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Voices

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Rows of unpainted shacks stand gangling in disheveled rows. A few children play hopscotch in front of one of the shacks. Some have on sweaters . . . most do not. One fine-boned little girl perches on a stone step and idly finger a bud on the scraggly lilac bush. Her smaller sister hops on a sharp rock, then kicks it from her square with exasperation. She had gone to school today and worn the shoes. The girl pinches the bud from the bush and rises.

The men have come from work or from looking for work. They gather in small bunches. No jobs left at the ax-handle factory . . . No luck at the coal yard yet . . . Maybe they'll need help at the sawmill tomorrow . . . The bunches break apart and the men scatter.

Dusk comes slowly here. A smoky, bacon smell permeates the air . . . It is supper time. The children wander indoors and sit down to plates of cornbread and navy beans. They tease and fuss with the universal chatter of all children when it is supper time and spring, and they dream splendid dreams of after supper games.

With springtime suddenness it is night. Men sit in cane-bottom chairs on front stoops and smoke. Swirls of the smoke meet the smoke of now-smoldering wood and coal supper fires, aiding the damp river air in obliterating the sky. Women come from the houses and sit alongside their men . . . They do not talk much. The women are much older than they were yesterday.

The night quiet is punctured by the metallic clank of a soup can hitting the ground and by smothered giggles as feet hasten to find a hiding place before the leader retrieves the can. From the tent revival down the road a steel guitar twangs a mournful hymn and a voice pleads, coaxes with hypnotic fluctuation.

Occasionally from across the road comes the raspy voice of an old woman who spends her nights quilting with quick, small stitches the vivid tales of plat-eye and conjure women and warlocks. She sells her quilts for three dollars to the women of the town who want to add authenticity to their early American homes— and she is happy. There is always a ring of children, bewitched by her tales, delighting in the thrill of being only half-afraid.

The children leave together. The curious network of string that spans
from the floor to the porch eave and the wizened vines which climb from rusty Esso oil cans and cling tenaciously to the string assume an eerie, odd-bodkin character after the plat-eye and conjure women and warlocks. The children hold hands in mock-fear and remember how the porch is a dim green sanctuary in the summer sun . . . They watch the stealthy shadows, not really believing—afraid to doubt.

In an alley a stray cat picks his fastidious way between heaps of tin cans . . . A rat prowling among the cans dislodges one of them and starts an avalanche of the clanking, clattering metal. The cat yowls and scurries away . . . The children scatter and then laugh at each other from the security of front doors.

The late moon appears between the clouds which catch the glow of the town. This is not a part of the town here . . . Not really. The men who collect the taxes say it is; the town people say with their looks that it is not.

Under the street light three boys are comparing the merits of pet pocket knives. With the right flick of his wrist, one succeeds in making his stand erect in the dirt. Two girls come and stop to talk. One boy shyly kicks a splotch of new crabgrass. Soon there is awkward silence. The girls hesitantly say they must go. The boys volunteer to walk with them. A rock flies from somewhere and shatters the street light and the girls giggle shrilly at such daring.

The far-away lightning of a spring storm flickers . . . A gust of wind filters through the minute cracks in the walls of the houses . . . The men remember the river and the spring floods. A child stirs on his quilt bed on the floor as the fire in the stove snaps and showers sparks. A distant dog barks at the lightning, or an imagined sound, or an imagined smell, or for no reason at all.

SUMMER'S ECHOES

The tender drip of tingling dew that taps on hungry shoots, Sweet uncertain oozing of watermelon that splats on newsprint, The Burp that tells the world that this is good, The silken stream of chilled and golden threads of beer, Saline baths of sweat that comes from toil well-earned, The wholesome spring of sinews from the strain of happy step, Satin lips that brush their freshness across the denim of your own, The bloating hunger for a waiting, singing finger-tip, These are the echoes of the summer past and the ones to come.

Charles F. Whitaker

A POEM IN FRENCH FOR SNOB APPEAL

Les morceaux du terre ont cicatrise' la purete'
De la neige, l'Ecran rouille'
A couru de buee'
Les branches nues, et les fait se balancer
Au clair de lune
Une petite maigre buisson s'incliner ses fleurs
Comme les hommes vieux
Aux chapeaux bruns.
J'ai ouvert la fenetre
Pour rendre clair l'air
De la funee' des cigarettes
Mais j'ai ecoute' le vent.

Libby Thompson
DEATH IS WHITE

In snowy whiteness she creeps
Slowly, tiptoe, to hide her
Purpose. She gnaws, pulls and draws
Life’s last thread into spider-
Woven thinness; she holds it
Taut, then teases with white, tightly pulled bedsheets, alcohol
Baths and doctors dressed in white.
She teases too long, retreats,
And breaks the thread. The remaining fragments quiver, dangle,
And cause aching, trembling strain
On dependent fibers which,
As the mourning, disember
Reluctantly as the last
Leaf which falls in December.
She braces the sad with crisp
White handerchiefs and tearful
Friends bringing white-iced cakes in
Sympathy. Less than cheerful,
Funeral music drifts through
The church and mingles with light-
Scented lilies. Death reigns as
The lilies, white . . . snowy white.

Neill M. Myers

THE RAPE OF THE SNOW-FLAKE

Clouds, gravid with their hoary burden, passed between my sight and Venus.
My breath rushed back at me in arrogance, then it too passed on.
The clouds above gave birth to their free child, silently, without pain.
The proud mother threw her new-born bliss gently across the vacant night,
And the majesty of her gift kicked sand on the temple’s damning creed.
Each flake of love crept down, silent and individual and wantonly alive;
Each cast its own shadow across the strong cool body of its predecessor,
And soon it seemed as though a sweeping throng of bees had arisen
In angry quest of some solitary sanctum in which to live and be.
The shadows of the throng rose in silent sweep; as flake descended
so it rose.
A simple child of ice touched my lips with cold caress, then laughed
and ran;
Her body, moist and softly lingering, dissolved in the lust of my tongue.
The taste of her caress, the damp smell of her lusty love held my memory;
Titilating, tempting, testing to see if I might try and catch her sister.
My lust matched her tease, and I dangled in aching joy and waited.
I crouched in the cold, holding my breath that its wanton spirit might be quiet.
The ashen blurr of the street-lamp produced the light for my sultry scheme.
My leaping eyes at last caught the lilting sift of her silent path, and
Now I cursed myself for fear, in its haste, my heart would make me known.
Still, I steadied myself, the satin touch of her love, alive in my heart.
Her uncertain step slipped nearer and nearer, she hurried unaware,
The cool serenity of her fact almost gave halt to my rush but she stood too near.
I sprang forth, my lust, uncontained, blinded me with its fiery glare
We met, and once again her cold caress brought life to my searching lips.
I stood in the silent drift of living flakes of love, content and fulfilled.
The clouds continued their birth throes and the night gave room to their child.
Again and again the satin sift of uncertain steps made their way to land.
Again and again came the blissful flakes soothing the lust of fevered man.

by Charles F. Whitaker
ONE SPANGLED, BANGLED NIGHT

One spangled, bangled night
the world sang a wind song of
resounding absolution and
there was no thing beyond
our understanding:

- melody in shadows on
  a face, a hand
- harmony in
  street-trilled puddles and
  swirl of saffron sound
- adagio limbs making
  windbreath etchings of
delicate movement
- phantasmagorical lights flashing
  staccato tantalizations and
- a metronomic choir chanting
  an answer to the riddle
carved in ancient catacombs
and hallowed in high temples
- two syncopated people and
  melody cascading in
  magnificent cadenza
  until the double bar.
- sforzando sadness:
  whispered rainleaf incantations
  voodoo-hoodoo, new damnations

One spangled, bangled night
the world became a tone poem
in six-eight time with variations.

