of the congregation watched Mrs. Bluebonnet.

Abruptly, the minister's loud voice pierced Mrs. Bluebonnet's one thought. She suddenly became aware that she was in church, that it was time to sing, and she opened her mouth, but quickly closed it. What was that that Reverend Cantrell was singing? She was certainly not familiar with it, and she glared at him with open hostility.

He sang on, and then Mrs. Carlson's unsteady voice joined his. Children chimed in. Soon the church rang with voices. Everyone sang except Mrs. Bluebonnet, and she stood there red-faced, indignant, ignored.

Spring came and made way for summer. Mrs. Bluebonnet kept her ears as alert as her eyes. Surely, by this time, somebody must have seen the girl. Voices must be carrying her condition about the town. But no scandal reached her ears. Certainly the girl must still be in town, because all of the notes were postmarked Fairwealth. The mother must be keeping her locked up. "Ah," Mrs. Bluebonnet concluded, "she must live in the country. Now whom do I know who lives in the country?"

A week before Arthur's final examinations, the letters reached a startling climax:

Darling,
I can't go anywhere, can't see anyone. Mother's tears finally shattered me. I told her your name. I didn't want to, but you must realize my position.

Mother wired Dad. He will be home next week, and I dread what will happen. Please come before it is too late.

That week Mrs. Bluebonnet nearly went mad with nervous tension. But Arthur just studied diligently for his examinations. "He must have nerves of steel," Mrs. Bluebonnet thought, "or else the war completely unbalanced him."

Monday and Tuesday passed. Wednesday came. Arthur was taking his last examination, and while he was at school, a blue envelope arrived. Mrs. Bluebonnet successfully fought an impulse
to steam it open, but it was with reluctance that she carried it up stairs.

Arthur was leaving for his home immediately after he completed his examination, and he had already packed. She put the envelope on the bare dresser and went back to her chair and rocked and rocked.

Late in the afternoon Arthur came running up the front steps. He opened the door and walked in. "Hello, Mrs. Bluebonnet. I think I did alright on those examinations. May I use the phone?"

He went over to the telephone and called a taxi. Then he went up stairs.

After about twenty minutes the taxi honked noisily outside. Arthur came down the stairs carrying his baggage. He stopped at the door.

"Goodbye, Mrs. Bluebonnet—and thanks for everything."

She smiled, and then he was gone. She climbed the stairs, faint with fear that the letter would not be there. She entered the bare-looking room, crept over to the dresser, and peered through her glasses. It was not there. A strange sickness filled her—disappointment mingled with a biting emptiness.

She peered anxiously about the room. She emptied the waste paper basket on to the floor—torn papers, ashes, cigarette butts—and, yes, there was the blue envelope.

Her tight-drawn face broke into a happy smile, and she sat down, relaxed and eager, on the edge of the bed. And she read:

Darling,

Everything is alright now. The twins arrived prematurely, but I know they will always thrive. Mom is happy, Dad is delighted, and I can relax now—

Then Mrs. Bluebonnet looked closely at the letter. Her eyelids popped up like toast out of a toaster, and her dark-stained eyes strained over the rim of her glasses, as she read on—

I named one Curiosity, and the other Suspense. Aren't they cute names. And thank you, Mrs. Bluebonnet, for putting up with me. Of course, the room was cold, the water worse, and you did like to snoop, but then, even if I did have a few beers you put up with me—stuck by the wavering veteran—and I stayed long enough in one place to get my studying done. I won't be back next year. Don't look for me.

Always,

Arthur

Tears burst from Mrs. Bluebonnet's eyes. Her face twitched and reddened. She wanted to swear, but couldn't. She stood up, tears streaming down her face, and she stumbled down the stairs muttering, "Oh, oh, oh." She sank into her rocking chair and sobbed, "They don't want to be rehabilitated."
Abigail

By IRENE TURLI

Abigail was fascinated by the dance. She had seen the Ballet Russe once, and she had watched Roland Devausier do the "Clown Dance" over and over again whenever he was in town. She loved the sequence from Romeo and Juliet, but most of all she loved the "Clown Dance" with its combination of wit and grace. Perhaps Abigail was not a little in love with Roland, too, the tall, lithe man with the tender smile. He might not have been all that she saw in him, but she was easily swayed by the emotions of the art world; and she responded to Roland through his art, for so she knew him and in no other way. Of his personal life she had heard nothing.

"Come along, darling," Aunt Mathilde said upon entering. "We must not miss our train."

Because they were so short a way from Chicago they were going by day coach. She had no thrill of excitement over travel. She had traveled a great deal, from one Aunt to the other. After she had visited Aunt Maret in Boston, she was going to New York. Aunt Betty had died and left her the house she owned. She felt that it would be strange to go and live there alone—this was Aunt Maret's idea. Maret prided herself upon an independent spirit.

Aunt Mathilde smoothed her silver hair and said, "You must write to me often." Aunt Mathilde had always considered Aunt Mathilde an indispensible asset to Abigail. It was hard upon her now to realize that the child so willingly listened to Maret. Maret was one of the lesser black sheep that sometimes happen upon a family tree, but the fact that now she had become circumspect did not alter the fact that Aunt Mathilde was much better.

To Abigail the promise that she might see Roland more often, that she might walk the streets he walked, was in her idea of independence, but the true scope of it was not yet upon her. She was not thrilled by uncertainties. She felt secure, as if the rest of her life lay patterned before her, with a Roland dancing in its spotlight.

Aunt Mathilde looked at her niece without emotion, and found herself disapproving of her looks. She looked well-groomed, well-brought-up, but with that look was some vacancy of expression, as if the mind traveled without the body. This look had once or twice been on Maret's face in her sight, but far more strongly, the passions of Maret only a little under the surface. Damn the incompetence of Betty, anyway, didn't she know what might occur?

Both Mathilde and Maret offered
advice, but Maret offered to help her shop, which was more concrete. It was often a surprise to Abigail to see how well she really did look. Maret had changed her, for previously, as Maret knew, Abigail’s daytime wear had always been stoically reminiscent of Mathilde.

Maret smiled at Abigail as she paraded. “You must take the dance, my child, you will be a marvel at the dance? And do you sing? You must sometimes practice, and your piano—do not let the arts desert you. I will give you a letter to my friend Montalt Sloan, and you must see him often. He knows New York.”

By the time fateful July had come around, pretty Abigail, the subject of a painting by Sloan, the toast of New York, the friend of the questing reporter—and no Roland anywhere at all—oh, how the time flew!

Always she looked for Roland, she thought by chance to meet him. She said nothing of it. She went out more often with Sloan than she cared to do, in the hope Roland would be there. She and Emily Contes, the wife of the iron and steel man, were constantly together. The world was unproportionately bright. Her lids sometimes drooped from the excesses of the life she led, and to no purpose—for she had not found Roland.

She did not find Roland, never was to find him. Roland had deserted her ideal. He had refused all theatrical assignments. He was gone. He was married to some farm girl, he had no right to sink to such ordinary conduct. Abigail read about it in the papers one morning, and with it a considerable expose of his former loves. She burned with anger. This man, this Roland, he was too old. He was not what she had made of him. Her ideal was gone with nothing whatever to replace him. Roland no longer danced before her, only in her tired state.

She had not, then, the necessary stamina to resist Contes, the son of Emily. He was now twenty-one, a sulky young man intent upon the pleasures of the world. He was that kind who considered matrimony fatal. His charms, of which he was not unaware, seemed magnified in her sight because she had built so great an empire for Roland, who no longer wanted it. She felt lost, and young Edward was one to cling to—cling she did. Their romance blazed in the gossip columns, and was not really so—poor Mathilde did not know that. Mathilde took unwilling counsel with Maret, who did know it, and they quarreled. Abigail floated on in a half-daze, led by a passion she did not understand, until at last the meanings came fully upon her consciousness. She walked out on him, went home, and bolted her door securely. She was exhausted by a struggle she did not know she did not know she had won.

Abigail awoke to ask, “What in heaven’s name am I doing here alone?” She called for Aunt Maret. She forgot her other Aunt, and Mathilde retreated. She could obtain no comfort anywhere, because she could not ask for guidance. She feared to put into words what was wrong—that she was out of place in the world of lights and shadows. Mr. Sloan consulted at length with Maret, and they decided she must go out, but in their company for a time until her equilibrium was restored. They made a blunder they did not know about, and that was to take her to see Roland Devausier in a ballet version of The Sleeping Beauty. He had renounced the stage for love, but love had seen fit to put him back
upon it. His wife sat in the first box to the right.

Abigail could not look at him, or thought she could not. He was her prince, now lost. He was the enigma, the emperor who would not rule. He was the answer to part of her misery, and she suspected him of all of it. She would not heed him, she would put a film between herself and him, and only appear to watch. But she did watch, her ability to be immune was not great. She saw him now, the prince who came to find he knew not whom behind a bower of roses. Light, and quick, and graceful, he embodied all the meaning of romance in his movements and expressions. She felt tears running down her cheeks and did not suppose she could explain them. Maret was feeling wistful, she was dreamy-eyed. She paid little attention. It was Edward, coming into the box, who tried to understand.

