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Anna tiptoed carefully into the small kitchen. The soft clip-clop, clip-clop of her slippers betrayed her hurried shuffle as she stepped off the frayed rug in the living room to the bare bleached wood of the kitchen floor. The coffee-pot signalled with its energetic bubbling that it had finished perking. It seemed to Anna to say, “For God’s sake turn me off or I will get so strong and hot that I will splatter your ugly old kitchen!”

Anna laughed to herself as she thought about it. “The pot calling the kettle black, eh Herr Schwarze-pot?” she taunted. “The only reason I keep you around this ugly old kitchen is that you fit it so well with your dents and scratches and burned-up look! And why should you complain anyway? I pulled you out of the ashes on Kirchenstrasse, gave you a new home and feed you real American coffee!” She shook her fist menacingly at the old pot in a mock gesture of reprisal. “So don’t give me your threats, Herr Schwarze-pot, or I will sell you and buy a shiny new one that will not complain so much!”

Anna didn’t have to look at the kitchen to know it was bare and drab. The plaster was cracked and peeling in a thousand places which made the walls and ceiling resemble a huge map of railroad tracks criss-crossing a country. The once sturdy oak table had been charred and weakened from the fire and smoke following one of the one hundred and fifty-four air raids on the battered city of Berlin. Mr. Wernicke, from the apartment downstairs, had re-enforced it and had pronounced it “better than before, by God,” as he greedily eyed the two one-mark coins she took out of her purse and placed in his shaking hand. He had had that “schnaps” look in his eyes and had probably dashed straight to Graeber’s Rathskeller on the Marienplatz as fast as his stubby old legs could carry him. The rest of the kitchen was in an equally poor condition . . . but it was a kitchen . . . more than many people had these days. Why, there was even a bedroom to the apartment and a living room with a rug in it!

A shrill wheezing sound from the neglected coffee-pot reminded her she would be late for work if she didn’t hurry. She quickly removed the pot from the ancient stove to let it cool before pouring a cupful.

The small figure of her daughter, Lisa, appeared in the doorway sleepily rubbing her eyes. She clutched a small ragged doll close to her chest as though, if she were to drop it, someone would snatch it up and she would never see it again. “Mama!” she said. “What was that
noise? Was it the warning siren? Do we have to go to the shelter again?"

"Ah, liebling, liebling. Of course not. It was only Herr Schwarze-pot screaming for help. See, he is boiling mad!" she said mockingly. "Come, Lisa, have a cup with me. We must hurry though. It is almost ten; so I must leave for work soon. And you should be in bed! You must go to school in the morning."

The girl pouted, "I don't want to go to school. I would rather help you work and make more money for us."

"Lisa! That is no way to talk. We were lucky to find an apartment so near a school. Yes, and we are lucky there is a school still standing for you to go to. Your father would have wanted you to go to school."

She rarely mentioned her late husband Franz to the child. She scarcely remembered him. He had been dead for six years having probably become fertilizer, along with many of his comrades, for some Russian farmer. Either the cold Russian winter or cold Russian steel had claimed him. She didn't know which . . . nor did she care. He was dead . . . that was enough. She had seen too much of death and dying during her own private hell in Berlin to feel much remorse at his passing. She only felt a twinge of anger toward him for letting her and Lisa down when she felt she had needed him the most. But that part of her life was over now . . . life is for the living.

"Mama . . . MAMA!" cried Lisa.

"Yes, dear?" she answered, recovering from her tangent of thoughts.

"Are you going to marry him, Mama?"

"Marry who, Lisa?"

"The American . . . Captain Krueger, Are you?"

"Why, I don't know, Lisa. What makes you think Captain Krueger wants to marry me?"

"I saw the way he looked at you at Frau Kroll's dinner party; and you've been seeing him almost every day this week," the child added.

Anna looked at her daughter and smiled wonderingly. Sometimes she was amazed at the perception of this eight-year-old child. She seemed to be able to grasp a situation in an adult fashion, recognizing and weighing the consequences. Yet, at the same time, she maintained a quality of childlike naivete that set her apart from an adult observer. Anna supposed that this characteristic stemmed from the child's seeing too much of life too soon . . . the war and everything connected with it. It was strangely comical to watch Lisa as she weighed the pros and cons of a particular decision or situation. It was at these times Anna wondered how much her daughter really knew about her and her "work."

"Mama, you should marry him if you can. A woman needs a man."
"Lisa! What do you know about that?"

"I know," she said simply, as she stood up, grasped the coffee-pot with both hands and poured herself more coffee. "Want some more?" she taunted.

"No, I have to leave now for work," said Anna, somewhat abashed by her daughter's frankness. She stood up, walked over to the closet, took the fairly new American Army overcoat off a hanger and put it on, wrapping it tightly around her. She walked over to where Lisa sat sipping her coffee and said, "Would you like to go to America someday, Lisa?"

"Oh, Mama, that would be wonderful, wonderful!" Lisa, the child, had spoken this time.

