MOUNTAINEER
SPRING, 1951

... volume nine, number three, published by the students of Montana State University: an editorial, four stories and ten poems . . .

Editorial
Two poems: John Pine ................................................................. 3
Black Conscience: John DeJung .................................................. 8
Sonnets: sentimental: R. Cyrus Noe .......................................... 9
An Ice Age Incident: F. N. Rude ............................................... 17
Portfolio: Noe ................................................................. 18
The Bottle: Lee Birkett ............................................................ 28
Three Poems: John Barsness .................................................... 31
Plea: Estella Baker ............................................................... 36
They Die in the Night: Herbert P. Pepion ................................. 37
Satyr, Asleep: Rude ............................................................... 40
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519 S. Higgins
Readers, Writers, and Understanding

When a man's verse cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room.—As You Like It.

Recently the problem of communication between writer and reader—a problem which exists everywhere in America and not only in the University—focused hotly on the Mountaineer when it was attacked on grounds of unintelligibility and snobbishness. The average reader, said the critics, was being victimized by a little group of intellectual snobs ("pseudo-intelligensia") who wrote the "great literature" in the Mountaineer. The writings of this clique could be neither understood nor enjoyed. I cannot believe that the Mountaineer is as difficult as these people maintain; I know that the main purpose of our writers (who are only faintly snobbish) is never obscurity for its own sake.

Admittedly, a small portion of the material published in the Mountaineer is experimental (in this issue see "They Die in the Night") and may prove momentarily baffling to readers unused to any experimentation. But on the other hand, the Mountaineer, when compared with many college magazines, is rather unsophisticated and conservative in this respect. The basic problem is not one of simply not "understanding." The average writer for the Mountaineer writes in complete English sentences, with occasional lapses; these make the prose at least "understandable" to anyone who can read English. But this basic "understanding" is not the only kind required in reading; "understanding" literature is, in another sense, the turning of words and sentences of a story or poem into a cogent experience in the reader's mind. The average person, if he is unable to do this, usually fails because he has no basis for his "understanding." He does not know what to look for in a story or a poem or what a story or a poem should do for him.

In this brief article, I shall try to touch on some main points in "understanding" modern fiction, not only as they apply to the Mountaineer, which is a college magazine only, after all, but to modern writing generally considered. Some have assumed that only English majors are expected to understand our magazine or modern writing. This is not true and should not be true; and some basic points can be brought out which may aid understanding of all "serious" writing. They may aid the reader in doing some "serious" reading, and increase his appreciation of what the writer is doing and what he is trying to do.
shall deal here principally with fiction, since poetry provides some different problems of great complexity.

Assuming that the reader has read little serious fiction, we should first point out a rather basic change in the idea of a story which still causes some confusion. The short story today has a minimum of plot; that is, a framework of story in which the hero, superficially and typically described, overcomes certain well-defined material obstacles and at last achieves a material goal. The plot may still be found in escape literature, in the adventure story or the romantic western or the more baroque science fiction stories. The plot story is popular as escape fiction is always popular. But these stories are to serious fiction as a child’s sidewalk drawing to a good oil painting. These are not the logical province of the college writer particularly, who, for perhaps the only time in his life, can freely work on serious, meaningful writing. The plot story is one kind of fiction; it is not the only kind and to me at least, it is not the best kind. And I sincerely believe that the serious fiction actually gives greater pleasure than the fiction of sheer escape.

That modern short stories have little plot is not new to most readers but this fact is nevertheless significant, because it is a rather necessary development out of certain basic problems of writing itself. This development arises from a basic and perennial question: "Just why does one write, and for whom?" The answer to this perhaps explains why the plot is no longer a very important part of the short story, why the plot story itself is rather inadequate, and why the kind of stories which have replaced it are like they are.

The serious fiction writer is an articulate person who, first loving words (although not enough perhaps to be a lyric poet), wishes to express the world as he feels it and perceives it himself, to give the world and experience in the world a meaning, to show human beings (and the concern of the human writer is human beings as logically as the concern of the bear writer would be bears) in engagements of dramatic interest which point some quality of human character and human life and the world we live in. He also wishes, in a sense, although this is not usually the first wish, to express himself, to find perhaps (as Sartre puts it) "the feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world." It is admittedly difficult to go a step further and answer the other question, "Why does anyone wish to express the world or himself?" It may be said that this is purely irrational, if we would have it that way, based on drives a little like those which result in laughter and love and the mating of birds.

However, the result of this purpose in the author is that a story becomes something more than a relation of events (a plot) or a descriptive sketch; it becomes an interpretation. The plot is an inadequate vehicle for interpretation; therefore it can be relegated to a position of less importance than it had formerly or than it has in the present story to entertain.

Now there are many ways of looking at the world, many ways in
which an author can interpret. He can say to himself that the world is order, that everything happens (via Pangloss) for the best, that all he need do is perform his animal functions (adding the daily brushing of teeth) and go to church on Sundays. Even this view can be turned into literature, although it would be more suitable to sermons. To another writer (whose views seem more intelligent in our time), the world does not have a rational character, a sentimental regard for virtue and individualism; instead there is a red stream of evil which runs through it, poisoning us here and there, turning us into many kinds of cripples. There is a drama of and a meaning in evil which can be described and deciphered, but it sometimes lies quite underneath the current of actual event. Now the writer has the difficulty of expressing this, of opening the eyes and minds (if only to disagree with him intelligently) of the quite essential second half of the creative existence of a writing, the reader. He is saddened and disheartened when complacency turns a shoulder and says: "I don't understand." This is an argument both baffling and, in a sense, terrifying. Communication becomes impossible; the work of the writer has only a half-sterile existence in a vacuum of indifference.

But once the author has something to say, some view of life, some insight into man and the world, what can he do to express it? He must find correlatives and examples, but he cannot at the same time sermonize. He is not working from theme alone, but his overall view will come through in the end, even if unconsciously. The search for the proper correlatives and methods haunts "good" literature from Shakespeare to Graham Green and Hemingway and Faulkner. The writer can be extremely devious, as Kafka was; he can deliberately load his stories with symbolism as Lawrenee sometimes did. But no matter what his method (and this is not the place to discuss methods), his attention must shift from plot to motive and character and thought, to setting as an organic part of the story, a sort of external correlative to internal situation. His style must become more conscious and studied to express the more subtle and more difficulty defined issues. Metaphor, for example, becomes organic in the best writing. The story is much more than can be "understood" from plot alone.

Probably a good example of how a story can be "understood" by the reader if it has little plot could be best chosen not from work of accepted masters but from our magazine, a product of the writer learning and not the professional. Because of its availability to the reader, I would like the discuss briefly a single story in the Winter issue, "The Finished Room."

What might be called the plot of "The Finished Room" is briefly this: A bored woman thoughtlessly stares at a salesman on the street; he comes to her apartment; she plays up to his crude sexuality and then drops him. This is certainly bare: no well-defined obstacle, no sigh of relief as the mortgage is paid off by the oil strike. But this, fortunately, is not the story "The Finished Room." This is a parody of the story
called the plot. What else then can we "understand" in the story? What can we get out of a story which is, on the level I have just described it, so obviously empty?

To begin with, the story, like any good story, contains a great deal more than the plot. On one level it is a cultural criticism, on another (integrated with the first) it is an expression of personal tragedy, an insight into a kind of life poisoned by our world. There is a woman (not too superficial, after all) who has been reared in the Middle West, but who was plunged into a large city life by her marriage to a rather ineffectual man (we know a good deal about him too). She knows no one; she cares about no one; she does not miss the middle class "Helen Hokinson existence" of the Middle Western life she knew before. Her life is without purpose or color; it is absurd, a travesty of a life, one of many such lives perverted by a world which takes away purpose with responsibility and work. But she has for a time escaped this final realization, this final sinking into a vacuum of lethargy and tedium. She has furnished a room as a creative expression of herself, a room which could be everything (considering the narrowness of her resources) that she wanted it to be. But the very things she does to the room are mechanical and soulless. She chooses gray, choosing in a sense the shade of her life, empty of any color except the pale, insipid reproduction of Picasso. Nothing in the room is genuine; it is hollowly conspicuous in the run-down neighborhood in which she lives. Her ideas were formed from the huge, middle-class magazines, also soulless and inartistic, without any real creative spirit, like herself. Her creative inability is expressed on another level too; she has no children; even her sex life is gray and without any real vitality.

At last, after painstaking care with something without meaning, but with a saving activity attached to it, she is finished. This is the pallid crisis in a pallid life. Her life, so like herself, delicate, pampered, unreal, is drowned at last in ennui. All her formerly imagined exclusiveness, her dreams, her very real boredom show their naked bones as she looks down on the salesman, who has a sort of impersonal maleness beneath the man. But her scene with him (of which the story really consists) is sheer farce; she has neither the vitality or the interest for a real extra-marital relationship. And while she realizes at last that her own life is completely without significance and purpose, she realizes that the salesman is not alive either (although he has a sort of brutal strength that her husband does not have), that he has become a shadow of a man by the sordid cheapness of what he must do for a living. In short, the story can be "understood" as a rather nightmarish tragedy of lives without meaning, and much of this shines through without such painstaking interpretation. It is an insight and an interpretation of a world in which life sinks into a series of endless days in a dull gray room. When we "understand" the story, we feel something of this meaning, the sense of a tragedy as real in its pallid and shapeless evil as the blood tragedy of an earlier period. Men robbed of purpose and meaning and action, half in love with tedium MOUNTAINEER
and ennui, are as truly tragic as men robbed of life. Their horror is more subtle and more lasting.

