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Reflections of An "English Major"*

By HENRY V. LAROM

During recent years while tossing mailbags, playing in a dance band, dude wrangling, proof-reading, hack-writing or racking my brains over advertising copy, I have had occasion to pause now and then to ponder the problems of the English Major, (the student, not the grenadier guard); and it seemed to me a strange paradox that while developing a taste for reading and writing he must become, at the same time, a misfit, a being mal-adjusted to his environment, and a fugitive from the common forms of entertainment.

Even a Freshman in English is no longer satisfied with a daily paper that features Westbrook Peglar and George E. Sokolsky. The Reader's Digest, so valuable in high school, dispenses for him neither sweetness nor light. News magazines, if read at all, must be examined critically for the ruthless angle or slant given to the week's events.

He is no better off while listening to the radio. With few exceptions, the commentators become for him merely the voices of prejudice. He can solve the murder mysteries before they reach the first commercial; the soap operas do not touch his (or her) emotions. Even the good music he does enjoy is gradually vanishing from the networks, and Groucho Marx only broadcasts once a week.

For the English student the average movie is a bore, the fiction in the slick magazines an over-simple formula, the book clubs print rubbish, and he is left, poor soul, with nothing but "little" magazines and the world's great literature.

Handicapped as he is by a seemingly twisted and snobbish attitude, he is faced by an even greater problem, for after four years of college he is usually unprepared to earn a living, and often without even a vocation in mind. After the graduation speaker has told him how the future of America rests with him, he wanders forth into the economic forest equipped with little besides a multitude of grade points in literature and composition.

Unless he has a private income, he is now faced with the alternatives of either starvation, some form of part-time work which might

This article contains the substance of an address to the English Club by Mr. Larom on the subject "How to Be An English Major and Still Eat."—Ed.
leave him time and energy to think, or joining what is commonly called the "Rat Race."

A further problem arises for many of us because we want to write and in all probability what we have to say will not sell, and even we are lucky enough to see it all in print it still won’t keep the children in bubble gum. As the increasing responsibilities of marriage and babies, and the attendant expenses of food, shelter, transportation and life insurance bear down on us, a great many—perhaps most—of us climb reluctantly on the merry-go-round. Soon it gathers speed, our vision blurs, and the danger of jumping off becomes so great that we hang on until the big ride is over.

Assuming that, like the present writer, you are no genius but that even after college you want to go on reading and writing and thinking independently, I think that perhaps my experience may be enlightening.

After graduating in English from MSU in 1932, I was faced with a number of responsibilities in the midst of the depression. Deciding that I had a certain facility in the writing of dialogue, I went in radio-advertising in New York City.

At first I was delighted to find that I was surrounded by English majors from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Hamilton, and other top-flight colleges, and that my immediate boss was a Rhodes Scholar. I was glad to discover that I could make a living that I put off, for the time being, any thought of serious writing, and soon, as the paycheck increased in size, so did my enjoyment of the money—and gradual the darkness closed in.

It is true that I attained a certain distinction in my field. I wrote the first "Cavalcade of America" script. I did continuity for "The sentimental gentleman of swing, Tommy Dorsey, his Trombone and Orchestra," and I once directed the only cowboy program on record containing a full-blooded Indian with an English accent.

But the pace was telling on me. I became a commuter to Long Island and stood in the crowded cars, peering dimly through the smoke at The World Telegram. I directed evening programs that kept me up late, and at last I achieved the distinction of being in demand—something called a "Brainstorm Supper." Here, after an excellent dinner from the advertising agency’s experimental kitchen, we sat around the table while an account executive explained his problem, and we racked our sleepy brains in an effort to produce for him an eleven p.m. "a campaign as good as B. O."

After a while I became thoroughly ill, and in an amazing resurgence of fundamental intelligence, I resigned.

I realize that the above description is likely to brand me simple as stupid. But if, after war service, you find yourself married, wi
children and responsibilities that increase faster than the bank balance, I think it possible that you, too, may have trouble turning old literature courses into cash.

However, if you understand the dangers in time, you may be able to live a different sort of existence. "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only indespensible, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind," said Thoreau, the man who might well become the patron saint of the English major. "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts... It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically."

There are ways, as Thoreau found out, to avoid quiet desperation, but it is wise to think them out ahead, to know as he did some craft that will make a living. Some of us, for instance, while still in college have found that we can teach. This requires, of course, either a minor in Education or graduate work for teaching on the college level. As anyone can see, teaching is far from a part-time job—yet there is time off now and then, time for thought and reading.

Some of us can live by hack work, though it is dangerous to serious writing. I believe it is possible, however, if you make the two kinds of authorship keep their distance. For instance, I have been quite successful with children's books,* but I do not think it has hurt my short stories. A good living can be made with fact articles or slick magazine fiction—yet I fail to see why it should hurt your poetry.

If like Thoreau you are a handyman, or if you enjoy mechanics, get the training you need as soon as possible, or take courses in social work, psychology, adult education, arts and crafts—to name only a few other possibilities. In short, the time for economic planning is while you are in college, even though military service may intervene.

Of course, technology and garrison psychology may dominate our lives for many years to come, and these will not make it any easier for the English student. At times he may even feel like a medieval monk protecting his books in the hopes of some vague future renaissance. Yet this is a valuable function, and unless the libraries themselves become radio-active it is always possible that the world, out of sheer boredom, might take to the old books again...

But this is dreaming!—an old English custom. No public opinion survey would corroborate it. "Can't you see?" ask the radio, TV and magazine executives, "that this simply isn't common sense?"

Only from Walden Pond comes a faint answer. "Why level downward to our dullest perceptions always, and praise that as common sense?" asks the crochety commentator from the beanfield network. "The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring."

*For the English Major, advertising should be relegated to a footnote—Mountain Pony, Whistlesey House, $2.50, etc.
With empty eyes and face, she sat in the room, a magazine open on her lap with its varnished scenes of interiors glaring in the window light. She did not look at it. Page after page like these she had long ago sucked dry. Now she had no need of them, except as gratifying sops to her own superiority. She watched her own beautifully manicured hand moving restlessly toward the cigarette on the table near her and checked herself. It was only two o'clock and she could not allow herself another until two-thirty. Her eyes wandered caressingly over the room.

The sunlight flickered dimly into it, city sunlight that had filtered through layer upon layer of the dust motes that hang above city streets, gold turned to grey. Grey sunlight for a grey room. It was a room done with Taste, the kind of taste handed down by women's magazines with their subtle patronage. Everything in it was grey: dark, almost oxford grey, walls, silver grey carpet, grey iron tables with shining glass tops unmarred by fingerprints. The chairs were covered with pencil sketch chintz prints, smooth, spotless. The walls were interrupted three times; by a mirror whose ornate gilt frame had been silvered (with aluminum paint), by a small etching with a large mat and by the largest print available of Picasso's Woman in White, washed out colors almost luminous here. A shoebox room, the slanted light from the windows across one end giving it a tilted modern perspective.

It looked a tremendously expensive room, but it was not. It was a room where infinite care and time had been expended, woven like a spider web, by a woman in search of perfection, prodigal of time. Hour after endless hour she had spent selecting, discarding, each minor decision held like a soft peppermint against the roof of the mouth until the last delicious moment of savor was gone and it was time to fill the emptiness again. How long it had lasted—two and a half years—since her marriage. And now the room was done and the woman sat idle; only her brain scurried about, seeking some loose strand, some imperfection, some proof that her work was not over.

Almost hating herself, she reached for the radio, twisting the dial until the muffled hysterical voices of a daytime serial came softly for her ears alone. Then she leaned back with a deprecating smile for an
invisible audience to show that she really didn’t care for this sort of thing, but it did pass the time. The marketing was done, (on the telephone), the apartment was clean, magazines digested (books took too long to read), and the afternoon stretched arid before her. Museums, antique shops, auctions, matinees, she knew them all, knew too the restless other women who thronged them.

At two-thirty she had her cigarette, at three o’clock the telephone shrilled. Eight, nine, ten times it rang, while the unctuous voice of the radio announcer came through the sounds like scenery through the gaps of a moving train. She did not answer. She knew it would be Allan, her husband, and she knew, too, the whole pattern of the conversation. It would relieve him to think she was out enjoying herself, like his mother, or her mother.

She thought of her mother in Ohio, leading her comfortable Helen Hokinson existence with her bridge club, her literary club, and her endless round of visiting and being visited. She resented the pity that crept into her mother’s letters, pity for her lonely life, laid like a comforting, patting hand on her arm, and she loathed being patted. And so when she answered she made her letters gay and hurried, stuffed with descriptions of the matinees she hadn’t seen, cocktail parties she didn’t go to, occasionally including a gentle barb clipped from the New Yorker, a discreet sneer for the inanities of suburban life.

The telephone ceased its clamor and she got up to stare out of the window. One flight below in the dirty street, for it was not a good neighborhood, women sat on the steps of the brownstone houses lazily gossiping away the hours. The woman across from her always pad her hair in curlers. For what, Elise wondered. Did she take them out at night and glamourize her undershirted husband? A fat, curly-haired two-year-old toiled earnestly up and down the six steps beside his fat, snarly-haired mother. His pants were wet. They were always wet. A knot of children surged together and apart, together and apart, governed by the cars and trucks that moved in their blind and aimless pattern on the street.

A man walked down the street, his hat held idly in his hand. His hair was red and wavy, and from her position above him she could see a gleam of pink scalp behind the careful pompadour. His chest was strong and heavy, his arms too long, legs too short. All her life she had shrunk away from the sensuality that hung about these men, their very maleness plain under their poorly-cut suits. This one wore a blue pin-striped suit, the blue too vivid with the white of the stripes, the kind that went with a painted satin tie. She knew these men from years of side-long glances, knew the hair on the backs of their hands, their scrubbed shiny looking ears, their too-white teeth. Like a prize bull at a fair, she thought.

She pulled the glass curtain away to get a better look, and as if
she had his head on a string, it swung around and looked up. She
his eyes calmly for the briefest of seconds. Then her eyes swivell
up and down the street as if to find something of more interest. I
eyes were blue, a horrid sharp, unmuted blue. She heard the folds
the curtain slither over each other, a thin sound, behind her own qui
breathing.

Hurriedly, she crossed the room and sank again onto the davenport. The top layer of her mind began to gibe at her for looking
him. I'm positive his other name is the man in the street, and at ho
are the wife and kiddies. I've seen other women looking at men li
that and wondered why. Of course, strength is attractive—to so
people—but muscle above the neck, thick gristly muscle; how do th
stand it? I've never seen eyes like that, it's the same color as a g
flame, blue, hot. Allan has grey eyes, no, hazel, like an agate with
pattern. This man's hands would be hot and sticky. If they mov
across your skin, they wouldn't slide, they would bump along in lit
jerks. She lit a cigarette and began to smoke in short nervous puf
so that it was half gone when the sound of the doorbell stabbl
through the room.

She looked at her cigarette, carefully tapping the meagre ash ov
and over with a meaningless tic-like gesture. If she let him in sh
could amuse herself with his pitch. By the time Allan came home, s
would have it worked up into a facile tale of the kind he delighted i
A good corny salesman spiel somehow restored in him... somethin

The bell had rung for the third time when she opened the doc
The man had turned back toward the stairs so that her first sight w
of the apelike silhouette of his thick back and neck. When he swu
around to face her she saw herself as he should see her—distinct fr
the shapeless housewives with their bandanna-bound heads he must u
used to—tall and slim in the pastel hostess gowns Allan liked her
wear, the smooth cap of black hair binding her fragile head.

