

The CRUCIBLE



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The PREFACE

To the student body and faculty, we of the English Club, present this student publication. It has long been our dream; today, it is partially accomplished. The publication is not in the form that we would like, nor does it contain all the excellent writings we had hoped for. Nevertheless, it is the beginning of something which we hope will be continued, will provide a stimulus for your literary attempts and will be a sort of reward for your hours of struggle in the writing of your masterpiece.

The editor wishes to thank especially all contributors, Russell Gabel for his excellent staff assistance, Dr. North and Mr. Hill for their kindly advice and all others who were, in any way, responsible for the publication.

LOIS M. WAGNER,
The Editor

Grandmother

By EILEEN GLENNON

On the evening of her eightieth birthday Grandma slowly picked her way down to the barn. It was time to milk and the men were still working in the fields. As I followed her, carrying a milk pail, I swung it back and forth, seeing how close to the edge I could bring the little bit of water in the bottom without spilling it out on the ground. Grandma mumbled, "The men are so slow these days. I don't know when the work would ever get done if I weren't here to keep it moving." Grandma liked to think that she was indispensable and independent. Her action on this particular evening in a way epitomized her life. She was always taking on chores and responsibilities which seemed to her children and grandchildren to be beyond reason. She baked bread twice a week because the men did not like bakers' bread. She thought that if she herself did not go up on the hill to pick potato bugs from the vines there would be a potato famine. She would not have anyone at the house to help her. Nobody could get the meals and keep the house clean to suit her. She knew every whim of the men and catered to each of them.

Grandmother made exceptionally good sugar cookies and when I was around, they would disappear very fast. She often remarked that she was not going to bake cookies when she knew I was coming to the farm, for I ate them all, and then there were never any for the men. But she always had an extra supply on hand when I arrived, and I am sure that she would have been disappointed if I had not raided the cookie jar.

In her eightieth year, Grandma tried to do as much as when she was forty. When blackberries were ripe it was a common sight to see her in her blue sun bonnet and a big blue checked apron start out for berries. She carried two milk pails and had a quart pail tied around her waist. She would pick the quart pail full and then empty it into the milk pails until she had them both full. It would be only an hour or so until she had accomplished this and then she would come back and can and preserve them right away. She would clean the berries as she picked them and thus wasted no time in getting them "done up."

Grandmother would make fresh butter three times a week. When I was there she would let me churn it. When the milk would get small flakes of butter in it, she would pour me a glass of buttermilk. I never could be sure that I liked it, but Grandma said it was good for me—and I had made it myself.

When I stayed at the farm, my room was right above the kitchen. The heat from the big wood stove would come up through the grate which was right by my bed. At night when I went to bed I would stand over the grate until I got nice and warm, and then I would get between the cold sheets. I could lie there and listen to the men talking as they played cards, their voices drifting through the grate. Grandmother would come in and turn the wick of the

kerosene lamp down very low, and I would always try to stay awake until the light burned out.

Even in her last years Grandma spent all her spare time (you'd wonder she had any) knitting socks and mittens or braiding rugs. Even when her fingers got twisted and stiff that last winter, and it was painful for her to knit, she still knitted us our mittens.

During those last years she would take a nap after the noon meal. The way she went about it always made me smile to myself. She would sit in her special rocking chair and, picking up a newspaper or magazine would settle back to read. That she really had no intention of reading was very obvious, for she had to have her glasses to read and she never put them on at this time. In a few minutes she would be asleep. She would sleep for about twenty minutes or half hour, and the first thing she would say on awakening was, "I wasn't asleep; I heard every word you said."

Grandma was very particular about her chickens. It was a long time before she would allow me to gather the eggs, a chore I loved to do. Some of the eggs would still be warm and they were always so clean. Sometimes when I would go into the chicken house, a chicken would still be on the nest. I loved to hear her cackle and see her spread her wings as she hurried out her small door. Grandma would always hurry in to see whether I had chased the chicken or just scared her. Although she would sometimes permit me to gather the eggs, Grandmother would never think of letting me or anyone else shut up the chickens for the night. On the coldest night of the year, she could not rest until she had "put the chickens to bed." I would always offer to lock them up, but she would say that the chickens knew her and if anyone else went, the chickens wouldn't rest and neither would she.

One day Grandmother had a heart attack. The Doctor was called immediately, and he said she must not move around, that she must stay in bed and that we must not let her up under any circumstances. The only reassuring thing he said was that so long as she lay still, she was in no immediate danger. It was the first time that any of us knew that there was anything wrong with her heart. It did not seem possible that my Grandmother, who had been so strong and active up until that morning, could be lying still and crumpled on the bed, the old faded blue and pink patchwork quilt pulled high under her chin. The sun was still out and my Grandmother in bed! As soon as she realized that she was in bed and being waited on hand and foot, and that we were worried about her, it was all we could do to persuade her that she must stay in bed at least until the next day. Later that night, when we were all in bed, I heard someone stirring around and going out the door. I was too sleepy to pay much attention, and I thought it was probably one of the men going down to the barn to make sure everything was all right.

The next morning I heard my Mother get out of bed early to see if there was anything to do for Grandma before going down to get breakfast. I got up and went to Grandmother's room with her. The bed was empty, and her dress was gone from the chair. We quickly

went downstairs, but no one was there, and the door was standing open. Grandmother had gone out the night before to "put the chickens to bed," for the last time.

Little Boy At Dusk

By DEAN BOTTORF

After school, in the short dusk of a Friday afternoon in March, I came toward home, pleasantly concerned with plans for the week-end holiday. The hard crust of the winter's snow had begun to soften, and there was a hint of spring in the air. At the top of the rise closest to my home I passed Harris Lee's farm, and it seemed to me that the burley Mr. Lee looked after me as I passed. From there a section of the road spread out before me—the deserted, abandoned Farley place and beyond that, the rock-and-timber house which Harrison Wingate had built and in which he had painted pictures which he had sent to art dealers in Williamsport. Queer pictures, the townspeople said—pictures of queer blurs and shadows, pictures in which men did not look like men nor horses like horses. Frequent rumors had it that Harrison Wingate was slightly crazy.

But my thoughts were far removed from men who might have been crazy. Sometimes, if I was lucky, I found an apple imprisoned under the snow, a late one that was almost a ball of cider. I swung off the road and back into the Farley orchard. Presently my spirits rose. I had found not one apple but two. I bit through the skin of the first, and the cold locked-up juices of the first oozed into my mouth. When the fruit was sucked dry, I tossed it aside and bit into the second.

Suddenly, for no reason at all, I was filled with a strange dread. Only then did I realize how much the day had darkened. My eyes rested on the house where Hatt Farley once lived, and I forgot to suck the cold juice from the punctured apple. Often, since the house had been abandoned, I had romped around the wide porches and climbed over the heavy railings. But now, as darkness gathered about me, the structures had ceased to be friendly and inviting. Against the almost black sky, this old friend of a house had all at once become threatening, a being of lightless windows and locked doors. I became uneasy and began to move towards the road. Without warning I broke into a run as though peril clutched at my heels.

Shakespeare And I

By JO GAUNTT

Every English teacher, I suppose carries a copy of *Shakespeare: Complete* at all times and sleeps with the copy on the table nearest his bed—every English teacher should! When arranging my schedule of classes for the last semester of school I was prompted by some divine counsel to elect a course in the study of Shakespeare, because I had never learned to

appreciate his plays beyond the allegedly elementary "Merchant of Venice."

I walked into the class that first day feeling very noble and full of virtue. This attitude of generosity fell upon me because I realized that, at last, after dodging the task for three years, I had agreed with myself to give Shakespeare a fair trial. My mind was open, free from all prejudice or pre-conceived opinions; I was very benevolently willing to test the judgment of the ages, to see for myself whether or not this dramatist was really great, or was just a happy accident of his times.

That first class met at nine o'clock in the morning on a cold, snowy January day; the very weather seemed to conspire against Shakespeare. The teacher walked into the classroom with one brief-case and two arms full of books. These were proposed textbooks and reference books for the course. He liberally passed them among the class for our inspection. I read with waning enthusiasm, "Shakespeare and His Times, The Universal Shakespeare, A Criticism of Shakespeare, Shakespeare Ad Varolem (the Latin is subject to correction) and saw nothing that gave promise of revolutionizing my thought-rut. There followed a short lecture concerning the importance of an appreciation of Shakespeare to an English teacher. I had some idea on that subject for in a way it accounted for my presence in the classroom. Next there followed a period during which each member of the class was to tell, very frankly, why he had elected this course. I felt somewhat relieved when one girl admitted that she wanted to study Shakespeare's plays because she never knew whether popular quotations were his or from *The Bible*. A student with sleuthy tendencies said he was taking the course to find out if Shakespeare really had a ghost-writer! I felt the proximity of kindred souls, but rejoiced that my reason was far nobler than either of theirs.

I come now to a most significant moment of my life. I believe that you have seen how positively fair and generous I was until this point, and that you will hold no malice for me in my plight. Only pity the sorrowful, deluded life which I must lead. The teacher made the assignment: *Love's Labour's Lost*. "Read and be able to find the climax, and give Shakespeare's motives for the action." It did not sound difficult, but those words have spelled my eternal damnation.

Of course, ignorant souls are seldom conscious of their imminent doom; so I sat there smiling pleasantly, in a satisfied way, at the teacher and then at each member of the class. I was thinking that I would run through this *Love's Labours* stuff, jotting down occasionally a climax or a motive for action. After all, I thought, a climax is a climax; a motive is a motive, Shakespearian or otherwise.

I labored through the play; I did not love it; I was thoroughly lost at the end. The shedding of tears at the realization that all my good will had been futile, had no enlightening effect. I could find no climax, nor, on second reading, could I find a series of climaxes. I could think of no reason in this world nor the world of Shakespeare why he should have written it. The motives were lacking for me.

You say, "You failed when you gave up so

soon; you should have waited until you had read many more plays." I did, in a way. I waited until I had read *A Comedy of Errors*, which I felt was more than appropriately named. I waited until I had read *Romeo and Juliet* with its "fair coz's," and everyone dying at exactly the wrong moment. I waited until I read the Richards II and III, in both of which too many people wanted a throne that there was no good reason for anyone's wanting. Surely I was lost, but did I give up entirely? No, I waited until we came to *Henry IV*, both parts of him. At last! I was saved. Here was the real Shakespeare; here was the dramatist everyone raved about; here was the poet and portrayer of character. When suddenly I remembered! I was learning to appreciate Shakespeare in order to teach his gospel to innocent, sheltered adolescent children.

Could I tell them, or worse, have them read for themselves, about naughty bar-maids, fat-gutted old sots, bawdy houses, and sons who were disappointments to their own fathers? I could, but I should never dare to allow them to understand it all, assuming that they would not!

That in itself was a horrible thought: to think that I was spending time learning to teach something that I should never be allowed to teach. Do not, however, expend all your sympathy upon me yet; there was an even worse fate in store for me. I was brought to the realization that I am not, and never can be, a cultured intellectual. One who reads the *Henry* plays should not look upon the shady remarks of Falstaff as funny; they are merely unfortunate. The humor of these plays is in the lovable, faulty character of old Sir John, and not in what he does at night. Our instructor made clear that, considering the plays which were written by Shakespeare's contemporaries, his are practically Sunday School texts.

I had the wrong idea; that was plain. My sense of humor showed itself to be low and degraded. I was embarrassed to be the only one who would laugh loudly when, by some lack of foresight on the teacher's part, a student read some passages in which Falstaff mentioned any of his private life. I shall always have the feeling that that teacher even believes now that I delight in hearing any dirty story!

Now you know my fate. I who propose to be a teacher of English must engender in high school pupils a reverence and adoration which I cannot feel. I can only say to them, "You must read this play because many people think it is wonderful. Note the beautiful poetry and intricate plot."

But, I suppose, I shall always carry my volume of *Shakespeare: Complete*, and, I suppose, keep the copy on the table nearest my bed, at night.

My Hero

By KATHERINE A. FREY

If a little girl of thirteen falls in love, it is a most difficult problem for her parents. To her it seems most wonderful. But if she falls in love with nothing more tangible than a movie star, the need to solve the difficulty is not so pressing. I imagine that is how my fam-

ily felt when they observed that I had satisfied my adolescent yearning to love something or someone by simply adoring Otto Kruger.

In spite of Clark Gable or any other popular male on the screen, I was thrilled at the sight of Mr. Kruger in "Paris Interlude." It must have been a very mediocre picture but to me at the time it was grand. At the end, Mr. Kruger was entirely alone, so my young heart wanted to befriend him. I remember feeling disappointed that the critics said the picture was terrible.

Otto Kruger never became popular in the movies, but I enjoyed with ecstasy every small part he played. One of his best roles was the one of Doctor Livesey in "Treasure Island." Hungrily I went twice to see this film. But seeing a movie of my hero every few months was not enough. I began collecting pictures, news clippings, minute biographies, anything about him that was available. Piece by piece I practically put together the story of his life. The height of this fantasy came in the summer time so that I had many hours to hunt through old magazines and newspapers. From all possible sources I collected the things, from my friends, even from beauty parlor operators. My English teacher learned about the scrapbook. She had seen Mr. Kruger in two plays on the stage in New York. You may imagine my childish delight when she gave me two crisp programs with large, clear pictures of "Otto" on their opening pages.

When I discovered that my very own aunt had met Mr. Kruger's sister at Cornell University, my interest in her increased immensely. I demanded a detailed description of the sister and wanted to know if she had mentioned her famous brother. Of course this meeting had taken place years ago so that my aunt's recollections were dimmed, but in spite of that I was satisfied.

This affair could not be totally one-sided so I wrote a letter to my hero. After three months of anxious waiting, I received an autographed picture of him. The "O" in the first name was made into a face, and the cross for the "t's" formed a wide grin on the face. I was delightfully convinced that this surely must have been a personal signature. In one of the many stories I read about him, I found that he had been at the point of death because of a serious internal hemorrhage. Childish sorrow filled my heart, and many nights I fell asleep dreaming that it was I who had saved his life, or that I had been nursing him back to health.

Strangely enough I found a man in our city who looked as much like Mr. Kruger as anyone possibly could. Of all things, he was an undertaker! But this had its advantages, for whenever I saw him, he was dressed in such very fine black clothes that they added more to the resemblance. It happened that there had been a death in the family who lived across the street from my home. On the day of the funeral my mother was forced to speak to me very severely because I had been rude enough to watch the funeral from my bedroom window. Of course, I couldn't confide to her that I was not at all interested in either the deceased or the mourners but—the undertaker, even though he and my hero moved in worlds apart from mine.

"One Lump - Or Two?"

By JANET L. WHITE

How utterly conventional we mortals are! Every word we speak, every movement we make—yes, even our thoughts are polished and narrowed down to facilitate passage through the channels of convention.

Let us visualize a beautiful August day spent somewhere on the Connecticut seashore. It is about four-thirty in the afternoon. The sky is a maze of blue with the sun high overhead, cushioned on a few white clouds. A slight breeze blows in across the sea, capping the waves and helping them on their lazy way up the beach. Down the road can be heard the cries and accompanying bell of the Good Humor man, advertising his wares. The "ping" of a tennis ball as its flight is reversed by a forceful racket swing, and a youthful cry of "Deuce again" bring evidence to our ears of a good tennis game in progress on the courts across the road. It is a glorious day, offering a million and one ways for human enjoyment. But here we sit in a stuffy bungalow sunporch, taking tea with some newly-acquired friends, mixing lemon with our aspirations. Resigned to our fate, we chat pleasantly and reach for another cup of tea. In answer to the request of our charming hostess, "One or two lumps, my dear?" we obediently mumble, "One lump, please," and resume our place in the conversation. How many of us would rather take five lumps and stuff them deftly and effectively down our dear hostess' throat!