"I will do what I can to arrange it, then. But I can promise nothing. As you seem to know, he likes me . . . whether or not enough to marry me and take us to America . . . well, only time can tell about that."

Lisa got up from the table and embraced her mother. "Mama, Ich liebe dich, Ich liebe dich! (I love you, I love you!) When I grow up I want to be just like you!" she exclaimed.

"Maybe you will, liebling." But not if I can help it, she thought to herself, lazily stroking Lisa's long blonde hair.

"Well, I have to go now or I'll be late. So, go straight to bed now. I'll see you in the morning."

"All right, Mama, goodnight."

"Goodnight Lisa," she said as she opened the door and stepped out into the cool, clear October evening.

The stars shone brightly in the sky and sprinkled with light the rubbled streets of the skeletal city of Berlin. The light from the stars mingled with the makeshift lamps and lanterns of the many workmen who filtered through the rubble clearing a path here, tearing down the remains of a house there, rebuilding . . . a thousand tasks being done. Berlin was picking up the pieces and was trying to fit them all together again.

As she walked, Anna thought about Captain Krueger. He was a German-born naturalized American citizen. His parents had emmigrated when he was a small boy. He had "wangled" a position in the Berlin Occupational Forces because of his ability to speak German fluently. He was happy to be in Berlin because of the many friends and relatives of his family who lived here. Frau Kroll was one of those family friends. He had located her through a search organization and had come directly to see her. Anna had been over talking to Frau Kroll at the time and she had grudgingly introduced Anna to "her dear friend of the family." "And how were his parents? What was it like in America? You lucky boy . . . here we have nothing," and so on.
Frau Kroll wasn’t fooling Anna. Luck had brought her an American friend however distant the relationship. An American meant good coffee, American cigarettes and many other benefits. These things could be sold at black-market prices and enable one to survive for a long time. She had wanted him for herself naturally. After all, the most important thing was survival... for the present anyhow.

But Erich Krueger had other ideas. He was not so interested in digging up old acquaintances and relatives in behalf of his family to be adverse to a friendly relationship with an interesting and fairly pretty younger woman.

When Frau Kroll suggested a small dinner party in his honor (and at practically all his own expense as he had brought all the necessities which Frau Kroll couldn’t obtain and had graciously refused payment for them) he insisted that she invite Anna. Frau Kroll had been backed up against a wall and Anna had enjoyed it tremendously.

The dinner party was a grand success... for Anna especially... much to the chagrin of Frau Kroll. Captain Krueger enjoyed her company and Anna his. He found some excuse to see her every day after the party and she even skipped work a few nights in order to relax and enjoy herself with him. She had sensed, as only women are able to do, that he was falling in love with her. She wondered if she could fan the flame of his new-found love into an intense enough fire for him to want to marry her. She thought she could. She didn’t love him... but she could easily enough... especially if it meant a life in America for Lisa and herself.

As she walked along, she decided she would give up her “work” and her relationship with Gerda. The sooner the better, she thought. I will tell her tonight.

She turned the corner at Berlinderplatz with practiced step and glanced at the familiar building directly in front of her. She was always a bit overwhelmed at the sight of the Berlin Cathedral rising majestically out of the rubble that enveloped it. However, she knew that if she were to approach the church from the side she would see the gutted-out interior of a building that, from the front, looked like it had escaped the bombs unscathed. “You and I are very much alike, old church,” she mused. “We are something entirely different on the inside. But are we to blame for our deception? Not really, I think.”

She continued her familiar course; down Jahnstrasse three blocks; turn left at Wilhelmstrasse; go to the third house from the corner; open the door; go to Gerda’s apartment and knock.

“Where have you been?” exclaimed Gerda. “You’re late tonight. I thought you weren’t coming.”

“I am coming for the last time, Gerda,” Anna replied.

“What? What nonsense is this! This is only the beginning. You can’t stop now.”
"I can and I must and I will. Tonight is my last night of 'entertaining.' I have enough money to last for awhile. Lisa and I will get along."

"Aha," cried Gerda. "It's that American Officer you told me about. He's asked you to marry him ... is that it?"

"Something like that ... not quite," Anna replied.

"Well, why didn't you say so. By all means become legalized, liebling! I only thought you were getting another wave of conscience." She laughed bitterly. "Come now. Get dressed. You're going to entertain another Officer tonight. It will be good practice for you if you are going to marry one and leave me to the mercy of all these lustful American males."

As she went into the bedroom to change, she thought about Gerda and their relationship. It had been a very profitable one. She had made plenty of money as a prostitute ... much more than she had dreamed of making at the factory where she had first met Gerda. She generally made more money in one night than she could make in a whole month of back-breaking work in the factory.

It had been difficult at first. She had felt guilty all the time; especially when she looked and talked to Lisa. But she had got over it, mainly because of Gerda's persuasive arguments and partly in her realization that she and Lisa could live much better with the extra money she earned. Besides, the neighbors knew nothing about her "work." They and Lisa thought she still worked at the factory.

