The EXILE

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Denison University

Granville, Ohio
They have called us the beat generation. Our deities are Dylan, Charlie, Jimmy, and Zen. We dig them. And don’t think that “dig” is a phony word, for it’s not. It’s just our way of putting a word back into the language, a word that got lost somewhere in man’s frantic rush to apartment dwelling. “Digging” is feeling something in the guts. It’s sexual, and religious, and untranslatable all at the same time. This is if it’s used right, and using it right is all feeling and no logic.

We have heard all the tired voices, the Lockian insistence, the Kantian affirmation, the Nietzschean dynamics—but the world has too many geniuses and too few saints. Examples, not instruction, are our first concern. But then the examples are dreams too, just as all knowledge is a dream of that final irresistible moment—that moment when all light is fuzzy, and we “know.” There is only that moment out of time, that moment which is 186,000 miles per second, which stops us and makes us beat. We can feel the tired ear and night-faded face on time’s flesh—cold cheek pressed to warm bosom. Knowing is not limited to calculated guessing, but becomes real as an ambulance wail in the empty alleys of the night, real as a new-warm morning’s damp sunrise was once real to a little boy leaving home’s radio-excitement and trudging across the park to Poplar Street and school. And we don’t have to know with drugs or alcohol, but we can know by poetry or speed, or music (Oh particularly music—that prime minister of the arts) or even by just being so tired from moving and talking, running and laughing, that dawn finds us lying on time’s flesh—cold cheek pressed to warm bosom.

But this beat generation cannot be limited to its more colorful avant garde or its other fringe, the psychopathic criminal; rather, it should be extended to encompass whole areas of a new reality looked to be much of today’s younger geneation. It is often not a pretty thing, for it is something which even those involved are not conditioned, either culturally or psychologically, to accept. This reality leads to an exciting truth, a greater knowledge of man’s essentially spiritual nature; but many are poorly prepared—particularly the less well educated and the more traditionally raised—for this revelation.

Despite the flounderings of Time, Esquire, and others to describe its adherents as knighterrants, crusaders pursuing their “holy grail,” the beat generation is often conspicuously lacking in positivism. In the beginning it is not so much wanting to know, as feeling that one can never know anything for sure, and realizing this even more than have other cynical generations. We are not even sure that there is nothing—no God, no cosmological absolute, no physical laws, no emotional reality. We feel between everything and part of nothing. We have seen so much “no” that we are sick of the whole thing. It has been cheap plastics, and tin, and phony consumer goods so long (not only in our environment, but in our heredity, too) that many want to forget the whole business. We want to get man away from graphs and charts and group statistics, make him a man again and keep him honest. If nothing else, we know that we want to preserve puny man’s immemorial privilege of being able to escape—to rise above all this jazz.

The group has its real thinkers, its quiet creators, and fervent prophets; but there is likewise a cruel element in it—essentially a segment having only contempt, a subtle sneer, for a society which gives it nothing to believe in, or rather in which it categorically refuses to look for anything in the way of belief. The famous twins—love and hate—are equally represented here. This is the side that nothing can really hurt, the side that can laugh at and love the world at the same time. This is the girl who begins a letter, “I’m just a slut and I know it. I’m no good to myself and I’m no good to society.” But all the time she is mothering a whole clan of those more lost in nihilism and passion than she. It’s the boy leaving Columbia to take an apartment in Harlem, giving everything to “understand”; it’s the little Jew listening to jazz or poetry in a village club, trying to live life with one breath; it’s the happy triumvirate on their way to Mexico, where living is cheap, to write and to fall in love with color; and it’s even the young Chicago jazzman-student going to Africa, seeking the bloodless revolution.

But we are not all so funny, so goliardic. Less pleasant scenes are equally frequent. There was the girl who, lying drunk on a hard couch after a weekend that had stretched into a year, an infinity of alcohol, could only say, “It used to be funny, didn’t it; it used to be such a lark.” Another girl—something out of Seventeen—took nine...
sleeping pills and woke up violently ill, all because the discordance had become too much for her, the moments of escape too beautiful, but too short—too short to bear waiting for the next.

Some have said that this is a basically religious movement, that is at its roots ennobling, heroic search. In a sense it is, but when does searching become hopeless? Perhaps man was not constructed for searching, but should have naturally the things for which he searches. A peace of mind should come at a certain point in life as easily as it did to the old Brahmin who, when the years of farming and raising a family were over, turned naturally to the contemplative life. Is it at all possible to find this true shantit by hunting feverishly for solitary moments of relief?

The West moved in one direction a long time ago, and the East moved in another. Now a slow reunion—a union forming, as Schweitzer put it, "that synthesis of east and west which will produce a more perfect and more powerful form of thought which will conquer the hearts of individuals and compel whole peoples to acknowledge its sway"—is being predicted by the beat generation. Indeed in all its depravity this generation is prophetic, and the pallid distorted faces of its members may be the sweaty masques in the kleig lights of a future scene. But this attempted splicing of philosophies is bound to be painful, and may well be impossible. There is mental and physical agony, mental agony and wrecked bodies dedicated to a few moments of knowing, a few moments of knowing that knowing one moment is knowing all moments—W. B., C. D.

In this issue the editors of Exile are proud to publish "In the Wake" by Lewis Clarke. This story has been awarded the semi-annual Exile-Denison Bookstore Creative Writing Prize.
Contributors

Editor Dennis Trudell, a sophomore from Snyder, N. Y., appears for the second time in Exile with his short story, “The Waiting Place”.

Ellen Moore, whose poems have enlivened numerous issues, plans to study writing next year at graduate school. Ellen is a past winner of the Exile-Denisonian Bookstore Award.

Julia Austen, a freshman last semester from Shaker Heights, appears with her excellent poem, “Lethargy”.

A former contributor to Exile is senior Lewis Clarke, a government major who returns this spring with another fine short story.

Two members of the Denisonian staff turned their talents to creative writing for this issue. Russ Speidel, known for his creation of Floyd appears as does sophomore William Bennett. Bill, who serves as an editor for the school paper, contributed the editorial and two poems to this volume.

Publishing for the first time is junior Joseph Arnold, from whom we hope to hear more in the future.

Editor Virginia Wallace, senior writing major from Rocky River, Ohio, has for the past three years been a frequent contributor to Exile.

Senior Frank Reid publishes for the first time with his poem, “Died At Noon”. Frank is an English major from Williamsport, Pa.

Exile welcomes two other new authors with Dianne Torgler, a sophomore from Euclid, Ohio, and freshman Carol Ann Schreier, a promising poetess from Stafford Springs, Conn.

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The cover for Exile, designed by Jane Erb, was chosen by the Cleveland Art Directors from a number of contest entries submitted by Denison students. It will be permanent, with each issue varying in color.
Philip squatted on the warm wharf planks and heard the Collingwood slowly turn in the channel and back in towards the dock, in front of him but a little down from where he sat holding the fish line between his fingers. He heard the clang of the engine room gong and the squeal of steel plates as the ship slid along the pilings. There were many people on the steamer this trip—more than there were Tuesday, or even the Saturday before, when the ship was bound down from the Soo in the height of the tourist season. There were sharp cries from the Indian stevedores and the thunder of a hand truck as lumber, fish, and staples were shuttled from boat to dock. There were the sounds of greeting as new people arrived to Alconac and as old inhabitants returned.

Philip heard the steel cables saw impatiently against the bollards as the steamer rolled gently in the wake of a passing tug. Then the big whistle blew and its note reverberated from the surrounding hills. The cries and the sharp sliding noises of the loading increased in intensity. Then he could hear the sound of the steamer's screw pushing the water up under the wharf and he could sense the widening void between the ship and the dock. She blew once more for the railroad swing bridge just above the town. Almost as quickly as she was gone, the buzz of dockside conversation died and soon the silence returned.

The Indian returned to his fishing and felt a tug on the end of the fish line. The tug returned, strong and insistent. A large fish. A grandfather fish. The same fish that had pulled on the line earlier that morning when Philip had first come down to the water. The same fish that had hung warily under the wharf for three summers. But, being an old fish, he was careful and did not want to be caught and slit open on the warm wharf planks to later sizzle and pop in Philip's frying pan, to fill the room of Philip's shack with a warm, delicious odor.

Philip pulled in the line to feel if the worm was still there. He had to be watchful, for it was mid morning and there were other fishermen on the wharf now; fishermen from the cities with expensive fly casting equipment that threw their hooks far out into the channel and pulled their bait slowly, seductively through the water. Often the fishermen from the cities stopped to talk to Philip and admire the size of his catch, but he could hear no footsteps on the dock now. They were there, though, up and down the whole length of the wharf, smoking cigars or pipes and talking fish among themselves. When they stopped, they always asked Philip how he managed to catch such large bass with only a small hand line that cost twelve cents in Alec's store across the dusty street.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and stared across the water and said that he couldn't tell, perhaps it was all luck. He didn't tell them that the largest of the fish swam close to the pilings of the wharf, between the boats and the dock, and rarely ventured out into the open channel. But it took patience to catch them—they were wary and had lived a long time. Philip felt the tug again and his fingers took in the slightest bit of tension on the line so he could set the hook if the fish chose to take the bait. But the fish—it was the big one—had wandered off again.

Philip played with the big fish for the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, jerking the line when he felt the more impetuous nibbles of the smaller, eager fish, and saving his few worms for the large one, should he choose to take the line. Even so, he had rebaited the hook several times before he heard footsteps creaking on the planking beside him. The man was smoking a cigar, but there was no sound of fishing tackle with his walk.

"You must have been fishing here all day. I saw you fishing when I came off the boat this morning."

"Yes," Philip answered, turning towards the man cautiously so that he would not foul the line on the dock stringers. "I heard the steamer... the Collingwood... come in at nine. I was here then."

"Say, you're blind, aren't you?" said the man. Then, afraid that he had injured Philip's feelings, he added in a softer tone: "I didn't notice when I got off the boat. Are you blind in both eyes?"

