"Western Michigan University's Literary Magazine"

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It was already 7:00 on an evening in the late fall when it begins to get dark before suppertime. “Outside, Ma,” he begged again and again.

Finally he brought me his too-small jacket, dragging it on the floor from the hall to where I stood at the kitchen sink.

“He, Ma,” he said again.

I drew my hands across the apron, picked him up and lifted him in front of the window.

“It’s dark outside—and cold.”

“Outside, Ma,” he said again.

I zipped him into his jacket, snapped his cap, and buttoned my own sweater over the damp apron.

He wasn’t afraid as I carried him into the dark, though the wind creaked in the big elm and bore through my sweater as I stepped around the house. Surely he would change his mind.

“Want to go in the house now?”

“Sandbox,” he said, and I could see by the light of the swaying street lamp the sparkle of his eyes, “Sandbox.”

I set him down in the driveway and we walked hand in hand to the back yard where the play bars hung naked in the night air and the doghouse towered larger than usual in a fearsome silhouette.

“Andy, new house?” he asked, pointing at the vacant shell next door.

“Yes.”

“Mike, new house?” this time with a rising inflection.

“Mike’s moved to the new house—and Jerry, too,” I added, anticipating the next question.

He pulled me toward the sandbox and I sat on the edge of it while he sent an exploratory finger into the cold and dirty sand.

“Cold,” he said, looking at me quizzically, “Cold.”

He came over and settled himself in my lap; I felt the cold from his cheeks in front of me in the dark. We sat for several minutes listening to bare tree branches rubbing against each other, watching the swaying shadows cast by the streetlight rocking in the wind and smelling the smell of cold earth. I shivered.

“Cold,” he squealed, putting his hands against my face, “Cold.”

He didn’t protest when I picked him up and carried him toward the house.

Once back in the warm envelope of the kitchen he slipped down and ran, jacket dangling half on, half off into the dining room corner where a begrimed elephant lay face down in the wheelbarrow.

“Cold,” he said, winding the elephant in an old hanky, “Cold.”
as the spigot is turned
coffee
becomes
down

and we drink of the cup
some with sugar
some with cream
some without

and we live on
because . . .

Max Steele

CHOICE

I have been so long alone,
Sequestered. Life has dimmed away.
Isolation buries me.
Endless time becomes the day.

Long ago were turbulence
And tempests, and I had to pay
For leaning toward the frenzied storm.
Endless time becomes the day.

Caution knocked at muddled brain,
And I exchanged my fine display
Of feeling for a blind reserve.
Endless time becomes the day.

I know quiet, and my hell
Is meted out. It leads the way
For stark insensitivity.
Endless time becomes the day.

Joan S. Popke
AND THEY STILL STAND . . .
(a dialogue of one)

Three still stand, Sir
We have not conquered them all.

Yes, Sir, we tried—
There is something holding them.
It is as though they were statues;
They stand so stalwartly.
Sir, can they be the ones
We’ve heard of . . .

Of course, Sir, I realize it’s a myth,
But Sir they just won’t die.
We’ve fired a complete round of ammo
At each of them—Three won’t fall
Sir, it’s eerie the way those three
Stand there among the dead.

No, Sir, they still have not fallen . . .

Yes, I’ll go out there, Sir.
I’ll try Sir.

Sir, they’re dead. But they just
Stand there—Statues among the dead
And Sir, they’re smiling—
How can they be happy in death?
Sir, there is nothing after this life . . .
Is there Sir?

I understand, Sir. Yes, I will.
I will remove them before the rest
See those smiles . . .
Can’t have the men believing in a myth
That would destroy our
Purpose—our civilization . . .
But Sir, I still can’t see
Why they believe . . .
The crack of a screen door slamming shut rolled over the valley and was swallowed up by the tree-covered hillsides. A man had emerged from a small cabin which huddled near the base of a hill. The cabin was ringed on three sides by a stand of tall pine trees and faced toward a meadow-like clearing from which the fog was just now departing. The dampness and cold of the early morning caused the man to shudder involuntarily, then he threw back his shoulders and breathed deeply of the crisp, cool air.

Jason Woodruff was feeling very much the rugged individualist this morning. “Ah... this is the way to live,” he said aloud and formed in his mind the picture he would describe at the club. He savored the feeling of power which came over him as he stood alone in the morning quiet. Standing on the porch of the cabin, arms folded over his chest, rifle held under his arm pointing downward, clad in the red wool of the hunter he looked like the man of distinction in a whiskey ad.

Only a slight paunch, now concealed by the heavy wool hunting jacket, and a hint of grey around the temples gave evidence of Jason’s fifty years. The huge frame and strong hands which presided so ably over the conference table looked equally competent in the role of the hunter.

He paused long in his contemplation of the countryside. His gaze took in every detail which he etched in his mind, forming the eloquent phrases he would use back in the city. His fancy wandered and he could see the admiration in the eyes of his young secretary as he described the adventure.

A rustling in the woods to his left caught his attention and he glanced in time to see a cotton-tail rabbit bound from the woods and disappear in the tangled underbrush bordering the field. Stepping down from the porch, Jason thought to himself that the rabbit had nothing to fear from him, he was after bigger game. As he had told the boys at the club, he’d settle for nothing less than the biggest buck in the woods this trip. He could imagine the head and polished antlers of the deer mounted over the fireplace in his den.

He walked slowly along the edge of the field, crunching the fallen leaves underfoot and skirting the brambles which caught at his wool trousers. The frost, leaving the ground, made the going difficult and several times as he climbed the hill his foot slipped and he grabbed at the brambles to catch himself.

The sting of the thorns ripping into his palms infuriated him and suddenly the good feeling of the morning was gone. “Damn it, someone ought to get those things out of here.” Jason swore as the frost-smooth earth kept slipping from under him. Twice more he was thrown to
one knee, forced to drop his rifle, and catch at the thorny underbrush to retain his balance.

Reaching the top of the hill, he paused, breathing heavily from exertion. He cleaned the mud and litter from his rifle and brushed the dirt from his knees. He lit a cigarette and as he smoked and rested, some of the feeling which had held him earlier, returned. As he looked down the path he had just taken, he felt proud and was moved to mutter, "By God, the old boy does all right yet."

Crushing the cigarette underfoot he started out again in the direction of the cedar swamp. The deer, he knew, had spent the night deep in the swamp and would be moving about soon, looking for food.

The sun had pulled itself over the rim of the hills and was spilling light and warmth over the woodland. Patches of white frost remained on the ground only in spots where the trees clustered together and the thick pine foliage overhead blocked the sun. The ground was fairly level and carpeted with decaying leaves and broken twigs. Only an occasional fallen tree blocked Jason's progress. These he vaulted easily and grinned in self-appreciation.

As he marched along he couldn't help feeling that it was nice to be alone. First time in years that he had really been by himself and it felt good. Of course there had been four of them originally planning the trip, but that was before the big change.

Back in June he and Fred Peters had been talking over lunch and Fred had said, "Say, Jake, why don't you and I and a couple of the boys get together this fall for some hunting? Few days away from civilization will do us all good."

"Good idea, Fred," he had said. "Let's plan on it."

At the time Jason felt sure that by fall he would have full control of the company and that Fred, as well as many others of the 'old guard' would be out. 'Course he'd been running the company for years even though not fully in control of it. That was all changed now. He had bought up a lot of the outstanding stock and the board of directors was in his pocket. By God, he thought, it's been a damn good year. I deserve a little time to myself.

He was entering the woods that bordered the swamp now. The woods ran up a hill and from a vantage point on the hill he could watch the edge of the swamp that opened onto a broad field. If the deer should leave the swamp in search of water or a salt lick, he figured they would have to pass right in front of him. It was dark in the woods and damp. The coolness caused him to hunch his shoulders under the jacket and he pulled up the collar, buttoning the top flap. The earth was springy with a soft covering of pine needles and where the frost remained the footing was slippery. More than once his boots slipped on the slick whiteness and he clawed wildly at the air to keep upright. "Damn frost anyway," he growled, "be a damn sight better if we had a little snow for tracking."

Reaching the top of the hill he walked along the edge looking for a likely spot to hole up. About fifty yards from the edge of the swamp a group of boulders were clustered around a small clump of trees which clung to the hillside. From here he had a clear view of
the deer runs leading from the swamp and was close enough to get off an accurate shot. The wind, which had been blowing against him as he climbed the hill, had shifted slightly but was still coming from the direction of the swamp and blowing toward him. Thank God for that, he thought, at least I'll see him before he smells me.

Squeezing himself down among the rocks, out of the wind, he considered lighting a cigarette but decided against it. Nothing to do now, he knew, but to wait. Be a helluva lot better if there were a couple of men to enter the swamp from the rear and beat the brush, scaring the deer out. Well, he had invited them anyway but if they wanted to hold a grudge and be damn pigheads it wasn't his fault.

He had called Fred on Friday after thinking about it all day. Sitting in his spacious, oak panelled office, he had reached for the phone a hundred times; finally towards late afternoon he had called Fred's number. Never let it be said that Jason Woodruff backs out on his friends, he said to himself.

On the other end of the line the phone buzzed and the receiver was taken off the hook.

"Fred? Say, Fred, how's tricks, boy?"

"This is Jason—ah—ah—Jake, you know. Say, how about that hunting trip we talked about?"

"Hello, Jason," a voice answered coolly. "No thanks, I don't think I can make it this year."

"Fred, hold on a minute, I've been wanting to talk to you about what happened, with the company I mean." The voice at the other end remained silent, so Jason continued, "You know how it is, a fellow's got to do what he thinks is best for the company, can't stop progress you know." Here Jason chuckled, a low, confidential laugh designed to indicate mutual understanding. It fell flat, still no answer from the other end of the wire.

"You might be interested to know that the latest sales figures show we're leading the field in total volume since I took . . . that is, since the personnel change. Leading the field, how do you like that?"

"That's swell, Jason, glad to hear it."

"Sure you won't change your mind, about the hunting trip I mean?"

"Can't make it this year, Jason, but thanks for asking."

"Well O.K. if you're sure you can't make it. Take it easy then, and say, we'll have to get together for lunch some time."

"Sure, let's do that, so long."

After Fred had hung up, Jason sat for a moment reflecting on the conversation. Sounded like Fred was blaming him for his own lack of ambition. Well, he thought philosophically, that's how it goes in this business, some people are easily stopped and others forge ahead.

