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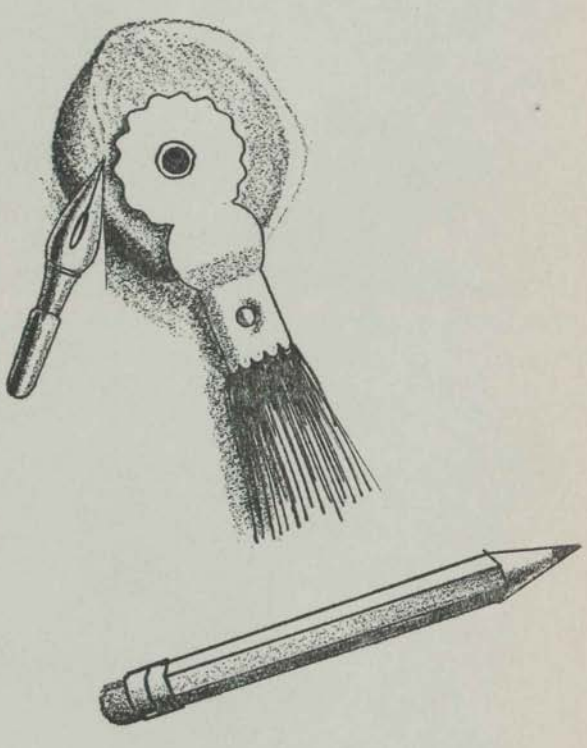

1951

MANUSCRIPT

is the magazine prepared for the students
of Morningside College by

MANUSCRIPT CLUB

Volume 13 1951 Number 1
Morningside College Sioux City, Iowa

The Little Ones

By JUNE SALIE

The trees were busy making wind. All the branches were blowing back and forth, and yellow leaves went down the hill with Josie, some dropping with a whisper at her feet, some riding on the wind far down to the railroad track, to the tops of the telephone poles. She raced to keep up with them and the wind helped, pushing against her back. But the leaves were so light and so small that soon they were far away, only specks of color. Oh, they were having a fine time! They went wherever the wind did, sometimes high and sometimes low.

Josie came to a stop half-way down the slope, breathing hard. She sat down in the grass to rest and Mister Brown, tired, too, came up behind her, with his red tongue flicking up and down. Josie put an arm around him and looked down the hill to see Pa driving the team of horses, the potato plow dragged along on its side, flattening the grass in a wide path, crushing the sunflowers. Pa was so excited; he shouted orders and pointed and looked back to see if they were all coming. Vern and Jackie were behind him, not hurrying, no, never hurrying, their bare backs a warm brown color in the sunlight. They were two Indians on a reservation who had to pick potatoes for the white man, and they were chiefs too; Vern had said so. They planned a massacre and all the tribes of east and west would join. Jackie had told her that they meant to scalp Pa and hang his black hair at the end of a pole. Jackie was mean; he was so mean. Josie looked down at the potato patch and shivered, thinking of the massacre.

Uncle Pete was there, carrying the pails to the tractor. The way he walked said he was mad. He didn't want to help pick potatoes. It was too bad he had to come along when he did, just when he was finished wth his cream truck route, because Pa always had to have help and called, "Pete, you couldn't help a fellow out, could you?" And of course Uncle Pete always could.

The day was as bright as the sunflowers. She could look from this hill and see everything, the little trees and houses across the river, and cars hurrying on the road. The wind was so strong. The wind had never touched a thing but leaves and water and long grass. But now it's touching me, thought Josie.

She stood up and followed the path the potato plow had made, Mister Brown close at her heels. She looked at the sunflowers that had been torn from the ground. Would they die now? But she could not feel sorry, she could not feel sad today. See the birds in the sky, how they circle over the hill. They can see more than I can. Thy can see if there are any clouds coming. I hope they can't see one single cloud.

Now Pa shouted for her to hurry and his voice was so faraway. If

his voice had been loud, she would hurry. But it was such a little voice; she would just stand here and look some more.

"Josie," a voice called from behind.