Within each of us is a naturally rebellious spark, of which we may or may not be conscious. It must be admitted that at some time or other we have had the almost uncontrollable urge to do something unconventional—something just a bit "crazy" or out of the ordinary. In our younger years, what a relief and what fun it was when April 1st rolled around with a legitimate excuse for giving vent to our pent-up pranks! But the older we grow, the more restricted we become, and to exercise any peculiar urge on April 1st now would class us as either childish of a bit "queer."

Please do not misunderstand. I do not advocate everyone's being radical. There is a distinct line of demarcation. A radical's ideas are usually to gain an end. The utopia about which I am talking is the fuller enjoyment of life by doing exactly what one wants to do when he wants to do it. We have all had this desire, I know, but few of us ever adhere to it even occasionally, so fearful are we of becoming entangled in the apron strings of Mother Convention.

About five-thirty of an evening not long past, I had a sudden desire to climb to the top of a hill visible from my window. Others about me were dressing for dinner, getting ready for a scheduled event. I felt as though I just had to get up there away from schedules and appointments, above petty misunderstandings and pointless conversation! Fortunately, I found a friend in somewhat the same state of mind. Proceeding to dress ourselves warmly, we started out to seek solace in the quiet of the evening, stopping on our way to arm ourselves with a snack, consisting of two ham-

burgers and two bottles of chocolate milk. As we walked up the road to the cemetery, the sun was setting in the hills ahead of us and seemed to grow more beautiful at each step. The brilliance of the sunset gradually diminished and spread out into pastel shades which were infinitely soothing to my mind's eye. As we neared the top, I was utterly awed by this sight and felt so much a part of it that it seemed as though my heart could burst with joy. Following the road, we were forced to turn our backs on this beauty and continue up the hill to the very top of the cemetery. There below us lay the evidence of civilization, snuggling between the protective arms of quiet blue hills. Using a tombstone as our dining table, we spread out our lunch and proceeded to discuss life's problems between bites of hamburger, meanwhile drinking in the scenery together with our chocolate milk. Occasionally, the far-off bark of a dog could be heard from down in the valley, or the muffled whistle of a train. As the sky beyond the hills took on a deeper hue and bits of light began to dot the valley, we arose, brushed off our table, and retraced our steps down the road at a much more rapid pace than that with which we had ascended.

Now to consider this escapade from the practical point of view, it sounds utterly ridiculous! Imagine sitting on a tombstone in the cemetery at sundown, attempting to eat a hamburger and drink a chocolate milk between shivers, and still professing to be comparatively sane. Had it not been for proving a point, I would never have admitted doing this. Yet, I did gain satisfaction from the episode. It left me with a certain feeling of having asserted myself, of having done something I really wanted to do, and I was in a much happier frame of mind than I would have been had I not followed my urge.

How true Wordsworth's statement, "The World Is Too Much With Us!" We make self-sacrifices and bear innumerable discomforts for the sake of society, while our inner desires are kept imprisoned beneath the shell of public opinion. We are too busy trying to do what we think ought to be done to realize the happiness to be had by doing what we really want to do. To fidget to the strains of Lohengrin, because the situation demands it, when one's feet ache for the music of Glenn Miller, or to hear Benny Goodman's nerve-racking jazz when one craves the soothing melodies of Strauss; to be forced to fill a paper with ideas when one's thoughts are on anything but writing, or to want to write and be unable to because of a pressing engagement; to work daily in an office and travel only by "logue," or to be constantly on the road when one desires the security of his own office; these are but a small smattering of the tortures to which we mortals unwittingly subject ourselves.

It seems unfortunate that we cannot live two separate lives, one for earning a living and one for earning happiness. Some fortunates almost reach a utopia by mixing the two. (I hope I may one day learn the formula). But do not take me too seriously. Were everyone to follow this policy, there would undoubtedly be chaos. Thus, with you, I bow to the victor, Convention, and murmur, "One lump, please,"—not five!

Remnants of a Lady

By DALE OLMSTEAD

Tears wormed their way among the valleys of her cheeks. As Mag shifted her great bulk from one buttock to the other, her hips seemed to drip and flow out of the narrow confines of the chair. Lifting her head from between her gigantic shoulders, she whined, "Gimme another beer."

As the beer was shoved before her, she clutched at the grimy glass, greedily slopping it over her chins. She drank with the sound of a hundred soup-sippers. Setting her glass on the table, Mag looked hastily around the smoky room, and seeing that she was being observed by a well-dressed man at the next table she daintily wiped her thick lips on the collar of her waist.

It had not always been like this, Mag thought. Why, it was only twenty-three—no—twenty-five years ago that she had married Bill Sweeney. It had been lovely that morning—a spring morning clipped right from the seed catalogue. She had been thin then; in fact, Mag's figure had been the envy of all the countryside. Straight and tall, she and Bill had stood before old Parson Weber. As the parson had pronounced those final magic words—she remembered it vividly—a glass had crashed to the floor from the clumsy hands of a drunken guest. Enraged at him for spoiling the crystal-like perfection of the moment, Mag had stormed at the drunk. She had struck him with her open hand, leaving a lacy pattern on his cheek. Before the imprint had disappeared, however, Mag had been begging forgiveness as she massaged the reddened cheek. Except for the broken glass, that had been the most beautiful day in her life.

Too bad the same couldn't be said for that other important day, Tuesday, February 17, 1929. Yes, she still remembered the exact date. It had been written on her brain with a grief-inked pen.

Mag had just gotten up and was padding around the kitchen trying to find a clean cup for her coffee. Suddenly a persistent knocking came at the door. Lumbering down the dark hall, Mag paused to straighten her wrinkled bath robe. Pushing at her hair she opened the door. The caller was Frank Woodrow from next door.

"Mrs. Sweeney," he stammered, "I don't know how to say this but—well, Bill's been—killed."

Mag's insides had made a complete revolution and then swung dizzily from side to side. She had heard him mumbling something about a brick wall giving 'way. Bill had been under it. Now he was—dead. She had dropped heavily down on the stair steps. She had rested her huge head on her hand as the tears began to come. He had left no insurance—their love hadn't been the sensible type.

"You want my last dime?" she whined, throwing it at the bartender. No, thins had not always been like this. Mag heaved her bulk to her feet and began to lurch towards the door. Pulling a red bandana from a concealed pocket she blew her nose lustily, and queried, "Goin' my way, Mrs. Snook?"

Coke With Lemon

By WILLIAM R. BITTNER

Each age adds a hundred easier ways of doing old things and drops a few old and sometimes beloved institutions. So it is with the place-to-go-and-chat-with-your-friends. Shakespeare talked box-office, the new waitress, and other things of great literary importance with Ben Jonson and the boys in a tavern. Sam Johnson dictated to Boswell in a coffee house. Sidewalk cafes were very popular with Parisians until the tourist trade changed clothes from German-made English tweeds to gray uniforms, and began carrying guns instead of cameras. In America a number of years ago the barber shop was the first place to which you went when you got back in town after a trip. But now the barber shop is merely a hair-cutting establishment (perhaps because the clientele ceased being stag); and for some time now, and until only very recently, the favorite American spot has been the drug store.

Sardonic German cartoonists used to picture the American people as rushing madly to the "apoteke" for everything. To a certain extent the "everything" part was true. When you entered a drug store, you had to look hard for the drugs. Of course, the main attraction of every drug store was the soda fountain. This was a low synthetic-marble wall, its gray mottled surface making it hard to see the few dried tears of chocolate streamed half way down to the ever-present marks of dirty shoes at the base. The top always had little puddles of water, coca-cola, or some other liquid erratically distributed over its surface and not yet spread about by a soggy towel. Ranged about the bar were little stools with bright colored leather seats, upon one of which you took your place to await the coming of your friends. Because of their familiarity, you usually did not notice the occupants of the other perches; the cosmetically-young school teacher, up at the far end, waiting for the toaster to pop out the covers for her ham sandwich, the local politician drinking a milk shake, one leg braced behind him as a stabilizer, the opposite one and his stomach fighting each other for room on the stool, the "cowboy" flirting with the waitress, and the group of small boys at the end near the magazine rack, reading comic books with one eye and keeping the other on watch for the manager. No matter what time you went in, this same group was arranged exactly as before. The toast was never done for the teacher, the milkshake cup never ran dry, the young man never emptied his stock of wise-cracks, and the manager never came. This was the only display in the drug store that was never changed.

As intriguing as this group was familiar, the system of pumps, ladles, and faucets that made up the assembly line of the department stretched out their levers in regimental similarity. Shiny, chrom-um-plated (if you saw the finger prints and syrup stains, you were too close), they urged the life-long ambition of the drug store addict to go back and try to mix something. The back bar displayed a mixer, the toaster, a few arrangements of ginger ale bot-

bles, and usually a bowl of aged, but not yet retired fruit. Aside from its capabilities as a shelf, it served as a divider between the cupboards below, and the mirror-bespeckled, and be-speckled-mirrored, wall of stained walnut wood. Like the waitress who leaned on it, it was resplendent in its uniform; but it was common kitchen utensil underneath.

There was an air of laziness all about. Even the coca-cola you ordered seemed lackadaisically to emit bubbles of gas as you sipped at it. The overflow (there always was some) didn't even have the ambition to run across the bar, but just stayed in a restful pool around the base of your glass like a sleepy, overgrown amoeba.

But soon your friends would arrive, and the place would change masks from a sleepy and commonplace to lively and exciting. In the wake of their inward flow you would be swept farther into the interior of the store, to the row of booths, military-similar, and gaudy as the stools. Into one of these you would follow, landing with a plop because, after your towering position on the stool, the seat was never as high as you thought it was. A few minutes of boisterousness always filled the time between the waitress' decision to come back and her collecting a few glasses of water; then she would arrive, spill most of the liquid on the table while dealing them, and stand in wait for your orders. These she filed in her mind in stolid regularity as she meandered back to the fountain, and conversation would run its course unhampered until her return. When the waitress had completed her travels and had come to rest finally on her original position of relaxation against the back bar, your time was your own, and, secluded from the world by walls of shampoos on one side and candy boxes on the other, life was lived. The seclusion was also good when a boy and his O. A. O., S. P., or whatever the current slang chose to call her, were interested in seeing each other the top of the table. This occasion was rare, however, because, although one sundae was easy to buy, the purchase of sundaes for two was a financial venture, especially so because he did not know how much the fruit-and-nut-ed aggregate of her choice would cost, and was not quite sure of the propriety of looking it up in the menu.

Except perhaps as a place to get films and cigarettes, those possibilities of the drug store other than the preparation of potential indigestion never entered your mind. In the farthest back booth the shadow of the store's title role did overlap the amusement aspect, for from that you could see the pharmacist at work (No one ever seemed to buy anything from him, but he was always busy). This was, however, the least frequently occupied booth, to be taken only when the others were in use, and this shadow from the world of sickroom and hospital could be swept out by merely looking front, past the candy boxes and toys cluttering up the middle aisle, to the signs above the fountain prominently displaying youthful girls and little boys, all beautiful in a stereotyped sort of way, eating with relish from plentifully filled dishes of ice cream. There always seemed to be more relishing than eating going on in those pictures.

After school the drug store, with the efficiency of the valve in the charged-water dispenser, would shut off school thoughts; Saturday nights the drug store was an amusement spot; on Sunday mornings the drug store was the place to go after church; and at all times the drug store was the place to meet people. Yet now it is slipping.

The new youth wants music and dancing. And a new "place" has appeared to meet the want. The Milk Bar is the great replacer. There you find no stools around the fountain. The booths are not in regimental row, but are ringed around the wall like the exuberant wall flowers they hold. And at all times the roar of the "juke box" blares in from the crowded dance floor. To think that the heritage of centuries, the convivial meeting place with refreshments, is being done away with by a revolving black disc and needle! Imagine Boswell trying to hear Johnson above the noise of a juke box.

Yes, an institution and a time are passing. And I suppose that when I am old and gray, and go into a drug store, I shall enter a dingy shop with herbs and drugs in the windows, and shall order my medicine from a man who hasn't the vaguest idea of how to mix a chocolate malted, or draw a lemon coke.

The Ultimate Medical Short Story

By JOHN AKELEY

A large space gaped beneath the left wheels of a car as it careened around the corner. It came to a sudden gasping stop in front of a neat white house that seemed to hold a tentative peace among large maple trees. The door of the car burst open and a small man wearing a homburg and a worried expression popped out and darted up the walk. He was surprisingly agile for his eighty-five years, taking the steps two and three at a time. His stethoscope flopped loosely from his pocket, and the little black bag in his hand swung like a brakeman's lantern, but so swiftly that it was impossible to read the carefully stenciled "M. D." on its side.

Doctor Schitchit came to a stop in the center of the room. "My, but I am getting absent minded," he mused, pulling the door frame from around his waist. "Ah! The patient!"

In one leap the doctor cleared the fifteen feet between himself and a small fellow who was quietly rocking in an old arm chair. Ramming a flat piece of cotton-dry wood into the man's mouth, clasping his tongue to his jaw, the doctor with his calm, professional assurance, asked, "What seems to be the trouble?"

The slight man obviously was in excruciating pain. He beat his hands on the doctor's chest, and smashed four bottles of small pink pills that splattered and danced all over the floor about Doctor Schitchit's feet. The fellow seemed to be fighting something.

With a perplexed expression the doctor removed his wrist and splint from the man's mouth. Spitting out a large piece of tongue

the man carefully got to his feet, and shook himself.

"Doctor," the man said, "my name is Chipit, Emery. I sent for you because I have had a serious accident."

Doctor Scitchit, the true medical genius, asked, "And, my good man, just what sort of accident?"

"Well," Mr. Chipit answered with all the courage he could muster, "It's that hangnail." He extended his right arm so that the doctor could see his hand. It was a very clean hand, the doctor thought, having only a few specks of dirt just behind the second knuckle on the first finger, and a maggot crawling in and out under the thumbnail. The nail itself hung by a minute thread from the end of the third finger.

"Hmm, that looks bad, I am afraid we shall have to amputate." Saying this, the doctor pulled a small microscope from his pocket and set it up with the rest of the equipment he had hastily removed from his vest pocket.

Emery didn't seem to be any too happy about the idea. "Doctor, are you sure you can do it here?" he asked, seeing all the preparations that the doctor was making for the operation.

Doctor Scitchit looked up with a horror-struck expression on his lined face. "Can I do it here? My gad, man, what do you think I am, some fool intern? Don't tell me that you never heard of the great Emil Scitchit? The man that performed that great emergency in '17?"

Opening his little black bag and extracting a folding operating table, a sterilizing cabinet, and instrument table complete with instruments, and an ether tank with mask attached, the doctor said, "Now, just lie here on this table for a moment while I sterilize my instruments." Doctor Scitchit dropped his scalpel, forceps and other small paraphernalia in a bottle of apple jack he had in his hip pocket.

Mr. Chipit did as he was told, a little apologetic about having hurt the doctor's feelings to such an extent. The operating table seemed very substantial considering the size that it had been folded into. Emery watched Doctor Scitchit as he walked over with the ether mask in his hand. He had donned a surgeon's frock and mask, making his appearance very professional.

Doctor Scitchit lighted a cigarette as he watched his patient slowly, with the deep agony of the cheap ether, slip into unconsciousness. Leaving the mask on Emery's face as an added precaution, the doctor picked up his instruments and started on the long tedious task ahead of him.