Barbara Reynolds

ON HAVING READ WOLFE

Impressionistic Essay By Charles F. Whitaker

An ember in the west slashes a wound in the lumpy side of the horizon. A sanguine stain seeps over the stilled sky. The stain changes from red to purple to violet as the wound dries with age. And an ember sinks deeper and deeper. To Where?

From the top of the mountain you become a deity with the stained lights of domesticity blindly blinking into the darkness at your feet. So many lights with so many shades of the same color, showing the same darkness to the so many lives. But Why?

The wind pulses as it plunges around the edge of the mountain. The blood of the seasons, casting life into the face of the mortals on high. The rustle of the leaves is the valves fluttering as this life passes through your body. The rustle ripens, rises, rushes, in a crescendo. The explosion within you must be unleashed to match the pulse. But the explosion continues. The pulse continues until the pounding drives you blind. Then it ebbs away. You do not notice how or why or when. You are suddenly alone. The gasping life courses through limbs that are, that are ... O Lost!

Is it ended? The shifting rustle of the descending crescendo reminds you that the pulse is yet there; it will return. The wind is yet fertile over the spermy dark below—a dark variegated with the egg-like glitter of stained lights. Stained lights which hold a torch for their masters. A light, a light, to see What?

From where does the pulse spring again? The wind blows a stained mist about the mountain. The mountain stands, stony, steady, still, gasping single breaths of the sweeping life. The mountain towers above, searching over the womb of the dark. The mountain stands alone, in anticipation, in hunger, in hope, for What?

Once more the exploding blindness within you succumbs to sight. You look across the spermy dark; you look, fertile with a rhythmic lunge into anticipation. The veins of a railroad lie at your feet. The great mechanical corpuscle passes, pulsing, pounding, along the veins which lead from darkness into darkness. Uncertain dust settles on the uncertain steel to be ground down by the uncertain corpuscle, an engine
bound for the uncertain. L-O-S-T, L-O-S-T, the scream of the engine mixes itself with the gasping rustle of the returning wind. A scream cast from the spermy dark into the womb of the mountain. For whose ears to hear?

And the pulsing wind begins again, and the stabbing crescendo ascends again, again, and the vacuum within you explodes again, again, again, and a voiceless echo retorts again... again... again...

The fleshless fingers of the trees clutch out in sensuous agony, blindly clasp ing into the black, crashing together as the surge of the wind continues. The trees whisper, they scream, they sigh. You are left blind with the hurt. You match the scream of the trees, wailing to the wind, to the train, to the spermy black—Set Me Free!—For What?

Then, as suddenly as it began, it halts. The wind has had its fill. You remain, unfulfilled. The fury within you has only reached a silent plateau. For how long? You know not. You lie in your bondage. The chains arresting the explosion within you clash sporadically about, and the echo eats into your soul.

O Lost! O Ghost!
Must I roam this dust-filled land?
O Angel! O Ghost!
Ever ask I for thy hand?

My heart is a vacuum. It must be filled.
My soul is exploding. It must be free.
My blood is singing. It must be heard.
My sperm is screaming. It must have life.
O Ghost, take my hand!
O Angel, lead me! O Angel, O Angel...

GENTLY ROARING LIKE THE SUN
sun-wet
sweat-bathed
sand-pocked
I feel Indian-brown and smelly
a red and yellow awning striped
against the distant lapping sun
the yellow
mellowing sun
jabbing with therapeutic fire
fingers
at my bare and passive back
to impale me on this smiling lump
of summer earth I hug cool and dark
to my stomach in a stupor of
shell vacuousness
gently roaring
like the sun.

Carol Blankenship
THE CHESS PLAYERS
You were not a king
or a knight
but a Greek god
and Greeks don't play chess
But you were molded of
the same ivory that sits before me
and statues I find in musty books.
Our castles were built on sand
as we prayed to the sun to never
let summer end
But the bishops moved on the dark
squares and green turned brown
and slowly we retreated.
We lost our queen first and then
desperately
raced to get a pawn to the border.
But the pawn was lost
and now
there are only pawns.
Libby Thompson

TIME SPENT DURING RECESS
See that little boy?
He's a bubble
Blown from an infinite
Bubble-pipe.
He began wet,
And soapy,
And transparent;
He's becoming dry,
And dirty,
And rubbery.
Better he should burst
Before He crumbles—
Burst into freedom,
And reburst into infinity,
And leave a mess
And a memory.
Doug Hundley

TIME COMES
Time comes when a
mountain must fall
And
Fruits of a year crash
splatteringly
Like over-ripe apples
A time when old-folk
patter
Is drained like emptiness
A time to don an iron
shirt
And
Face a savage black sunset
With meaning
Sam Edwards
DANCING DUSTY SEAMEN

The libation of the morning cast its praises on my ceiling.
Silken strands of sunlight weave their path up o'er my sill;
They trumpet out their greeting in a manner soft and still
And the echo of their shadow lifts the dust about the room.

The dust of countless footsteps whirls and dances in the light;
Dark and dancing seamen sail in golden rivulets,
Dancing seamen seining on my ceiling with their nets,
Dusty, dusty, seamen from an unknown shadow's womb.

They speak no word, nor stray they in the casting task of morn,
But do dart and dive as seagulls at the breaking of new waves
Slaying golden cod of sunlight with splashing blow of staves:
Dangling, dusty, seamen, crying joy at each new kill.

Dervish wisps of darkness, dancing shadows on my ceiling,
Dusty, drunken seamen, singing mirth as on they sail,
Hear the seining seaman's laughter as it echoes their travail;
With each gust of life they giggle, the sole owners of their will.

Charles F. Whitaker
FROM THE GRAY OF THE SUBWAY

Short Story By Neill M. Myers

The doors closed, Marywill Powell looked nervously up and down the car for a seat. There was a vacant spot next to a Negro woman dressed in a brown wool suit with a fur collar; beneath it she wore an orange sweater. Marywill fidgeted with her black kid gloves to stall for time. At the other end of the car there was one empty place beside a girl with a washed-out complexion, highly teased black hair, and no lipstick. Marywill sat there.

The subway wheeled from side to side and shook her insides. Neat and slim in a grey jersey suit, Marywill was a visitor to New York. It was her second trip on a subway, her first alone. The first, with Don, had been exciting; this time it was frightening.

The girl with no lipstick was reading a newspaper. Marywill could see the headlines: BARNETT DEFIES COURT AGAIN; TROOPS MAY BE SENT INTO MISS. She took a cigarette from her purse, but returned it as she realized she couldn’t smoke underground.

The train stopped abruptly and the pale girl got off, her newspaper under her arm. The subway was more crowded with this loading and a sleepy old man took the seat next to her. Two Negro boys stood in front of her, holding the metal grips extended from the ceiling. The stocky one wore a dirty olive sweater, the other was dressed in a coat and tie. His skin was smooth and chocolate, his hair nearly straight, but his nostrils were wide-spread and his lips protruding. Marywill lowered her head as her eyes met his hard stare.

The train was dark with them now, and these “yankees” thought nothing of sitting with them. But Marywill noticed that they didn’t talk to each other.

She forgot the tired and grouchy looking people in the crowded car. She thought of home in Mississippi, of iced tea at dinner and of Della’s cooking. Big, black, laughing Della. How different, how out of place Della would be with these black sophisticates of her own race. Marywill guessed that she missed Della as much as anyone in the family, but she was glad that she wasn’t home now. Glad she had decided to go to school in Virginia rather than at the University where all of her friends were going. What heartbreak they must be feeling with riot, controversy, pressures squeezing them together and stretching them apart.