She spoke with a rusty grating sound, a voice that had not bee
used all day. "You wanted to see me?"

His voice was a good one, brisk and eager, businesslike. "Ye
Mrs. Morrow, if I could have a few minutes of your time!" So h
had noticed the name plate. That was a nice trick, probably taug
in a smooth two-weeks course in salesmanship. He moved awkwa
past her, his bullet head scarcely an inch above her own.

"Nice little place you got here, Mrs. Morrow. You should se
some of them I go into in this neighborhood." He was straightenin
the huge knot of his tie, and an unwilling empathy twisted her hanc
as she watched.

"Won't you sit down, Mr...?"

"Fisk, Bill Fisk." He ducked his head an inexperienced sort
bow and sat down on the edge of the chair by the davenport. "Thank you, ma'am."

"Did you come to see my husband, Mr. Fisk?" The scraping had left her throat and her voice sounded cool and formal to her ears.

"Not exactly, Mrs. Morrow. I have something here that will interest both you and your husband." She watched his eyes leap from detail to detail of the room, lingering longest on the two doors that led to the kitchen and the bedroom. Was he waiting to see Allan materialize in one of them?

"Suppose you tell me, Mr. Fisk."

He licked his lips self-consciously and she felt the inside pockets of her cheeks tug in a dry smile at the effort he was making to relate his spiel to what he could judge of the room and the occupant. Then he fastened his eyes on hers with an earnest expression she could almost see him practicing in the shaving mirror.

"These days we got to look ahead, Mrs. Morrow. We read in the newspapers about the atom bomb, but what do we do about it? Nothing. Here we live in the greatest city in the world, the best target there is, and when those Reds come over with one of those bombs, where're they going to lay it? I'll tell you where. Right here in the greatest city in the world. Am I right? Sure, I'm right, and we got to prepare for that day, Mrs. Morrow. Now, I got right here in my pocket practically the only insurance sold in the U. S. today that covers that particular contingency. And when I say covers, I mean covers! This is no ordinary life insurance, Mrs. Morrow, this is something you can't afford to be without. Real protection, for you, for your husband, for your kids, and even,'" he let his voice display the grandeur, as if he had penetrated her most underlying secret, "even your furniture and clothes! Includes hospitalization and every sort of contingency you could imagine." He let the rest of his breath out audibly with a flashing of his best shop smile. There was a round dimple in his chin that reminded her of a Follenbee doll she had once had.

"Now, I don't know what kind of protection you already have, Mrs. Morrow."

She held out the glass cigarette box to him. He broke off his speech politely, taking a cigarette, searching his pockets for a match. She leaned forward for him to light hers, resting her little finger against his as if to steady the flame. Then she raised her eyes to his, delicately tasting the look she found there.

"What a forward-looking company you must work for," she said.

He grasped at the words, the contempt in them whirling past his ears, whether because he could not comprehend it, or because it was more politic to ignore it, she could not tell. "Yes, ma'am that's what
they are. A brand new company, The Atomic Age Assurance Company, formulated for a special cause. They saw the needs of the people of this country and jumped right in to help them.” The words spiral on and on, issuing from between the white teeth like smoke.

She watched avidly the motions of his lips and tongue but the words did not reach her ears. I know this man, she thought, I've known him for years. I know what he will say before he says it. I know the texture of his skin, the broken nail on his right hand, the sound of his voice. I know him, I hate him, I . . . . She raised her arm in a lazy arc to push an invisible hairpin into the dark coil on her neck. He was watching out of the tail of his eye.

“‘And you can see from the low cost of the premiums that our job is really to help you, no matter what your income is.” He paused awkwardly. Time out to delete the paragraph about the idle rich, she supposed.

Using the pause, she swung her feet onto the davenport, tucking them cozily under her. The long gown fell in graceful folds around her ankles; she felt his glance on them. She watched the rise and fall of his chest and wondered if it were matted with coarse red hair like some she had seen in the street below. His eyes were a paler blue with the out of the sky to intensify them. Darkness, city twilight was closing the room in. Allan would be home in an hour and a half.

“Oh, yes, the premiums,” she said softly.

His face was changing as he looked at her. The practiced smile was gone and the eyes looked slick, glazed. He rose to push an ash tray closer to her on the coffee table and slid into the seat at the other end of the davenport with the easy assurance of a chess player.

“The premiums are kept especially low,” he said, “so that everyone can avail themselves of this protection.” Even his voice was different. A hoarse insistent note crowded it as if there were not room for words and breath too. He waited again like a chess player for her to make the next move.

She leaned forward to put her cigarette out, pressing her breast against the cool pastel silk of her gown, feeling the slow hard pounding underneath. He was sliding down the davenport closer to her. She could hear the sound of his breathing moving hot through the red lining of throat and mouth.

“How low?” she asked huskily.

“Very low.” He moved again; now her hand was pressed against his pant leg, the rough material scratching.

Her eyes traveled slowly, heavily, up the gaudy tie, over the long pointed collar, to the ruddy skin of the neck, the chin with the heavy
beard hurrying to reappear, the slack lips, the nose, the eyes. Passion fogged his eyes, running into them in little red streams, a hard slick salacious passion she had never seen before. A knowing, practiced passion. Like a bull, she thought, a curried, brushed bull, without thought of refusal. How long does it take a bull to recognize the proper stimuli? How long has it taken this man to recognize the unbearably bored woman? How many houses has he gone into, how many cigarettes offered him, how many women...? So obvious she had been in her subtlety. So the other women must have been, but this man was above, or was it below, subtlety. She saw the faces of the other women, as she had seen them so many times, in the auctions, the movie matinees, the parks, hating what she saw in their faces without recognizing it.

She rose in one swift fluid movement to kill the moment, to cast away the required ecstasy. Then nothing remained of the illusion but a fat, short, redfaced man, wrinkling her chintz slipcover, his eyes still glazed with might-have-been.

"If you will leave a prospectus with me, Mr. . . . ah . . . Fisk, my husband and I will look it over. Then the next time you are in this neighborhood, you can drop in and I will give you an answer."

"
Three Poems by John Pine

Caterwaul

As one anonymous urchin bawls
Abrupt hot tears from Maiden Lane,
Behind high Metropolitan walls
One spasm of indigenous pain
That deranges dumb lethargic air
And echoes down brick corridors . . .
I hear it caterwaul, "Despair, despair"
Before interminable shut doors.

My Lost City

Do strident gulls wheel on the breeze
That whips up off the Battery,
Or glowworms crawl across the bay
Past freighters putting out to sea
Toward evening, as the skyline pales† . . .

These lakes are glass; immaculate
Between tall silences hackneyed, trite,
Upon which sit somnambulant birds
Who never bruised Nantucket Light
Toying with the violent gales.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Alighting at the curb
From sleek chrome automobiles
Or walking, we circle like gnats
About the marquee, and whirl . . . ah!
Giddily in florescent air
And come to rest at the fag end
Of the line, and dumbly stare.
It had been a lonely year for Philip Meister. In his whole married life he had never considered the possibility that he might be left alone. He plagued himself ceaselessly, therefore, to know why the unexpected had happened.

It was the suddenness of her action that he couldn't comprehend, Philip said. Sinda had gone down to Santa Fe with him, but he came back to Chicago alone. Even a year later he was saying to friends, "Can you imagine what came over her?" He kept insisting that nothing upsetting had happened in New Mexico. Sinda was really far too sophisticated to be upset because he took the Spanish girl dancing. Besides she got interested in the pansy Brady right away herself. Sinda was usually as predictable as the phases of the moon, but sometimes she would do queer things. She would cry for no reason, for instance, and this Brady was another of her whims.

"Of course," Philip said, "I'm not stupid enough to think Sinda really wanted Brady. I wouldn't think any woman would want to trade in a man for a Brady. No, I'm positive that it wasn't so much that she wanted someone else as that she wanted to be free from me. But I can't understand it. We hadn't been unhappy together, although we did go to the Fiesta as sort of an attempt at a second honeymoon. But after Sinda met Brady she was moody and distant. You know she left me a note which said just this:

Dear Phil:

Simon Brady said once, 'Think how it would be if you were to toil and endure all of a long year, and the festival never came.' I can't go on with you now that I know the festival will never come.

And she signed her name. I know that note by heart. I've tried to see in it some real motive, some clue. Can you imagine it? Just that. But you can see the strange power Brady had over her. I met him once afterward you know and told him to his face that his evil influence was to blame. He just looked at me calmly and said, 'I had nothing but the power of unintentionally making your wife see her plight, Mr. Meister.' As if I were too gross to understand Sinda."

Philip Meister's friends, people who had known Sinda too, were no
help to him. A couple of them suggested that Sinda must have acted on the strength of long standing grievances, but the others agreed with him that it must have begun in Santa Fe.

"Sometimes," Philip said, "I think it was the very character of the Festival itself that worked on her. To me it was a lot of noise, dust, and crowded bars. Oh it was colorful, picturesque you know but Sinda seemed to see something sad about it. In fact several people—Brady and Alita—seemed to find something sad about the fiesta too.

"I don't know though. Logically it must have started when I met the Spanish girl. I keep wondering if I am to blame. But my whole affair with Alita was innocent. Even if I am to blame, I am innocent."

So in his loneliness did Philip Meister search his conscience and declare himself blameless, even a year after he came back one night just before dawn to his rooming house on the outskirts of Santa Fe to find his wife lying on top of the bed, her wrists slashed, dead by suicide.

II.

For an hour that September night the guitars were still. Ever light in Santa Fe had been put out and crowds waited along the street to see the procession of candlebearers come down from the Cathedral At last, when the doors of the Cathedral were opened, a great slab of light fell gleaming upon the street, a carpet for the feet of the worshippers. The only sound was the shuffle of bare feet over the smooth cobblestones, and smoke from the guttering candles floated in the cool air, with an odor like that of decaying flowers. The procession passed slowly, dark faces bent, hands cupped to guard the fragile flames. Then from the Hill of the Martyrs outside the town came the chanting of the mass for the dead. It was then that he kissed Alita for the first time.

She had said, "If we don't go we will have to listen to them singing the requiem." So they had pushed out of the crowd and gone along a deserted street. They strode out swinging their arms, holding hands. Her high heels clicked on the pavement, and even lifted up like that, he noticed, her head was just below his shoulder. They were silent at first. But Alita's mood changed swiftly, and suddenly she had thrown her body backward to show him she could touch her hands to the ground. Her hair fell between her spread knees and her breasts strained against the shirt she wore; when she sprang up, he caught her in his arms and kissed her. As he held her, the breeze lifted and they could distinctly hear the chanting of the worshippers who were gathered around the ancient graves in the desert. She pushed him away gently, her head turned to catch the sound of the singing. Then they walked on in silence. Suddenly the lights came on again. He looked at her. Her face was quiet, serious. But then she smiled quickly and put her hands over his ears, saying, "Don't listen." She shook
his head lightly with her fingertips. Laughter was behind the Spanish words she said. He asked her what they meant. She looped her arm through his, and propelled him back toward the plaza, the bright lights and the music. She said in flawless English, "After all, they have been dead two hundred years."

Afterward, it seemed to him that that was the beginning.

III.

Sinda heard about the Santa Fe Festival before they left Chicago. She kept taking about it. She asked Philip if he wanted to go.