She finished dressing quickly and went out to the living room and Gerda.

"Anna, why do you have to stop seeing other men? Can't you see your officer during the day and spend your nights in my happy company?"

"Ah, Gerda! You! You don't understand. All you care about is 'geld und gemeutlichkeit' ... 'money and the good time.' You live for the moment . . . I for the future!"

"All right, all right," Gerda said. "You don't have to preach to me. I know what I'm doing and why. Maybe you are right in what you are doing. Who knows, maybe I'll snare a handsome American Officer myself! I'll play the innocent little fraulein led astray by my American lover who was false to me . . . ."

"Shut up, Gerda! I . . ."

She was interrupted by a knock on the door. Gerda shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "Forget it and act like you're having a good time," as she walked over to the door and swung it open.

"Major Donnelly," she cried. "How wonderful of you to come. And who is the friend you have brought this evening for Anna?"

"His name is Captain Erich Krueger," said Major Donnelly, casually.
SUE COOK
We shared this day fourteen years ago when I was ten and Duke was one. Duke was a beautiful, black English collie. We were constant companions. I was a child, and he was a child. We were young, excitable, and in love with each other. Our curiosities and imaginations responded simultaneously to the same things as though we were one.

We lived on the edge of a small industrial town; it was no different from any other Michigan town. Since our house was small I had to sleep on the sun porch. I didn’t mind because this was my very own room, and sometimes Duke could come inside and visit me.
The day began when I sat up in bed and glanced about my dark room. A strange, weak, fluorescent glow filled the room. I stared at the window trying to determine what was different. I placed my bare feet onto the cold, linoleum-covered, concrete floor. The linoleum crackled as I tiptoed to the window. I could see deep white snow that was new and smooth. "It must be three feet deep," I thought. It was almost up to the windows on the hen house; it covered Mother's new rosebush; and it hid the hens' drinking pans. I pressed my face sideways on the cold glass and strained to see Duke's house. I could see the old plum tree, but I couldn't see Duke's house. Something came into sight. I wiped the steam from my warm breath off the frosty window. It was Duke! He was standing chest deep in snow. He was staring expectantly at the house, his ears perked alertly. Not caring what the time was, I began dressing swiftly and quietly. I put on two pairs of overalls, one pair of thin socks, shoes, boots, sleeveless sweat shirt, old red coat, stiff yellow leather mittens, and stocking cap. I slowly and easily opened the door. I carefully closed it, and stepped into the white stillness. The loudest sound was the fall of the snowflakes. Falling snowflakes make no noise. The piles of snow mysteriously grew deeper. They seemed to rise out of the ground. I dropped to my knees in front of Duke, and we exchanged embraces—silent, wordless greetings. I unsnapped Duke's chain, and he bolted into the deep snow. I followed him around the yard; we jumped high, bucking the piles of fluffy, white, chaff-like snow.

We turned and walked toward the garden as if drawn by some celestial magnet. I had not commanded, and Duke had not barked. We just went drawn by something that was present, but not visible.

We plunged into the snow, we ran, we kicked; we did not speak. We could not tell where the garden began or ended. We could not find the road or sidewalks. We were blazing the trail! We were the first to cross fields, break paths, and witness the arrival of new snow flakes.

We stopped to catch our breath. We embraced by rubbing our faces against each other's. Then, Duke and I galloped further into the white expanse. We could not see or be seen; we were oblivious of reality.

I wondered where we were and what time it was. "We must be near Fawn River," I guessed. Duke had run ahead; I followed his tracks. My foot brushed against something hard. I went back and swept the snow from it. It was a tombstone that read, "Jasper Cooper Born 1825 Died 1841." We were in the cemetery. Duke came charging back and cocked his head quizzically at the gravemarker. I rose and started running; Duke followed in my trail. We ran for a long time, and when we stopped I didn't know where we were. I didn't care. Since Duke seemed to want to keep going, we trotted further.
Then I stopped and looked around. For the first time since we had left the house, I really looked hard. The world had shrunk. The horizon had become smaller. The horizon was still a circle whose circumference was equidistance from me at any point, but now it was only a scant thirty or forty feet away. The quiet was so conspicuous that I could almost see it. The large, damp, white snow flakes were silhouetted against the dark sky. The flakes did not swirl or float, but fell straight and quickly to the ground. The sky was so full of snow flakes that it seemed they were not moving in any direction, but only milling around. There was no light except the fluorescent glow.

"Duke——Duuuuuke! Here boy!" I called, speaking for the first time. Duke charged to my side, shaking and spraying snow. I kneeled and he sat in the snow. I slipped my arm around his lean shoulders, drew him close, and purred, "Atta boy." Together we stared unseeing into the great stillness. I began to talk without realizing it. "Duke, this is perfect. Let's call this the happiest day of our lives. Let's not run any more. Let's make a poem for today." Together we strained to see that poem which was written somewhere out there among those snowflakes. The world stood still. The piles of snow, the snowflakes, the glow, the whole wide-world silently and breathlessly awaited the poem. We were the center of the universe.