The cramped position he had assumed and the cold which had penetrated his clothing brought Jason out of his meditation. He shivered and scanned the brush bordering the swamp for any sign of movement. There was none. He decided to have that cigarette after all and fished one out of a badly crumpled pack. If it took the whole damn day to wait out the deer, then by God that's just what he'd do.
And wait all night too, if it were necessary. Reaching into the inside pocket of his jacket he pulled out a leather bound flask, unscrewed the top and lifted it to his lips. The liquor burned his throat and a warm glow settled in his stomach. Just what the doctor ordered, he thought, fastening the cover and returning the flask to his pocket.

He found himself wishing Bill Allen had come along. There's a man who appreciates good liquor, he thought. Bill had been president of the company at the time of the reshuffling and had chosen retirement over demotion. The bitterness had been plain in his voice when Jason called.

"Hell no, Jake, I don't want to go hunting. Get some of those 'bright young men' of yours to go along."

"Now wait a minute, Bill, no reason we can't be friends. A few days in the woods will give us a chance to talk things over."

"We talked everything over last time. If you had wanted to come into the company, all you had to do was come and tell me. We would have been glad to have you, there was no need to go sneaking around on the outside."

Jason chose to ignore the subject. "Bill, you were working too hard, time you stepped down and let the young fellas do the work. Remember, there's always a seat on the board of directors waiting for you."

"I don't want to sit with the damn directors and I don't care to go hunting either, but don't let me stop you, Jake. So long."

Hell no, he won't stop me, Jason thought, there's nothing on this earth can stop Jason Woodruff when his dander's up.

The morning wore on slowly, the passage of time being marked only by the sun's slow movement until finally it hung directly overhead, white and heatless. An occasional movement in the brush startled Jason out of his thoughts but it was only a rabbit darting about searching for food. Deep in the swamp a bird sounded a long, wavering cry, powerful in contrast to the sparrows and chickadees which chattered overhead.

Once a porcupine ambled out of the swamp and disappeared in a clump of trees by the field's edge. Jason discovered another in the limbs of a tree overhead and amused himself by annoying it.

There still was no movement in the swamp and Jason pulled out another cigarette. Placing it in his mouth he reached for a match, the next moment the matches were dropping to the ground, the cigarette hanging lifeless from his lips. Where a moment before the field had been empty, three lithe, brown animals now pawed the earth at the swamp's edge. Their heads jerked nervously from side to side and their ears were pointed straight up as if listening expectantly for some signal. Jason held himself rigid, scarcely daring to breathe, he searched frantically for some sign of horns on the animals' heads. There were none. Two does and a fawn he decided. In the field all movement had ceased, only an occasional jerking of the ears marred the animal's statue-like appearance. They remained like this for what seemed to Jason hours. Suddenly the tableau was broken. As if the all-clear had been sounded the deer had suddenly relaxed and were now gazing in the direction from which they had come.
Jason’s gaze shifted from the deer to the dark, shadowy opening in the swamp and was held there, as if by some will other than his own. He was no longer conscious of the cold. The palms of his hands, pressed tightly against his rifle, were moist with sweat.

Jason’s eyes widened and he felt the breath catch in his throat. What he had taken, at first glance, to be wind-tossed branches had revealed themselves to be a magnificent set of antlers crowning the head of the largest, most venerable animal he had ever seen. Like a proud and majestic monarch the animal came slowly out of the woods. Its splendid head was held erect, the antlers brushing the sky. To Jason’s fascinated gaze it was the most wonderful spectacle ever witnessed. The animal was as big as any Jason had ever heard of, weighing easily some two hundred and fifty pounds. The huge rack of horns, worn so proudly, gave evidence of the deer’s great age.

Jason fought to shake off the fascination which had held him spellbound. His thumb released the safety catch of the rifle and with that act he became his old self again, cool and calculating. Cautiously he edged the rifle out in front of him. Laying his cheek against the stock, he aimed at the animal’s chest. The first shot sent the buck crashing to its knees and then over on its side. Almost immediately it was up and three quick leaps had carried it into the refuge of the swamp.

The crack of the rifle had sent the rest of the herd scrambling back into the woods and the field was empty as Jason came running and sliding down the hill. He followed a trail of blood-spattered leaves leading to the cool interior of the swamp. Half running and half walking he was almost on the fallen animal before he discovered him. Using its last ounce of endurance, the deer had bounded over a knoll and collapsed where it had landed, lying now on its side in the midst of a brush pile. The deer fought to raise itself and then fell back, its eyes rolling to stare up at Jason. The antlers had become entwined in the brush preventing any movement of the head and the long, sinewy neck was grotesquely stretched, making taut the smooth, brown skin which rippled with each gasp for breath.

A look of utter abhorrence clouded Jason’s features. He was embarrassed and revolted by the deer’s death throes but could not force himself to look away. He tried to raise the rifle to his shoulders but his arms wouldn’t move. They hung lifelessly by his side; the rifle slipped from his grasp and clattered to the ground. Slowly, Jason lowered himself to the ground close by the deer’s side. Never for an instant did his eyes leave those of the dying beast.

The hole in the deer’s chest did not seem large enough for death to enter. From it, small intermittent trickles of blood marked each heaving of the chest.

Jason was not aware that the deer had ceased struggling. He stared fixedly at the dethroned monarch, his mind whirling, grasping for a solution. For one wild moment he thought of covering the wound, then everything would be as it had been. Legs crossed in front of him, head and shoulders bent, he sat beside the stiffening animal, rocking slowly from side to side.
From high above, the last leaves were severed from their mooring and came drifting aimlessly down. A rising wind whistled through the trees bringing with it the first snow. The drifting leaves settled upon the dead beast, forming a multi-colored shroud. Still Jason sat, rocking endlessly from side to side.

In the west the blood-red sun was drawn slowly but firmly below the edge of the earth.

OF WHEN AND WHY FOR

Flesh picked grey flecks
And collared them in pink.

In the beginning of when and why for
The blood moon will closet light
And fade it to a grey ember.

Nine choirs of sky will break
Brittle flames and char my thighs.
I did not serve of when and why for.

The world-spewed splinters
Crumble into pulp
Preparing white beds.
I did not serve of when and why for.

And over my fired flesh
And the nine choirs
And white beds
A flaked firefall
Spit the song of when and why for.

Pete Green
The amethystine sky bore little resemblance to the sky in regatta paintings and yet the black-bottomed, white-crowned puffs of cumulus were like sailing ships in tight formation, and the brisk wind shot them along at a rapid clip. The wind was more than a sailing wind, it was storm wind. It embraced all of the potentials of a sailor’s dread, a force nine gale. The trees rocked gently in the subtle ground breeze while aloft the clouds grew darker and the background lost its purplish tint and turned dead grey as if to shroud another onslaught of nature.

As the sky darkened and the surface wind increased, the inhabitants began the preparations to close out and ignore nature’s tirade. From the streets, the wind twirled gutter refuse up into the yards and slapped spright poplars with last Sunday’s newspaper, and cats withdrew from alley can-stench to seek shelter in their kind master’s home. Six bright yellow leaves went scuttling down the street like some advance guard announcing the imminent, and a screen door slammed resonantly against its jam and then slammed again. A big striped bus charged down the street with passengers grimly holding onto children in an effort to beat its own schedule. Commuters leaped deftly from the last step and made for shiny cars and becoming wives, while the second section of today’s paper skittered off down the tracks toward the next station. Headlights, now forced on by the increasing solemnity of the sky, swung about resolutely seeking out tiny garages which were their homes.

Apartment dwellers watched disinterestedly as leaves and bits of gum wrappers blew into the foyer alongside their tired feet, then turned to silver mail boxes tastefully off-set by gold-edged name plates. Climbing worn stairs to a number-emblazoned door, and from there into the grey, dreary sanctum, they dropped grey-wrapped packages and turned to the mighty switch which could throw grey nothingness into bright yellow home.

In one of these homes there were sets of jalousie windows which cranked open and shut by a small handle on the inside. It was the type which has the screen on the inside of the window when it is closed. In this particular home, the windows had been left open in the single-minded early morning dash and now the wind was whistling freely in and out fondly lifting up the draperies and then dropping them to whirl away and then lift again. Inside, a woman kicked off sale shoes and wriggled from a low-overhead dress and plunked into a wrought chair. A man pummeled a deck of cigarettes and pulled a can of beer from the refrigerator. He peered aggrieved at the invading wind and the wide open windows. On one of the leeward window moldings sat a fly comfortably admiring his reflection in the window pane and watching the springing storm. His friends had all gone on to safe storm niches and had left him alone, brooding on the window.
The little fly contemplated many monumental questions regarding his existence and that of his fellows, and the one which bothered him the most seemed to be why he should exist at all. His fly-brain tried to conceive some rational explanation of life, some meaning to which he could attach significance, but after meditating for long moments, he failed to arrive at a single reason or reward for existing. He simply existed until that time when he wouldn't. With this totally unsatisfying philosophy he turned his acute gaze upon the blowy nature, only occasionally reaching his shielded sanctuary on the window frame. The wind would swish past his fragile wings and then rush at the draperies on the other side of the screen and into the warm yellow room.

The fly, still calmly admiring nature and himself, was suddenly startled to feel himself swinging in toward the screen as the window was cranked vigorously by a woman. The window snapped shut. The fly was trapped. He regarded the sullen woman as she paced back to her chair. His situation seemed hopeless, but he did not panic. He began to think of his friends who had flown off and left him, and of what he might do to escape, and then he thought of not escaping and that brought back his earlier conclusion. But then, he reasoned, why contemplate discouraging things when I could be planning a way out. Then again, he paused, why should I try to escape? Well, it'll pass the time, he rationalized. He began to walk along the molding in search of some tiny exit. With growing concern when success was not immediate, he began to run, up one molding and down another looking for a hole in the glass or in the screen, for although reason dictated calmness, he became agitated by this forced security. Soon he began flying back and down and over and up covering every bit of glass, buzzing furiously against the impermeable pane. Then with growing bitterness, he turned to the screen which, he reasoned, probably offered a better chance, since it already was full of holes and all he had to do was find one large enough. But, as he buzzed along, he became more and more discouraged because of the efficient organization of the holes into one small size. He paused. Gazing into the room beyond the screen, he watched the man boredly toss off the last of the beer. Ignoring the conclusion he had carefully reached that his existence was pointless, the fly surrendered to a powerful instinct which compelled him to seek an immediate escape. With all calmness now replaced by a single purpose, he became maniacal in his desire. In an effort to arouse the attention of a savior, he began to buzz violently about the confining frame of the window, crying out in agony for release. He kept this up until, nearly senseless with exhaustion, he fluttered to the sill between the two confining walls.