She did not turn at once for she knew that voice. She stood rigid and for a moment unable to think; then her heart began to sink, like the golden heads of the sunflowers that didn't look up any more. Tears rushed to her eyes. She turned quickly and gasped. Yes, there was that woman, coming down the hill! She was going to help too! Why couldn't she stay away just once? Why couldn't she let this beautiful day alone? This was their hill! The potatoes were theirs! Nothing, nothing belonged to her. Yet she was coming, her skirt blowing, swinging a pail as if it did belong to her, as if it did! Josie tried to swallow the hard lump in her throat; she struggled against her tears. Her voice was choked. "You don't have to help. You don't know how!"

"I thought I'd try anyhow," she answered, not stopping, not turning back, but coming on. She was still smiling. Josie wished she wouldn't smile so much. She smiles at Vern and Jackie, she smiles at Pa, she even smiles at the mailman. Josie, watching with horror, thought that surely she would turn back. Didn't she know this was Ma's hill? "We don't need you!" Josie wanted to shout, but instead she turned and ran down the hill, toward Pa and the potato patch. Mister Brown barked and dashed ahead of her. Josie stopped only once to look back. Yes, she was still coming. But she can't catch up with me. She's too fat to run! Josie sat down in the grass to hug Mister Brown.

"Mister, we love each other, don't we? Vern and Jackie, they get along with her. She gives them cookies and they like her. But we don't. We won't take her cookies. We'll never take anything from her."

The dog struggled in her arms and with a whine, broke loose and raced down the hill, scenting a rabbit. He wriggled on his belly through the weeds, he leaped like a kangaroo, he sniffed the ground and sneezed with the dust in his nose. Josie ran on to the potato patch. If there was only some way to make that woman go away! She had asked Pa again and again to make her go. Why was she here anyhow? But Pa only said, "She's your new Ma. Now you be nice to her." "She's not, she's not!" Josie screamed. "Ma's coming back! Ma's coming back pretty soon!" But then Pa wouldn't say any more.

Josie ran to him now. He was on his haunches, working over the plow.

"Pa, don't let her pick potatoes!"

He looked up with a scowl. "Huh?"

Josie pointed to the hill. "Her!"

Pa only took a quick glance. He pulled out his red handkerchief and wiped the grease from his fingers. Then he stood up, straightening his back with a groan.

"Pa, the potatoes don't belong to her!"

"Hush up, what's the matter with you? We've got a lot of work. Now grab a pail and help the boys."

Pa walked around the plow and took up the reins. He shouted "Giddap" to the horses. They didn't move. Pa turned the plow over and grasped the wooden levers. He swore now. "Damn you, giddap!" The horses started, the roan pulling slightly ahead of the black horse. Pa pushed down on the levers and the potato plow cut into the ground. The earth opened and spilled in two black rolls on either side of the plowshare. He looked back to see the potatoes coming up, big ones, little ones, the plow thrusting them out from their quiet place.

Pa wouldn't say "Go away" to that woman. Maybe Pa would never say that.

Josie turned to Uncle Pete who came with a pail to pick the first row. She grabbed his coat sleeve as he was passing.

"She's coming, Uncle Pete! Tell her we don't want her."

"Who?" Uncle Pete stopped, pushed his hat back from his forehead.

"She's coming down the hill!"

"Well, everybody's got to help, Josie," he said, looking down at her with a smile. "Uncle Pete's got to help, Josie's got to help. Everybody's got to help."

"But she don't, Uncle Pete."

He patted the top of her head.

"I've got some candy for you in the truck. Now you remind me about it before I go home. Well, guess I better get busy."

Uncle Pete went into the first row, stooping to pick up potatoes. Josie stared at him. He wouldn't say "Get out of here!" to that woman. Didn't Uncle Pete always do things for other people? Didn't he always bring her presents—gum-drops, licorice sticks?

Now she turned and ran to Vern.

"She's coming, Vern."

"Good thing. 'Else we'd be here all day."

"This is Ma's hill!"

Vern turned away. He said, "You better start picking. I ain't going to pick 'em all."

Josie looked up the hill. The woman was almost here. Jackie was at the trailer, looking for the best pail. There wasn't much time left.

"Tell her to go away, Jackie!"

"Who?"

"Her!"

"Huh? What for?" Jackie swung his pail in front of her face. "I'm going to scalp you and hang your hair up and all your blood will run out!"

Josie sobbed aloud. She didn't know what to do, and Jackie was so mean.

Pa shouted from the end of the first row. "Start picking, you kids!"

Jackie edged past her, making a face, sneering, "Cry-baby!" Then with a whoop he was off to pick potatoes.