As he carefully chipped away at the loose nail, with his cigarette dangling from his lips, Doctor Scitchit's thoughts drifted back to that immortal day in '17 when he had performed his greatest operation. It was as clear as if it had happened yesterday.

Mr. Chipit twitched slightly.

In his reverie Doctor Scitchit again heard the head nurse call him from his office to surgery. The famous little doctor entered the great anteroom, where all the famous surgeons of the time had come to witness the delicate operation.

The little doctor bowed to the thundering applause of his audience and walked to the extensive public address system which was used to convey the details of the operation to the huge gatherings. He said that he would attempt to remove the dangerously ingrown hair in such a way that the patient might live. Nonchalantly strolling over to the head nurse he asked, "Is everything in readiness?" The nurse gave a last careful check and said, "Everything is under control, 'Doc.'"

Slowly the doctor picked up his saw-edged scalpel and began. There was no sound in the room save his careful scraping on the patient's skull.

"Five no trump!" came from the balcony.

The little doctor reached his left hand behind him, and the nurse automatically placed a racing forum in it.

"You're just two seconds under the record, the nurse said as Doctor Scitchit cut the last artery into little lengths like macaroni. Doctor Spiffle, the visiting brain specialist, looked about him as if in quest of a daisy to confide his awe in.

It seemed but hours later that the young and efficient doctor had pulled the needle and thread from his lapel and finished the operation with a neat bit of chain stitching that astounded even the greatest.

Mr. Chipit twitched again.

"Ah, yes, those were the good old days," the ancient Doctor Scitchit said aloud as he came back to reality.

Just as a precaution he took Mr. Chipit's pulse. It was very weak. The doctor calmly gave it back and went on. He finished the delicate operation with three stitches in the man's cuticle.

Removing the ether mask from Emery's face the doctor noticed an odd palor about the man's cheeks. Prying at the patient's mouth, Doctor Scitchit crashed the rigor mortis and looked in.

"My, my! What do you know? He had Losgratitis. A dirty shame." Doctor Scitchit carefully removed the dead cigarette from his lips and walked to the telephone.

"Oh well," he mused, "He probably wouldn't have been able to pay his bill anyway."

Changed

By MARGARET SHAFFER

The car slipped noiselessly along through the fading night. Just as the sun pushed its first rays over the low mountain top, I stopped my car beside the old winding lane I had not seen since childhood. I jumped from the car and stepped eagerly into the old moss-covered lane. I hurried along with light spongy steps, not stopping to inspect the huge patches of dogwood which, interwoven among the twisted grape vines, made a shadowy wall on either side as I hurried along.

Vaguely I wondered if I had ever gone away from this childhood rendezvous. I found it hard to realize that just two hours before I had been a part of a madly-rushing throng of joy seekers in a smoke-covered college. Here all was quiet. The air was fresh and clean, al-

most smelling of soap. Worry and flurry were not a part of this world. I tripped idly along to the old wooden bridge.

Everything was just as I remembered. Below the bridge, the rippling waters slipped merrily along. Minnows flipped white bellies up to the morning sun. A hop-toad hopped thoughtfully along on the bank. Across the hill came the faint tinkle of a cow bell. I wondered how soon Grandfather's battered straw hat would appear on the horizon, followed by Grandfather himself with his familiar "Hey! Hey! Hey!" Above, in the blue sky, drifted lazy white clouds. A cool breeze fluttered down along the creek and played in the weeping willow trees over-shadowing the bridge.

My haunt had not changed except that the bridge had begun to sag at one side and its weary old boards were splintered and weather-beaten. One of them was gone entirely. The willow trees, perhaps, hung just a little lower as if to say that the years had been on them too.

These few changes seemed strange. I wondered childishly why the minnows had never grown up, why the cow had not lost her bell, and why these clouds were still over head. And then I remembered that it was another toad, a new family of minnows, a different cow and a new bell, and even the clouds I had watched as a child had long since drifted into eternity.

And I realized that I was no longer a child whiling away the afternoon in the sun. I had ceased to wonder why toads hopped and fishes swam, why bells rang and breezes blew, and why I had never been so fortunate to meet a king. Instead I kept remembering about the history assignment due at eight o'clock the next morning, the science test that I had not studied for, the twenty-eight dollars I owed the bur-sar, the problem-child in first grade, and the debt I had to pay to my house mother. "Well, back to the old grind," I said aloud with a brave attempt at cheerfulness. The empty words drifted into the willow trees and together they laughed. Glancing forlornly over my shoulder for a last look at the only peaceful spot in my world, I hastened up the lane to my car. I knew that I no longer belonged—as I once had. I had gone away to be educated, busy, and happy in that magnificent outside world, and now I had become such a fixed part of its great hurry and speed that I could never escape. I was doomed to a life of rush-rush-rush, day after day, and my care-free happy hours at the old bridge were gone forever, like the clouds, passed into eternity. But, somehow, as I hurried back to the city, I felt a new tingle of happiness in my veins, and I knew that while I hurried along with the crowd, I should know that somewhere could be found rest and peace and quiet.

Brains

By ESTHER CRISMAN

Seemingly one of the best places to find excitement is on the highways of the United States. There are few families who do not own automobiles, and since gas and oil are not

too expensive, half the population is found on the road every day in the week. Motorists drive to horse or auto races, art exhibits, theatrical performances, sport features, scientific experiments, business conferences, and sometimes for the sheer enjoyment of riding. From this number Death makes a huge profit each year.

One evening last summer, I was riding over a part of the Lincoln Highway with a cousin who was in interne at the private hospital in Johnstown. It was just that time in the evening, between six and seven o'clock, when everything is silent, calmly awaiting the shadows of night. Our car was traveling at a moderate of speed when suddenly from the rear came the roar of another automobile. Even as we heard it we knew it must be traveling at a tremendous rate of speed. Almost two seconds later the radiator came into view and then the car flashed past us and vanished.

"If he keeps that speed, he will never get around the next curve," I heard my cousin mutter through his teeth.

I glanced at his face and saw that he was seeing perils hidden from me. At that moment we turned a corner that gave us a view of the fast-vanishing car. It spun along the ribbon of concrete like a racing animal, then suddenly it lurched, turned, and came to rest in a deep ditch at the side of the road—one huge mass of battered machinery.

As we came closer to the scene, the doctor drove his car into a side road. I vaguely remember his mentioning the word "court," but at that moment it had no significant meaning. It was just a word. He leaped from the car and rushed back toward the highway. I watched for an instant, then followed. He turned and saw me, then stopped.

"Stay there," he said. "Some of these people will be dead!"

"I want to come! I've never seen an accident!" I explained hurriedly.

He looked at me for a moment with disgust, then remarked, "You'll faint."

"I won't!" I answered stubbornly and started toward what had once been an automobile.

The doctor forced the car door open and I held my breath. For the first time my eyes saw broken skulls, disjointed limbs, bones poking through flesh, and blood-matted hair. I leaned my weight against a tree and repeated my last words, "I won't faint! I won't faint!"

After what seemed to be a decade, I opened my eyes and compelled them to focus upon the wreckage. A policeman had arrived, and a number of people. I heard the voice of my cousin: "This man is unconscious. The others died immediately after the crash."

By this time there was a crowd, and above its murmur I could hear the roar of a siren. The white-clad men picked up what remained of the bodies and placed them inside the ambulance. I looked up to see my cousin laughing at me.

"I'm going back in the ambulance. Bring my car to the hospital," he ordered and added as an afterthought, "if you are well enough to drive."

I told him I was quite well and took brave steps (I sincerely hope) toward the car. At first I thought I could not even touch it. It

seemed like a horrible monster that tore men apart so that they could never be put together again. I gritted my teeth, started the motor, and with the images of dreadful happenings racing through my mind, drove back to the hospital.

Upon my arrival there, my one desire was to get away from everything that even suggested death. I got out of the car and hurried down the drive, trying not to listen to the roaring in my ears. Unexpectedly, I heard my name, and turning, saw the chief surgeon, whom I had met only a few hours before. He asked if I wished to find my cousin and I still do not think it was I who answered "yes." However, we went down a long flight of steps and through a series of halls. Finally we entered a small room in which my cousin was bending over the man who was lying on a table.

"Nasty accident," said the chief surgeon. He examined the body carefully, looked at the head, and exchanged an understanding glance with the interne. "A deep concussion," he said, and turning toward me, he pointed to a bit of gray matter on the table. "This is part of the brain," he explained.

I felt every ounce of blood in my body drain to my feet. My heart seemed to be doing its pounding in my head.

"Can a man live without brains?" I asked, in a very far away voice.

"Young lady," said the surgeon, "this is the morgue!"

The one thing that added a ray of sunlight to that hectic day of events was that my cousin took me to his office. I did not have to wake up in the morgue.

Draw Your Own Conclusions

By BETTY LOU SMITH

The curtain came down, amid the burst of applause from the audience, on two young people in a romantic embrace. As the curtain closed, they pushed apart and dashed to opposite wings of the stage, into the arms of their eager friends, who congratulated them. The boy accepted this as nothing unusual, but the girl hastily pushed through the group and dashed to the dressing room, tears streaming from her face. This would be the last of everything. Never again could she participate in a school activity. Never again would she have the satisfaction of knowing she was a success. This high school play was the last. In two weeks they would graduate. Could she possibly get to college?

"Jean Wentworth," she scolded in the mirror as she removed her makeup, "you ought to have more sense than to act like this. Don't think of tomorrow; it hasn't yet come." Then humming a popular tune in a broken voice pent up by emotion, she rapidly dressed. She had just finished putting the last costume in her suitcase when the tap-tap of high heels was heard in the corridor, and her closest friend burst in upon her.

"Jean, you were marvelous tonight. Everyone is praising you and Dick. And the way you pulled them out of that hole when Bob forgot his lines was pure genius."

"Thanks, Kay, I'm so glad the play was successful. Did you really like it? Could you notice that Bob forgot?" Jean stopped packing and sat back on her heels to listen.

"Like it? Heavens, pal, everyone is raving. That last part, the embrace, you know, sure gave the audience a thrill. The way you went into his arms—ooooohhh!" Kay continued on rapturously, and then after a pause answered Jean's second question, "Why of course you couldn't tell about Bob forgetting. I'd never have known, if I hadn't been prompter. It was clever of you to begin his lines and then let him finish them for you. Hah! Quite clever."

The sound of excited voices and rapid footsteps sounded in the hall.

"Well, I'm going now, Kay. Are you going to walk home along with me?"

"What? Aren't you going to stay, Jean? Surely you're going to the party. Hasn't Dick asked you? The leading man always takes the leading lady. I'm going with Paul."

"No, I'm not going, and no, Dick didn't ask me. Have a grand time Kay, so you can tell me all about it tomorrow. I'll stop for you about a quarter after eight. So long!" Jean picked up her suitcase and stepped out the back door into the darkened hall. If only the back door of the school was unlocked she could go through the alley and soon be on her own street. Then it would only be a few blocks home, and the street was dark. Eleven-thirty, no one who knew her would be around to mention that horrible play. Oh, if she could only get home without one of the crowd seeing her.

No, the door was locked. She must go through the main hall and out the front door. However, the audience had gone, by now, and the others would probably be still gushing about their important "dates," and what a pity it was that Dick hadn't asked her. It hurt to think he had invited that little sophomore. Oh, well, she would not be sleepy in school tomorrow.

Jean hurried along the main hall. It was deserted and rather dark, save for the one path of light which crossed the hall from the room in which they had been made up. Could she get by without being seen? She crossed to the other side of the hall and crouched against the wall. Oh, she could see a group of boys and girls crowded around a central figure on a chair. It was Dick, having his makeup taken off by a group of devoted admirers. Quick, she must hurry on before they saw her. She could not possibly stand their praising when at the same time they were laughing and pitying her. Not now, anyway.

"Pitvng me of what?" Jean demanded as the cool June breeze struck her face. "As long as I have leads in plays I don't want pity. Just because I don't get asked to parties is no reason to pity me, but I'll get even with them. On my way home I'll think of someone real nice to invite to the Senior Ball. Why, I can even make up in my imagination if I want to." But this last idea was doomed to be a failure, for by the time her imagination had worked out a perfect picture, Jean found that it was always a picture of Dick Chalmers.

Richard Chalmers entered the left wing of the stage amid the praises of his friends. Then they all buzzed out onto the stage talking about the play, and how wonderfully Dick had acted. He received these congratulations indifferently,

but with the charm of a true gentleman, for he was engaged in looking about the group. It was evident to him that the leading lady had vanished. Where had she gone? Had she invited anyone to the cast party? Report had it that she had invited a friend of hers from Brighton. If only his mother wasn't so aspiring in society! Dick wondered if he and Jean would ever act together in another play. Perhaps he would have chances at college, but Jean would not be there to pull him through the difficult scenes. What a swell little actress she was. Dick hoped that she could satisfy her wish to go to the American Academy.

"Hello, kids!"

Dick turned around. It was Kay Baynes, who had just returned from the dressing room.

"Where's Jean?" someone inquired.

"She's gone home," snapped Kay with a glare at Dick which he fortunately did not notice.

"Gone home?" exclaimed another of the cast. "Isn't she going to the party?"

"No, she has gone home," Kay repeated.

"Well, she's a queer duck anyway. She likes to stay at home and perhaps she's have a better time there, than at a party. But she's a great little actress."

The cast all began to give various opinions of Jean. Kay took it all in, but glared furiously at Dick as he got up and left for the make-up room, the others running after him. Kay sat down, deserted, on the davenport. She could not understand why Dick had not invited Jean to the party. Did he not always speak with the greatest praise in Jean's favor? For Heaven's sake, he was certainly queer, or else Jean was, but it couldn't be Jean because she was too regular. Thus Kay ruminated to herself as she looked out over the vacant auditorium. Just a few moments ago it was full of life, vigor, happiness and gaiety. Now it was empty and barren. How like Jean the auditorium was! Just a few moments ago Jean, too, had been happy, gay and vigorous in her role in the play; now she was going home alone, and quiet. Kay got up and left the stage. She followed the path the others had taken.

"Gosh! Phew! I'm glad to get that make-up off," gasped Dick as he vigorously rubbed himself with Kleenex. "Say, I didn't realize it was so late," he added, glancing at the clock, "why, here you are all dressed, and me not half-way started. Ex-cuse me!"

Dick dashed off to the dressing room and began to root through paper boxes for his clothes. He would certainly have to hurry if he was to call for Cleo on time. Cleo was a good sport. Dick liked her, but he always added to himself every time he had taken her out, "Not quite my type." "But what is your type?" would always come back at him, and he never could answer. Anyhow, he looked forward to having a good time, and lots of fun with Cleo. Brrrr! It certainly was cold out. He'd have to wear his overcoat. Where was the blame thing? Finally Dick was ready. He dashed out of the dressing room, called for Paul and Kay who soon joined him, and the three of them drove off for Cleo.

"I wish Jean were going to the party," murmured Kay from the depths of the back seat.

"What?" almost shouted Dick as he swung the car around the corner, "isn't Jean really

going? Why I heard she had invited some fellow from Brighton."