He said, "The whole idea of this trip is to go wherever we want to, and to stop as long as we please."

They were packing their bags. Sinda carefully folded up a blouse, and said, "Yes, but do you really want to go?"

"Of course," he said. "I would tell you if I didn't want to go to Santa Fe."

"Really wanting to go and just going because the car takes you there are different matters," Sinda answered. Her voice sounded strained. He didn't answer her.

She said, "Why don't you suggest places to go? You let me make all the suggestions."

He said, "I don't have to suggest places to go. I like to go where you go. I love you."

He came toward her. She snapped her suitcase shut and slipped it to the floor, and walked out of the room before he could reach her.

So no more was said about the matter until they were in Colorado Springs waiting for breakfast in the morning of the day the Fiesta began in Santa Fe. Philip suddenly wondered how far it was to Santa Fe, and they began talking about the festival. Sinda said again she would like to go.

That morning driving toward Santa Fe both Sinda and Philip felt the alertness and light-heartedness of going where they had never been before. In the small towns across southern Colorado they began to hear Spanish being spoken, and, early in the afternoon, at a service station in New Mexico, Sinda bought two sombreros because the car's top was down, and the sun hot. They had to be tied on to keep them from blowing away.

The landscape too gave them a feeling of newness, strangeness. From Colorado Springs toward Pueblo they came out of the mountains into dry, sandy hills covered with tufts of coarse grass almost the color of the earth itself. And below Taos in New Mexico, there were long stretches of level road, and mountains low against the horizon in the distance. They sped through Mexican villages; a few low houses, dogs,
chickens, and occasionally a man with wide-brimmed hat low over his
dark face, to shield his eyes from the sun. The whole country was
bathed in sun. The very hills were yellow with exposure.

Sinda and Philip were happy or rather carefree, not feeling the
usual restraint between them. Unconsciously they were preparing for
the gaiety of the festival. Sinda stayed at the wheel nearly all the
way; she drove fast, watching far ahead along the road, glancing oc­
casionally at the peaks ringing the horizon. They didn’t speak very
much.

Late in the afternoon, Philip was reading names from the road­
map—La veta, Taos, Durango—and he read to Sinda the name of a
mountain range, Sangre de Cristo. She repeated it.

The name seemed to capture her imagination.

“Isn’t it wonderful, Philip,” she said. “What wonderful country.
Imagine us naming a mountain range The Blood of Christ. The Blood
of Christ.”

Philip tried to joke with her. He said, “You’re the only person
I’ve ever known who gets emotional over names on a map.” So he
tried to sustain the mood of intimate carelessness he had felt when
Sinda tied his sombrero under his chin, sitting up on her knees on the
car seat. But suddenly she was silent, and her face as she looked far
down the road, was tense and tired. And then he too, fell silent, feel­
ing cheated, empty, and alone. Gradually, too, as they continued with­
out speaking, he felt resentment—not against himself. Even though
he had enjoyed their carefree mood he should have known that Sinda
would suddenly lead into seriousness. He should have refused to play
with her, and then he would not have had to even give an answer to
her seriousness. He could have stayed quiet while she talked. Besides,
she hadn’t even been talking seriously. No, she had been talking about
the mountains called The Blood of Christ, and then suddenly she was
quiet, out of reach.

He tried to reconstruct the events which had lead up to his rank­
ling resentment against himself. But he had hopelessly lost some of
the strands. It added up to complete nonsense, they had been happy
and at ease, then Sinda said something about a mountain range called
Sangre de Cristo and he had replied in the bantering tone appropriate
to their mood. It was senseless and Sinda was to blame.

Now that Philip had established in his own mind the cause of their
silence, his temper cooled and he began thinking about his relations
with his wife in a detached way. They were like magnets, he thought.
But their like poles were facing, and they had never been meant to
attract each other. But somehow they were fixed in that strange por­
tion. As long as they stayed a certain distance apart, each could lie
quietly, but as soon as they moved close, repelling forces were at work.
His mind was still idly mulling over the laws of magnetism, trying to apply them to human relations, when Sinda pulled the car to the side of the road, and went around to the trunk after the thermos bottle.

It was Sinda who spoke first, but he heard her without paying attention to what she said. She took off the sombrero and said something about the workmanship, running her long fingers over the crown, and not looking at him. Philip was looking over the prairie, his mind still half occupied with the laws of magnetism, turning the little tin cup about in his fingers. The beads of moisture on the metal wetted his hands.

Philip said quietly, "This lofty aridity answers something in me."

Sinda didn't answer. He said, "Perhaps in both of us."

She turned suddenly to him and put her hands on his arm. She was pale with seriousness, and spoke rapidly not letting him cut in. She said, "Philip, Philip," and her face crinkled for a moment as if tears were close. "It's new country and you like it. Let's try to be happy. While we're here. . . ."

He put his hand over her mouth and said, "Shh. . . ." She tried to twist her head away but he put his arm around her shoulders and held her tightly. He said, "We aren't unhappy Sinda." After a few moments her body went limp against his, and he felt a surge of tenderness for his wife. He felt that he must answer her somehow.

He said, "Darling we have to live out difficulties, not talk them out. Even if we could talk about things naturally it would be all right, but this dragging things in by the tail is terrible." He tried to sound wryly humorous.

Sinda said flatly, but with a sort of desperate urgency, "But you can't see anything to talk about unless it's dragged in by the tail."

She stopped and turned her head away.

Philip drove the rest of the way into Santa Fe. It was dusk. Sinda leaned back with her face toward the far mountains which were blue as ice in the half light. Neither spoke. After awhile they saw the distant lights of the town from the crest of a desert hill.

IV.

When they drove into Santa Fe the Fiesta had begun. The effigy of the Spirit of Gloom was already burning. It had been set ablaze as soon as dark came, and now gaiety swirled through the streets like some wild thing blown into town by the night wind from the prairie.

Philip honked and inched his way through the crowds. They skirted trios with violin, guitar, and accordion; lone singers with guitars, dancers, horsemen. At one corner of the plaza a stage had been set up, and they saw a girl whirling there with her arms above
her head, while the watchers applauded. The din was terrific. Over all the noisy milling crowd flickered the flames and shadows from the crumbling effigy.

Philip felt light-hearted and excited. He glanced at Sinda. She was still wearing dark glasses. The flames threw a red shadow across her face, and he couldn’t tell what she was thinking.

It was Saturday night; the Festival ended in the early dawn of the next Tuesday morning. They met Simon Brady that first night. At first they both disliked him. He kept talking when they wanted to see the Fiesta. Afterward Philip sometimes thought, “If we had never met Brady; if I had not been bored; if Sinda and I had begun to see the Fiesta together . . . what then?"

V.

The room they found was on the edge of town, but even from there they could hear the twanging guitars and the songs—ardent, melancholy, festive. In their room even before she unpached her bag, Sinda opened the window, and leaned there listening. The dry thin air was cold, and overhead the stars seemed big and close.

It was almost ten o’clock before they finished showering and changing clothes and started back toward the center of town to get supper. They stopped to listen to three Mexican boys singing, accompanying themselves with guitars; then squatting in a doorway, obviously quite drunk, a young fellow in cowboy clothes was fiddling quietly.

The restaurant was as crowded as the street outside. They were standing, trying to spot an empty place when near them a tall, thin man got up and asked them to share his table. He introduced them to his mother and told them his name was Simon Brady.

The mother said, “We feel guilty, you see.” Her son glanced quickly at her, and put his long, bony fingers over the pudgy beringed fist in which she was clutching a crumpled handkerchief. They looked at each other, faint smiles lifting their lips, and the mother said, “We feel guilty because we never eat out except in Festival time; then we come here where we won’t miss anything.”

The restaurant was quite dark, and outside dancing had begun in the streets. The sound of laughter, music and voices made it difficult for them to hear one another even across the table, and Philip set back watching Sinda as she leaned forward to hear what Brady was saying, and when Brady’s head turned she studied his face. He talked on and on. He was telling them about the Festival, at first, and Philip listened.

“You see, the Spaniards had imposed Christianity on the Indians, but when the Indians drove the oppressors out, they naturally took up their native rituals. Well, when the Spanish army reconquered the
territory a few years later the Indians naturally became Christians again."

Philip watched him closely. Brady was holding one cigarette after another between the thumb and forefinger of one large, long hand, while he gestured with the other. He took a long draw on his cigarette, then leaned back in his chair, while he carefully squashed the butt in the ashtray, and blew smoke from his pursed, protruded lips.

He said, "The Festival celebrates the bloodless reconversion (he made quotation marks in the air with two fingers of each hand) of the Indians, and the Spaniards who were killed in the original revolt are martyrs now."

Sinda laughed merrily, and lifted her glass high before her face before drinking, as if to toast Brady’s clever conversation. The mother had been looking down at her hands folded one over the other in her lap, but now she rolled herself about on her fat hips and slipped her arm through his and drew him toward her. As Brady leaned sidewise and forward toward his mother he turned his sleek head, too, smiling at her, and his blue knit tie swung away from the white shirt front and dangled between the soft, round cotton and the angular grey flannel of their knees. He straightened and silence fell among them. Philip was leaning back in his chair watching the dancers outside.

Then Sinda said, "Have you always lived here? Is this your home?" She was asking Mrs. Brady.

Mrs. Brady looked at Sinda vacantly for a moment as if gathering her thoughts, and then she said:

"Oh no, we didn’t always live here. Simon came out nine years ago, and he wrote me such wonderful letters about Santa Fe that one day I just took the train and came along."

She smiled and settled contentedly in her chair without having said where they had lived before. Her hands were folded in her lap, and she smiled not looking at any of them. And then suddenly Mrs. Brady looked Sinda in the eyes, and Sinda, after a moment, glanced away, avoiding the fat old woman’s stare.

Then the mother said, "I’ve never said it before but I think Simon wanted to send me back on the next train." For an instant her face clouded, and both Sinda and Philip watched for tears with dreadful fascination. But she did not weep. She looked back at her pudgy white hands.

Brady’s face was serious and strained. He took two quick gulps of his drink, and in an instant had become the jovial, loving son.

"Ho-ho," he bantered, "You’ve said it at least twenty-six times. And I think you’re beginning to believe it."

Mrs. Brady smiled an innocent, vacant smile at her son, and said
in a low voice, "I think I had better go home now." She rose a little heavily from the table and repeated, "You have your friends to tell to now, I guess I had better go." No one tried to detain her. Both Sinda and Philip got up, but the mother ignored them.

Brady went with his mother to the door, and they talked there for a few minutes before he came back to the table. Looking through the window, Philip could see the mother moving slowly away through the gay crowd. When Brady sat down, he glanced from Philip to Sinda. They did not speak. After a moment Brady said, "One can be always completely kind even to one's mother." Still neither Philip nor Sinda spoke. Brady spread his large hands, palms up, and shrugged his shoulders.

"No really," he said, "one must fight evil with evil. Only on answers with a lesser evil if possible."

Philip was leaning across the table to hear what Brady said. There was a strained atmosphere among them. Philip tried to pass over the situation lightly by asking in a jovial tone, "Is that why you like Santa Fe, Mr. Brady? The evil, I mean."

But Brady took the question seriously. They had already ordered two rounds of drinks, and Philip had noticed with annoyance that Brady seemed highly sensitive to alcohol.