It was too late. She was here, talking to Uncle Pete. Josie stared in bewilderment. Yes, Uncle Pete liked her too. She's just like a big fat cow, Josie thought. Oh, why didn't Ma come back? Nobody would tell her when Ma was coming back.

Now Mister Brown ran between the rows of dead potato vines and jumped up against Uncle Pete, then against her! Josie watched with new dread as Mister Brown licked her hand!

"Mister Brown, Mister Brown!" Josie screamed. "Come here, Mister!" She watched, she shouted more loudly. "Mister, Mister! You come here!"

Josie sobbed in helpless rage, without tears. The smallest voice said, "Now Mister likes her too." She found a pail and walked to the row Pa was opening, but with every step she hesitated and looked to see if Mister Brown was still there. When she came to the row, half-heartedly started to fill her pail with potatoes, she looked up and her heart lifted. The dog was following Vern down a row. Josie reached for a potato and her fingers tightened around it. She said aloud, "You belong to us. You don't belong to her." A slender root trailed from the potato and at its end, two other smaller potatoes were clustered. Josie thought, potatoes are together.

Now that she was stooping over the rows, she could cry because nobody would see her, nobody would hear. She thought of the dress that woman was making, a little dress with blue trimming. She had coaxed Josie, "Try it on for me, honey." And Josie stood very straight and still and allowed the dress to go on, but shrinking always from the woman's touch, from her fingers. She hated the dress.

"I won't wear it. She wants me to be like Vern and Jackie and Uncle Pete and Pa and even Mister. But I won't be! I'll tear up that old dress!" She looked up with tears in her eyes and thought wtih a sudden great joy, I'll tear it up tonight. I'll throw the pieces all over! Josie rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand and looked across at the woman who was bending to pick potatoes that she wouldn't touch. Josie stuck out her tongue and thought, I'll show you. I'll tear it up.

She went back to her work, but only because Pa was looking in her direction. There were so many potatoes. There were big ones and little ones, there were middle-sized ones. Josie picked up each one with care, because the potatoes belonged to her, and they would belong to Ma, too, if Ma was only here. There were so many little potatoes uncovered in the row. Pa had said, "Just pick up the big ones. Let the little ones go. They're no good." Yet winter was coming and they would be here alone. They would be cold, the little ones. The others that were so round, so big, that had so many eyes, would be warm in the cellar, but the small potatoes would be where the wind would come, where the snow would blow, where ice would form under a gray sky.

Josie wanted to put them in the pail, too, but she remembered Pa's words. "Who picked these little ones?" he might shout. She felt a fear for the small potatoes. She knew winter, she knew the sound of snapping branches, heavy with ice. She knew cold.

A meadow lark was singing bright notes. Josie watched it dip close to the grass, and then she turned back to the row. She paused to examine an earthworm wriggle out of sight between two clods of dirt, hurrying home. She began to wish that they would be through soon. The boys would push the trailer, bringing the big potatoes to the cellar, and she could go back to the house. It would be lunchtime—cookies, milk—and Pa would be glad because the work was done. But the little potatoes, thought Josie, would still be here.

Pa had finished plowing up the rows and was picking, too. The horses were tied to the fence. They reached over the top wire, arching their long shaggy necks and nibbled at the grass. Vern swore at Jackie for throwing a potato at him. They were tired of it. Their wet backs glistened in the sun. Uncle Pete's face was streaked with dust, but he was the only one who did not complain. Josie finished the row she had started and stood erect, rubbing her back, glancing covertly across the patch. She noticed with a start that the woman was gone, but in the next moment, Josie saw her coming down the hill with lunch pails. Pa called, "Lunch everybody" only a minute later, and came out of his row. He emptied the pails he carried in the trailer and said, "Pete, what do you think of these potatoes? I bet nobody's got potatoes like these."

Uncle Pete replied without looking up. "Only one thing wrong with them. There's too many."

Pa laughed. "Well, it won't take long now."

Josie turned hastily to the next row. Pa said it wouldn't take long! Then there wasn't much time, she must hurry. Vern walked past and growled at her, "Are you still on the same row?" She didn't answer. She was down on her hands and knees in the row. She worked, she hurried. She panted for breath, sweat streamed down her face.

"Josie," Uncle Pete called. "Lunch."