"I must see you. I must apologize for what I had said to you." He looked more mature, but not less willful. She smiled at him with smug contempt, sure of her own position. "And you apologize for something you still believe?"

"I assure you, I did not know what I was saying. I do not want you going on thinking badly of me."

"I do not think of you at all. I like to think of Roland better. He is a prince, and you are just a small blackguard."

Maret was astonished, she put her hand on Sloan's and said as much to him. Sloan, who knew just what was wrong, smiled a little grimly at history repeating itself.

"Don't be foolish, you young people. Wait, my little Abbi, and the boy will out-blackguard everyone to prove you wrong, and you will out-queen every queen to prove you're too good for him. Then the two of you will be wasted, believe me."

Edward was on his knees beside Abigail, very awkwardly so. She could have upset him by a gentle push. She reflectively watched Roland. What was Roland? Not a person, now, but a symbol. She could put him into her memories where he belonged, a part of lost romance, lost youth. This Edward was ridiculous, and she did not like it. She would have to go through the motions of forgiveness to make him rise and be sensible. She did so with considerable bad grace. Edward relaxed unduly, and did not see her smile. Maret did, and looked askance at Sloan. She knew of what Sloan thought, and his whisper, "Young fools, throwing away the only sweetness they are likely to get," but he had a trace of mockery in the face he turned to them. How well Maret knew, he had learned that the sweetness had its counterpart. But Abigail was not forgiving, she saw that. It was probably best. She would have a weapon to use against Edward all her life, if she so chose, whereas Maret had no weapon.

Aunt Mathilde knew her child was lost to her. Maret had taken her. Of them all, it was Maret herself who knew otherwise. Abigail had gone the straight and narrow path, but had not sat in judgment—not complete judgment, at least. She would not turn from Edward now that she had taken his apology, but she would not turn to him. She had discovered that Roland was not what an idol should be, yet had understood him as an artist who idealized what he played. Oh, she might have the look and passion of Maret, but it
was sleeping. If she belonged to any of them, it was to Mathilde. Yet Mathilde would be the one to lose her companionship. Abigail did not know that she had chosen, but she did know one thing—comfort was out of the sphere of her relationships. She must seek it in her own self, find her own consolations. The trend of her thinking was unconsciously inward and for the first time, as they left the theater, Maret detected the features in repose, such as those of Mathilde. A jealous pang touched her, and she reluctantly turned to Sloan instead. It was Edward who knew that he had read his fate there, and he who found the look enchanting.

The Cottonwood

By LARRY KADLEC

The cottonwood rises up from the valley,
A symbol of the impalpable search;
The strange tree, searching straight upward,
With strong arms, stretched with hope outward;
Greyed with a cracked hardened skin,
But slowly decaying within.
Race Prejudice: Mississippi and Montana

By BILL ROGERS

YESTERDAY afternoon, upon entering a friend's room, I was asked to answer a question: "Is Mississippi more race-prejudiced than Montana?"

After thinking the matter over from many points of view, I replied, "No." Immediately, I was asked to explain my answer. This is what I said:

In my home town, Anaconda, the majority of the male population make their living working "on the smelter." During Christmas vacation, I wanted to work to help meet my expenses at school, but, because I am a Negro, I was refused the right to do so. There are only three jobs which a Negro can hold in the smelter—janitor work in the office, loading calcite, or working with the arsenic. If these three positions are filled, the Negro must remain unemployed until a vacancy occurs. But a drifter can come to Anaconda from anywhere, and go to work immediately—that is, if he is White.

There are nearly one hundred Negroes living in Butte, but not a single one is allowed to work in the mines. They cannot even hold any job that is in any way connected with the mines.

Great Falls is almost as bad. There is a smelter in Great Falls also, but not a single Negro is allowed to work there.

Comparing Mississippi with Montana on this basis, Montana is by far the worse, because in Mississippi no laboring job is barred to Negroes.

A short while ago, a Negro boy graduated from Montana State College with a degree in engineering. He accepted an offer of a job at the Anaconda smelter, and was ready to go to work when his employer discovered that he was colored. The offer was quickly withdrawn, and when he attempted to find out why, he was told that it wasn't the policy of the company to hire Negroes as engineers. The company admitted that he was capable of handling the job, but they just couldn't hire him because of his race.

I'll admit that race prejudice isn't shown as openly in Montana as in Mississippi, but that doesn't mean that it isn't present. In Mississippi they stop the Negro from voting by the poll tax—and by violence. In Montana they do allow him to vote, but, as my father says, "What good is voting, if after you do help to elect some man to office, he refuses to let you work to make a living?"

I have a friend who was working in the "Ironworkers" department of the Anaconda smelter. He was very light-complexioned, and could not be distinguished from a white man. For a good many
year he worked on this job before he decided to get married. His wife was dark and easily recognized as a Negro, and upon discovering his race through his marriage, the firm quickly released him from his job.

Another couple whom I will call "Jack and Jill" were forced to go to Spokane to be married, since Montana does not allow intermarriage. After a few years they had a baby, and moved back to Montana. Later they decided to get a divorce, and "Jill" asked for possession of the child, but the judge ruled that she had no legal claim, since the baby was Negro and she was White.

In Kalispell a white girl was married to a fairly well-to-do Negro. When he died and left his possessions to his wife, it was ruled that she was not the legal heir, because Montana laws did not recognize their marriage.

When I was twelve years old, my mother and I went to a movie. Mother had bought the tickets, and we were ready to take seats downstairs, when the manager stopped mother, and asked if I was her son. She said, "Yes," and he then asked her if she would mind sitting upstairs. Mother asked why, and he told her that Negroes weren't allowed to sit downstairs—that she could do so, but that I would have to take a seat upstairs. We left the show, and Mother hasn't gone to a movie since.

Not only is the prejudice strong against the Negro in Montana, but also against other minorities. One day while I was playing a game of whist with a group of Montana State University boys, a conversation arose about a certain Jewish boy. The talk ran something like this:

"Say, Joe, you know that Kike downstairs? Well, he had nerve enough to ask Alice to the dance Saturday."

"No kidding!" said Joe. "Jesus, you would think those damn Kikes would leave something of ours alone."

I left the room then, and I knew that if they spoke about that boy in such a way, they would do the same about me when I wasn't there.

With these few examples I have tried to show you why I answered the question as I did. There is a lot of prejudice in Montana, and, down deep, there is really no difference of attitude between the two states. Can the situation be changed for the better? Perhaps it can—if enough people can be brought to realize that a powerful race prejudice does exist here. I am in a position to know that it does.
Outside the schoolhouse the December snow was cold and gray, but the schoolroom was warm. Fred tried to keep awake to hear what Miss Graham, the fifth-grade teacher, was saying. It was something about Minnesota. It's too hot and stuffy, thought Fred. I'm sleepy. Wish four o'clock would get here.

Then he remembered that classes were shortened today. The theater had a special free show for all the kids this afternoon. At two-thirty school would let out and everybody who wanted to could go see "David Copperfield." It would be a good show, Fred decided. The book had been pretty good.

"Minnesota has 10,000 lakes," he said half aloud as his mind returned to Miss Graham who was still talking. That was a lot of lakes, he decided. If every lake was as big, half as big as Terry lake, there must be a lot of water in Minnesota. He thought of the Minnesotans going from one island to another in gondolas like they did in Venice.

He wished the class would end. Carla, his sister, would be waiting outside in the hall when her third-grade class ended. He remembered he had promised his mother that he would take Carla to the show. Carla was short and fat, and she always tagged along with him. The other guys made fun of him when he walked along with his little sister.

The clock over the blackboard said two o'clock. Only a half hour to go before school let out. He turned in his seat as Clayton Hall, who sat across the aisle, nudged him. "You going to the show, Fred?" Clayton asked in a whisper. Fred nodded. "It's gonna be a good show. Besides, I gotta take Carla to see it. Mom won't let her go unless I go with her."

"Let's go out to the snow fort instead," Clayton urged. "Frank and Stan and Doug and I are gonna play snowfight. Let Carla go by herself." Fred straightened up, and so did Clayton. Miss Graham was looking at them. "You, Fred, and Clayton, too, stop whispering. Pay attention to class."

Fred liked to play snowfight. He and Clayton usually took the fort to themselves, and let the rest of the kids try to attack it. It was just like fighting a real war. Napoleon used to play snowfight when he was a kid, he remembered from his last year's reader. There was a picture of young Napoleon in the book, standing on the snow fort driving off the attackers.

"I promised Mom," he whis-
pered over his shoulder. "Aw, let Carla go by herself," said Clayton. "You always have to drag your sister along. Why can't she go by herself? Nobody's gonna hurt her."