Now whether the reader believes from his experience (and the story seems very real) that such evil exists or not, if literature is to have any meaning or purpose at all (and there are those who remain anesthetic and would see it destroyed or emasculated), it should provide for him a momentary "understanding" of such evil. I may not feel that things are as bad as represented, but if for a time, I understand the view of one who really feels meaning in the world, if the veils of insensitivity are drawn aside at all, even at the expense of temporarily suspending my hopeful notions, then the literature has done something and something good; it has become an event in my life and an experience, a contact with meaning where no meaning was before.

Now the college magazine, if any place, should be the place where serious writers, whose potential if not their performance approaches the general qualifications touched on here, can practice their own interpretations and methods and find some audience for them. When the problems of making a living interpose, creating an even greater loss than even study and scholarship, perhaps, the writer will have even less time to write and fewer and fewer places to publish his work. It is the business of a college magazine to encourage serious, meaningful fiction, and not the pure escape fiction which many would like us to encourage. This encouragement is in a sense a duty, and is an essential part of a university, which has as much a duty to try to help writers as to help young businessmen or botanists. The budding pulp writer can bud a little farther and find his market; the serious writer who really wants to learn his craft must work a long time before he can achieve much, and the very places he can publish—more select in their audience than they really should be—will be fewer. The duty of the college magazine is therefore two-fold: it is to provide a place for the works of serious, sincere young writers in their college years; it is to provide the reader in college with writing by people of his own approximate age and background, with writing of a kind which should be encouraged and receive wider acceptance and understanding than it does.

The Mountaineer does not claim to stand alone in attempting to do this. Of the number of college magazines which the Mountaineer receives as exchange and through other sources, the only ones of any value at all in the serious magazines are those which deal with this kind of fiction, and not with pulp stories or freshman themes. Montana is one of the few smaller state universities to have such a magazine, but the magazine has something in common in quality and purpose with the magazines of the wealthy private schools and the large universities. All of the writers are interested in something more than entertaining; sometimes they are rather flat and uninteresting; but sometimes the writing sparkles with a delightful sense of purpose and understanding. And they are experimenting too. They cannot claim and we certainly do not claim that the writing in our magazines is "great" writing or that all those who

MOUNTAINEER
write for the college magazines are the writers of tomorrow or next week. Only a few will survive the onslaughts of conflicting work, conflicting interests and loss of interest; few will overcome the obstacles of small talent, of a deadly competition. But for these few, and for those others who live in embryo only, in possibility if not in performance, we have a duty and a responsibility to encourage them, to help the reader also by letting him read types of fiction written by persons close to him. It is often assumed that writers exist in a cloud somewhere, in some Parnassus close to the Muses, that someone we know could never be one. This is not true, and if the reader realizes that the author is a fellow human being, a serious person trying to tell him something, to discuss something with him, he may at least try to see where his understanding fails before he decides that the whole affair is beyond him or a conspiracy against him.

—R. T. T.

* * *

Two Poems by John Pine

Sometimes, Huddled Together

H. CRANE (1899-1932)

Sometimes, huddled together
And staring through the window panes
At that staccato blur
Outside,
    one among us leaps
From the fast train
Of circumstances
And we speak for the first time,
"Isn't it a pity"; "Isn't it a pity."
    But I don't know.
Perhaps he fell in fields
Of daffodils, and talks with butterflies.

Merchant of Venice

In nondescript khaki, the gondolier
Pawns his service for a cigarette
And lighting it blows a parasitic grin;
Then does my Neapolitan-in-debt
Flick nicotine ash on the Adriatic
(Where beauteous Laura and the dolphins are),
Readjust his rags, and politely give
Laura and mosaic for a choice cigar.
Black Conscience
By JOHN DEJUNG

...it's wonderful, the things a man can do... there ain't no end to it...

They knew each other a long time and I guess they was nearly as friendly as a white man can be with a nigger. It wasn't that they each didn't know their own place for they knew that all right. Buck always said, "Mr. Joe," and he meant respect by it too. But it went back long before much was thought of places, who comes first and who says "Sir" to who. It was back when they was kids and both living in Welland County.

Buck wasn't much over seven when he followed along to watch the doings at the big graveyard working. Young Joe Sidder's folks owned a small section of land and they had old folks buried in the cemetery, but it wasn't only because of that that Mrs. Sidder liked to go. It was mainly because of the talking and meeting of neighbors that made graveyard workings so specially looked forward to and she was all through with her cooking and fixings and looked quite clean and rested, too, almost an hour before Jim Fenz' wagon drove up.

This was back in May when we all decided on the working cause the grass was just growing all over where the old folks was buried. And where it wasn't grass, it was weeds and cockle burrs and even mulberry bushes where the goats would sometimes feed. The river was still up then and the road was narrow, like always in the spring, with new bushes and green shoots growing. Much of it was a mud road, the hard clay kind that looks just like the hard road and almost deceptive to the point of fooling mules, but no mud is that good. Mules had no use for that kind of mud and pulling through it would make them breathe hard and bust out sweating and sometimes balk.

There was a full load in Jim Fenz's wagon, but Jim never minded none, cause he liked hauling things, real full loads most of the time, and we all knew his liking it in the way he drove. He was a cripple with one foot shorter than the other and he had a kind of pale, scrubby red hair. Maybe there was something comic in his driving, snapping his reins on his mules and yelling at them. Anyways, the young boys often would laugh when they saw him come by. One time I remember Jim got mad and chased several of them in his wagon, nearly catching one, but mainly he never seemed to mind, only grin and make just as if he was twice crippled; but he's dead now. There was mostly older people
in the wagon and Young Joe was seated in between them. Everywhere about there was fish and ham and strips of vension and all kinds of preserves and cakes and cookies and store bread and fried chicken. Looking and smelling all that food must have made Young Joe excited and he came close to forgetting himself when the mules balked in the mud. He started helping Jim Fenz to yell "Gee awr thar" at them, but Jim didn’t need no help with his own mules and Young Joe found that out quick when Jim turned about.

The grave working was all the usual meeting with upwards of seventy or maybe more people there and almost everyone grouped together and talked at first. From up above it must have looked like a thick field of starched sunbonnets with lots of clumps of white cotton mixed in. Soon first greetings wore off and some of the men wandered off by the wagons to drink a little, but most of the women, after setting out their fixings, went about work in earnest with hoes and shovels and on their knees in their own part of the cemetery. For a while it looked like rain but the wind came up and it was a west wind so everyone was glad.

Young Joe was about eight at that time and he was plain restless too, so at his first chance he snuck away from Mrs. Sidder, who never noticed. He walked over near the wagons where the men was drinking, all the while keeping out of sight of his pa; when suddenly he seen something on the far side of the wagons, not much bigger than an armadilla, and it was Buck. Right away Young Joe took off after him, from curiosity, mainly; but he skirted wide of the mules, knowing full well what mules will do if once riled up, and because of that he lost Buck for a little while. I guess he ain’t never forgotten about old Whitey, living over on the town side of the river, who got killed by mules. He was on his way to his youngest girl’s wedding and he climbed down under in front of his wagon to pick up his reins, but he never got to it. The mule that kicked him was one that he had had a long while and was proud of and I guess trusted him. It was one kick and it broke his neck and he bent into the mud, never moving. The mules never moved neither, but stayed still till it was feed time and then they went with the empty wagon to the shed. His girl waited a considerable time at the preacher’s and then got married anyway and rode off crying because her pa wasn’t there.

Well, Buck was out of sight when Young Joe finally got around all them mules. Back behind the wagons there was a thin run of wild pecans with here and there a grassy clearing and back there Young Joe found an open grave that had once been dug, private like, for one of the Clayton brothers, who later turned up living after the bad flood. And sure enough, in that grave, which was maybe as much as six feet deep, was Buck, but he was all quiet and huddled and right away Young Joe seen the trouble why Buck doesn’t move. It was a big cotton-mouth, maybe two inches through, and there he is slowly uncoiling.
coughing little bits of gray dust. Young Joe had to make his mind up quick and there was no chocks handy that wasn’t too soft or too muddy so he sat down and pushed with his heels against the edge that was directly over the snake and there it went, the whole side, right into the grave. But the break must have carried more with it, cause it was mostly that sticky clay, and there was Buck buried over his head. Young Joe right away yelled for help and soon three or four of the men come running with one young widow woman who happened near by. One of the men had been drinking and he laughed when Young Joe told him what’d happened. But the others got sharp shooters and shovels and pretty soon Buck was dug out, though they had to be careful so as not to cut him when they’re digging. Someone had to stay with the widow woman all that day cause she was real upset for it hadn’t been more than since last spring when her husband was killed in a well cave-in. As for Buck, they made him wash the clay off’n him and then they even fed him cause he was so small and scared.

