Calliope Spring 1957

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CALLIOPE
Volume IV, No. 2

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Editorial Offices CALLIOPE, Ty House, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. Contributions to Calliope may not be reprinted without the written permission of the publishers.

Student Council
This publication is partially supported and under the organizational supervision of that student body.
The Keeper . . .

Remember I'm an old man. Boy, don't take me too far back. Into that swamp my hand spread out to feel the muck between my fingers queasy cool and small quite like the notes her low, cold whistle called my thoughts up on the leaf black path she walked. I let mosquitoes touch their hairs and sting into that undercurrent way you feel to watch the song you really want to sing . . .

Boy, not too far back.

How can it be, you rest your weed mussed head and wait, wait for her to pass so lonely but you still lie hidden still and she is gone, the earth turns hard, you're an old man, boy, and too far back is keeping you with me.

. . . Douglas Hodgman

And When in Silent Years . . .

And when in silent years
I think back to the willful weeping
That pursued my youthful days
My sickened soul may miss the wreckless waif
And days of dissipated sorrow
For the artful artificer
Then fetch a faggot for the sinner-saint!

When setting suns begin reminding me
Of graves that gape and have no horror
Of universes peaked with sticky stars
When trembling touch will need a morbid memory
And cracked crooked smiles
Devour dimple dents
Then cover up the casket of a bloody bore!

When bleary eyes can shed a solitary tear
(For crying will be tiresome by then)
And see a world that's new again but brown
And youth becomes a popinjay who knows too much
And love a lonely lore
And radical forever wrong
Then mark the marble with a chiseled touch!

. . . Philip Greco
Two For the Price of One . . .

. . . Harold Males

I peered through the cigarette smoke at the dapper little man seated opposite me in the booth.

"I repeat." He stated, "I have something of great value to sell you, at a relatively low price."

I lifted my beer, sipped at it and replied, "And I repeat, I don't need any French postcards."

The little man looked annoyed. "You do me a great injustice. My wares are not of such a low order."

I sneered at the little man's outraged dignity. "Tell me what you got to sell and then beat it."

His face brightened and he announced, "I have a soul for sale."

"You what?"

"I have a soul that I wish to sell you. Perhaps you'd care to examine the merchandise before you buy? Look!"

And he brought his clenched right fist up onto the table. It glowed a dull, pulsating red. Smoke curled from between his fingers and a faint crackling sound could be heard.

"Then you're . . ."

"The very same, at your service. You may refer to me as you wish. I'm not at all partial to any one particular title."

I cowered back into the booth corner as he leaned towards me in his eagerness. "Go 'way. I don't want nothing to do with you."

"But I can help you. I can sell you a soul."

"Go 'way. I've got a soul."

"Have you?" He laughed softly, "Oh, maybe you've got a small one; one that's fit for the gas station attendant you are now. One doesn't need much soul to pump gas or change oil. You fancy yourself a writer however, and for that, your soul is not nearly large enough."

"The stuff I write is good."

"Good for what? Your plotting is perfect, your characters are well defined and the unities are always observed. It's a pity that none of your stories have that slight spark that could make them come alive. I can give you that spark, with this." Once more he brought his fist up on the table. "Unless you'd rather spend the rest of your life pumping gas."

"What is that?"

"It's the soul of a writer who is now in my domain . . . a famous writer."

"How can two souls fit inside one person?"

"Your's as you know is rather small and for that matter, so is this one. This one however, has one thing you lack, namely, creative talent. Oh, please don't look so offended. It's only the truth. The two souls will complement each other and since neither is full grown, they'll fit comfortably enough."

"What's your price?"
"I just knew we could do business. My price is cheap. At your death, I collect your soul as well as this one. Two for the price of one, you might say. I never could resist a bargain, but we all have our failings."

"And I'll be able to write good stories?"

"Like none this generation has ever seen, my friend."

"Get out your contract, I'll sign."

"That's old hat, my friend. Your word is good enough. And now . . ."

"Wait, I want to talk with you a minute."

"Of course, but please make it brief. I'm a busy (you should excuse the expression) man, you know."

"How come I don't have to sign in blood?"

"No one ever had to do so. It is a base canard perpetrated by my enemies."

"And where are your horns?"

"I never had any. You can thank your theologians for that silly idea."

"I'm taller than you."

"Fear always did make me seem larger than I really am. And now I really must be going."

"Wait, One more question."

"Yes?"

"What is hell like?"

"As it has been said on Earth. I allow each person to create his own hell. You know what you hate and fear most. You'll devise much more fiendish tortures for yourself, than I could ever hope to dream up. And now I really must be going. Oh, your purchase, here."

"Stop. I've changed my mind."

"Too late." He giggled obscenely and opened his clenched fist under my nose. The world exploded inside my head. I caught one brief whiff of burning sulphur. I passed out.

I came to with the bartender shaking me. "Closing time. You okay, Charlie?"


"A good night's sleep will fix that. Come on, I gotta close up."

"Yeah, you're probably right. Be seeing you."

I left the bar and walked through the deserted streets to my apartment. Stories, characters, dialogue whirled through my head. They were alive. I had that spark. I had to write. My footsteps quickened.

"The hell with hell. My name will be immortal."

At my stoop I looked up. There was a light on. Angie was waiting up for me again. Angie, sweet Angela. Prettiest girl in the neighborhood. Could've married any one of half a dozen guys with dough. Instead she married me, Charlie Fredericks, who was gonna be a famous writer some day. Six years, lousy jobs, poor food, no kids and a cold water flat, but now, at last, I'd keep my promise.

"Charlie, you been drinking again."

"Just a couple of beers, Angie."
"You want something to eat?"
"No. Go to bed."
"Ain't you coming to bed?"
"No. I feel like writing some."
"But you gotta get up early to go to work."
"I ain't going back to that gas station again. I'm gonna sit here and write."
"What'll we eat?"
"I'll sell what I write."
"Who'll buy it?"
"What'sa matter? Don't you think I'm any good?"
"Guess I better take that job in the laundry, tomorrow."

She turned and went into the bedroom. I stayed up all night writing, and in the morning, Angie left the house to go to work in the laundry.

That's the way it went for the next year. The stuff I wrote was good, damned good, but the slick magazines wouldn't touch it. They said it was too morbid. The literary magazines were glad to take it, but they either paid hardly anything at all or they gave you a subscription. I had more damned subscriptions than I knew what to do with.

I hadn't changed too much from the guy I was. I drank a little bit more than I used to. Occassionally I took a reefer. Nothing you could call a habit though. Just something I picked up from some musicians I met.

And still Angie went to work in the laundry. She looked as pretty as ever, but she was thinner and she chain smoked. But Angie was a good kid. She never complained. She was as good a wife as a writer could ever hope for. Then it was over.

I came home one night in time to see the ambulance pull away from our house. I ran up to the knot of neighbors and asked what had happened. Mrs. Palermo turned to me and spoke scornfully, "You bum. She tried to give herself an abortion and she bled to death. You killed her, you bum." She spat on the sidewalk. The neighbors nodded sad assent.

I stumbled up the stairs. "Angie" I moaned. "Angie, I love you." There was blood all over the apartment. "Oh, Angie." My God, I needed a drink. I wrenched open the cupboard. All we had was some sweet red wine. I grabbed a tea cup, filled it, gulped it down and refilled the cup. "Oh, Angie. What have I done to you?"