With the grey skies threatening and the wind howling, the fly wondered vaguely where his friends were and how long he might hold out in this prison. With saddened eyes of one forsaken, he looked above him at the sheer, immuring planes and sighed dejectedly like some crinkled balloon making a last gasp, for here, between the window and screen, was the end of the world for the little fly.

As he turned his head slowly about, looking out at the storm-
ravaged trees and then in at the yellow glow of security, he felt pangs of remorse and vexation. With the sullen look of one cheated, he turned his eyes about him for a single last look, and, as though some greater power were trying to tease him, there suddenly appeared to his misted eyes a small yet promising hole which had been missed in his urgency. With a leap of elation and a stirring of his sensitive heart he roared up to the Godsend in the form of an irregularity in the seemingly faultless screen. With agile wriggings and considerable contraction he worked silently at escaping into the promised land of yellow light where the wind and bleak weather couldn’t reach him and where he could enjoy the comforts of home like any civilized fly. With a surprising determination, he managed to struggle through the opening and into the lighted sanctity of the home. Pausing momentarily, he sighed with tremendous relief and tears welled up in his big fly-eyes. His temporary imprisonment had given him a new outlook. It had forced him to realize that the ability to act and think freely, even if not toward a specific end, was reward in itself for existing. He could now appreciate the compelling instinct for freedom.

Revelling in the bright light of freedom, he surveyed the room and noted the two humans and the open loaf of bread on the table in the center. Beside it sat the huge man with desolate, unhappy, grey eyes staring forward at a large white sheet of paper as if the answer to intense miseries would be found there. The tiny fly, still clinging to the inside of the screen, sympathetically regarded this person who was apparently imprisoned by his ignorance of the freedom which he owned. And, reasoned the fly, if he is ignorant of his freedom, then he can’t possibly realize his own captivity. His sorrow for this seemingly miserable soul sitting at the table was genuine and the fly wished there were some way in which he might enlighten this trapped person. With his newfound understanding of life, he felt it was his duty to become a missionary and pass on this intense feeling for the freedom of life to someone who needed it, and his first subject was right at hand. With heart swollen and eyes shining with the excitement of his mission, the little fly pushed off from the screen, and leaving his former prison behind, flew in a great exhilarating circle down to the table with the bread. Ignoring the inviting bread, the little fly cleared his throat and with well-chosen words began an oration on his meaning of existence, accompanying his dramatic expression with eloquent, attention-commanding gestures. With mounting verve, and almost carried away with his message, he continued, then abruptly stopped when he realized the large white sheet seemed to interest his audience more than his important message. Yelling a little louder than he had intended, he commanded his audience to attention and with a satisfied grin watched as the human turned his full attention to the fly and began to fold the distracting white sheet. He began his speech again, remembering all the time his narrow escape and the lesson it had taught him. With hand dramatically extended in a poignant pause, he looked up in time to note that his message apparently wasn’t reaching his listener. With an ironic smile, he wondered if perhaps he might communicate by speaking on a lower level of intelligence as the folded white sheet came crashing down on his fragile, sensitive body.
AND THEY WERE DESTROYED

A crashing, blinding holocaust of might,
Then curtains part, and lo, seven candles flare.
The seventh angel sounds the trumpet's woe,
Electric torches sear and rend the air.
Awestruck, dumb, and tempted to black fear,
The Alpha and Omega close,
Ye sons of clay, now cower, die and burn.

Cary Shields

NIGHT WALK

I shall not soon forget this night.
Houses are dark with drawn drapes,
And golden bugs at the street light
Kiss the burning bulb.

An old drunk gapes
At me as I whisper my dream of embarking
On a voyage to net white whales in a tea strainer. Dogs are barking at the fall sea
Of leaves. Big black crickets crack night.

This night, raped by the obscene sun, dies
Trailing the bleached blood of morning sky.

Peter Green
BASED ON A NEGRO SPIRITUAL

They spiked his palms and then his feet, and rallied in their rampant lust, as justice doomed the Roman seat.

The taunting crowd no longer hushed. "The Crazy Bastard!" "King of Jews?" "Let's Crucify Him!"—came the thrust.

They raffled off his cloak and shoes. They flipped him spit to wet his face, and paid him all his proper dues.

The spikes, now each in proper place, brought jeers from model, mocking men. Their righteousness became disgrace.

He came to save the favored, then—the essence of his life unknown—not fit to be a citizen.

A man transformed divine was shown, and God upon His Heavenly Throne heard one last whispered mortal moan—"Please. Make them take my mother home."

Phillip D. Adams
Sammy left the crowded chow tent and walked in the bright warm sunshine toward the rear of the circus lot. The sounds and smells of the circus set up a friendly barrage on his senses. The warm colors of red, orange, and yellow were intensified by the strong morning sunlight and people spoke to him as he made his way through the litter of sideshow tents and concession stands. As he passed the popcorn stand, the wizened figure of Joseph appeared from below the counter.

"Cot mornin' to ya, Meester Sammy, Cot mornin' ".

Sammy turned and leaned over the counter. No one ever passed the popcorn stand without stopping to talk to Joseph. Joseph was as much a part of the circus as the poles in the big tent. He had been there as long as anyone could remember and his smiling leathery face had set the character of the circus for decades. His brown eyes had watched many of the younger men come and go. Joseph was very old.

"Mornin', Joseph." Sammy tried to brighten.

"Whatsa da matta, Meester Sammy, you don' looka so good to Joe dis mornin'? Wheresa da beeg happy face?"

"That damn kid who thinks he's a manager wants to see me. It's the third time this week. He thinks I'm too old for the act. He says old clowns are a liability to the show. Damn fool never saw my act. He never saw the kids' faces. All he can think about is dollars and cents and how much it will cost if I get hurt."

"Datsa right, you gotta da top billing, Meester Sammy. Watsa he think who he is? Don' he reada da poster? Don' you worry, you come maka popada com with Joe. Datsa cot job."

Sammy turned again and started away from the stand. He was a star. Certainly he was a star, not even Joe denied that. Who was that smart young kid to order him to the office like a trained puppy? Anger rose in Sammy and he purposely kicked at a pile of neatly coiled rope sending the coils into a tangled mass. Let that damn manager sort out that mess. Stinking roustabout work was no more than the snot-nosed kid deserved. Keep him out of important peoples' hair. The morning sun had become angry and the heat was hot and unfriendly on Sammy's neck and shoulders. That's what that damn kid deserved. He ought to be a stinking roustabout and coil rope and drive stakes all day. Garbage duty would be too good for him. Let him go up and down the roads putting up Sammy's posters. Putting up Sammy's posters—yes, that would be the perfect job for him. Then he'd know what greatness meant.

There were gold scrolls on the frosted windows of the manager's office and gold lettering. The truck stood importantly at the back of the lot and the water on the roof steamed in the early morning sun. There was no activity around the office, only the water steaming up into the bright sunshine.
Sammy entered and stood looking at the long littered room. Papers and letters covered the battered desk and filled the waste basket standing at its side. The dark room smelled stuffy and close. There was the odor of old paper and spilled ink. The room looked tired.

The manager glanced up with a weary grimace. He was a small youngish man who looked underfed. Sammy felt repulsed as he looked at the man. There was nothing of the artist about him, no life. He was just as dead as the spilled ink and the old rotting paper. He was like an ink pen dressed up to represent a man in a store window; all he could produce was lines on a piece of paper. Sammy controlled his voice. "What do you want to see me about this time, worm."

"Sammy, I'm going to try to be nice about this. I wish you'd let me."

"Oh, you're going to try to be nice to me? Well, that's nice. I'm so very glad to hear that. I was really quite worried that you wouldn't be nice to me this morning."

"All right, I tried. After the show tonight you'll have to hand in your resignation. You're not producing. Our attendance is the lowest it has been in years . . . Is that how you wanted me to say it?"

Sammy looked at him blankly for a moment. His mind froze into a tight hard ball from which no thought would come. Slowly the truth of the preceding week began to seep into his understanding.

"What . . . What about my contract?"

"Sammy, that contract is going to be worth nothing unless we can get people into the show who can produce. We're almost bankrupt."

"No more posters . . . what . . ."

"I'm not asking you to leave, Sammy, we'll always be able to find work for you on the lot, you know that. We take care of our people."

"Yeah, worm, you take care of your people. You always take care of your . . ." Sammy felt for the door with the frosted glass window and the gold lettering. The tears in his eyes blurred his vision. Big man . . .

II

Sammy reached for the bottom rung of the rope ladder and looked out into the vast emptiness of the tent. The cavernous darkness varied in shades from the blackness of the upper reaches to the grey formlessness of the center ring. Ropes and guy wires strung their spider-like webs at him, making long fingers pointing into the upper blackness. The bleachers formed solid rows of ebony arranged into squares and cubicles like a Picasso painting. The rope ladder reached up into the blackness and out of sight with each of its rungs a station on the way to oblivion. A rat scurried its way across a corner of the tent taking with it all forms of life and human activity. Human emotions too, and frailties, and hurt, and joy—these left with the rat. Its furtive scratchings finally receded into the night leaving the tent a huge dim nothing merged within by shadows of grey oblivion.

The ladder swayed in the silence and music came stealthily in under the entrance-way and seeped through the heavy canvas. The
harsh breath of a calliope ruptured the silence with its eerie meaninglessness. The tired machine was playing a waltz in a hectic three-quarter time. Strained through the heavy tent its music became not a waltz but the caricature of a waltz with figures attached to strings doing erratic dances in a side-show. There was a Barker with a cane shouting to pay a dime and be herded in with the rest of the people. Later, when the figures had gone through their motions, the people would come out dazed and disillusioned, wondering why they had paid their dimes. Why had they? Why had he? Oh, he'd paid his all right, anyone could see that. Right up to the manager, straight to the big man, with the dime in his grubby, sweating fist. Straight to the man, the great big man... That was twenty years ago, now the dime was tarnished. It was old and all used up. It was no good to anyone now, so take down the posters, move on, make way for the next herd if you can't produce. Grab a tent stake. Produce! Produce what? Produce nothing...? Sammy paused in his climb and listened. The ladder swung back and forth with the creaking from above keeping loose time with the waltz.