It was after that that a person would see a lot of those two boys and almost always together. Neither of them were hardly ever dressed except for remade britches and sometimes a shirt. There was the time they were hunting Jett Trowle’s lost cow and he said, “fifty cents to the one that finds him and gets him back,” so they were really looking. Young Joe got bit by a green scorpion that morning and he sure would have been bad off excepting Buck used his knife and then sucked and spit for more’n twenty minutes, and got the poison out. They never found the cow that morning cause it took them to nearly supper to get back into town and have that leg checked by Doc Knowles for it was bad swollen. When the cow was finally found it had been dead a week and was of no use to anyone. Young Joe was much impressed by what Buck did. “Ain’t you afraid of eating that poison?” he said to Buck, but Buck just told him that frightness don’t make no difference less’n you got something wrong to be ‘fraid of.

It wasn’t too long after that when Josie, who was Buck’s mammy, died and the day following her funeral Buck left to work for his uncle Henry who had a place close up to Lufkin. He wasn’t back for ten years and Young Joe meanwhile got to be pretty tall and was in the navy when he was seventeen. He was still in, scrubbing decks on some big ship or maybe shining up to a little South Sea gal when Buck came back and there was a big dance that night in Niggertown.

Those ten years made a difference, too, and it wasn’t hardly the same nigger that come back, for Buck looked more like his older brother than himself. He was bigger than six feet and all of him was grown to where he was easily the strongest nigger in Welland County. He was blacker too, real shiny and smooth, his lips pushing out into a big smile whenever he’d see someone who’d remember him from before he left. Down in the Golden Bear dance hall, Buck was drinking and talking and buying more whiskey and laughing that night, but all that liquor
stayed in him because he was so swelled up and not holding himself back for anything. Everyone who knowed him bragged on him and the juke box was playing all the time. He was there the whole night till after three, talking and drinking and laughing and dancing some, but not much because it seemed like too small a thing to be dancing with one gal when he was big enough to be king of the whole dance hall. He held court that night, with his feet planted sometimes on the table, sometimes just on the floor and there he stood, growing out of them just like a swelling gum tree in the springtime, with the wind and all the other trees helping.

"It's wonderful, the things a man can do," he kept saying. "There ain't no end to it. He can work and eat and he can swell up and lay on women and there won't be no guessing but they'll know he's the biggest and best man there is. There is none can shine up to a big man," he kept repeating, "and they ain't none for him to be afraid of either." And they all remembered him for all that talking.

Buck didn't stay in town but for a few days, just long enough to get all the niggers to talking about him and saying how they once knew him and then he left back for Lufkin where his Uncle Henry was laid up with the back sickness. Uncle Henry didn't live much longer either and since he had never considered about making a will, his place went to his only brother in Louisiana, who sold it for what it'd bring. I guess all that was why Buck got to hanging around Lufkin and drinking until one night he got in a fight where someone got cut up with a knife and the Judge gave Buck eighteen months at hard labor.

It was a bad time that year and not only for Buck either. There were lots of things happening which were no fault of anyone in particular, at least not where it could really be blamed without there being another way of looking at it. In Welland County there was no rain for nine weeks in one spell and right when the crops was really needing it and when it finally clouded up and folks seemed glad again, but it didn't last. Jett Trowle lost most of his cows and his oldest boy broke his leg jumping off his horse coming back from a church meeting. Jim Jenz was hit by a tree while clearing land, it being no use plowing, and the main trunk of the tree come between him and those mules of his, but one heavy branch caught him full in the back. He was dead before Doc Knowles come out there and the Doc said he couldn't have felt no pain cause it hit him that hard, but to judge from his scream just 'fore he was hit, I guess that was plain enough.

Young Joe returned from the navy about that time, but he never looked young no more but kind of quiet. I guess he'd seen too much water to stay long in Welland county so he moved away soon after seeing how things was. About a month later he was arrested in the Prince Hotel for being winner in a crooked poker game and because it was his first time he got a choice of ninety days or a hundred dollars
fine, but since they took away his winnings, he didn’t have no choice. That was how he met up with Buck again.

They come up on one another accidentally on the county road, tariffing it in time for the cold weather and they never said nothing for all day. Later, when they speak, it’s real slow and quiet, almost like at first they was afraid of each other. Finally Mr. Joe says for Buck to wait for him in Lufkin cause Buck is out first and so Buck waits. From then on they stayed together; Mr. Joe would find Buck a job, sometimes swamping for the trucking company, and once on a pipe line, but generally it was around some beer and gambling place. After a while they moved down into Houston and each had a job in a big club there and no one would of know’d them for Welland County boys from the way they was dressed.

Now it must of been soon after that when they was in Houston that Mr. Joe met up with Ruth. She was hired as a singer at the club but her job didn’t last too long and she went to stay with Mr. Joe. Buck never seen much of Mr. Joe after that, leastways not regular like he used to when times was slack. Buck was too big and he was too quiet and soft moving for a big nigger and Ruth could hardly stand to have him come around Mr. Joe cause it scared her, not from anything Buck did, but just his bigness maybe and his being a nigger. So Buck wasn’t around much and for three months it went on like that but even without Buck it was never too easy between her and Mr. Joe. It got Mr. Joe to laying around and being short with his words and finally the clubman said it was important for him to be careful so Mr. Joe told him O.K. and he watched hisself after that. But it never seemed to make no difference with Ruth.

The way it happened was never all told around here but I guess it was one of them bad nights when there was no moon and the wind reached high into the dark sky, pushing away at the clouds from the dust of the city. From the east there was the shuttling rattle of the freight cars and the low warning of the switch engine where it reached to Caroline Street and Buck was standing there. He was waiting outside of a single-story frame house at the end of the street and he’d been watching into the house while the wind blew against the clouds. Beyond the house was a dead-end sign that marked off the edge of the dirty bushes growing from the drain canal. In the darkness the black ditch water moved on into Buffalo Bayou and out through Houston into the bay. From his quietness, Buck seemed like he was wondering about the water getting away from the street gutters and sewers and it never stopping, but when Ruth yelled he turned back to the house. Then there was no more yelling and only a thick shadow of light around the edge of the window blinds. After a while Buck went over to the door and knocked at it easy.

“Come on in,” Mr. Joe yelled from the back of the house. He was by the sink shaving hisself and he scarce looked up when Buck come in.
Buck walked in slowly through the house, looking over at Ruth where she was laying on the rug. Her housecoat was torn and she was out cold, her jaw turning purple where Mr. Joe hit her. Otherwise it was a pretty regular house with just enough fixings to cover up the empty wood walls and the lights didn’t glare too much like in some town houses.

"They send me from the club, Mr. Joe," Buck said. "They’s a big game tonight and you’ve wanted."

"'Uh huh,'" Mr. Joe told him, "'O.K.'" And then he got dried and finished dressing. "'Look Buck,'" he said, "'I gotta go, but you stay here. You watch Ruth when she wakes up and see she don’t make any rumpus,'" and then he went out to his car and drove away.

There was no noise in the house, but sometimes the wind like it was fixing to rain and Buck sat in a hard chair looking across at Ruth. She was a thin girl with long, brown hair, and she looked even thinner and maybe younger, laying on the worn rug that way.

It was about 9 o’clock when she woke up and immediately she started glaring at Buck. Then she noticed him looking at her skinny legs and torn clothes and she called him a black bastard, but Buck never got up from where he was sitting.

And that made her even madder and she stood up and swore again at Buck, but he just watched her breasts heaving under her housecoat.

"So you got no use for me, Buck? So I’m trash to you? You lying, black nigger! You’d just like to grab me and paw me, that’s what you’d like. If it wasn’t Joe was coming back, you’d be crawling all over me. You’d rip me apart if you wasn’t such a scared nigger bastard."

Then all at once she was clawing at Buck and he grabbed her and squeezed her and her lips were wet and sticky and he felt her soft belly pressing into him. Then suddenly she went limp and he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.

When Buck woke up it was still night and Ruth was standing over him, laughing crazy. She was naked and he saw her ribs were marked where she was beat. And it wasn’t just one beating either. But there she was, laughing crazy and calling Buck a bastard again and saying wait till Joe got home. And Buck told her to shut up and slapped her, but she kept right on laughing and swearing.

"You lying black bastard, you raped me, wait till Joe gets home, you raped me, you . . ."

And Buck slapped her again and he shook her but her eyes kept laughing at him and so he shook her harder and harder till he was sweating and soon her eyes stopped laughing.
Buck was still sweating for some couple of minutes and he never knewed she was dead when he lay her back on the bed and dressed her in her torn housecoat. He didn’t know till after he noticed that she was so quiet and her breasts had quit moving. Her neck was broken and Buck just stood bent over her, staring.

He never moved for a long time, just stood there and looked at her, her skinny legs, her head folded on her shoulder, her long brown hair on the rumpled sheet. Then far off in the east the switch engine blew its low warning again and Buck looked toward the door. Then he picked Ruth off the bed and laid her back in the other room on the rug against the wall, same as he first seen her. And it was just like when he first seen her and he sat in the hard chair waiting for her to wake up like he knew she must.

Buck was still sitting there and never moved when the door opened and Mr. Joe came in and it took Mr. Joe by surprise, him being there so late.