"We're as free as the wind,
And as free as the day.
We'll never let anything stand in our way."

These words poured out of me naturally, spontaneously, and simply. We felt as free as the wind and day that had chosen to stop and hear the happiness of a young boy and his dog. Nothing stands in their way. The blowing wind will always blow and the passing days will always pass; man will never stop them again.

I don't remember turning around, but I knew we were heading back. Soon, I could see a tiny light far away. It was a speck at first; it grew larger as we approached it. The sky was growing light, and the snowflakes were smaller and harder to see. The speck of light became our kitchen window. The chimney was smoking; automobile tracks broke down the middle of the road; the old black rooster crowed; the sidewalks were shoveled into neat white trenches.
The Riddle of Human Growth & Development

Little children,
Do you know that you might happen to Grow

And come
To be
Great,
Big,
People strange as we?
DIANE BROWN

SOMEWHERE NEAR

Through sleeping sounds the loneness tears,
As ravenous wolves crouched to spring and satify on this flesh.
One presence only can scatter grinning jowls and lust brimmed eyes,
Farther than the way of transient trains that pass even now in rolling rush,
Whistling haunted echo of the lone burdened search.

Clothes cannot cover naked need
Nor distance diminish part's mute appeal to the whole,
And both class with whine of the vicious wolf world.

Jagged teeth swell separation with crazed gnashing.
Licking creatures stalk as prey the severed part.
On this snarling prowl for sundered ones,
Blood craving of the parched fiends annuls repose.

But somewhere stands shelter where howl fails to pierce;
Where fangs fear to sink, and shadows sleep deep;
Here a refuge in love so dear—
Unit constant transcending fear.
Seek voice; Find form;
Hear! Appear!
That beasts and terror may turn and run.

Come near if you hear
To a somewhere past fear,
O hear—Come near—
Still nearer near.
There once lived in a woods far away a little boy and a little girl, the children of parents both good and wise. Together they played among the trees, as all children do who have not yet been given their work in the world. Their days were happily spent and they knew no fear, for their parents loved them well.

The woods had long been an object of curiosity to them; the woods and the little stream which ran sparkling through it. At first there had been only the woods. But one day their parents had gone farther than usual into the forest to look for flowers; and they had decided to take their children with them. It was then that the children saw the stream for the very first time.

The parents of the boy and girl would not let them go near the stream, for they were wise as well as good. And so the children asked them questions instead.
It was of course the flowers which first interested them in the stream; their parents seemed to love them so. For some of them they would wade out into the stream itself. Most of them were along the bank though. The two children didn’t understand why the flowers were important, but thought that they must be if their Mother and Father said they were.

Naturally there were many questions to ask, such as “Why do you love the flowers?” and “Why do you never go downstream or upstream—there are flowers there too, you said.” And the parents answered their questions as best they could, telling them as much as they were able to understand. But they did not understand very much of what their parents told them. They were too young; they had known only the woods and the little house with the flowers around it where they were born and had always lived. They wondered together . . . wondered greatly to themselves . . . where the stream went—what lay upriver—past the bend where they could not see? The flowers were pretty, the ones in midstream.

As the days passed and the two children grew, their visits to the stream became more frequent. Their parents slowly began to teach them which flowers were the best, the ones that would keep longest at home; and the two children watched where they could be found. Some, they learned, were found in the sun and were many in number. Others were found only in the deepest shade, away from the rest and were difficult to find. There weren’t many of them and the pair didn’t think they were very pretty anyway. Still others grew out in midstream, in the blinding sun, where it sparkled and reflected itself endlessly through all the day; and these, the two children thought to themselves, were the prettiest of all. For they were of brighter colors than the rest, bigger and with many petals. But wanting to avoid the heat and the wet, their parents, “never once,” they told the two, “had ventured so far from shore.”

Now there came a day, but very shortly after the two children had first been allowed to creep near the bank—it was to watch their mother while she chose the very special blooms for the table on Sunday (“Mother, pick that one. It’s the prettiest.”)

“No dear, it will die. *This* one is better.”

“But Mother—it’s not pretty.”

“O but it will be dear, it will be. Come now.”)

—that the two children did a daring and forbidden thing. Cautiously, so that their good parents would think that they were still playing among the trees, the little boy and girl crept down to the mossy bank of the stream and lay on their stomachs there to watch. How brave they were! For never before had they disobeyed their mother or father.

Close, close! they were to the flowers that trembled in the current
at the water's edge. And if they lifted their eyes only a little they
could see the prettiest flowers of all in midstream.

The children gazed for long, tense moments at the brillance of
the colors, the wide, soft petals, their forms—there were many—rising
and falling with the stream, nestling gently against each other.

The two children glanced at each other for assurance.

"Tomorrow the petals will fall."
"They will look so much nicer than the others back home . . ."
"They will fill the house with their scent. Smell them!"
". . . it isn't deep . . ."