Sammy wondered if anyone had ever looked at him during his ludicrous gambolings and seen the strings. Maybe the ruffles had hidden them. Now they were getting in the way. The paint covered his face. The big mouth was always happy and the eyes had stars in the corners. They'd been real once—now they were only cheap, smelly paint. Maybe the strings were tied to the stars? They had corners on them, sharp corners, and the strings could tie right around them and make his head jerk like the puppet's. Just like a puppet, first this way and then that, following nothing, now impatient, now lax, but always controlling and forcing, always pushing. Pushing, pushing, pushing... those were stars for you. God, he hated them. God? Why had he said that? How could there be a God up here in this blackness? What kept bringing up God? Was there a string attached to his mind too? Was it jerking the word God up and down in his mind and then yanking on another string attached to bring up the argument that there was no God? Somehow all of the strings had gotten tangled and just these two kept working over and over.

The darkness grew around him as he climbed higher. It oppressed him and tried to force hot air into his laboring lungs. Now the main ring was clear. It was perfectly round and empty, both inside and outside. There was nothing near it but the dangling ladder that led up to Sammy. He watched it while the two strings played their tune and the large ruffles tried to hide them. The roundness of the ring fascinated him. No holes, no breaks, only the continual emptiness of a curve going around and around and around with nothing on the outside, nothing on the inside. The chips in the paint were not even visible from here.

A night watchman entered the tent from the actor's entrance. Sammy watched him from the darkness. The watchman was whistling off-key like most watchmen whistle. His light thrust here and there searching and probing. Maybe it looked into things and maybe a watchman could practice looking along the beam until he could see
things that others couldn’t see? The smell of sawdust rose to Sammy and the beam of light began to climb the ropes and poles of the tent. Up it would rise, twenty, thirty, forty feet and with each foot it would grow dimmer until at last it gave up, overwhelmed and confused by the darkness. Maybe the watchman didn’t know how to help it? ... Maybe there was nothing for it to see. Yes, that was it, maybe there was nothing up there for it to see.

The music from the calliope had stopped now and only the watchman’s footsteps and whistle rose to Sammy’s ears. The whistling walked along beside the watchman like a guard. But it wasn’t a good guard because the watchman kept forgetting all about it and it kept getting lost in a sort of wheeze or moan that went on and on without any tune. Maybe the watchman was afraid too? Maybe there was a string attached to him that made the whistle even when he was tired of the whistle, when he hated the whistle? A bird flew from one of the ropes past Sammy and the watchman finished his circuit. His string was pulling him to the entrance. The light searched and searched but it was unable to find the string. The light had grown weaker.

Sammy looked for the bird, but the blackness of the upper tent only allowed him to see the next three rungs of the ladder. Just the next three, then it would be two, and finally only one. After that he’d have to feel for the ladder and follow the rope upward until he found the next rung. Somehow it didn’t seem as though there would be an end though, just a going on and on, upward into the darkness with the strings jerking this way and that.

When the end of the rope ladder finally came it was a surprise. The splintered cross-member of the tent was an arm thrusting out into the darkness at right angles. Sammy reached above and gasped when his searching hands found nothing. His heart froze and expanded until the terror threatened to burst and dislodge him from the ladder. All was blackness now and the ring seemed small and unreal in the dim greyness below. The watchman was going his rounds again but now his light was a speck which fluttered here and there. His whistle sounded weak and only came in fits through the blackness up to Sammy.

It was harder going now, the splinters of the cross-member caught at his hands and without the ladder it was harder to keep his balance. Each time he looked downward toward the ring he became dizzy and felt that he wanted to be sick. Now it was necessary to hitch himself along with his hands and stop after each movement to regain his balance. Each time the sickness grew a little worse. The idea of falling began to captivate him. What was it like falling down, down, down, through the blackness into the greyness and finally the hard-packed sawdust? The sawdust would be soft from three feet and it might bounce from six feet but how would it feel after sixty feet? Or a hundred? Old timers said it was just like a rock. They should know, they’d watched themselves on posters, they’d climbed from the strings and now were left with only the tent stakes and memories of the beautiful posters.

The dizziness was very bad now and it wouldn’t take long. Just rock back and forth a little and then from side to side. Soon the
splinters would draw away from the cross-member and there would be a frenzied clutching and then a drifting down and down. Past the rope ladder, away from the bird, past the guy wires, away from the strings, out of the blackness into the dimness, down, down. The strings would jerk but it would be too late. They would break, . . . yes, break! But then again, it would be too late.

(VISTA)

a typical hereanow slob
in dung arees sweatshirt sneakers and unruly hair
knows he is a slob (vista altobrow)
(but unbeknownst is the black bassbrow veil)
and a success at being a failure
as the adjusting amoeba
is being pushoved
is striking back quietly
yet is a failure because he succeeds
becoming a slob (that plays the role) ish
comfortable in a stiff tidus environment
(belonging because it does not belong)

but can also be the gentleman
in black formal (tosuitheothers) rags
whom incestuous bitc (decadent) hes esteemire
because he is suchanice boy
(a role ing horseassiduously speaking)

Max Steele
The man ambled along the beach, pausing now and then to stoop. He had come from the road which ended at the beach, treading his way carefully through the dry sand. From the small group of picnickers whom he had just left came occasional anxious glances, but he wandered on oblivious of them.

He was barefoot and from beneath his feet came the small squeaks that dry sand makes on a very hot summer day, much like the small squeaks that snow makes on a very cold winter day. It was like little explosions at each step, with the coarse sand melting immediately on touch. He knelt, scooped up a handful and squeezed it between his fingers. The sand ebbed away like some dry liquid, leaving his hand feeling dusty and rough.

He stood again, and the stiff clean breeze from the ocean coursed through his hair, reminding him of the touch of a woman once, a long time ago. The wind rippled against his skin; so cool . . . so different from the sultry dampness of the city behind him.

The texture of the sand changed beneath his feet now, the little explosions were gone. The sand was firm and damp and cool—no—cold. He walked on, following a receding wave until it returned and water raced around him, until it in turn receded, leaving him wet to the knees. The soaked legs of his trousers clung to him, clammy—yet pleasant.

He walked on down the beach, placing his steps carefully so that each wave at its highest point just gently washed his toes. His foot struck something, and he dropped to his knees again, to search around him with his hands. He found it and held it before him. He turned it, touching it tenderly, feeling the smoothness of the ridges and the roughness of the grooves. He traced the spiraling line to its conical point and knew that it was a conch shell, something he had seen a long time ago. Standing up and cradling the shell in the crook of his elbow, caressing it with his other hand; he turned back toward the step that told him he had strayed too far.
LOVE SONG FOR EARLY VISION

for D

Once while in the polluted light
Of abortive attempting to decipher
Other minds, the improbable dream
Of you became impossible reality.

Quietly to me you gave
More than all the brilliant ages;
I promised you a morning to cherish
An evening that would never come.

Through a violent season we created
Our new light and now because we want
No other life we will not give
This prelude any fatal culmination.

The road we use as symbol
Leads to others, and searching now
We find ourselves composing only
Necessary discord, no lasting pain.

In our own-created light
We read each other's eyes
And find not only life in loving
But nervous death in distance.

To me you have become
All reason all existence all desire;
The music of more than genius
A symphony in flesh and light.

Richard Hauck
SILHOUETTE

At last the light
lifts the dark
and tips it over.
Long lanes of corn
crane their ears
to hear the doe that
dares step out
onto the sills of silence.

Phillip D. Adams

and whose footman holds my cloak
and what fair maiden holds my key
of thigh baita rapture
to carry me beyond the threshold

youve no cloke to hold my son
doctrine you dispute
and all the keys are out just now

but as you enter
you may lift the threshold slightly

and be hanged by the life

Max Steele
Douglas Hodgman

“Oh, you sing,” said the Gryphon. “I’ve forgotten the words.”
So they began solemnly dancing round and round Alice, every now and then treading on her toes when they passed too close, and waving their fore-paws to mark the time while the Mock Turtle sang this, very slowly and sadly:

“Will you walk a little faster?” said a whiting to a snail,
“‘There’s a porpoise close behind us, and he’s treading on my tail.
See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!
They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance?
Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, will you join the dance?
Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, won’t you join the dance?”

From The Lobster Quadrille, by Lewis Carroll.

The time is early spring, 1955. The place is the city. It is not many months after the death of Dylan Thomas, weeks away from the deaths of Charlie Parker and James Dean.

The nonsense language is the language of that place and that year, called jive, or bop, or what you will, man. It is a language of emotion, suggestion intonation, and repetition. Its meaning is its acting out, for it has no meaning of its own.

The cast consists of:
1. Freddie King, who bears the quality of loneliness, the terrors of his private world. His older brother, Tom, was thrown from a jeep and killed some years ago.
2. Irma Delong, whose intention would be to find some order, some beauty no matter how ugly, in a chaos of sensation.
3. Bud Tanner, whose every breath is defined in terms of death; he lives each second as if it were his last. Yet it would be difficult to determine his personal moments, for it is difficult to determine his separate identification within his acts of participation. He is not what “beat” has come to mean, for he would never bother to care about not caring. His nose was broken in one of his many fights.

They are all reflecting reflections of the other characters, other situations. They are all detached.

The story is called: THE NIGHT BUD FOUGHT.
All afternoon Mame perched before the blue shadows, but toward dusk I could tell she wasn’t watching much any more, and the ashtray was overflowing with long cigarettes burnt on one end and crumpled on the other where she snapped the filters when she tamped them out.

The phone rang, and she was already releasing her hair for the comb as she picked the receiver up. I kept my eyes on her mouth still blotchy with last night’s lipstick, and knowing I would listen to every word, she talked so loud it sounded funny.

I tried to catch her eyes when she replaced the receiver, and it made me half laugh when she wanted to stare back. She swung her head right past my view and marched on through the bedroom.

Gradually I settled in my everyday daze with one leg motionless over the arm of the chair, the other beating time on the balance of my heel to a musical commercial. Sometimes I would think about King.