“What the hell, you still here, Buck?” he said, but then he saw Ruth where she was laying and he went real quiet for maybe five minutes. “I gotta leave town, Buck,” he said. “Ruth’s dead. I gotta leave town.” But Buck never answered, just kept looking at Ruth.

“Quit it, Buck,” Mr. Joe yelled, “It ain’t no one’s damn fault. But I gotta leave town. It ain’t worth staying here for.”

So Buck got up and said nothing, but just stood, looking over to Mr. Joe and maybe thinking of his thin back and his striped blue suit. It was crumpled in the small of the back and the heavy wrinkles shadowed the blue stripes into dark, bent creases, but Mr. Joe never stood still. He grabbed some shirts and shoes and a suit and put them on the rumpled bed and he paused over by the bed, looking around the room. Then he bundled his suit and things in his worn suitcase and called for Buck to get in the car. They drove to the Union depot and Mr. Joe left on the train for Brownsville. “Goodbye, Buck,” he said and he gave Buck a new fifty-dollar bill. But Buck never said anything. He just drove the car to Milan Street and then walked to his room and waited. And he never had to wait long either.

The Sheriff came for Buck and took him down to the court building and locked him up in the room they use for questioning.

“We’re going to ask you some questions, Buck,” he said. “We’re going to ask you where Joe is, Buck, and you’d better tell us. He killed a girl and it’ll be hard on you, less you tell where he’s at.” And that’s how the Sheriff began and it went on like that for all day, but Buck never said nothing, but “No, Sir, I don’t know, Mr. Sheriff.” After a while two deputies came in and they wasn’t easy on Buck like the Sheriff was and Buck’s face was all swollen and cut when they finally left and he just set there saying, “I don’ know.” He just
leaned from his chair, his eye puffed up and his thick lips close together. He sat there like that, way into the night and there seemed nothing awake about him, except maybe his chest swelling easy up and down. He was leaning forward with his head rolled in his hands, his whole body like a wide, humped cypress root pushed out of the earth, almost like he was wanting to be sucked back in, only there was no going back.

Then the Sheriff came back and stood there looking over to Buck.

"Well, it’s all over now, Buck," the Sheriff said. "They got Joe going over into Matamoros. He wouldn’t stop so they had to shoot him. We ain’t going to ask you no more questions. You can go now."

But Buck never even looked up.

"You thought pretty much of Joe, didn’t you, Buck?" the Sheriff said, and he went back out of the room.

There wasn’t no mention of Buck in the papers and when we read about Joe Sidder getting shot and about that dancer that was killed it was just like a big noise that came up quick and went away without no echo. Of course, Mrs. Sidder took it hard but we never seen much of her cause she stayed to her house. Then Buck came back and took up a job working at the Gold Bear dance hall keeping things quiet and tossing out niggers that drunk too much. He married up with one of them thin gals that hung around there and he’s living in niggertown. Some of the men in Welland County said it’s funny for a big nigger like that to quiet down so much, but there’s no use in being wild forever. "Look what happened to Joe Sidder," old man Simms would point out. "They ain’t no use in this wildness," he’d say.

And I guess we all pretty much agreed cause since then we ain’t never thought about Buck less’n it was the time when his wife almost died giving him his first boy who he called Joe. But even then no one thought of Joe Sidder so I guess that’s all forgotten and maybe Buck is the only one who still remembers.

* * *

MOUNTAINEER
Sonnets: Sentimental
By R. CYRUS NOE

LVI
Love, a big howling love with muscles
Must, odd conceit, be mirrored
If its firm rotundity, vibrant,
Would retain its sparkling shape.
How strange that this so virile
Must like the blued and gilded lovebird
See one like its own to keep
Its gay integrity nourished
So think it not so strange
(so strange) if my love (so strange)
Shall strut and prance before you (dodging).
It sought strong (lack-brain) pseudorgan
To find some flick(er) of its image
In the silver spread before it

Xoo
when the clock that marks our fortunes
spins dangerous near the midnight midnight
midnight final this world has so poorly earned
but yet must take to experience:
then i shall rouse me from whatever stupors
and gather my energies like childs about me
and so doing come to you my angel.
to you my angel angel angel.
for in such withering hours we must
take to our frightened souls the task
we deem of most importance greater moment:
and so when the spheres growl in the heavens
and the grasses wither, i shall come to you
and tell you that I Love You.
An Ice Age Incident

By F. N. RUDE

... had never known love, the contact of bodies in the moonlit gardens of the lonely ...

At thirty-nine Dr. Marvin Carruthers thought himself a fortunate man because he had never known passion. He had seen that it was the toy of a moment and he had wanted nothing to do with it; he tended toward a classical calm, he said; his comfort and security were too valuable to him. As a boy, of course, he had had some of those silent, worshipful, day-dreamed and night-envisioned romances, but these had ceased with his high school days, and he looked back upon them without rancor as harmless fantasies. In college, he had been absorbed by his studies; he discovered early his social advances awkward and incomplete compared to those of his experienced contemporaries and he had turned with a quiet and desperate satisfaction to his work. He was an excellent student, and a very busy one. Besides, said Dr. Carruthers, love makes fools of men, and he was very proud. He looked at the married men he knew and shuddered.

And so Marvin Carruthers had never known love, the contact of bodies in the moonlit gardens of the lonely. He had never really known any other emotion either, even sorrow. When his father died, he had been shocked and frightened and a little guilty because he had never loved his father, but he had not known grief. Death left him only with a sense of injustice, of intolerable interference with the routine of life. Even when his mother died, he felt only a negative emotion, a kind of consolable relief. He had long grown away from her.

Hate was equally denied him, although he did not think of it this way. He had decided early that nothing was really worth hating, and he had no temper. Neither envy nor jealousy crossed his mind, or ruffled his calm intellectuality. He was beyond a doubt precisely what some of his averagely stupid female students declared him to be in their soft warm voices when he gave them C's and D's: "That Dr. Carruthers is a cold man, a regular fish." And some of the strong young athletes who took his course because they needed the credit or had to fulfill some requisite snickered and whispered among themselves the word "queer." But he wasn't really; he was simply a man without very strong drives. It was something they could never understand.

So he was catalogued cold, and he remained cold, but he enjoyed
some things which were surprisingly warm. He enjoyed music and he
played the piano accurately if not with great feeling; he enjoyed good
food and old wines and older books and his professorship. He prepared
almost flawless lectures, and book of essays built on them had been
printed by one of the better university presses. The book had been
well if not effusively received by his colleagues. He dressed carefully
and tastefully and maintained a veneer and reserve between himself
and the tentative familiarity of his students.

In fact, Dr. Marvin Carruthers was beautifully insulated against
the world. He had no nerves naked to the violence, the greed, the filth
about him everywhere. He liked to think of himself as a sort of priest,
austere, far from the world, celibate, almost ascetic but with a proper
appreciation of the really good things. He was not a Catholic, of
course, having come from his Presbyterian childhood only as far as
the high Episcopalian, but he thought he knew the meaning of the
priesthood and sometimes he thought he gave his lectures and readings
an almost pontifical formality. He was insulated, calm, mundane and
at the same time removed. He ignored the vigor and the violence of
the world, the sinuous violence of lovers, the hateful violence of the
quarrelling wives and husbands, the unknowing violence of cruel chil-
dren. He was, after all, a cold man, a cautious man, the last man in the
world to be violent himself or to throw himself into the pitiless vacuum
of emotions, of passion.

About nine o’clock on a late summer evening, Dr. Marvin Carruthers
drove at a precise twenty-six miles an hour through a street of
apartments close to the center of town. No one was visible on the
street; the apartments offered their eyeless, cold windows to the twi-
light. He held the wheel with a practiced calm, his hands spaced
evenly on the lower half of the periphery; he felt that this lent his driv-
ing a competence; it made him feel sure of himself, invulnerable. But
he was not thinking of this now. Shortly before he left home (to visit
Humber of mathematics) he had been playing his piano, a Beethoven
sonata that he could play with reasonable ease, and the final rondo ran
through his mind. As it became particularly strong, he would sing it
softly, making up little nonsense syllables to fit the rhythm. “Dum-
dum-da-dum, da-de-daaa, da-de-daa, dum, dum, dum, daaa, dum,” he
sang to himself and his hands lay precisely on the lower half of the
steering wheel and he sat straight, with the look, although he was un-
aware of it, of a man leading a procession. He felt at peace; his dinner
had agreed with him; he looked forward to his evening with a friend.

He was only vaguely aware then through the edge of his glasses of
a movement on the sidewalk and then his heart skipped in panic as
something seemed to loom up in front of the car. He swerved and
stepped on the brake pedal and heard in terror the sickening crash of
his auto against another parked at the curb. He was aware of a vague
thud before he hit, and then he sat in the car, not moving, trying to
breath again, to slow down his racing heart, to see from his eyes. He tried to open the door but he could not find the strength. He was shaking violently. By the time he staggered out into the street, ill and shocked, he was aware of a man standing on the sidewalk holding a boy by the arm and another man without a shirt who ran out of an apartment building. Then a crowd began to form in twos and threes and Carruthers was on the inside but not in the center.