"Yes."

The man settled himself on a nearby bollard and spoke as softly as his rather gruff voice would permit. Philip imagined him wearing a white shirt and a large, straw hat. "I'm sorry," he said, as if he would continue the conversation.
Philip sensed that the man wanted to talk. “Yes.” And he added solemnly, as though repeating a rehearsed phrase, a memorized verse, “I was blind in one eye when I was born. I was born without sight in that eye. Then, when I was nineteen, I was chopping wood and a chip flew from the log and hit the other eye. I was blinded in that eye also. The Indians do not have hospitals.”

“What do you do—fish all the time?”

“Yes.”

“Well, don’t you work?”

“My brother works. I can’t work. I fish.”

“What do you do in the winter?”

“Fish through the ice. There is a good place to fish through the ice here.”

“Since you do so much fishing, you must know all about it.” The man paused and then added casually, “I mean you must know about the good places to fish and what size hooks to use and all of that stuff.” The man blew a cloud of fragrant cigar smoke in Philip’s direction. “I’d really like some good fishing,” he said. Philip didn’t quite know whether the man wanted information, as so many of the other vacationing men did, or whether he was after something else. He said nothing.

“I just retired and came up here to take life easy and do a little fishing,” the man continued. “Always wanted to fish. Read about it. Never took a vacation in my life. Never! That’s why I sold more insurance for the company than any other two of their salesmen. They came and asked me about it. ‘They said ‘C. J. Parkman—that’s me. Used to carry a bunch of cards around when I was working, said ‘C. J. Parkman, District Salesman’ on ‘em, but I had to leave ‘em when I retired.) They’d say, ‘Parkman, how come you sell more insurance than anyone else in the office?’ And I’d tell ‘em ‘work. Hard work!” That’s the only way to get anything done in life. Go into it headfirst! Dive into it! Work till you’re dead tired and then work some more. That’s why I sold more insurance than any of the rest of them did.”

“But don’t you work any more?”

“No, they have this rule, see. Says a man’s got to retire when he reaches sixty-five. That’s me. I’m sixty-five. I could have worked another five, ten years, but they got this rule and a man can’t do nothing when the company’s got a rule like that. Wife died, too. That was two years ago last August. So I looked through all the travel literature. Tried to find a place where there was good fishing. A place that wouldn’t cost too much. Not a place that’d bleed a man dry. This was the best place I could find. Fishing’s supposed to be the best anywhere. So I came here.”

He shifted his weight on the bollard; Philip heard the movement and decided he must be rather heavy-set. “That’s why I came down to the dock to find out all about the fishing, soon as I got my stuff put away in the little cabin I rented. Never waste any time, I say. That’s why I sold more insurance than any of the others. Still be selling more, too, if they didn’t have that damn regulation.”

“They always have them,” Philip said.

“What about the fish? How many did you get?”

Philip shrugged. “None, yet.”

“None! And you been here fishing since morning?”

“Since seven.”

“And you haven’t gotten a one! The travel folder and the people on the boat said that Algonac had the best fishing around.”

“I have enough fish for this week. Any more and they would just rot and be no good. I live with my brother and he fishes, too.”

“Then why waste the time?”

“There is nothing else for me to do. If I catch a good one, then the others on the dock will pay me for it and pay me also for saying nothing and letting everyone think that they caught it. I need cigarettes.”

“Well, I see. That’s smart.”

Philip pulled in the line and rebaited the hook.

“I tell you what. I’ll go up and get some tackle and come down here tomorrow and then you can tell me where the big ones are. OK? Will you be here tomorrow morning?”

“I am always here,” said Philip.

“See you about seven o’clock,” said the salesman.

Then Philip fished quietly, uninterrupted for the rest of the afternoon, until the long shadows crept across the water and the dock was no longer warm in the sun. Finally, Thomas, his younger brother, came down to the wharf to walk beside Philip and steer him slowly home.

The next morning, after Thomas left him on the dock and he had dropped his line down between the pilings, Philip felt the hard tug, a quick but persistent pull; but when he tried to set the hook, the fish was gone. Soon the dock began to warm and C. J. Parkman was there. The Indian smelled the cigar before the salesman spoke.
“Well, boy, here it is a fine, sunny morning and I’m all set to go fishing. Got all the gear right here. Bought it at the store soon as I got up. Man told me just what I needed. Said he’d been selling fishing gear for twenty years, so I took his advice.”

Philip moved in the line, sensing that the big fish stood still in the water, idling its fins, waiting. Finally he spoke:

“The fish are not biting too well this morning. They bite best when there is no sun, when it’s raining. They bite best when the wind is out of the West or South.”

“Well this gear will get them whether they want to bite or not. That’s what the man at the tackle store told me.” The fishing gear rattled noisily as Parkman set it down upon the wharf.

“They bite best when the wind is from the West or South,” Philip repeated.

“They’ll bite, right enough. Why, I’ve spent . . . . . . ,” and C. J. Parkman filled the better part of five minutes with a long discourse on the advantages of fly rods, dry and wet fishing lures, bait casting, “swimming minnows”, gaff hook, and landing nets. “And these boots. They’re the best part of it. Why they come right up to your waist and you can wade right up in water that deep and keep dry as a bone, too. Wade right off the shore anywhere without having to sit on a dock. This tackle box! Why there’s enough room there for all the gear a man might need. Look at the size of it! If I’d had more money, I’d have filled the whole thing up, right to the top.”

Philip tied his line to a nail and felt the large new tackle box carefully. He lingered on the smoothness of the enameled finish. There were many compartments in several trays, all filled with sharp hooks or reels or spools of line. There were boxes with weirdly shaped lures in them, whole sections filled with lead sinkers and weights, and three fish knives of peculiar shapes. Some of the contents felt strange to Philip’s touch, but he did not ask its purpose. For a moment he was envious, and wished that the new, shiny box and the rods were his instead of the salesman’s.

“I was wondering,” said Parkman, after he had explained about his preparations, “I was wondering if you would go with me and sort of act as a guide. I’ve hired a boat with one of those motors on the back, so I can go anywhere I want to, but I’m still not sure of the best places in spite of what the man at the store told me. Perhaps you could help me out. I’d be willing to pay the going rate for a guide.”

Philip returned to his line and pulled it in to see if the bait was still on the hook. It was. He flipped the water off his hand while C. J. Parkman stood on the dock behind him with a whole box full of expensive tackle. Philip wished he could go. He imagined what it would be like in the open boat with the water flying by and the roar of the motor and the spray blowing back in his face with the wind. It had been a long time since he had been out in a boat. He thought hard about going; he almost started to reach for the handline, to pull it in.

“No, I couldn’t guide for you. I don’t know where the fish are. The fish move with the current; sometimes they are here, and the next day they have moved to there, and later they are somewhere else. It is true that there are good places and bad places, but these things change too. I haven’t been out in a boat for a long time: I don’t know where these places are any longer. Besides, I wouldn’t guide for you. All the others—the tourists and the others—they would laugh and point at us and say that there are two blind men in a boat and that one is blind for thinking he can catch fish with the other.”

The Indian fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

“I do know that this dock is the best place around; better than any of the others. Thomas, my brother, guides the fishermen. He says that this place is as good as any. So do Samuel and George, who also guide. I knew it too, when I could see and find these things out for myself. I don’t tell the others about the dock when they ask me. They think that I only stay here because I am blind and cannot go out in a boat. That way they do not disturb the fishing and the dock stays the best place. Besides, they would not know how to fish from it. But I am telling you this. You have paid a lot for your new fishing tackle and will be disappointed if you do not catch fish.”

“But the man in the store told me that you have to have a boat to catch the large fish. Anyway, I already paid for the boat and I want to try it first.”

Suddenly Philip felt sorry for the salesman, who stood in his heavy wading boots with his expensive tackle. If he doesn’t catch fish here, thought Philip, he will be unhappy and leave and try some other town. He will try anywhere where they tell him the fishing is good. But they will always tell him in such a way that he will have to rent their boats or buy their tackle. They will not tell him the truth. Philip wanted the salesman to stay.

“Listen,” he told the man, turning his face towards him. “There is a big fish down under the dock. A huge fish. Perhaps it is the biggest fish in this part of the Island. It is the biggest fish that I have ever felt. From the way he pulls on the line, I can tell. I never
felt a fish like him. He moves; he comes and goes under the pilings of the dock. I have felt him now for three summers. For three and a half summers. I know him every time he pulls on the line. I am waiting for him. I know he is there, and some day I shall catch him!” Philip set his unseeing eyes on the dock. “You have all that fine tackle. Try it off the dock. Right down here where I have been fishing, by this piling. It will take a long time with my little hand line. I have to wait until the weather is right and he is hungry. I have waited a long time. I thought I had him hooked several times. If you try with your new tackle, you will have a better chance. You will probably catch him if I tell you where to put the line. With your new rod, you will be able to set the hook quickly, before he slips away. He has come several times today. Please try off the dock here. This is the best place.”

“But I already paid for the boat,” said Parkman, feeling the urgency in the Indian’s voice. “I want to try the boat in deep water. I’ll come back later, maybe, and try here.”

“This is the best place,” Philip said.

“I don’t believe it. The tackle store man was right. I’ll try the boat in deep water. Sure you won’t come?” Parkman asked.

“I can’t,” Philip said.

Then C. J. Parkman was gone, his wading boots tripping heavily along the wharf.

Later Thomas came down the dock and sat beside Philip. He lit a cigarette and handed it to his brother. Philip leaned against the bollard.

“Are there no fishermen to guide today?” Philip asked in his native Ontario.

“The weather is not good for fishing.”

“No, it is not good today.”

Philip sat and smoked, silently, while Thomas looked across the channel, to where a towboat was churning up a wake as it pulled a log boom towards the railroad bridge. Suddenly he caught his brother’s arm.