When I was a kid I could imagine him as one of the dark and husky throated forms in tunnel places where the walls were jukebox green and purple, where sometimes eyes in the corner of a mirror glinted out to the street. Then thoughts of King held the same strange excitement as being huddled with others in the caves we made from card tables, rugs, and turned over chairs.

But now I’d seen some of those tunnels myself, watched the man with a spinning cloth beneath his hand and day old toothpick in his mouth, heard the dull mutters of those who leaned for tired hours above a glass of beer. And now I could only picture him as the heap home under the fluff gushing quilt with the broken wall clock hanging by threads over his head.

I sat forgetting King, hearing Mame pat her wrinkled cheeks with rouge, twisting my leg above the balance of my heel until the doorbell buzzed and I forced myself up to let the thing in.

“Let Mr. Sutton in, would you, dear?” Mame called as sweet as she could for a woman whose best voice, my friend Bud says, is like an old neon sign.

Sutton tried to pat my shoulder with his spadey hand as he brushed by, but I dodged into the folds of the curtain to Mame’s bedroom, black already in the late afternoon.

“Honey?” Mame coughed from the can. “Honey, did you let Mr. Sutton in?”

Sutton answered by rapping softly on the bathroom door. I leaned against the back of the television chair, feeling a little sick in the commercial music silence.

“Ham?” Mame said with a whisper not really very stunned. “Ham,” Mame said again, her voice this time loud and hoarse. “Ham Sutton, you get away from that door!” Sutton sauntered back to the center room, turned to me and smiled.
"Well kid," Sutton said through a yawn, raising his hands to a half stretch behind his head, "I suppose there's a cold beer around?" He flicked the tip of his tongue across the blade thin mustache on his upper lip and walked on to the pantry.

"Hon," Marne husked, shoving the door a crack. "Freddie, hon, would you get Mr. Sutton a glass of beer, and I'll be out in just a jiff." I turned the television up so I wouldn't hear Sutton gulp foam across the room.

"Ah, hah," gruffed Sutton, heading toward the television, "that there Bombo Scotty, my favorite comedian, kid, the very best." He paused and scrutinized me leaning against the television chair in the dark folds of the curtain to Marne's bedroom. "There I go again," he spoke suddenly, slapping his bony cheek with his free hand, "thinking only of myself. You want a beer too, don't you kid?"

"I don't want no beer," I said standing straight at last as Sutton stuck his slender hand into the open icebox.

"What's that?" Sutton said plucking off the cap.

"I don't want no beer," I repeated loudly.

"A boy of fifteen who doesn't like beer?" he cried with doubt. "Listen, son, I was a boy once myself." He approached me with two beers, a wink and a smile.

Son. He'd said son.

"And us kids, yessir, we all drank beer. Oh, we didn't let our folks find out, you bet your boots on that... But I'll tell your mom old uncle Ham said it was all right." He set the beer down on the floor when he saw my fists were clinched.

Sutton went to the couch and sat licking the mouth of the bottle. He watched the television with the half interest a dog observes a fly. Marne came out of the bathroom in a faded robe and reached around me to draw the curtain.

"Hon, sit down now and talk to Mr. Sutton," she pleaded. I scowled—she knows the way I feel—but sat.

"Mame tells me you don't go to school," Sutton said spinning the bottle in his hands and smiling. "A kid your age—"

"Turn the TV down a little, won't you, Fred" Mame called from behind the curtains. Sutton jumped up and clicked the button.

"That Bombo Scotty's getting paid for murder." Sutton waved his bottle at me and felt for the edge of the cushion with his other hand as he settled back. "Why, five years ago, I could fall down twice as hard and do it for nothing, too. But like I was saying, here you are a bright kid of fifteen or sixteen—"

"He was sixteen last month," put in Mame.

"And the whole world's your oyster. But, kid, you just got to have a high school degree to get ahead in the world today." I was watching pools of light still appearing on the dark screen like raindrops in the river.

"He used to do real good in school," said Mame. "He brought home mostly Excellents on his report card, and we thought he was going to be the smartest one in the family." You could hear Mame dress as clear as if you were watching... Now the other shoe..."
“Why, once when he was in the sixth grade his teacher drove him home from school . . . And she told me he could do arithmetic better than any other kid in the class. She told me that. She said maybe he’d grow up to be an engineer.”

Sutton made loud, slupping noises when he swallowed, and you could see his Adam’s apple jerk.

“And he used to make his brother Tom so proud. Tom would maybe take him to the movies . . .”

Please stop, I thought. Please stop.

“. . . and afterward they would have a soda or something down at the corner, come in laughing and roughing around . . . Tom would tell me when Freddie went to bed, ‘Mame,’ he’d say, ‘Fred’s going to show us all some things.’ That’s what he said . . .” I gnawed my knuckle. “. . . ‘Mame, Fred’s going to break this family out of the rut’.”

Mame came through the curtains, her puffed red face and sleek black hair surrounded by the frizzly fur collar of the cloth coat she’d been wearing for years. Sutton, on the edge of the coach with a lighted match in the cup of his hands, looked up at her and smiled around his cigarette.

“Here, hon, hold the light,” she said, and quickly snapping a cigarette from the pack to her mouth, she dipped down to the flame. “Big words he used, too,” Mame said spitting out a cloud of smoke. “But listen to him now—talks like the kids next door.”

“Well, if I had a son as sharp as Freddie here,” said Sutton, coming to his feet, “I’d make the boy finish his school, you can be sure of that.” Sutton coordinated a head swivel and a smile in my direction.

“Oh, he’d hate me, he’d hate me at the time all right. But when the chips were down, and the kid cashed in because of his education, he’d thank me, he’d be glad his old man made him toe the mark”

I should tell him whose son I am, I thought. I should tell him any minute King’s going to stagger in the door and fall all over him. Any minute now, any minute.

“Hold on just a sec, Ham, hon,” Mame said with her finger in the air. She hurried across the room to the pantry, and Sutton eased precisely back.

“You got the kid trained on one account, anyway, I never knew a kid of fifteen who didn’t drink. I brought him a beer, and there it sits. He doesn’t touch a drop.” I watched his mouth open at me in a little smile, and I wished I could feel more mad than sick and hit it just once there, hard like Bud would do, cover the bristles of that little mustache quick with my knuckles and watch his head drop back.

“Oh, he drinks all right, I guess,” said Mame, placing utensils on the table. “He just doesn’t like beer.”

Sutton grunted and looked at his watch. He cleared his throat, stood up and sighed, “Look, Mame, I told Pat and Mike we’d be at the junction by six, and it’s—”

“Coming, coming, coming.” Mame slammed the icebox and brushed back her hair once more before the mirror over the sink. Sutton opened the door to the outer landing as Mame scurried across the room, stopping momentarily under his arm to frown at me plea-
santly. “I got chops on the stove, and there’s milk and bread on the table, Fred.” She took another step and said, “I left some change, too, if you want to get ice cream up at the corner.”

“Okay, Mame,” said Sutton, inching out in the landing.

“You be good now and go to bed tonight, hon. I’m coming home early this time for sure.”

Mame left Sutton holding the edge of the door. In the mahogany shadows of the darkening outer hall, his narrow face seemed to float all lemon white.

A crooked smile parted his lips. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do son,” and the door swung shut.

I sat in silence hearing the faraway drip, drip of water across the room. A car honked in the street. Next door a baby was crying in fitful gasps, but at last I could hear myself breathe, feel my own presence. Someone near was cooking cabbage; the odor steaming under the door and leaking through unseen cracks in the walls is like my sore throat, a sure sign of early spring.

Slowly the room turned dense, and the small dark thoughts came out of hiding. I knew them, but I could not call their names. A corner cobweb thick with black dust expanded before my eyes, fluttering like a veil in a moist draft. I tried to breathe the shadow back inside me, but the light went bad. In the shadow I guess I trembled as if some unknown horror must appear.

Frozen in the chair I was shivering inside because I could not see my fears or call their names. It was like waking at night to know the face of the thing that bounded reeyed over the desolate moors of a wild dream is in the window above your bed—and that face is you.

Mame, I thought . . . King . . . Bud . . . Tom. The fears flickered about me like dark flames dancing faster, closer and faster.

On my feet, that was the answer. Walk quick, I thought. Put back the chops and milk and take the coins and walk, dance or fight or drink, and the flickering thoughts will stop . . .

The last light in the sky was a cloud-formed yellow wedge sinking between the television antennas on the flat roofs of James Street’s flats, and a cold, moaning wind rushed from the maze of the city, singeing my sweater with ice as it passed.

I crunched through crusted trash in the space parting Fargo’s grocery from Stewbert’s hardware to reach the back stairs. The wooden steps steeped lattice like, open over the locked bathroom Bud shared with the store. I was feeling better now, but still uneasy, and I tapped out rhythm with my heel while waiting for an answer to the knock.

I rapped off some more flaky paint, and the door jerked back.

Bud’s hair surged black and uncombed over his forehead and ears. One moment he stared at me with frozen glitter. Suddenly creases of something like a smile broke his face, and the color of his eyes changed from green to brown.

“Rock id man!” he growled, and grabbing my hand and arm, pulled me quickly in.

“Hey, Bud,” I laughed. “How ya been?” Bud waved me to the chair’s tattered plush by his bed.
“Thoughd you might be someun else. Wanna shoed?” Bud asked picking up a glass from the table by the drawn green shade. A naked light bulb swung brightly from a chain in the room’s center, but it seemed my eyes were adjusting to the dark.

I nodded, “Make it short.” Bud handed me the glass and poured one for himself. He leaned against the table lifting the yellow liquid up to light.

“You hip, man?” I stared at him peering into the whiskey until he cocked his head and coughed, “The sound, man! The sound!” Guitar music was throbbing in the box. Low and moody, it sounded like a yellow jungle or an empty bullfight ring.

“Yeah, sounds great.” Bud studied his glass. For a long time. I could see an ash floating on the surface of the liquor. Bud watched it and the guitar strummed.

“Is going do be a fighttonighd,” he said.

He spoke so softly it took me awhile to consider the words.

“A fight? You? . . . You mean tonight? Who are you going to fight?”

“Mmmm, some weazel . . .” Bud swallowed the shot. “Call him ‘Dromagik’?” “Dromakik?” I almost shouted the name but checked myself. Bud’s nervous whenever I act impressed, but I knew of crazy Dromakik and the gang he rumbled with. Bud waited.