The big man without a shirt looked at the cars with a quick, heavy look. "Hey, what's goin' on?" he said.

But they were already gathered in front of Carruthers' car, where the boy lay, his legs tangled in a blanket. The man's face lit with recognition and he said to nobody:

"Jesus, y' hit the kid? Let's have a look. I know some first aid—I work at the cement plant."

"He was stealing," the man with the boy said. His voice was nasal and slow. "He stold the blanket from a car and then they run into the street."

The boy's eyes were open, but shock had drained his face to a yellow paleness. The big man bent over him.

"I don't like the way he's laying," he said. He covered him with the stolen blanket. The boy began to whimper softly with the rhythm of his breathing, lying strangely limp and small in the street. The crowd grew larger and a passing car stopped. A middle-aged woman shouted from it:

"Can we help? Is anyone hurt? Can we help? Take him to the hospital?"

"No," yelled the big man. "Somebody called an ambulance. Thanks." He waved her on with authority.

"What happened?" somebody asked again.

The man with the boy told them, and they turned their attention briefly and vacantly on Carruthers, who leaned on the car and said nothing. Then the big man caught their attention and they stood mutely, their heads turned to listen to the monotonous whimper, the fantastic music of suffering. The big man stared at the boy:

"Jesus, I don't like the way he's laying. Hey kid, can you move your toes?"

The whimper did not cease. The boy's eyes were empty. The other boy, who was standing with the man on the curb, stared at the blanket with a startled, unbelieving look, began to cry, muttering over and over:

"Howm I going to tell his mother? Howm I going to tell his mother?" A woman put her arms around the boy, and smoothed his hair, and he sobbed into her breast.

MOUNTAINEER
At last the ambulance came and a police car and the doctor, a cheerful young man in a light suit. The red light of the ambulance turned silently and the police pushed back the crowd into the darkness and stood with spread legs before it. The doctor whistled softly and cheerfully and turned to the ambulance men. One was about nineteen and looked frightened.

"Now, be careful, boys," the doctor said. "It looks a little like a spine. I'll show you how to take him off. We need some others too." He selected an ampoule and thrust a syringe needle through the rubber tip.

A beefy policeman with a flashlight glared at the crowd as he pushed through. "Comon, comon, move aside." He looked at the men closest to him, the big man without a shirt, the man with the boy, at Carruthers. His eyes were small for his face and his lips were thick and shiny.

"Which one of you guys hit him?" he asked, and he squinted at them.

The big man pointed to Carruthers.

"Comon," said the cop, "we got to get a report on this. We'll have your car hauled off. Cripes, what a mess."

The big man was watching the doctor. "Jesus," he said, "I didn't like the way he was laying. I know some first aid. I work down at the cement plant." Nobody said anything; the red light revolved silently. The crowd parted to let the policeman and Carruthers go by.

That's all there was to it, then. Just an incident, a frightening experience that shook his nerves and fatigued him terribly. That's all. They didn't keep him long at the station; they released him on his own recognizance. They assured him that he would probably be exonerated of any blame in the matter. They were extremely polite, for police. They even wanted to take him home in a police car, but he took a taxi instead.

Only after he was again in his own comfortable rooms, did he begin to realize the events to which he had been such an accidental contributor, and the whole event was a dream, far away, unreal. He was tremendously tired and nervous. His nerves, so long fed on quiet, reacted to the fear and excitement by producing an anxiety, an unaccountable malaise. Although it was nearly midnight, he called his lawyer, and the latter reassured him that he would not be accountable.

He finally took a sleeping pill, but he held in his mind the images of the dark street, the boy tangled in the blanket, the crash and the light, almost imperceptible thud of a boy's body against a bumper. He could see the lights and the people and the woman with her arms around another stricken, frightened boy. He was numbed before the vividness that was really dullness, like the lights and music of a carnival. He
had tried to regain his calmness, but the waves of ruthless curiosity, of pity, of fear, had penetrated his reserves and left him paralyzed. His habitual calm and satisfaction deserted him, and left him weak and pallid, not quite real. He wished desperately that he had someone to talk to, even his housekeeper who lived in her own home. With the discovery of so much life around him, for the first time since he was a very young man, Dr. Carruthers felt loneliness. At that moment, he would have poured out his feelings like a child to anyone, without shame or remorse. But there was no one, and the hours of fitful and finally deeper sleep stiffened again the resources of his life and pride, and gave him a surface, deceptive calmness.

Randall, his lawyer, was a successful middle-aged man—husky, with an impressive shock of graying hair, a commanding deepness of voice and a manner that usually made men like Carruthers uncomfortable, although he welcomed it today because it stood for assurance, for relief, for solidity. He felt that he and Randall were good friends, although they were not.

"Of course you hit him," Randall said, peeling the cellophane from his cigar. "Of course you hit him." He lit it and puffed and Carruthers watched the action as though it were important. "But hell, man, he was stealing and he ran out into the street from behind those cars. You'd never get blamed for that in a thousand years. And you've got insurance to cover the other car. Kid's name, by the way, is Bonino, Joseph Bonino, delinquency record, Italian family, laborer, no money, hardly speak English. And the kid was stealing. You have nothing to worry about."

"It isn't the money," said Carruthers, and Randall noticed for the first time how pale and tired Carruthers looked and he felt a new pride in his own vigor. "It isn't the money. I just don't like to feel the responsibility of hurting someone; I don't like being the cause of pain. It destroys a certain fundamental peace that I have cultivated so long." The last hung flatly in the cigar smoked sunlight of the room, and Carruthers realized how asinine he must have seemed to Randall.

"You're crazy if you do anything about it, though. Put out a helping hand, and some shyster will take advantage of you. You can't trust these damned foreigners anyway. Putty in the hands of the ambulance chasers. It isn't your trouble. The kid was stealing. Forget it."

But Carruthers could not forget so easily and he went to see the boy's doctor, one hired by the county, for the boy's parents, as Randall had said, were very poor.

"Of course," said the doctor, "Of course it is a little early to tell, and these injuries are tricky, but there is the possibility that the boy may not be able to walk again. He's lucky to be alive."
"I see," said Dr. Carruthers, "If there's anything I can do, please tell me."

"Surely," said the doctor and he played his hand over his stethoscope. "But I wouldn't stick my neck out if I were you. He wasn't much of a little beggar to begin with. They dropped the thievery charge all right, but he was stealing. Now, if you will excuse me, Dr. Carruthers, I'm happy to have met you and please drop in again if you like."

And then Carruthers went to the boy's house. It was as run-down and dirty as he had expected, because all that part of town was dirty. He looked at the unpainted walls and the broken fence and the harsh, dry soil feeding harsh, dry weeds, and over everything he smelled the faulty sewers and the fried food that left a coat of grease everywhere. The man who answered the door was small and his black hair was beginning to turn gray. Behind him was a plump girl of about fourteen, with a rather pretty face but her skin was very dark.

"Yes, what you want?"

"I am Dr. Carruthers. I... I struck your boy with my car."

The man's face changed and seemed to gain strength under the thin features. His wife, fat, clad in a dirty dress and slippers, padded to the door. She said nothing.

"Ah, so you hit my boy? What you have to hit him for, huh? He steal, okay, put him in jail, but what you have to hit him for?"

The woman's mouth opened and she fell into an old wooden chair and sobbed.

"They say maybe he won't walk." The woman cried louder and the girl put her arm around the woman's neck and looked at Carruthers with frightened eyes.

Carruthers was beginning to feel nauseated from the heat and the odor and the stupid emotion before him, and he spoke swiftly and authoritatively.

"I know," he said. "So I want to do what I can. I want to help. Maybe a specialist could do something."

The dark man's face changed again, and he looked puzzled. "You give us money?" he asked. "You give us some money?"

"Why yes, I can give you some money." Randall was right, he reflected; they were all the same.

The man spit on the porch. "But we no want your money. Keep it. I work, the boy be okay. I don't want your sonofabitchen money. Keep it. He is my son."

Carruthers tripped on the door sill, but he walked out without turning back, out into the dirty street through the dry garden of bare dirt.
and weeds. He walked without looking back and he felt ill and dirty. He wanted to wash his hands.

He found that he could not concentrate on his work any more, and the others in his department realized that he was under a strain and they were more considerate of him than they had been. He was advised to take some time off, to get away, to rest, but he refused.

But he did try to change his way of life a little, under the pressures of his nameless anxiety. There was in his department a Dr. Rodely, a rather tall woman, dark, with the faintest touch of a mustache, but very intelligent. She was about thirty and not particularly attractive, but Carruthers wondered if he could perhaps become interested in her. He had known so few women, and he wanted a different kind of companionship. So a few days after he had seen the Bonino family, he asked her to go with him to hear a quartet giving a Beethoven cycle at the college. She accepted gladly the opportunity to go out with Dr. Carruthers, who seemed, after all, to be so tired and worried. Her footnote-thirsty eyes softened for a moment with a glow of maternal ingenuity.

And so they went to the quartet the first night and it was very good and the music was full of the magic that Beethoven always had for Carruthers, and he enjoyed himself and felt a returning vigor. Cecilia, for Dr. Rodely's name was Cecilia, she informed him, although he well knew that, dressed plainly and expensively and was almost pretty in a gaunt way.