Miss Graham passed down the aisle, giving out maps. The maps were blank, with only the state lines drawn in. "Let's see how many of you can draw in the names of all the western states," she said. "You should finish by two-thirty. When you finish, hand in your paper and then you may leave."

This is easy, Fred thought. He started with Washington and Oregon, and then Idaho. After awhile he became puzzled. What comes under South Dakota? Then he uncertainly lettered in KANSAS in big letters, and handed his map to Miss Graham. "I'm finished now. Can I leave?" She nodded and he went out in the hall. Behind him Clayton laid his paper on Miss Graham's desk and followed him through the door.

The big buzzer sounded and the third-grade classroom across the hall burst open as the younger kids ran out. Carla was the first one through the door. "Freddy, let's go see the show. I want to see 'David Copperfield'."

"It's 'David Copperfield'," Fred corrected her. He and Carla, with Clayton following close behind, walked down the stairs and went outside. "Come on, Fred, let's go out to the fort," Clayton insisted.

"Mama says you got to take me to the show. I want to see the show!" Carla demanded. Then she started to cry. "Freddy, let's go to the show right now! I wanta see the show! I wanta see the show!"

"Let's put snow down her neck!" Clayton said. He picked up a handful of snow and moved toward the girl. Carla scampered around until Fred was between her and Clayton. The three stood irresolutely on the walk before the schoolhouse.

"Leave her alone," said Fred. Clayton threw his arm around Fred's neck and dragged him into a snowbank. They wrestled in the snow. Fred felt like he hated Clayton as the other boy held him down and pushed snow in his face. Fred knew Carla was watching. Why did she have to come along and try to drag him off to the show, and then stand there watching while Clayton licked him?

"You better leave me alone," he demanded as he spit snow from his mouth. Clayton pulled him to his feet. "Come on, then, crybaby. Let's have a snowfight," Clayton urged. Fred knew the other boy was really friendly even if he did drag him around and lick him once in awhile. "All right," he answered, "but you better not pick on me again."

The two boys, with Carla following stubbornly, walked through the snow to the fort. Frank and Doug were waiting at the fort. They called out happily as the two approached. "Hey, Clayton, me and Doug will stand you two," Frank said. "You guys take the fort."

Fred wanted to turn from the other three and run off with Carla. He wanted to join the snowball fight, but he wanted to see the show, too. Carla was a nice kid, even if she was sometimes a pretty ornery little sister. Just then a snowball hit him in the shoulder and he scrambled behind the fort. Clayton was packing the soft snow into hard balls.
He handed three to Fred. "Here they come," he yelled. "Let's get 'em!"

"Wait over by the school, Carla," Fred said. "I'll be there in a minute." Then he forgot about Carla as Doug raced around the side of the fort and threw a hard one. The snowball hit Fred in the leg. "Hey, that's no fair! You guys are supposed to stay away. It's no fun like this."

Doug and Frank retreated, and Fred saw Clayton's snowball hit Frank in the back of the neck. Then Frank got mad, and Clayton called him a sissy. "Let's quit it," Frank demanded. "I'm tired."

Clayton had an idea. "Let's go over to my place. My mom will make us some sandwiches and cocoa. Wanta come along?" Fred looked over at the schoolhouse. Carla wasn't there. Probably she had gone to the show with one of her girl friends. Well, might as well go with Clayton. If Carla wouldn't wait for him, she could go to the show by herself, or she could even go home and tell Mom on him. That possibility made him pause for a second or so. Well, he thought, just let her tell. Carla was a crybaby. He would have taken her to the show if she had waited.

"Okay, let's go," Fred declared. Doug was not so sure. "Will your ma like it if we come in?" he asked. "My ma will sure as hell give me a paddling if I bring a bunch of the guys in the house."

"Sure, it's okay. Come on."

The four walked along the street toward Clayton's house. "Watch me hit that tree," Fred announced. He threw at the tree, which was only fifteen feet away. The others hooted as he missed by a good five feet. Then they all picked targets as they walked down the alley toward Clayton's. "Bet I can hit that woodshed window!" Frank said. Clayton yelled, but Frank threw anyway. "Boy, bet we catch hell," Clayton said as the snowball crashed through the glass. "That's our woodshed window, and Pop will take it out on me if he thinks I did it."

"Don't tell him," Frank retorted. "Make him think somebody else did it."

They tramped through the snow into Clayton's yard. "Wait outside," Clayton commanded. The other three stood uncertainly as Clayton walked into the kitchen. Pretty soon he came back. "Okay, come on in. But leave your overshoes outside." When they got into the kitchen Fred took his cap off. Mom would sure be mad when Carla came home bawling about Fred because he wouldn't take her to the show. Maybe if he came home right away and told Mom that Carla wouldn't wait for him, Mom wouldn't tell Pop, and maybe he wouldn't get a beating.

"I better go home," Fred said. He pushed the cup and saucer away from him. Mom would sure be mad when Carla came home bawling about Fred because he wouldn't take her to the show. Maybe if he came home right away and told Mom that Carla wouldn't wait for him, Mom wouldn't tell Pop, and maybe he wouldn't get a beating.

"Let's play cards," Clayton answered. "You don't have to go yet." Fred played with only an occasional thought for the game. I'd better get home. Why didn't I go to the show with Carla? Wonder how mad Mom will be?

After a few games, Mrs. Hall looked at the clock. "Hey, boys, I think you'd all better be going. Your folks will be looking for you pretty soon." Fred looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes to five. "Thanks for the cookies and
cocoa, Mrs. Hall," Frank called through the open kitchen door as the three stood on the back porch putting on their stiff overshoes. Fred and Doug mumbled "thank you" too, and then the three walked toward the alley. "So long, Fred," the other two called as they left him to walk down a different street.

I bet that was a good show, he thought as he walked toward home. Maybe Carla went to the show by herself, and hasn’t got home yet. Then I can tell Mom she wouldn’t wait for me.

The street lights turned on as he neared his block. He hadn’t noticed it was so dark. Now it looked really like night as the sky seemed so black compared to the white snow at the street corners under the lights. It was starting to snow again.

It was too dark to get the wood in without the coal oil lantern. He’d get it in after supper, he thought. Mom was always yelling about getting plenty of wood in before it got too dark. He could see through the kitchen windows as he walked up the driveway. Carla and Mom were in the kitchen making something. It looked like doughnuts. Carla seemed to be cutting them out and Mom was dropping them in the frying pan.

He took his overshoes off and kicked them into a corner of the porch. Then he opened the door and walked into the house.

His mother looked up as Fred closed the door behind him. Carla ignored him as she cut doughnuts. "Fred, I told you to take Carla to the show!" his mother said. She didn’t yell, though. He was glad of that, but still he felt sorry or mad or scared or something.

“I waited for her! I waited for her after we got through playing and she had already left! I told her to stand by the schoolhouse and then I’d go with her! Can I help it if she won’t wait for me?” Fred half yelled the words at his mother.

At that Carla turned quickly. “You’re a fibber! I waited and waited and you kept on throwing snowballs. I told Mom, and you’re going to get a licking when Pop comes home! I’ll tell Pop you were mean to me and see what you get then!”

“Is this the way I’ve raised you?” his mother cried out. “Can’t you ever take care of your little sister once in a while? You better get some wood in the wood-box before your father comes home, or he’ll hear about this. No, you can’t use the lantern. The wood’s all split and all you have to do is carry it in the house.”

Fred carried three loads of wood into the house and then carried in some kindling. His mother gave him and Carla a couple of doughnuts and told them to go into the dining room and set the table.

“I’m sorry I didn’t take you to the show,” Fred said slowly. “Me and Frank and Doug went down to Clayton’s house. We played cards and I forgot to come home. Are you still mad?”

“Did Clayton hurt you when he got you down in the snow?” Carla asked in return. “He always picks on you. I hope he didn’t hurt you.”

Fred took a mouthful of doughnut and chewed it as he answered. “Naw, me and Clayton are good friends. Besides, I can lick him
“That’s a naughty word,” Carla protested.
“Well, I will beat him. Wait and see.”

As a Friend Betrays . . .

By MARY FRAN LAW

Slowly the sky is shot
with thin clouds—
opalescent
green, blue, pale pink
as a pearl, just lifted,
still merging with milky gelatin.

The twilight gleams briefly, then
the pearl falls
into dark wine.

Night is dead, but the clouds
are working—
white worms, greyed
by the black sky—
congealing into clods
of close dampness, of heavy foreboding.

Dust is all grey; the clods do dry;
dawn will essence
through the fog.

Sky is no longer sky
but ceiling,
limiting space—
square and porous, wet,
a dripping dungeon-stone
sealing the cell with fathomless weight.

The clouded pearls,
the twisting fogs
vaporize;
wet rock still chills.
How Much Rube?

By HARRY C. NELSON

It was night. The lighted glass on the bus read St. Louis. It pulled to the side of the road and ground to a stop. The driver leaned back, looked in the mirror, and without taking his eye from it he said: "All right. You in the last seat. Your ride was over in Decatur."