“Why?” I asked, my voice still too high.

“Mmmm, was geting dark, man, and I was low for gicks—(shook) for action, you tune?”

I listened cautiously.

Bud poured another drink and held it again under the light, his hand supporting his elbow, his words directed at the bottom of the glass, muttering as whenever he said much, half to himself:

“See, lasd nighd I tunes Dromagik down at Mac’s, he’s sounding about this chick, and it bugged me, like. So tonighd I buzz bim at the Green Wall . . . I says, ‘Man, you stuck Lola Wadson for a pig. Well, I think she’s somethin’ else . . . !’” Bud chuckled, “He’s swearin’, ‘Who you! Say who the muck you think you are! Say, do you know Lola Wadson?’”

“I says, ‘Maybe I don’t Lola Wadson, bud I know you! You’re the lowesd, like under the toiled sead—dig!’” Bud chuckled almost enough to spill whiskey, then shrugged and reclined in the other chair by the record player.

“So I tells him I could tear him righd apard, bud sdill no action. He’s all turkey for a trick. Bud I tells him Chuck will pud me on the level, so I have to hold the phone while he talks to Chuck. Then he wands to make the vacend lod scene, bud I tells him thad could sdir the fuzz, and no one bugs this turf ad nighd. I says, ‘You and me alone, no guns, no blades, up ad my pad, huh?’”

Bud sighed. “Man, whad swead id takes to blow some up these days.”

“Yeah, but uh . . . Won’t they wreck your pad?” “Mmmm, is jusd id. Like, I’m cutding oud tomorrow for good.
This been a boring pad, man. God to have somethin’ to remember id by.”

“Crazy,” I said. shivering. Sometimes Bud could make me dizzy like that. And now he was leaving.


I nodded. “Yeah, that slob,” but the word was empty. “That . . . that . . .”


Bud’s last words faded and he seemed to shrivel inside himself, his chin lightly touching his chest. I watched him listen to the record, wanting badly to ask a question. But I knew Bud was through talking for awhile, and I had to wait silently. I couldn’t keep my foot from tapping always a little faster than the music.

When at last the door knock came, the trembles had spread from my stomach to my skin, but Bud remained a low hump, apparently lost in the sound. “Led em in, man,” he said with a slight gesture of his hand.

Dromakik. He had two buddies behind him, but all I really saw was Dromakik’s immense shape bulging forward. His face was scarred, and the long curve of his mouth balanced the spiked arc of fuzzy hair above his forehead. He scowled, examined me carefully and grunted “Where’s Tanner?”

I pointed to the chair as Dromakik’s friends pressed in behind.

“That’s Tanner?” Dromakik squinted, although the narrowing space in the door was night black. Dromakik pointed at Bud hunched low in his chair, his head tilted back as if pulled by the music. “Hey, you,” Dromakik growled. “You Bud Tanner?” Bud looked small and wadded. The guitar strained against the silence.

“Mmmm, I’m Tanner.” Bud’s voice sounded faraway. “Well, I ain’t going to fight you,” Dromakik’s face wrinkled and creased as he spoke. “You’re too small for me to waste my time.”

Bud flowed to his feet, and then he looked taller. I shivered as I saw his eyes change from brown to green. He stared a moment at Dromakik before padding behind the chair and taking the record off the box. Carefully, he closed the cover, pulled the plug and placed it gently under his bed. Dromakik advanced to the bed himself, his face a continual scowl. As he talked he inched forward over Bud.

“I don’t like guys playing games with me,” he rumbled deep in his throat. “An I ain’t ever seen you before in my life, Tanner. I ought to mash your pretty face.”

Bud’s eyes glittered with liquid green as he slowly wiped the spit from his face. “Freddie,” he said quietly, “lock the door.”

I stepped around Dromakik’s friends, trying to control the wobble in my legs, to act like I never knew or cared about the way they watched me move. I placed the hook in its latch and turned to see Bud over by the shelf now, placing the whiskey and glasses in a cab-
inet. Dromakik grabbed him by the back of his sweatshirt collar, and Bud spun around with the twist. Dromakik clutched both hands in the neck of Bud's sweatshirt and swore loudly, his mouth shaped like the dark yawn of a cave. A moment they stood motionless as a photograph, Dromakik with his mouth open while Bud smiled and the green in his eyes glittered. Then Dromakik sprawled back, his stomach doubled by the force of Bud's blow.

Bud hit him three more times, sharp and loud in the face before he reached the floor. Dromakik twisted on his knees, wheezing and holding his stomach. Bud circled him, jogging on the balls of his tennis shoes, his arms expansive and balanced in the air. Dromakik's two friends drew back in the shadows against the wall away from me. “Ged up! Ged up!” Bud’s cough was like a big cat. “Ged up! Ged up!”

Dromakik struggled to his feet, his eyes almost indistinguishable in the mass of wrinkles contorting his face, and tottered heavily forward. He huffed twice as Bud pumped both fists into his stomach and darted back beneath Dromakik’s wild swipe at his head. Instantly Bud danced in again and jabbed short blood bursting blows on Dromakik’s nose. Dromakik lunged for Bud, sweeping both arms out before him and staggered against the bed as Bud stepped aside. Snorting noisily, the blood draining down the sides of his mouth, Dromakik shook with rage. “That first punch,” he rumbled, “was nothing but luck. That was a lucky punch.” Bud came weaving lithely, small ripples in his sinewy neck.

Suddenly Bud climbed on, squirming violently and slamming his fist into Dromakik’s kidney. Dromakik struck down with all his weight both hands on Bud’s neck. Strangely, I felt for seconds the light had flickered out, and I blinked my eyes. Dromakik was smashing his knee into Bud’s face on the floor.

“Huff huff,” Dromakik grunted, his stomach heaving as he ground at Bud’s face. Writhing and snapping, with a push Bud rolled away, and as the two wrestled to their feet he clamped his arms around Dromakik’s thick neck.

But Dromakik swivelled, caught Bud off balance, walloped his chest and sent him flying across the room. There was a tinkle of glass and the shade plopped in a heap.

Bud came raging back, his sweaty hair streaming loose behind like a mane. His arms were slashing even before he tore into Dromakik, his fists pumping so fast you could hear them better than see them.

Dromakik retreated tottering, a little spray of blood and sweat dancing above his head. We three spectators were like shadows of the room; we stood motionless and dark; watching the fight we had no form or substance.

Bud and Dromakik bounced off the wall. The room shook and I could see Dromakik’s face, the blood and wrinkles, the shredding skin.

Snarling and huffing they thrashed across. Bud looked like the walking windmill, his legs always leaning forward, his heels in the air. Dromakik seemed the bear trying to brush away a swarm of bees. Then Bud’s fist smashed through the one lightbulb above his head and darkness came with a spark and a shower of glass.
The fight went on.

Bud's snarls became short vicious howls, and Dromakik's huffs thickened into heavy grunts. The dark was very black, but I could smell the blood and sweat and feel the heat.

The table crashed to the floor. The walls shook. One of Dromakik's friends screamed. Either Bud or Dromakik had slugged him in the dark. "Oh Jesus," he sobbed, "Oh my Jesus," and his voice was surprisingly shrill. Someone hit him again. He shrieked and began to whimper.

Through it all I could hear a pounding now like a drum. Someone, Dromakik's other friend, bumped me running along the wall. Desperately I pushed him away. He was pulling on my shirt—no he was pushing me. I stumbled and fell. The drum pounded on with the whimpers and snarls and moans and grunts. Above my head I could see the dim white of Bud's tennis shoes, dancing to the beat of the drum.

"Someun's ad the door, Freddie, someun's ad the door." Bud danced away as Dromakik lumbered by.

The door, the door, I thought, I was dizzy, and the shadows reeled around me full of sound and dance. It must be the police, but Bud wanted me to open the door, and I crawled along the wall searching for the latch. The pounding was just above my ear. I pulled and a woman's voice came pushing in with night.

"Hello, what is this? Hello, what's going on in here?"

Mame.

"Hey, Irma, come on in," Bud coughed.

The girl hustled by. "Bud... Bud! Stop a minute. Stop that right now. Already I could barely see her as she swirled around Bud and Dromakik. "I said quit," she snapped, and I think she was between them.

"Just a liddle fight," snorted Bud. One of Dromakik's friends slipped by me through the open door.

"Who is this, Bud who is this man?" Funny but she didn't really sound angry, only loud.

"Going to kill you." Dromakik's voice was breathless and low.

"Just led me ged by, Irma," Bud muttered, Dromakik's other friend, still snuffling, slipped through the door.

"You, you leave like right now," and she was wrestling between them again, shouting, "Get out, out, you get out."

Dromakik and Bud pumped some more.

The girl screamed so loud the fighting stopped. Her scream was a high warble, and I think she was pushing Dromakik.

"Okay, Tanner," Dromakik huffed. The girl continued to scream. "Okay, Tanner, okay." The girl followed him across the room. His body seemed to slump as he moved out, but his voice was still ominous and low. "Okay, Tanner," he said once more, stepping out into the night. I think the girl's scream could have been heard for blocks.

But behind the closed door she stopped suddenly, and I could hear Bud panting in the dark. She began to laugh in a way that started like tears, but she was hilarious.
“Ah Ah Ah, Bud . . . This is too crazy . . . This is too much . . .”

Finally Bud was chuckling between hacking coughs. I stood silently in the dark. “Ah ah . . . The only way a girl can get to see you . . . is be . . . like crazy! Oh Bud Ah ha . . . I haven’t . . . so much fun in weeks. Oh, ah ah, who was that guy, anyway? He was big enough aha. You know someday,” she said sobering “you’re going to kill yourself that way, Bud . . . Bud, where’s the light? You broke the light, didn’t you?”

Bud chuckled. “’S good to see you, Irma,” he said.

“You know I’m getting good at this kind of thing,” Irma laughed. “Like soon I’ll come to see you screaming through the door. Say, are you really leaving tomorrow? I guess you’ll have to—this pad is probably a wreck. Look, I’ll go get a lightbulb and some brew. You stay right there and I’ll be . . . Bud, who is this?”

Irma nearly knocked me over, bouncing toward the door. Her cold fingers probed the outline of my head.