“A tug is coming by here with a tow of logs.”

“Yes. I can hear it. It’s the Ben Hosack.”

“But there is a funny thing out there, too. A man in a white shirt is fishing in the steamer lane from a rowboat.”

“I know that man,” said Philip. “He was on the dock.”

“What sort of a fool is he, then, to be fishing in the steamer lane? And now he’s standing up! He is a fool!”

“He does not know how to fish,” said Philip. “He never fished before—he’s just retired.”

“He does not know how to do anything or he’d sit down and take up his oars,” said Thomas.

The steam tug blew for the railroad bridge.

“He shouldn’t stand like that in a rowboat,” said Thomas.

He watched as the tug passed close by. For a moment man and boat were lost behind the superstructure and dense black smoke. When they reappeared, the boat rocked violently in the wake of the tug. The white-shirted figure staggered to keep his footing.

“Ah,” said Thomas. “The tug caught him in her wake and overturned his boat. He will know better than to fish in the channel next time.”

Suddenly the line pulled hard through Philip’s fingers, slacked, and pulled hard again. The line hurt as it slipped through his hand. He passed it to his brother without thinking.

“What is he doing,” said Philip, standing. “I wish I could see him! Tell me quickly, Thomas, what is happening?”

“I can’t see him. Wait! The boat is filling with water. He must be on the other side. No. There he is! The current has carried him beyond the boat. He should have stayed with the boat.”

“How far away is he?”

“Not far. He’s trying to swim towards the boat.”

Philip stared across the water while Thomas untangled the fishline and pulled the big fish towards the wharf.

“He’s gone now. I can’t see him. He must have been pulled under, or else he’s a poor swimmer. They are starting from the shore now, but they won’t get there in time.”

“It was those boots he had on,” said Philip.

“What?”

“It was those damn boots,” he said, in English. “They filled with water and he couldn’t swim.”

“They’ll have to drag the channel for him.”

Then Thomas lifted the fish to the dock while his brother stared vacantly across the channel. The fish thrashed violently on the wharf and almost fell again to the water. Thomas caught it quickly with his foot.

“Give me a hand, dammit,” he said to Philip. “It’s your fish.”

Only when the huge bass was limp on the wharf, its head laid open and its tail flapping weakly against the planks, did Philip turn
his back on the water. He ran his hand over the scales and put a finger in the fish's open mouth. A small crowd of fishermen had gathered and were talking in excited tones to Thomas.

“Tell them that it was your fish,” he said to Philip in a low voice.

“What’s the difference?”

“You should have landed it instead of watching that rowboat. What sort of a fool was he, anyway, to fish in the channel?”

“He was no fool, I think.”

“What?”

Philip shrugged. “He was retired.” He knew he could not explain. “Let’s take the fish and go home,” he said.

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**Song of Oneself**

**Carol Ann Schreier**

Polo-coated dreamer,
Do not cry
That they cannot understand.
You are of them
But not among them.

Thinker in saddle shoes,
Laugh with them.
Yes, laugh, but keep
That of yourself they cannot touch
Or hurt.

Love him, starry-eyed coed,
Let him know your heart, your body.
And at last,
If it is love,
Let him know your mind.

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**Died at Noon**

**By Frank Reid**

Died at noon. A proper time to die,
With all the afternoon stretched out before him
And all the morn complete.

The sun rides high in the heavens,
There is time to mourn and time to make arrangements
Before night and death's counterfeit cry halt.

To die before ending is to die unsatisfied,
But how sweeter far than the full knowledge
Of bitter lees of loss, or the tasteless victory

In satiation there is not merely enough, but all.
In not venturing, there is nothing for remembrance.
Somewhere between lies Aristotle's golden noon.

So let me also die at noon, after foundation.
Others may build where I have laid the plan,
And I be lain to rest within my restless grave.
PICNIC IN THE SPRING

BY JOSEPH ARNOLD

Spring didn't come when we thought it would. In early March it looked as if it was going to clear up; the afternoons became mild and the snow melted everywhere but in the drifts and shadows. On a Thursday night it started to snow and by morning it was all white and gray again. The thermometer went down to twenty degrees and didn’t come up until April. Then on another morning I woke up and it was spring.

It was a beautiful week at the college; nobody did much studying and the classrooms became a sort of tedious prison. When the weekend came everyone was ready to forget their books and papers and old yellow theories. It was still too wet to go on outings in the hills that surround the university, but people began to think of such things. The girls dug down in their trunks and dressers for their wardrobes of spring blouses and bermuda shorts. A few went into town to look at new things. The fellows at the fraternity house were out washing their cars, playing ball, or sitting idly on the front porch in chairs from the living room.

I was sitting, still trying to wake up, watching two of the boys play catch. I thought how sore they would be tomorrow. In the chair next to me slouched Bill Jacobson, studying the April issue of *Playboy* magazine with about as much attention as he gave anything. He threw the copy into my lap.

“You can read it. It’s a crappy issue.”

I started to leaf through it. “What’s the matter with it? They’ve got a story by William Saroyan and the girl here is pretty fine.” I pointed out a picture of a clean-looking young thing with bedroom eyes and a teasing amount of clothing on—just enough to be decent—which was funny in itself.

“That’s what I mean,” he said, “She’s sexy, but she’s all covered up. You didn’t see that in *Playboy* a few years ago. Well, I guess they will go the same way as *Esquire* just look what happened to them—no nudes and a lot of crap about culture.”

He was probably right, but I didn’t want to talk about it. The warm sun and the fresh smell of the rich earth made the slick pages of those magazines seem out of place. The black mud and puddles of water were there before me and pretended to be nothing more or less than what they were; while *Playboy* seemed to be winking at me or laughing at me— or something like that. But that was really not true either. Hell, the whole thing was stupid and I let it go. I got up and went into the house.

One of the guys was coming down from the upstairs at full tilt. He jumped the last four stairs and we both went crashing against the far wall.

“Sorry, Doug. I just couldn’t stop.”

“Jesus,” I said, now fully awake, “I didn’t think spring would turn the fraternity into a bunch of supermen. You’ll never live until summer.

“Hell, I just feel so damn good, man! No more snow, no more slush, no more heavy coats.”

I had just caught a whiff of his after-shave lotion—and at eleven o’clock in the morning! “Now wait a minute! Don’t tell me you’ve got a date—after all these weeks.”

“With that blonde from Caxton Hall,” he said nonchalantly.

“Man, you know. In the spring a young man’s fancy turns to gettin’ a little.” He ended his recitation with a slap on my already wounded shoulder.

“You should be a poet, you lecherous bastard,” I called to him as he dashed out of the door. I went on into the living room thinking that he was probably right and cursing myself for breaking up with Ann Gennings after almost a whole year. She was sort of a nice girl, even though she did talk like a well-brought-up puppy dog and was about to give me the royal brush-off. Well, what’s done is done and that’s the way it goes.

Three fellows were gathered around a coffee table playing blackjack. I sat down and joined in the game.

“What’s going on outside?” I was asked.

“Not much. Cramer is out washing his damn car. Owens is next with the hose. The jocks are out back playing baseball.”

“What’s going on outside?” I was asked.

“Not much. Cramer is out washing his damn car. Owens is next with the hose. The jocks are out back playing baseball.”

“Want another card?”

“I haven’t got much to lose, gimme one.”

Tom Mitchell was dealing the cards. He was the social chairman for the club, and also my roommate. I went over twenty-one points
and threw my cards in. "Say, Tom, when are we going to have a social function?"

"I suppose you mean a picnic."

"If it isn't imposing on you to ask."

He laughed, "You're the hundredth person to ask me that today." He took a breath, "Next week we're having a supper dance, the weekend after that, we will have a picnic—if the weather's good."

He turned over the last card, "Pay Twenty."

"Oh, my lord, you cheat. You must," said another player as he threw his cards in. "A picnic really sounds great. Women and beer—what a blast."

Outside there was a sudden and intense disorder, a chorus of female screams and male laughter. Bill came in from his chair on the porch to report the scene. "It was Cramer, ya should have seen 'im. He was washing his car and these dollies came by—Jesus, they got soaked to the skin." This drew a hearty exclamation from the group. Just at this time the hero of the episode came staggering into the room with his dirty sweatshirt and bare feet. He was laughing so hard he could hardly walk. "Christ, ya should 'ave seen 'em. I never seen a bunch of chicks so surprised in my life. They never knew what hit 'em."

"What the hell were they wearing?"

"That's half the story," he answered. "They were all dressed up." Henry Cramer went into a new convulsion of laughter so severe that he had to stop. "They... they had on their nice crap, stockings and all that jazz... funniest thing I've seen in a week."

This brought even more laughter from most of the group. They talked a while longer about the hapless girls, lamenting the fact that they weren't better looking, which would have made the whole affair that much more delightful. The topic switched to how really ugly the girls were, then to how good the dance would be next weekend, and finally how great a blast the picnic would be on the following weekend. Everybody likes picnics in the spring. The conversation broke up and Tom and I were alone at the coffee table. He began to play solitaire, then he stopped and looked at me. "Why do you suppose Henry Cramer is such a God-damn slob?"

"I don't know, he's been that way ever since I knew him freshman year. I thought maybe he'd get run over or kill himself in that convertible, but every year he shows up again, just as disgusting as ever."

Tom was looking through his pockets for a cigarette. "When he got pinned to Connie Roth I went out and got drunk. That's right, we both went—you had just broken up with Ann."

"You know, I felt worse about Cramer getting pinned than I did about my getting unpinned." (Which was a lie at the time, but now it was more or less true.)

Tom continued, "How such a gross bastard as that could have such a wonderful girl as Connie for a pinmate is just beyond me."

"I'm convinced that the grubbier the guy is, the better the girl he gets." I lit up a Lucky Strike and watched him play solitaire. "You just cheated."

"Yah, I know—lem'me have a cigarette. I always cheat. It's the only way to beat the game."