In the back seat a boy in a gray sweatshirt sat up. He appeared about nineteen.

"DECATUR! DECATUR" he said. "You mean we've passed through Decatur."

"Now don't give me that—that I must have been asleep routine. It's old stuff."

"Old stuff hell. It's your job to wake me up. I was asleep."

"Yeah, I know, and you always fall asleep behind the seats so you are well hid."

"You knew how many were supposed to get off in Decatur. Why didn't you count 'em?"

"Oh, you're wise aren't you. You think you know what I'm supposed to do, eh. All right smart boy. Let's go. Outside."

"Outside! I'm not getting out here. This isn't a stop. Christ this isn't even a town."

"That's right. But, its as far as you go."

"As far as I go? As far as I go? How do you know it's as far as I go? Suppose I buy a ticket to St. Louis?"

"If you do, you pay as of Decatur."

"As of Decatur hell. It's not my fault if you fall down on the job and I sleep through my stop. I'll pay as of here."

"Look punk, I'm not going to argue with you. You got three dollars and forty-five cents?"

"Punk, eh?"

"I said you got three dollars and forty-five cents."

"Yeah, I got three forty-five, but you won't see it. I don't think the bus company'd ever see it. You'd graft it. What kind of a receipt do I get?"

One of the passengers in the middle of the bus said: "Make up your minds. This bus is late, and I'm in a hurry."

The boy in the sweatshirt stepped into the aisle and moved toward the front of the bus. In the middle of the bus, when he was abreast of the passenger who had just spoken, he stopped and leaned over the passenger. And, suddenly the boy straightened up with a look of surprise on his face and said: "A nickel for a cup of coffee? You want me to give you a nickel for a cup of coffee? But, I don't even know you."

The passenger rose in his seat.
"Why I didn't ask you for a..." He looked at the other passengers. "I haven't said a word," he said.

The boy shrugged his shoulders and then turning to the passengers, announced again. "He wants me to give him a nickel for a cup of coffee."

The statement was greeted with silence. Then someone in the back of the bus began to snicker. The boy shook his head and then turning to the passengers, announced again. "He wants me to give him a nickel for a cup of coffee."

"You know why sucker? 'Cause you get outsmarted."

He stepped down to the door and then before stepping out he said: "Thanks for the ride, rube."

"You better get off this bus, kid."

Outside the night was damp. He stood on the slanted road bed till the bus pulled out and watched the two red tail lights draw together in the distance. At the side of the road a sign said: "St. Louis 90 mi." Behind him he saw the lights of a car. It was coming his way. He put up his thumb. The car swung out in the middle of the road to avoid him and kept going. Ahead of him was a highway restaurant. He started walking towards it.

It was a lunch counter and out in front were two gas pumps. He stopped in the light by the pumps and reached into his pocket. He withdrew his hand and held it under the light. In it were a dime and two nickels. He wanted a cigarette, and he wanted a cup of coffee. He didn't have enough for both. He put the money back in his pocket.

When he opened the door a bell jingled above his head. A lunch counter ran the length of the room, parallel to the highway. Two farmers were drinking beer at one end of the counter, and a waitress was standing on a stool pouring water into a large chrome coffee maker. He moved up to the counter and sat down on one of the stools.

"Give me a cup of coffee," he said.

The waitress appeared not to hear him, for she remained standing on the stool, peering down into the coffee maker. Then, she stepped off the stool and without turning around she said, "Cream or black."

"Blonde and sweet."

She turned her head and ran her eyes over him coldly. "The sugars on the counter," she said, giving him his coffee.

The Ink Spots were singing "If I Didn't Care" on the juke box. He drank his coffee and listened. The Ink Spots finished and Ella Fitzgerald began the "Cow Cow Boogie." He finished the last of his coffee.

"Give me a pack of Camels," he said.

She took a package from a glass case and tossed them on the counter in front of him.

"How about some matches?"

She threw two packages of safety matches to him.

"They cost a penny extra."

"A penny extra?"

"That's right. They have a big tax on cigarettes in this state. We don't make enough money on them to be giving away matches."

"Don't give me that. These matches have advertisements on them. They give them to you free."

"Look, do you want the matches or don't you?"

He took out a cigarette and lit it. He made no reply. Outside a car pulled up by the gas pumps. It was a new car and the driver was alone. He got out, said some-
thing to the service attendant and came into the lunch room. He waved his hand at the two men drinking beer, said hello to the waitress and sat down at the lunch counter beside the boy. He ordered a cheeseburger and a glass of milk.

"It's damp out there tonight. I think it's going to rain," he said to the youth.

"Yeah."

"Fella on the radio just said it was raining in Chicago," the man said.

"Yeah, they get their share of it."

"You from Chicago?"

"I guess you'd say I was from Chicago. Right now I'm headed for St. Louis. You going that way?"

"No, I'm only going to Hillsbourgh. It's down the road about forty miles. I'd be glad to give you a lift that far, though, if it'd help."

"Yeah, it'd help."

The juke box was playing "Moonlight Cocktail." He listened for a minute, then got up from the stool.

"I'll wait for you outside," he said. He turned to the waitress.

"How much do I owe you?"

"That'll be twenty-eight cents."

"Twenty-eight cents? Twenty-eight?"

"That's right. Twenty cents for cigarettes, seven cents for coffee, and one cent for matches."

"I'm not paying for any free matches, and how do you get off with seven cents for a cup of coffee? It's a nickel where I come from."

"We get seven cents for coffee and one cent for matches and you owe twenty-eight cents."

"Look baby, you're not dealing with the farm boys now."

He took the opened pack of cigarettes and threw them on the counter. Then he threw the two packages of matches.

"There's your cigarettes and there's your matches. I'm not buying." He laid a dime on the counter beside the cigarettes.

"The dime's for the coffee," he said. "Now, if you want to call in the local sheriff or whatever you have around here, we'll see about you selling free matches."

"Oh, aren't you tough. Aren't you clever," the waitress said.

"I'm two steps ahead of you, Sarah Jane."

"Get out of here. Get out of here, you cheap bum," she said.

Outside he began to laugh. "What a rube she is," he said. He began to laugh again and heard someone else laughing. He looked over toward the gas pumps. It was the service attendant. He was leaning over a car, having trouble closing the hood.

"I guess it is funny," the attendant said.

"What's funny?" the boy asked.

"The trouble I'm having with this hood."

The boy walked over toward the car. The attendant was peering through the grill, trying to see the underside of the hood. The boy crouched beside him. They both examined it.

"The catch is broke and it won't lock," the attendant said.

The boy poked a finger through the grill and toyed with the catch, trying to fasten it. He probed with his finger for several seconds, then stepped back from the car.

"The hood's out of line," the boy said.

"I know. It's been like that for a week. I told him about it the last time he was in here," the attendant said.
They lifted the hood and examined it. Then they closed it and the boy pushed the hood from the side while the attendant tinkered with the catch. Finally, the catch slipped in place and locked. The attendant pulled upward several times on it.

"It's locked all right," he said. "Thanks."

"You got a rag I can wipe my hands on?" the boy asked.

"There's one in the station. It's on the shelf to the right of the door."

The station was a makeshift addition built onto one end of the lunch room. Inside was a Coca-Cola container, a desk, and several barrels of oil; on one of the walls hung a calendar with a picture of a girl fishing; there was grease on the rough wooden floor.

The boy found the rag and wiped his hands. He looked around the room curiously. There was no cash register. He stepped over to the desk and opened the drawer in it. Inside was a small box. It was the change box. He quickly shut the drawer and looked outside. The attendant was washing the windshield of the car. He opened the drawer again. There was a small stack of bills. He picked them up.

"You want anything in there, help yourself," the attendant called to him. "Have a coke."

The boy started slightly, then began to smile. "You buying?" he asked.

"Sure, help yourself."

The boy shrugged his shoulders and dropped the money back in the box. He closed the drawer, walked over to the coke container, took out a bottle of coke and opened it. The attendant came in.

"I opened it by mistake."

"Oh."

"Don't worry. I just helped myself to the coke," the boy said and smiled. "You offered to buy it at just the right time."

"Oh, I'm not worried. You don't look like that kind to me."

The boy's smile vanished. "Well, don't let it fool you," he said. "You guys take too much for granted. I gave you a break."

He stepped outside and walked over to the car. The driver was just coming out.

"You ever give a sucker an even break?" the boy asked.

The driver smiled vaguely.

"Well, it's something that I have a hell of a time learning not to do," the boy said.

The driver looked at his watch. "I'm late," he said. "I'm going to have to hurry." They both got into the car.

As he pulled away from the gas pumps and on to the highway, the driver turned to the boy beside him and said: "Did you have the waitress in there mad? I don't know everything that happened so I'm not going to take sides, but, wow, I don't think I ever saw Cheryl that mad."

"Cheryl, Cheryl, Christ don't tell me her name is Cheryl."