But later, when they went to the little restaurant run by Italians who were not the Italians like the Boninos, the little restaurant where Carruthers had often gone alone, he tried to talk to her in his loneliness and he found that he could not, that none of the things which he would have liked to tell her would come out. And he found that she was like he was, although younger, cold and dependent too much upon what she had built within, behind the walls of intellect, lacking the warmth of life that has creative joy and fire. He needed someone warmer, and he knew paradoxically that he could not talk to one who was warm and alive either. So he smiled coolly and they played their wits over their little jokes and all went merry as a marriage bell, but somehow there was frost too. He knew in his heart that he would never ask her out again or any other woman, and he felt that somehow she knew it too.

When they said good night, close to one o'clock, they left each other with a clasp of cool hands, and the conventional thanks and each felt empty and cheated, as though the world had taken something from them that they could not recreate for all their knowledge and experience. They felt in them something of the tragedy, of the hollow tragedy of everything they had done, and Carruthers felt in his heart that he somehow had deserved all along the contempt of the strong young ath-
letes and the soft, so hard girls who despised him with their eyes and mocked him with their young bodies. Miss Rodely took off her clothes listlessly, and cried for a few minutes before she went to bed, and she felt that something was dead, and she cried for the child she had been, the children she had failed. She felt she cried for a whole race of the lonely. She looked at her body that was so often forgotten and it was not beautiful, although she knew that she was not old.

And Dr. Carruthers went home himself through the cool night and let himself into the dark house and turned on the lights and sat alone and thought about what he had done, about the people he had known, and his thirty-nine years came to him as years lost, the best years he would ever have. He felt old and useless, and he wondered if during all the time he had taught, that he had never understood what he had taught, never understood the literature he had discussed, because he had none of the joy in life, none of the pride and vigor that the writers of that literature, sometimes tortured and unhappy, had possessed. He felt an impotence that he had never felt before, and he was very sad and almost ready to cry because his sadness meant nothing to anyone else except himself. He was alone upon the stage of his loneliness; the audience had never come. He went to bed then, and from where he lay he could see a star above the trees. He smiled faintly and coldly into the darkness and with the thought that he had not looked at the stars for eight years, he went to sleep.

Not long after this night, on a warm autumn day, Carruthers went down to the county-supported hospital to see the boy Joseph Bonino. He walked through the quiet suburban residential districts and up through the neatly trimmed garden to the building itself. He felt the warm softness of the sunlight on the weathered door, and the greasy knob was hot to his touch. As he went in, he smelled the odor of floor cleaner and hospital chemicals and sickness. The girl in the office was young and not pretty. She chewed gum slowly as she wrote. He smiled at her from a sort of pity for her youth.

"I would like to visit Joseph Bonino."

"Yessir, room 316. To your right from the elevator."

He waited for the elevator, an old rattling cage that groaned past him. Once it went by with a man in a wheel chair, a sick and terribly pale man, and then a young man in white trousers and a sweaty tee-shirt rode up with a load of linen and grinned at Carruthers as he waited. At last it came back and he rode up with a nurse. Neither looked at the other.

There were three beds in the room and a girl strode out with a tray of glasses, one of which was filled with blue fluid and thermometers. Carruthers was nervous and his hands felt cold. A boy of about nineteen in the corner stared at him uncertainly. Finally Carruthers' eyes travelled to the boy by the window, lying flat in his cast, his face
dark and yet pale, almost yellow against the sheet. A young priest whom he had seen at the police court sat beside the boy talking with him. When he saw Carruthers in the door, he took his hat and rose. He patted the boy's hand and went past Carruthers without a word, but nodded his head and smiled.

Carruthers looked down at the boy. God, he's small, he thought; too small to be sixteen. Insignificant, a child only.

He smiled faintly then. "How are you, Joseph? Are you feeling better now?"

He looked at the long black hair in relief against the pallor of the face and the arm still on the cover, and finally he looked into the boy's brown eyes, but the eyes held no resentment or even pain or fear. Carruthers looked away from the empty eyes and out the window. He felt no pity, nothing. Why isn't there something in his eyes? he thought. Why isn't something in my own?

"Well, I wanted to know," Carruthers said, "I guess you don't wish to talk to me. Can you read, Joseph? Do you like adventure stories?"

The boy only stared at him, and Carruthers wished that he could feel something for the boy, some pity, some sympathy, but he was as numb as the boy's eyes were. They were mirrors to his own lack of feeling. The boy said nothing.

"Well, I guess I'll go now, but I'll see you again, Joseph, and you'll feel better too." He paused but he could think of nothing to say. Then the boy spoke in a high, flat voice that grated in the silence, that irritated something deep inside Carruthers: "Tell Father McCarten to come back."

"Certainly," said Carruthers. "I'll come back sometime soon too. We can be friends, I'm sure. I'll send you something to read. Goodby, Joseph."

He left the room silently. The priest was waiting outside the door.

"I'm glad that you came to see him," he said.

"I want to do what I can. I offered them help," Carruthers said.

"I know."

"Do you think he can ever forgive me?"

The priest looked at him. "Yes, I think he has already forgiven you. It isn't so hard for the young. But I think you are a very unhappy man, Dr. Carruthers."

They shook hands.

Carruthers walked away, almost stumbling on a half full bottle in the corridor, down the rattling elevator. He ignored without think-
ing about it the gum-chewing girl at the desk and the odor and the
shabby woman pleading with a fat doctor who stood smoking a cigar
with his hands thrust into the pockets beneath his white coat.

Outside, the sun was still warm, and Carruthers felt the sticky
wetness beneath his shirt, but he was not really warm. He walked out
through the flower beds lining the narrow sidewalk, and he walked
slowly up the long street where children played and housewives chat­
tered in the front yards. A young man was cutting a lawn and a girl
in shorts lay watching him. They were laughing at something Car­
ruthers could not hear. Carruthers walked past them without looking
at them, cutting out to avoid the sprinklers. He walked on. He looked
at a sleeping dog in the shade and at two little girls playing house.
They looked up at him and stopped playing, suddenly self-conscious.
But he did not really see them or smell the afternoon warmth, the touch
of fall; he was aware of himself, of a nameless, objectless tension in his
stomach. He shivered and put his cold hands in his pocket and won­
tered vaguely if he had ever been a part of this world of apparent
warmth and beauty and love, and whether he would have to remain
outside forever now, in some dimension of ceaseless unfertility, where
the plant never grew or the sun never shone. It was a loveless place
within the cold borders of his mind. He was cold now, almost frozen,
and he wondered if he would ever be warm again, and a part of his
back tingled strangely. But others on the street could not feel his
coldness or even notice him. He went up the street in the sunlight,
carefully, tastefully dressed, but cold and afraid. He walked toward
his comfortable, cool, empty rooms. He walked alone.

* * *

MOUNTAINEER
... and felt forever in a woman's body, and saw forever in a woman's eyes...

Barbarossa*

Sauk Centre Minnesota: September 11 1950

Here a neatness, here a scoured order
On the barbered woods and prairie:
Here no whore no tramp no pirate
But pleasant Nelson Olson
And his underclothes are clean.

What part of this man's
Blood have you sucked?

Harry's Bar: the man is fat and old, the beer is six percent.

Y'know, why that Frank had an awful fine education,
Why, Christ, he could talk at you for five minutes
And you wouldn't know what the hell he was talking about.
Yes, that's a fact. You wouldn't know.
That man had a awful good education and he was smart too.
A educated man. No I ain't. Ain't much for readin'.

(And the censers of eager angels swing over a man who is going soon to die)

The sidewalks are in good repair,
Here where the senile leaves
Attend the mannered houses
Like sered and prostrate manservants.
The length of the upper street
And those that lead away
(one to an old fort; this has been commemorated)
Are calm, with the houses calm
As time chews their ears
Leaving them good homes,

(*The reference is to the late Sinclair Lewis, who was born in Sauk Centre and had the town appear as Gopher Prairie in his novel "Main Street." Frederick Barbarossa was a red-bearded Roman emperor of German extraction. Mr. Lewis had red hair.—Author's Note.)
Good homes, professional homes.
Here is something
A clean old cow might feel
Standing in the neat slaughter box,
Chewing, her slack body
Enjoying the gentle coax of gravity:
The transition, so rudely forc’d,
By him of the singing hornet,
Is really just an extension
Of the slumber, the drowse.

(Death, oblivion, the son of such a father)

What then in him did you irritate?
(And later in the year he was to die)

Poem: The Desire Street Wharf
New Orleans Louisiana: October 30 1950
A brassmade bulb, the pimple of daylight
Irritates the greyed horizon:
Then, lashed at the garbaged waters
A line of incredible lividity,
Sunborn reds and firemaw yellow,
Bisects the urinous flow,
Making beautiful (for an instant)
The Father of Waters.