Marywill opened her American government book and tried to do Monday’s assignment. She couldn’t see the words. Even in her satisfaction with her own school, her happiness in being in New York to see Don, she couldn’t forget her friends and family; she needed to be with them . . . Troops marching in on her own people. Federal, “yankee” troops who were under the command of a government which refused to understand her people. And she could do nothing. Her thoughts whirled with the rocking of the car; she wanted to cry. To cry out against the people here; the well-dressed blacks who thought that money could erase their heritage, their background; to cry out against the apathetic whites who read the propaganda of the northern newspapers without question; against her professors who thought that she was a prejudiced, irrational individual as far as the civil rights issue was concerned.

Marywill looked up; the two Negro boys were laughing loudly. She pulled her skirt down over her knees and scooted close against the back of her seat. She wanted to throw up at the sight of their snickering; to tell them that she hated them and Della, and Shobell the yardman, and everyone of them for the trouble they were causing.

She could only think of the Saturday night her father had been awakened by one of them wailing, “Oh Mr. Jim, Mr. Jim, John Henry’s done gone an’ shot his wife. Come quick, Mr. Jim, she’s mo’ napt to bleed hussef to death.” And Daddy would get out of bed, rush John Henry’s wife (or Napoleon, Jake, Nub, or Charlie’s wife) to the hospital. The next day he would see the sheriff, perhaps pay a fine, and get John Henry out of trouble.

She remembered her third grade year when her mother had asked her to give one of her dolls to Lula Jane. Lula Jane was Shobell’s daughter and was sick with pneumonia. Marywill had thought that terribly unfair of her mother, but she had given Lula Jane her newest doll. She smiled as she remembered her mother’s soft, easy persuasion. Lula Jane had gotten well in less than a month and had never so much as thanked her for the rubber baby that wet its pants and cried real tears.

It seemed that all her life she had been giving precious dolls to ungrateful Lula Janes.

Frowning, she stared at the signs along the walls of the subway; Miss Subway, a sexy blonde in a low-neck blouse, sat smilingly between
a Marlboro ad and Smoky the Bear. Below her were three small children, huddled sleepily next to one another. It made no difference to them that the one in the middle was black. Marywill flinched. Let them do it this way up here! If they didn’t care, then neither did she . . . If they were outnumbered by a blackened mass of ignorance, if families of illegitimate children ate up their state tax money, if their Negroes had been vexed and stirred from a contented state by a communist-infiltrated NAACP, if they knew all this, yet gave their colored folk work, help, money, friendship on a basis which both the white and the black understood . . . maybe then these people would live their way and let her people live theirs. If only they would give them time to adjust, time to build, time to conform naturally, the white and the black of the South would become grey peaceably.

Marywill swept her poufed brown hair from her neck and sighed. The dirt, the heat, the hardness of the crowd about her seemed to fuse into a mass of ugliness. She wanted to run; run to Mama, to Daddy, to Mississippi!

The conductor was gone, so instead she rebelled against all she hated here by smoking a cigarette. No one reprimanded her; they didn’t care. That was the thing up here, no one cared.

The car jerked still at Grand Central and Marywill left the whirr of the subway. Quickly she walked to her hotel, tired from the pinching of her high heels. Seven o’clock. She would have to hurry to be ready for dinner with Don by eight. At last in her room on the fourth floor of the Biltmore, she stepped out of her shoes and into the softness of the carpet. Undressing hurriedly, she rushed to turn on her bath water.

Waiting for the tub to fill, she decided to write a letter home. Looking soft and fragile in her slip and stocking feet, Marywill pulled two sheets of hotel-personalized stationery and a ballpoint pen from the desk drawer. She wrote in large print:

DEAR DELLA,

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES YOU SENT ME. THEY WERE AS GOOD AS EVER. I LOVE YOU.

MARYWILL

Her bath water overflowed.
THE LOFTY HUMAN MIND

The lofty human mind—what it has achieved!
It shoots fireworks at planets
And makes night day incandescently.
It can fly, is amphibian in a tin can,
And can even make it rain.
Its tall buildings graze the clouds
and men go faster than sound.
It dreams of the day when there will
be no crooked noses
It even contemplates making man in a
test tube.

I bet He laughs sometimes.

Libby Thompson

HAPPINESS IS A SELDOM THING.

I'm not happy when I'm sober
Unless it's in October
When the world is dying.
April has a bit of magic
But the month of June is tragic—
Weddings, crying, sighing.

Thanksgiving dinner fills me
And Christmas really kills me
While everyone is giving.
The birth of Santa Clauses
In Bethlehem sure causes
Lots of hellish living.

Celebration needs no season;
Mother's Day is ample reason
For spirits to rejoice.
If you don't believe it, ask her;
The spirits make the master.
Master, hear my voice.

Doug Hundley

COLLEGE

A bright medallion
turning cankerous red
and slowly falling
so that when you go behind the
murky green of the trees and look
for the bright after the cool
you see only sparkled plaster
painted across the sky
like fool's gold.

Libby Thompson

TO YOU, WITH LOVE

Make yourself a sponge my brother;
Forget your father and your mother;
Untie those blasted apron strings
And start to think of other things.

Everyone has got a lot
That you would like, or maybe not.
Eat it all in spite of that;
Digest the lean; spit out the fat.

Preachers preach and teachers teach,
But what they say just cannot reach
A mind's unceasing hungry goal
That yearns to search from pole to pole

To find an answer and another.
Make yourself a sponge my brother.

Doug Hundley
Minnie Sanders rolled over in bed, and the day was already in the windows, dull, heavy with wet tree limbs and muffled trains three blocks away. She moved her head slightly on the pillow and felt the coolness of the pillow case three inches from where her face lay. The quilt had pulled loose at the foot of the bed, and cold air violated the feathery warmth of her bed. The room was cold, and the clock ticked loud in the sullen silence. At the kitchen door the cat scratched quietly with dew paws, and her mother snored softly in the front bedroom. A truck passed on the street and backfired into the thin morning air.

The door to Edward's room opened, and she heard him creak the floor boards in his sock feet. She pulled the quilt over her nervously, and the tacking tickled her nose. She sniffed, sat up in bed, and touched the slick linoleum floor with bare boney feet. Her dress hung in neat folds over the top of a chair, the folds breaking the garish orange pattern of splattered roses. She took off her white nainsook gown and reached for the dress. Edward would be wanting his breakfast.

In the kitchen Edward sat humped at the table. He traced the design of the tablecloth with his thumb and grunted when Minnie set the gold-ringed mug that said Brother on it in front of him. They said little to each other, and Minnie waited until Edward had finished and crossed his knife and fork over the plate before she began to jerkily place food on her plate.

"Have you got everything ready?"
"Yes."
"Do you remember what I told you to say when they come?"
"Yes, Edward."
"Don't make it sound like I told you to say it when they come."
"They're coming today?"

Edward looked at her with surprise. "Well of course they're coming today. Isn't that just what I just said? Can't you even remember that today is Friday? They said they'd come today."

Minnie snapped her head up and stared at the sweet potato vine in the pint jar on the cabinet. The roots were matted into the square shape of the jar. Some of them were almost white in the muddy water, and every week the jar grew fuller. Minnie idly wondered how much longer the potato vine could live in it.

"Minnie, are you listening? I said something to you."
She swung her gaze back to Edward out of the corner of her eye. She fixed her look just below his chin at the top of his unbuttoned shirt where two wrinkles met in a "v" that the top button would have covered.

"What are you thinking about, Minnie?" Edward softened his voice a little.