"Is that why you didn't invite her?" thought Kay to herself, but she knew better than to ask it aloud. Kay knew, or rather surmised that Dick's mother had a great deal to say about what the boy should do and with whom he would go. Not that Jean was not a nice girl. Oh, my, no! But Jean's parents were quiet-living people. She lived in a lovely single brick house with wide lawn around it, gave parties for her friends at different times, but that was all. Her mother loved to work around the flower gardens with the gardener, cook with the housekeeper and sew at home. She rarely went out with the other mothers, but occasionally entertained them at her own house. She greatly depended on her daughter to keep her company and manage social details which she could not bring herself to face since 1927. Jean's father worked for the government, and was away most of the time. No, Jean's family was not socially inclined. They lived comfortably and that was all. There was very little left over. Ever since her mother had been ill they had been paying on the doctor bill. Then, too, they had lost every cent of their savings in the depression, and had mortgaged the brick house up to the last cent. Now there was that to pay off. The gardener and the cook, an old married couple, were not paid. They merely acted in those capacities for their room and board. They had been there for about 15 years, since Jean could remember. They occupied the third floor and always ate in the breakfast-nook. No, Jean could not afford to go to college with a mortgage, sanatorium bill, and empty bank account staring them in the face. Perhaps three or four years from now, but not at the present moment.

Dick's mother was at the head of the Bonny Bridge Belles, the card club which she devotedly entertained at her home every month. She joined the Civic Club, Red Cross, Children's Betterment Organization, Foreign Mission Society, P. T. A., and literally hundreds more, to get her name in the paper, so that the public would be familiar with her. Just last year she had joined the Country Club, but had not yet been socially adopted. For this she was trying hard, by means of having her son invite the daughters of the "aristocracy" to all the school dances. Oh, yes! Mrs. Chalmers was quite clever. How could a quiet mouse like Jean help her get anywhere? Her son was going to be a gentleman of leisure and wealth. His father would back her up on that whether he liked it or not. Through her son SHE would gain her goal.

And now Dick had invited Cleo Strafford to the cast party. It was a good thing too. Cleo's father was very influential in the town. It was good for Dick to be seen out with his daughter. Mrs. Chalmers would meet Mrs. Strafford at the Club tomorrow, and start a conversation about the "two dears, and how well they look together. Such a charming couple."

Dick had fun at the party. Cleo was a smooth dancer, and together they tried many new steps. Kay, too, had a good time although she longed for her friend. Well, she must keep her eyes open and be able to tell Jean all the news tomorrow morning. It was obvious to

Kay that Dick was not interested in Cleo. They laughed and bantered to and fro, but neither had any feeling other than friendship for each other. At last the party broke up.

Next morning the hero and heroine of the play were congratulated all over again. However, preparations for commencement were beginning now, and these soon occupied the minds of every student. January wasn't any too soon to start planning for the great event. Dick had already determined to ask Jean to go with him to the Senior Ball, and Jean, thinking it hopeless to get an invitation from any boy she liked, had decided to ask an old playmate of hers from Brighton. Mrs. Wentworth had approved, and written to the boy's mother, an old school friend of hers, to invite her and her son to spend Commencement week with her and Jean. Jean, of course, wrote to Ted, who answered enthusiastically, and sent her a lovely commencement gift and flowers. Dick knew nothing of this as he and his mother battled it out between them that night.

"You can't go with her," screamed his mother, "Who is she! No social position! If you go with her, Richard, I'll tell your father and he'll see that you don't go to college. Do you hear me, Richard, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

"I hear you very well, mother, but I am going to take Jean Wentworth to the Senior Ball. And another thing you might as well face now as ever: I am not going to study business at college, I am going to study electrical engineering. If you tell father and refuse me the money, I'll work my way through, wash dishes, scrub floors, shovel snow—anything! You'd like that, wouldn't you, mother, dear? That would help your social position. Go tell father. It will do you a lot of good. I'm still taking Jean. Goodnight."

"Richard, come back here! You can't threaten me like that! I'll—"

But Dick had closed the door and started for the garage. Damn, but it was slippery out. A thin coating of ice lay over the pavement and street. It must have frozen just recently because it wasn't this way when he had come home. Why did his mother have to act so hatefully? and against a girl like Jean! It put him into a bad mood. Dick examined the car. His mood became more cheerful when he discovered the chains had been put on, and the gas tank filled. Dick guessed he'd drive down to the drug store and see what was doing. Perhaps he could come to some conclusions on how to invite Jean to the dance. So he backed out of the garage and started off. He drove around awhile, and then started out for Jean's house. The best way he decided was to go straight to her house and ask her. Just as he came near the house a slight figure stepped out, and started down the street. It was Jean, probably going to the drug store or over to Kay's, Dick thought. He drew up beside Jean, tooted the horn and then called, "Jean, where are you going?"

"Oh, hello, Dick, sorry but I don't know horn toots yet," answered Jean coming over to the curb. "I'm going over to Kay's house."

"Hop in and I'll take you over."

"Oh, it's just a block, Dick."

"Well, please jump in, I want to ask you something."

"Weeeellll, all right," said Jean thoughtfully, and got in.

Silence reigned but neither noticed it as Dick started the car. He seemed to have forgotten what he had to say, and Jean was busily watching his movements in starting the car. Along they sped and finally after glancing at each other once or twice, Dick exclaimed.

"Well, I really do have something to ask you."

"Yes, and I really was going to Kay's, you know."

They laughed joyfully.

"What were you going to ask me?" questioned Jean.

"Ah, feminine curiosity," moaned Dick, and then seriously began to stutter and stumble. He was embarrassed for perhaps the first time in his life.

"You know, Jean," he managed to get out at last, "I have always wanted to take you to a party, ever since I first met you in high school."

"Why, how nice!" Jean helped him along.

"But I never could Jean, because,—well, my mother always made the arrangements for me. Now I am going to ask someone of my choosing. Please excuse my mother, Jean, she doesn't understand. I know this is a lame excuse and all, but I do hope you'll go."

"I'm afraid I can't understand what you mean, Dick," said Jean puzzled.

"Oh, I know I made a mess of this invitation, but Jean, dear, will you go to the Senior Ball with me?"

"Jean, dear," the phrase rang through Jean's head. Had she understood him?

Silence again. Dick put all his attention on driving. They were climbing a long hill now, and the roads were still icy. The state road men had evidently not gotten this far with their ashes. They were now nearing the top of the hill at which was a sharp curve to the left. Below to the right, lay the river and rocky bank. How beautiful, but coldly menacing they looked from this height. Dick glanced down at the girl beside him.

"You will go, won't you, Jean?" he almost whispered. "Jean, dear, please say you will."

There was the "dear" again. Yes, Jean had heard correctly the first time. Silence for another second, but it seemed a year. Jean tried to get control of herself. Suddenly Dick turned toward her, and gripped the wheel fiercely.

"Jean, I love you."

"It's puppy-love, Dick, you don't know what you're saying. You'll get over it. You must," cried Jean almost in tears.

"Oh, Jean, can't you see it's not puppy-love!" Dick took his eyes off the road to look at her. She slowly raised her eyes to his. Yes, it was true. She was too honest to deny it, but his mother—

"Dick, you can't, you can't."

"Yes, but I do Jean, I do love you." His arms suddenly went around Jean, drawing her close to him.

It all happened in a minute. The sharp curve drew near. The unguided car skidded over the bank, its occupants oblivious of earthly things. Down, down, down, to the rocks below they fell to their death in each others arms. Was it better this way? What might have happened to these two had their patterned lives been saved? Draw your own conclusions.

The Comet

By TONI KILSDONK

Georgie sat under the lemon tree and wrestled with despair. Around him the thickly hung branches bent almost to the ground, making a pool of shadow against the tropic afternoon. It was hot and very still; except for the ceaseless whirr of innumerable small insects, no sound penetrated his retreat. He sat crouched in a motionless ball, his bare legs folded under him; his head, with its wildly curling hair, clutched tight between his damp little hands. He was trying to hypnotize himself into oblivion, to forget the thoughts that bit at his reluctant brain.

All week the servants had been praying. In the kitchen, skinny black Francisca mumbled over her pots and pans, her scrawny voice now and then rising into a clamor of supplication. Carmen, the housemaid, was equally pious. And, down in the basement where the laundry tubs were placed, old Martha's frightened pleas drowned the running water. But these were foolish women, easily given to panic, too ready to fall on their knees. Even at six, Georgie felt a certain contempt for them, based on his own less docile temper, his harder will. He sighed deeply. It was Thomas who really worried him.

Thomas was the coachman, a muscular, easy-going creature, with a booming laugh, a miraculous understanding of horses, and an utterly fearless strength. And yet he had seen him kneeling in the cool flower-scented dusk of the stable, praying, praying, the slow large tears rolling down his cheeks. He was cataloging his sins for the benefit of Deity, he was confiding his declarations with money and women and insisting, fervently, sincerely, devoutly, that it was all a mistake, that the real Thomas was not involved. His soul, he assured God, was a lily. Georgie had wanted to laugh—the idea of coca-colored, bandy-legged Thomas as a lily was deliciously funny—but he stopped himself; the occasion was too serious. If Thomas was afraid, there must be something in it; it seemed altogether probable that the end of the world was at hand.

Georgie wriggled uncomfortably. His legs had gone to sleep. He unfolded them with care and let them swing over the edge of the narrow terrace. He plucked one of the large speckled greenish lemons and pressed it to his nostrils; feeling an odd reassurance in the familiar pungent smell. Could it be possible that tomorrow morning none of this would exist, no lemons on the lemon tree, no horses in the stable, nothing but a vast gray emptiness where once a world had been.

When Mother first told him about the comet it had seemed very exciting, just another of those spectacular exhibitions like earthquakes and hurricanes, which nature provided so abundantly on this wind-swept Near East island. It had a special quality, of course, as both she and Dad were careful to point out to the children. A clear view of a major comet, they said, was not often vouchsafed to the casual tenants of this earth. It was something to look forward to, to observe accurately and to remember always, so that one's children and

grandchildren, too, might come to hear about it.

Neither of his parents, naturally took any stock in what the blacks were saying. Nor, as a matter of fact, did Fraulein Shaefer. At the thought of Fraulein, Georgie's face screwed itself into an appalling mask of hate. Not only did he loathe his governess with a deadly loathing; he also held her largely responsible for the perilous state of his soul in this crisis. Because, in spite of his parents' indifferent serenity, it was a crisis. White people, he had found, were not to be trusted in these matters. They had a smug blindness; they lacked the curious intimations of disaster which the natives so often displayed.

Georgie shook himself unhappily. He peered out between the shiny leaves, wishing Charles would appear, or Mary, or even the detestable Fraulein Shaefer. But there was nobody there, just the burning silence, a pitiless glare of sun. He glanced absently at the lizards crawling in and out of the deep fissure which ran the entire length of the drive, from behind the stable to the gate. It was the momento of an earthquake, Mary's earthquake they had always called it, because it happened four years ago, just before Mary was born. Georgie had thought at the time that the earthquake had spawned up Mary along with other peculiar things. He chuckled in a superior fashion. What a dummy he had been; he knew where babies came from now.

He knew lots of things. How to read and write and how to sit on a pony, and the right way to fall off, if you had to fall off. This gave him a feeling of pride and mastery until he recalled that it was all useless now, that the one important thing he didn't know was—how to be good.

According to Fraulein and mother and everybody else, being good was the only thing God cared about. God! An old man behind the sky with implacable eyes and a thin mean mouth, like Fraulein's, concealed by his bushy beard. Georgie knew he wasn't good. He lied all the time. Occasionally out of a need to defend himself, but more often for the sheer joy of it, because it was fun to make up some fantastic story and try to convince others of its truth. He wasn't very successful—Fraulein usually found out. God hated liars, she would say, gloating with evil pleasure; after they died He sent them straight to the hottest corner of hell. Georgie, tossing his head recklessly, had always refused to be impressed. He didn't expect to die for a long, long time, maybe never, and anyway he planned to make his peace with the Heavenly Father when He removed Fraulein, who was surely old and ugly enough to die very soon. But it was too late now. God was tired of people, tired of the earth, and tonight He would grasp His comet up by the tail and lash about Him furiously until they were all destroyed. Georgie understood the impulse; he had it himself sometimes, moments when he screamed with sudden rage and tried to break everything in sight.

His head dropped between his knees. In the pit of his stomach fear uncurled, a writhing slimy worm. Hell loomed before him, the black pit, the bed of flames, a swarm of tiny devils like red ants settling upon him, overrunning his helpless body. And this would go

on forever, on and on, it would never end, it would never, never end. He rocked back and forth on the narrow stone ledge. "No!" something inside him screamed. "No!"

He grabbed wildly at a branch of the lemon tree. No use, he was falling off. It was just a few feet to the ground and, except for a scratch on one knee, he was unhurt. He dusted himself off and started walking slowly towards the rear of the garden, staring about him with a certain wonder, almost surprise not to be already dead and damned.

The garden was not very big as gardens go, but everything grew there; it was a tropic Eden, made to gladden the heart. He was seeing it as though for the first time—the great height of the mangoes, the curly cerecitas, and the curve of the banana leaves almost hiding the clustered yellow fruit.

He stood for awhile, lonely in the flooding light, and then he saw Charles emerging from behind the cacti, a slender comforting shape. Charles saw Georgie, too, and waved and scampered to his side. Once there, however, he had nothing to say; he just looked very solemn and uncomfortable.

"Where's Mary?" Georgie asked finally.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Playing with her dolls, I suppose."

He stared at him intently. "I gave her all mine this morning," he said. "You never liked them, anyway," Charles pointed out.

It was true, of course, dolls were a nuisance, but it is always hard to give up one's property even when one has no use for it. He had felt he was making a somewhat belated, but a very noble gesture.

Charles scuffed his shoes in the dust. "Let's have a cockroach race," he suggested.

He agreed. It was one of their favorite games. They hitched the large cockroaches which could always be found in the cellar to a half walnut shell, put a pebble in the shell to keep it steady, then let the creatures run along a hollowed-out path to the goal. The children made their reparations quickly and, crouching on the ground, set off the contestants. Georgie became absorbed in the race; he squealed happily as his entry forged ahead, groaned as it swerved to one side, encouraged it generally with a variety of sounds. Charles', however, gained steadily and, at the goal, just managed to edge his off. He raised shining eyes to his brother, expecting to find him beaming, elated with victory, but he looked very odd as he struggled to his feet.

"You won," he said through twisted lips.

He couldn't believe his ears. "What?" he stammered.

"You won," I said." Charles thrust his hands into the brief pockets of his sailor pants.

"You're loco, Charles," he yipped. "You won. By a mile!" he added handsomely.

Charles became very white. "All right," he said, "What shall we do now?"

He pinched Charles' arm, determined to get to the bottom of this peculiar behavior. "Why did you say I won?" he demanded.

There were tears in Charles' eyes. "Oh, no reason," he said. Then, as he persisted, "I-I wanted to do something good," he blurted out.

Georgie's heart swelled with love. Dear Charles! He, too was afraid, he, too, wanted to propitiate the old man in the clouds. Georg-

ie came close to him. Shoulder rubbed against shoulder, grubbing fingers found each other. "Let's go talk to Thomas," he said shortly. "Maybe it isn't true."

They found him harnessing the team of dappled grays. "Where are you going?" asked Georgie in a flat, small voice.

Thomas buckled a strap with care. "The lady, your mother, wishes me to drive her to the dressmaker's" he replied. He said, "It is possible she will never have a use for that gown."

Charles' fingers gripped so hard that they hurt. "You—you really think the world's coming to an end?"

Thomas shrugged largely, he spread his pale palms outward. "How should I know?" he said. "I am a plain man, you understand, a plain ignorant man. It is not for me to fathom God's will," he said, crossing himself devoutly. "Maybe the world ends, maybe not."

Georgie felt faintly annoyed by this non-committal answer. "I saw you praying."

"Why not?" agreed Thomas. "It does no harm to pray. That way, one is safe."

They walked away thoughtfully, digesting this bit of wisdom. "Shall we pray, too?" Charles asked.