She hurried; she must hurry. She heard Pa's voice, laughing a little. "Look at that kid. She's been on the same row all this time. She's just like me, doesn't care much to work." Jackie yelled "I'm going to eat your bread if you don't come."

Now her face was close to the moist, sweet-smelling earth. A white butterfly came near and touched her arm, but she did not feel it. Locusts sang all together from the trees along the fence, but she did not hear. She worked with her hands, with her fingernails. The soft earth on either side slid into the furrow.

"Come on, Josie," Pa called.

Cover the little ones with earth, cover the small ones. Winter is coming, winter is coming. Cover the little ones. They are so small.

Eye Wish

By JOAN KISER

Sean was very happy: hours of homework lay before him, the day was the most beautiful he could remember, and everyone else had gone to his aunt's for the weekend.

After gathering his history of America in the twentieth century, his sociology book, and **Blane Blair**, his English book-report novel, he ran far out into the back yard, past the flower garden and the guest house and into the orchard where he sank down into the velvety-green grass under a shady apple tree.

Contentedly he sighed and picked up his book on history. He opened the cover and flipped the chapter dial to thirty-two, the volume to low, the tone to bass, and turned it on. Almost immediately a low, warm voice began reading.

Sean closed his eyes and as the voice read on, the past came alive to him. He rode horseback across the rolling plains in Ancient America, he traveled on steamboat down the Missouri River, he flew by jet plane from one country to another and then from one world to another.

When the voice completed the section and started the next, Sean turned off the chapter dial and turned on the chapter review dial. Another voice, a little more firm and business-like, went back over the most important facts. Sean concentrated a little more seriously than before, but he completely missed one sentence and had to turn on the jump-back sentence dial.

Within an hour and fifteen minutes, both history and sociology were completed and Sean began **Blane Blair.**

When he turned on the book, soft music issued forth, and a man's voice read the introduction. Then as the story unfolded, other voices came forth, sweet feminine voices, big manly voices, and happy children's voices. As the mood changed, so did the music, and Sean lay back or sat up, ears glued to the book, as chapter after chapter flew by.

Blane Blair was a man born in the late nineteenth century, nearly two thousand years ago. Parts of Blane's life Sean could hardly believe, and he thought the author a little too original.

No man could possibly have withstood all the hardships that were credited to Blane. It was possible that he might have lived successfully with only airplanes, wooden houses, and the medical facilities then provided, but in that case, he undoubtedly wasn't the "average man" the author described him to be, but someone blessed with extraordinary strength of mind and body.

Above all, though, Sean could not imagine this Blane Blair complaining about eye-strain. Throughout the book, Blane's "dream" had

been to find a way to study which would not involve so much use of the eyes.

How happy Mr. Blair would be now, using his eyes only to read the title of the book and to find a soft shady corner in his backyard.

"No 'good old days' for me!" thought Sean as he turned his bright blue, rested eyes toward the sunset.

He Will Call

By DEAN HUGHES

I want my house to stand
On a quiet lane spattered with sun;
Let me live my days past,
Hear the children's gay laughs;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

I want my house to stand
By the side of a shimmering lake;
Let me fish in the Spring,
Hear the Sunday bells ring;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

I want my house to stand
In the shade of a sky-reaching elm;
Let me harvest in Fall,
Watch my children grow tall;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

I want my house to stand
'Neath a roof made of silver-gray slate;
Teach me Winter's chill clutch
And the rain's gentle touch;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

I want my house to stand
'Round a chimney outcropped at its peak
Let me know the fire's cheer
When my loved ones are near;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

I want my house to stand
'Neath the view of His vigilant eye;
Teach me His way with things
And the joy loving brings;
God will wait, He will love, He will call.

The Midget Cow

By JUNE SALIE

The canvas flap moved back and forth over the opening, shifting light in and out. "No," Ella Arlene said to herself, hunched against the old battered trunk in a corner, "don't think about death." Aunt Lil stood near the opening of the tent, fanning herself with part of a newspaper, lifting the heavy hair from the back of her neck and letting it fall again, sighing. "Think about Miss Gregg," Ella Arlene ordered herself, drawing pictures in the dirt with her stick. Ants scurried across the face she had drawn. "That's Portia," Ella Arlene said to herself, with a queer half smile as variable as the light. Stick scratching through the dirt, she thought of Miss Gregg with the blackboard behind her head, hearing her voice again. "Well—and why do you like Portia so much, Ella Arlene?" "Because—because she was smarter than all them men!" Uncle Bert's voice called hoarsely from outside, above the swinging rhythm of an electric organ, "Step right up, folks! See the midget cow. The only one of its kind, stands just twenty inches high!" and Aunt Lil muttered, with a fierce glance around the tent and at the pen, "That's right. Get 'em in!" She walked to the pen, frowning and listening to the little gasping sighs, squeaks, and as she turned away, Ella Arlene looked up wildly from the ground. Then quickly the dark head bent over the drawing, her stick moved.