"That's right, Cheryl Bailey. Her father owns a farm down the road."

"Her old man must have been drunk the night he named her. How could he pin anything like that on her?"

"Oh, I don't know if she's that bad. She's...

"Yeah, yeah, you got a cigarette?"

The driver searched his coat pockets, found the cigarettes and passed them over. Then, he began again: "She isn't...

"You got a match?"
"There's a lighter on the dash."

There was a short silence and the driver began again: "Like I was saying, she . . . ."

"Which one of these knobs is the radio?"

The man behind the wheel glanced warily over toward his companion.

"I don't usually pick up hitch-hikers," he said.

"Yeah, why not?"

"Well, you never know what you are going to get ahold of. Some of the guys I see along the highway look awfully tough."

"How come you picked me up?"

"Oh, I don't know, I guess . . . ."

"Maybe I look different," the boy interrupted. "Maybe I'm a guy that looks like he wouldn't be packing a gun. Is that the way I look to you?"

"Something like that," the driver replied, and paused. "Anyway it wouldn't do a hitch-hiker much good to stick me up, because I never carry much money." He glanced at his companion. The boy said nothing. "If any of them ever want my car they don't need to knock me on the head for it. I'd give it to them. I got insurance."

"Yeah. You're lucky. You don't have much to lose."

The driver made no reply but moved over to the far side of the car. The boy played with the tuning control on the radio.

"If you're worried whether I'm packing a gun or not, relax," the boy said. "I'm not."

"Oh, I didn't mean that."

"Yeah, I know."

The boy turned up the volume on the radio. A news program was on. They listened in silence for the rest of the trip. Then the driver said: "That's Hillsburgh right up ahead. It's as far as I'm going."

The boy made no reply.

"It'd probably be better if I let you out here," the driver said. "You'd probably have better luck." He pulled the car over to the side of the road and stopped.

The boy got out of the car and slammed the door. As the car drove off the boy began to laugh. He felt a raindrop on his cheek and glanced at the sky. It was black.

Up ahead he could see the lights of a car. He thumbed it, but the car kept going. There was another one right in back of it. He thumbed it also. He sat down on a guard rail and decided he was on a bad stretch of road. There was a curve in front of him and people didn't like to stop on curves.

It was starting to rain. He walked up the road till he came to an open stretch. It was raining hard now. He thumbed three more cars. Then he thumbed a big truck and it stopped. There was a sign on the windshield, "No Riders." The door was flung open and a deep, gruff voice asked: "How's the weather out there keedo? Kind of damp?"

The boy jumped in the cab of the truck without replying.

"I'm not supposed to pick up riders kid," the driver said. "But this is a bad time of night to be hitch-hiking. I'll bet you were mighty glad to see me pull up."

While he was talking he put the truck in gear and started up. The youth looked over at him. He was a big, heavy man. The driver double clutched into a higher gear and continued: "I'll bet . . . ."

"You got a cigarette?"

The driver ignored the interruption. "I'll bet you were saying a little prayer that I'd . . . ."

"You got a cigarette?"

"Now, look, you got it all
wrong. It ain’t the way it’s done. Don’t ask me for a cigarette before I finish talking. Especially, right after I pick you up out of the rain.”

“You got a cigarette?”
“You’re tough aren’t you?”
“You gotta be tough.”

“You got pushed around.”
“You got it all wrong.”

“Why is it all wrong? What are you doing, holding school?”

“Get the chip off your shoulder.”

“How about that cigarette?”

“My cigarettes are in the glove compartment.”

The boy started to open the glove compartment when the truck driver reached over suddenly and bought his fist down across the boy’s wrist.

“Ow, ow, Jesus Christ you almost broke my arm. What’d you do that for?”

“I didn’t say you could have a cigarette. Anyway there aren’t any in that compartment. I just said that. I’m wise to you kid.”

“You big ape. You son of . . . I ought to blast you where you sit.”

The driver received these words in silence; then he pulled over to the edge of the road and stopped. He reached over and grabbed the boy by the front of the sweatshirt and jammed him into the corner of the cab. Holding him helpless with one hand, he searched him with the other.

“You got a gun on you kid?”

After satisfying himself that the youth was unarmed he released him and said: “You’re all talk, aren’t you?”

He put the truck in gear and drove back on the highway. “I’m glad I picked you up. You’re good for laughs,” he said. Then he reached over and slapped the boy on his knee. “Cheer up kid. I’m not sore. No hard feelings. I’m sorry if I roughed you up a little. How far you going?” He glanced over at the youth who was still bunched in the corner.

“I’m, I’m . . . trying to get to St. Louis.”

“St. Louis, huh. Well, I’m going to Bellville. I cut south about ten miles this side of East St. Louis, but I’ll carry you that far.” He took out a package of cigarettes and lit one. He threw the package across the seat. “Here kid. Keep ’em.” The boy let the cigarettes lie. “Go ahead, you can have them.”

“I don’t want ’em.”

“You don’t want ’em. Well, you just asked me for ’em three times, and now I give them to you and you don’t want ’em.”

“You figure you got the drop on me so now you can play the big shot,” the boy said.

“Look kid, you’re all wrong again. I picked you up ’cause I wanted to give you a break not ’cause I wanted to play the big shot. Now, go on, take the cigarettes. I got another pack.”

The boy looked at the package lying on the seat.

“Well, if you say you got another pack.”

“I got another pack.”

“Thanks.”

“You say that word, ‘thanks,’ like it comes hard.”

“I guess it does. I don’t use it very often.”

“Take off the wet sweatshirt. There’s a wool sweater in back of you.”

“O. K. I will. Thanks.”

“You better look out with that word.”

“All right, I won’t use it again.”

“Naw, you keep on using it, kid. Don’t listen to me. I don’t
know what I'm saying half the time. It don't hurt a guy to show appreciation. Not that I rate any.'

"Sounds like you're holding school again," the boy said with a smile.

"Yeah, don't it." The driver looked sheepish and then began to laugh. "Hell kid, don't mind me. I just talk."

The boy leaned back and relaxed. He looked small in the dark sweater of the driver.

"Where you going?" the driver asked.

"I'm headed for St. Louis."

"You got some relatives down there?"

"I got a sister."

"I'm only going as far as Bellville," the driver said.

"Well, every little bit helps."

"Yeah, if worst come to worst, you could walk the last ten . . . Aw hell. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll swing down to Bellville by way of East St. Louis. It's only a few miles out of my way."

"Aw, you don't need to do that. I can get a ride. Besides you're probably in a hurry, or you might get in trouble with your boss. No, you don't need to do that."

"It's raining out there. You're liable to stand on that road a long time before you get a ride. I'm in no hurry and what the boss don't know won't hurt him."

"Well, if there's much chance of you getting in trouble I'd rather take a chance on getting a ride," the boy said.

"Don't worry about it."

"Well, I won't if you won't."

The boy couldn't see out the rain-covered windshield, for there was no wiper on his side, but he could see out the door window. It looked dark and cold outside, but it was warm in the cab of the truck. The truck driver seemed to be having difficulty seeing. He was seated on the edge of the cushion, peering out through the part of the windshield kept clean by the wiper. He felt sleepy.

About five miles out of East St. Louis the driver reached across the seat and shook the boy. "Wake up kid. We're almost there," he said.

It had stopped raining. The road was dry. In the east a streak of light was beginning to appear. It was almost dawn. The boy sat up and rubbed his eyes. He looked over at the driver. "I guess I fell asleep," he said. "You probably wanted someone to talk to."

"Naw, I haven't felt like talking. I've been driving since three o'clock yesterday afternoon."

The boy made no reply. He was taking off the heavy, wool sweater and putting on his own. "Do you know St. Louis?" the driver asked him.

"No, I've never been here before, but I won't have any trouble finding my way around."

"No, you won't have any trouble. St. Louie is an easy town to know. I'll let you off where you can catch a bus that will take you across the river; then you can ask someone over in town for the address you want."

"How far is it across the bridge into St. Louis?" the boy asked.

"Oh, it's not far. About ten minutes on the bus." The driver paused. "You got bus fare, ain't you kid?"

"Yeah, I got . . . Naw, I'm broke, but I can walk that okay," the boy said.

"Aw hell kid, sure you can walk it, but it's too early in the morning," the driver said. He reached in his pocket and took out a handful of change. He selected two coins. "Here," he said.
“Here’s a buck. It’ll pay your fare and get you a cup of coffee.”

“I don’t want to take money from you,” the boy said. “I can walk it easy enough.”

“Don’t be silly kid. A buck doesn’t mean anything.”

“Yeah, but I don’t like the idea of it,” the boy said.

The truck driver reached across the seat. “Come on, take it.”

“Well, all right, but I feel like a heel.”

“Why should you feel like a heel?” the driver asked.

“Well, I bummed a ride from you, got your cigarettes, used your sweater, and now I’m bumming a buck off you. And I done it all after you had the drop on me. It makes it look like I’m taking you. I don’t like it.”