"I know, I do it too. I try to follow all the rules, but it's just too damn much trouble. It's a lot easier to cheat. And ya never lose." He took a drag on his dead cigarette and watched Tom cheat at solitaire. After a few minutes he gave up altogether, pushing the cards into a disorganized muddle in the center of the table. He rolled back on the couch. "That game is too complicated. It's more fun to do nothing. Wouldn't it be fine if you could do nothing all the time?"

The talk was getting too profound for a Saturday morning. We sat for a long while with our minds bathed in the delicious contemplation of this useless thought. Out the front window, I could see a couple of girls talking to Guy Owens, who was washing his car. He was obviously trying to get them to help with the job. Guy was a good-looking fellow—from Iowa, I think—kind of a hick before he came to college. They helped him. "What ever happened to what's-her-name, that girl from Thomas Hall—the Tri-Delt? You still dating her?"

Tom rolled over on the couch and a quick smile of remembrance came into his face and passed as quickly as it had come. "We stopped dating." Silence. "Well, more accurately, she stopped dating me." He gave a funny little laugh. "How'd ya screw up?"

"I didn't, that's just the way things went. You know how it is with those things."

"Oh, come on, ya must have done something wrong. You got drunk and passed out on a date."

"No." "You were your usual crude self."

"Go to hell." He said it in an ordinary way, but he shot a glance at me that said I had better stop. "All I know is that something's wrong. You're a good guy. Girls..."
naturally dig you and you've got a smooth line. I just don't understand it."

"I don't either. Let's forget about girls."

"O.K.", I gathered the cards up and shuffled them—setting them back down in a neat pile, "Who ya going to take to the picnic?"

"Nobody!" He ground his cigarette out on the table leg. "I'm just gonna tend bar—you wanna do it too?"

"Sure, what the hell, we'll both get tight!"

I could see from Tom's eyes that a girl had just come into the room and the next instant I heard Connie Roth behind me say, "Hi Tom. Is Henry here?"

"Just a second, Connie. I'll call him." He got up and went to find Cramer. I turned around in my chair.

"Oh, hello, Doug. How are you?"

"Fine. You want to sit down?" I motioned to the couch. I couldn't help watching her as she came around the table to the couch folding one leg under her as she sat down. Her hair was a soft brown. She wore it back and tied with a small ribbon. Connie looked like the kind of girl you'd want to keep in a spacious house by a far sea shore, just so nobody else would see anything so sweet and womanly. There were not a few men who balanced dangerously on the brink of something resembling love for this girl. Looking at her this morning I could have tumbled over with the slightest breath of a push except for the thought of Henry Cramer. His leering face chained me to the edge of the cliff and drew a maddening veil over the form of Connie Roth.

"Doug?"

"Hmm? I'm sorry, Connie, what?"

"I hope you won't take this wrong, but I am sorry you and Ann broke up. I know her pretty well from the sorority and—well, I never thought she was quite the girl for you. But I shouldn't say anything anyway."

"No, that's O.K., you're right, as a matter of fact." I leaned back in the chair. "As a matter of fact, you hit the nail right on the head; she bored me to death and I wasn't showing her the kind of time she wanted. It was undoubtedly good all the way 'round, but I wouldn't say that to anyone except you or maybe Tom."

She looked down when I told her that. She spoke while she was looking at the floor, "I really do mean it, though, that I am sorry; I know how hard it is, when you've been going with someone for a long time and seeing them every day, to stop all of a sudden."

"It's funny how you feel so bad when you break up with someone even if you don't really give a darn about them. You just feel sort of let down when the thing finally comes to an end and you know it's actually over."

She looked back up again as a thought came into her mind. "That's it," she said, "That's really true. Remember last year when I was in that terrible play? Even though it killed my grades and was nothing but work, I cried when it ended; I cried just because it was all over and I'd never go to another awful rehearsal." She was lost in thought again. "And in the spring I can't stand to see the school year end, and in the fall I hate to come back."

Tom and Henry came back into the room. Connie got up and went over to them, giving Henry a little smile. Henry came up and took her arm. "Sorry, honey, I was in the john. Did ya dig the car on the way in?"

"Yes," she replied, "I saw it. It looks very nice. I was going to help you, but I had to work at the sorority house. I'm sorry."

"Sure, I know, anything to get out of a little work. Well, I'll forgive ya, let's drag out." He spun her towards the door and propelled her with a slap on the butt.

"Don't," she said, looking back and laughing. They chased out the front door and into his convertible. The rear end of the car sat down on the axle as it took off.

Tom and I looked at each other and didn't say anything—it had all been said a hundred times since last week. I went upstairs to do some work. I thought I would read some history, but by the time I got into my room and saw my books and notes on the table—and then my nice soft bed—I decided to study later when I was fresh, maybe Monday or next winter.

The spring came on at full gallop. Each day brought a perceptible change in the countryside. The brown and scruffy grasses turned green and when the weekend of the picnic arrived you could hear the small rustle of the new leaves in the spring wind. Studies faded with cold snow; now they were both gone.

There was still a film of dew on the ground as the caravan of autos pulled out from the university. They soon raised a wake of dust along the dirt roads that work in and out of the hills. All was prepared for the day; the beer was cold, the food was abundant, and the spirits of the male and female passengers were towering.
I felt good as I bounced my car along the Spring Creek road. Tom gave me a paper cup full of gin and orange juice (which we both preferred to beer) and we pushed the no-draft windows all the way around so that the fresh air rushed in on our faces. We gulped our drinks between bumps and watched the pastel landscape roll by. After two drinks and a cigarette we arrived at Abraham's Hollow, shortened to "Ham Hollow" by the generations of college students that had used the place. It was perfect spot for a picnic on this spring day. The slopes that formed the sides of the hollow were a lush green, dotted here and there with lighter bushes and early flowers. The sky was a china blue, so deep that I remarked to Tom about it. In fact the whole panorama gave the appearance of a brightly painted china bowl—so sharp and glazed it was unreal to eyes accustomed to the achromatic winter world.

I pulled the car up by a stone pavilion (gift of the class of 1948—they were mostly veterans. The university asked only that they not put their name on such an unacademic structure.) We set the food out on a long table directly under the large commemorative plaque. We also had the responsibility of tapping the kegs of beer, which we were forced to do almost as soon as we were out of the car. There was a primitive scramble to the flowing spigot and soon, amid animal shouts and good-natured cursing, the mugs of the picnickers were brimming with white foam. Cramer and Connie had just filled their mugs and were now walking directly toward us. Henry slapped me on the shoulder.

"Now this is what I call a damn good function, man; this is going to be a real drunk." He suddenly looked perplexed. "Say, what the hell! Haven't you guys got dates?"

"No," I said, "I couldn't find anybody as cute as Tommy." I gave "Tommy" a pinch in the butt.

"Oh, yes," said Tom, "we've been living in sin for some time now, right down the hall from you." He put his arm affectionately around my waist and I guessed the gin was getting to him too. Henry laughed loudly and I could see that Connie enjoyed our stupid humor also. Henry swilled his beer down and wiped the remainder from his face and chin.

"Jesus, you guys are turning queer! Get a date." They started off and Cramer called back, "Get it while it's hot!" He laughed again.

I poured another drink for Tom and myself. Cramer seemed to have a talent for enraging me. Why didn't I have a date? Why didn't Tom have a date with that girl from Thomas Hall? Why was Cramer pinned to Connie Roth? What was the difference between Tom and me and Cramer? Why was it him instead of me? The whole thing was too revolting.

The day skipped along and keg after keg was emptied. Lunch was devoured and everybody sat around for a while digesting their food and getting drunk again. It was a very successful picnic. And it should have been; the winter was long. We were all glad to be able to get out into the country and raise some hell and get drunk and make love to some girl.

Everyone likes picnics in the spring.

I was more sorry than ever that I didn't have a date. Tom had been petulant for some time, and now he spoke. "Doug, just look at everybody! They're like a bunch of ants." He took another drink and added, "only ants know what they're doing."

"Oh, you're just mad 'cause you don't have a date, and that's your own damn fault."

"No," he retorted, "that's not it at all. Now, really, look at these people. You can't tell 'em apart—you know, the boys from the girls. They all have bermuda shorts and tennis shoes."

"Oh, come on now." I looked at the girl nearest to me. "I can tell the difference. You just have to look a little below the surface." Tom gave me a half smile, then looked serious again.

"No, you don't get what I mean." He was getting irritated with my lack of interest. "Even underneath they are the same as the guys, a bunch of drunken slobs who haven't grown up and can afford not to. I'll bet that if a lot of these girls didn't go to college they'd be whores, and the guys would be bums."

It bothered me to hear Tom talk like that, maybe because I believed part of it. "Shut up, you're drunk. These people are just trying to have a good time. Getting drunk is no great sin." He thought about this for a moment. I continued, "What the hell, you and I aren't exactly sober and neither of us is exactly a virgin. How ya gonna scream about people when you're no different yourself? Nobody is perfect—you or me, or—or anybody."

He closed his eyes and pushed the question away. "O. K., O. K., you win." He brightened up, "Let's go over and watch the beer-baseball game."

We went over to the ball diamond where the game was getting started. Everybody played on one of the two teams. Whenever you pitched the ball, hit it, caught it, or did anything at all, you took a
drink of beer. The first girl up at bat managed to trickle the ball down the first base line where she tripped over it and spilled her whole mug full of beer on her shirt and pants. Most of the players, in an effort to take a quick gulp, slobered the stuff down the front of their shirts. There was also the usual number of arguments. Henry almost got in a fight with Guy Owens over a play at third base. The conflict drew a sizable crowd, spurring both contestants on. The whole affair ended in a maudlin reconciliation, both fellows drinking innumerable toasts to their friendship and good-naturedly rubbing white foam into each other's hair. This ended when Henry had to join the ranks of those who went off into the woods to vomit, a particular hazard of beer-baseball. Some unlucky men and women didn't make it to the woods and were a constant source of ridicule. I was not feeling especially well myself, and I lay down.