“Who? Wha?” Bud jumped off the bed. “Oh, Freddie. Irma, meed Freddie. He’s kindof quied, like sometimes you don’d know he’s there.” Irma’s fingers resting on my cheeks still seemed to move. “Bud,” she said, her voice curious and surprisingly intent, “he feels so young. Were you here all the time, Freddie?” What I could see of her eyes in the dark was gleam, and I shifted uneasily on my feet.

“Yeah,” I said.

“Poor kid,” she mused. “Bud, I’ll be right back,” and she bounced through the door.

When Irma returned her arms full of packages, Bud was standing on the chair, carefully unscrewing the lightbulb with a crumpled handkerchief.

“God a lightd?” Bud asked as Irma shelved the packages.

“Okay, Tanner, okay,” Irma husked, passing the new bulb to me. “And some Gin and Vermouth, too,” she added. “Like it’s Martini time.”

“Gruff,” Bud tried to locate the socket. “You know this swingin’ Irma, Freddie, whadyou think, she teaches English. Some highschool on the south side.”

“Yeah? Gee, that’s real good,” I said, trying to think of something to say.

“Bud the kick here with Irma, she’s god to be one of the ardy crowd, too.” Bud snorted. “She thinks she can be a jumpin ardsd and teach school ad the same time.”

The light flickered on.

“Dad, your pad is bad!” Irma groaned. Blood flecked the walls and was spattered over Bud, especially on one side of his face and his right hand.

Irma found the broom under the sink and began to sweep up glass. “Bud, even the window,” she laughed, “And you could comb your hair.”

Bud brushed back his hair so his eyes no longer peered like through a jungle thicket and pulled out the box. “Les have some sounds to sweep by,” he gruffed.
I held the dustpan. Her breasts bending over looked hard and round as rocks through the tight red sweater. “Thanks, Freddie,” her smile was as slender as her arms and surprisingly slow.

“This the first time that broom been used since you were here last,” Bud said, and the record started. “Hey rock!” Bud shouted.

“When the dawn was breakin’
I told her she had to go.
Shakey baby looks up and dig me—
‘Daddy wanna rock some mo’”

“What kind of things, kind of people do you like, Freddie?” she said easily, ignoring the record. “That’s silly. I should say what don’t you like.”


“Rock,” shouted Bud, and pushed me from my crouch to the floor.

“Bud, the glass!” Irma cautioned.

“Mmmm, fix us some Martinis, Irma,” he sang and slapped her on the behind. That smack was sure loud.

“You never get tired, do you?” she said, moving over to the sink.

“But I didn’t want to do it,
No, no, I didn’t want to do it,
But she sends me so.”

“Look, man, the broom, she hip!” Bud began to rock with the broom, swinging it around, making it shake and waddle. His face was turning blue.

“C’mon, Freddie, the broom, she rock with you.” He passed me the broom still twitching from his hand.

“Aw, Bud,” I said.

“‘Mon, Freddie, don’ be square,” he gruffed, pulling me out and making me move, clapping to the beat.

I began to dance with the broom.

“But I didn’t want to do it,
No, no, I didn’t want to do it . . .”

Bud laughed, and I laughed too. It was so silly. Bud grabbed a Martini that Irma had just poured and swallowed it whole. “Mmf, make some more. Thad woman makes the besd Martinis.”

Later, Irma was dancing with us too, and we were making our own drinks. Lots of them. Bud would dance with Irma, the box blaring thumping, and Bud’s hands jumped and pawed around her as she spun and whirled, her hips in rhythm with his knees, breasts nibbling air beneath his swinging arms.

Irma was dancing with me, leading me into patterns that made my feet dip and do funny tricks. She smiled and spun in close, her hair across my face, bobbed off again, twisting her slender hips. Bud was dancing me, his rough arm crossing my shoulder, pushing me out, speeding me up, keeping me in time with his frantic feet, saying, “Go man, hey, we’ll cram this jam to dawn. Tough chick! Bad sound! Hey, man, go!”

We were dancing together, all three arms entwined like small children, swaying and laughing.
"Someone fed me feathers," giggled Irma. "Like I'm high in the sky."

"Like you god goose pimples big as crabapples," sang Bud, and the two of them pranced around me, weaving their arms. "Hey, dig da wild gig, girl! Shake off the wall and down da hall!"

"Gas me daddy! Ninety-nine, blow down the line!"

"Like sixty-nine is jusd as fine. Hey, hey, go, go!"

"Oh, won't you blast me last, oh?"

"Jusd pass the jumpin' end, fox ... Hey, go, go!"

We danced alone, and that was best, for then it seemed we were the most together. We could see figures, detached forms dancing in and out the mirror above the sink. A red face, not mine, not mine, was staring from the mirror, and whose throbbing hands were pouring another drink, another drink? A voice not mine was laughing, singing: "But I didn't want to do it, but I didn't want to do it."

Bud and Irma were rolling on the bed, and funny, the music from the box was no longer swinging. No. Slow, drifting, the cold progressive flute. I sang low and soft, settling in the corner. Bud. Tom. The room was spinning. Thick with shadows. Mame. Irma . . . Sutton . . .

It was early morning.

Heavy fog covered the marsh, filtered through the reeds, waivered steaming off the water. I was shivering, and when I tried to hold my arms still, my teeth began to chatter.

"Whatsa matter, kid? Tom’s jacket not warm enough for you?"

Bud spoke softly through his teeth.

Tom smiled. "Freddie's gonna be okay," he whispered. "Aren’t you Freddie?"

I stopped shivering, and there was a movement over the water, a flap of wings.

"Look!"

Bud and Tom shot together. The arrows flew parallel before one dipped beneath the rise of the duck. The other rose up up and stuck, ruffling wings. A burst of motion. The duck was coming down, flapping awkwardly. It sputtered into the water, splashing mist.

Bud and Tom stared at the duck. My throat was aching sore, and I was shivering again.

"I told you we should have brought guns," Bud muttered. "We would have killed it dead."

"What’s the sport of guns?" Tom's voice was so low you could hardly hear it.

"Sports, crap," Bud said clearly. "Bows and arrows, Jesus!"

Tom watched the duck's feeble flutters. I kept trying to clutch his hand, and he kept brushing me away.

"We can’t leave it there." Tom said with a small quiver.

"Well, what else you going to do—not go in—Aw, no, Tom." Tom was taking of his shirt. Then his shoes. I knew if only I could bite my tongue hard enough, I wouldn't cry.

"Look, now, your kid brother is crying," Bud said suddenly, turning on me. "Hell, not only bows and arrows but a six year old kid."
I wasn’t either crying. I just couldn’t keep the water in my eyes.

“Freddie’s going to be all right.” Tom’s voice was kind of sharp now like the cold. He stood naked in the fog just yellowing with the light of dawn and the smoke from the city. Rims of ice crackled in the mud beneath his feet as he walked down into the reeds. I pulled Tom’s jacket tighter around my shoulders, but the cold seemed to creep up my legs, and my teeth chattered loudly.

“Wait up!” Bud was stripping too.

Tom looked back, the water spreading in small ripples around his legs. “Only takes one to get a duck,” he said and moved on.

“If you don’t hurry up, I’m going to beat you to it,” Bud laughed, tossing his pants aside and splashing after Tom. “Wait till we tell the guys we went swimming!” he shouted.

I pulled Tom’s jacket tighter around my shoulders and watched them race away. The fog eddied and billowed over the mud. My shoes got wet, and I think I was calling Tom, only I knew he couldn’t hear me. Tom . . . But the fog was growing thicker. Tom . . .

“Whadsa madder, Freddie, you cold? Hey, Freddie! Jesus, man, are you drunk?” Bud was slapping my cheeks, and then Irma was standing over me too. “Looka the way he’s huggin’ himself,” Bud chuckled.

“Hey, Freddie, don’ sdare ad me thad way.”

“Freddie, are you feeling all right?” Irma asked cautiously.

“Yeah, I’m okay, okay.”

“Irma, make me ’nother Martini, whadyou say, huh?”

“No, now wait,” Irma said, her cold fingertips moving to my brow.

“I want to make sure Freddie’s all right.”

“Bugs,” Bud muttered, moving away. “Thad damn mother instinc.’ You know why women will never make ardisd?” he said, mixing a drink. “S thad damn mother instinc.’ Happens to the besd of them.”

“Freddie, don’t you think you better go home now?” Irma was sitting by me, moving her hands through my hair. Her words sounded from her chest, and she felt warm like rocks in the sun.

“Naw,” Bud said, holding his drink up to the light, “Freddie don’ wand to go home. He likes being with people don’cha, Freddie?”

I looked away from Bud.

“And there’s noone home tonighd, huh, Freddie? Noone home.”

Bud was grinning.

He’s so young, so very young,” Irma murmured, rocking me slowly.

Bud splashed his drink down the sink. “Aaach, I don’d make ‘em like you can, Irma. Hey,” he said standing back and grinning again, “You wand to take him to bed?”

“Don’t listen, just don’t listen,” Irma whispered in my ear, hugging me closer. I was getting nervous and wanted to stand up, but maybe it would hurt her feelings.

“No jive, I think he’s cherry. Would do him some good. Irma, take him to bed.”

Irma stood up and glared at Bud. “You never know when to stop, do you?”

Bud spread his legs under the light—grinning, his hair loose again and tumbling over his eyes.
Irma fumbled down over my knee, found my hand and squeezed it, but her gaze seemed frozen on Bud and gradually she trembled.

Bud waited.

Then I saw a funny thing. Irma said not another word, but walked slowly to Bud where he stood motionless, the grin fixed upon his face, his eyes deep and watery with a glint of brown. Momentarily, she paused before him, her legs moving slightly like the tail of a cat, her hands curling behind her back. And she sprang into his arms, her fingers digging in his neck, her legs twitching, her breath full of whimpers.

Bud clamped his arms around her, bending her back and gnawing at her ear. Then he pushed her away and reached for the light. In the dark, Irma continued to whimper. Bud jerked on the light again, and Irma was leaning over the bed. He pulled a blanket out from under her and grabbed the pillow.

"Here, Freddie," he said, "make a bed."

The light went out again. Bud and Irma jounced around, squeaking the springs. Bud’s shoes clopped to the floor, then Irma’s. I pulled the blanket tightly around my neck and wallowed in the pillow.