I swayed and fell forward. The sharp edge of the stove was coming up at my eyes, but I didn't care.

Blood, wine, red all around me. Smoky dull red and in front of me... the dapper little man of a year ago.

"Welcome, my friend. Now that wasn't so bad, was it?"
"Angie's dead."
"Sorry, she wasn't mentioned in our agreement. If it's any comfort to you, she's in the other place."
"My stories never sold."
"They'll sell now that you're dead. You'll be rediscovered. Your
name will be shouted up and down the length of the land. You have achieved immortality."

"What's my punishment in hell going to be?"

"You have already decided that. Down here, no one will ever know of you. All will scoff when you claim to have been a writer. Your fate is thus: You are condemned to an eternity of faceless anonymity. This is your hell, and it's all of your own choosing."

Useless tears coursed down my cheeks as the devil finished speaking and turned to go.

"One more question, please?"

"Of course, that's the least I can do for you."

"Whose soul did you sell me?"

"Why, I'm surprised at you. I thought you had figured that out for yourself by now. That was the soul of Edgar Allen Poe."

A Fling at Lunacy . . .

(Al, out of the spring dust, hunger and homelessness covered by veneer of youth, came to Betty's lunchroom where a memory melting span of years old Betty dozed moldy with hair, her chins steadily sinking deep between her gut glued breasts. Al's smile up welled something in her eyes like glinting water through a sheath of ice. That day, a local poet said, the moon was straddled by the sun. Many heat filled weeks the summer breathed on rippling muscles in the sand and words of love on surf, until one dawn a blackbird studded wind was full of leaves, and Al into the dust was gone.)

Down on the lonely, rain dark beach, Betty took a fling at lunacy (Don't go! Don't go!) On sand she whacked a bloody nose to feel his salty lips, and burrowed in thistles to kiss the nape of his neck (Don't go! Don't go!). She entwined herself in splintered driftwood to feel him bite into her flesh and held her ear against the earth to hear his moving body sing inside her head (Don't go! Don't go). Breathless she pounded up the beach in passion of a chase, collapsing presently knees first into the sleet burried waves sobbing, O please don't go! Don't go! not to Al but to a slender, toe-nimble Betty, skipping out so far into the Northern sea that even Al could never bring it back.

... Douglas Hodgman
Green and White Love . . .

Richard Hauck

It was a very fine shotgun. It was old, but it was beautiful in its age. Each barrel was carefully engraved and gold inlaid, but only a little, just enough to make it near-perfect. He had bought it second hand from a friend who had inherited it. It was not too old to be used; it had white-powder steel, not twist or Damascus barrels, but was indeed a beautiful weapon.

For a hundred skins, he thought, it should be beautiful. It was very fine; in his hands it was comparable to a faultless idea, clean and strong.

He looked at the gun and then he looked out at the marsh where the first light of grey morning was only beginning to create visibility and he thought, very typical marsh, this one, creek bed, yards and yards of weeds and tangles to hunt through, steel mill's stacks sticking out from behind those trees downstream.

He had hunted it many times, this Jersey marsh, and every year he saw a little more of it disappear under the Valley's industrial boom. Soon, he thought, I will have to hunt the salt marshes; and I will hate that because a gun will rust in an hour down there.

There were rabbits in the marsh edge and he had startled one or two. Perhaps, he thought, a couple of those in my coat would round out nicely a brace of fat, corn-fed mallards. But first, the ducks, for they will not wait long. Lord, the marsh is full of ducks this morning!

And they were there. Their sleepy garble dominated the marsh sounds. He knew that they were anxious to take leave of the creek and its hunter peril and seek the safety of the protected corn fields, where they could gorge themselves on the fallen silage cuttings. They did not stay long in the marsh and he would have only a few shots.

Beautiful, peaceful, he thought. Need this break from the scholarly grind. School is mighty rough this term.

A pair of wood ducks flashed by; he heard their first peep peep peep and he did not wish to shoot them, for they were scarce, and he was not sure that there was an open season on them this year. They were through instantly and gone in the mist.

Last Thursday night, he remembered. Damn! Why did that have to come up in my mind to spoil a nice morning? Out here it is different; out here the animals love and recreate and it is very simple and clean.

But those animals in the dorm . . .

The woodies came around again . . . peep peep peep . . . and set their wings and pitched into a pot hole not far from him.

I wonder if anyone told the Dean. That wasn't much of a fight. One punch. Probably nobody told.

The shotgun was indeed beautiful.

Up in the dormitory room there had been four or five of them shooting the bull and it hadn't been ten minutes before the subject
was women and the physical conquest of same. As usual, he thought.

He moved out into the shallow water and worked quietly and very
very slowly from hummock to hummock to avoid the deep, soft-
bottomed holes.

Typical thought of the modern collegiate, he reflected as he
stopped and listened. Well, I was going along with the jokes until
that pig got funny.

His stomach knotted when he thought of the remarks.

That bastard . . . Wish I had a woman like your’s, he’d said. She’d keep me nice and happy.

I told him to shut up, but he kept on . . . He felt his stomach
knot tighter.

He had walked over to the pig’s chair and said, “Watch your
sewer mouth, damn it!”

Then the pig had said, “Hey, man, when are you going to share
your woman with me?”

He’d hit him. Right in the face he’d hit him and the pig had
his feet up on the desk, leaning back in the chair and when the fist
squashed his nose he had fallen over backwards chair and all and had
landed on his head.

Lord, I thought I’d killed him . . . Indeed, there had been blood
on his knuckles and on the floor, but the pig came around right
away and his friends had helped him down to the john and had
cleaned him up.

They never think of beauty or real love, only sex and their own
satisfaction. They should hear what God must hear. He must. hear
those fifteen-year old girls crying in their sleep because they had had
hopes and desires and very pretty dreams and they had all been slain
and they had found only bitter hurt and shattered illusions. Oh, God,
she says, I’m not a virgin now, O God. And God says Was It Right?
And she sobs no, Lord it hurt. And the mark is permanent.

Damn them all. They are damned.

Two mallards blasted out of the reeds in front of him and woke
him and startled him. A drake and a hen, he could see immediately,
and he pulled down on the drake and touched off the right barrel.
Feathers flew and the bright green head twisted back under the body
and the bird spun splash into the water. He covered the susie and
got her squarely with the left barrel and knew she was dead when
he fired. He felt great.

The drake had not been hit hard, though, and when he
approached, loading, it floundered away and the old shotgun misfired
and the duck was lost to him in the tangles. He never found the
hen either, for it would not flutter as a wounded bird would, and
her brown body had become as the color of the marsh. He felt sick.

He hated himself for the act, so he thought of his girl and how she
would understand the way he felt now.

I’ll bet she would like a diamond . . . a little emerald cut . . . so
what if little diamonds shouldn’t be cut square? It was to keep, not
to sell; if square is prettier than round to her, then it shall be square.
I wonder if I am that sure I love her? I wonder if I should cut my
throat that way? kkkkkk and I'm out of circulation. I wonder if she would have me.

She is very different. Of course we want each other, she had said, but babies must have parents and care and when they grow older they must have respect for themselves and respect for their parents. If it were only us, you see, it would not matter, Love would be enough. But we are not by ourselves, and we have to add many things.