Almost Thou Persuadest Me
Panama City Republic of Panama: January 15 1951
A night of laughter grew stale
(laughter seldom but laughter loud)
And the sun rose in the Pacific.
And Marton was walking in the street.
Ahead of him walked a man in long black robes
Dark as the morning was pale,
Through the narrow careless streets
Where Morgan spoiled the virgins,
Shot the fathers, stole the gold.
The grey hair on his face,
His long, his vacant face,
Framed his decent burning eyes
(fired with mystic fuels).
And he walked alone, alone,
And he walked so much alone.
(and Marton thought)
Has Christ come to us again
And cannot now find even twelve
To follow and to listen?

The early wind caught the man’s hood and
Blew it back and the great grey head
Shone in the morning, a sight for the sinful.

And Marton reached a passageway and entered.
And felt forever in a woman’s body
And saw forever in a woman’s eyes.

Fugue
New Orleans Louisiana: February 12 1951

Here the great brown earthworm
That sucks the blood and garbage
From the thorax of a nation
Makes that arc they call the crescent.

Cajun colored anglosaxon
Cabbie huckster entertainer
And on the lampposts
Signs of recent laughter:
Hear the sad, the busy sough
Crawling on the concrete.

They pretend to culture in the Quarter;
Walk along Claiborne and hear the laughter,
Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.
Hear the laughter, stopped by the wall.
Walk along Rampart and hear the laughter,
But don’t forget how to cry
never forget
how to cry.

Jet
Palo Alto California: February 17 1951

Tracing thunder across startled skies
The new birds fly;
Faster, they say, than their own sound.
Why, why so rapidly?
Why, when even the crudest tool of war
Need only be as fast
As the careless thoughts of the old men
That send the young to die?
The Bottle—
By LEE BIRKETT

... he clutched his bottle like a child protecting his toy and started to cry ...

I.

Red ran blindly down the street, panting heavily—his breath making white clouds that drifted by him. Few places were lit in the early morning, but a small light glimmered arrogantly in the fog. He paused at the door to look behind him and then hurried into the hall and up the stairs. A crack of light came from the door on the right, making the dust-balls seem to dance in the dim hall. Red turned the knob and went in.

"I’m back, Mr. Thomas."

"That’s right, Red," came a soft voice. "Always come in slowly and speak."

Red smiled happily at the kind words of the gentleman. Mr. Thomas was sure good to take the time to make him a gentleman. No one had ever bothered before. Red hoped he could be like him someday.

"Well, my boy?"

"Oh, I almost forgot." Red pulled a pint bottle out of his pocket and gave it to Mr. Thomas who snatched it almost ungentlemanly. "It’s all I could get, but it’s a good brand." Mr. Thomas poured a large glassful and looked lovingly at the amber sparkles between his fingers. Red shifted his weight to the other foot.

"I’m sorry I couldn’t get more," he said.

"That’s all right, Red. You can go out again later. Better get some sleep now so you’ll be fresh this afternoon." He dismissed him with a wave and returned to pour another drink. Red drifted happily to sleep on his ragged bed, listening to the clink of the glass against the bottle. He was a funny duffer, Red thought, to want to drink that stuff all the time, but he sure was a nice fellow. . . .

When Red woke up, Mr. Thomas was sleeping with his head cradled in his arms on the table. He got up quietly and stretched. The afternoon was almost gone. Red decided to sweep the room. The broom was old and the straws worn, but he faithfully scraped it over
the floor each day. Mr. Thomas shouldn’t have to live in a dirty place like this. He wasn’t used to it like Red.

"Can’t you stop that damn racket, Red?" muttered Mr. Thomas.

"Sure, Mr. Thomas, sure." He pushed the broom behind the door and went over to the window. It faced over a dirty alley. Red could see the cats crawling around the over-turned garbage. A fat, sloppy woman was gathering her clothes off a line stretched between two wings of the tenement. They didn’t look like they’d been washed. It was all smoke and dirt and crying in the alley. Red frowned and turned away.

"Would you like me to fix somethin’ to eat?"

Mr. Thomas didn’t answer. "Guess I’ll go out for a while." Still no answer. Red waited a little longer and then went out.

The streets were crowded with people going home from work and kids playing on the steps in the sun. Red swiped an apple from an outdoor stand and went along munching it and looking in at the windows. He threw the core at a dog sleeping in the sun, and decided to get about his business. The old fruit man would be closing up soon, and Red needed a few dollars to buy some food and booze.

Red turned up the alley to avoid any snooping eyes. He had a big sack over his shoulder, and he smiled, thinking of how pleased Mr. Thomas would be. He stopped abruptly as a figure came toward him.

"Mr. Thomas, what are you doing here?"

"They were at the place asking about you. We’ve got to get out of here."

"Who was?"

"The police, of course, stupid. That fruit peddler gave them a description of you. I told you not to work the same neighborhood too much. Come on, we’re wasting time."

Red fell in step behind him and they hurried back down the alley.

"Gosh, Mr. Thomas, I’m sure lucky to have you to help me out of this scrape. I sure appreciate. . . ."

"Shut up and come on." Red followed silently. Guess he couldn’t blame Mr. Thomas for being short with him after he’d been so dumb. He was lucky to have some one watch out for him, that’s all.

II.

The man could hear the train whistle as though it were far away. Its dying wail came sliding through the cold night air. Red stood at the door of the box car and watched the night glide by. He hunched his shoulders together and pushed his hands further into his pocket. His coat was huddled about him as if it were trying hard to keep him warm. His pants were torn from climbing in the car and the breezes

MOUNTAINEER
whipped through the cloth. His cap was pulled down until his face was only a dark shadow.

"My good boy," came Mr. Thomas' soft, harsh voice from the dark. "Would you be so good as to close that damn door?"

Red jumped at the sound and looked without seeing into the emptiness of the car. He turned again and tugged until the door was almost closed. The bright moon made a pattern through the opening and threw a dim light in the car. After leaving his station at the door, he threw himself on a pile of burlap sacks and hunched up again in his thin jacket. His eyes soon grew accustomed to the shadowy interior and he could make out his companion on a crude bed of more burlap.

This was the second night they had spent on this jogging freight. After the whiskey was gone, Mr. Thomas hadn't said much. Red decided traveling wasn't exactly what he expected. It was nice to watch the country go by in the daytime, but it was too cold to even sleep at night.

The express began to go through small towns again. "We're getting close to Twin Junction according to the last sign," commented Red.

The other cocked his head. "Twin Junction? Why that's near Appleton, isn't it? Didn't know the train was heading this way."

"Is that where you lived?"

"Not exactly, sonny." Red didn't like that. Even if it was Mr. Thomas calling him that he didn't like it. He asked no more questions.

There was a long hill before Twin Junction, and the train slowed to make the grade. Red moved over to the crack in the door and watched the town come into view.

"What do you see so interesting, sonny?"

"Nothin', just houses." He watched the lights get bigger. "It seems like we might stop. Do ya' suppose there'll be an investigator?"

"Relax, Red, they don't like to poke their heads into dark box cars. It's too dangerous." He laughed hollowly at the naivete of the young tramp.

The wheels of the train went slower and slower. Red went back to his burlap bed and huddled down. He wouldn't look in the direction of the older man. The train slowed down even more and now they were gliding between other trains. There would be an empty space and then more cars. Always there were tracks that Red could see. The train stopped and then jolted back a little. The whistle blew and it jolted forward again. Red sat motionless. Suddenly his ears caught the sound of running footsteps. It would be the inspector. He felt his hands shaking and tried to stop them. He knew Mr. Thomas was watching him. But he couldn't help shaking, because the footsteps...
were alongside the car. Red saw him then as he grabbed and lunged in the door. He closed his eyes and sighed—it was only another passenger like himself.

The man lay panting inside the door. Red could see Mr. Thomas watching the newcomer with interest. Neither of them offered him any assistance as he finally sat up and crawled on all fours toward the opposite wall. He leaned back against it and surveyed the scene. He looked surprised when he saw the car was already occupied, but said nothing. The miles rolled by as the three men continued to look at each other. Finally the newcomer closed his eyes and seemed to doze. Red, too, started to sleep, but Mr. Thomas kept his small, beady eyes alert and moving. He eyed the newcomer's clothes which seemed fairly clean and new compared to his own. His face was clean-shaven and he looked young although his eyes were deep-set and dark. The moon disappeared and the three men became obscure dark spots.

"Sonny, sonny, wake up." Mr. Thomas was shaking Red. He blinked at him and opened his eyes. It was still dark. He couldn't imagine what was going on. Mr. Thomas was still shaking him.

"I'm awake. What do you want?"

The man's voice was low, and he licked his lips nervously. "I tell you, Red, that fellow has a bottle. He pretends to be asleep, but he takes a nip every once in a while."

"See if he's got some food. That would go better."

"Help me get the bottle and we'll see. Com' on, Red." He shook in anticipation; his words were short and jerky.

"Just ask him for some. We can't take it from him," argued Red. Mr. Thomas looked sullenly at him.

"I don't want just a nip. I want the bottle." He eyed Red again. "I'll give you half. Com' on."

Red was afraid of Mr. Thomas like this. He had never seen him act so mean. He got to his knees and the two of them edged over to the third occupant of the car. When they got close he opened his eyes.

"Wat cha' want, you dirty bastards, sneaking up on me?"

"Ah, now, don't be that way. We only wanted a nip of your bottle."