It was not deep. They touched the flowers with reverent hands,
held them gently against their faces, breathing their fragrance
deeply, deeply, until they themselves were a part of the scent.

"O look there! that one is so beautiful. Come!"
"It is downstream, sister."
"But it is close."
"My arms are full and so are yours. We can carry no more."
"Silly, silly—watch me. Look, look over there!"
"The bend—the bend."
". . . and there—look there!"
"It . . . it is nicer than the rest . . ."
"Come!"
"But . . . wait . . ."

A mother and a father, lonely now, still gather the rarest of the
flowers from beneath the mossy overhangs. Many times, in hope, they
have raised their eyes to the bend. But their day grows old and their
young ones have not returned. Not many do, is the truth; and a rare
grace has companioned those who have.
carl gasta

winter walk

to be alone
in winter moon-blued stark streets
and wonder wander-walk.

bits of snow smash like fragments of a lightbulb
memories unreal really become.
soft recall depends on lost sounds.

my new dreams
needing yearnings feed
but never suck warm things.
they grow-die brittle dry
splinter sharply
pricking me.

matted grass encased in glass
and dumb dirt is craked.
frigid drafts keep the stones alone
and my breast an empty throne.
“I have written a great book,”
Said the cripple from his chair.
“At the world I took a good long look
And found both foul and fair.”

“I know now its ways and whys;
I am worldly wise and round.
I see through all man’s truths and lies.
For answers I have searched and found.”

“My analysis I now perfect
In a work of fiction formed
For only those of the intellect
With which I myself was born.”
And tell me, lord of knowledge,
Who so young was maimed and smitten,
What great worldly college
Formed these opinions you have written?

From what great works of insight
Did you draw your sure conclusions?
From what theology beams this light
Which unshadows man’s illusions?

On what broad far and foreign soils
Did you search for what you found
And in impassioned nightly toils
Relate as sure and sound?

“Through that side window of finest plate
You see my wisdom’s store;
I gain my knowledge as I mediate
On those bricks on the house next door.”
Otto hesitantly lowered his bulk into the old bulgy armchair facing the TV, glanced nervously toward the kitchen where Ada was clearing away the supper dishes, then proceeded to seek refuge behind the evening newspaper. From over the din of dishpans and china, Ada called, “I thought you was goin’ up to see poor Benny.”

Otto squirmed uncomfortably, “I don’t know what good I can do. You said yourself he won’t see nobody.”

Ada confronted him, dish towel in one hand, a large wooden spoon in the other, which was presently pointed at Otto. “Yes, but you happen to be his best friend, remember? After playing pinochle with a man every night for eleven years you just don’t ignore him when he needs comforting. How would you feel if it had been me instead of Benny’s wife? You’d expect your best friend to stand by you, that’s what you’d do.”

Ada turned toward the kitchen, “I got a nice sandwich ready. He ain’t the kind to fix himself something to eat.”

Otto resignedly grunted himself out of his chair, shoved his pudgy feet into his worn felt slippers, and cast a resentful glance at Ada’s retreating figure.

Otto plodded down the hall. It seemed just like every other night, same old worn spots in the ugly flowered carpeting, same smells and same noises. From behind each dingy brown door, life was going on as usual. Here was the Johnson’s apartment; the radio blared and the smell of fried pork chops filled the air. The O’Deas were having boiled dinner; Otto loved boiled dinner, he’d ask Ada to fix some soon. From Pierce’s apartment Otto heard the usual arguing. Joe and Marie Pierce had moved in a few months ago; there were never any cooking smells from their apartment. They both worked and ate all their meals out. Makowskis had their door slightly ajar and little Sammy bolted out with his toy pistol. “Put ’em up Mr. Klein,” but Otto didn’t feel like playing a rustler tonight.
Herman Makowski appeared at the door. "Hi Otto. You're going up to see Benny as usual, Huh?"

"Yeah, Ada thought maybe he'd see me. You know, on accounta we been friends for so long."

"Sure, I'll bet he'll be glad to see you. It's awful, ain't it? Real unexpected. Poor devil," Herman bit his lower lip and shook his massive head. "Tell him, Otto, that we are all here to give him a helping hand any time."

"O.K. Herman, I'll tell him. I'll let you know how he's taking it."

Otto turned, and clinging heavily to the bannister, slowly climbed the creaking stairs. The fourth floor had an atmosphere of gloom and sorrow. The lights seemed dimmer than usual; the mud colored walls seemed more oppressive than ever. Otto almost turned back, but Benny needed him ... what would he say to Benny? Talk about the shop? How everyone was talking about ... about what? Well, he'd think of something to say to comfort poor Benny.

When he reached Benny's door, he stopped and listened. He heard a muffled sob. Otto was embarrassed. A man just doesn't cry regardless of what happens. He stood there uneasily for a moment then tapped on the door. "Benny, are you there? Benny, it's me, Otto. Otto, your old friend has come to see you." Otto scratched his head and put his ear to the door. Finally there was a sound of a chair scraping and then heavy footsteps ... the door opened slowly. Benny stood there dejectedly. His arms hung limply at his sides; his head bent down; he looked at the floor. "Come in, Otto" ... his voice was thick and choked. He returned to the table, sat down, put his head in his arms and began to sob.