Well, he thought, maybe she is just tricky, but I know better. She is very wise. And he did respect her because that was the way he loved.

He looked for the ducks for almost an hour and then quit and was sick about losing them. He waded to the bank and started for his car.

A rabbit bounced out of a windfall and headed for the marsh. It stopped, for he had not frightened it by his silent movement. He raised the gun and sighted down between the barrels at the rabbit's ears. The cotton tail bounced towards the marsh; its bottom mostly higher than its head until it stopped and became bottom-down again.

Oh, what the hell.

He lowered the gun; he could not kill the rabbit because it was useless and the ducks were gone and all the rabbit wanted to do was reach the marsh. He tossed a stick and watched the cottontail scramble and then he turned away and began to walk out of the fringe-woods.

She would only hug him when he gave her the ring; she would put her face into his sweater against his chest and he would kiss her spun-copper hair and he would have hanged himself for sure, but their Love would be sealed.

Funny world, he thought, with diamonds for love-tokens. Someone must make a lot of money.

He didn't care. He had never felt so glad about anything as he did now because he had not killed the rabbit.

Chanson de Printemps . . .

Brise fraîche
arbre naissant
feuilles vertes
C'est printemps.

Une fleur
isolée,
Une image
de beauté.

Un chant doux
d'un oiseaux
en plein air,
très nouveaux.

Une idée
puis un mot,
puis l'amour
viendra tôt.

. . . Diane Peacock
A Reckoning . . .

I would like to comment briefly on "A Reckoning." It was originally written as a kind of oratorio for six female and three male voices. The female voices act as the chorus and never speak singly except for a solo female voice which reads the short italicized verse at the very end. The male voices, on the other hand, always speak singly except when in Part III, two male voices read the dactylic hexameter section.

I

Chorus:
In these sad times of milk and honey
Waiting for a curved sky to open all its woes upon us
Small boys sit grubbing by a curbstone
Trying to reconstruct their mother's woof

We do not know our ageless face
When seen reflected in a sewer pool
We only hope that sifted sunlight
will one day reach us here beneath the grating.

Salamanders waltzing by with swinging gills
Remind us of our past endeavors
And the stillness of our ringing triumphs
Only echoes and re-echoes in our brains.

Virulent seems an easy word to say
While we try our best to hide it
Making fretful peeps into the light
And disbelieving what we see there.

Up jumped Pythagoras
A triangle in his hand
He summed and squared
And then declared
And loudly played the band

And dirty Archimedes
While getting in a tub
Saw water rise
And copped a prize
Beneath a Grecian shrub

And Isaac Newton took a walk
And sat beneath a tree
An apple dropped
The heavens stopped
And gravity was free

Old Ben Franklin flew a kite
A latch key on its tail
The lightning broke
And from the smoke
A lightbulb from a gale

Then Darwin came of age
And spewed a simple plan
Amoebas quake
Peking spake
A monkey from a man

And Max Planck took a turn
A simple proof to lay
A nation churned
A city burned
The First Law dropped away

Now men like Wiener speak
And try to do their best
Machines that whirl
Machines that twirl
And play a game of chess

But who can say that this is good
Or beautiful or so:

Or a drunken Persian's
Simple version
"... And like the wind I go."

II

Chorus:
Silently, stealthily
Hoping against hope
The ages creep into the future
And the wisdom of Confucius
Settles gently in the mire
Of a half-forgotten vision

Little Miss Muffit finds it more difficult
To make her two ends meet
Forced to live on curds and Whey
Because she can't buy meat

Flannel suited gentlemen
With bright Bis Ad degrees
Manicure their finger nails
And perch in barren trees
They try to snipe a client's purse
Along the Madison trace
Employing tricks of "Salesmanship"
They sell the Human Race
And now the standard peak
Of Everyman's mirage
Becomes a five-room bungalow
With every new garage

III

Chorus:
Muffit, Muffit, the Wisdom tree is bare
Its apples have been plucked
The seeds are scattered now on barren ground
Your loin is barren too
For you have touched the runner
But have felt no child within your womb
Muffit, O Muffit, we feel the ache of fear

"This is the forest primeval
The murmering pines and the hemlocks"
And here Muffit comes in the noon-day
In search of a log for her fire
She walks as a dreamer of dreams walks
Afraid of the shadows she sees there
Reality gives her no notice
For green grass she steps on will bend not
And clay sod accepts not her footprints
But Muffit bent on her journey
Keeps trying to make her world know her
Impatience and anger excite her
She siezes a tree twig and snaps it
But finds it is she who feels pain

Far away
In a distant city
Far away
In a distant town
Full of horns and bricks and glass
Old men sit in public parks
Or humbly chew on grass
A tall man in his prime
Walks briskly down its streets
And gives straight-forward smiles
To everyone he cheats
Young girls in their bloom
Marry dull young men
And disappear in little homes
To play house once again
Pussy Cats are free
To roam the streets at night
But freedom isn't everything
One must be in the right
IV

Chorus:
We hear the step of Muffit on the stair
But we know its tenor means a sadness
We know a mournful step upon the stair
Waiters and watchers such as we
Know sorrow in a footstep
Our vigil has been long and taught as well

In the silence of every still night
Death seeks his reward
For he is watching too, and waiting
He begs a rightful claim

Frenzy reigns at times
Violence, Fear, Horror, and Deception
Patriots give breath to paradox
Shame and dignity become a sword

The battle rumbles on
The great machine of sorrow
Casts no backward glance at shattered hopes
It is driven by the hero

Chorus:
Expectation mixed with dread
Make us listen carefully
To what is said
Metered phrases grow in density
While the situation grows
Gathering intensity

Standing in the filtered light
Of immortal truth
Poets on an island waste
Crucify their youth

Hoping through agility
To mend the ways of men
They state in terms unmodified
The old sweet song again

A jangle on the Jabberwock
A trill from Johnny Donne
And Eliot's sweet inspection
Beget no pride or fun

Chorus:
Why is there so much anxiety
Why is there so little truthfulness

V
Why is there always economy
Why is there so much ruthlessness
Why is the burden of guilt so heavy
Why is the chance of salvation so slim
Because man is never so humble
Because man is conscious of shame
Because man has never liked loving
Because man must search for a name
Because death must always mean sorrow
Because life should always mean joy
Because man is forced to borrow
Because Christmas won’t bring a toy

When will the truth be satisfied
When will the lovers be free
When will the old men rest easy
When will the sighted see
When will the fortune be won
When will the poet be heard
Now is the time for pestilence
Now is the age of crime
Now we must loose our maidenhead
Now we must live in the grime
Now we must watch husbands worry
Now we must end life in anguish
Now we must try and hurry
Now we must settle in languish

Where is the joy that blessedness brings
Where is the fine enchantment
Where is the new horizon
Where is the old encampment
Where are the promises gone
Where is the freedom from guilt
Here is a sniveling school-boy
Here is a ring in the dust
Here is a tired mother
Here is a vestige of lust
Here is an absence of reason
Here is a feeling so shallow
Here is attempt at treason
Here is a land never fallow

Sleep now well my son
You can wake tomorrow
St. Anthony will help us find
The joy we lost in sorrow
Sleep now without fright
I will sit and watch the night

... Philip Greco
My Melody...

... James Loch

I'd picked up this melody in an off-beat section of skid row. An old drunk, he was. Sitting there with a half-filled glass of cheap booze in his hand, humming to himself.