“Now goddam it kid, cut that out. You make me feel like Jesus Christ.”

“I want you to know that I appreciate . . .”

“Okay, okay. That’s enough. Don’t say any more. This is the place I’m going to let you off at, right up here. You can catch a bus at that stop-light.”

He pulled the truck over to the side of the road and stopped. The boy got out of the truck and walked around in front of it to the other side. The truck driver’s window was open. The driver leaned out and said: “You won’t have long to wait. Buses run every half hour all night.”

The boy didn’t look up. He read the sign on the door of the truck. “Mayfair Trucking Company,” it said. On the truck box in back of the cab the rain had dried leaving a coating of dust. He rubbed his finger through it. It made a mark. He looked up at the truck driver. “Well, thanks,” he said. “I guess . . .” He looked down and commenced making marks in the dust on the truck box.

“Now, look kid,” the driver said. “I don’t want you to start making me feel like Jesus again.” He began to laugh. “Goddam this is really rich. You got me feeling like a young school-girl.” He ground the truck in gear and said, “Goodbye kid and good luck,” as he drove off.

The sun was coming up in the east. The first rays were striking down on to the street. They struck on a southbound, dust-dried truck whose driver sat very erect, feeling that the world wasn’t such a bad place. The dust on the southbound truck had been rubbed away just behind the door on the driver’s side. The first beams of morning fell on the spot where the dust had been erased. It had been erased to spell the word “SUCKER.”

Back on the highway, standing in the same sunshine, was a boy about nineteen in a gray sweatshirt. He was standing in the street looking at a dust covered finger. He watched the truck getting smaller in the distance and shook his head in disgust. “What a rube,” he said. “Holy Christ what a rube.”
The Adventures of Peter Rabbit

(From Pygmy Primer to Pendantic Pleonasm)

By G. NEWTON BUKER

Peter is a little brown rabbit. Peter has three little sisters. One is named Flopsy. One is named Mopsy. The other is named Cottontail. Peter has a nice mother. Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter live with their mother in a sand bank. The sand bank is under a very big tree. Flopsy is a good rabbit. Mopsy is a good rabbit. Cottontail is a good rabbit. But Peter is not a good rabbit. Sometimes Peter is a bad little rabbit.

"Now, my dears," said old Mrs. Rabbit one bright morning, "you may go into the fields or you may go down the lane, but do not go into Mr. McGregor's garden. Your father had an accident there. He was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor. Now run along and do not get into mischief, I am going out." Then old Mrs. Rabbit took a basket and her umbrella, and went through the woods to the baker's. She bought a loaf of brown bread, a loaf of white bread and five currant buns.

Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail, who were good little bunnies, went down the lane to pick blackberries. But Peter, who was very naughty, ran straight away to Mr. McGregor's garden, and squeezed under the gate! First he ate some lettuce, then he ate some French beans. And then he had some radishes. And then, feeling rather sick, he went to look for some parsley. But round the end of a cucumber frame, whom should he meet but Mr. McGregor!

As Peter came around the corner of the cucumber frame, it just happened that Farmer McGregor, who was on his hands and knees planting cabbages, looked up and beheld Young Rabbit peering at him. McGregor lost no time in getting to his feet, grabbing the business end of a nearby rake, and pursuing the frightened rabbit and shouting gustily between gasps of breath, "Cease running, robber! Wait there! Hold!" Peter was nearly scared to death, and in his confused state of mind, he tore wildly around the garden, circling along the secure fence, and forgetting completely the place whence he had entered. In Peter's rapid cruise about the garden, one of his shoes became disengaged from its buckle and flew from his foot. After this calamity, he lowered himself onto all four feet and in this position he increased his speed to the extent that he was able to lose McGregor. Peter had escaped! But no! Just as he was crawling under a convenient hole in the wall, the button on his new jacket engaged itself among the strong fibers of a gooseberry net. In his wild mental condition, Peter didn't think of
freeing himself from his captivity. So here was poor bewildered Peter Rabbit. Up from nowhere appeared McGregor, the enraged pursuer, and in an additional bit of fright, Peter wriggled from his jacket and tore off, searching for new cover. He found sanction in a water container in the tool shed.

As Peter assumed the attitude of resting upon his haunches, Mr. McGregor, the legal possessor of the domain, inaugurated the position of a curved posterior lumbar, and commenced keen scrutiny of the several inverted urns of pottery that desisted from exertion upon the surface between the two adjacent vertical levels. Unfortunately, Peter, barren of personal desire, by involuntary spasmodic action drove ozone forcibly and audibly through the cavity of his cranial orifice, thus communicating the location of his proximity to his pursuer. Without hesitation, the latter resumed his hurried quest, till the former removed himself from the edifice via an architectural casement, the while disquieting a trio of earthen receptacles. Said casement, being of more diminutive magnitude than Mr. McGregor, constituted the disjunction of Peter Rabbit from his pursuer. Thus frustrated, McGregor recapitulated his halycon horticulturist endeavors. Young Rabbit reclined for the express resolution of assuming catalepsy. His inactivity (by enthymeme of regressive meditation, nostalgia for his consanguinity) anteceded lacrymose sensibility. An indudation of anguish suffocated his intestinal fortitude.

Now
This is how
This tale commences:

Who should come along but a mother
Mouse, bearing peas and beans?
Behind her another
Mouse, her baby, followed.
Peter Rabbit saw them and swallowed
A big lump in his throat. This
Reminded him of his
Mother: the way she turned around to
Look back at her offspring.
‘What do
You use for a gate to leave this
place?’
Asked Peter. Mother Mouse
looked at him and hastened on, urging her child to
greater speed.
‘Need
You be so unfriendly?’ thought
poor Peter
To himself. He looked ahead, saw her goal and said ‘I’ll beat her
To it and get away from
This unfriendly place and go home. I’ll never come
Back again.’
He ran very fast, and when
He had crawled under the fence,
He ran straight toward the woods, since
He was afraid of Farmer McGregor, and
Since he was eager to get back home to the bar of sand
Under the old trees and fences.

The Rabbit, running rapidly, reached the relieving roadway and rested. But Bunny balked at barren banter. No need nap now, noticed naughty Peter, pushing past the posts on the pavement. Good gosh! Gotta get going: garden gate is giving! McGregor might make more mileage than my meager muscles make.

Young Peter (alias Red Rabbit of Kansas City fame) came gal-
loping down the trail, leaving the posse to bite his dust. His fine hair was flying in the breeze, his clear eyes were shining with the excitement of the chase. "Shucks, amighty," he muttered to himself, "I might just as well rest a spell, ah reckon. Ain't no man nor beast can ketch up to me no how." He pulled up under a welcome shady fern, and laid his handsome straight body upon the ground, and hoisting his two hind legs into the air comfortably, he picked the cactus quills from between his toes with a nonchalant paw, and fanned himself with his ears.

"Wal," said he a short spell later, "I reckon I better be a pokin' on, since Ma will be a-slicin' the carrots and cleanin' the lettuce. Shore am glad to be a-gettin' near home."

And after he had rested, he did arise onto his feet and began homeward. It was then that he beheld his own Mother, as she was his parent, who did beget Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail, who were his sistern. He did spy her and did rush to her. Thou art back, my son, said Mother, and she did hold him close. Preparest thy son his manna, quoth Peter. Drop dead, thou naked Rabbit, said she. Where hast thou left thy garments, and why doth thou look as of the Earth? Thou hast indeed been an unworthy son and must be sacrificed—thy supper. Maketh thyself ready for sleep, oh, wayward son.

Now poor little Peter the Hare Was forced to sit in his chair. While his three little sissus Ate porridge delicious, The top of his platter was bare.

For a moral I'm all at a loss, Since the story is stupid and gross. But with shins black and blue, The mails must go through, And a rolling stone gathers no moss.
Ballad: "One Floating Flower"

New Year's Eve in London:
Here's Piccadilly full
Of people surging up and down
To wish each other well.

Among them moves a figure
With eyes of oceanfoam;
A girl plucks at his overcoat
And leads him to her room.

An Irish girl of seventeen,
No longer virginal,
Draws down the blinds against the night.
Beyond the windowsill

The midnight bells go booming wild
All over London-town,
Singing echoes through the streets,
The bright confetti's thrown

Into the air, there's colored snow
Beneath the hurrying feet,
And laughing voices fill the pubs
Far into the chilly night.

Though morning will be greeted by
The weary, revelling crowd,
For many stiffly silent folk
The final cock has crowed.

For others, calendars go up
As morning storms the sky,
But elsewhere Molly Kelly greets
The dawn of No Year's Day.

A sound like thunder fills the room,
Beating against her waxen ears:
Out of a conch-shell paperweight
The turbulent ocean roars.
Landmarks

Notice the leaves; how quietly brittle, so
Brittle a gust would break them loose. Oh,
Notice the leaves.