Otto paused in the doorway and nervously glanced around the usually neat tiny apartment. Benny's lunch pail was still on the table, his work boots were in the middle of the floor, and his work clothes were thrown carelessly over a chair. There wasn't a sign that Benny had eaten all day. Course Benny couldn't even make a cup of coffee. He was really lost without Louise. What would he do now without a wife to look after him? "Hey, Benny, come on old pal, you just got to straighten up. Look, I brought you a nice liverwurst on rye. I'll make you a cup of coffee ... we'll both have a cup of coffee, how's that?" Otto fumbled around in the small neat kitchen, found the coffee, filled the percolator, lit the gas stove, and got two cups and saucers.

Benny raised his head, wiped his eyes on his sleeve. He looked gaunt and hollow-eyed sitting there in his underwear and old pants. "Otto, what am I going to do without her?" Otto didn't know what to say so he rattled the spoons, and got out the cream and sugar. Well, it would do Benny good to talk about her, relieves the mind; Ada said that when her brother Louie lost his wife. "Just think of it, Otto, for eleven years we were together. Every night I'd come home and she
would have my clothes laid out, my dinner on the table, and the paper all ready for me to read. She knew I liked onion rolls and made 'em fresh for me every day. Every night was something good for supper. After supper, I'd read the paper 'til you'd come up, and remember how little and quiet she was sitting there knitting sox for me while you and me played cards. I wonder if she got tired of knitting. Do you think I shoulda got her a TV? Do you think that, Otto?"

"Don't think about it Benny. She was always welcome to watch TV with Ada."

Benny wasn't listening. He was unburdening himself. "And after the card game we'd have a can of beer. You were nice to bring beer, Otto. Louise always said that. She'd say, 'That Otto, he is a good friend to bring us beer.' On Friday night I'd give her grocery money and she'd go over to the A & P on Saturday to do our shopping. She liked that, Otto. Louise really enjoyed it. She liked to get out once-in-a-while. On Sundays we'd walk over to State Street and look in all the big store windows, or we'd go over to the lake and I'd buy her some peanuts . . . she seemed to enjoy it, Otto . . . she . . ." Tears trickled down the unshaved cheeks.

Otto groped for words of comfort but they wouldn't come. "I think the coffee is done," he mumbled. He poured the strong black coffee and pushed the cup in front of Benny. "Come on, Benny, this coffee will make you feel better. Here, this sandwich is real good. Come on pal, you gotta eat. Keep up the old strength." Otto laughed feebly.

Benny looked up and glanced around as though he were in a dream. He slowly stirred his coffee, then threw down the spoon. Shaking his head and covering his face with his big bony hands he sobbed, "Why, why Otto, for God's sake, tell me, why would Louise want to run away with another man?"
SUZY DICK

Opening Night

The aged actor, sun,
His glorious encore done,
Bows graciously and goes;
Then the day's curtains close.

As earthly applause rings,
The moon from the dark wings,
Performs in the spotlight
The opening of night.

R. FOCO

ALONE?

The acquiescent chambers of my mind
In timely prayer do mouth
The words, unclothed with heart,
Ascend, they fall . . . unheard . . . unsaid.
Why do we mortals pray at all,
If ties of voice and heart
Combine only under stressful straws;
A last resort? . . . Then when conflict
Leaves to rest . . . In Adam's strength
We place our trust.
The day is hot.
Only a torpid tremor stirs
Sculptured trees.
A dog lies panting in the sun,
His thick fur shining,
Radiating dry heat.
A sprinkler whirls like a dervish
And the sun sets silver gems
On wet grass.
Willow branches bend
Pressed by heat to reach for relief
On flat, wet ground.
The sun, the cause,
White hot in heaven,
Lets no cloud block its path.
Solo: lento con appassionato
Oh, say, can you see
Where yer goin’?
By the public’s probing light
What so proudly we hailed
At the PTA’s last meeting?

Aria:
School days, school days,
Dear old Golden Rule days;
Readin’ ‘n’ ‘ritin’, ‘n’ ‘rithmetic
Taught to the tune of the hickory stick.

First voice: teacher.
Mrs. Dowling has gray hair and wears glasses. She can’t control the rumble in her stomach so the kids sometimes call her Old Rumble-Gut. She taught government in high school for eighteen years and thinks creeping socialism is our greatest problem. The principal smiles to himself when he thinks of the trouble Mrs. Dowling had last year. A group of senior girls reported that Tom was feeling their legs. Mrs. Dowling didn’t know whether to peer at the girl’s legs to catch Tom in the act or to put her leg out to be felt. She began to talk to the principal seriously about grouping students on the basis of how much interest they showed in schoolwork. In that way, Tom would be in a special group; and one of the new teachers could handle it.