I felt heavily tired, and again I was dizzy.

"You know, Bud, I wrote another poem, today." Irma’s voice drifted like a distant rustle. "You want to hear it?" Bud grunted. "I remember my poems only when I’m drunk, isn’t that funny?"

"S because you wride ‘em when you’re drunk."

A soft breeze was blowing through the window, not quite so cold. A dog barked, and faraway a diesel moaned, grinding slowly through the night freight yards, sounding its horn long and low.

"Children of tomorrow, you come from a dazzle of broken glass, a beam of sorrow, a light not heat nor reason, an anarchy of stunted grass."

Bud laughed, "Murder, Irma, murder."

"But in the season of your tomorrow, burn the ways your children pass, they turn like rays of light beneath the earth, not forgiving or forgiven for the darkness of their birth."

"Mmumph," Bud grunted. "Whadsa tidle? Mother goose geds the siph?"

Irma sighed. "I did another, too: ‘You are the night, the anxious night . . . ’ Uuuuh, Bud, you . . . smuddering me . . . Oh!"

The room was silent. Almost. The train was hooting out of the yards now, rumbling faster, straining in the wind. The shadows whirled in rhythm with Bud’s quick breathing, growing harsher and thicker.

I had a funny dream. I dreamed of Sutton dressed in black, how he stood with his white undertaker’s hands, shovelling earth into a pit. I watched in the grey rain, and I called to him, "What’s in the grave, Sutton, what’s in the grave?"

Sutton only peered at me blankly and said, "A stitch in time saves nine."

"Nine what?" I called, running toward the grave.

“Stop,” I howled, wrestling with Sutton over the pit yawning dark beneath my feet.

Then I fell, dizzily down with the dirt, down far into the warmth of the earth. From high above a voice was saying, “You’ll never get out of there, son, you’ll never get out of there . . .”

I was gasping for breath and fumbling on the door when the light snapped on and Bud came bounding over the floor. He grabbed me, his hands rough around the neck of my shirt, but not before I let in the night.

“What you doing?” he coughed, “Freddie!” and slapped me sharply across the face.

“Look how dark it is,” I sobbed. “It’s dark outside, it’s dark outside.”

Bud kept slapping me across the face, and then I shuddered. His glittering eyes had changed to green.

“Bud!” Irma was shrieking and trying to pull him away. My whole face was stinging like a burn, but I hardly felt it. All I could think of was those sharp green eyes. Gosh, Bud is crazier than me.

He stopped as if in a daze. Irma saw it too and let him fall back.

“Bud, are you all right?”

A morning bird began to sing. I noticed now the night was turning blue.

“Huh? Huh . . .” Bud shook his head. “Huk, I’m all right . . . Jesus, whad time is id?” An alarm clock was under his bed. For the first time I noticed its ticking.

“Rod,” Bud said prowling back across the room. “Irma, I’ve god to splid, be ad south side ina hour.” He slammed a suitcase out from the bed. I trembled a little against the wall, my face still numb. Irma started rummaging through the drawers, tossing clothes out into the middle of the room. My kidneys were killing me. I couldn’t remember using the toilet beneath the stairway all night. All that drink, and yet, I had never asked Bud for the key—or had I?

“Uunh, Freddie, call a cab, huh?” Bud was gathering his records, packing up the box.

I shivered over the telephone. “Where you going, Bud?”

“South Side Sdation. Tell ’em South Side Sdation. Tell ’em, ged here in half an hour.”

As light widened in the window, I could see how purple and swollen Bud’s face was. I finished the call, then watched Bud and Irma frantically packing.

The time passed fast and dizzily. Soon the room was emptied, and the three of us were out in the deserted street, in the warm tarry smell of an early spring morning.

Bud examined his belongings carefully, then stared at me. “Hey, Freddie, aboud back ad the pad . . . I guess I wend a little off the wall . . . Jusd flip, man, dig?”


“Hey Irma, here comes the cab.” Bud picked up a suitcase, set it down again. “Give me a buzz.” He gathered her into his arms and released her as the cab pulled up to the curb.
"You the party going to Southside, bud?"
"Hey, man, you hip!" Bud's hair was thick and black, loose around his eyes and shining in the early sun.
"Bud," I said.
"Mmff, whad's thad?" Bud looked over his shoulder as he helped the driver pile boxes into the trunk.
"Bud, where are you going?" I asked.
"Why, Freddie, I don'd know yed, man."
"But how'm I going to get to see you again," I forced myself to ask. "I mean how will I find you?"
"Mmff. I think I'm going to be in the suburbs. Maybe Irma will know ina couple a days. Ged in touch with Irma."
Irma watched silently, her face without expression.
The driver waited, tapping his fingers on the window as Bud paused half in the rear door. Bud's face creased suddenly into his old grin.
"Id's been, man," he said, sticking out his hand. I shook it, feeling the strength of Bud's grip. Then the cab hummed out from the curb, and Bud waved once more to the two of us, his hand forming a small dip in the air. We watched the cab shrink down the yellowing street past tenements, bars, and pawn shops into the edge of the sun.
Irma stretched so her breasts pointed the sweater. "I guess I need some real sleep," she yawned. "My bus is up a block. Going that way?"
"Yeah, I guess so," I said. We started to walk.
"Spent all my money on liquor last night again," she said, talking to herself. "Only bus fare left and barely that. Shouldn't, but I always do." Mame won't be back for an hour, I thought. "Say, do you know what Bud does for a living?" Her eyes were half laughing, but kind of cold.
"I guess he sells stuff. Don't know. I've never asked him." She glanced away, her mouth half laughing too. "Yes, he sells stuff all right," she said.
We came to the corner across from the dime store and stopped. Irma looked into her purse and then at me.
"Well?"
I scuffed my feet on the pavement, studying the running cracks.
"You're a lonely kid, aren't you?" Cars went crackling by.
"Oh, I got some friends," I said. "Like, well Bud, and Ronney—he's the kid lives next door, and ..." I looked up for a moment, but she was all eyes and I looked away again.
Two business men strode past, alike in navy blue, one talking, the other laughing in a deep voice. The one talking watched us over his shoulder as they waited on the curb. Half way across the street I still could hear the other's muffled laugh.
"Look, Freddie, you've got a lot to learn if you think guys like Bud care at all for you ..." Her voice sounded bitter. "He doesn't care for anyone, least for himself." Then I looked at her, my lips tight. Her hair hung frowzy and dull in the growing sun, and her skin seemed grey.
I stepped into the street. "I guess I better be heading home," I said. "Freddie ... wait" Her hand was on my arm. "You're going to
need my number . . ." She went back into her purse. "To get Bud's address . . . and maybe some time you might want to come up to my house . . . I could help you with your English themes." She came up with a gnawed pencil and a ticket stub.

"I don't go to school," I said.

"Well, here's my number," she scratched it out in the palm of her hand. "Look, Freddie," she said in an advice giving tone, but she stopped there, her mouth curved on one side in a funny smile.

I took the ticket. "Thanks," I knew I should say something, but I had no words. "Guess I better be heading home." I was walking across the street feeling hangover dizzy. I wanted to look back, but I knew she would be watching me. The giddy sidewalk felt unreal beneath my feet. I kind of bounced. I was taller than I really am.

Not quite ready to go home yet, I walked north into the city. I could see people busy behind the windows of stores, my reflection winding in among them. I passed the black glitter of a furniture store into the display of a funeral demonstration. They had a coffin right there in the window, shiny brass and maroon plush.

A slow thought grew in me that was more a feeling. Gradually, I knew that maybe it would be all right with Mame and me if I wouldn't forgive her. I wouldn't forgive her, and then she would know I didn't blame her, and like Tom said, everything will be all right. I shuffled faster, my hands shoved deep in my pockets. I guess I was still drunk a little or I wouldn't have been making those funny sounds from my mouth.

"Hey, catch the cat," the voice said. "Man, he's really swinging."

Felt good, like maybe it was going to be a real long day. I bounced along, sounding louder, above my head the miles of glass kindling fire.
i watch them carry the burden
not quite so white
they carry from the first year
made heavier with the blood
and the bodies of many wars
for your own good

i will not help carry this burden
for my mind sags
with one four centuries older

Max Steele

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MONOLOGUE IN A MINOR KEY

Yes,
I do
think it true
that poets lie.

Spring
is only
a statistic.
A poet will

Cite
spring as
that time
in the reign

Of May
when
lovely liquid days
make roses flame.

Is
this truth
the poet gains?
Yet, I too

Suppose
statistics
also fool.

Peter Green
a smallish toohuman nimbly squats
delicately in the center of
the lavish dining table in
the toopopulated thick carpeted
this is who i am
melting pot of our sweet society

and ever so assiduously toasts lightly
a slice of bread like mother never made
over the soft flame of the
atmospherethatyouarepayingfor candle

thinking of the large bronze ashtray
on the chandelier that once held heavy bulbs
and the chianti bottle hanging from the kitchen wall

and the nude floor lamp with glaring bulb
and painting perched above the window

and dabs margarine inconsistently on the toast

Max Steele

TO WEBSTER

When from the many depths of books and conversation
She comes upon that what is said, to her consternation,
She finds the content all but given to dissipation.

Shyly she retreats from her barrier of confutation
With the hope of finding some sort of revelation
That will bring her to her mental destination.

She takes it upon herself to delve into the blue cover
Only to find that that which has been said to her
Could have no meaning if it hadn’t been for Webster.

Mary Ann Williams
WILLIE PAUL

Proud, headstrong and defiant are his dispositions. 
He got them from his odd social positions 
In the world today, or so psychiatrists say.

Proud of the tan skin from a white mother and black father, 
Headstrong when it comes to defending his right on earth, 
And defiant while he waits the birth of a new day.

Donna Love

ONE AND ONE

The scent that whispers through the grove of pines, 
Which carefully planted, regiment the low and narrow lane. 
Swells there among its worshippers and stifles them. 
Once cut the pines become the common wood.

The wind that lashes through the lonely Jack 
Strips it of its pride, breaks a 
Heart, and wrings its blood on its lofty throne. 
Shredded, barkless death becomes it, 
Its haggard, eerie presence gone— 
Is missed.

Bending, swaying, common rows, 
And weathered bucking markers 
Live their lives apart. 
The reaper time preserves or rots their epitaph.

Fred Gaulzetti