"Edward?" Her voice quavered slightly.

"Yes?"

"Nothing. You got a clean shirt, Edward. I ironed it yesterday."

"I don't want a clean shirt. All I want is for you to act like you're not just standing there. Act like you know what I'm talking to you about. Try to remember what I told you to say." Edward pressed his thumb down in the middle of a flower on the tablecloth in disgust.

"Today is Friday." Minnie clutched the aluminum strip on the cabinet behind her.

"Minnie . . ." He shook his head wearily. "Sometimes I just don't know, I just don't know about you . . ."

"Wait, what I mean is, I'm supposed to tell those men that you're sorry that you can't be here, but you had to go to work, and now I'll have it easier that Momma is gone, and I'm supposed to carry out her things in the best suitcase so they won't talk. Is that right, Edward?"

She looked hard and scared at the blurred floor and heard herself. After she stood a few minutes, she raised her eyes and looked at Edward in a fearful sidelong glance to see if she had done all right.

"That's right, Minnie, that's better, only try not to run it together so like you had to get it said in a hurry. And remember to say how happy you think she'll be with them other old women. Remember that, Minnie. Why don't you iron some today or something so you won't have to just sit and wait for them to come." Edward picked up his dinner bucket and left for work. He did not look in on his mother.

Minnie sat down at the kitchen table and looked again at the sweet potato vine. The leaves were all still very green and smooth, there were hardly any brown spots. Minnie liked the vine. Once Edward had knocked it over getting a glass and threatened to throw it away. Minnie hid it after that, in the bottom shelf of the cabinet until the leaves started to turn yellow, and the water got low in the can. Then she brought it back out again and set it farther away from the sink where it wouldn't be in Edward's way.

She got up and let the cat in. He walked with a proud arched back around the kitchen and returned to her chair to rub contentedly around her ankles. Minnie reached down and patted him on the head. "You're a pretty cat. Were you waiting for Edward to leave? Edward doesn't like you, does he? I do, though . . . You're a pretty cat."

Her mother stirred in the front bedroom. "Minnie?"

"That's Momma! Get out of the way, cat. That's Momma. I'm coming, Momma!"

"Minnie, where are you?"

"Right here, Momma, I'm coming." She walked through the hall past the folding bed and into her mother's room. "Here I am, Momma. How are you today?"

"Is that you, Minnie?" The old woman peered out of watery morning eyes.

"It's me, Momma."

"Where's Amos?"

"Where's Daddy? Oh . . . He's already gone to work—yes, he's gone to the field for the day."

"Already gone to work? Did you fix him some breakfast?"

"Yes, Momma. He ate a good breakfast."

"Has Edward gone to school like a good boy?"

"Edward has gone to school like he should."

"Edward! Where is he? I wish he was as easy to see as you are, Minnie. You've never given me a minute's trouble."

"I guess I'll iron some today, Momma. Edward's got a couple more shirts that need doing, and you've got one more gown to iron and put in the suitcase."

"Minnie, you be careful ironing that white organdy pinafore of yours. I think you're really too little to be ironing that, but you got to learn how to iron so you'll know how when you get grown. Why don't you just iron that old white shirt you wear to the field to keep the sun off your arms?"

"I'll be careful, Momma."

"Amos! Amos! Come here and kill this bug!"

"That's not a bug, Momma, that's only them little round circles in that piece of that quilt block. Hush, now." Minnie walked over to the window and smoothed out the lace curtains. "It's a pretty day today, Momma, a good day for plowing. Don't look like it's going to rain any for several days. It's a good day for Daddy to plow . . ."
The old woman picked dryly at a feather coming through the pillow. Then she tried to put it back. She watched Minnie out of suspicious eyes.

"...I liked to follow along behind Daddy when he plowed, especially after it got warm enough to go barefooted. Edward always wanted to pick up the worms Daddy turned up so he could go fishing, but I liked best just to follow along and mash up the clods with my feet."

"You are a good little girl, Minnie."

Minnie smiled softly. "Momma, do you remember how Daddy used to come in from the field with dirt in the cuffs of his overalls? That was funny, wasn't it, Momma... only you almost got mad when you went to wash them, and they got the water all muddy." She picked up the gray ceramic dog off the dresser and rubbed out the thin dust outline where it had been setting.

"You are a good little girl, Minnie...I was glad when you were a girl. Amos wanted you to be a boy because he said we needed another son, but I was glad you were a girl because girls aren't so much trouble to see after. I told Amos he'd be proud of you once he saw how nice girls were. I told him he wouldn't have to bother about seeing after you. Mothers know how to raise their girls, and they don't need no men to help them."

Minnie hid her face against the wall. The paper felt cool and dry and smelled like dried paste and old paper. She shut her eyes very tightly and wondered what time it was. The clock on the dresser had stopped. She had forgotten what time Edward said the men were coming, but she thought it was probably about time.

"Daddy brought me a bunch of flowers from the field one day before we moved. Don't you remember, Momma? They were blue and pretty and sort of fuzzy, only he laughed when I said that."

"You cried then, didn't you, Minnie?" Her mother collected her thoughts and smoothed her hand over the sheet. "I told you not to cry, that men don't like to see little girls cry, that he wouldn't bring you any more flowers if you didn't hush, but you ran and hid behind the folding bed."

"Momma, it won't be long now until the men come." She said it in a rush, flinging out the words on the old woman. "You be quiet when they come. Don't you say anything about Daddy."

"Amos will be in from the field in a minute, Minnie. You'd better set the table and go get some radishes from the garden for dinner. Your daddy likes radishes. Don't pick the big ones that have already gone to seed. They've already got pithy inside and burn your mouth."

Minnie bit her lower lip and thought about the fuzzy blue flowers.

They grew in little bunches in fields, sometimes down under weeds so that you could hardly see them. Her Daddy had never brought her any more of them. She had cried, and her mother had chided her for hiding behind the folding bed. Edward had laughed and called her a sissy girl, and she didn't pick any more of the blue flowers.

The old woman broke into her thoughts. "Edward bought you a dress once, didn't he? What did it look like, Minnie, I don't remember. You know how boys are, they don't like to buy dresses for girls. Edward said it was all his money, that you didn't help him much with that patch of cucumbers, but I told him to buy you a dress. What color was it, Minnie?"

"It had orange flowers in it, Momma. Sort of like this one I've got on. Edward likes orange." She plucked at the starched ruffle on her pocket. Somebody knocked at the door. "I guess that's the men, Momma."

They came into her mother's room and gently picked up the old woman in her white gown and carried her to the car. Minnie walked behind carrying the best suitcase.

"Where am I going?"

"Momma, remember the nice men I told you about? They've come to take you to see some other nice ladies. Now you just be still and let me tuck the covers in around you before they start." When she had finished, she stepped back, and they shut the door, "Goodbye, Momma."

"Goodbye, Minnie, you are such a sweet little girl..." Her voice floated querulously out of the car window as the driver started the car.

Minnie went back into the house and paused by the folding bed. She ran her finger between the tufts of its chenille covering. She pulled a chair over the floor boards to the closet door in the hall. That way she could reach the big box on the closet shelf. It had dust on the top because Minnie hadn't looked in it for a long time. When she lifted the top, the dust tickled her nose, but she soon found the old shirt. It was about halfway down in the box. It was too small to button across the orange dress, and it didn't cover her wrists all the way as it once had from the sun. But it covered her arms, and little girls needed their arms covered when they went out in the sun to hunt blue flowers.
DEDICATION

You don't think I know you
but I do.
I know how you grasp a book
with tense fingers
and how the small
furrows deepen
as you turn the pages.
leaving on each page a greasy thumbprint.