I didn't think much of it at first because he was a real bum but afterwards it kept coming back. The more I ran it over in my mind the more I liked it.

It's funny how a melody or a few lines of verse gets hold of a person. You just can't seem to get it out of your head.

I had never been effected by anything like this before. I had some background in music but nothing too extensive. You know the usual thing in the well-rounded upper middle class family; high school band, a few piano lessons, and a couple of appreciation courses in college. But nothing that would make me a musician.

It got to be an unconscious thing with me. For instance, at work, people started complaining because I was getting on their nerves, always humming what to them was a weird thing. But to me it was beautiful. I could just hear the mystic, reedy, somewhat hoarse sound of a bassoon lifting my melody in surging rhythm, carrying me away from the crowds to heights I had never surpassed, showing me the aesthetic beauty of life and the turmoil and waste of its people.

I would sit in my apartment and dream up fantastic arrangements of crashing cymbals and rolling tympani and then the mystic, reedy, somewhat hoarse sound of the bassoon breathing my melody throughout the whole room, furniture, walls, ceiling, everywhere.

Whenever I was taking a midnight walk in the park, the soft cool summer breeze would sing my melody to me and the flowers and trees would sway to the rhythm.

I was in a world of my own.

It was a hot Monday afternoon and I was downtown during the rush hour. Everyone was rushing for home. All of a sudden I heard it, my melody. The horns of the cars were playing it, only it wasn't a pacifying pleasant melody. It was a flat, sharp terrifying sound that made the blood rush to my head and my lips pucker up as if they had just tasted a raw, ripe lemon. I crushed my ears with my hands and the sound died down, but when I took my hands away it started again. I couldn't stand there; so I rushed into a bar and pushed the door shut and held it closed to that terrifying sound in the street.

I stood there for I don't know how long, until I felt close to normal. Then I turned around feeling rather conspicuous since everyone seemed to be looking at me. I walked up to the bar, sat down, ordered a double shot of good booze. Gave the bartender a five and told him to keep the change in order to overcome the look of suspicion in his eyes.

After a couple of drinks I felt normal and my melody was back again.
When I walked out on the street, the traffic had cleared and I attributed my actions to my bad day at the office. My boss had had me on the carpet for falling behind in my work but, actually, I think he was just under pressure from the front office and was afraid of losing his job. The same old stuff. It isn't my fault. It's the men under me.

After a good steak in my apartment and a hot shower I didn't feel too much like going out. So I called my girl friend and broke my date. She wasn't too happy because it was the fifth time I had broken a date in two weeks. But she was getting like everyone else, always on my neck. I was getting bored with her anyway.

That night I had a hard time getting to sleep and finally had to take a couple of sleeping tablets. I took a couple of shots of bourbon for insurance and then went right to sleep.

The next morning I slept in and was suffering from a swollen head and an overly parched, dry mouth. I took a shot of whiskey to straighten myself out and started off to work. I caught a cab and arrived at the office an hour late. My boss was waiting for me but I wasn't in any mood for his crap. So, I just walked up to him and quit. He smiled, thanked me, and said he didn't enjoy firing people.

I walked out of the office building feeling quite depressed and cynical. After all, it wasn't my fault. I just didn't feel well.

I was walking down the street with no particular goal in mind when a bright red fire truck came screaming around the corner. Almost at once the fire truck was obliterated from my vision and the siren changed to that flat, sharp, terrifying sound that made the blood rush to my head and my lips pucker up as if they had just tasted a raw ripe lemon.

I knew of one thing that would cure me of this. I rushed down the street with my hands clasped to my head in search of a bar. I turned down a side street and saw half a block away a bar with the sign above the door reading “Melody Inn.” I rushed down the street, through the door, up to the bar, and ordered a double shot. I gulped it down quickly and ordered another. My head was clearing and my melody was returning.

Then I noticed it. Everyone here was sitting around with half filled glasses of booze, humming their own melodies.

My Solo . . .

Solo step one step one step
swirl through a lace of hope and promise
one step through a dance of love and hopefulness
one step one step, shoe by shoe,
one step one step one step two!

... Anna Fable
Hometown Girl . . .

Jeremiah Halbert

It was one of those typical cocktail parties. Crowded into a room reserved by the Amec Engineering Company for such events were all the promising young executives of the firm; two top executives, two Army officers, a Navy Commander, a host of models and the guest of honor, Sen. John Falstaff, chairman of the Armed Forces Thermal Control Commission. The room was filled with the constant buzz of a crowd climaxed every now and then by the roaring laughter of Peter Selas, sales manager of Amec. In one corner of the room Matt Casey was trying to talk to Captain Louis Cann of the Army Engineering Corps. Matt, at 29, was typical of many of the young executives of the firm. He was a graduate engineer, had a wife, Betty, and two children, Tim and Terry, the latter being only two weeks old. Matt was doing very well for himself, his last year's salary was in five figures and this year he estimated it to be at least two thousand dollars above last year's earnings. At the present time he was trying to interest the captain in his pet topic, Thermostatic conductive regulators.

"Lou, the installation of our Thermostatic unit in the Anover Street Armory will cost a little more as an initial expense but in the long run it will save you money."

"Matt, those units cost $240 apiece and that Armory will need at least 40 of them. We just can't afford it with our present budget."

"To be exact it will take 43 regulators. However, our product is 74% efficient and will last for ten years. Your present condensors cost $40 apiece, less installation, have to be replaced every two years, and are only 62% efficient."

Lou Cann was tiring of the arguments and wanted to break away, at last he spotted his commanding officer, Col. Phil Jones, and saw his chance, "Your product has not been thoroughly tested. The Army cannot take the chance."

"We have used it in our plant for the last six months . . ."

"I know, but is is too short a period to make any valued judgments. Look, why don't you draw up some reports on the details of your unit. Perhaps then I will see it your way. Right now I have to go see the Colonel."

"I'll have them at your office in the morning." Matt yelled as the Captain turned his back and started weaving his way toward the Colonel's group.

With the captain gone Matt started to look for the Commander. He finally spotted him in the middle of the room and started to work his way toward him. Half way across the room a model stepped in front of him, looked at him thoughtfully and exclaimed:

"Matt, Matt Casey, why you have gotten so fat I hardly recognized you!"

"Alice, Alice Feathers, from Floral Park. You are the one that has changed greatly. What are you doing here in New York?"
"I'm working as a model to get enough money to see my way through the Academy of Theatrical Arts. It sure is good to see someone from home."

"The feeling is mutual. Look, we can't talk here. It's too noisy and besides I'm not supposed to talk to anyone but our guests. Why don't you have dinner with me tonight? I told Betty I would be eating out and I would like to hear the hometown gossip."

"If you are sure your wife won't mind, I'm not the one to turn down a free meal."

"Good. I have to leave at four or so, so why don't you meet me by the Fifty-second Street entrance at ten to six."

"It's a date. See you there."

The rest of the cocktail party rambled on, each person in the place knew they had a job to do and did it. At a quarter to six Alice left the few remaining people and went down stairs to meet Matt. Matt was waiting there and escorted her out on the street. Once out there Matt confronted her. "If you don't mind let's eat in one of those places that cater to tourists. New York is just like a small town in a lot of respects. If I'm seen with you it will be all over the office tomorrow that I have the best looking mistress in New York"

"I understand... And they talk about Floral Park." Alice chuckled.