"No. Go to hell!" replied the drunk. He clutched his bottle like a child protecting his toy and started to cry. "You can't have it. I need it. It's medicine."

Red was watching Mr. Thomas out of the corner of his eye. He saw him feel along the floor, and saw his hand close around an object. Then suddenly he raised it and it fell on the drunk's head. Red gasped. "What are you doing? Do you want to kill him?"
Mr. Thomas looked at him strangely. "He asked for it," he said coolly. He pushed the limp body back to a sitting position and felt for the bottle. Lifting it to his ear he shook it and a smile of satisfaction crossed his face. He put it carefully in his coat pocket and turned to Red.

"We'll have to throw him off. It wouldn't do to have him found here with us. Here, give me a hand."

"But we can't do that," said Red. "The train's going too fast. He'll be killed for sure."

"Shut up and do as I say. I tell you it'll be harder for us than for him if he's found here. Now give me a hand." He started to tug at the body, and then turned to Red. "Do you want any of his clothes? You're about the same size."

Red shook his head numbly and reached out to help the old man. In a daze he helped him drag him to the door.

"Open the door further, sonny, so we don't have to stand him up."
Red obeyed without answering. His companion was all business. He glared at Red fiercely if he didn't obey his orders immediately. Red watched the limp form totter on the edge of the car and then plunge over. He winced as he thought he heard it go down the embankment. A loud whistle from the engine shut out every sound, and Red crawled back into the darkness. He glanced over at Mr. Thomas. He might even decide to throw him over next. He huddled in his burlap sacks. He could feel his whole body shaking. His stomach felt funny, and if he'd had anything in it, he knew he would have lost it.

The old man in his corner tipped the bottle again and again. Red wondered if there were enough there to drink himself into a stupor. It took an awful lot for Mr. Thomas. Time seemed to slowly drag by as he sat there and watched. Mr. Thomas looked at him slyly once or twice and went on with his drinking. He licked his lips and wiped his mouth with his hand. Then he would lift the bottle and shake it to see how much was left.

The pale lights of early dawn filtered through the darkness into the box car. The empty bottle lay beside the old man and he sat with his arms folded looking into space with a contented look on his face. Red watched for him to get drowsy but his eyes remained open. It seemed to Red that they got brighter, especially when he looked at him with that vacant sneer of his.

Red decided that the minute the train slowed down he would make a dash for the door and jump.
Three Poems by John Barsness

Space

O God, why does a man love distance so?  
I've seen him stand up on the nearest bench  
And stare down at the plains for hours, as though  
He'd seen some winkin', shameless, naked wench  
Entice him from the sunglare on the buttes,  
Or caught the glancing light the pot of gold  
At end of rainbow throws. Why, a man's boots  
For wearin' may be full of holes, and yet he'll stand  
Forgetting debts, his shrivelled crops—his wife—  
Just—looking at that cursed, endless land.  
I don't know what he sees; but sure as life,  
It ain't the things he must for certain know,  
That make a man love empty distance so.

Sonnet to the Movers

Sometimes, when rain has swept across the plains,  
The clouds are like the prairie-schooners' tops:  
They lurch, and shake, and then move on again  
Forever westward, never allowed to stop  
By the compelling wind that drives them on,  
As once the wagons sailed a sky of grass,  
Scattered sometimes and dropping one by one  
Into some valley's peace, to rest at last.  
And when the clouds have gone behind the rain,  
The prairies flower, as once did the towns  
Where wagons dropped their cargoes on the plain  
To nourish harvest in this fertile ground:  
And though the wind has died, the seeking pain,  
The grass still prophesies the fruit of rain.
Meriwether Lewis

Mine was the spark that drove us all the way,
The faith, the knowledge that we could succeed;
I drained a part of my own soul each day
To answer all the others’ urgent need
For courage. They had no sure quest, no flame
Within, that led the way. Clods, tools, who knew
No more than hardship or their country’s name—
Only my own sure dream could see them through.
Now it is done; so I, too, must be done;
Faith, hope, courage will not come again,
Given too freely that my goal be won,
So I have nothing left—no ease, no pain—
Caught by this obscure end, snuffed out alone,
Lost to myself, despondent and unknown.

A Poem by Estella Baker

Plea

Homer and the Bible
for a long time joined the
literate world in that much
knowledge.
They joined the circle, only
by one circle being different,
An “o” being taken from, or
added to, the goal,
However the being
is seeing.
Universal where now identification?
When the small circle bursts
the life of the earth,
Will the three circles with­
stand obliteration?

Good
God,
I beg one
of you to.

MOUNTAINEER
They Die in the Night

By HERBERT P. PEPION

... to be alone and suffer
is the greatest grief ...

Number One

Their dad died the night the beer was on the floor and wet stains under the old woodstove. Their papa died in a pool of sticky, congealing blood, welling up from his mouth and spilling over in red foam. It ran down the sides of his pale white neck, like the warm red wine had once run. Their dad died in the night. Eliza, his wife, their mother, drooped her stringy, damp hair over him. Twice she put her hand to his mouth only to have the flow of warm, red blood come bubbling up through her fingers. She wailed, tearing her hair. He died to the grating music of the old gramophone and to the sounds of shucks in the next room where strangers lay in drunken passion.

Tela, seven, lay in the corner bed. Her brother, four, lay pressed to her breast. They were both crying.

Number Two

After that the years passed in a drunken world of beer bottles, small meaningless love words, sticky candy—and strangers.

Number Three

The night was any night. The stars were out and the smell of fresh wild flowers came floating in from the hills. It was a usual night with the noise of wild laughers filling the three-room house; the smell of poteen breaths mixed with the smell of blue larkspur, and the gramophone raked a rag-time tune. Tela, ten, lay in the corner bed covered with an old, red-stained patch quilt. Jonnie, seven, lay sleeping in his mother’s bed across the room. It was any night in spring at 2:15 when the stars were out and the moon staggered faintly across the sky. The world lay moonstruck—drunk with moonshine. The door opened.

"Come on, baby. Come on, Tela. He won’t hurt you. He’s a nice man and he’ll give you a whole ten dollars."

"Come on, little girl. You’re big enough. You’re old enough,” the man said.

Tela screamed and screamed: “Jonnie! Brother! Help me!”
"Shee . . . hush!"

"Come on, baby, let the man," Eliza said, pursuing her drunken lips. She held Tela’s skinny hands.

"Get away! Get away! Jonnie, help me!"

Jonnie moved in a narrow world of puppets, directed by strings attached—or dare he believe in angels? "It’s in the chimney piece, Jonnie—there you have it!—O still and soft now—you have it—hold your heart, be still . . .

The man’s hand was on the quilt. He pulled gently.

"Come on, baby girl, he’s going to give you a whole ten dollars."

Jonnie’s hand is small and trembling. He moves by puppet strings of love.

"Come on, Tela girl, I won’t hurt . . . ." And a shot roared in the darkness—a red blaze—and then another. The little house seemed to burst with the noise. In the faint rays of moonlight, Eliza lay over the bed, red blood bubbling from her nostrils. The man lay in the dark stains, his head angled against the door.

Tela screamed and screamed . . . .

**Number Four**

How the mind works around in circles and matures—and one before the age grows old, far too fast, too young. Ah . . . if the mind could die, Jonnie—but the closest contacts are the books, to be lost from all else in the demesne of books. Broken moments when the instructor in the institute of correction comes through the veil of mind, his voice a droning bee in the class. But to blot for times and times (though they seem but a instant blotted) the memory of that which pains and pains, that comes to haunt in the deepest dreams . . . and through the years the sole excuse and refuge are the books and isolation.

"To be alone and to suffer is the greatest grief . . . and for her whom I love so dearly . . . and now I am free to go to her. . . ."

**Number Five**

Jonnie, nineteen, smoothed her hair. Tela, twenty-three, sat there in the small white room with the heavy, screened windows. Perhaps in the enclosure of her mind she was free, in her asylum.

"My dearest sister, speak to me. Say one word. I love you, little sister. If only you would talk . . . say one word."

Tela only sat there, indifferent, mute to the world.

"Perhaps it is right. How happy is it there within yourself, in your world of reality? How easy it would be now, little sister, to put a bullet through my head . . . just a little flex of the finger . . . and
the lead goes through, piercing like a compass needle . . . spattering perhaps . . . and the hole—the hole in my head, I could not repair it! The torn tissues, the blood—it will be too late then to arrange the flesh in normal order, then perhaps, with a last effort of dignity, lay down to die.”

and Tela sat there mute and silent and the time had come to leave her and the hour of visits was over and the long summer is over and the wild flowers no longer rend the air the cricket dies in the night the moon lies in drunken stupor on the ripple-clouded sky

* * *

Satyr, Asleep

By F. N. RUDE

Many times in the blackened hours
When sleep has passed me, swift and heedless,
A thought within me, crystalized, towers:
It breaks and throws the needless
Visions of my torpor to the ends
Of my hot and sweating brain; it stands
Uncovered, and the sharpness of it transcends
The time in moments, the space in lands.

No comfort this, this thought of you,
This you so clear and bright within me;
No: though no more remote when due
In dreams than in flesheed reality,
But this: You, so close, so nearly wed
To this stale, dull, this partial bed.

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