I know you
how you may read this
and laugh
or explain it in terms polysyllabic
or even worse,
care too much.

I know you
but you don't know me
and you never shall
I do not write for you
but for one
who can laugh
and not explain in loud words
with eyes wide
and mouth drawn tight
And one who would never care to know me.

Libby Thompson

FINDING FUNDS IN FIELDSPOt

Short Story By Algie Ray Smith

I need sum money. Not Saturday nite money, but reel money. As Paw says: money money. The kind that makes your pants pocket look embarrass'n. The kind that when you go in the pool hall, you keep your hand on. I need fifty dollars.

And I reckon on to git it!

I could a-married up with Ida Jo Timble fer tin dollars. One month a-workin on the milk truck and old Ida'd be mine. Two fer the preacher man, two fer Ida's Paw, and the rest fer Ida to set up house with.

But didn't I tellya? I let Ida go. She used to be my sparky, but I give her up. I had tuh. I done been prepositioned by a gal from Boston. Besides Ida done married up with Jeb Richardson, who works down the bank.

Here on to is how it happened:

That durn girls' school stuck roots here in Fieldspot, and I got a hankerin' to go over there and look round. Ida done told me not to ever do that. But I did: I went one day with old man Shepherd on the milk run. While I was over there I met me a gal from Boston. Prettiest thing I ever blinked at. All red-lipped and golden-haired. Pitcher book like.

Anyway she saw me in town on Saturday nites, and I took her places. Mainly to the drug store. She never would go to the pool hall with me. Couldn't figure that one out. I bet she could of been a good shot, tuh. She did take a drink of "shine" with me one night, but she didn't like it right purt.

Wal, I got sweet on her. We'd hold hand in the drug store and look at picture books. And she'd giggle! Dadgum if she weren't just like me when I looked at them books. Them girls werein all that silly stuff, or none at all. Enough to make a feller laugh.

I think it were the giggle that got me most about her. When she giggled, little furrers come in her cheeks and her eye tops fluttered. She had funny eye tops. One week they was short, one week long. One week they was blue, one week green. Kinda strange ain't it, but I liked her all the more. I could git a quarter any Saturday just showin' her off in town. Folks liked to look at her so.

About three weeks ago we got to walking round the hills a lot. Hope—that's her name, my Boston gal. Hope would pick up things and splain em to me. One time she picked up a rock and said tuh me, "A rolling stone gathers no moss."
“Go on. Git,” I told her. “Now ain’t that summery.”

I didn’t believe her at first, so I rolled that rock down a little bluff. And I’ll be hanged if that rock didn’t do just like she said. There weren’t no moss on it a-tall. I’m saying to you that Hope’s right smart.

She said other things, tuh! Once we had stopped by Johnson Crick and she up and said, “Roll on, oh mighty waves, roll on!”

Yuh know what that durn crick did? It just gurgled at her and kept right on flowing. Dangest thing I ever saw. Making nature listen tuh her that way. I asked Hope if she could make the water do a two-step or something, but she said, “Not today.” But I betcha she could have!

Anyway, like I said, we got tuh walkin round in the hills. Hope’ud take my hand and say, “Oh, Lucious, are the woods not beautiful?” And I’d say, “They are not.” I didn’t want to disagree with her. After all she was the only one who didn’t call me Luke. And that made me tingle to hear her say, “Lucious, are the woods not beautiful?”

If she said the woods were on fire, I’d set a match to em rather than make her out a lie. That Hope was all truth and wise and—wal, I liked her.

As I keep sayin’, we like to walk round in the hills. And a few days back, Hope said, “Lucious, I’m afraid the summer is about over.” And I’ll be durned if the summer weren’t bout over.

“Lucious,” she said, “all things come to an end. The tide comes to the shore and flings driftwood upon the beach. The tide recedes and the wood is left ashore alone.”

Now I stopped and done sum reckonin on that! I reckon the A and P truck did bring the Tide to the store, but I didn’t know about it flinging any wood on any bench. Nor did I know that the Tide boxes had any seeds in em. Probably some special offer they was having. I let on like I understood.

“Lucious,” she said after that, “kiss me! Kiss me, Lucious!”

And I did! And she run all the way down the hill! I was just plum to weak tuh follow.

Next day Hope went back to Boston. The whole school went I reckon cause ain’t nobody there now. Ain’t nothing ceptin’ a sign by the road saying ‘Closed Thanks to the people of Fieldspot for a wonderful summer The Fieldspot Finishing School for Girls.’

That was almost two weeks ago and Hope’s gone. I been a-mooin like. Paw says I ain’t the same Luke. He thinks I’m ripped cause Ida Timble run off with Jeb Richardson. But I ain’t. I’m a-wantin fifty dollars.

You see yesterday I hiked over to Martinvil’ and went in the bus depot. I asked this poker player who was standing in this cage if he were in charge of the busses. He said, “No, I only sell tickets to ride on the busses.”

“Well,” I said, “I want a bus to Boston.”

“Boston?”

“Yea,” I answered. “It ain’t in Arkansas. It’s in Massachusetts.”

“I know it’s in Massachusetts, boy.”

“Well?”

“Well, boy, what are you going to Boston for?”

I didn’t want to tell him the truth, so I made up a story. I told him I was going to help with the bean crop, or maybe work in the Boston Bean factory itself. I told him I was right struck on beans.

“Well,” he said, “I guess I can get you to Boston. You’ll have to go through Memphis. Then to Louisville. I’ll check on it for the rest of the way.”

He messed with a bunch of books and wrote some figures on a paper. Finally he said, “It’ll cost you fifty dollars. One way.”

I told him that I was only goin one way: the best way. And then I left.

Now you see why I need fifty dollars!

Fifty dollars! Where have I seen that before? I remember now. In the post office. There’s a shingle on the wall by all them convict pitchers. It says: Fifty dollars reward for the discovery of Moonshine stills believed to be operating in this vicinity. Contact your nearest officer of the law.

I don’t know where any shine stills are, but I’ve got a plan. I’m going to tell Frank Rosser and Eb Fisher all about it. With their help I can git that fifty dollars.

Here it is two weeks past. Hope’s been gone fer nigh on to a month. I found Frank and Eb. They listened to my plan, but they didn’t want to help none. So I lugged some scrap barrels and pipes out into the woods by myself and built a right nice still.

Oh, it’s shakey and smokes a lot, but I reckon it’ll look reel enough when the time comes. See. What I’m going to do is git me a still workin.
I mean really workin. I'm gonna to run off a few quarts of shine. Leave em lyin about when I do. And then go tell the postmaster I found a still. I'm gonna git that fifty dollars shore and light tail for Boston. Simple?

Last night I swiped sum corn from Paw's crib. He'll think the rats done it. I got sum molasses from the cellar to use for sweetin'. Where I got the rest of the stuff is my secret. Now I'm goin to start a batch cookin'. I ought to have that fifty dollars soon.

* * * * *

Well, hello. What do you see? In just two days I got me some fine stuff. And I mean fine. I sampled it myself. It tastes good. I might save some and take it to Boston with me. Maybe Hope'll want some now to drink. The other she tasted probably weren't no good.

In another week I should have enough shine to make it look convincin' when I tell the postmaster. He'll ring up the sheriff and they'll come out and find my still. I'll tell em I found it while possum huntin'. They'll pat me on the back and give me fifty dollars. I just know they will. I can see all them Boston beans now. And won't Hope be surprised to see me.

I'll just git off in Boston at the bus station. Hope'll probably be at the drug store. I can ask someone shore where the drug store is. Anybody could tell me. And if Hope ain't in the drug store, I'll just ask the man in what holler does Hope live.