"Now understand me," Brady said, and there was something almost alarming in the intense gestures of his hands. "Now understand me, I don't mean that evil must always be answered by evil. But no one believes in the turn-the-other-cheek business any more. So if you can't answer evil with good, it is better to answer it with evil." He relaxed suddenly and smiled. "So I let my mother walk home," he said and turned up his eyes in an abashed and ludicrous manner, and lifted his hands in a helpless gesture.

Evidently Brady now was willing to change the subject. Philip was about to suggest that they should go their separate ways, and he was annoyed when Sinda continued the strange, strained conversation.

"But I don't see what you mean," she said. "I mean, if you're serious, what is the advantage of fighting evil with evil?"

Brady seemed a little embarrassed at the question. He answered smiling, "Well, at least you express yourself. If you're a masochist you turn the other cheek; if you're afraid of a fight you walk away, but if you're sensible and truthful you slap back."

"But lightly," Philip said, still trying to divert the conversation.

"But lightly, yes," Brady answered.

"But why?" Sinda asked and Philip was greatly annoyed to see that she was seriously interested in Brady's hare-brained chatter. Now Brady became serious too. "Because," he said, "the important thing is to give expression to life."
"And you think evil is part of it?" Sinda asked.

"But of course my dear." Brady smiled and spread his hands again. He was willing to drop the conversation, but he felt that he had to explain what he had been saying. And so he talked on, punctuating his words with flourishes of the cigarette which he held between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand like an exquisite miniature baton. He leaned intently across the table and at such close range the dim light accentuated his features rather than hid them. He had a long face with either the refining quality of sensitivity or of elegance, perhaps both, to save it from horiness. Certainly there was in elegance about Brady bordering on effeminancy. His eyes were lanted and heavy lashed, and the mouth was thin, but well-shaped, so that the two together gave the face an expression of habitual melancholy. It was a monkish face, but lean, healthy, tanned by the sun.

Sinda was saying, "But you are almost saying that the evil in life is good."

"Well," Brady answered, "life as we know it wouldn't be life, and I don't think we would like it, if it weren't for the bad things. That's why I stay in Santa Fe—because there is room for all here. Life may be expressed in many ways. The individual may become a desperado or a religious fanatic. But here both are accepted. There is room for both expressions of life. But where you and I come from the business of living was uniform, patterned, life-denying."

Philip found himself interested and offended by what Brady was saying. He leaned across the table too, and looked intently at Brady. Philip said, "Yes, but all this is highly theoretic. People are the same everywhere. Nothing could happen here which couldn't happen anywhere. They have desperadoes because the police force isn't big enough. Show me where these people are any different from the people back home in Chicago."

Brady didn't answer for a moment. "Well," he finally said, listen to their music. Music says what words can't say. One measure gay, the next sad. In their music, forces are balanced just as in life. It is the same in their lives. You see most of these people have nothing gay or pretty in their lives. Their daily lives express misery. But then the fiesta comes..." He looked out at the crowded plaza, and sat thus for several minutes, his face sober, and silent.

Brady drained his glass and ordered another round before he spoke again. Sinda was twirling her glass against the palms of her hands. Her face was drawn. Brady spoke first.

"I'm sorry. You don't know what I'm talking about. And I don't say it. It's a feeling. Music can say it. So can actions. I mean that these people say the inexpressible things about lives in their daily lives. They express life through action." He stopped and bounced his fist on the table with exasperation.
"Now here's the idea," he continued, leaning closer toward Sinda.
"Tomorrow you must go to mass at the cathedral. I remember the first time I went. It was when I first got here. It's the crucifix in back of the altar you must notice. Some would call it vulgar, but no you," and he reached out and covered Sinda's hand with his. "They would call it vulgar because there is red paint on the hands, feet, or the brow, and on the side. Red paint to represent blood. The blood has already flowed out. The Christ is dead, and they have shown him that way in the crucifix. And when the priest lifted the wine toward the ravaged figure, I suddenly saw why he was represented as being so gruesomely dead. Do you see? They know he is to be honored because he expressed himself, because he expressed his conception of life by way of death."

A long silence ensued. Geysers of light flickered over the windows from the fireworks outside. It was nearly midnight. Philip put both hands flat on the table and pushed himself up. "I think," he said, "I will express myself," and he grinned sardonically and a little drunkenly at Sinda and Brady. They looked at him without speaking. Then he excused himself simply, abruptly, as if he were going to the Men's Room, and he walked out the door into the noisy, crowded plaza.

VI.

The crowd was thinning out. The sound of music and laughter seemed to be moving into the side streets. Philip felt excited at being alone in a strange town in Fiesta time. He took deep breaths of the cold, clear air. Overhead the stars were close and big.

He found a tavern but the bar was lined four deep. As he leaned against the wall waiting for a chance to order he began talking to a little Mexican policeman, and that is how he met Alita. The cop was telling him how many hours he had been on his feet that day, and she overheard him while pushing by. She made believe stomping on his tired feet, and she laughed and chattered in Spanish. She had been drinking; her eyes sparkled as she grasped the policeman's shoulders and laughed into his face. She was wearing a white mantilla over her dark hair. When she glanced at Philip and said something in Spanish he knew she didn't expect an answer, but he wanted to talk to her.

He said, "You look like a real Spanish senorita in that mantilla." And immediately he recognized the insipidity of what he had said, and he felt embarrassed.

The girl didn't look at him. But she shook the little policeman's shoulders—she was nearly as tall as he—and said in English, "Mexican. Not Spanish. You and I are Mexicans, eh, Pedro?"

The policeman took the laughing girl's wrists and held her at arm's length from him, looking into her face with his dark, melancholy eyes.
"This one...", he said to Philip, shaking his head as if he could think of no words to describe her. And then, "Get a drink for this friend," he said to her. Suddenly she turned full toward Philip, serious.

"What, no drink yet?" And she was already pushing away through the crowd, before Philip could speak to her.

VII.

So they drank together and talked. When that bar closed they went to an after hours place on the outskirts of Santa Fe. They danced. Her body was lithe and young. It was nearly two in the morning when Philip came home.

He went to his room and put on the light only after he had lunged across the bed and been surprised to find no one in it. In the bright light the room was neat, deserted, still. Sinda had not been home. He put out the light and lay on top of the bed in his clothes so that Sinda could see that he had come home drunk.

When Philip woke up in the morning his wife was sleeping under the covers and he was on top on his own side, still in his clothes and shivering with cold.

VIII.

It was Sunday morning.

Philip lay still, shivering, trying to decide what he should do. He rehearsed waking Sinda gently; he would not mention last night. He would laugh about his throbbing head as they sipped coffee, and Sinda would give him an aspirin from her handbag. But then he thought of how she had left him shivering on top of the covers. Cramps began to ripple across his stomach. He got heavily to his feet. His head was pulsing and he gripped the edge of the bureau, and knocked Sinda’s compact clattering the floor. He expected the noise to wake her, but she didn’t stir.

When he came back from the bathroom he studied his face in the mirror. He had shaved and his face was flushed from drinking. Alcohol always took away his paleness, and made him look younger. He put on a bow tie and a coat which emphasized his big frame. He actually liked the feeling of a hangover, after he had showered and shaved and put on fresh clothes, and he stood in front of the mirror combing his thick hair and enjoying the frail, giddy sickness in his stomach. Sinda was still sleeping when he went out.

IX.

The sun was already hot. After a cup of coffee, Philip sat on a bench in the plaza, and he could feel the sun drawing the alcohol out of his body. He felt weak and giddy, but he stayed there like a sun worshipper until he felt as if he would faint with dizziness. His head
was still throbbing and he felt uneasy and irritable. The idea kept occur-
ing to him that he should go back and wake Sinda. He knew, al-
though she had not said so, that she would want to go to mass in the
Cathedral. He should go wake her. But he couldn’t get rid of the
feeling that his wife had been awake when he left the room. He was
annoyed that she had left him uncovered last night; Sinda rarely re-
taliated but obviously this time she was protesting because he walked
out on Brady’s monologue. Well, they understood each other per-
fectly, and they had always made it a practice to ignore the little
tensions, like this, that came up between them. After all, marriage,
too, as Brady said, was a balancing of many elements, Philip thought,
and even if the scale tipped far one way, as it seemed to be now, it
would right itself. It was better to sit still, better not to jar the
delicate balance, better to let equilibrium be restored. Even if he had
gone too far, Sinda was already reestablishing the delicate balance—
by leaving him dressed and uncovered, by ignoring him this morning.
He was sure she had been awake.

So Philip mused as he sat in the hot sun that Sunday morning in
Santa Fe. So he mused and his uneasiness gradually subsided and he
dozed there in the brilliant light, the heat, and quiet. There was noth-
ing necessary for him to do, and finally he slept, and the symetrical,
quivering figure of the delicate scale filled his dreams.

When the gathering crowd awoke him, he did go home, but Sinda
had gone out, and he went back to the plaza, vaguely disturbed, but
relieved too in that Sinda’s actions were justifying his own.

The unexpected was to come to Philip Meister when he was con-
fident that he was master of the situation, when he had been obsessed
for some hours with the idea of the self-adjusting scale, when, although
the girl Alita had just proven to him otherwise, he was sure he could
count on his knowledge of human nature. Later he was to say, “It was
the suddenness of it I can’t understand.” But really it was the un-
predictableness of Sinda’s action which stunned him. And perhaps it
was because the idea of the delicate balance had grown strong in his
mind just as he was thrown into complete confusion that made every-
thing so unclear to him later. Even a year afterward, he said it must
have begun with Alita, and still that could not be, because his whole
affair with the girl was innocent, completely innocent.

That afternoon as Philip stood watching dancers perform on the
open stage in the plaza, Alita came up beside him and took his hand.
They spent the day together. That night they watched the candlelight
procession going barefooted to pray where the bones of the martyrs
lay in the desert. That night he made love to Alita, and came home
again toward morning. When he stepped into their room, he again
did not put on the light, but shut the door softly and stood against it
listening. There were only the scattered voices of late revellers. After
awhile his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and he could see the
curtain stirring in the cold air, and the neat emptiness of the bed. After awhile he slept, and woke when Sinda came in and pulled the shade before lying down because it was already daylight. She bent over him and shook his shoulder. She said his name and gently shook him. After awhile she turned his face up with her fingertips and it seemed like a long time that she looked at him, not making a sound. But he kept his eyes closed. Sinda sobbed after she got in bed. Philip fell asleep after awhile, feeling justified because she had come in later than he. The scale was adjusting itself.

That day, because he slept late, Philip was in when Brady called, and Sinda accepted for both of them an invitation to lunch.

Brady was gracious but quiet. He looked tired, and the expression of melancholy was accented by the smudges of fatigue around his eyes. When Sinda left them for a few minutes Brady said, "You have a charming wife, Mr. Meister."

Philip held out his lighter to Brady's cigarette.

"I'm pleased you find her so," he said.

Brady blew smoke slowly from his pursed lips and said quietly, "And are you enjoying our little Fiesta?"

Meister didn't answer the question. He looked steadily at Brady, and the other returned his gaze, holding his cigarette before him between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and on his face there was an inquisitive, expectant look. "You are accusing me," Philip thought. "You are reprimanding me in order to justify your own interest in my wife. But I'm not afraid of your accusing or of you, because you wouldn't dare, neither of you would dare."

X.

That night, Monday, was the last of the Festival. Even if Philip and Alita had driven outside town into the desert, they would still have heard the singing and felt the swirl of the dancing. There was no escaping it. They sat in a dusky bar. Through the windows beside them they watched couples dancing outside in an open court. Shadows flitted over Alita's face, and the sad-gay music throbbed like some element of the air itself. Once Philip and Alita went outside to dance but the night air was cold, and they did not stay.