Halfway down the street they came to a small restaurant and entered. They were lucky; a table in the far corner was empty. When the waiter came over they both ordered two Roast Beef au Jus dinners and a Manhatten before the meal. Throughout the meal the talk was about Floral Park, who got engaged, who got married, Did they have to get married? What ever became of old Dr. Peters? Alice answered the banter as well as she could and then asked Matt how he was doing. Matt then started talking about his family. Like most young married men, when talking about their families, he lost all sense of time, when he did look at his watch it was seven-thirty.

"Look at the time. Betty will start to worry. I have an idea, why don't you come home and spend the night with us. Betty will be pleased to meet the girl that used to tell my mother on me when I skipped Sunday school."

"Really, Matt, I shouldn't. After all she has been out of the hospital only a couple of days and she won't feel like entertaining."

"Bosh! She will be glad to see you. Besides I won't take no for an answer." Matt then called the waiter over and paid the check, helped Alice on with her coat and while she was putting on her gloves picked up her modeling case. "Uugh, what have you got in here, a pipe."

"No, a hammer. I use it to keep the wolves away." countered Alice. They left the restaurant and headed down the street. "I parked my car up here when I came back... pretty convenient, isn't it?"

"I think you had this planned all the time." Mused Alice.

"No, not exactly. But it is working out."

They reached the car and Matt put the modeling case in the back seat. He then stepped aside and let Alice get in, made sure her dress was clear and closed the door. He walked around to the other
side and got behind the wheel. Starting the car he headed it toward the East side Parkway, from there he drove through the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and finally on the Belt Parkway headed toward his Long Island home. Half way home he turned to Alice. "Would you mind driving for a while? Those cocktail parties in the afternoon give me a headache."

"Not at all. Pull over."

Matt pulled the car over and got out to walk around to the other side. Alice slid behind the wheel and got comfortable. Matt got in the car on the other side and said. "Straight ahead and then turn off at exit 29."

"O.K. There is some aspirin in my purse, why don't you take a couple?"

"Thanks, that's what I need. By the time we get home I'll be fit as a fiddle again."

Alice maneuvered her way back on the highway as Matt searched for the aspirins. He finally found them, extracted two from the box and swallowed them. "Brrr . . . they sure taste bitter without water."

Ten minutes later Matt slumped down in a sound sleep. Alice glanced over and smiled. She continued along the road, came to exit 29 and turned off. Once off the highway she turned left and took that road for about a half mile. Then she turned left on a dirt road and went up the road about two hundred feet before she stopped the car. Reaching back she brought her modeling case forward and opened it up. She took out a pair of men's shoes, size ten, and a hammer. Removing her heels, she put them in the case and set it on the floor. Working with care, she put on the men's shoes and stepped out of the car into the soft mud alongside the road. Taking the hammer, she grasped the handle with both hands and hit Matt on the head with all her force. Meticulously she then removed his wallet, took the money out of it and dropped the billfold on the ground. Then she removed his watch and ring (she would drop these in the sewer later). Pulling Matt's body down on the seat she then hit him on the face fourteen times. Still showing little concern she threw the hammer into a nearby field, picked up her modeling case and took off down the road. A hundred feet up the road she reached a concrete section. There she removed the men's shoes and put on her heels again. Walking at an easy pace she came to a split level home about one hundred yards up the road. She walked up the walk and knocked at the door. "You're a widow now, Mrs. Casey. Where is the rest of my ten thousand dollars?"

Betty Casey nodded and turned back into the house. Two minutes later she came back and handed Alice an envelope. Alice took the envelope, peeked inside, and then started down the steps to the car she left in the yard that morning.
Far-Away Blues . . .

Can't see her face no more (too far away)  
cept'n when I close my eyes, 
can't hear her voice (not any more)  
less'n there's a strong south wind, 
doin't ev'n think 'bout her now (no blues)  
cept'n when I hear a roll'n piano play'n some soft  
slow tune,  
  or hear a cat-bird sing’n like they did down there,  
  or some'un laughs,  
  or hear the moan of that eight o five  
head'n back to N'orlens—  

Then he sat on the steps near the I.C. line,  
he sat while the eight o five rolled by,  
put his head down in his arms,  
like he's trying to fall asleep,  
. . . or cry—  

. . . E. G. Domine

Just You and I  
Against the World . . .

miss x (let us say) and i  
sought a shelter in the mist  
of dawn's early swamp  
as we drove  
cars came toward us  
their lights piercing night  
and watching us  
but no one was driving  
any of the cars  
lights glowed in houses  
but no one was there  
and everything was as it had been  
and now we saw the trick  
no one was really there  
alone  
we were drawn together  
and in the endless night of infinity  
life rolled back  
and back
and now we were the only life left
and began to feel the great burden
we drove back through all the years
and at dawn
we were standing naked hand in hand
on a cliff looking over the sea
watching the sun come up in the west
life was ours now
and we felt the weight
of millions of years and tears
and crosses and nails
but somehow as the sun climbed higher
we knew that we could not fail
and we turned and looked at each other
and there
pinned to her left breast
was her sorority pin
and the clothes came back
and the people in the cars and houses
and i laughed through tears
at what could never be

... Max Steele

At the Convention of Kings ...

Tom Crum watched how
the King of Virtue claimed precedence over
the king of East Bamboo but couldn’t prove it,
and how the King of Sports tried to be bigger and
better than the King of Riches but couldn’t quite do it.
When Tom Crum sneezed,
the King of Weather, the King of Candy,
the King of Tomorrow, the King of Tires and
many others asked, “Of what are you king?”
When Tom Crum answered, “the king of nothing,”
they all bowed down and worshiped him.

... Anna Fable
The Pills

. . . John E. Rathbun

The two men sat in the small room which was illuminated only by a bare globe, suspended from the ceiling. No furniture was evident save a small table, directly under the light, and three folding chairs. Several half-pint milk bottles with small amounts of coffee in them were on the table along with various paper back novels and a time and sign in sheet.

"How is he tonight?" asked the man sitting closest to the table.

"Quite as they come" was the reply. "You know, I just can't figure why a guy would do something like that."

"Some guys just need different ways to express the old impulse, I guess," the first man answered.

"Maybe you're right."

The talk between the two men stopped. The first man sat looking at the bare wall while the other one leafed through a current issue of "True Detective."

"Say, this magazine has an article on him," the second man said and nodded his head toward the door. "Says in here he had a bad case of tuberculosis from the war. I didn't know that."

"Hell, haven't you ever saw that big, long scar on his back? That's where they opened him up to take out his left lung."

"I thought that was just a war wound of some kind. Sure is a nasty one, ain't it?"

"The war must of done more to him than just that. He must be half nuts to do what he did!"

"I dunno, if it hadn't been for his wife finding those things in the cellar he'd have gotten away with the whole mess."

"Oh, they'd have found him out, come spring when they opened up the cabin for the summer. Things like that just don't go unnoticed. Not with all the people tramping those woods in the summertime."

Talk between the two men again lapsed as they both stared at the floor or walls of the little room. Through the open door came the noise of doors being slammed and of people walking back and forth on steel plating. The clock on the north wall said nine o'clock.