Georgie thrust out his underlip mutinously. "No," he said. "What for?"

"Just so, well—so God'll let us go to Heaven," he pleaded.

Georgie looked at him, his deep brown eyes under the close-knit brows, his fine sensitive mouth.

"You needn't worry, Charles," he said gently. "You're so good you'll surely go to Heaven. And so will Mary, I guess, because she's so little."

"And—and you?" Charles whispered.

He shook his head wordlessly. There was an ache in his throat. Too late, too late. If he prayed now, God wouldn't believe him. Beside he wasn't honestly repentant, just scared.

"If God sends you to hell," his brother was saying fiercely, "I'll go there, too. I'll go down and take you out."

Charles would try to, Georgie knew, with a rush of gratitude. Just as when they put him in the corner for punishment, Charles would come and put his arm around his shoulder and refuse to budge until Mother released them both. They often quarreled, they would spring at each other like tiger-cubs, but between them ran this deep current of love.

The carriage rolled past them; Thomas flicked his whip smartly and manipulated the horses so that they trotted evenly. From the front of the veranda they heard Mother calling. They ran towards her, trying to keep abreast of the horses. She was leaning over the rail. "Should you like to go with me?" she asked. Then, after a second glance at them, "No, I'm afraid you're too dirty. You'd disgrace me." She looked very clean and fresh herself in a white embroidered linen suit. "Don't forget to change," she said. "You'll be staying up to see the comet, and I want you to look nice." Georgie brooded over this. "Can I put on my best suit?" he asked. "And my watch?"

Mother nodded and smiled. Her dark eyes sparkled. "All right," she said. "After all, it's a very special occasion."

They stood by the gate, watching her drive

off. "You know," said Charles, "Mother's awfully pretty."

But Georgie was lost in thought. Mother was undoubtedly going to heaven, too, and so were Dad and the servants. They would all be together in that golden city, singing and playing their harps, beating their great white wings. While he . . . he choked back a sob.

They went back to the house with dragging steps. As they climbed the steps to the back veranda, they saw Fraulein Shaefer asleep in the hammock. Her iron-gray hair was pulled back from her red swollen face, and her mouth lay open. She made funny noises as she breathed. They paused for a moment, afraid she would wake, then tiptoed cautiously into the house.

"If God told you you could go to Heaven if you kissed Fraulein, would you do it?" Charles asked meditatively.

"No!" exploded Georgie.

"I wouldn't either," admitted Charles.

In the nursery they found Mary sitting in the middle of the floor surrounded by all her dolls as well as Georgie's, the billiken, the teddy-bears, the brown and white rabbits, and an array of animals now so battered that their species were practically indistinguishable. "I have a Grossmama," she was crooning. "She lives far, far away, and I have to take a great big ship to visit her." She let this sink for a moment, then went on to her climax. "I have another Grossmama who lives in Heaven. That's even further away and no ships go there." She looked up as they entered. "But I can go there," she said importantly. "Carmen told me so. I can fly there on my little wings."

It was too much. Georgie fled to the bathroom. He let water run into the basin and ripped off his shirt. He picked up a nailbrush and scrubbed himself passionately — face, hands, knees, everything. He was doomed, but he meant to go shining, a Lucifer in his fall . . . After dressing he went into Mother's room and looked at himself in the long mirror and found his image good.

He was still standing there when the door to the hall opened and his father strode in purposefully. He swung a long ebony stick with a silver top; so Georgie knew he had had a good day. He smiled a small polite smile into the mirror. "Hello, Dad," he said.

"Hello!" The bright eyes in his sunburnt face flared wide with astonishment. "I didn't see you. What are you doing?"

"Looking at myself," said Georgie gravely.

"You're starting pretty young," he grumbled.

He edged away from the mirror. Impossible to tell Dad that seeing himself so fine and brave and defiant kept the worm of fear from uncurling in his stomach. He always felt a little shy with his father because their orbits so seldom touched, and because his father had a habit of making general remarks which didn't fit the facts as he knew them. While he was wondering what to reply, the sound of waltz music floated in from the parlor. The gay little notes had grace and spirit, and yet there was something sad about them, too.

"Your mother must've come home," said Dad and hurried into the hall.

It was getting late. Georgie snubbed his nose against the window-pane and watched the sudden dusk fall like an obliterating hand. Noth-

ing stirred in the quiet darkness. Color and sound had died together. He turned from the window and stumbled blindly across the room, and his heart leapt like a bird upon the narrow walls of his chest.

When they called him for supper he went into the dining room and sat down at his usual place, his napkin on his lap, his hands folded politely. But he simply could not eat. The knife and fork lay untouched beside his plate. Fraulein was furious; she raged and blustered, but her threats were meaningless against the threat if the cuckoo-clock on the mantelpiece ticking away the minutes, ticking away hope. Georgie felt hollow and thin as a shell that is cast up on the shore, and the pounding of his heart was like the pounding of the surf, remote, no longer his own.

He didn't know how much later it was that they all trooped out on the dark veranda. "In just a little while now," Mother was saying, and Dad was being very busy telling everyone where to stand, like a general disposing his troops to the best advantage. After they were all settled to his satisfaction, the servants crept out; so he had to begin all over again. But they paid no attention to him, they just flopped on their knees in a row and began to pray in loud mournful voices. Francisca, Carmen, Martha, dressed in sober black, and Thomas with a lily in his button-hole, to remind God, Georgie supposed. Prayer bloomed in the air like incense; it mingled with the sweet smell of flowers from the garden.

The veranda was a raft, adrift on a limitless ocean; the tides of space washed over it, chill and dark. Georgie trembled with something that was not fear, his eyes blurred with stardust; he was waiting for a sign.

"My knees want to pray," whispered Charles in his ear, and he felt his own knees buckle as though the earth itself were pulling him down. But his back was straight as a poker and his pointed chin was defiant, a challenge to the overbearing night.

They saw it first as a patch of brightness, the velvet night worn as a thin gauze, a light gleaming through. The brightness spread, something, something round and golden reared its head into the sky; it rent the sky with glory and shot towards them at incredible speed, with a mist of gold around it and streaming behind it, golden soft hair. It was God, Georgie knew, God Himself showing His face, not the old gentleman of his fancy but a being ageless and beautiful, blithe and swift as light. Even as he stretched out his arms to receive Him, He was gone and all that was left was a shred of bright hair blowing in a windless night.

"Is that all?" asked Mary, and Mother laughed a little uncertainly, and the servants cried and Fraulein sniffed loudly and said it was time to go to bed. Thomas brushed off his knees in a shamefaced way and slunk off down the garden steps. "An extraordinary phenomenon," Dad observed.

Georgie could not stop crying. He was safe, the world was still there, he had lost nothing that he'd had before, but it wasn't enough; it would never be enough again. He flung himself on Charles, his small body shock with a passion of grief and loss. "Why did He go so soon?" he sobbed. "Why did He go so soon?"

A Man of Wisdom

By LOIS M. WAGNER

Janice Kent stood alone on the railroad platform of a small village far up in the Adirondacks. "Alone," she thought, "far away from everything that had made me bitter. Far away from everything I love!" Not that she hated the mountains, the green of summer, the coolness and clearness of the air. Desperately she told herself that she must not hate it. Even more desperately she told herself that she must love it; this place that was to be her home for the summer. She watched the train roll out of sight, leaving her behind to find what she had come so far to seek; leaving her behind to conquer herself.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder, breaking her reverie. "Waitin' fur sumun?" a strangely friendly voice asked her.

Glad for the warmth of that voice, she turned around. Much to her own surprise she smiled, immediately willing to introduce herself to this funny little fat man.

"No, but I'd like to find the hotel. I'm Miss Kent."

"Goin' to stay long?"

"All summer, I think." Again she smiled. It was the first time in days that she had not had to force the corners of her mouth up and make her eyes sparkle with happiness that was not there.

"Anything to do?" he queried.

"No, it's just a vacation."

"Well, then you won't want to stay at the hotel."

"Oh, but I do!"

"I know a nice lady what's lookin' fur a roomer."

"I prefer the hotel," she said with soft determination.

He motioned to a man standing at the far end of the platform. "Jock, take Miss Kent to the hotel."

"Thank you so much, Mr—, Mr—"

"Thomas, Jim Thomas. Just call me 'Tommy.' Everybody else does. If I can do anything fur ya, let me know. I'm mostly round here somewheres."

"Thanks again, Tommy!"

Jim Thomas watched Janice Kent climb into the old Model T. Ford. She was pretty, extremely so. Probably about 20. Well built, about five feet six, he judged, but she was much too thin.

It always worried Tommy when anyone was too thin. Perhaps because he wasn't. He sensed that there was something wrong with Miss Kent. Not exactly with her, but something had happened sometime that brought her here alone. Somehow he must find out and help her. He didn't know how now, but there were ways.

Jim Thomas wasn't a meddling person — some people called him that, but he really wasn't. He only wanted to help people. Tommy knew a great deal of common sense psychology, more than most educated people know. Yet he often admitted that he hadn't had much "book-learnin'."

Time and time again Tommy had unknowing-

ly straightened out lives. Or perhaps he had deliberately tried. Nobody ever knew.

Once a young author had come to Middleville, discouraged by constant failure, broken in health, seeking peace and a new start in life. Tommy had talked to Ashton Best about everything. Together they had discussed books. Tommy was eager to learn and Ashton could tell him many things. Sometimes they walked through the woods. Tommy told Ashton all the legends connected with Middleville and the surrounding countryside. That fall Ashton Best had gone back to New York, a rested young man, ready once again for whatever life had to offer; thanking the little old man who had helped him forget himself and think only of the things he had to offer the world. Ashton Best's first successful book had been the story of Jim Thomas in novel form.

Janice came up to her room from dinner and stood looking out of the open window at the sun sinking just below the mountain tops. It left behind it a golden orange which grew fainter with the minutes. She sighed. It was as if the sun had taken with it her cares. And for a long time after that she stood there wondering why she had come to Middleville. There was nothing here. Only once had she ever heard of it. That had been in Ashton Best's novel, "Man of Wisdom." He had used Middleville as a setting and book reviews had it that this was a little town far up in the Adirondacks.

There was nothing here. That was what she wanted. Rest and quiet, time to heal the broken heart of a divided love. She was determined to forget the world she had left behind and for three months at least, live her own life; straighten out the wrinkles, the things Fate had dealt her, the things she didn't understand.

She was tired from the day's long journey, tired by the unpacking, so she dressed in her lounging pajamas, a beautiful blue satin, neither too light nor too dark for her shiny black hair and white skin. They deepened the blue in her eyes and heightened the slight pink in her cheek. Carefully she massaged her face with cleansing cream and brushed her hair thoroughly. When she had finished she went to the desk provided by the hotel and picked up "Anthony Adverse," brought along because she had been promising herself for a long time to read it. This, she felt, was the time.

On the bed, which was none too comfortable, to say the least, she opened the book and read the first line, then fell to thinking about Tommy at the station today.

"How absurd that that short, fat, homely man, who must be almost fifty, should be called 'Tommy!' But he was a queer little being," she laughed. Even her own laughter startled her. She was happy and she realized that just one person's being friendly to her had caused it.

Janice began eagerly planning for the summer. When she came she hadn't even thought of it. Now she'd go on hikes before breakfast, swim in the nearby lake, read lots of interesting books, and perhaps Middleville had a tennis court—perhaps there'd be someone here to play with her. More than that she'd have time to talk to Tommy. Perhaps he could tell her who that man was who had helped Ashton

Best find peace, happiness, and life.

Janice fell asleep, a sweet restful sleep. She dreamed of swimming in the blue waters of Lake Lomar. She dreamed of rowing there too—neath the silvery moonlight, and under the hot sun of day. Always at her side there was Someone.

Early next morning she awoke, rubbed her eyes, and went to the window to watch the sunrise—a great orange ball coming out of the nowhere into the somewhere, giving new light, new hope, new life to someone everywhere. It never seemed to tire of the work it was created to perform. The sun kept right on shining higher, higher in the sky. Janice marveled. The scenery, the high mountains standing out against the blue sky like giants of strength and solidity—they, too, stood there century after century, never tiring, fondling each new seedling, feeling lonesome, turning blue when an old one was gone. How many summers had they seen come and go; how many animals had sought their shelter, how many Indians had camped beneath their trees at night; how many children had played 'hide-and-go-seek' among the great tall trunks of those ancient trees?

While Janice wondered on, an old Model T rattled past, carrying Tommy to the station. Janice glanced at her watch. Five-thirty! Did people really go to work that early up here? Why, her father had never gone before ten! That thought brought a stabbing pain to Janice's heart. She didn't want to remember him; that was what she had come to forget.

Quickly she dressed and started out for that morning walk she had thought of last night. Janice had no idea of where to go, but exploration was adventure for her. She turned to her left and walked through the one street of Middleville out into the countryside. Her step was brisk. The air was cool, almost cold, but so very refreshing. There was the spicy smell of pine pitch and needles. Along the cindered road the wild flowers grew. Janice stopped to pick a few. She did not know what they were; she only knew that they were beautiful. Overhead the trees whispered in the breeze. Each seemed to understand the other one. And she didn't even understand herself. She wished she did. She wished she understood tree language.

It was growing warmer when she turned her footsteps toward the hotel and breakfast. She ate as she had never eaten before. Two eggs fried just right; bacon browned crisply, so crisp, so thin that it fairly melted in her mouth; a bowl of crunchy cereal; and two cups of steaming, black coffee.

Two days later she wandered down to the station. Perhaps Tommy'd be there and talk with her. She didn't know what they'd talk about, but it would be fun talking to someone friendly like Tommy.

"Gee, Miss Kent, I thought you was bein' a hermit!" was Tommy's greeting.

"Call me Janice, Tommy," she laughed.

"Janice. Just as pritty as its owner."

She blushed.

"Like ta see sumpun' cute?"

She followed him with interest, "What?" she asked.

"Little animals." Tommy's sentences were rarely longer than three or four words.

"But what kind, Tommy?"

"You'll see."

The cute little animals turned out to be guinea pigs.

"Know what they use 'em fur?" he asked.

"No, what?"

"Sper'ments in laboratories?" He shook his head with knowing wrinkles on his face.

"These? Oh, how could they!" There was almost horror in her voice.

More days followed. Tommy and Janice became more friendly. She always dropped in to see him. He was always glad when she did. They'd talk about lots of things. Janice learned the names of many trees and flowers. Tommy taught her where to look for birds' nests and what to do in case of a rattlesnake bite. In return Tommy learned about New York and the outside world. Janice told him the stories of operas, read him books, described to him London and Paris.

One afternoon when half her vacation was over and there was no one else around, Janice exclaimed, "Tommy, you're the only friend I've really ever had."

"Seems like there should be more."

"Yes, I know, Tommy, but there aren't."

She was silent for a long time. Now he could help her. Tommy knew that she was ready to tell him her story but he went on about his work—waiting. He never asked questions. He didn't need to. People always told him without his asking.

A half hour passed before she spoke again. This time it was a strained voice that said, "Tommy, there's something I've got to tell you. I know you'll understand but you're the only one who will."

Another pause. Minutes elapsed. Neither spoke. The air was growing tense. At last— "Years ago when I was eight—Oh, I remember it so distinctly—I woke up one night to hear my mother and father scrapping."

"But Jim, I don't want another baby! I never even wanted Janice!"

"I tried to close my ears, but it was too late. Oh, Tommy, I was young then! But to know that I was unwanted, even then, cut a wound so deep that it will never heal. I wanted my mother to want me because I wanted her. I loved her."

"My baby sister was born, fortunately, dead. She never knew the agony of not being wanted."