They drank not heavily, but steadily. For a long while neither spoke, because earlier they had made themselves melancholy with the thought that this was the last night of the Fiesta. Philip had talked about starting back to Chicago, and it had come to both of them, and Alita said it, how strange it was that they should have come from so many miles apart together.

And Alita said, "How much stranger too that I should love you."

They had never mentioned love between them before, and Alita's
admission filled Philip with desire and an anxious awareness that when morning came he would be leaving Santa Fe with Sinda. He foresaw how it would be; probably he would never come back, and there would be no excuse to justify corresponding with Alita. He would not know where she was or what she was doing. Finally she would become almost a wraith of his imagination, and gradually his desire would be quieted. Unless he could leave her behind him without desire.

Philip had not answered her in any way when she told him of her love. He was looking beyond Alita at the dancers in the courtyard, his cheek on her hair. He noticed an old man in the orchestra, who sat with his head down, musing over his guitar, the dark shadow of his hat brim hiding his face. Philip told Alita to look, and when her face was turned from him, he put his lips against her hair and said softly:

“Look, Alita, he is thinking of when he was as young as we and in love. One day his lover went away and that is why he is sad. He remembers the hours they wasted.”

Alita was silent for awhile, and then she took the hand he had slipped under her arm against her breast, and held it in hers. She said quietly, “No, Philip, not because his lover went away, but because they have been so happy together. That is why he is sad. Last night he walked in the procession and heard the requiem. He thinks as he sits there that this is the last Festival he will see. He is sad because he is old, and he has loved so long. And he knows he will not live much longer. No, Philip, if his lover had left him so many years ago he wouldn’t be sad to die. It is because he is leaving the one he has loved so long that he is sad.”

She turned her face against his suddenly, stridently, and they kissed. She was asking him never to leave, and suddenly Philip was talking about his wife whom he had never mentioned to Alita before. He drank rapidly and talked about Sinda, holding Alita in his arms. He was telling Alita that they had only the rest of tonight, and tomorrow he would go away.

He heard her speak Spanish to someone, and another girl stopped at the table. She was a young Mexican girl with heavy breasts and a sulky mouth. Alita spoke to her in rapid Spanish, and the girl glanced at Philip and sat down. Philip ordered a drink for her, and Alita straightened out of his embrace. While they were waiting for the drinks to come, Alita suddenly put her hands to Philip’s face and turned toward him. Her eyes were close to his, and he saw how she studied his face as if that she might never forget it. Her eyes were moist and dark. Then they closed as she kissed him.

The new girl started to go. Alita took her hands from Philip’s face and put them on the girl’s arm, and kept her from going. And Philip too asked the girl to stay, although he did not know who she was. He was quite drunk, and he kept asking the girl why she was so quiet, and why she wanted to leave them.
At last the strange girl put her hands over his, and squeezed gently. "Let's go somewhere else," she said. He turned toward Alita. She was gone.

XI.

Philip Meister wept as he staggered through the streets of Santa Fe that night. He lost his way for awhile, and wandered through dark, narrow streets on the outskirts of town. He cursed his wife, everything about her, even her goddam silly name. At first he swore that he would kill her as she slept there in her bed. Then, strangely, for the first time he thought of divorcing Sinda. It was a sobering thought.

He found a diner and drank three cups of coffee, then went out in back to relieve himself. Overhead the stars were close and bright. From the plaza he could hear the sound of singing drifting faintly out to the edge of town and beyond into the prairie. As he stood for awhile looking up at the sky, listening to the distant voices, all his emotion gradually subsided into the urgent need for sleep, and he turned toward the singing, anxious to be home.

It was very late now. The stars were already dimming, retreating in the light of early morning, and the air was stirred with those soft, sudden breezes typical of dawn. The leaves lifted, rustled and fell, and once he passed a lawn sprayer which had been left running all night. Its soft persistent tinkle made with the leaves' stir and his footsteps, a streetful of sound; so quiet it was. Then as he came toward the plaza he heard more clearly the sound of singing and of guitars.

Six young Mexicans were singing their hearts out, one song after another, and strumming guitars. Around them booths were being torn down; even the big stage, where the dancers had whirled and stomped only a few hours ago, had been stripped of its bright bunting. The bare new planks shone white in the hard lamplight.

He was almost sober now. He knew that he would never divorce Sinda, and he was no longer in a hurry to get home to talk to her. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps, he thought tomorrow, as they drove along over the sandy hills, he would talk with her. But he knew everything she would say. Perhaps she would stop the car again and weep a little. Well, he would see... tomorrow.

It was very quiet as he came up the street; only the leaves stirred in the cold air, and away behind him he still heard the plinking guitars and the faint sound of voices. Suddenly his foot struck an empty beer can. It bounded away with intermittent clatter, and at the end of its trajectory, rolled away into the road and spun slowly silent. He was almost home; he had been so startled, he did not think to listen again for the guitars and singing.
Six Poems by Robert T. Taylor

Pathway to Centaurus

The tall man and the boy stood on the hill;  
Where the summer night winds softly brushed their faces:  
"Look, there's Polaris, son, there in the north,"  
And he moved his finger a little at a time  
To show him Draco, the lions and the bears,  
And he whispered then a long dream to the boy,  
And showed him a vision in the valley, poised  
And balanced, set in light against the sky.  
He wondered aloud and the boy caught then  
A little of his awe, the tingle on the neck,  
The hungry thoughts of what is in the void,  
Of what Medusa Perseus finally fled  
Or what Andromeda he won at last.

Atavistic impulse: others pointed too:  
The gothic fingers pointing like man's own,  
Pointed in stone to show the outward way.  
Even the plants curve outward, even man  
Points outward, points to fields of siren light.  
The pointing was always there, the static signs  
Of obelisks and Stonehenge and the trees;  
The waiting was there, for power to carve away  
Man's roots, to leave him clean as he was never  
Clean—if only minds could turn, if hands  
Were trained less clumsily, if only men...  

But when the boy comes down from summer hills,  
Leaving the stars behind, the boy forgets  
His father's dreams and learns, of course, too soon  
To sleep contented in the sweet soft mud,  
The scarlet pastures of the fecund earth.  
And if he looks above the bursting match,  
The steady wandering of his cigarette,  
And sees Bootes and the stars that hold  
No hold on him except perhaps his mind,  
He does not remember, wonder why no men,  
No clean men leap there with a comet's grace  
Across abysses, carving the thin unknown  
With delicate knives, the young skilled hands like blades.
It seems, indeed, the younger dreams fulfilled
In every drugstore smother the old dreams down
With lethal athletic pictures, harsh bad prose,
Sold for a quarter with contraceptives, combs,
And pills to soothe the ever beating nerves
That sing with planets in their courses, yes.
Beyond this monster and the semi-naked girl
In the mud, the street, no man has time to dream
That Centaurus could also furnish us with suns.

A Song for All the Sad Young Men in Years of Loss

O go and gather hellabore,
A purge before the wedding feast
Of the athlete and the sweet young whore,
The bathing beauty and the beast,
O go and gather hellabore.

The snow is falling down by night
Up to our knees by night and day,
The purest snow is not so white
As the clean hands torn off in play,
The snow is falling down by night.

O, love us, sweet, this last bald year,
The last that we can laugh and lie,
Grant us safe fornication, dear,
And a glimpse of pity before we die,
O, love us, sweet, this last bald year.

And if you will not, let it be,
We are only victims of our birth,
We can carry our love to the fecund sea
And fertilize the dying earth,
And if you will not, let it be.
A Song for Love in a Cold Country

Awake, awake, your lover calls;  
His eyes are seeking yours. Unkissed  
Except by stars, by ruined walls  
He lies love silent, spent in dreams  
While the ardent boy beside him screams  
Like some uncouth-tongued atavist.

His mouth is amorous but pale,  
The tardy winds caress his hair  
And the hair of old Neanderthal,  
Two noble apes in one damp bed.  
Awake, come kiss him, kiss the dead,  
The gutted lover, so old, so fair.

For an Aging, Seldom Published Poet

His eye twitches with old tics;  
He drinks alone, Faust in twilight,  
Theology known, a little physics,  
Unsatisfied, a die-by-night.

He is growing much older in his tower,  
Old in his fantastic rookery,  
My tired, loved, hackneyed brother,  
Poet-taster of the devil’s cookery.

But he will remake the world soon,  
He and I and the infant Shelleys,  
In love bring seas inland, the moon down  
For the sake of empty hearts, full bellies.

No, he is not, as you think, impotent,  
True, death is closer in his tomorrows;  
But he is exultant even in torment,  
Though time’s subtle rats nibble his toes.
Beauty Is Timid Under the Falling Sky

I was unaware I ever said
More than a word to her;
She was more silent on the stair
Than my searching bird or my silent bed.

And yet on one pale afternoon in fall
She kissed my lips and hands
And the taste of her was brightly crass;
She bounced our love like a child’s red ball.

We whisper now upon the stair,
Together in the sun,
Or else we hide upon the lawn
And secretly pluck the blades of fear.

And yet I am sure I never said
More than a word to her;
She was more silent on the stair
Than my silent bird or my searching bed.

With Age Comes Wisdom: There Will Be No Night

"'Tis strange
I should be old, and neither wise nor valiant."
    The Maid’s Tragedy.

The old men lean against the wall,
And chattering watch blond Helen pass,
And munch old lust as a cow eats grass,
Forgetting a moment the cooling sun of fall.

Young men, young men, we have something to say,
You are the lucky ones, taking this path,
Feeling the beauty of Achilles’ wrath,
Ah, youth, adventure, love and death today.

We are full-bellied old, we know
Having lived so long in peace how well
It must be to go maying down to hell
Young in spring, not old in winter snow.
"He's deformed," Mildred Sweeney told her husband. "Can't you see that? He's not all right here." She tapped a dimpled fist against her forehead.

"Even if he was just dumb, if he looked like other kids—even if he was ugly—but that head, Bart, that head."

"Shut up," said Bart Sweeney. "I'm trying to hear this." He made the radio louder.

Mildred waved deprecatingly. "Read about it in the paper."

"Shut up, will you?" Bart Sweeney growled. He kicked off his unlaced shoes, jerked a thumb in the radio's direction. "This is bread and butter, this stuff. I want to hear it."

Mildred stared at him. Worse, worse, every day. Takes a bath never. Feet—uh. Fat, fat all over, big blue veins in legs like rope would make you sick, sick, sick, sickening.

She turned suddenly, went back to the kitchen, opened a can of hash. "Get ready to eat early," she called sharply. "I'm not hanging around here tonight with you and the freak. Let the two of you spend a nice night together and maybe you'll get what I mean."

The radio was subdued. From his chair in the living room Bart Sweeney demanded. "Where you going tonight?"

"Movies," Mildred replied carelessly.

"Who with?"

Mildred snorted. "Me and Walter Pidgeon, who else?"

The radio became louder.

—he's dumber too, regular dead-head. They know it at the union. Didn't get checker's job. Too dumb. No education. Uh. Something bigger in the wind, says him. Some wind, ha. Know where that wind is from. Gone as far as he ever will. Through. Picture the big, soft face of him mooching up to them smart young Jews. Never mind, see what happens after the strike, maybe something, if he kisses around

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enough. They may throw him something. Just let something extra start coming in I'll grab every lousy cent of it.