And it won't be like I was goin uninvited. That day in the hills Hope said, "If you are ever in Boston, drop in."

I told her I would and she said, "One if by land, two if by sea."

Seeing as to how I'll be goin by bus, I'll take one. That way she'll know I'm coming by the road. Yes, sir. I'll hang a lantern from that bus and Hope can see me coming for miles. I ain't dumb. We sent messages like that many nights when Paw and I was frog giggin'. And I know Paul Revere: he makes skillets and things. I just might look him up tuh.

* * * * *

Now ain't it funny how time changes things? Here it is another day and I'm all comfortable on this little bed. Guess what? I'm in jail. I clean forgot about all that smoke, I reckon. The sheriff came out himself and caught me. I can't make him believe that I weren't going to sell that shine. Well, I can go to Boston another time. I don't reckon on its moving.

Frank and Eb was in to see me this morning. They both had new hats and new shirts. They said Frank's aunt died and left him fifty dollars. I guess some people have all the luck!

IDENTITY

Oh, you were Zeus
and I was Aphrodite
You dispatched thunderbolts
to Pan when young and flighty.
You were Apollo
when Iscariot arose
And I was Diana
hunter and hunted with a silver bow.

But reason was Pandora.

Libby Thompson

METAMORPHOSIS

A butterfly emerged from an ugly worm
Which came out of a grey-black womb.
Beautiful and silver, she saw the world
Glittering and gay after her dark tomb.

She wandered, her wings dripping gold,
And everywhere, she gave and loved.

Til one day, the evil ones
Picked her wings and sucked her golden blood.

Libby Thompson
Nickie handed her suitcase to the man in the worn blue uniform as she got on the bus. Already she was sorry she had worn the brown tweed suit. The skirt was too straight, the bus steps too high; her feet were beginning to hurt from the pinched tightness of her alligator heels. She turned and erased her brown long enough to smile “Thank you” to the bus driver, and curled a neatly gloved hand around the handle of the large white suitcase. She walked straingly toward two empty seats near the back, the suitcase resting heavily against her thigh. Blocking the passengers trying to get past her, she heaved the bag into the rack above. Nickie moved aside to let Margaret Dawson have the seat next to the window. Awkwardly getting into her seat, Nickie prepared for the trip she hated: three hours of jolting, smoke-stuffy air, cramped legs and an upright girdle.

The bus was filled with girls going home for Christmas. Silly, sophisticated girls wearing kid gloves and gold, charm-heavy bracelets. Margaret began chatting at once. “Only three hours until I see Bill, Nickie. Just think, only three more hours.”

“Uh-huh.” She was tired of thinking, tired of thinking about tests, about papers, and most of all, tired of thinking about Bill. Nickie stared at the man sitting across the aisle from her. She didn’t want to think about him either; his clothes were grimy, his shoes muddy and he was picking his nose. Disgustedly, she lit a cigarette and stared at the animalistic fur hat in front of her.

Margaret was saying something about hoping Bill would like the sweater she had knitted him and she wondered what he was giving her—she really couldn’t imagine—but it wouldn’t be anything like expensive perfume because Bill hated perfume and it wouldn’t be a bracelet because he gave her that last Christmas—It could be a sweater, but she hoped not. There was something so embarrassing about a boy’s knowing what size sweater you wore—but it would be...

Nickie nodded and closed her mind to the incessant rattling; without thinking she stared across the aisle. That dirty old man again and a nasty little boy sitting next to him, his nose pressed against the dirty window and his greasy blond hair curled over the collar of his jacket.

Nickie turned her head, but Margaret was still talking. She felt as though the sides of the bus were closing in, pressing her tightly against the things she wanted to forget. It was like the feeling she got in a crowded elevator; no escaping, nowhere to go except up or down.

She leaned her head on the back of the seat and closed her eyes. Christmas. Home. Sally’s wedding. Parties. No Bruce. Parties. Bruce. Her stomach felt squishy inside. What would she do when she first saw him, what could she tell her friends . . . how would she explain something she didn’t understand herself? She wouldn’t. She would tell all of her noisy friends nothing. The whole vacation would be nothing, as hollow and empty as the ache in her stomach. And the family. The thought of still having to pretend to believe in a Santa Claus for her little brother Jeff repelled her. Surely by now he would have figured out that it was Mother and Dad, sily, extravagant in their gifts. The presents would be heaped beneath the tree, heavy with tinsel and lavish ornaments—useless, expensive gifts from her grandparents, duplicates from her friends, nothing from Bruce. The ceiling was closing in now.

Unwillingly, she opened her eyes and met the gaze of the old man. Embarrassed, his eyes flitted to the front. In that split-moment, something in the sadness of his gaze compelled her to look at him. Unconsciously, she traced every detail of his face. The corners of his eyelids drooped, as did the corners of his mouth. Each line of his wrinkled face seemed to be pulled by some inner drawstring to his eyes; with glassy-sadness they stared nowhere. His adam’s apple protruded rudely above the dusty blue and yellow shirt. One of his hands was resting on the ragged jean of the boy beside him, the other stretched tightly over the arm rest. His nails were thick and pathetically black-rimmed. Nickie closed her eyes and wished for sleep.

Two hours later Margaret nudged her. “We’re only twenty minutes away, Nick, you’d better comb your hair and fix your face.” Nickie rubbed the mascara from beneath her eyes and re-did her make-up. She wished for some toothpaste to get rid of the cotton-stale taste in her mouth, but only lit another cigarette. She felt better somehow, even vaguely excited as the scenery no longer was nondescript but familiar, refreshingly old.

The bus pulled into the station with a series of jerks. Margaret was babbling; she had spotted Bill. Nickie could see her little brother jumping, waving wildly beside her parents.

One last jerk. Quicky Nickie slipped from her seat and reached for her suitcase overhead; but a brown-strong hand with black rimmed nails grasped the white handle. The down-turned mouth turned upward, showing yellowed teeth as the old man handed her the bag. “Merry Christmas, Miss.”

“Thank . . . thank you” she stammered, “Merry Christmas to you, to . . . to both of you.” She smiled weakly at the small blond boy beside him.

Black mascara streaking softly-pinked cheeks, Nickie ran to her family and grabbed the small jumping boy with the tousled blond hair.
SONNY AND THE YELLOW BALL

A Short Story by Algie Ray Smith

Sonny squats precariously on the dull, blue-grey bench that extends along one wall of Mogen’s Pool Parlor. To the casual observer he appears much like a wet opossum: angular chin, rather long nose, pinkish, slightly recessed eyes, and a crop of fuzzy, white hair. His nose continuously twitches as though his nostrils were searching for fresh smells. His head operates very much like a swivel, seemingly turning free of any movements of his neck. His pink eyes blink optimistically at all they encompass.

At nine years of age, Sonny has found his world amid the clatter of multi-colored balls rolling across a green sea. He admires the yellow ivory most of all: its magnificent position at the head of the triangle endures with herculean prowess the initial assault of the white thunder. Sonny likes to think of the white cue ball as being thunder, for “it knocks the thunder out of the colored ships.”

And the yellow one-ball is a mystical ship to Sonny! It protects all the others at the start and is the first to be sacrificed to the white god: the first to fall prey to the leather whirlpools, while the tornado-thunder-god speeds on to other victims. After the one-ball is gone, Sonny loses interest in the game.

Sonny has two ambitions at the present: to get a dollar and to get a one-ball. The first of these ambitions he wins and loses daily; the latter remains a hoped-for dream, as of yet unfulfilled. Sonny never realizes that in the events of a day, a dollar passes through his hands. He can only comprehend a dollar as being something rectangular, green, that which other people have. How he envies the men who glaringly shove the crumpled bills across the pool tables!