For four years I tried to be good. Tried to make my mother love me. Oh, Tommy, she was so beautiful, so kind, but all the while these stinging words, 'I never even wanted these things in my ears. All those years my mother and father fought continually. They never meant me to hear, but how could I help it? Time and time again my father tried to reason with Mother.'

"Martha, can't you give up a few of your clubs and be a mother to your daughter once in a while?"

"No! Why should I? My clubs are my life!—that high cultured voice of my mother's!"

"Please, Martha, for my sake, his voice was always tender, loving, pleading."

"For your sake!" All the sarcasm the world ever held!

"Well, Tommy, as I said, that went on for four years. Finally they agreed to a divorce. Always my father kept begging for one more chance. On the day they signed the final papers

my father said to me, 'Janice, you won't understand now, but someday you will—I still love her.'

"As long as I live I'll never forget his voice as he said, 'I still love her.' There were tears in his eyes. I tried to understand. I wanted so to comfort him, to tell him that everything would be all right. But everything wouldn't be all right. The divorce had decreed that I spend part of my time with one parent, part with the other. First, I went to my mother. That was hell! I knew she didn't want me there, yet she feared the criticisms of society. Don't mistake me—she was good to me, so very, very good, yet I knew what lay behind that cloak of goodness. I was happier with my father. He loved me. He wanted me. He did little things to make me happy. Yet, I loved my mother more."

"It went on that way until Mother decided to remarry and sent me to boarding school. I wanted to go. I hoped there I would find some comfort for my aching heart, find some release for my pent-up feelings. But I didn't. The girls were kind and considerate; they tried to understand, but how could they when I couldn't bring myself out of my shell?"

All this time Tommy had said nothing. Experience had taught him that most people could find the answers to their problems by just talking, telling someone else.

The tears started to run down Janice's cheeks. "The last of May was graduation time. I wrote asking both my parents to come. Mother wrote back that she was terribly sorry but she couldn't be with me this time. 'How she wished she could,' she said! Father promised to come and I knew he would!"

"He was to come in on the twelve-thirty train. Several times I called the station to see if the train had arrived. It hadn't. It was two-thirty. I had to be dressed by three and so I went ahead, hoping that he would arrive in time to hear me speak. I hadn't told him that I was valedictorian of my class. I wanted to surprise him. Just as I was about to leave my room a telegram came for me."

"James Kent killed in train accident enroute to Larson City! Stop Get in touch with authorities immediately Stop."

"Killed! My father killed! That word numbed me. How I got through that speech—what I said—I'll never know."

There was his funeral. The last look at the only person in this world who loved me. A part of me was buried with him, my father.

"In his will he left all his money to me."

"What was I to do? I couldn't go to my mother, the woman who never wanted me, the woman who sent me away to school. And coming there caused my father's death. Oh, I know I should hate her, but I cannot because my father loved her; because I, too, loved her."

"Once I had read Ashton Best's book, A MAN OF WISDOM." Her voice was calmer now. "It was the story of an old man far up in the Adirondacks, who gave Ashton Best enough philosophy to want to live. That little town was Middleville. I thought perhaps I could find that old man and, perhaps, he could help me too. That's why I'm here, Tommy."

She was finished. Now she was waiting. Tommy said nothing.

"Do you know him, Tommy?" she demanded.

"No, but if I can find him, I'll send 'im straight ta you."

She was gone and Tommy sat there a long time thinking. He must do something. But what? He remembered finding solutions for other problems but he had no immediate suggestion for this one. Perhaps time would bring its own solution.

Janice did not come in to talk to Tommy for the next few days, but when she did, neither mentioned the former conversation. Instead, they went on talking about birds and bees and flowers, operas, books, Paris, life.

Janice had gained weight and color this summer but Tommy was worried. He still had given Janice no assistance and he must. The summer was slipping away fast and he knew that she would soon go back to the city, looking for employment—something to fill her time.

One day the train stopped at the station and from it stepped Ashton Best. He and Tommy threw their arms around each other in glad reunion. Together they went into the station, sat down and talked over old times.

About an hour later Janice dropped in. She looked around. "Oh, Tommy, I'm sorry. I didn't know you had a visitor," she said, half apologizing, yet half wanting to stay.

"Come in anyway." It was the stranger who spoke.

Tommy, remembering that they needed an introduction, said in his friendly manner, "Janice, meet my old friend, Ashton Best!"

Janice stared, her eyes like saucers. "You, Ashton Best!"

Nothing had led her to think him so tall, so blond, so ultimately handsome.

"Yes!" he laughed, and she laughed too at her childish behavior.

He was staying at the hotel. It was Tommy who suggested that they go there together. They walked slowly and he told her about a German who had been on the same coach with him coming up.

"He was so funny, the way he dressed, the way he talked, the way he did everything."

"I'll bet he said 'gut' for 'good!'" she laughed.

"Yes, and every time the candy man went through he thought he had to buy something."

The walk to the hotel was all too short. Before they parted he asked her to dine with him.

"Give me time to dress," she added.

"Don't take too long. I'm awfully hungry," he reminded her as she scurried to her room.

She came down in pale blue linen that made her eyes a deeper blue. Across the table they told jokes and laughed. The evening's conversation went easily. He told her he had come to stay only a week. She made no comment.

Practically all that week they were together. There was fishing in the early morning, swimming in the afternoon, and hiking out into the forest with appetizing lunches. Often they stopped to talk with Tommy. In the evenings they canoed on the moonlit Lake Lomar.

It was the night before he was to leave. They had walked out to the lake and were sitting with their backs against a great tree, watching the tiny ripples catching up the moonbeams. They were not talking. Each was wishing that tomorrow's parting were not so near, that it were not necessary.

It was Janice who broke the silence. "Ashton, who was that man you wrote about?" "Janice," he gasped in astonishment, "didn't you know it was Tommy?"

Realization suddenly struck her. "It was Tommy," she mused.

The quietness of the night again surrounded them. The moon came higher in the sky to shed its glory on the scene. There was stillness everywhere.

The next morning they stood together at the rail of the observation car waving good-bye to Tommy until distance took them from his view. Even though he could no longer see them, he stood on the platform looking in the direction in which they had gone. Thoughtfully he reviewed the events of the time since he had known Ashton and Janice. They were so young. They had so much of life before them. They needed each other.

Then Tommy did the thing he had done often this past week. With face toward the sky, in tender reverence, he prayed, "Lord, let them be happy."

Lost Talent

By ESTHER CRISSMAN

I silently cursed J. K. as I wandered through a narrow street in Virginia. I was looking for a story for his "lost talent" campaign which was to run as a feature article in the November issue of our magazine.

"Get me a new kind of story. Not local boy makes good or oblivion reaches the limelight, but something different! Find me a lost diamond or a pearl hidden in an oyster shell," J. K. said when I left him, and his words stung my brain as I remembered them. It wasn't stimulating weather to look for black rock or oyster shells. The smell of asphalt nauseated me and my clothing stuck to my body. As I wiped the perspiration from my face I saw a bar room across the street and hurriedly put my much soiled handkerchief into the pocket of my trousers and made my way through a stream of light traffic and into the shelter from the hot sun.

I walked up to the bar slowly, again wiping my face, and asked for a glass of beer.

"The bar is rather deserted," I remarked to the bartender in an effort to make conversation, and then I spied a tall thin man at the end of the bar.

"Yea," said the bartender as he returned with my drink. "Everyone down watching the boat race."

"Any bets?" I asked.

"No, I've lost too many bets. I quit gambling." I saw that he was watching the other man anxiously.

"Ever play the race tracks? I won \$50.00 last —" but at that moment the man at the opposite end of the bar had staggered from his place. The bartender rushed over to the figure and held him steady.

"Lie down, Sam. You're not well enough to go," said the bartender.

The stranger focused his eyes upon the bartender.

"I don't care what you do with me, Ned," he murmured.

I was shocked to find myself suddenly believing that this man was not drunk. Although he staggered when he walked and his face had a lost, haggard expression, he did not seem drunk. I leaned forward, almost losing my balance on the stool to get a closer view of the man that the bartender was assisting to the couch. The physical appearance of the body was not old, I decided. He was not more than thirty-five, and there were streaks of black among the gray hairs on his head. But to guess his age from his face I'd say seventy-three, I concluded.

There was something familiar about this man. His physical stature and the lines of his face seemed to light a memory from my own dim past. I decided to find why even a bartender should offer to care for an old tramp. "Guy's pretty well in the bag," I observed to the bartender.

He polished glasses for a number of seconds and then remarked, "Yes, but not in the way you are thinking. His mind is drunk, not his body. He was finishing a first glass of ginger ale when you came in."

"What's the matter with his mind?" I hoped I was not being inquisitive.

"He's broken, that's all. Five years ago he was the world-famous Sammy Rivers. His Rippling Orchestra was known from Florida to Alaska, but now he's unknown."

"Sammy Rivers!" I gasped. Sammy Rivers, the tall, distinguished looking, kind friendly man who once said to me, "You're looking for a job? Well, why don't you be my press agent?" "Do you need one?" I had asked. "No, but when I do I'll call you." Three weeks later when I was contemplating jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge or hurling my body from the Empire State Building, I received a telegram from Sammy telling me to come to Chicago at once to "give him to America." I had a swift vision of the man who was always on time for rehearsals, wrote his own music, spent money lavishly on his orchestra, and visited the hospital every week because he loved to see children happy and expose them to a bit of fatherly devotion.

Swiftly my memory turned back to the days when Sammy Rivers' name was known to more people than Clark Gable's. Sammy had been the carefree, gentle, appreciative, nature-lovin', and kind young man who broadcast from the Golden Triangle, Radio City, Madison Square Gardens, the Waldorf Astoria, Carnegie Hall and countless other famous places in the world. I recalled his screen and radio success and realized how suddenly he had dropped into oblivion. I remembered writing articles for him when he married Nila Lee at the time they had both reached the peak of their careers. His words that were spoken so earnestly that day in the M. A. S. Studio in Hollywood found their way back into my memory.

"She's an actress and I know the risk I am taking in marrying while we're both successful, but I love her. If I have to live without her, all my life will have been in vain." I had gone to Africa with a scientific expedition directly after his marriage and was surprised to realize I had given this man little thought since that time.

"Sammy Rivers!" I repeated in stupidity to my informer. "I used to be his press agent."

"I know. That's why I told you. Sam used to be real fond of you. You're older, but you look the same." The man polished glasses again.

I remembered now that this man tending bar was Ned Carter, Sammy's piano player. He had been Sammy's best friend and I wrung his hand with pleasure as he came around the bar to me.

"Tell me about him," I insisted, motioning to the sleeping figure on the sofa.

"He married Nila Lee, you know." I nodded quickly and saw it was going to be difficult for Ned to tell his story.

"It was like most Hollywood marriages. Bliss six months, then Reno. There was a new lead star coming into the celluloid recognition at that time, who rushed Nila. Sam was touring Europe with his orchestra and she decided to play around with the new star. When Sam came back to California, Nila told him their marriage was ended. I'm sorry, but I really wasn't in love with you. You swept me off my feet and I married you. I've been on the river long enough. I want some ground under my feet. That's exactly what she said to him. He said, 'You mean you don't love me?' with tears running down his cheeks, and she said, 'That's generally the idea.'"

"Well, Jake, you never saw such a man as he was. He walked from the room and over to Ben's Beverly Hills home. He almost killed the guy. If it hadn't been for a servant Ben never would have put his handsome face in front of the camera again. Then Sam disappeared. Everybody searched for him, but no one could find him. I went every place I knew he had ever been, but I couldn't find him."

Ned was silent and I could see how much he had loved his friend. Even recalling those days brought him a painful memory.

"Two years later," he continued after the silence, "I went fishing in Canada. I chose the lodge Sam and I used to visit long before he was famous. One night as I sat at the fireplace there was a rap at the door. I crossed leisurely and opened it. Before me stood a wretched figure in ragged old clothing and dark glasses."

"I'm sorry, Ned. Got anything to eat?" it said.

"I stared, and when I heard a dull thud I subconsciously knew both my pipe and book had fallen on the floor."

"I'm no ghost, Ned. I'm really Sam. I saw a light as I was tramping past. I remembered some of the times we've had here. You wouldn't disown me because I'm a common bum?"

"Sam!" was all that I could say.

"I kept him there for months, trying to drive some standard of living into his head. I even bought musical instruments and put them at his finger tips, but he threw them in the lake. I took him to a night club and exposed him to the old life he had lived, but he got drunk. I've talked, pleaded, coaxed—done everything I can think to do, but it's in vain. He won't come back to the world he left five years ago. At last he decided he wasn't going to 'sponge' on me any more. He wanted to come to Richmond to get a job. 'Southerners are kinder than Northerners, and they don't ask as many questions I'll find something to do.' I came back with hope high in my heart, but it was useless!

He disposes of garbage at the City Hospital."

Silence fell between us again. Sam stirred and got to his feet. I started over to him but Ned caught my arm. Sam looked at us.

"Hello, Jake. Good to see you. Time for me to go, Ned?" he spoke in a toneless voice.

"Sammy," I began, but it was useless. I looked into the cavernous eyes, the white face, the broken body and realized the truth.

He saw that I knew his dilemma and bowed his head. "Too late, Jake," he turned from me and walked into the street.

Ned and I watched him in silence. My glass dropped to the floor, but neither of us moved to pick it up. Through the roaring noises in my ear I heard Ned say, "After we got back here, he said he couldn't stand the thoughts that kept running through his brain. He thought it was easier not to think."

"Dope fiend," I murmured, and my blood ran cold in my veins.

This man who had been at the top of the ladder had stumbled and fallen below his original plane. "Would it be possible to bring him back?" I wondered. From experience I knew his body contained talent, but how could he be shown that his place is at the top, the very pulse of lilted rhythm. Suddenly I had an idea.

"Ned!" I called excitedly.

He came over to me.

"How soon can you get away from here."

He glanced at the clock on the wall. "I'm finished at five."

"Come over to my room in the Peacock Hotel. I've got a plan." I picked up my hat and rushed out the door forgetting the intense heat of Virginia.

I hurried to a public telephone and promised J. K. a gem if he would postpone the special article until February. He replied that he thought I had found a cup of radium, but if it was worth waiting for, he'd wait.

Ned agreed to my plan and we both worked furiously to carry it out. Two months and three days later we had completed the task and were ready to see if our efforts had been in vain. Ned and I felt as important as great surgeons. After all, the making or further breaking of a human life lay in our hands.

Our plan was only a guess. Little enough of it was logical, but we believed in it because we loved Sammy Rivers and those we persuaded to work with us loved him too. Now we all sat tensely in New York awaiting his arrival. None of us were talking much as we nervously smoked cigarettes. I stood at the window and watched the snowflakes covering Broadway, giving that street of fame and tragedy a beauty it did not deserve. The telephone rang and everyone was silent while I spoke into the mouthpiece.

"O.K., Ned. We're ready," is all I said.

The men took their places and I dimmed the lights. The door opened and the orchestra began to play Sammy's theme song.

The man who looked older than his years paused at the entrance of the room. At first he looked frightened as he stood stiffly at the door; then, as if he had forgotten himself, he stepped into the room. For a moment his eyes held a look of fear. You could almost see the music reaching his soul and lifting it to its own original heights. He paused with the gleam

of desire written on his face. Ned smiled encouragement, and Sammy looked longingly at the orchestra.

"You can do it, Sammy," I said quietly.

He stepped forward with a trace of the old elastic step and picked up the baton, then took his position in the exact center of the group. Ned and I turned to grip each other's hand. I silently thought how well Ned had clothed him for this occasion. His face was still haggard, his body too thin, but we would soon have him looking like the original Sammy Rivers.