The first man stood up, stretched his arms, yawned and said, "Guess I'll go take a look at him. I wouldn't want him to be doing anything to injure his health." After saying it, he laughed hollowly and left the room.

The second man picked up the magazine and resumed his reading. After about five minutes he closed the magazine and yawned. "I guess I'll have to get more sleep," he said to no one.

"I guess he'll last," said the first man as he re-entered the room.

"Say," said the second man, "how many of these have you seen?"

"Only about seven or eight, I guess" was the reply. "It's funny how after the first one it never bothers you."

"This will be my first time and I don't think it will bother me, not after what he did."
"You'll know for sure in about an hour."

"My brother has a girl that is the same age as that Byrant girl. Even goes to the same school. Boy, don't you think he felt funny when they found her! Why, he picked her up after school every day until the end of the semester."

"What good would that do?"

"I asked him the same thing and he said it didn't, but it made him feel better anyway."

As they talked on, the time slipped by and then another man came to the doorway. "It's time," he said and disappeared down the hallway.

"You got the keys?" asked the second man.

"Yeah!"

"Okay, I'll push the button in and you can go get him, then I'll join you."

"Give me three minutes, then let up on the button." With this the first man left.

Three minutes later the second man joined the first man. The first man addressed the third person of the group. "You know which way we go, Burtie?"

Burtie nodded his head and started down the hall with one man on either side of him.

They entered a large room with a large steel and glass box sitting in the center of the room. It was a peculiar box, about seven feet tall and five feet square, with glass windows on two sides, a blank side, and a door in the fourth side.

"How's the weather down in 'Frisco, tonight, Doc?"

The first man was speaking to a short, stocky man with glasses and a very shiny head. He had a black leather bag in one hand and was nervously scratching his ear with the other.

"So, so" was the reply. "You better get him in so we can be on time. You know how they are when we run late."

"You got the stuff in the timer box yet?" asked the first man.

"No," said the doctor, "I'll wait until you finish."

After the two men had finished their part of the task and the door had been shut and sealed, the doctor put the "stuff" in a box that was situated on the back of the large box. Then he set the timer for two minutes.

The three men stood and watched and soon they saw through the two inch thick glass the two tiny, greenish-colored pills roll down a little spout into the metal cup of water under the chair to which Burtie had been strapped.
Mrs. Roda Under the Pentagon...

Old Mrs. Roda climbed on her hilltop garden with footsteps shorter than spurts of flame, in rosebuds planted when a ring was in the moon.

I knew whenever I came home from school to see the late spring sunlights flirting in her yard, she would be watching me.

Beckoning faraway she seemed a soft grey shadow tucked between green spreads of tree, but coming close I saw her wrinkles strung with pocks like beads.

She nuzzled whispers in my ear to tell me how my life was patterned by the stars, and when I should tack wolf's—bane above my door.

I liked her well enough to fear that if she ever kissed me with her thoughts, my mind would know Endymion's sleep.

... Douglas Hodgman

The Futilist...

Reason sat in a corner
In a dingy room and frowned.
It knew how perishable
Are smiles. Nor would it
Paint a picture or read a book.
It knew there was no use
In any such endeavor.

Children played in the sunny court
Below, laughing and singing—
Never knowing—Poor Souls—that their Laughter, their songs, were as the brief Flicker of a firefly in our dark well.

They laughed, they sang
They didn't know—Poor Souls!

... Pauline Hylkema
The poolrooms were closed. The toteboards gathered dust and the sound of the ticker-tape was heard throughout the land no more. Men were thrown out of work. Boys stood around without bets to run or balls to rack and girls no longer knew where to look for their studs. A whole way of life had been destroyed. It was terrible.

The gathering storm clouds had been paid no heed. We had seen reform rear its ugly head before, only to die quickly. We waited for the 'Do-Gooders' to retreat and the retreat never came. The bookies were harrased from the streets, the wire services were disconnected and cops defaulted on new cars as all outside sources of income dried up.

On a chilly, drizzly September afternoon we watched Eli padlock the door of the 'Capitol Billiard Emporium'. We watched silently, uncomfortably, like mourners at a funeral. Poor Eli... twenty years in the same spot... never a day late with the vigorish. What could he possibly work at now? Suddenly Eli looked old. He trudged away.

The onlookers drifted off aimlessly. Soon the sidewalk was deserted except for me and Sam, The Stick. The Stick was none other than Sam Katz, twenty years old, five feet eight inches tall and two hundred fifty pounds heavy. He was not only jobless as a result of this catastrophe, (he made his living off the pooltables) he was practically homeless as well. He turned to me, and in a voice choked with emotion asked, "Now what, Scales?" (I worked in my old man's grocery).

"Whadya mean, now what?"

"Yeah, I forgot. You already got a job. Guess I'll have to get one too." He started to turn away. "Say Scales, how do you go about getting a job?"

"Well, you can look in the paper or better still, you can go down to the U.S. Employment Service."

"No kidding? Where is it?"

"I don't know. You can look it up in the phone book."

"Thanks. Guess I'll do that." He didn't sound too enthusiastic.

I didn't see him for the next two weeks, but when I did, I could see that something was troubling him.

"Hi, Stick. Did you get a job?"

"Yeah, but it almost wasn't worth the sweat."

"Why? What happened to you?"

"Well, when I first go to this employment joint, they ask me for my Social Security Card. Man, I didn't even know there was such an animal. They get a big yak out of this and they send me to another joint to dig up one of those cards. I fill out all the blanks like I'm told and hand it back to 'em. Those birds also think it's pretty funny that I'm twenty years old and never had a job. But by this time, I've lost my sense of humor and I tell them how much I can..."
make in a good night down at Eli's. This bit of information quiets them down somewhat."

"What about the bad nights, Stick?"

"We won't mention them. Well like I said, I take this card back to the employment joint and they ask me what can I do. Naturally, I tell them that I'm just about the greatest snooker player in Brooklyn. This clown smiles and puts down "Unskilled" on my application. This upsets me no end, but I let it pass. He sends me down to a joint in the garment center, and at last I got me a job, just like all the other peasants."

"What do you do?"

"Oh, I push one of those carts full of dresses from one shop to another."

"How's the pay?"

"That's another thing that burns me up. You know they got something they call withholding tax?"

"Yeah, they got it some time already."

"Well, nobody ever told me nothing about it. I got to work Saturdays if I wanna make any real dough."

"Too bad. Well, take it easy."

"Yeah, I'll be seeing you."

This time I didn't see him for over a month, but I heard about him through my mother.

"Guess who I saw today, Julius?"

"Joe Stalin and stop calling me Julius."

"Very funny. You should maybe have a little more respect for your mother, don't you think? And Julius happens to be a very nice name."

"Okay Ma, you win. Who'd you see today?"

"Sam Katz and he looks like he lost a lot of weight."

"No kidding? Pushing them carts around can slim a guy down."

"No, I think he's on a diet, I think he's going with a girl."

"How can you tell?"

"He had a shave."

"I think you're wrong, Ma. The only thing Sam ever went steady with was a pool cue."

"Still, I think Sam is going with a girl."

As usual, my mother was right. It seems that the boss's daughter used to pick her father up in their car after he locked up the shop. Sam liked her looks, but the only way he could get near her without her old man hitting the roof, was to work overtime. Sam put in much overtime. This course of action had a number of interesting results: one; he got close to Natalie, (that was her name) two; he convinced her father that he was a go-getter and three; he made a hell of a lot of cash.