As much as Sonny loves the sport of the colored balls, he equally as much despises the mimicry of the pinball machines. He has regarded them, from his first encounter, as vile and deceitful. “I don’t like ‘em,” he would say; and he would purse his lips and stick out his tongue at them. To him they were princes of mockery who, with their flashing lights and metallic balls got down on all-fours and challenged all-comers.

It was not as much their gilded raiments, or their electric pulses, that he abhorred as it was their desecration of the slim, green bills. Dollar bills were of no importance to the machines. The bills could not be crumpled and passed across the glass enclosure. They had to be transformed into deflated counterparts of the shining balls that bumped and crawled down the pegged boards.

But Sonny was not unaware of the value of nickels. In fact, nickels were his livelihood: dollars his dream. Without the nickels he could not continue in his poolroom world. Without the nickels he could not eat, nor could he enter the green ocean where he sent the yellow ball in pursuit of the white.
Sonny gets nickels every day; he obtains them in various ways. Often times he will squat on the blue-grey bench and, with an eye of indifference watch the pinball machines. While a half-drunk worshipper stuffs nickels down the omnivorous slot of a machine, Sonny will count the coins carefully. He knows that there are forty nickels to a roll and that forty nickels must enter the slot.

When Sonny counts only thirty-nine coins, or on occasion thirty-eight, he will slip from his perch and bound deftly to the machine and examine, with a probing finger, the large slot in the front. Often his dexterity will be rewarded; and a nickel that the machine has refused, he will accept. If he has found no nickel in the return slot, he will then run his hand along the top of the glass enclosure and perhaps find a nickel that has lodged itself there. If no nickel is still to be found, Sonny will drop beneath the machine and scoop up the coin wrapper. The wrapper, more than once, has contained the lost coin.

The player, in his eagerness to give his nickels away, might discard the wrapper while a single coin unknowingly remained within. Sonny’s intensive search requires only seconds, and he will be squatting on the bench again before the player returns with more nickels.

Sonny has other ways of obtaining nickels. Men will purposely pitch them into the spitoon at the end of Sonny’s bench. He will leap from the bench and plunge his hand into the conglomeration of cigar butts, tobacco chews, and black-brown spittle. He will fish purposely in the mass until the coin is retrieved, withdraw the object of his intent, wipe the nickel on the front of his jeans and smile: All to the delight of his beneficiary.

“What do you say, boy?” his contributor will ask.

“I say, ‘Thank you,’ ” Sonny will reply and leap back upon his bench.

The man will turn to any who share his delight. “Thubboy needed thubnick. I hate these him takemoney widoutwurking forit.”

Lately men have tried to pitch nickels in the toilet at the rear of the poolroom, but a screen covering over the latrine has made it too easy for Sonny. The screen was placed over the latrine to catch the beer-whiskey-wine bottles, but the screen also catches the nickels. All Sonny has to do is dash in, pluck the nickel from the screen, and dash out again. Hardly any effort at all is required. “I ain’t getting my nick- el’s wuth; it ain’t fair,” the nickel tosser would exclaim after Sonny’s quick recovery of the unclaimed coin. Few nickels are tossed in the latrine any more.

Once upon a time Sonny even earned quarters, but that was before the accident occurred. Jim Hensley, who regarded himself as champion of the “frog stcker”, used to make bets that he could cut the pill in two if Arn would hold it. Arn accepted the bet, but wouldn’t hold the pill. Sonny came up and volunteered his services. “Okay, boy,” Jim said. “And if I win, I’ll give you a quarter.” Sonny held the pill between his thumb and index finger. Jim placed Sonny’s hand against the wall, then backed to the opposite side of the poolroom. With everyone watching, and thinking it just another joke, Jim threw the “frog stcker”. Sonny didn’t even flinch as the knife split the pill in two and buried into the wall. Jim collected the twenty dollars and Sonny collected his quarter.

“I told you I could do her,” Jim guffawed. “Shore easy money.”

Jim and Sonny worked together for about a month after that: Sonny getting a quarter each time. But one night Jim came into the poolroom roaring drunk and betting an hundred to twenty that he could hit the pill blindfolded. Arn Hanson saw a chance to get more than his money back. He had lost thirty dollars to Jim by previous bets; so he took Jim up immediately. Sonny, who now believed that Jim was the world champion of the “frog stcker,” was more than eager to hold the pill.

Everyone watching thought surely that this bet had to be a joke. They laughed loudly when Arn tied a red bandanna over Jim’s eyes; they slapped each other on the back when Jim drew back the “frog stcker.” But they moaned in disbelief when the knife cartwheeling through the air and pinned Sonny’s wrist to the wall!

Jim was arrested for public drunkenness and for endangering the life of a minor and was given thirty days in jail. Sonny got to ride in an ambulance and was the hero of his own set for awhile, but the incident was soon forgotten. Sonny was allowed back in the poolroom after he had promised Mogen that he would not work for Jim again. So the quarters stopped, and Sonny went back to hunting for nickels.

Tonight, as Sonny sits watching in his smoke-filled world, he notices argument being carried on at one of the back tables. Ezon Jordon has his cue stick raised menacingly over a short, fat man’s balding head. “thuh devul, you say! You crooked the table,” Ezon accuses.

“Did not,” the fat man protests.

“Did!” Ezon argues.

“Did not!” the fat man echoes.

“I shot thuh one. Straight. Id didn’t hit in. You crooked the table.”

At the mention of the mystical one-ball, Sonny slides from the bench and moves to a position nearer the argument. A J, the table racker, makes his way to the table. “Put that stick down, Ezon er I’ll run you out” What happening anyway?”

“He crooked thuh table and thuh one wobbled. I seed it.”
“Did not,” the fat man counters.

A J picks up the ball in questions and runs his fingers over its surface. “Just as I figured: the ball’s chipped. Now quit arguing! I’ll get another one.” He walks away with the yellow ball and comes back presently with another. “Here!” He rolls the ball across the table. It rolls true. “Try that un. And keep the peace,” he adds in a tone of authority.

Ezon and the fat man look at each other, but Ezon offers no apology. The game continues. Sonny follows A J down the line of tables to a wooden counter. “Whatcha gonna do wid her?”

“The ball?”

“The yeller one. Whut’s chipped.”

“Throw her away, A J answers. “You want it?”

Before Sonny can answer, A J hands him the ball. Sonny stares at it, unbelieving. He fingers it and feels the chip. “I don’t care,” he says to himself. “I always wanted a yeller ball.”

Holding the one-ball carefully in his hand Sonny walks from the poolroom. Outside he encounters Jim. “Say, boah, if it ain’t my old pardner. Say, what you got?”

“Chipped ball. A J giver her to me.”

“Let me see it,” Jim replies, seeing the chance to have a little sport.

“No, she’s mine . . . A J giver her to me . . .”

“Well, I won’t hurt it,” Jim answers, and he snatches the ball from Sonny’s hand.

“Giver her back, giver her back,” Sonny wails.

“Well, git it then,” Jim laughs, and he rolls the ball across the street.

Instantly Sonny darts into the street after the ball. There is the sickening screech of brakes applied too late, a shallow thud! Men begin running from the poolroom. A J comes out, staring. “Lord!”

Jim has backed against the plate glass window. “Crazy kid,” he says, “ran right out in the street.”

Sonny lies a few yards down the street. His body is sprawled in a dropped-rag-doll position, one arm resting against the curbing. The yellow ball which has rolled across the street, rolls down the gutter and comes to a stop against his outstretched hand.