(The children come and go,
Wearing bright colors, laughing; they
Have grown a little; the sky expands, the day
Tilts under the sunlight)

"Stay, oh stay
A moment longer; we remember you
Taller, or somehow different."

"Roses grew
There on the corner last year—two
Enormous bushes; you were gone
Long before that. Blossoms upon
Apple trees promised fruit, but autumn came on
Too quickly, most were lost; the cold
Held tightly all that winter."

"We are old,
You know, you young men have so many choices;
We have none . . ."

You shake their hands,
Hearing the brittle leaves, the brittle voices,
Rustling in the air. The children dance
Beyond you, unapproachable; the traffic noises
Drift from the city. Turning, you can see
The sooty spear piercing the factory
As when you went away: a smokestack,
Holding its frozen tornado in the midst of change.
This is the end of the voyage, and how strange,
How stranger than leaving, is the coming back.
WARREN eyed the sugar bowl through sleep-stained lids and asked John to pass the sugar, please. He dumped two spoonfuls in the coffee and hesitated—three wasn’t too much. As he stirred he collected his thoughts from the haze of 6:30 a.m. and, like the others around him, prepared to address the day. When the coffee and sugar were one, he took out a new pack of cigarettes and opened it carefully. That first one always tasted good on top of breakfast. He lit it and felt the smoke erase all taste from his throat and fill his lungs. This was the best time of day; this was the best place to be at the best time, lingering over the coffee, leisurely waiting for Oscar to make the first move, to tell them that they had better get an early start, that they were way behind with everything.

With the others—John, Emmet, Roy, and Lindy—Warren enjoyed a small show of independence after breakfast. Until Oscar made the first move they’d all keep quiet, basking in the silence, forcing his hand.

While thus engaged, Warren glanced across the table at the foreman. He was looking intently at Warren, not evincing a desire to speak, simply looking at him. But there was something about that look that made Warren shift imperceptibly in his chair, something that made him pull too hard and too often at the post-breakfast cigarette.

Finally it came. Oscar wiped his leather lips and squashed his cigarette in a saucer. He raised his watery blue eyes and surveyed the heavy plates which all but obscured the red checkered oilcloth. ‘Well, it’s getting time to move.’

No one said anything. ‘Well, it’s gettin’ about that time. Guess we’ll fence some today while John and Emmet finish with the binding.’ He was looking at Warren.

No one spoke. Oscar pushed at the dead cigarette in the saucer and teetered on his chair. He put his hands against the table and began pushing himself backwards. Breakfast was over.

As they filed out onto the porch, each nodded to Oscar’s wife and daughter Elizabeth. They rarely spoke to them and when they did it was a mumbled ‘Mornin’ Mrs. Golden.’ Usually the older men merely inclined their heads while the boys—Roy, Lindy, and Warren—went to the trouble of looking the other way. It was routine for all but Warren; when he had had time to wash pretty well, he’d sometimes stare at Elizabeth until she looked away. Then he’d smile and walk down the steps.
This morning, as usual, the work details banded themselves together in silence, waiting to be driven or directed to work. Oscar adjusted his hat, smoothing back the gray hair out of sight. "Well, the boys and I will try to finish the fencin’ down to the corner. You fellas ought to get the binding done today."

They all nodded and walked down to the yard by the sheds, the men picking up their feet from the ground, the boys scuffing clouds of powdery dust. It followed them along, caught in their wake, thin and yellow, a ghost in the cold light.

They stopped by the sheds; John and Emmet stood together while the boys gathered like indifferent sheep, waiting for the next order. They kicked their heavy boots at the ground and lit the second cigarette of the day, while Oscar gazed up the hill to where the sun would soon appear to tell them that they must work. At last its rim moved up on the ridge, making the hill itself black.

"John an’ Emmet can get the tractor and commence with the binding. The boys and I’ ll go out where we left off."

They went their separate ways, Lindy and Roy to the sheds for the implements, Warren to gas up the truck. Their tasks done, the boys hunched themselves down in the bed of the truck and waited for Oscar to drive them to work. This morning as usual it was his duty to fill the water bags.

Lindy yawned and looked at the surrounding yards. "A goddam shame. Look at it, all the old junk—stuff they’ ll never use."

"That’s the way it is with these big outfits that lose interest, ‘em right.” He tilted his head back and closed his eyes to the warming sun. His features were fine and well-molded. A scruff of a beard broke the line of his jaw and gave his face a dirty rather than manly appearance.

"Well, anyway, it seems pretty dumb to buy all that stuff and let it rot in the yard.” Lindy, too, lay back in the sun. It glittered on his peach-blond stubble and made his normally rosy complexion vivid. He and Roy were both young, still in high school. They had each taken the ranch as a good place to get in shape for fall football, a good place to train for that all-important pursuit.

Warren, the tall, detached figure slumped in the truck with them, was not much older. His long frame sometimes betrayed his immaturity with its awkwardness. A youthful enthusiasm occasionally broke out in the bunkhouse at nights, especially those Saturday nights when they’d go to town, the boys to the show and Warren to the bar. Warren, the mysterious, who would lie in his bunk and intimate experience with weird currents of society; a tramp steamer to Australia, a fast freight to Tampa, unfamiliar terms, ‘bunko’, ‘crib’, obscure mannerisms from places far away. That
was Warren, from some place far away.

Their drowsy minds were jolted into action as the water bags began dropping over the edge and into their laps. They swore at Oscar as they gathered them up and put them into a corner. The truck shuddered and began rocking through the yard and up the hill. Ahead of it lazy grasshoppers, torpid with the morning cold, crawled wearily out of the way; later they would jump and fly. As the engine whined and climbed out of the valley, the countryside began rolling away, a huge panorama of yellow and brown and blue; the yellow was wheat, endless strips and pools of it, ragged and scotched by the brown which was bare earth resting until the next planting. Overhead the sky was blue as usual; no sign of rain that might mean trouble for the owner and rest for the worker.

The trio sitting on the jolting truck-bed held themselves away from the sides and braced their palms against the splintery floor. Now and then a crow bar or a spade slid away from the piled equipment and one of them would kick it back. Warren pushed an insistent spade away from his boot. "God, what a mess today is. What a hell of a way to live. You kids ever see Australia? They got the damndest country there you ever saw. Right in the middle is nothing—nothing but scrub and sand, hundreds of miles of nothing but desert. You holler sometimes about being thirty miles from the home town; you should live where there aren't any people but cannibals and snakes...."

Lindy, the boy who would make first-string tackle, looked back at the dust cloud following the truck. "Jeez, though. It wouldn't be so bad out here if things were done right. You know, we're doin' a job on this fence line that could have been finished weeks ago if they'd do it right."

"Yeah," said Roy. "There's a goddam post-hole digger sittin' in the garage right now. If they weren't using the tractor to bind down in the bottom, we'd have it up here runnin' the digger. It's a waste of man power to screw around with bars and shovels."

Warren nodded and smiled. "Uhuh. So maybe you'd rather run the place...." In the ensuing silence he centered his attention on an industrious hawk circling feather-like above them. "See that? That's the way to live. On your own; working for number one. He's out earlier than the rest—probably eats the best, too." He fondled one of the cool water bags, letting the soaked canvas moisten his hands. Within seconds the dust had caked thick upon them. "Whatever you do, don't work in a bakery," he said, musing over the hands. "It's the gummiest, hottest thing on earth."

The others nodded and Roy said, "Yeah, I was thinkin' the other day, an' I bet the women back at the house put in as much work feeding us as we do digging."

Warren moved farther away from the sideboards and grinned. "Yeah, I guess they do." Wiping the doughy dust on his gloves, he added, "Poor little Elizabeth, stuck clear out here in the woods...."

"Bet she'd be pretty if she ever dressed up," said Lindy. "In school she'd do okay alongside a lot of 'em." He looked curiously at Warren whose smile had frozen on his face in a manner approaching an arch fiend. "What's so funny?" he asked.

"Well, tell us if you're thinking something funny. You're always putting on that know-it-all look an' then keeping the secret."

Warren looked at them and laughed out loud. "Maybe, when you're a little older."

"Little older, hell. I still don't think you're as old as you say. Com'on, what's funny?"

"Nothin'," insisted Warren. "I was just thinkin' about poor little Elizabeth, stuck clear out here in the woods. . . ."

The truck bounced, the bed dipped and dove into the ditch. Without looking they knew that they were where they had left off fencing. Oscar drove into the field and followed the fence line for a few hundred yards and stopped. He climbed out and went around to the back of the truck.

"Here we are, boys. Climb out."

They kicked the tools off the bed and jumped after them. Warren looked at Oscar. "How far do you think we'll get?"

"Down to the corner," the foreman replied, adding defiantly, "that's not so damn far."

His small, blue eyes watered and he wiped the dust from their wrinkled edges. "Depends on how hard we go." He said it as a man who had worked ranch work for some forty years, a man who had found that pace of all good hands and who could follow it for hours without stopping. The boys had tried before to outdo him, Roy and Lindy had tried, that is; Warren knew better. And as Warren and the old man exchanged glances, there was an almost indiscernable note of something beyond the ordinary relationship of foreman and hand. Warren turned away and began putting on his gloves.