The sky was a strange color; it was blue, yet it wasn't actually blue either. The air was changed too. It had grown a good deal more heavy and still. The shouts of the picnickers now carried across the hollow with a far-off metallic sound.

Cramer was back now and he was eager to resume the game that had gone on without him. As he took up a bat, he yelled out to the pitcher, "All right, get the lead out and throw that damn ball up here!" The first pitch came in and he missed it by a foot. He yelled some new obscenity and took a more determined stance at the plate. He connected with the second pitch, but it was low on the ball and it went high into the air. Every eye followed its almost sluggish ascent.

When it fell, it fell forgotten. Even Henry kept looking at the sky. I can't really describe how it looked; I can only say that in the flick of an eye it was like dusk, only the sun was still high and it was three o'clock in the afternoon. But more than that, a wind was now blowing. It was a cold west wind and it swept into the hollow with startling force.

I nudged Tom, "Hey, look over there, is that a hill?" As soon as I started to speak I knew I was wrong. The hill was a cloud so dark that it looked like part of the horizon. Finally the ball was found and thrown in. Play was resumed, but in a less eager fashion.

"Oh crap! Of all days to rain," stormed Tom.

It was disappointing to have such a wonderful function ruined by a storm. Everyone likes picnics in the spring. So we pretended that perhaps it would blow over if we paid no attention to it. All the picnickers fell into the play with a new tenacity, but it was not much fun in the chilling wind. Yet the game went on. The sky grew darker with each play and the players became almost desperate in an attempt to blot out the impending storm. No one wanted to leave the field and the beautiful hollow to the rain, not on the first spring outing.

It was getting too dark to see the ball. The clouds were a brownish gray and all boiling in a cauldron of wind whipped sky. A few people left to put up windows and tops on the cars. The rain first fell in a few giant drops and then the swirling mass of clouds was dashed by a stroke of lightning and pounded into the earth with a reverberating clap of thunder. Every bit of earth, every tree, every flower, and every living thing in that hollow was drenched in the torrent of cold rain.

I could see only a few feet in front of me. It was dark as a winter night even when the rain let up. For an instant I could see the sides of the hills in the blue electrical flash of the lightning, and then the darkness was slammed down with a thunder crash that rolled over and over in the seething heavens.

The only shelter from the scathing fury of the storm was the stone pavilion. When Tom and I got there most of the people had already arrived and were standing in small groups looking out to where they had been a few minutes before. I saw Connie standing alone and went up to her.

"Have you seen Henry?" she asked. "I went to put the top up on the car, and get away from that terrible game, but then it started to rain and . . ." Her last words were drowned out by the thunder.

"No, I didn't notice, but he isn't so tight that he won't come in out of the rain. Even Henry isn't that dumb!" The last words slipped out before I could stop them. At that instant a bolt of lightning crashed down into the woods across the hollow where the ball diamond was. We could hear the splitting of a tree before the thunder drowned out everything. I turned to look at Connie; her face was pale and drawn and she continued to stare out towards the meadow and woods beyond. "Did that scare you?" I asked.

She didn't look at me, she just kept looking outwards. "He's out there, I saw him."

"What?" I said, "you couldn't have—out there by the woods? No, I know he wasn't that tight."

Tom nudged me. "I think she's right, I thought I saw somebody running out of the woods as the lightning struck." We all strained our eyes trying to see through the curtains of rain and darkness. Another ganglion of sparks leaped across the sky and came down over the hill. In the flashing luminescence I clearly saw the form of Henry Cramer...
running across the open field towards the road. For a second I could see him running with his arms outstretched, like a man with a beast at his heels.

Before the thunder had died away and I could say another word to Connie, she was gone. At the sight of him she had dropped her coat and run out to him. I picked it up ready to run after her. Her white tennis shoes splashed across the field as she ran. Then I could see them together, out in the meadow; she was helping him up. At that instant everything became unearthly still. The wind, the trees, the rain, and the two figures in the open meadow were like a frieze. Then a white hot blade slashed down.

There was a scream.

I am sure that none of the forty or fifty people in that hollow will ever forget that sound—male or female. It was the scream of the rat as the trap-spring snaps its back.

“God!” The word rushed past my ear.

And I believed it.

Then the thunder exploded into the hollow and the rain burst into the pavilion. There was no place to hide.

The endless searching days and nights are just begun,
We grab a tranquilizer for the queezy stomach full of nerves.

Is this the progress to infinity;
To know the desert pattern of tiny shuffling feet,
To find tobacco stains in chalky, neon-darkened halls.
Always the tile patterns, endless squares and pastel colored doors,
The posed facade.

But to feel,
To feel free again.
To ride bumpy-high
In a blue borne sky.
Nothing creeping slowly under you,
Relief-joy surging
To the top of your head;
Raise the world with a top tilting turn.

Ants and windmills,
You silly asses.
Of all the pictures in our family album—and they are numerous, for my parents then were fascinated either by their growing daughter or by photography—the snapshot that always makes me pause is one of me posed with one arm arched over my head, the other pulling out the folds of a long dotted swiss skirt to reveal a foot pointed to curtsy. On the unbelievable corkscrew ringlets into which my usually recalcitrant hair had been coaxed sat a facsimile mobcap, the kind I always picture Shakespeare's Joan wearing when she "keeled the greasy pot". An outsider, seeing the ruffled sleeves and flounced hem of this garb would intuit school pageant. But I know better; the snapshot was taken in our garden and the dress is the one I wore when I was an Apple Dumpling in ballet school.

First, it must be admitted that the stress and strain of becoming a ballet dancer were not always glamorized by filmy costumes of dotted swiss. On the contrary, the school stipulated that practice clothes be white utilitarian garments, with short skirts and no unnecessary frills. This edict my mother interpolated to a costume as simply plain as she could make it. The pudgy contours of my third grade physique—I had all the grace of a baby balloon—were garbed in a white rayon top patterned from one of my sleeveless undershirts, and a slightly flared hiplength skirt which clung seductively over white rayon pants. I seriously doubted if Pavlova or any of her cronies had begun their careers with such a handicap.

But once at the polished waist high railing called the barre that ran the length of the ballet practice room, one forgot costume in the effort to hold head high, arms curved, and oh, the bane of being fat, derriere in, s'il vous plait.

Just as it does not start with exotic dress, so ballet training does not start with a few casual twirls on the tips of the toes. There must be a preparatory time, about two years, during which the young dancer's ankles and leg muscles are built by slow and painstaking exercise into sturdy tools with which to hold precisely balanced attitudes and execute difficult steps with control and deceiving ease.
So the fifteen girls of my first term class wore the kind of limp black kid slippers Degas never painted, grasped the barre for balance and stained white uniforms with tears and perspiration as we tried to mold stubborn inflexible feet into the five positions that form the basis of all dance steps. We even managed to feel superior to a skinny black haired girl who finally dropped out of class because her knees creaked on all the deep bends.

All the practice, all the tedious exercise was deemed worthwhile if it earned a nod of approval from Madame Josephine. Once she had been première danseuse with a Paris company, but now she was the owner of our school. A figure of imposing vitality, she became invested with the most extravagant gossip: the older girls, who took their toe shoe lessons from her in awed silence, whispered that she had been jilted by her lover and the grief had driven her from the stage. To me, she seemed above such human tragedy. Even with the assistant teachers she was majestically aloof, and when she came to watch us, the young woman who led our practice session faded into insignificance. We hated our skimpy white costumes when we saw Madame Josephine's graceful knee length skirt and the cherry red shawl she wore for warmth over her low cut bodice when she was not dancing. She was tall, vibrant and moved with a regal ease.

She was simple enough, though with fifteen of us, in assorted sizes, it posed a problem. To head the line was not the same as being possibly the one with the figure most like a dumpling—I was chosen. I practiced on my own in our basement, endangering wet clothes and the children's room of the library, and concentrated on books on dancing. There were plenty, most of them about girls in the great Russian state schools. I longed to be Russian and live on a collective farm with my own Five Year Plan so I could dance for the Ballet Russe. All the heroines of these novels were peasants, or at least poor, and they qualified on arduous examinations for scholarships to train to be dancers. They all danced in black formfitting leotards.

Possibly because we had made some progress, but more probably because the mothers who paid for lessons demanded a more tangible reward than washing practice clothes, Madame Josephine announced that we would hold a recital. Here it was that I was destined to shine.

The ballet of the first term girls, which might have been variously titled, "Evolution of a Blossom," had a story line that was sure to enthral. In our sheer white dresses with the red flounces we were first dainty apple blossoms, subsequently rosy-cheeked apples, and in the final pirouetting triumph, apple dumplings on the way to the oven. The first dainty apple blossoms, subsequently rosy-cheeked apples, and in the final pirouetting triumph, apple dumplings on the way to the oven. The mothers who paid for lessons demanded a more tangible reward than washing practice clothes, Madame Josephine announced that we would hold a recital. Here it was that I was destined to shine. The ballet of the first term girls, which might have been variously titled, "Evolution of a Blossom," had a story line that was sure to enthral. In our sheer white dresses with the red flounces we were first dainty apple blossoms, subsequently rosy-cheeked apples, and in the final pirouetting triumph, apple dumplings on the way to the oven, which was, by coincidence, offstage. As the shortest in the class—and possibly the one with the figure most like a dumpling—I was chosen to head the line. Now heading the line was not the same as being the star, but it would lead to a certain conspicuousness, I reasoned, as I practiced on my own in our basement, endangering wet clothes with my flying leaps, while the spiders laughed in glee.