NIGHT WIND

We roar down the night
Making a line of life
Through three points . . .
The great light that splits the darkness,
You shielding me from the on-coming
World with your body,
And me in my scarf and sweatshirt
My slacks and tennis shoes.
The wind is our own and
It kisses our faces with cool night kisses.
We mock the eunuchs of life
In their warm, enclosed, four-wheeled
Boxes of security which stare at us
For a moment with two glaring eyes.
If I were a pennant, I would slap
The wind furious with speed.
Instead my hands have warmed two
Places on your coat where I hold you.
We lean around a curve where
Black tree tops worship the moon
On our way to a turning point
Where life will stop for a while
And go backward.

Carol Blankenship
"My goodness, Jim Bradley, I believe you know every single remote road in Davidson County," Carolyn Hendricks mischievously teased the tall, black haired boy sitting beside her.

Bradley looked down and grinned at her as he drove his sleek white Impala down the narrow road in the park, some five miles from the city limits. They'd been to the dance at the college for a while, but had left early.

"Oh, Jim, isn't this a beautiful night—I mean, with the moon and all and—oh, it's just beautiful."

She was leaning over against him—he smelled the fragrance of her perfume mixed with her spray net. He liked the feeling.

Suddenly she moved.

"The radio, Jim... Let's turn on the radio."

The sound of a combo vibrated the dash in the final bars of a top tenner. Then the deejay cut in with the time, temperature, and a commercial which he botched up beautifully. A slow romantic number came on next and Carolyn leaned back against Jim after straightening her dress. Suddenly the drone of the motor ceased.

"Dammit!"

"Jim, what's the matter?"

Jim's frown turned to a "what-the-hell" type smile and he chuckled.

"You'll never believe this, honey."

"Believe what?"

"I swear to God, I have actually, truly run out of gas. No fooling."

"Oh, Jim, tell me you're kidding!"

"No, I'm not, Carolyn. Scout's honor!" Jim steered the car over to the side of the road. It came to a slow stop.

"Oh, Jim, what will we do? I'll be late getting back to the dorm. Oh, Jim!"

"No, no... Don't sweat it, honey. Somebody'll be along in a second and we'll get them to go back to the station on the main highway and get us some gas. I'll pay 'em."

"Oh, Jim, are you sure it's out of gas?"

"Positive, dear, it's happened before. Now, don't worry about it. Say, uh... we might as well make the best of it."

"Jim Bradley, if this is a trick!"

"We've been dating too long for me to have to pull tricks, dear."

Jim slipped his arms around her and drew her close to him, sliding his lips across her cheek to her mouth. The radio switched to the sharp beeps proceeding the news cast, causing Carolyn to draw away quickly.

"Turn that damn thing down, Carolyn."

"Okay, dear." She turned and reached for the dial, but stopped at the sound of the announcer's anxious tone:

"WMAK's man on the scene at Central State Asylum, Johnny Rice, reports that there is still no word on the inmate who escaped earlier this evening. Police have organized a wide search within a five mile radius of the hospital and warn all people living in this vicinity to make sure all doors and windows are carefully locked. This man is extremely dangerous. I repeat—extremely dangerous. He is a homicidal maniac. Motorists are advised not to stop for anyone on the roads in this area and to report seeing anyone—I repeat—anyone traveling alone in the vicinity of Central State Hospital. WMAK will bring you all the up-to-date news as it happens."

Carolyn looked up with terror at Jim. "Oh, Jim, are we—are we near—?"

Jim answered soberly, pushing down the button on his door and leaning over Carolyn to push down hers.

"Don't worry, honey."

"Jim," Carolyn's voice was shrill as she seized the shoulders of Jim's shirt. "Jim, how close are we to the asylum?"

"About two miles, honey, but—"

"About two miles," as the tears streamed down her face.

"For God's sake honey, it's not that bad. The odds against him coming this way are a thousand to one."

"But, Jim, if he is—oh, if he is—"

"Don't think that way. A car'll come by in a minute. Everything will be okay."

"Oh, Jim, I'm so scared. Oh, Jim, what if he—Hold me tight, Jim—Hold me tight."

"Don't worry, honey, don't worry." A cold sweat broke out on Brad-
ley's forehead as he stared out into the trees and down the moon-silvered road. He couldn't let Carolyn know how scared he himself was. The shadows leered grotesquely back at him. It was good it was a clear night. They could see him. But, oh God, Jim's stomach began to heave within, how much easier it would be for him to see them.

The radio was playing a limbo number but it was wasted on the unheedings ears of the two. For what seemed more like an eternity than merely five minutes they had sat there. The fear and horror built with their silence, but neither could speak. Carolyn's involuntary sobbing suddenly changed to choking gasps. Jim hugged her closer and started to speak but instead looked down at her. She looked up with tear-filled eyes, then fell back against his chest, sobbing again.

He was glad she was so upset. That way she couldn't feel him shakin'. He glanced quickly from the road to the rear view mirror, then to the uncomforiting woods at his right and left. Rapidly he repeated this. Then again and again. Why didn't a car come along. Oh, God, for the sight of headlights...Oh, God, please...let a car come by.

Carolyn screamed with a fear that pierced Jim's soul. She had seen it first—the wild figure of a man silhouetted against the sky at the top of the hill—a shadow racing madly down the road toward their car.

She was hysterical. She clawed at Jim's shoulders, screaming as though she herself were mad. Jim stared at the figure three hundred yards away yet unmistakably visible—a creature moving faster and faster, drawn by the shining white metal of the car. Jim's hand slipped quickly under the seat and fumbled around, searching frantically for—yes, there it was—he pulled the tire-tool out without looking at it, his eyes still fixed on the figure now only a hundred yards away. Carolyn was out of her head. Jim did not notice her nails digging through his shirt into his shoulders.

Sixty yards, fifty yards, Jim threw on his bright lights but the man did not stop. Thirty, twenty—Jim braced himself in fear, pushing down on the floor and shoving his shoulders back into the seat. The man ran to Carolyn's side of the car and grabbed the door. Jim saw his crazed face and heard the almost incoherent screaming demands as he tugged at the locked door.

"Let me in. Let me in. I tell you! Open this door. Open it please. The car shook with the force of the tugging. Suddenly he turned and ran around the car before the headlights. Jim saw him stop directly in front of the car to pick up the rock. Jim knew what he must do.

Jim shoved Carolyn roughly away, tearing out of her arms. Quickly he opened the door and jumped out as the man turned around the fender.

"Stand back," Jim cried, but the man ran up to him. Jim lifted the iron tool quickly, bringing it down squarely onto the man's skull. The right hand held for an instant, then released its grasp as the lifeless body slumped to the road. Jim dropped the tire tool to the burning asphalt. He was crying and he was shaking—shaking all over. He fell back into the car seat beside Carolyn. He slid his hand over to the back of her neck and began to stroke it.

"It's all right, now, Carolyn." Jim's voice was quivering. "Everything's all right now."

Without any sound other than her crying she pulled herself up to Jim, burying her face in his chest. He laid back, exhausted and repeated, Everything's all right now."

He looked slowly out to the side of the car at the gory scene, still stroking the back of her neck tenderly. He stared almost in disbelief at the bloody tire tool lying in the road, then moved his eyes across the pool of blood to the widely gashed skull. Then, looking at the man's chest, Jim saw it—the badge of a park security officer on the dead man's shirt. And then, footsteps. Jim closed his eyes and began to sob insanely; he heard nothing anymore—not even Carolyn's scream of horror as she looked up and into the eyes of the new figure outside the car—into the gleaming, leering eyes of the maniac.
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