"But Old Man River, he just keeps rollin' along," Sammy turned and was singing into the microphone.

At the end of a half hour I joyously seized the "mike" to say, "You've been listening to Sammy Rivers and his orchestra broadcasting directly from Radio City, New York. Jake Towne is your announcer."

The old staff rushed in to greet the returned hero, and several offered contracts. Sammy smiled at all of them with a dazed expression.

"Jake Towne is my manager and publicity agent. I'll second any statements he may make," Sammy patted my shoulder and I saw him leave with Ned.

I must have been busy with my audience and receiving congratulations for Sam for several hours. Finally my servant came to say that Ned wished to speak to me, so I took the call in my office.

"For God's sake, Jake, get over to Mercy Hospital," he screamed and hung up.

With fear and desperation clutching at me I cursed the taxi driver as he stopped at every red light. At last I was in the hall, face to face with Ned. I feared the worst.

"He didn't do it purposely," he cried at me. "I tell you it wasn't suicide! He was glad to be back, glad to start again—even at the bottom if it was necessary."

I clutched his arm. "What happened?" I demanded.

"We were crossing Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Traffic was very heavy. We were making plans and Sammy was so excited that he didn't see the traffic lights change. He stepped into the street, saw his mistake and turned to come back—but they hit him. A big truck ran over him." Ned was sobbing and his words were almost incoherent.

At that moment a doctor came out of Room 84 and we saw a nurse drawing a sheet over Sam's face.

J. K. had called me seven times and told my servant that if I wished to have my pay check for the last two weeks—and if I was interested in one in the future—I was to bring some kind of material into his office Wednesday A.M. I didn't want Sammy's story torn wide open for public gossip. I didn't feel that I could bear hearing his humble life discussed by unfeeling little groups of people. But it was all I had worked on for months. I had nothing to substitute.

Ned said, when I presented him with my problem, "You have to live. Sam would understand that." Now I took my last page from the typewriter and walked into J. K.'s office.

"I'm afraid it's not what you wanted. I'm sorry," I told him.

He scowled at me, and I silently wondered what paper I should try to write for as I went to my office and tried to forget the recent tragedy that had so unnerved me. I was there no longer than ten minutes when Jim, the office boy, said that J. K. wanted to see me. I closed my typewriter and went into the editor's office.

"This Sammy Rivers gave you your start in the journalistic world, didn't he?" J. K.'s voice didn't seem as harsh as usual.

"Yes," I admitted.

"Suppose we just put an account in with the deaths?" he suggested.

I looked at him in stupefied amazement. This man who had always been hoggish about sensational stories held one in his hand and was refusing it.

"Sammy did me a good turn once and I'd like his past to be buried with him."

He looked at me and gripped my hand in understanding.

"Thanks," was all I could say.

So the world continued to think of Sammy dying in some mysterious way that night when he left his wife in California. The rest of us don't care when he died—it was nice to have known him.

River Rambling

By BETTY LOU SMITH

I have always loved the old river which cuts off the end of our back yard. And yet I can not tell you the reasons for this love, because the things that the river had done to me have been enough to turn me against it.

When I first came to live by the river I thought what a wonderful thing it would be to be able to swim in my yard. But the river disappointed me; it was too dirty and full of sewage. You say, "That is not the river's fault!" Well, yes, and no! Then again in the winter, the river disappointed me. I wanted to go ice-skating very badly, but the river was not deep enough to freeze smoothly. Even after the dam was put in it disappointed me by not freezing at all. "Not the river's fault?" Well, yes, and no!

Many people condemn the river for the many floods and scares it has brought to them. I do too, but I can understand the river's feelings. Just like human beings who, when filled up with emotion, must overflow in some way, so the river must overflow when it is filled too much. I shall never forget the first flood I witnessed. Coming home from play practice one night, I went up to my room to study for a Latin test. The rest of the family were either in bed or reading. Because of much rain that week there had been talk of flood, and already a small basin on the other side of the town had overflowed, flooding many cellars. However, we never thought of our river getting temperamental. Finally my Grandfather decided to take his usual nightly walk before retiring. This walk was down to the river and back to the house. He started out with his flashlight, and got about three-fourths of the way down the yard when he came trotting back calling: "Quick! We must move the furni-

ture, there's going to be a flood. The water's up to the pear tree!" Instantly the house became alive. My brother bounced out of bed; Grandmother dropped her book; mother stopped sewing; and where my Latin book went is still a mystery to me. Such strength, agility, and skill were never known before in our household. I trotted up the front stairs with books piled up twice my height. My brother looked like a consolidated pyramid of pots, pans, and dishes, going up the steps. The other members were piling furniture, one piece on top of the other. None of us ever thought that there would be much water in the house. "Perhaps knee-deep," my Grandfather judged, "but no deeper than that." And so we piled, rather than carried things away. The top shelves of books were left in place. Brother Bud did not remove the top shelf full of dishes. Only a few prized antiques of my Grandmother's collection were taken upstairs.

Closer and closer, the water crept up the yard toward the house. Then it began to rush into the cellar window, a miniature Niagara Falls, in its rushing and roaring. Further and further it crept up the cellar steps. Now there were only four steps showing. Three, two, none! It was on the downstairs floor. I went to bed and slept soundly. The last words I remember were my Grandfather's, "Well, I guess we've done about all we can. The water won't come up much higher now." I closed my eyes, thankful that there would be no Latin test the next morning.

At noon the next day I opened my eyes, heard the excited voices of the family chattering away, and the high nervous laugh of my Grandmother. Looking out the window, I saw a sight that made my heart plunk right down to the pit of my stomach, not from fear, but from astonishment. My old friend river had come up to see me. Yes, and he was just about in my bedroom window. I jumped out of bed and ran to the front stairs. Six more steps and we would move to the attic. Did Grandfather say it would be only knee-deep? Someone must have pretty long legs. I chuckled to myself as I imagined such a looking person. Then I turned to the back stairs. Just six steps left of them too. "How about a swim, Sis?" a voice called out, and I realized that I was cold and hungry.

There was a lot more happened during the old river's upset. Indeed, I can not look at a can of soup today without turning green. It is only recently that I can taste canned fruit. To top off the disaster, a fire broke out on the next street, and the flames shot far into the sky. Just when it should have rained, it didn't.

But the old river went roaring on, venting its wrath upon mankind by tearing away that which he strove so hard to build up. Houses, garages, furniture, cattle and fowls came zooming down the river. It has been sworn by the neighbors that a pair of ducks (or turkeys) came floating down the river on a house roof. As they neared the bridge, they jumped off, walked across the bridge, jumped back on the roof again and continued down the river. Personally, I was no witness to any such feat.

The river soon pulled itself together and the disaster was eventually righted. The river flowed on serenely as if it had its satisfaction,

and could now act like a proud girl, with her nose in the air. Still I love the old river.

On summer nights I often go down by the river to dream lazily. When it gets velvety dark, my imagination works best. I love to watch the moonlight skip along with the ripples, and race with the rays of light from automobiles as they come around the mountain curve on the highway across the river. Usually I am alone, for the mosquitoes drive everyone back to the house. But as mother says, "Mosquitoes are particular. They only like sweet things." Though they buzz around me there are very few who attack. Often a romantic couple will come strolling down the yard next door, to the river. I am not polite enough to leave, being there first, but I will turn my back. Canoes floated slowly by. On the highway across the river a car comes slowly to a stop. The lights go out. I wonder why? The river is the cause of it all—the old river that cuts off the end of our back yard, the river that I love but do not know why.

The Little Tin Soldier

By BETTY LOU SMITH

The little tin soldier looked dreamingly from the shelf where he was stationed on display, with the rest of his comrades. He wondered if someone would buy him for Christmas, and if his new master would appreciate him.

Suddenly he bent forward. A little boy had entered the store. He was a jolly looking fellow, and the little tin soldier could not help thinking what a fine playmate that boy would be. The tin soldier decided to watch him. The boy carried a large bundle of newspapers under his arm and as he walked through the store, he would hold one forward and ask, "Paper, m'am?" "Paper, sir?" Then the tin soldier's heart stood still. The boy was coming nearer. Perhaps he would buy him. Nearer and nearer the little newspaper boy came. Then suddenly he looked up and saw the little tin soldier. My, how his eyes shone! My, how they sparkled! Suddenly he asked:

"If you please, sir, how much is that little tin soldier?"

"He goes with the rest of his troop for \$5.95." "Oh! Well, thanks very much."

The little newspaper boy gave one long look at the little tin soldier, and then went sadly on his way asking—"Paper, sir?" "Paper, m'am?"

All day long the little tin soldier thought about the newspaper boy. When it was almost time for the store to close he saw the little boy again. "Perhaps he is going to buy me this time—no—he is talking to the clerk."

"If you please, sir, would you take my name and address, and if Santa Claus should come here for any toys would you please tell him to let me have just that one tin soldier? You see, we're very poor, and I'm afraid it would be too expensive to have the whole troop."

The little tin soldier's heart leaped up when the newspaper boy pointed to him, but his hopes soon sank as he saw the boy hand a note to the kind, good-natured clerk, and then go away.

"It will soon be time for the clerks to go

home," said the tin soldier to himself, "then I will climb down and read the note. I'll find out what the newspaper boy wanted."

Soon the store was deserted. The clerks had gone home and the janitor had slightly opened a window so that the store would not be stuffy. "He'll be back any minute," thought the tin soldier, "I must hurry."

Quickly the tin soldier jumped from the shelf and landed with a thud on the counter. "Yes!" he exclaimed, "here is the note. It says 'Bobby Brown, 613 Pine Street.' Do you know what I'm going to do?" He turned to the troop on the shelf, "I'm going to go to this little boy's house." To this day the little tin soldier does not know what made him say this, but something inside prompted him.

Without paying any attention to the protests of his comrades, the tin soldier marched across the counter towards the open window. Clank—clank—clank—went his tin legs. The newspaper boy's note was stuck on his bayonet. Without hesitation the little tin soldier climbed onto the window sill and jumped out. It seemed a long way down, but when he landed, he knew no more, for the terrific bump knocked him unconscious. He was awakened by something soft and cold falling on him. It was snow. The little tin soldier was amazed.

"Where am I?" Oh, yes, I remember, I jumped out of the window."—What are these walls doing around me? I am outside, for I feel the snow and see the sky, and oh just above me there is the store window, and oh, I can see there peoples' feet going by. Oh! where am I? I can't get out; the walls are too high. Someone may fall in here and crush me, or else I'll rust to death in this snow."

Clank—clank—clank —Clank—clank—clank the little tin soldier began to pace up and down the little cement ditch into which he had fallen. It was right beneath the middle part of the big show window. The tin soldier had fallen from the fourth floor window right above it.

All day long the tin soldier paced up and down his prison—Clank—clank—Clank. clank—Clank—clank—clank. This was the only way he could keep his courage up.

"This is the day before Christmas, and now no one will ever want me. I am getting stiff with rust. No one will ever see me in here."

All day long he watched the peoples' feet go by. All day long he glanced up at the big show window. Things began to be missing from it.

"People are buying things, but no one can buy me, and I'll never find my newspaper boy now."

Soon the people stopped walking by. The stars came out. One star seemed especially bright and large to the little tin soldier. He felt strangely comforted. Suddenly he heard someone coming towards the store window above him. The tin soldier looked up.

"It's the little boy. Oh, I wish he'd see me and take me home."

More footsteps were heard. The little feet above the tin soldier moved rapidly away and a voice familiar to the tin soldier said, "Paper, sir?" The tin soldier's heart leaped with joy. Soon the little feet could again be seen by the

tin soldier and a voice was heard to say:

"I suppose my tin soldier is gone by now." The little tin soldier wanted to shout, "No, come get me, I'm down here," but he could find no voice in his throat; so he snatched his bayonet and made himself tall and straight. Then he began to march—clank—clank—clank. The little boy looked down. The tin soldier came to attention.

"What is that shiny red thing in that ditch? Why—why—Oh, my tin soldier!"

The little tin soldier felt himself lifted by the newspaper boy's hands into the wide world. "What's this on your bayonet? Why, it's my note—that's me—Bobby Brown. You were meant for me. Someone placed you there where I could find you."

The little tin soldier's bayonet was pointing right up to the great bright star, he stood so erect, he was so happy. Bobby looked up into the heavens; then he exclaimed: "It was Jesus who placed you there. He sent you to me on the eve of his birth. Before we go home we must pay our thanks to Him."

So the little newspaper boy and the little tin soldier went into the great cathedral across the street. The little boy knelt down and gave his thanks, and the little tin soldier stood erect on the seat beside his new master to give his thanks, and both prayed with equal fervor to our dear Saviour whose birthday they would celebrate together.

Freedom, 1941

By DALE OLMSTEAD

As Christopher Carrant strode up the darkening street he whistled a happy tune. He breathed deeply of the April evening, straightening his stooped shoulders as the fragrance of the wine of spring flooded his lungs. He jumped from one dry spot to another, avoiding the little pools of water that rested lazily before running into a convenient sewer. He was playing his violin as he hurried along—not really, of course—but in his mind his whistling became the full tones of a well-played violin.

"What is that poem of Browning's?" Chris thought. "'The year's at the spring—The hillside's dew pearled—God's in His heaven—All's right with the world.' No, that's not right. Well, anyway that fits it perfectly, 'All's right with the world.' Well, nearly all," he added aloud as he thought of the world.

It was nice being promoted to head book-keeper and getting a dollar and a quarter more a week. Soon he would be able to quit and go to the New York Conservatory of Music with what he had saved. "Besides, it's spring," he exulted as he vaulted up the muddy steps of his home. The mud gave him a moment's displeasure, for it seemed to mar the beauty of this spring evening. It hinted that nothing was ever quite perfect; always some minor detail to threaten and then burst into ugly importance.

Leaving a whistled note suspended alone in the evening air, Chris entered the dark hall. The smell of boiled cabbage swept forward to nauseate him. How he hated boiled cabbage!

And yet he knew that his mother had to have it just to please his father. His father seemed to get some devilish pleasure out of forcing people to eat things that they did not like. Chris passed through the hall into the steaming kitchen.

"Hi-yuh, Mom. How's my best girl?" he greeted. Mrs. Carrant turned from the fiery stove, drying her hands on her apron, a gesture which seemed to embody her helplessness. Her thin face smiled. She did not smile, just the mask of her face. Kind, bewildered eyes were capped by a profuse mass of greying hair.

"Pretty good, Chris, but my eyes still bother me. They keep watering, and sometimes I can barely see," she replied in tired monotone. "How did you get along today?" The new work isn't too much for you, is it?"

"Of course not," he hastily assured her. "The new boss is swell, and I don't mind working harder. The extra pay is worth it." He turned to leave the room and then asked, "Do I have time to read the paper before supper?"

"Yes, it's in the front room—I think," she replied and went back to her glowing stove.

Chris hastened through the dining room and its memories of so many unpleasant meals. He burst into the front room and was at once confronted by the sight of his father. He sat facing the door, his muddy feet sprawled on a battered ottoman. His flabby hands clutched a pipe which gave off an odor before which even the boiled cabbage bowed in defeat. The stubby fingers culminated in black mourning bands of dirt entrenched beneath broken nails. His cold, piggy eyes peered from between rolls of fat.

"Get me the paper, Chris," he ordered without any other form of greeting.

"But I—," he began. "He's just doing this to be mean, to start another fight. He had all afternoon to read the paper," Chris thought. "Here," he said, thrusting the paper at his father.