In an incredibly short time performance day had come, Madame Josephine was ushering in the parents, and it was time to lead the rest of the quaking blossoms out through the curtains. The dance itself was simple enough, though with fifteen of us, in assorted sizes, it posed all the problems of a troop maneuver. It started with a line which snaked its way around the semi-circle of spectators who sat on chairs on our level. (The piano reposed, safe from harm, on the platform stage above.) In this double S twisting, our arms encircled our heads, hands far enough apart to hold an imaginary balloon—a psychological trick to achieve that drifting, light-on-the-feet look. Then, at the
summons of a piano chord, we fell back, regrouped into a cluster of apple blossoms and began to bloom, springing out in two's and three's to assume arty stances. I rather think the falling of the petals was omitted for fear our naturalistic bent might have insisted on a Minsky routine.

With successive gyrations we fluttered through the buffets of a rainstorm and the kindly ministrations of the sun, evolved into apples, fell to the ground in a series of mincing hops, joined hands once around for the apple dumpling polka, and somersaulted off the stage to the oven. Applause and laughter followed the other fourteen girls; I somersaulted into a handy wall and exited to jeers of "applesauce"...

Madame Josephine gravely congratulated all the mothers and passed around the enrollment list for the next term. After a month, though, my contract was cancelled. I had been sent to learn bodily grace, but it was discovered that Madame Josephine was being rather too graceful with one of the fathers and the neighborhood mothers' league declared a boycott. My loyalty to ballet persisted until my next birthday, when I was given a baton and dreams of a stage career faded before visions of spinning the shiny baton in front of the blare of a marching band and a parade that would astonish all of Main Street.

LETHARGY

By Julia Austen

Walk softly, children, lest you wake
Your fathers, weary, drenched in sleep;
Walk softly, children, never take
Their sleep from those who cannot break
The lethargy of Man.
But if you find in tip-toed quest
A man who lightly sleeps, and dreams,
Then wake him, children, wake him lest
He sleep too long, but it seem
As if he waked himself.

TO ROUALT'S "THE OLD KING"

By William Bennett

My king, my bearded patriarch,
Your abdication (long recorded)
Is yet a present fallacy;
As crown jewels under dull indoor light
Wait centuries for tourist tears
To clot the dusty glass.

What did you do to warrant such a fall,
That orphans should be year round crippled
in February streets,
Allow the many to usurp the fortune of a few,
And, by the way, your wife is working
in the five and dime.

Yes,
The mob riots conservatively in the suburbs,
Waiting through this warm winter
For a damp spring to muddy the back yard.
No one can do anything too much,
Or nothing, too little.

God, which we in affirmation yet deny,
We wait like nervous sheep to feel the knife.
The small boy ducked and moved quickly on padded moccasin feet to where the heavy undergrowth would hide him from what he had seen in the forest. He crouched for a moment, then cautiously lifted his head and peered through a space in the brush. The face was still there, about thirty yards away, near the base of a large tree. He turned away and lowered himself to one knee. He swallowed with difficulty, and felt his heart inside the deerskin jacket, as he fought to keep his body from shaking. The second look at the face had been even more frightening than the first, for now he knew it was real. Silence seemed to have isolated him as if the forest were waiting for something, but the boy looked up and saw that the sunlight still came in patches through the thick green of the beech trees. The forest was bright and alive where the patches touched, and muted and deeper in the shadowy places. Then he heard the birds in the branches above and knew that it all was really the same as before. Except that it wasn't, for when he gathered courage and looked a third time the face was still there, motionless by the tree.

The boy had come far into the afternoon woods. It was much cooler here than back at the cabin where there was no shade against the August sun. He had come following a narrow stream, walking a ways from it because he thought that if it became wide and deeper he might see animals drinking from it. Or at least some frogs or snakes, or maybe even an animal track like the one his father had found in the mud. He had walked quietly so as not to frighten away any of the creatures he hoped to see. He had been looking carefully around but for a long time hadn't seen or heard a thing except for the birds, or an occasional faint scurrying off in the underbrush. It was a great shock, therefore, when suddenly he had seen a man's face just ahead through the trees.

Daring now to take a longer look, the boy could see the rest of the man. He was crouching, and not only his face, but his whole body seemed very stiff. The man seemed to be watching for something, for he kept his head straight ahead, staring in the direction of the stream. The boy saw that he was dressed all in green; that was why it was hard to see him right away. Green pants, a green coat, and he wore a green peaked cap pulled low so that even the lightness of his skin wasn't apparent against the natural backdrop. The man's face was in shade and the boy thought that it didn't really look like a face at all, more like a mask that was somehow a part of the dense forest growth. In fact the whole body looked unreal. For a moment the boy thought that perhaps it was a statue, or a big cardboard figure like the ones he had seen at the grocery store. But then he looked at the face again and knew the man was real, very much alive and waiting.

There was something about the grim intent face that made him afraid to look at it for very long at a time. Then something else caught the boy's eye—a long, thin thing the man appeared to be holding. It was dark and looked like a long stick, but it was hard to see in the shadows. The boy wondered what it was, and wondered what the man was doing, crouched there in the bushes.

The boy thought that if he moved just a little to one side he would be able to see better, so, very deliberately, feeling the ground for sticks which might break and give him away, he crawled the few feet. He got to his knees, hardly daring to breathe in fear that his movement might have been noticed. Already, though, his fright was turning to curiosity and soon he had made himself comfortable and raised his head to look.

He peered again and gasped silently, for now he could see what it was the man held. It was a bow, held upright with one hand; the other was out of sight in the man's lap. On his coated back, the boy saw a green quiver, probably packed full of deadly arrows. The boy stared at the face once more. He tried to think of who would have a bow and arrows, but all he could think of was Indians. The man didn't look like an Indian, at least none of the ones he'd seen in the movies. And his face was too angry-looking, the chin thrust almost defiantly as the head remained fixed looking toward the nearby stream. He was watching for something, though the boy had no idea what it could be.

The bow fascinated the boy and he wondered why he hadn't noticed it at first. He had never seen a real bow before, only the ones in picture books and movies. Once he had tried to make one of his
own, but the string had broken the first time he pulled hard on it. The boy breathed quicker now, but this time it was the excitement. He felt he must know what the strange man was doing. Slowly he lifted himself so he could see if the man held anything in his other hand. He stretched his neck, exposing his head for a moment from behind the tangled growth. Sure enough, the man held an arrow across the bow. The boy felt a sudden tremor as the full realization that the man intended to shoot something came to him.

The boy lowered to his knees again. He was so excited that he was afraid he might wet his pants. Looking, he saw that the man was still in the same position, crouching by the tree. With this sudden knowledge of what might happen at any second, the boy felt as though he were a privileged spectator of some great show. His curiosity about the stranger and his unknown target became overwhelming. The boy glanced toward the stream but could see nothing. Except for the birds, up and out of sight in the tops of trees, there was nothing at all to disturb the silence of the forest. Nothing came, or moved; still the man, the archer, waited.

The boy felt a cramp beginning in his legs. He ignored it for awhile, but soon it became quite painful. He decided to shift and lie down, and he found a place where, by lying on one side and propping his head up with one arm, he could still see the man. Then he thought of soiling the jacket and placed some dry leaves underneath his elbow. The jacket was his father's, made from real deerskin. All summer long he had asked to wear it; finally this afternoon, the day before they would go back to the city, he had been given permission. It was far too big, and the sleeves came down, almost covering his hands, but still, he was glad to feel its brown softness around him. He lay now and looked once more at the crouching man. The face was what he watched mostly, although it still frightened him. There seemed an awful intensity behind its fierce stare. The boy thought that the green man must be growing uncomfortable, that he would surely have to change his position soon. Yet still the man remained the same way, his hands on the bow and arrow, waiting and ready. Then the man moved. It was so slight that at first the boy thought he must have imagined it. But, as he watched wide-eyed, he saw it again. One hand, the one which had held the arrow across the bow, that hand was moving slowly, very slowly down and, finally, into a pocket in the side of the green coat. The man had to bend forward so the hand could fit inside, and his body moved that way just a fraction. Then the hand came slowly back into his lap. Lying on the ground, the boy felt a tingle crawl over his body. He hardly dared to breathe yet at the same time he couldn't take his eyes from the man. All summer the boy had played, sneaking up on pretend enemies and overhearing secret plans but now, this was real. He saw the hand move again, come from the lap and up to the man's mouth. Something was put into the mouth; then the hand returned slowly to the lap and the arrow. The boy figured it must be candy or something to suck on, for he watched closely but could not see the mouth move as if it were chewing. All the while the man's eyes had not wavered an inch from their staring.

For a long time the Bowman did not move again and the boy thought that he must be quite strong, for already his own neck and elbow were growing stiff. Gently, he moved his legs and body around so he could lie for awhile on the other side. While he was shifting, he tensed in fear that he would make some noise and give himself away. He took his time moving, cautiously inching, a little at a time. Then, when the boy was settled and watching the man again, he began to invent stories about him—who he was and who he was waiting for.

First he played that the man in green was a private detective after a gang of killers hiding out in the forest. He was a detective who always used arrows to hunt bad guys and was dreaded by all members of the underworld. It was easy for the boy to pretend, as he was used to being left to himself, and he became anxious, half-expecting at any moment to find a furious battle break out in front of him. Then swiftly as his mind worked, the boy saw the archer as an adventurer who had come to slay a great maneating tiger. The beast had escaped from a nearby circus and had everyone in terror for their lives. No one could shoot a gun well enough to kill the tiger and if only wounded it would be more fierce than ever. What was needed was a single arrow right between the eyes, and only one man in the world could manage that. There he was, over in the bushes watching, waiting for the wild charge. And the boy too waited for the tiger to come.

But this also faded quickly, as did the next pretense about a vampire werewolf who could be destroyed by a silver arrow through its heart. The boy was disturbed because his images refused to stay so he could elaborate on them as he usually would have. Often he spent hours on one story, playing both sides as he romped in the crowded forest, but now it was hard to become involved in any of them. He finally decided it was the man's fault, for every time he
got an idea he looked at the man to verify it. But that face would
fit none of his heroes. It was too hard, too intense in its frozen staring.