Pretty soon everybody was chummy as all get out. Sam commenced to talk about down payments on homes, Natalie began steering Sam towards jewelry stores, (just window shopping, of course) and her old man, since he didn't have any sons, began making noises about a partnership.
About a month before the wedding, Sam came into the grocery store. I hardly recognized him. He was actually thin. He had a shave and he was wearing about three hundred bucks worth of clothes on his back.


"Please." His face had pained look “How about calling me Sam?”

"Sure thing. Can’t say I blame you. What’s doing?"

"Besides getting married, not much. Listen, I’ve got a proposition for you."

His deal was simple, but it just about bowled me over. Sam never had much of a head for business and he was afraid that his father-in-law was going to find that out very quickly. This partnership could prove extremely painful, unless he could rely on someone with some business experience. By someone, he meant me. I was to start off the same way he did, namely pushing a cart. Since I had some brains, I would get ahead quickly. Also, since Natalie was getting married, someone would have to pick up the boss. This someone was Sarah, Natalie’s kid sister by about a year. Sarah, he assured me, was damned good looking and a swell kid to boot.

He told me to think it over, and believe you me, I did just that. I didn’t mind getting a chunk of a business, but picking up a wife at the same time, sort of bothered me. I mentioned the proposition to my parents. My father grumbled at the prospect of my leaving the store, but my mother told me, I’d be a fool to refuse.

I still didn’t know what to do. Three days later Sam dropped in again to see what I had decided. He was driving his wedding present from his father-in-law to be ... a brand new Mercury convertible.

I start work at the Peerless Dress Manufacturing Company Incorporated this coming Monday.

Jazz . . .

Deep rumble of many voices punctuated by shrill bursts of laughter
Low throaty tones of the clarinet woven through the dim smoke-clouded cellar
Loud peal of horn calling through the dusk
Dull thump of drum—
Quiet

Dim lights glow on the shimmering golden form of the trumpet
It raises then drops quickly as blinding spots hush the throng
The trumpet sounds—the drum answers
The clarinet glides into an obligato
The bass picks out the beat
They blend—

JAZZ

... Patti Burns
"Then I say, man get off your hind end, we's going to that party."
"What did he say?"
"Well, he say he wasn't goin' and I say he was an' we went." She chuckled.

Stebby was in the stock room printing up price tags for some returned dresses. She liked to go to the stock room because she usually saw Cassie. When Cassie wasn’t busy taking customers up and down she would bring the elevator to the basement and stand just inside the doorway, so she could hear the buzzer and still talk to whoever was working in the room.

Stebby finished the price tags and looked at her watch. She wanted to hear the rest of the story but she had been told, as usual, to hurry right back. "Well," she said slowly, "guess I'd better get these back to Mrs. Hart or she'll start screaming like a wild bird."

Cassie laughed that wonderful Negro laugh that starts from the stomach and wells up into a rich "Hyah, hyah, hyah." She laughed because she enjoyed it and Stebby enjoyed making her laugh.

"Whyn't you hop on the elevator an' I'll run you up?"
"Huh, you know what dollar signs would say if I did, don't you?"
"Don' let him bother you."
"I won't. That's why I'm walking up."

Cassie shrugged loose-jointed shoulders and Stebby walked away. It was three flights to Better Dresses, Suits and Coats and Stebby wondered how many times a week she went up and down, the back way, past the lounge, the office, lay-aways, alterations, the dirty window to the fire escape, the employee’s rest room and finally into the back room of Better Dresses, Suits and Coats.

As she stopped to catch her breath Stebby could hear Mrs. Hart out on the floor with a customer. Stebby heard her rasping to a young girl and her mother about what a wonderful bride the girl would be. It was a canned speech and Stebby recited it under her breath as she threaded the new price tags through the sleeves of the returned stock. In a few minutes Mrs. Hart swished into the back room.

"Honey," she said, pressing her lips together and looking in the little mirror on the wall, "run down to Lingerie and get a crinilin for this bride I got in the dressing room. I'll call so they'll let you have one. Hurry now."

Old Mrs. Bennet said, "While you're down there stop at Jewellery and pick up my earrings that Selma was fixing."

"Anything else?" Stebby inquired, more politely than she had intended. They said no, they guessed not, not now and Stebby hurried away. This time she could take the elevator.

"Main," Stebby said and watched Cassie’s long frame slowly begin to uncoil.
“Um,” Cassie marked her place by creasing the paper with her fingernail. She put the True Love under her stool and said, “Now where they got you running to?”

“Lingerie for a crinolin for the prettiest little bride you’ll ever see and jewelery for Mrs. Bennett’s earrings.” Stebby counted on her fingers.

“Well, whyn’t you say so? That sounds like a rush job.” She pushed the button for main and they both laughed.

“Hurry back, now,” Cassie called as Stebby got off the elevator.

Stebby picked up the earrings from Selma and repeated the message she was to give to Mrs. Bennett and then went to Lingerie. A fat salesgirl who looked like she never wore the foundations she sold told Stebby that they were busy and that it would be a few minutes while they found the size and filled out a departmental loan form, so Stebby wandered over to Sports-wear to wait.

The spring merchandise was coming in, Cruisewear, they called it. Stebby looked thru the mix and match sets and the thirty-five dollar cotton dresses marked “dry clean only.” A customer near by remarked, “Lord, by the time I could afford a 30 dollar cotton dress I couldn’t afford to wear it if it had to be dry cleaned.”

The department head purred, “But they last so much longer if you do and see how nicely the seams are finished.”

Stebby wandered back to Lingerie thinking of her $4.98 cotton skirts. “They wash so easily and look so young and crisp,” her mother said. Stebby thought oh well, someday. Stebby picked up the package on the counter scribbled, “Crinolin, sz. 12, Mrs. Hart,” and the department loan slip duplicate and headed to the back of the store and the elevator.

“I see you got all your por tant packages,” Cassie commented.

“Yeah, an the documents that go along with them.” She showed the duplicate loan slip to Cassie.

Stebby groaned as she got off the elevator. The show racks were filled with dresses to be buttoned, belted and taken to the back room to be hung in the proper size bin. Why, oh why couldn’t this store keep their better dresses out on the floor like the other stores did? Then she remembered the weekly store meeting about distinction of merchandise and atmosphere. She put the earrings on the table in the back room, handed the package to the impatient Mrs. Hart.

“I had to wait for it. They were busy in Lingerie.”

“The way they act,” Mrs. Hart said over her shoulder as she hurried to the dressing room, “you’d think selling a $3.00 nightie was more important than my $150.00 dollar wedding dress.” Stebby felt like saying, “They’re just an interested in commission as you are.” But Mrs. Hart was in charge of the most expensive department in the store and was passing judgment and when Mrs. Hart passed judgment it was best to nod and forget it. Stebby stood on her tip-toes to see into the mirror. It irked her that it was so high. Its heighth seemed to smirk at her and imply that she didn’t really belong here; that she didn’t have the long line featured in the Monday night ads. She quickly combed her hair. She wondered if it would be straight by evening.
when she had a date. It had been such a long day and so humid. She looked at her watch. It was almost time for a break but first the dresses on the racks. Button, belt, straighten on the hanger, button, belt, straighten on the hanger. She did it quickly and almost in rhythm. It was the same thing all day, button, belt, straighten on the hanger. She took an armful of half-sizes and maternities; they went to the very back of the room and she always took them first. When all the dresses were put away and she had checked the dressing rooms to make sure there was nothing left in them she peeked her head in the Bride's room where Mrs. Hart was murmuring over the young girl in the brides dress.