"Come on," she called, "you can get in here and start making coffee."

The radio voice, precise, was announcing "... another meeting of union bosses and transport operators scheduled for tomorrow in a final attempt to reach an agreement which would keep bus, subway and elevator lines on the move..."

"Come on," Mildred yelled, "do something, will you?"

The radio clicked off. "Where's the kid?" Bart Sweeney called.

"How should I know. Coming home from school, I guess. Maybe a truck hit him and he was called before his God."

Bart Sweeney walked into the kitchen. His stockinged feet made shuffling noises on the linoleum floor. He began to fix the coffee. "God forgive you," he said sullenly, "for talking that way about an innocent child."

"Look to God yourself and never mind me," she advised him. She drove an ice pick heavily into a can of beer, poured the beer slowly into a small cheeseglass.

Bart said, "They're trying to settle, the way the radio tells it, which shows how wrong the radio can be. When I left headquarters today, Schwenk the lawyer was telling us how we might be out a month this time."

Mildred put a bottle of chili sauce on the kitchen table, sucked drippings off her thumb and forefinger. "Yes," she said, "well then go down to Fred Daly and see if he can put you behind the bar some extra shifts, just so's we can eat around here. The freak's at it all the time, he must put the food into his head."

Bart Sweeney bent over and scratched the tops of his toes.

"Did you hear me?" Mildred demanded.

Bart nodded. "I'll see him tomorrow afternoon, but I think he's got plenty of help."

"Ask, anyway."

"I will," he said. His feet felt itchy, warm, sticky. Another month, more heat would come. New York, rotten in July. Schwenk up to the Berkshires all summer. Nice. Very nice set-up, phoning orders to the stiffs down here sweating their drawers off, sits on a cool porch in the evenings, nice, neat young wife nights. This hasn't done a wash in two weeks. Better soak a pair of socks tonight for morning. Shirt all right one day more. Just don't take the coat off. Girl in the subway moved away. Cute piece, mean face. Shouldn't have taken the coat off. Pretty particular, all of them, at first anyway. After they don't care much. You don't care much. Funny they
change. Three, five years married, fat, don’t care if clean, you
either, little hard pimplies on the thighs, used to be smooth, dirty hair
on the top of the dresser, looks cleaner than the head though. Blonde
hair, dirty blonde hair. Poor Mary’s hair black as coald, and the kid’s
head, God bless the mark, black hair, too. And the black head of the
wop of a father, the dirty wop, may God Almighty let him burn in
hell through all eternity.

He straightened. He said, “Maybe I’ll go to the movies with you.
Have you got money?”

She thought: He can stay with the freak. God’s punishment on
that kid, I feel it in my heart. Some disease back of that, something.
The bum of a mother tearing around the gin mills, and the wop play­
ing the piano, and her with her ‘Oh, Joe, l love it so,’ and this slopb
here with his ‘Don’t be saying anything about my poor sister Mary,
as sick as she is.’ Sick, ah, the poor thing.

She whirled to Bart. “And leave the freak home alone. Oh, no,
none a’t that. You stay right here with him, he’s your burden, not
mine.”

“He’s been alone before,” said Bart.

“Yes, and for the last time,” she rasped. “He’s here because of
you, and you can watch him and not have the neighbours saying you
leave your own flesh and blood alone nights, as young as he is, with
no idea what he’ll find to do to himself in that head of his. Suppose
he turned the gas jets on, or fell out of the window?”

“What the hell do you mean,” said Bart, “by my own . . .”

“Yes, your own,” she said, jutting her head forward. “He’s
Mary’s sin and it’s on your soul as well. Wasn’t she your own flesh
and blood, God help her?”

Bart Sweeney stepped toward her, his face darkening. “No more
a’t that stuff,” he warned through tight teeth. “No more.”

“All right,” she cried, throwing a dish towel to the floor. “Find
out for yourself what the neighbours are starting to get around.” She
marched past him.

Bart turned, and grabbed her wrist tightly. Her round face
twisted in pain. She creamed, “Leave off of me you son of a bitch.”

He let her go, but quickly placed himself between Mildred and
the kitchen doorway. The gray flesh about his jaw shivered, his eyes
were wide with bright anger.

“What have they been saying?” he demanded in a hoarse voice.
“You’ve been at it since I came in—building up to it—get it out and
over with. Come on. Come on.”

She eyed him carefully. He was standing on the balls of his feet,
inclined toward her, legs apart, shoulders hunched forward, hands
clenching. She had touched the place. Neighbours talking, about him,
about the freak, about him and the freak. Were they? They could be. why not? They talk.

"They say he's illegitimate," she burst out. "That's what they say."

Bart laughed harshly. "Why, for Christ sake, didn't they say that when he was born? and don't I know that myself? Is that all they can keep talking about?"

"No, it isn't," she whispered. "They say he's yours. They say he's something out of you, that something the matter with you gave him the shape he has, and that you put the blame on your poor dead sister to keep the disgrace off your own head. How do you like the tune of that little song?"

Bart stood perfectly still and silent. Her face was close to his, but he seemed not to be seeing it, seemed to be staring through it. Suddenly he hit her with his fist. She gave a little cry, and tumbled backward against the stove, slipped to the floor and lay still, staring at him with a crooked smile at her mouth.

Bart covered his eyes. "Mother of God," he groaned, "is this my Cross, a poor crippled thing, and this cow-beast, on my hands while I live?"

Mildred, her face white, watched him narrowly, the strange little smile playing at the corner of her mouth. One arm had bent under her large body when she fell, her dress had flown up and it lay across her middle in dingy folds. She made no effort to right herself. She lay quietly, regarding him with fierce, silent amusement, as he stood breathing heavily through his mouth, one hand covering most of his face.

After a few moments she spoke. In a toneless voice she said:

"Get rid of him, Bart. Get rid of the kid. Send him away to the Carmelites where he'll be cared for. Send him away for the good of all of us."

Bart Sweeney turned his back to her. He stood still, staring through the kitchen doorway. Neighbours, dirty pigs in a pig world, pig neighbours grunting in their dirty little pens, grunting and fighting, snapping, lying on their young, pushing them into the muck, killing them with their big selfish pig bodies, the whole world a sty of pigs and the little pig eyes of them can't see. And let there be a small one born, or a white one with no black on him, and, God Almighty, they'll run it off by itself, and not let it at the corn, and kill it with the ugly teeth of them if it tries too hard to live. And here's Father McCaffrey with his, 'Send him to us at the academy and we'll give him a Christian education and train him up for a useful life.' And him, smart little chap, though, saying he'd rather go over to the public school on Second Street, telling about the time we went up to Van Cortlandt Park and saw the pigeons and birds and squirrels and rats out
in the sun, all living in peace, because they were used to the difference between all of them, and that was like the school on Second Street where there wasn’t so many of the same as how one would stick out and get laughed at and picked on, and they were all the same at the academy. And, by the good Lord, it’s the truth, all of them brats with pale, dumb faces and mean eyes, out of the like of this one here. Thanks be to God she never wanted to give me one, it would have been like that. Up to the Carmelites, is it? Up on the river to die like a plant nobody waters.

“Help me up, Bart,” Mildred asked quietly.

Bart Sweeney closed his eyes. It’s closer up there, though, closer to the God that made him, and they’ll raise him up in his faith, and he’ll have little jobs around the seminary to do, and the boys’ll be nice to him.

Bart Sweeney went into the living room, put on his shoes, and left the flat. Outside, the air had become cooler. A light breeze from the river pressed his damp shirt against him. It felt cold.

He said to himself, “I’ll drop around to Fred Daly’s and look in the window.”

Miss Loeb stood before the mirror on the door of her locker in a corner of the class-room. She wiped her face with a damp cloth, wiped off the morning cosmetics which had begun to make her cheeks and lips tingle. Then she put on fresh lipstick, and powdered her face again. When she finished, she remembered the little button of her garter that had pressed into her thigh all afternoon. She started to lift her dress, but a foot made sounds on the wooden floor in the rear of the room, and Miss Loeb was reminded of the boy. She turned, flushed.

She said: “You see, Anthony, what happens when I let you stay late? Now I’m embarrassed.”

The boy said, “I didn’t see anything, Miss Loeb.”

“Well, I hope not, Anthony.” She forgot the garter. She combed her hair, put on a brown felt hat, and closed the locker.

“If we don’t have to wait too long for Jimmy and the car,” she said, “we’ll give you a ride home. But I don’t want you to wait too long and have your people worry.”

“It’s all right,” the boy replied. “I always walk home, and I always like to walk home. Are you going to get married to Jimmy?”

Miss Loeb stared at the boy. She said, “You shouldn’t ask things like that, Anthony.”

The boy looked troubled. “I’m sorry,” he said, and paused for a moment, his head down. Then, “Why not?” he asked, in a very quiet voice.
"Why not what?" Miss Loeb said, absently. She gathered papers and books into her arms.

"Why not ask if you're going to . . . to do that?"

Miss Loeb freed one hand and arranged the papers and books that still lay on her desk.

She said, "Well, it just isn't a nice thing to ask. It's a personal question, Anthony, and people don't ask those kind of questions, because it isn't polite. You know that."

Anthony said, "Oh."

Room is dirty, Miss Loeb thought. Janitor doesn't clean it when he should. Coloured teacher's room, dirty, too, he doesn't clean that either. Biederman. Typical Dutcher. Why clean up after a Jewess? Let it go. He'd get along good with old girl Hanly ("You know yourself, Sylvia, that Jimmy would do better—and so would you—if he married a girl of his own religion.") So said Pop. But Pop was right, said it for a different reason. ("I know these things, my darling, from the wounds on my mind they gave me all my life.")

"I always like to walk home," Anthony said, "because then I can stop and see the puppies."

"Where?" Miss Loeb asked, absently.

"In the pet shop on First Street," said Anthony. "They get bigger all the time, and they get furrier and change colour almost every week. They were grey first, now they're brown and the black is coming a little bit on their stomachs. But you know what they do, Miss Loeb?"

"What?"

Anthony lowered his voice and dropped his eyes. He said, "Can I tell you?—because I'd like to know why."

... "Yes, Anthony, if you want to know something, always ask."

"They eat their own . . ." Anthony said softly, "their own . . . you know."

"Anthony, that's terrible," Miss Loeb said seriously.

"Yes," Anthony agreed.

Miss Loeb thought a moment.

She said, "Well, Anthony, maybe the man in the shop doesn't feed them the right things, not enough salt maybe, or something like that, and that's why they do that." She hoped she sounded very reasonable.

"Yes," the boy pressed, "but if no salt goes into them, how can it come out?"

"Well, maybe it's not salt, maybe it's something else."

"Yes, but it doesn't make any difference what it is, if it . . ."

Miss Loeb started to the door. She said, "When you have science
class, Anthony, you ask Mr. De Palma, and he can tell you better than I can.’”

The boy followed her out. Miss Loeb turned out the light. In the hall, a man approached, and Miss Loeb said, “I’ll leave my door open for you, Mr. Biederman.” The man nodded, walked past them.

Anthony asked, “Why does the janitor always wear the same things?”

Miss Loeb pursed her lips. “He hasn’t got anything else, I guess.” Anthony said, “Oh.”

On the steps of the school, Miss Loeb paused and looked up and down the street.

Anthony cried, “There he is,” and pointed to a faded green coupe across the street and some distance toward the avenue. A figure at the wheel honked the horn and waved out of the window.