The boy was forced to move again, and returned to kneeling on the
matted ground. During the procedure he almost fell forward into the
underbrush, and when he had righted himself a cold sweat glistened
on his forehead. Inside of his father's jacket he could feel moisture
form and begin to trickle down his body from under his arms. Then
he heard something, and quickly looked through the growth and over
by the tree.

He was shocked when he saw that the man had raised himself
to kneeling and had drawn the large bow. The boy could see clearly
now how big the weapon was and for a moment he could not take his
eyes from the bent bow and the arrow fixed in place. The man was
still rigid, though he was bolt upright, with the one arm held straight in
front of him. The other was drawn far back with the string. His
eyes now glared in the same direction, his mouth was still the grim,
straight line. For seconds the man knelt poised while the boy panted
with excitement. Both were transfixed, watching with every sense
alert. The boy heard the sound again. It was rustling noise, faint
and off by the stream. He looked back at the bowman. The man's
face had changed slightly; his mouth was curled in a vague smile,
and the boy thought he saw the eyes narrowing. Then the hand
pulled the string back even farther, bending the huge bow in a great
arc. Something seemed to pass over the man's body, for after a sudden
quiver it raised a little higher and leaned forward just slightly. The
boy felt a chill climb his own back. He saw the lips part and tighten
as the man clenched his teeth; then the evil smile grew on the face.
It was a look the boy had never seen before, and he began to shiver.
Still he could not take his eyes from the man.

The rustling came again, but further off this time. It stopped,
and the boy saw the smile stop also on the man's face. It changed
slowly and twisted suddenly, then disappeared entirely into the grim
concentration of before. The man's body relaxed and, moving slowly,
he released the pressure on the bow. Then he lowered himself to the
crouching position, still looking at the same part of the waiting forest.

The boy was shaking badly now, more frightened even than when
he had first seen the staring man. He kept his eyes on the green
figure, but all fun had gone out of the spying. He felt queer inside,
as if any moment he might become sick to his stomach. Some terri-
ble thing had almost happened, he sensed this instinctively. Somehow
he should have known not watch the green man.

Looking around, he noticed the sun had lost much of its power.
It was late in the afternoon and the trees were bathed in shadows;
there were no longer any patches of sunlight coming through. The
woods looked different now, a sinister gloom to the nature he had
seen only as friendly all summer. Green was no more a bright and
happy color; all had become strange and tense in the air about him.
For the first time during the two months the boy felt alone, and in a
place where he did not belong. He saw that now, that it was wrong
to be there watching in the forest, and he wanted to be far from the
strange man, out of the darkening forest and back to the cabin in the
clearing, back inside where he could crawl under woolen blankets and
be safe. Once more he looked over by the tree and knew then just
how evil the green man was. No wonder he had been so afraid of
being discovered. He must never, never be seen by this evil green
man.

The boy's hands fumbled when for some reason he took a moment
to brush a few leaves from the jacket. His mind raced, urging him to
flee in haste, but he knew he must remain cautious and he clenched
his fists tightly in an effort to control the shaking. Turning, he took
a single careful step, then a second, and found the footing solid.
Another step, and he let his breath out slowly and took a few more,
now growing faster and glancing up to find the way. He didn't see the
twig, but he felt it under his moccasin and heard it break sharply
in the forest stillness. For an instant he froze, then, in greater fear,
he began to run, crashing through the underbrush. He didn't hear
the other sound, or the quick whisper of the arrow as it came and
struck deep into the deerskin softness for which it was made.
She has gone,
Fled beyond dawn and river mist,
Beyond the grasp
Of her agile eyed debtors
Whose self-sustaining vision
Falters only at the brink
Of eternity;
For she has left them nothing,
No more than a remnant of retribution or revenge
Strung between life and death,
Nothing to profane
That each she knew not.

Then which of these shall speak
Or sing her flight,
Her final flaunting of propriety—
The men in flannel, khaki, denim,
The bearded and the beardless?
All their women,
The waiting, whispering women
Who cursed her in their beds
Or hearded homeward, hearthward
Husbands, lovers, sons?
And how shall they remember,
How etch her epitaph
Into the gray granite of perspective?

If they be heirs
To more than casual covenants,
More than ritual inebriates of sacrificial wine—
These men who share their guilt as brotherhood,
These women weaving mercy of morality—
Perhaps there shall arise
A prophet,
One who dares demand
The bartered birthright for the yet unborn,
A haven for the living,
A heaven for the dead,
Saying:
Mourn for her who dwelt upon the wall
And bound her hair with scarlet cord,
Waiting for the sons of Israel,
The trumpets of a second Jerico.
THE CAMP-OUT AT MINNOW LAKE

By Diane Torgler

The man and woman across the way watched us curiously as we pulled in and set up camp. They were trying to carry on a conversation, but all the while they were watching us to see what kind of equipment we had and what sort of people we were.

We pitched our tent on a high spot in case it rained. Ever since the night Daddy had had to crawl out the flap and dig a ditch around the tent in the middle of a pouring rain, he had insisted that we pick a high spot.

The ground was coated with pine needles that scented the air with a fresh, clean smell. We could see patches of blue and white sky through the scraggly, twisted pine trees that bore the scars of nails and thoughtless initials. In spite of these signs of previous campers, it was a beautiful spot. The water pump was close, so we wouldn't have to be skimpy with water; the rest rooms were clean, and they even had showers. Everything was just like home.

Daddy called us to help him with the tent. While we sorted out the poles that supported the walls, he put the center piece and the four roof supporting poles in place. Then one at a time, he connected the roof poles with the wall poles and stationed one of us to hold them up. He always got mad at us though, because each connection was harder than the last one. By the time he reached the fourth, he was convinced that we were pulling the wrong way. While Joe and Juanita and Mother and I each held a pole, Daddy drew in a deep breath, braced himself with a wide stance, and heaved the last connection into place. Once we had the tent up, Joe and I took over the easier job of pounding in the stakes and trying the supporting ropes to them.

When all the heavy work was done, we sat down to a delicious meal of hamburgers and home fried potatoes and creamed corn. It tasted so good that we couldn't eat fast enough. Nobody even bothered to talk. Mother said she could always tell when we liked what she cooked because nobody talked. After dinner we sat around the table and discussed how many miles we were getting to the gallon and how many miles we had come that day. Daddy said the important thing was that we had arrived and could spend the rest of our vacation in camp. Joe and I agreed, for we had caught a glimpse of glistening blue and sandy beach as we had driven to the tenting area.

Later on in the evening, Joe and I took a walk around the camp to see if we could find other kids our age. The family across from us had red-haired twin boys no bigger than Joe. We called to them, and they came out behind the car and talked to us for a while. But their mother saw us and announced, loud enough for us to hear, that they had things to do. I didn't think that was very nice of her, but Joe didn't seem to mind. I mentioned it to him as we pattered down the sandy path to the lake, but all he would say was that he wanted to see where we'd be swimming.

Walking along we heard the crickets start calling and off ahead the bullfrogs chime in. Finally we stood on the dark border of sand and an eerie loon's cry echoed across the silver water. The air seemed to pour off the lake, and we shivered under our woolen jackets as we walked back to the tent.

Back in camp, we listened to some unfamiliar music on the radio while we watched the moths burn their wings on the hot glass of the lantern. Daddy sat with a red plaid arm laid comfortably on Mother's shoulder and Nita, sleepy-eyed, nestled on Mother's other side. Joe whittled with his pocket knife that had seven different blades, and I made lines with a fork on the oilcloth. After a while, Daddy pointed out the Big Dipper, and not even moving our heads, Joe and I found the North Star. Watching the stars, we became aware of the static on the local station. Daddy got up to turn the radio off and decided it was time for us all to be in bed.

We moved the lantern into the tent and lowered the canvas covering on the mosquito-netting windows. Daddy snapped up the flap, and we began to undress. We always had to get undressed quickly because the night air was chilly and the pajamas from the suitcase were cold compared to our body-warmed daytime clothes. Each of us had his own place to drape his clothes on the poles across the ceiling. We almost always left our socks on because by morning the tent was steely cold. After we were ready for bed, we jumped
on the feather mattress and huddled together, yelling at the last person to hurry up so we could put the covers down. First came Daddy, then Joe, then Nita, then me, then Mother. I hated to sleep next to Nita because she likes to scoot way down in the covers and that pulled them off of me. The covers overlapped, but someone always held onto them and turned. I developed my own survival method. I slept with my hand gripping the covers, and whenever anyone turned with them, I pulled back.

Invariably, Nita had to get up in the night and make the trip. This night was no exception. Joe and I growled something about letting in the cold air, and why didn’t she think of it before. But she never did.

Morning came and I could hear the sounds of a crackling fire and smell the delicious, comfortable odor of coffee. I never could drink coffee, but I loved the smell of it. Then I could hear the bacon sizzling in the pan. Things smelled so much better in the air, in the cold morning air, especially that bacon. One call from Daddy—“Time to speak to the sun, kiddos”—was all I needed.

We didn’t bother to put on our clothes. We just wrapped ourselves Indian-style in a blanket and hurried out to the warm fire. We toasted our front sides and then our back sides while we waited for breakfast. Pretty soon it was ready, and Daddy told us to wash up and brush our teeth or we wouldn’t get any food. Joe and I did our usual finger-tip washing, avoiding the cold water as much as we could.

Right after breakfast, Joe and Nita and I decided to go swimming. We got our bathing suits on and raced over the hill toward the beach. Nita never kept up with Joe and me, and we always had to stop and tell her to come on.

As we neared the beach, we could see the blue-green water with pools of light resting in the lap of each wave. The red-haired boys were playing on the raft and waved to them. They waved back, and then swam away from us toward their towels. I looked at Joe. He said, “What the heck,” and leaped into the lake, lifting his knees as high as he could until the force of the water bore him under. I followed and the cold water closed over my head, giving me an electric feeling.