Picking up a book of Browning's poetry Chris sank into a chair. Ever since he could remember, his father had been issuing commands, and his mother had been softening them. He hated commands. Chris had found the poem about spring, and as he began to read, his face softened. Father and son sat, separated by the width of a room and by a chasm dug deep with barbed words.

"John! Chris!" Mrs. Carrant called, "Supper's ready. Do you want it to get cold?"

Mr. Carrant quietly went to take his place at the table. From his chair he snapped, "Come on, Chris. Can't you hear your mother?"

"What? Oh, yes! I'm coming," he mumbled.

As Chris slid into his chair, his father pulled a letter from his pocket and balanced it carefully on the tips of his fingers. He spoke with an air of assumed carelessness as he said, "Chris, this letter came for you today." Without opening it Chris knew what it was. He felt his father's triumphant gaze burning into him. The rattling of the paper as he opened the envelope sounded like the roar of an angry thunderstorm caught in the exaggerated stillness of the room. He read.

Lifting his eyes from the letter he said quietly, "It has come." I'm to report for my physical examination tomorrow—and I can't do it."

Mr. Carrant spoke, "Can't do it? Of course you'll do it. You have to do it."

"Why? Why should my life be ruined—all my dreams of music school destroyed? It just isn't fair." Chris's voice hinted at unspoken thoughts that he knew his father would not understand.

"Fair! You talk of fair. This is no time for fairness with a mad dog running rampant in Europe. We must all do our bit," Mr. Carrant replied. Without being aware of it he had fallen back on the stock newspaper phrases. They were as much a part of him as his muddy shoes or dirty finger nails. He fished for another potato in the greasy broth, and then punctuated his next remark with emphatic wavings of the impaled potato. "Maybe this'll make a man out of you."

Chris sprang to his feet. "It won't make a man out of me," he shouted, "because I won't go." Shoving the letter into his pocket he left the table and hurried up the dark stairs to his room.

Mrs. Carrant spoke quietly, "You ought not speak to Chris that way, John. He's always been a different sort of boy. Why must you always disagree with him? You and I both know he isn't healthy enough for the army, and if we can just persuade him to go for the examination, he'll be rejected and won't have to serve anyway. That way both of you will be satisfied. You won't say anything more to him, will you?" She reached for his hand. "Promise, John?" she pleaded.

"I don't know, Nell. He makes me so damn mad sometimes I could almost kill him. He's gonna go, though, I don't care how, but he's gonna go. I won't have a coward in this house." Savagely bisecting a potato with his fork he shoved one-half into his mouth and the meal proceeded.

Upstairs, Chris sat looking out of the window. The curtains waved lazily at a passer-by who wandered on into the dusk.

Thoughts raced 'round and 'round his mind—"I can't do it—this is my life—it's the only one I'll ever have—I've got it planned—this job for a few years—then music school, a chance to be a really good violinist—eventually a wife and kids, a boy whose dreams I can share—why should I delay and perhaps give all that up for a year's military training?—the training will lead to fighting, killing; it always does—and I shall be killing myself when I shoot an enemy, for the enemy just like me, has been dragged from his dreams. When he shudders and dies on the battle field with me standing over him, I am killing myself just as surely as if I put the gun to my own temple—a million dreams dying in the mud and blood and mangled bodies—all that some damned rich man can grow richer—No, I won't do it!"

Chris got up and walked over to the desk. As he passed his old dresser he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror.

"Ha! I should worry about military training," he muttered, "with a body like mine, they'd be sure to turn me down."

"Of course, I could report," he mused. "My teeth, at least, are sure to keep me out—but that wouldn't be right. I'd be a coward. I would be giving up everything I believe in, just to be safe and secure, and what a secur-

ity! Oh Hell!" he burst out, "I should never have let myself be bullied into registering."

A folded paper on his desk caught his eye. More of his father's work! The brazen headlines screamed, "Bergdoll Sentenced to Jail." Chris shuddered. He knew that it would mean jail, no friends.

The curtain danced madly in the spring wind as it too strained and pulled to break loose from itself.

The next day Christopher Carrant, along with thirty-six other men, presented his body for evaluation.

From A Novel

By ALICE BARR

"Syd," called Mrs. Birch, "Come in here and change the baby. And hurry up about it, Syd." She screamed at the child, "Quit scuffing your shoes in the dirt. I can't afford to buy you a new pair every other week. I don't scrub other people's floors all the time just for you to get shoes out of it. How many times must I tell you not to slam the screen door?" she groaned angrily. She buried her hands in a pan of soft dough. Flour lay in little white puffs on her black hair. Her small, neat body lent itself to the rhythm of her arms as she kneaded the dough.

"Sydney," she snapped at the little girl, "If you stand there much longer staring at me like a nincompoop I'm going to send you to bed. You're the stupidest, dumbest looking kid I've ever seen. Why, you can't even close your mouth when you look at people." Sydney's mouth closed so suddenly she bit her tongue. She walked slowly through the kitchen and into the dining room. A worn blue linen rug covered harsh splintered boards. Six chairs and a nut-brown oak table stood in neat order in the middle of the room. From one corner protruded a fat-bellied stove, while in the opposite corner a sideboard covered a torn piece of wall paper. A flight of creaky steps led upstairs. Sydney liked to sit on the stairs when the rest of the family was in the room. Then she was up high enough to look down on them. On an old Morris chair, in a tumble of blue clothing, reclined a chubby baby. Sydney stood beside the baby and watched with fascination the futile, grasping hands of the tiny boy. Blue eyes laughed up at the dark sister and blissful gurgles bubbled from his merry lips. Sydney changed him swiftly and expertly, then pinched his arm sharply. The yielding flesh always tempted her.

"I saw you pinch him," accused her mother shrilly and unexpectedly from the doorway. She advanced toward the frightened child and the howling baby, "I thought I could at least trust you a few minutes, but I see you're just like your dad. I can't depend on you for a thing. The minute my back's turned you're in to something. Go on! Get out of here and go play." Sydney escaped from the wrathful tirade of her mother to find Evans patiently bent over a bush of roses. He glared at her as she stood hesitantly beside him.

"Now what's the matter?" he snapped at her as though she were a fly and he a toad.

"Mom talks a lot, don't she?" the little girl

reached her hand to feel the soft loveliness of the Van Fleet roses only to run a thorn in her thumb. She placed the pricked finger in her mouth and frowned at the bushes. "You wouldn't think anything as pretty as roses would be mean, would you, Evans? Some day when I grow up I'm going to be a rose. I'm going to be all soft and smooth and pretty. When people touch me I'm going to be like velvet and then when I get tired of 'em I shall prick 'em. Evans stared open-mouthed at the child, so surprised he failed to correct her grammar.

"You're crazy," he grunted in disgust. "And anyhow, you're not supposed to talk about Mom like that." He looked into the liquid brown eyes turned up to him. Not a flicker of emotion showed in them. They were still and tranquil and fathomless. The full rub-lips sucked contentedly on the bruised finger.

"My God! Maybe she is crazy," Evans thought with a thrill of fear. "Be just like us to have a crazy one in the family. Then our little circle would be complete." Aloud he said, "Go and play. You make me nervous standing around watching me." The little girl turned away without a word. The boy caught a faint glimmer of hurt pride flash across the child's face and then as quickly disappear. She stubbed the toe of her shoe on the edge of the walk, crossed the lawn, and disappeared around the house. Evans turned again to his roses. He felt the creamy smoothness under his fingers. It was like velvet, just as Syd had said. Only what did she mean by saying she would be like a rose? He glanced in the direction Sydney had gone and wondered.

Sydney at that moment was standing in back of the little white house. She stared across an expanse of rambling garden to watch her sister walking slowly down the potato rows. This girl held a battered tin can in one hand and a stick in the other. Bent over the plants, she snapped a little red potato bug off them into the can filled with kerosene.

"Ann!" Sydney called to her. "Do you want me to help you?"

"No, I don't, yelled the other, straightening for a minute. "You only get in my way. Why don't you go some place and play? You bother me standing around here with your mouth open, so go away." She bent again to her job without another glance at her little sister. Sydney closed her mouth with a snap and went slowly on around the house to the back porch. There on the porch steps stood Mrs. Smith from next door. Mrs. Smith was fat, sixty-two years old and had beautiful, white hair piled high on her head. Those were the only things Sydney could remember about her besides the fact that she lived in a big white house with real carbide lights. Someday Sydney would have a home like that.

"Hello, Syd," she smiled at the little girl. With a smile her face crinkled into a myriad of tiny wrinkles. Sydney stared at her, then suddenly blurted out:

"Why do you always wear long dresses and high-topped shoes?" The lady from next door stopped smiling.

"You listen to me, Sydney Birch. If you don't learn to ask people questions in a decent tone of voice you're going to get in one grand

fight some day," she scolded. "And why don't you go out and play? You bother me the way you stand and stare at me." Sydney straightened her little body to its full height and threw her head back with a magnificent gesture of grace. Her long, slender throat quivered with rage. Her eyes snapped fire and wrath from smoldering depths. No longer was she a slow, dull little girl. She was a throbbing body of rage and beauty. Her beauty seemed to have been buried and then brought to the surface by her fierce temper.

"Don't you tell me to go out and play," she cried shrilly. "And I don't bother you, you old fatty. I'm never going to speak to you anymore. I'll throw stones in your windows. I'll . . ." The screen door slammed ominously. Mrs. Birch stood at the top of the steps and glared at her tempestuous daughter.

"Sydney Birch, you say one more word and I'll whip you within an inch of your life," she threatened.

"I don't care what you do," screamed the child. "Every place I go it's 'Oh, you bother me. Go and play.'" she mimicked heartbrokenly. Her mother descended the steps. Sydney backed off, her lips quivering, her eyes snapping. "Don't you touch me!" she shrilled. "Don't you dare touch me!" She eluded her mother's grasping hands and raced from sight. The two women stared at each other amazed.

"What ever got into the child?" gasped Mrs. Smith. "I never in my life saw her act like that. Why, she looked as though a fire burned inside her."

"I never saw her like that either. I'll give her a big dose of castor oil when she comes in. She'll be all right then." To Mrs. Birch, castor oil was a godsend. It would cure anything.

Six o'clock that evening Sydney slid into her chair at the supper table. She glanced neither right nor left and spoke to no one. Her heart failed her, though, when she reached for her plate. In its stead was a small glass of orange juice with queer oily streaks through it. Castor oil! Not a sound came from the other members of the family. Evans, eating quietly, furtively watched his small sister. Ann grinned in open derision. Mr. Birch wasn't there yet.

"You have to drink that juice before you have any supper," Mrs. Birch told the child. She looked at her curiously. Could this dull, stupid child be the same one who had so recently been a flaming torch of rage?

Days Too Short

By SONIA VENGER

It was one of those summer afternoons when the scenery seemed to dance and wave in the shimmering heat. A little barefoot girl in a blue gingham dress trudged up the blistered macadam road. Occasionally she paused to step out of the path of oncoming traffic and look back at the retreating landmarks and so gauge the distance she had come. As she walked along she deliberately stepped on the largest of the numerous tar bubbles that dotted the sticky road. Momentarily she amused herself

by trying to catch her grotesque shadow that danced ahead just out of reach. The heavy wicker basket swinging on her arm made a squeaking rhythm to which at times she hummed a tune.

At the summit of a small rise in the highway she stopped at an old watering trough to rest and listen to the trickling gurgle of water. At this very watering trough, she had been told, her great grandmother when a child had always stopped to rest as she too, in her bare feet, had walked to the cemetery. In the little girl's basket was an immense bouquet of bright yellow marigolds, pink and white zinnias, and blue corn flowers, and down under the flowers were two paint brushes and two small cans of paint. There in the shade of the overhanging chestnut boughs she refreshed the flowers and curiously studied her blurred reflection in the rippling mountain water. At her feet sparkling cascades of water spurted through cracks in the water-soaked boards of the trough, and on the shining puddles that ran to the edge of the oily road there were floating rainbows. After one last cool drink from the old watering trough, the little girl picked up her basket and started on.

The speeding cars that whizzed by set up a hot sultry breeze that swirled her skirts about her and swept her straight brown hair over her face. Friendly farm houses gazed after her as she left the hard hot road to take a short cut through a grassy meadow. She skipped through pink clover and past the purple thistles that playfully pricked her ankles. Now she followed a brook that twisted and turned between its shallow banks. Silver minnows and black skippers vanished as her mirrored figure overshadowed their play. A huge bumble bee circled her head in a dangerous drone, and as she broke into a run, it darted away as suddenly as it had come. The wandering road abruptly came back to the edge of the meadow, and the little girl, after cautiously climbing a rusty barb wire fence, once more stood on its blistered surface. Beside the road grew a clump of grey-haired dandelions through which she waded, enjoying the flight of the tiny parachutes as they spun, rose and fell. She pulled at one particularly large dandelion; it broke from its stem with a hollow pop. Then she blew the tiny seeds from its head and counted the remaining ones aloud, "one—two—three." She would have three children when she grew up. As she crossed the rattling thunderbolt bridge she realized that just around the bend lay the cemetery. She shifted her flower-laden basket to her other arm and hurried on.

The cemetery was a huge square of emerald green spread upon a gently sloping hill. Overhead, fleecy cloud-pictures shifted and changed against the bright blue sky. The wind whispered through the cedars, and a red bird answered its mate from the tall spire of a dark pine. In a path that zigzagged about the soft grassy plots, and past a rusty pump, the little girl solemnly made her way to a small wooden marker. She dropped to her knees systematically emptied her basket. "This," she thought, "is my mother's grave. This is where her ashes were buried in a small silver casket and this is where many people have stood and cried." As she pried the lid from the can of white paint, she remembered how red and

swollen Aunt Em's eyes always got when she came to the cemetery. It puzzled the little girl, who wondered why Aunt Em always cried when she stood by this grave. She felt no more like crying now than she had when her pretty box of Christmas candy was empty or when all the beauty and fire had been shot from her Roman candles on the Fourth of July. The empty box and hollow red Roman candles thrown carelessly on the dusty attic were never destroyed, for in them lay the power to bring back happy memories. The little girl carefully coated the small wooden marker with white paint. Aunt Em hadn't been able to buy a stone one because it would have cost too much money. The little girl looked around at the great, grey granite monuments. They must have cost just barrels of money. What a strange thing for people to do! Money could buy a lot nicer things than tomb stones. There was the old lady next door who had never been to a circus, the little city cousin who had never been to the country or seen a cow, the new linoleum Aunt Em needed in the summer kitchen—Oh, money could do a lot. It paid for movies and pretty dresses and doll dishes. Of course, the markers were, as many of them said, "In loving memory of . . ." but a

small stone could say just that as well as a larger one.

Now she opened the can of black paint and scrawled in wavering letters, M-O-T-H-E-R. During this process she felt no sentiment at all. People were born and people died. If, as they said at Sunday School, God took people to heaven when they died, every one should be happy, not sad, about dying. "I hope that when I die," she thought, as she filled a jar with water from the creaking pump, "no one will cry or make a fuss." She enjoyed the odor of fresh paint as she arranged the flowers. She hadn't wanted to bring flowers, but Aunt Em had insisted; so, to keep peace, she had brought them. Once when Mother had been making a trellis for the sprouting sweet peas she had said that flowers were made for people who were alive and happy.

Her errand finished, the grey-eyed little girl browsed among the tombstones reading epitaphs and chasing scampering chipmunks.

It was just across the thunderbolt bridge at dusk that a little girl in a blue gingham dress was struck by a speeding car. There in a crumpled heap lay a broken wicker basket from which ran a stream of black and white paint.

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