“Can I come and see Jimmy?”

Miss Loeb nodded and took the boy’s hand. They crossed Second Street and walked to the green car. Miss Loeb asked Anthony if he had been to see the school nurse.

“Yes,” he said, “Uncle Bart thought my headaches were in my eyes, but the nurse said my eyes were very, very good. She said it was a bone in my head, or something like that. You know what Uncle Bart said? He said that pretty soon the rest of me would start getting bigger and my head wouldn’t, so pretty soon I’ll be just the same all over. He said when I get to be thirteen it would, so in four-and-a-half years I’ll be the same all over.” The boy waved his hand. He cried, “Hi, Jimmy,” and ran to the green coupe.

Miss Loeb’s eyes smarted suddenly, and her throat became dry. She blinked. She told herself that she was going to be nice to the boy, very nice to him.

The man in the car said, “Hi-ya, Anthony. Getting ready for summer?”

Anthony smiled. “I don’t know. When are you going to get your front fixed where the man crashed into you?”

Miss Loeb came up. “That’s a good question,” she said.

“When I get my tax rebate—if I get it—I’ll put a couple of bucks into it. It’s not bad.” Jimmy winked one eye.

“Yes, it is,” said Anthony. “It’s squashed.”

“Jimmy,” said Miss Loeb, “shall we give this boy a ride home? He lives on Rivington Street.”

“Is he a good boy in school?” Jimmy inquired.

“No,” Anthony said. “I mean I’m a good boy, but I want to walk.”

“He likes to look at the puppies in a pet shop on First Street,” Miss Loeb explained. “Anthony, we can drive you that far.”
"No," said the boy, "because I like to talk to Mr. Polanski on the corner down there. He tells me about the tug boats."

"Who is he?" Miss Loeb asked.

"He’s a janitor, too, like Mr. Biederman, but he talks. He used to own a tug boat, and used to go to Albany, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie and Staten Island."

"He’s got them all down pat," said Jimmy, admiringly, "all the names."

"Yes," said Miss Loeb, "Anthony is very bright. He gets good marks, and he remembers perfectly and draws beautifully. I’m going to let you see some of his drawings, Jimmy."

"By all means," said Jimmy.

Miss Loeb got into the car. "You’re sure we can’t drive you?" she again asked the boy.

He shook his head.

"All right, then, Anthony," she said, "I’ll see you tomorrow."

The boy smiled and walked away.

"Too bad about that kid," Jimmy said.

"Yes," said Miss Loeb.

They sat together in the coupe, in silence for a few moments. Hard, Miss Loeb thought, to talk any more. So many things to say that it’s hard to know where to start—any more. A year ago, everything bubbled out, itched to see him to get it all out, all at once; he laughed when I got out of breath. Things that meant so little. Now there are big things—lots. Can’t get them out. Funny.

"How’s your mother?" Miss Loeb asked finally.

"Same as always."

"Same in every way I suppose."

Jimmy put the key in the ignition. His face had suddenly lost expression. "What’s the use of talking about it, Sil?" he said bleakly. "You know the situation. We’ve been over it and over it. I can’t hurt her. It’s not her fault. It’s the way she was raised. It’s Koine to take time."

"It may take too much."

Jimmy faced her. "That’s up to you, Sil."

Again they sat in silence. Jimmy turned the ignition on, started the car.

"I saw about that cottage. It’s in Manhasset," he said.

"Is it expensive?"

"Not very," Jimmy replied. He gunned the engine of the car. "I’ll need a little help though."

"All right," said Miss Loeb. Her eyes began to smart again. She
stared out of the car window, pressed her lips together. Suddenly she started.

“‘Oh,’” she said. “‘Wait, Jimmy.’”

The boy had placed the palms of his hands against the car window, and he was smiling broadly.

“I just came back,” he said, “to tell you that you wouldn’t see me tomorrow. You forgot. Tomorrow is Saturday. You won’t see me ’til day after the day after tomorrow.’”

Miss Loeb smiled and nodded. The car moved away.

Jimmy is nice, the boy decided, but he doesn’t mean things. Makes funny faces when he talks, and his eyes get wrinkly, and he tries to cover up his teeth when he laughs. He’s too little, too. Not like Mr. Polanski. Miss Loeb ought to marry Mr. Polanski. He’s got big teeth, like the milkman’s horse, and when he laughs he looks just like the horse, and in the cellar it sounds like the el train going by. He can carry two big barrels of ashes out of the cellar at the same time, even Uncle Bart isn’t as strong as that. He could lift up Jimmy with one hand, lift up Jimmy’s green car with one hand, even if Jimmy was in it. Not on the stoop. Must be in the cellar shoveling the ashes and coal. He shouldn’t have sold his tug boat.

The boy walked under the stone stoop to a cellar entrance. He tried a dirty wooden door. “Mr. Polanski,” he called.

“He’s not home today. He went out,” said a slow voice from the top of the stoop.

The boy came around to the bottom of the stoop and looked up. It was the girl who stopped going to school. Sits on the stoop every day. . . . Wonder why she doesn’t wear anything . . . underneath . . . funny.

The girl said, “What’re you looking at?”

The boy walked away. He looked back once, walked on.

The puppies sleeping. He tapped on the window. The puppies opened their eyes halfway, closed them, shifted slightly. The boy looked in the open door of the shop.

“Are you still going to sell the puppies?” he inquired.

“You want to buy him?” a dark man asked, disinterestedly.

“No,” said the boy. “I have no money.”

“You get some money, come back, you can have him—one.”

The boy walked away, across First avenue. In the concrete field the men were playing Bocci, funny name, funny game. Just roll the balls, bump the balls against each other. They never say anything, just “Uh.” Why don’t they ever say anything? Uncle Bart knew old Rinaldi who was shot because he won the game one day. The man just went in the house and got a gun and shot old Rinaldi. Uncle Bart laughed. Maybe the man who shot old Rinaldi is playing over
there. But they wouldn't play with him after that, because he might do it again.

An el roared by overhead, and the boy thought, "There goes Mr. Polanski's laugh." He grinned. Maybe Mr. Polanski got off the train. He waited. He watched the long stairway that led to the el station. People came down and walked away. Mr. Polanski was not there. The men had stopped playing Bocci. Some of them were looking at him. He walked away.

He thought: if I was big I'd live in Van Cortlandt Park, not here. Always smells like coal here; sometimes it smells nice when the bakery down the block makes rye bread in the afternoon so the people can have it for supper. Always have white bread home. What are the letters on the bakery window? Uncle Bart says it's the 'music sign'—Yiddish. People don't live up in Van Cortlandt park, Uncle Bart says the city won't let them, why don't the city let them? What is the city? The city. The policemen, it must be.

The policemen must be hot in blue suits. All good honest men, Father McCaffrey says. Good, honest, decent Father McCaffrey says good, honest, decent, when he likes something. ("Come to a school where your own kind are gathered from good, honest, decent homes, making their way to God and a Christian education that will stand them in good stead all their lives.") Uncle Bart: "Father, if he feels better up above let him go along, it's the least we can do, come in now to Fred's here, we'll go by the family entrance." Why do they say family entrance? Mr. Daly's family? No, they go in the house by a door on Second avenue, leads upstairs, saw Martin Daly go in there Sunday after church, he said, "Hello, balloon head." But he has pimples on his face and dirty teeth, and Uncle Bart says he's a bad fellow.

"Anthony."

The boy turned. Another boy, several years older, held out a piece of blue chalk. He said "Anthony, draw a boat, Anthony, I want to show my father."

The boy said, "Hello, Saul. All right." He took the chalk and drew a tug boat on the sidewalk. Two men came over, and one said, "Isn't that good, so fast he does it? He just lives down the street."

The second man, an old man with a dirty beard, said, "Very good."

"I have a friend, Mr. Polanski," the boy told them, "who lives near school, who used to own a tug boat and sometimes he takes me down to South Street and shows me all the different ones."

Saul said, "Draw me a bear, Anthony."

The boy said, "I never saw one, but there's a zoo in Central Park, and next week, or month, my uncle is going to take me there, and there are bears there, and after that I'll be able to draw one. I can draw a cat, though."

The boy made quick strokes on the pavement, and a large blue cat
appeared. The men had walked away, and were talking, but Saul had stayed to watch, and said, "I wish I could draw like you, Anthony.'

The boys said, "I have to go now. Here's your chalk back.'

Ahead of the boy, two girls were skipping. He started to skip, but it made him dizzy. At the corner of Rivington street and First Avenue he met Bart Sweeney walking along with his shirt open at the front.

Bart said, "Where have you been the whole afternoon?"

"Miss Loeb," the boy said, "stayed after to correct papers until nearly five, and I stayed too, to talk to her."

"Better get home right away," said Bart. "She wants to feed us early and go out."

"Are you coming too?" the boy asked.

"I'll be along," said Bart. "Run on ahead."

The boy took Bart by the hand. "I'll wait and go with you."

"No, no," said Bart, "run on ahead like I told you. I have some thing to tell you when I get home."

The boy walked on. Bart watched him, until he was some dis tance away, then walked slowly after him. The street ahead, the side walk, seemed covered with children, playing potsy and skip-rope and red light and high-water-low-water, some children sitting in groups cross legged, conversing in whispers, boys and girls, like faded dolls forgotten. Anthony threaded his way slowly through the crowd of children, always visible, walking with little steps that made his great head go this way and that.

Like a buoy out on the bay, thought Bart, when the water is choppy in the evening—bouncing from side to side. Funny things, always kind of lonesome, bouncing alone, far out on the water. Used to make a fellow sad to see them from the ferry, until one day saw one with a face painted on it. Someone in a boat must have come alongside and painted it, a grinning, funny little face, and it looked all the funnier bouncing this way and that way.

He started to laugh a little, thinking of the foolish buoy, but he seemed to be choking. He stopped in alarm, and closed his mouth tightly. Tears had suddenly rushed to his eyes, spilled out of them and rolled down his face. He opened his mouth, and a loud high sob came out. Two women, sitting on chairs at the edge of the sidewalk, looked at him curiously. He clapped his hand to his mouth, pressed his teeth against his lower lip. He turned quickly and trotted away in the opposite direction.
A Very Kick

By JOHN BARSNESS

This is the way we go. Up and up the stairs and turn to the left, where a door drumbeats the sound inside. Open and come in. Out of the outer darkness we walk in, out of long passionless restraint into the raucous laughter and the beer-filled air. You, John, walk with hands in pockets in, the long frame bent and cynical, the dark hair carelessly brushed over the bent earpieces of the masking spectacles. This is your night to howl, Ben said. There’s a girl up there will make you howl. Come on, old hoss. Don’t dream your life away. Life is a stage. Would you rather act or watch? Across the room we go, watching the actors, heel and toe.