We swam out to the raft and climbed triumphantly up the rickety, wooden ladder. I took a deep breath and reached my arms over my head, throwing my chin back as far as it would go. While my lungs filled with air and the sun warmed my back, I lunged and hurled myself off the raft, yelling at the top of my voice. Joe followed right after me, and I could feel him brush by me as he sank under. When I surfaced, I couldn’t find him and the water became curiously cold. I hardly had time to grab a breath before I felt his hand on my bathing cap. I came up sputtering, and Joe pushed the palm of his hand against the water and sprayed my face, laughing all the while. I yelled and started after him, but he had a head start. We swam to the raft, putting every bit of our energy into our kicks and strokes.

Joe scrambled up the ladder, almost losing his balance, and stood at the top, leering down at me. Every time I tried to climb up, he stepped on my hands. Finally, I told him he didn’t play fair, and swam nonchalantly back to shore. After a while, he got tired of playing alone and came ashore to help Nita and me build sand castles with moats and draw bridges.

“It’s the most fun in the world to be buried in the sand,” Joe said tactfully.

Nita looked at him. “I don’t want to,” she said.

“It’s all right with us if you don’t want to. We just thought you’d like it,” I said, as Joe and I started walking toward the water.

“OK, if you promise not to bury my head,” Nita said, still not sure she liked the idea.

Immediately, Joe and I glanced at each other. Nita began to howl and started running, but our legs were longer. We tackled her and brought her, protesting and kicking, back to the deeper sand. She decided that fighting wouldn’t get her anywhere, so she pouted a little.

“I don’t care what you do to me. You can kill me for all I care. And then you’ll be sorry ’cause Mother and Daddy will send you away.”

We finished burying her, and I said, “Let’s run!” Nita called, “Hey, wait for me!” But we didn’t, and when she came into camp finally, she was crying. Then Mother asked us what we did to her.

“Nothing,” I said.

“She’s just chicken,” Joe said.

“We did bury her in the sand,” I admitted.

“Well, you made a lot of commotion doing it,” Mother said as she turned back to the stove.

That night after dinner, Joe and I took a walk down to the pier. We went past the tent across from ours, hoping to see the red-haired boys. Instead we heard the man and woman talking.

“I think we ought to see the manager. People like that shouldn’t be allowed in a respectable place,” the woman said.
"Now don't be hasty. They seem like nice people," her husband answered.

"I don't care. We've been coming here for years, and I don't like to see the place go downhill. Pretty soon they'll be letting colored people in, and I suppose you'll say they're nice too. No, I think it's up to us to talk to the manager."

Joe and I hurried away quietly for fear someone would see us and think we were trying to overhear. "It doesn't matter," Joe said, but he kept kicking a stone along the road. We walked in silence the rest of the way to the pier.

The old planks groaned and swayed as we walked out over the water. The foggy mist rolled aimlessly over the sleeping water, but the night air seemed to have a rushing sound as of some far off waterfall. Now that we were out on the pier, we could hear peaceful lapping noises, and across the lake we could see the dull, red warning light marking off the shallow place. Joe stretched out on his stomach with his arms hanging over the edge. He dropped pebbles slowly. I watched him and listened to the plinking sounds as they hit, one by one. In a single movement he threw the rest of the pebbles and got up. "Let's go," he said.

"Joe, don't say anything to Daddy. Maybe they won't do anything."

"Forget it, I said," and he hurried on ahead of me. I trotted to keep up with him.

"Will you take me fishing with you tomorrow? Huh? Will you? Well, answer me," I said angrily.

"I said be quiet," he growled.

"Are you going to shut up or do I have to—"

"Well, it isn't my fault. You act like the world came to an end. You know very well that Daddy will work it out, and it isn't my fault so what are you getting mad at me for?" I didn't want him to see me cry, but the tears spilled down my face.

He walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "Quit your bawling. Somebody'll hear you. Everything will be all right."

When we got back to camp, Joe and I walked over to where Daddy was chopping wood and watched him a few minutes. "They said we were no good," he finally blurted out. "That man and woman. We heard them when we went to the pier. They're going to tell the manager to kick us out. You've got to do something."

"Take it easy, boy. Now tell me what happened."

"We went by those people's tent and we heard them talking. They said we weren't any good, and they're going to tell the manager to kick us out. That's all we heard."

Mother had stood up with her head turned towards us. Now she left the fire and walked over to us. Nita stayed behind and turned a browning marshmallow around and around over the hot coals.

"It's nothing to get excited about," Daddy said. "We'll wait and see what happens." But he picked up only a handful of chips and walked back to the fire.

"Well, aren't you going to do anything," Joe cried.

"There's nothing to do, Son." Daddy hunched over the fire as if to hide it with his body. "We'll wait and see if the manager comes over tomorrow. Some people just have narrow minds, and you can't argue with them because they just get more set in their ways. Anyway, this is a big country, and it wouldn't hurt us a bit if we left a day ahead of schedule. Now, I think it's time for all to be in bed. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Daddy and Mother stayed outside and talked quietly while the fire was dying down. Through the mosquito netting we could see the light play on their faces. Later they came to bed, but I don't think Daddy slept much because I heard him tossing during the night, and he spoke low to Joe a couple of times.

When I woke the sun was just tinting the sky, and Mother and Daddy were already outside. I heard a strange voice. Then I remembered what happened and I sat up and peeked out of the mosquito netting. The green park truck stood in the middle of the road.

"The name's Parker, Alex Parker," the man said. "You folks planning to stay long?"

"Well, we thought we'd leave fairly soon," Daddy said guardedly.

"Where ya headin?"

"Up toward Pine Valley and the Caverns."

"Pretty country up there," the man said, smiling as though he had suggested it. "Say, the reason I stopped over. The man across the way said he thought you were from the Okechewee Reservation or thereabouts."

"That's right," Daddy said. "We live on the edge, and I teach school there."

"We had a fellow from Okechewee working here a couple of years ago. He worked on the clean up crew. Maybe you knew him." The man named Parker reached up and felt his chin, and then moved slowly toward the truck.
"Mildred! Please shut the window. You know I can't stand a breeze on the back of my neck."

Mildred got up from her chair and walked to the window. A tiny puff of air put life into the threadbare curtains for a moment, bringing with it the fragrance of apple blossoms. She drew a deep breath and shut the window. The room was suddenly quiet, stagnant. She became acutely conscious of the ticking of the alarm clock on the mantel, and then of the grotesque array of paper flowers and faded photographs surrounding it.

Deftly she straightened the cushions in the wheelchair. "I'm sorry," she said, "but it's just such a lovely evening, and I thought a little air might freshen things. It's the first warm evening we've had."

Her mother made a noncommittal grunt. A stale, sour smell came from her and gradually permeated the room. Mildred drew away guiltily. She had neglected to bathe her mother again. It really doesn't do any good anyway, she thought, as she retreated to her own room.

The room was quite small. The former tenants had used it as a nursery, and it was painted a bright pink. It startled Mildred every time she entered, but she loved it with a fierceness that she couldn't quite explain.

She shut the door and went quickly to the window on the other side of the room, throwing it open wide. At first she couldn't feel anything, but at last a tiny ball of air crept in, feeling its way timidly, like a new kitten. Mildred took a deep breath, wincing slightly at the vague smell of uncollected garbage in the alley. Then came the sweet, wonderful fragrance of the blossoms again from the park at Twenty-Sixth and Elm.

"Mildred turned quickly, her body flushed with an ecstasy she rarely felt. The breeze curled softly around her, and she trembled. As she turned, she caught part of her reflection in the mirror over her dresser. She could also see her big brass bed with the big Raggedy Andy doll sprawled on the pillow, and the water color she had done in high school.

She moved closer to the mirror. Not bad for thirty-five, she thought. Maybe a little too tall, hair kind of stringy... I do have pretty eyes, though. Everybody's always told me what pretty eyes I have.

A tear appeared in one of them, slid down her face, and raised a little cloud of dust in the open powder box. She walked back to the window, but the freshness had gone. There was nothing but the smell from the alley. She shut the window with a little cry, almost a moan. Immediately her mother's voice came from the other room.

"Mildred? What are you doing in there?"

Mildred paused. "I'm coming, Mother," she said at last. She came into the room. "I think I'll go for a short walk," she said, anticipating the reaction.

"A walk? Where?"

"Just to the park and back. I won't be gone long."

"The park? But Mildred! Don't you remember what happened to poor Nellie Ross in that park last spring?"

"Yes, I remember," replied Mildred, methodically putting on her coat.

"Her body was so twisted and broken! She must have put up a very brave fight... Mildred? Are you listening to me?"

"I'll be back shortly, mother. If you need anything just call Mrs. Kutz downstairs."

"Mildred! Don't leave me alone! You can't leave me." The slam of the door cut off the sentence, but a wail of terror followed Mildred down two flights of stairs and into the front hall. She was running by the time she reached the door. As she stepped outside, spring engulfed her.

She wondered why she had brought her coat. It was really very warm out.

The park at Twenty Sixth and Elm was really very small, planted as it was in the midst of rows of grey houses. Its principal attraction was the two apple trees. In the summer, the apples hardly got a chance to ripen, but in the spring the trees burst with rampant beauty for a few days.
There wasn't a soul in sight. Above the sound of the night creatures, Mildred heard a radio. A dog barked.

Mildred sat on the edge of a park bench, her hands in her lap. She sat for a long time, and the eagerness slid from her face, and her shoulders slumped a little.

“You'd think someone would be out on the first warm night,” she said, to no one. An apple blossom dropped into her lap. She looked dumbly at it, then picked it up and pulled it slowly apart. The petals fluttered to the ground.

Nellie was a fool!

She got up, smoothing her dress with her hands, and pulled her coat tightly around her.

The fragrance of the blossoms had disappeared by the time she got home.