Oscar pulled on his gloves and picked up a bar and a spade.

"Roy, you an' Lindy can work together while me and Warren team up."

Warren followed him in silence as he paced off the distance from the last post and worked the spade in. It was a primitive method: using the spade as deep as possible and then the crowbar, inching and biting away the graveled earth with the bar until there was enough loose matter to shovel out. Warren was shouldering the bar before the others broke ground. They labored steadily, digging a hole, standing a naked post in it, and tamping the earth down. Tamping was the hardest, lifting the bar and letting the flattened end compact the dirt around the post.

Warren muttered to himself as his stringy arms began to protest against the weight of the bar. By ten o'clock he was silent again; there was no point in wasting energy. Now and then he'd find Oscar's liquid eyes examining him as they worked; the blue puddles would usually glance away upon discovery and Oscar would increase the pace.

Eleven: the sun began to revel in its strength. Their shirts clung heavy against them while Oscar's gray stubble harbored countless little globes of sweat. Lindy and Roy took more time tamping and moved ahead slower, displaying the pained expressions of youth feeling overtaxed. Warren met the old man's repeated stares with smiles, now, inscrutable and blank smiles.

Eleven-thirty: the water bags, now dry and dead on the outside, showed signs of collapse as they hung limply sagging on the posts. It was hot. The hoppers buzzed; the flies sang through the rising air; the tall cheat-grass was silent; all the victims of the noon-
time oppression began to feel the
heat penetrating, boring in to
meet the warmth of their own be-
ings. On the human ones the
sweat ran sticky and profusely.
Lindy’s and Roy’s heads wobbled
on their shoulders and their hands
flopped at their sides at any op-
portunity.

Warren, too, began utilizing lulls
in the activity. When Oscar
shoveled, he arched his back and
then hunched his shoulders for-
ward, searching for new positions
of rest. Oscar moved on; the yel-
low veins around his faded pupils
grew taut and full and the sweat
matted his hair to his forehead,
but still the pace was not broken;
he had worked this way before
many times. More and more his
eyes dwelled upon the drawn
youth working at his side. Less
and less were they inclined to
looking away when discovered.

Once Warren arched his back
from picking at the stubborn
ground and found the orbs staring
blearily at him. He raised from
the hole and grinned through his
sweat. His mouth formed a vile
phrase, but no sound issued from
his throat; he resumed digging.

Finally, when the sun allotted a
mere stub of shadow to the land-
scape, the foreman squinted at his
watch and proclaimed, “It’s noon,
boys. We’ll quit now.” He
 glanced down the road and ob-
erved, “Only seven more to the
corner. Not a bad mornin’.”

Roy and Lindy lost no time in
 quitting their project and hustling
the tools into the truck. They lay
back on the bed and rested their
heads on their arms to absorb the
roughness of the road, grateful at
the rocking as they emerged onto
the county road and headed for
the valley. The warm air floated
over the cab of the truck and felt
cool as it evaporated the sweat
from their faces and necks. They
took off their gloves and let the
breeze creep into their palms and
relieve the cramping muscles with
coolness.

“You tired?” Lindy asked Roy.
He turned as Roy nodded. “You
tired, Warren?”

Warren rolled over on his side.
“Not too. You know, this is a
funny country—not bad for a
while. Any place gets you after
a while, though. Guess this is
gettin’ me.”

Roy glanced over at him. “You
planning to leave?”

He was a long time in answer-
ing, being engaged with the yel-
low powder chasing the truck.
“Maybe,” he said finally. “Yeah,
I guess so.” He said it as though
he had just made up his mind.

The vehicle rolled into the yard
and lurched to a halt. As the dust
enfolded them, Oscar’s eyes ap-
ppeared over the edge of the side
boards. “Hurry an’ get washed,
boys.” He disappeared and the
voices of Emmet and John hailed
him farther up towards the house.

The boys eased to the ground
and ambled slowly to the pump
where they took turns dousing
each other with the cold surprise
from the well. “When do you plan
on leaving?” asked Roy.

“Maybe pretty soon,” replied
Warren. “When you begin to get
fed up,” it gets bad awful quick.
Like a disease; you’re fine ’til you
get it and then it’s no time ’til
you’re sick as hell. I’m sick as
hell.”

They threw on the pungent
shirts and walked up to the house.
The bell seldom rang at noon;
there was no need for it. Inside,
the Kool-aid pitcher’s red liquid
rapidly diminished under the de-
mands of thirsty bodies and the
warm food gave way quickly un-
der the attack of forks and spoons.
As in the morning, talk was short and seldom. The binding wasn’t quite done. Yes, they got a few holes dug. And Christ but it’s hot.

When they were satisfied, they sat back and had a cigarette. Warren found the foreman’s eyes on him as he was looking towards the kitchen. He turned and stared at Oscar, the same stare he had used all morning. They sat transfixed that way until a clatter in the kitchen pulled both their eyes in that direction. Warren moved in his chair. “You know, I’ve been thinking. We’re damn near done with the fencin’, only seven more to dig, an’ stringin’ wire won’t be much. Hayin’ s next and it’s one thing I can’t do because of bein’ allergic. . . .” He paused, looked around the table and back to Oscar. “I think I’ll quit, Oscar.”

No one said anything. John and Emmet were unmoved and the boys imitated their disregard. Oscar merely looked at or through him, his hastily combed hair matted in streaks of gray over the bald spaces it was supposed to cover, smoke drifting from the spit-ringed cigarette in his hand. “Oh,” he said. “Well, you’re probably right. With hayin’ commencing and you not liking it, there isn’t much use in stayin’.” He continued to stare until Warren’s returning glance grew vicious.

Warren flicked the long ash from his cigarette into the saucer and said quietly, “Besides that, this place is all backwards, Oscar. A guy wastes more time here just wonderin’ what’s comin’ next than he spends workin’. Look at all the junk out there in the yard an’ the sheds. Piles of it goin’ to rot. An’ look at us up there fencin’ with the men down here binding when we could use the tractor on the fence line.” He swiftly noted that the others had raised their heads and were staring at him in disbelief. “Besides that, it never works to have the company men out in California and some old bastard back here tryin’ to run things.”

As he spoke Oscar’s skin began to glow, and it gradually became sanguine after he finished. The foreman gripped a glass in front of him and said, “Any time you think I’m not doin’ the best job possible, you don’t deserve to work here. Look at you, a filthy guttersnipe we took in because we needed help. . . .” He thrust his lower lip forward and stared harder at Warren.

All eyes were on the youth, even the ones from the kitchen had been diverted from the scullery tasks to witness the cause of the commotion. He wrapped his arms around the back of his chair and glanced towards the kitchen and back to the men. “Shall I tell them, Oscar? Shall I tell ’em why I’m really quittin’?” A crafty smile lifted the corners of his mouth. “What would have happened if I didn’t quit? You’d have figured up something to get rid of me anyway. . . .” Another glance kitchenwards and there remained but one pair of eyes there. He got up slowly, nonchalantly, and walked to the window. “Make out my check, Oscar. I want to catch Grogan for a ride when he goes after the mail. . . .”

Oscar got up and shuffled to the big roll-top desk where he kept the books. The others at the table fastened their gaze on the saucers or the silverware. From someone’s lips came a whispery whistle while Roy and Lindy exchanged a couple of glances foretelling uproarious laughter once outside. Occasionally someone took
an unrewarding look towards the kitchen.

Warren stood tall and lean by the window, watching for the neighbor, Grogan, who could give him a ride to the highway, or into town if he chose.

"There," said Oscar. "A hundred and thirty." He walked over and handed the check to Warren who swung past him and out the door.

The foreman turned and shuffled back to his chair. He sat down and started to finish his cigarette when the sound of a truck came drifting down the valley. "That'll be Grogan goin' for the mail," ventured Roy. They listened in silence as the unmuffled engine cracked down the grade towards the yard. One by one they turned to the window. Down in the yard stood Warren, one hand held high above his head as a signal, the other gripping the handle of his bag. Oscar stopped in the process of squashing his cigarette and said, "Say, John, he bunks with you. Maybe you should've gone down an' watched him pack to see that he didn't take nothing."

John examined his cigarette critically and said slowly, "Not much danger, Oscar. I don't have much to bother takin'." He drew a lung of smoke and added, "Besides, he packed two weeks ago..."

The foreman's hand smashed the cigarette into the saucer and he rose to stare out the window where Warren, the former employee, was boarding the truck. The weak blue eyes leapt back to John as the truck began cracking its way up out of the valley. "You... that son of a bitch...!" The old man stood up, hesitated, and took a step towards the door. He remained there bent over for a moment and then, the truck's engine a thin cackle in the distance, he turned and screamed to the kitchen, "Elizabeth! Elizabeth, goddam it, come in here...!"
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