In the corner there is a girl, sitting on the floor. Look down on her, the bent slim legs, the body bent, head back, breasts forward, face a long slim pansy, toothed and beaked. The girl will make you howl, Ben said. John, Midge. Midge, John. Well, you finally got here. Make a seat, boy, make a seat—patting the rug edge where she sits. God, you’re a specimen. Smile, boy, smile. This ain’t no morgue. Laughter, loud, the drumbeats of the phonograph behind. Serenade to a Savage. A kick, that Midge. A very kick. Smile, John. There was a time for such as these. Once the frame bent joyously to meet the floor. When I was one-and-twenty, I—here is a drink, snatched from the air mysterious. Shift, the rough tweed shoulder leaning, brushing briefly at the shoulder of the low-cut gown. Quick laughter. Migod, you’re fast, aren’t you? Look at the specimen. Already he wants to get intimate. Push, a playful shove. The drink makes tinkling protestations in the glass. Keep your distance, boy. The night is young. He smiles, and wonders who these people are. A party, Ben said. Just a few. A bunch of jokers from the school. Young, but fun. Long time you haven’t been around, John. What do they teach there—Anthony Comstock? No—Castiglione. Who did not practice what he preached. I teach. What do I practice? Throw off the weeds, return to youth, receive awhile the touch of newborn confidence again. A kick, John. You’ll get a kick. They’ve got ideas, real ideas. They know what makes things tick. Some of them even know what makes them go bang. Some of them even made them go bang. So did I, once. The drink is ended, the hand is lifted. Drink again. What is this foreign-looking liquid? No matter. Listen. This is the place
the world is made. These are tomorrow’s ideas. Midge is the witch of the future world.

So the first one says to the second one, I’m not going to—oh, that Midge. A kick, she is. And thereby hangs a tale. Well, boy, laugh. That was a funny, son. He laughs. Oh, come on, give us a laugh, a real laugh. You’re Midge’s little man, you know. Laugh for honey. She swoops and turns, mocking clown’s face in beauty set and kisses his lips. Strong lips, vibrant, the front teeth crooked under them, the tongue silent. Fleet, no promise, just for kicks. They laugh. Midge mocks, frowns, retrieves a Kleenex from her sleeve and wipes his mouth. Cherry-red the stain. Cherry to thy lips as sweet—a fool with berry bright lips. This time he laughs. Delight this is, the paradox. Midge is the comrade, these are the fools. Now when she leans their shoulders touch, the hands they lean on brazen overlap.

Ben said, drink up. Come on boy, loosen up. You been working too hard, you been dead for years. How’s your sex-life lately? Now there’s a girl up there, she’ll... how is your sex-life, Midge? You are no mermaid, though you have a tail. Promise the thighs are firm and long, certain the breasts are young and real. You are the girl who had the drink who told the tale who...

She comes to life. She springs to catch a hand and stands. He would rise, but she is gone, the bright skirt flailing in the dance. He too, would dance, but no one waltzes in these parts. He leans for moments, pulls his body back and sits cross-legged, wishing for the pipe of peace. They talk, the youngsters, bright and brittle, the snowflakes falling to the floor. Careless he lets them drift. Sudden the focus on him, as the guest here. Did you write a book? He nods and smiles and sees his voice the warm chinook wind across the gentle blizzard of their talk. Chinook, a word that throws him back into the bleak wide plains of childhood. Perhaps his culture is as much a superimposition as theirs. How have they all come into this brightly cluttered room? There is nothing unusual in the child. They, too, have known the anonymous desire. You, John, are only chronologically apart. He leans and drains his drink and smiles to make his talk a part of them. But somewhere they have gone and Midge is flying. flying in a narrow cube of space upon the floor. Are we so soon forgotten? Ben said, let your hair down. We’re all one big happy family here. Take your pick and find your pickings. Gravely he lurches from the floor, rising his height above the whirl, his own Olympus where he gazes on the world. He moves along the wall, over and around the sprawling legs, making his own particular limbo till he marks a goal.

Here in the corner there’s a chair. Who would be using a chair? She uses it as a throne, well-fed, a blonde, a goddess from the fat, flat plains. Was he not a god, no book-made mechanism; down from
Olympus he descends to sit upon the chair-arm, and the blonde looks up, taking his measure from his thoughtful brow.

She moves her drink to save it from him and she says, where did you come from?

A good question. Raising the grade points for this class. Where? Down from the dark, wind-haunted plains. One by one the elevators go, marking the wheat-farms, high and low. I was a youngster once. There was a mountain framed outside my room. Did I not know the giants were still here? From over there, he said, the wolves were hammering at my door. I fled because I would not sign the manifesto.

God, you’re a specimen, the blonde said, smiling her advertising smile. The things you say. What for? For kicks?

For kicks. You’re a beautiful specimen. Do you kick too?

Over the glass’s rim her blue eyes speculate. She puts the glass down, the edge a red half-circle where her lips have lain. Well, not in bed, if that’s what you want to know, she says, but I’m a good girl.

Granted. A good girl. A very, very good girl.

But who wants a good girl? Mister, you’re a specimen.

I get along. I have no kicks coming. You furnish the kicks, I’ll furnish the—do you know Ben?

Who doesn’t? That Ben. Just one big happy family, he says. Come on in, Dolores, pick yourself a—Mister, I’m a good girl.

I do not doubt it, he says, leaning gravely from the waist to touch her goldspun hair. Dolores, thy beauty is to me. . . .

Hey, boy, none of that. Straighten up, straighten up, I’m back. Remember me? I’m Midge. My property, you are. Her property, she says. When was I staked out? The law says residence and cultivate your land. She waves a partner off into the crowd, her slimness slightly ruffled now. Careless she smooths her blouse, adjusts her breasts and smiles a wicked flickering smile. Where is my wandering girl tonight? She flicks a glance across the blonde inviting shape. Here rests fond hope. Dolores picks her drink up, smiles returning smile, and disappears behind the soothing glass. Farewell, my lovely. Stand, but now Olympus is imperilled. Round the rocky crag fair Venus glides. Woman at twelve o’clock low. Now tolls the witching hour of midnight. Boy, you’re a specimen. What do you do—try? Midgy doesn’t like that, you know. Midgy likes her men to stay put. Midgy night cut your delicate throat from ear to ear, if she catches you lolling around again.

Dance, Midge? Around and around we go, dancing to swing-time,
heel and toe. This is the man that Midge caught, that wrote the book that drank the drink, that—Ben said, loosen up. You’re only young once. When was that? The great American curse, the love of propriety. I am no man’s chattel, but Henry said the dynamo has taken Mary’s place. Good old Henry. Adams the last name, and Eve has always held apples to the man. If I am Midge’s, then I take the fruit.

Migod, she said, you dance. I dance. You play the tune. Body pressed to body, damp the contact of the listing frames. There’s Midge Hey, Midge, come here. Stop that damn prancing, here’s a man that needs a kick. Come spin a tale... her body clinging whirls away the contact gone, inertia taking up the rhythm’s play until his body gently leans against the wall and waits. Gone is the flower, when it came. A drink. For Shakespeare’s sake, a drink. Young man, the cloistered walls are far away, the book is closed, the sharp-faced guardian checks you out the door, sure in your exit that the virgin stacks will not be raped.

The strong young man comes by, his glance amused. Midge is a shaking flower, telling a bawdy tale with her bent hips. The strong young man repeats the unheard words. God, you’re a specimen. Mister, you’re cute. Away, away. I am no pervert flower. And Midge is flushed, triumphant as the laughter beats applause. I am forgot. This flower needs a stronger soil. And yet she comes, her face a withered mask. Boy, you learned quick. You stayed here put. Couldn’t you find a piece so quick? I would have tried, had I not loved liquor more. There was a chance. A little man came by. Him. Migod, not him. Darling, you are a specimen.

Darling, not boy. I come of age, I have thought as a man. Midge has repealed my adolescence, which I had thought I left upon a beach.

She smiles. She sparkles at the man named John. She takes his arm between her own. Darling, I’m tired of all this crud. Such lovely words. Such lovely lips. Ben said, this girl can make you howl. The wolf is at the door. How would you like to leave?

I’d like. Mister, you do have thoughts.

Across the room they go, watched by the actors, heel and toe. Leaving, Midge. Hey, Midge, the party’s just begun. How right you are. The eyebrows raised, the party smiles. Midgy’s leaving, who’s the joker with? Some friend of Ben’s, reporter, I think. God, what a stodge. Where is your coat, Midge, we will leave.


The hall is silent, poorly lit. The stairs are dark, she takes his arm, her body swaying into his. Here on the street the street lights...
and the rain. Always the rain. There is no prop like rain. This way, madame. My car awaits. She steps into the monster sleek. Darling, a boat. What do you do—sell gold mines on the side?

This? It serves. It gets me where I want to go. I wrote a book. Who writes a book must run a boat. The traffic scarce, the headlights shine iridescent on the pavement. The wipers hush across the glass. She moves, her thigh against his own, her head upon the seat. Where do we go from here? Let's ride. No, let's not ride. He who drives must use one hand, at least. Where do we go from here? She smiles an alcoholic smile and tucks her head across his shoulder. We wouldn't have to drive if we went home.

I will not think an invitation is much less. I will inquire, where's home? Not mine. There are no mountains rising from the city streets. Where is your home, fair maid, if maid you are? I live on State street, sir, she said. Turn right at the drug-store here. He turns. Silent they move along the streets, the dark, rain traveled streets. What are thy thoughts, o babe. A penny. I am not thinking, I remember nothing. All is anticipation, and the scene is not yet played. She leans, she peers, the numbered lights. Here is the place. The car glides in, to port against the curb. Impersonal the blocked apartments climb into the smoggy star-lost sky. Out and across, the rain against the tweed, the low-cut gown. In and to shelter and the fumbling key. The stairs are snug and carpeted, lovers can in secret tryst. Another door, another key, the darkness warm inviting. She takes his hand and leads him in. Ben said, there's a girl up there—she gathers close and pulls him down. Now no mockery upon these lips. Lost, lost, there is no longer John. Once there was snow beneath my feet, my face was held into the wind. Long, long ago the bells sang of my love. Let down your hair, John. Sow your wild oats. Where is the harvest in a stranger's field? She twirls away and makes a light. I'll mix a drink, she says. This is more like. God I hate parties.

Whose head is this? Where are we now? He seeks a clue within the room, sees only chintz, sees only blonde wood and the carpet's blue. There is an Esquire girl upon the wall. She lives here too? I must have dreamed—but Midge is real, the glass is real, the fire-edged tip of rum is real. Drink and the devil ha'done for the rest. Stevenson's pirates were not used to this. In a child's garden would they land, heave-ho. She leans beside him on the couch, her skirt above the nylon's shimmering tops, but she does not touch his lips. She finds the same kleenex in her sleeve and crubs the petals bare. This is no comic's buss, this kiss is real. The glasses tinkle on the floor. The lips part, seek to bruise. Back she leans, the gown is slipped, she whispers softly past his ear. Across the room we go, to where the bed lies, warm and low.

You, John, were never there. Was not your spirit sleeping in the virgin stacks? And yet the guardian tweed hung on the chair. Ben
said, would you rather act or watch? And could you say you watched? It was no dream. How goes the night? God, it's a specimen, but when the windows wake with morn, it will at sunrise slip away. What was it's name? Why was it there? Who was the spirit with the dark desire?

Who knows? The genie slipped the bottle, he was there; did he, too, answer to the name of John?

And yet there was a girl named Midge. Where is she now? There was a girl to make you howl. A kick, that Midge. A very kick.

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Poem---by Herbert P. Pepion

Sitting by the river
Waters dropping from the mountains
Pass me to the sea.

Who is the god of water
That makes sparkle this bright stream?
When I see myself mirrored here
I am young again.

Wrng from my heart is a song,
Carry it, you waters, to others
Forlorn along rivers like me;
Instill them with music
You have instilled within me.

If you float back past years
Let them sing from the heart again
Laugh from the soul—
Make them as children again,

For:
When I crush humanity
It shall be with my arms about,
Not trample them underfoot
But crush them with love.
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