Aria:
School days, school days,
Dear old Golden Rule days;
Kissin’, ‘n’ neckin’, ‘n’ everything
Taught to the tune of the latest swing.

Second voice: principal.
Mr. Lynch has been a principal for eleven years. In all that time he has never seen anything quite like what he has to put up with when he chaperones the school dances. It reminds him of how he used to buy ten dollars worth of tickets to dance with some juiceless whore at the taxi-dance in the Garden of Alloh at Seal Beach, California. The thing that’s shocking is to see the way little ninth-grade girls shake it around like pros. They wear skirts so tight they rip at the seams.
and display the dirty underwear. The boys don't seem to mind; they cut in and the bunch of greasy bodies sweat and shake in time to the music. The senior boys eye the crowd to see who's on the make.

Aria:
You ain't notin' but a houn' dog.
Just a' cryin' alla time;

Octet:
Hooray for the Orange and the Blue;
We'll always be loyal to you.
Fight, fight, fi——ight!

Chorus:
But we are afraid, we are alone, we don't know what to do.
(Piles of junk in abandoned basements.)
We are afraid, the schoolboard met, the superintendent is ill, the people have no money.
We have families to feed, and it's none of our business as long as we put in our time.
We are afraid, the wind blows cold, and next year jobs may be scarce.

Third voice: layman.
Lyle runs the garage and gas station where most of the teachers buy their gas. His daughter gets all D's in school, and when he raised hell awhile back, the principal fed him some bull about I.Q. scores. Lyle figured his kid was a damn sight smarter than some of those satchel-assed teachers that couldn't tell when their car wouldn't start that it was because the gas gauge had been riding empty all week. Lyle kept his mouth shut after that and let them run up their bills. The teachers thought they knew it all, but there were ways of pinching tubes when repairing tires that helped sell new tires. A bunch of crap about I.Q.'s was worth a few bills anyday. Everybody in the community knew the teachers were stupid when they wanted a new gym with a swimming pool.

Aria:
Row, row, row
For dear old Nassau.

Octet:
99 bottles of beer on the wall,
99 bottles of beer—

Fourth voice: school board member.
Mr. Rockwell didn't want the job of board member at first. But now that he was unopposed for three terms he sort of liked the prestige. His friends listed him as a leader in the community and he really thought he knew something about schools. He'd put the fear of God in a young teacher last year that made his daughter stay after school. He liked interviewing new teachers, especially the young college
girls. He was sure in another year he could work his way in with Miss Merton. Damn! The body on that woman would drive any man to drink, and he let his eyes tell her during the interview. Now if his daughter would only quit irritating the hell out of Miss Merton.

*Aria:*

The girl that I marry will have to be
As soft and as pink as a nursery.

*Chorus:*

We are led, but we have no leader, and time is short.
The world will not wait, but we have no leader.
We dare not dare to do what others don't.
We have our families, our jobs.
There are too many taboos.
Look at NBC, ABC, and the AP.
The little man can't survive.
You've got to go big or die.
We have no leader, and next year may be a poor year.

*Aria:*

Say it with music,
Beautiful music.

*Fifth voice: student.*

When Bob was in the ninth grade, he had a motorcycle. He always came to school in a black jacket trimmed with chrome metal. He wore a motorcycle hat with the edges turned down over his ears. He didn't give a damn about schoolwork; in fact, he flunked English that year. He gave lots of girls rides on his motorbike, though. There was one cute little number, Joyce. She was crazy about him and they used to go out to The Pines on warm nights and lie in the grass. Bob carried a blanket in his saddlebags, and Joyce quit school in her sophomore year because she was pregnant. Too bad. She had one of those shorty haircuts and wore bangs over her forehead. Bob goes steady now with Carol.

*Aria:*

Then the lamb, ram, sheep horns began to blow,
An' the trumpets begin to shout;

*Sixth voice: citizen.*

Mr. Steen's feet hurt him all the time. Carting dishes around a restaurant twelve hours each day broke down a man's feet. He figured if school in his day had been like it is now he'd be able to do something besides pick soggy napkins out of cups. Schools don't have standards anymore. Steen's kid came home and told him how the boys in science class fill Trojans with water and throw 'em at the girls. They pass kids 'cause they need the seats next year. Mr. Steen pushed the cart of dishes into the kitchen. He slipped his shoe off and nudged at the blister on his toe.
Aria:
Round and round the cobbler's bench
The monkey chased the weasel.

Seventh voice: lodge member.
Mrs. Wartnose has been campaigning against foreigners for a long time. They ruin a community. They bring lice, mice, and hordes of naked kids. The trouble is, as soon as they learn English, they start bitching about the schools. The schools where they came from were so much better than these in America, to hear them tell it. Well, Mrs. Wartnose has an answer for that. And along with it, the teachers should spend a lot less time with the UN and pound at America for Americans. American history, American government, and t'hell with the rest of the world.

Aria:
America, America,
God shed His grace on thee.

Octet:
Everything's up to date in Kansas City,
They've gone about as fur as they kin go.