"Ok if I take a break now?"
"Sure, go ahead."
Stebby started down the back stairs that were just behind the dressing rooms but Mrs. Hart called her back “Honey, take this crinolin back on your way, will you?” Mrs. Hart came and handed the crinolin and loan slip to her and whispered, “they're going to take it, and a veil too.”

"Wonderful." It came out automatically.
"Go the front way as long as you’ve got the crinolin and take your time.”

Stebby smiled as she waited for Cassie to bring the elevator up. Well the rest of the day should go pretty good, it always did when Mrs. Hart sold a bridal set. The elevator thumped to a stop and Stebby stood aside while two chattering girls got off. They were the kind who would look at everything and buy nothing. Either that or they'd take something home on approval and bring it back the next day. Either way it meant extra work, oh well, as long as Mrs. Hart was in a good mood... she got in the elevator.

“You on another important mission?”
“Just on a break, this is extra but I got extra time too.”
“Lucky you. I ain had a break all day.”
“Take one now,” Stebby said, "I'll run this thing for you." She was joking but Cassie said, “Why not? I can show you how in a minute or ain you serious?”

“Well, sure, I'm serious, I'd like to.”

When they reached main floor Stebby rushed her package to Lingerie. She didn’t know when she had hurried so fast. Her heart kept time with her steps. She gave the package to the fat saleslady and only caught a glimpse of her as she inspected the crinolin to see if it was soiled. She hurried back to the elevator and Cassie took her up and down once and then watched her do it. Cassie was right, it did only take a minute to learn and it was fun, it was different. At the basement they stopped and Cassie went to the lounge. Stebby settled herself on the pink cushion on the steel stool and waited for the buzzer to ring. She had a wonderful time going up and down, now she knew how her grandfather felt in the cab of his locomotive. The buzzer rang again and she went to main and opened the gray door. There, rocking from heel to toe was Mr. Simons. He was in his usual position. His hands were in the pocket of his blue suit and he was rocking star-
ing at nothing in particular. His eyes were like pieces of hemitite, cold and gray. She wondered if he knew what people said about his eyes, that there were dollar signs in them and that they spun and clicked like a slot machine whenever someone made a big sale. Now, they seemed to swing directly upon her. She wasn't sure because she wasn't looking directly at him.

"Better Dresses," he said coldly. He was probably on his way up to congratulate Mrs. Hart on her sale.

She pushed the right button. It seemed like a long way to better dresses. He didn't say anything, he just kept rocking and looking at the ceiling. When he got off he inquired, "Where's the elevator girl?"

"Cassie's taking a break. Nobody relieved her. I'm on my break too."

"I see." He rocked off in the direction of Better Dresses, Suits and Coats.

Stebby felt weak. With relief she answered the buzzer from the basement. It was Cassie who laughed and was reassuring about the incident.

"Oh forget it, he's only the sistant manager."

"I suppose," Stebby answered but the day seemed dull again, even tho Mrs. Hart had sold a bridal outfit. Cassie took her to her floor and reluctantly she stepped out of the protection of the elevator. She walked to the dress racks again. They were full again, with junior sizes, probably from those college girls. She began to button, belt, straighten on the hanger. She took an armful of dresses to the back room and began to hang them up. Mr. Simons voice floated back to her. "Where's the stock girl?" Stock girl! She ground the hangers across the iron bar. Mrs. Hart sounded bored. "Back room, I guess." She was probably dreaming of the commission on her next check. She heard his steps before she turned. Rock, rock rock. She knew what he looked like without turning, Touch of the heel, up on the toe ... touch of the heel, up on the toe ... eyes staring, straight ahead. Stebby put the dresses in the bin carefully, one by one. She straightened every skirt and adjusted every belt.

"Miss Stebbleton."

"Yes?"

He looked at the ceiling. "Our firm might get in a great deal of difficulty if today's incident were to be repeated."

She took her cue. "What do you mean?"

"Our elevators are licensed ... according to law, so are our elevator girls ..."

She barely heard the rest of the lecture. She only knew that her face was hot and that she was chewing on her lip and that she mumbled something and he left. Mrs. Hart was there now.

"My lord, honey. I thought you wanted a break. You don't have to run elevators and that kind of stuff. When'd you and the elevator girl get so thick anyhow?"

"Forget it." Stebby walked to the floor. Yeah, forget it, she thought, forget it, you wouldn't understand. There were more dresses on the racks. She began to button, belt ... I'll quit, she thought,
I’ll be eighteen in two weeks, button, belt, I’ll get a job in a factory, make more money, straighten on the hanger. She took the dresses to the back room, two regulars, three juniors, one maternity. She went to the phone.

Harriett, nosey Harriet, was on switch.

“Well, Stebby, how are you . . . looked for you at break.”

“I didn’t make it. Is Mr. Simons in his office?”

“Just a minute, I’ll look.” She could hear the gum, going crack, crack.

“Yeah, he is.”

“Ok, thanks.”

“Uh, you’re welcome.” Harriet was curious. Well, let her be. She put the receiver on the hook, and looked out at the show floor. There were no customers, no dresses to put away. She went to the office by the back stairs. She didn’t ask. Let them think she was in the rest room. Let them think she’d jumped out the window!

Mr. Simons saw her coming thru the glass window but she knocked any way. He nodded and she went in. She looked at his desk, it was clean and bare. She asked him about the possibility for more money. She knew what the answer would be. Then she told him she was quitting. She didn’t say she was sorry and he didn’t say he was sorry. There was nothing more to say so she left his office. She wondered if he watched her go. She knew Harriet did. She didn’t need to look at Harriet to know. Harriet would be looking, her whole expression a question mark, her gum going crack, crack, crack.

When she got back to Better Dresses, Suits and Coats the phone rang. It was Harriet and Stebby told her and when she hung up she told Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Hart. They didn’t say much and in the silence she remembered Selma’s message about the earrings and repeated it, word for word, to Mrs. Bennett. Mrs. Bennett nodded and both she and Mrs. Hart began to go through their sales slips for the day figuring their commission on scratch paper. “You gotta watch em—” Mrs. Hart muttered “You gotta keep track of every penny and then compare with your paycheck.”

At five-thirty Stebby gathered up her things, her purse, coat, umbrella for a rainy day, extra pair of hose in case she ran one. Mrs. Bennett was gone. She always left a few minutes early because she liked to catch the elevator while it was still running. Stebby noticed that her earrings were still on the table. She didn’t know what to say to Mrs. Hart so she just said goodbye.

“Well, bye, honey. Come see us sometime.”

“Yes, I’ll do that.”

She walked down the back stairs, past the checker at the door and out on the street. Still humid. She felt her hair . . . not quite straight. Her flats padded against the mosaic that was sidewalk. Yes, I’ll come back, she thought, I’ll come back and show you my thirty-five dollar cotton dresses. I’ll turn up my hem so you can see how nicely the seams are finished. I’ll be back and I’ll call you all honey. She fumbled for a token and got on the bus.