Chorus:
We are afraid, it's too new, and I don't want to be the first.
We can't do anything like that, we've always done it this way, it wouldn't work. (The stale smell in the basements is like dried manure.) We feel the chill, but we must huddle together for warmth, the wind is cold. We would that we could do what we should,
But the others—
(The maggots crawl in the manure.)
It is not feasible, permissible, or defensible.
We are cold and afraid; the next year may be a poor year.

Aria:
Give me some men
Who are stout-hearted men

Eighth voice: speaker.
Board members, superintendent, principal, faculty members, students, and parents. I hope you feel some of the pride I do as I look at this new school. It is your school, yet, I, too, feel a measure of pride. Pride that my country, my people think highly enough of the education of their children to set aside the money to build a magnificent edifice such as this. A building where all may come—be he Jew or Gentile, white or dark, (background music: sometimes I feel like a motherless child) the lame, the halt, and the blind—to receive an education; an education of which we need not be ashamed. I would like to say a few words about that education.
Aria:

Calm on the listening ear

Ninth voice: school dropout.

What the hell did they expect? A bunch a ol’lady teachers that never had no kids of their own and a principal that picked his nose. I didn’t have no good clothes n’ my old man worked nights and my ma the day shift at GM. Them damn teachers acted like there’s nothin’ in the world but books. They sounded like a telephone operator tellin’ time: read the assignment, study the lesson, go t’ the board, leave the room, answer the question, shine my shoes, kiss my ass. They send me to a guy called a counselor n’ he says, “Don’t you think we want to do what’s right for you?” He smelled like perfume n’ I says t’ hell with it all n’ quit.

Aria:

They asked me how I knew—

Tenth voice: senior girl.

Everything was fine until I had to go and get pregnant. I don’t blame Dave, we were in love. My ma and dad wouldn’t hear of me dating, they were so old-fashioned. Dave and I always had to meet someplace. In school we stood in the halls and nobody paid much attention. Sometimes we sneaked into the locker room but the janitor caught us. My ma knew just how long it took to walk from school and if I wasn’t right home she called school. Of course, I had things on at school some nights and that was the trouble. The principal made me stay home after April but I could graduate ’cause the robe hid my condition.

Aria:

The night is young and you’re so beautiful,
Here among the shadows, Beautiful Lady.

Eleventh voice: somebody else.

Nobody knows what they want—that’s the honest t’god answer. Some say the three R’s, and others say they gotta learn to adjust. Everybody’s got to be like everybody else. Take my boy, Eli. Ever since he was five, he’s been practicing violin. He’s got a scrapbook with every news clipping on Heifitz. The other day the counselor takes him in and says he outta mix with the kids more; ya’ know, games, dances, that stuff. But Eli wants to practice four, six hours a day. No, he’s gotta adjust; he’s alone too much. He’s not like the rest of the mob.

Aria:

Play, fiddle play,
Play my love back to me.

Octet:

The leader shouts democracy, by damn, or I’ll have your jobs.
The parents scream: the three R's, but we lost too many games this year.
The University moans: new methods, research, while sending the 112 class tests to be graded by IBM.
The students sulk, but they come through: that is, they live, they breed, they die.
(The little wheel turns within the big wheel, and there is nothing else to do.)

Chorus:
We don't know, but at least we know we don't know.
We confer and refer and defer.
(But the wind puffs through the basement, and there are cracks in the floor.)
The frontier is settled and there must be a change.
But our hands are tied;
Don't blame us: we are cold, we are hungry.
It's not our fault.
Blame the tribe across the river—
They have a green color.
Jobs were poor this year.
Blame the people on the other side of the hill—
They are purple people.

R. FOCO

So It May Be

Death may be a door closed tight
Barred against a day or night;
A breathless void, a lightless dream,
A mindless thought, an ending scheme.

Or . . .

Death may be a pass-through sphere
With life's death key to enter there;
A vacuumed state, a dreamless light,
An ending quest, a conquered plight.
It's as black as a sealed tomb
And the heavens appear as an ebony cloak
Studded with millions of tiny sequins.
The forest below lies motionless
    and without life.
The inner parts of man's soul
Have felt such darkened hours
When life seems to have no hope.
Then too, the self,
For which all is an inward step,
knows this emptiness and the torment
    of conscience.

Suddenly a ray of light oozes
Across this speckled darkness,
And the million winking eyes begin
To fade to a greater power.
The forest tingles as the gray
colorless branches strain
With potential life.
A mist makes the vision dance in uncertainty.
O God, could there be some hope,
Is there more than "I," or is it just
The dancing shadows from a fading fire?

The light breaks, shattering the gray
    solar system.
It touches a distant hilltop;
Reds, yellows, and eternal greens,
There are bathed, by a power greater than all.
Sweeping down the slope,
Piercing and warming,
So the earth now clearly breaths anew.
"I" am no longer, but part of Thee.
The light of heaven has filled my soul.
I stand now ready to face the day.
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