"See the midget cow, folks! Direct from Mystery Valley! One of the miracles of all time! Only twenty-five cents to see—Yessir!"

"Somebody's coming in," came Aunt Lil's warning voice. "Pull your dress down, ElArlene!" The girl darted a quick look at the opening and gave a tug to her skirt. Then, back straight against the trunk, she stared steadily at Aunt Lil with an unwavering dark look.

"Quit that, ElArlene!" Aunt Lil made a gesture of anoyance and looked away.

At that minute a man's voice asked, "Where is it?" Two big farmers in overalls were coming in, blinking and trying to see. Aunt Lil stared at them without speaking, and her hand edged around to hide a gap in her shiny crepe dress. One of the men looked around and walked toward the pen. "Over here, Pete." The other stumbled after, staring a moment curiously at Ella Arlene who watched from the ground, intense and cold. They looked into the pen. "My god," one said in a queer tone. Ella Arlene looked down and drew little circles in the ground. Her heart was beating in quick sharp beats.

"It's dying," one of the farmers said, turning his head to spit, and looking at Aunt Lil with contempt.

"Get out," she muttered.

"You people are going to get run in," the farmer said. "This animal is diseased."

"Get out of here! Get out!"

Aunt Lil stood there, panting, glowering, as the two men hurried past. The canvas strip was flung open, then it fell back and the light was gone. Aunt Lil turned, the gold in her front tooth flashing, looking into the pen with one knee on a bale. "So that's it! You're dying! How will we live now? Tell me that! You little beggar! You're dying on us!" She shouted at Ella Arlene. "Did you head what that farmer said? The midget's dying!" Ella Arlene, her fingers tight on the stick, made two circles, one for herself, one for the midget cow. "Too bad," she said dully.

"Too bad! Well, I wouldn't expect you to care none! Not you! But I'm thinking about how we'll live and what we'll eat." She ran to the opening. "Bert! Come in here!"

Now Ella Arlene, because Aunt Lil's back was turned, looked furtively at the pen and listened to the sound of breathing. Aunt Lil paced before the opening. There was a crash, a rattle, and a beer can rolled across the ground, kicked out of her path. "Bert!" she shouted again.

Light came in and Uncle Bert stood in the opening, head bent to light a cigarette. His brown jacket with checked sleeves hung from his high narrow shoulders. Ella Arlene turned away, averting her face, and a voice started crying inside her, "Miss Gregg! Miss Gregg!"

"Well," Uncle Bert was saying cheerfully. "I might just as well take the day off. Everybody's going to the races. Fella just said to me, where's this here Mystery Valley? An' I told him, well, the location's secret or I'd be glad to tell you. An' he said what's this midget cow look like anyhow? I said well, why don't you fork over a quarter and you can find out. Then he looked surprised as if asking was I nuts or something, and said no sir, he was going to see Bobby Smith's Devil Drivers." He looked past Aunt Lil to Ella Arlene. "Hello, sweetie. I got something for you."

Aunt Lil's face swelled with hardness. "Come here and look at this cow!"

"It's mighty hot," Uncle Bert said, wiping his face. "I guess the Lord intends heat like this just to kinda remind us of what we're getting into sometime." He was coming near, his hand was outstretched. There was a fifty-cent piece in the sweaty palm. Ella Arlene drew back, watching his hand.

"Give her money, will you?" Aunt Lil cried. "I never get nothing out of you!"

"You ain't as pretty," Uncle Bert said, smiling. "You had your day. Here, honey, take it." But Ella Arlene did not move. Uncle Bert shrugged, dropped the coin on the ground near her, and turned back to Aunt Lil. "You know what's the matter? These farmers see too many cows. Now if I stood out there and said folks, I got a couple midget angels in here, straight from heaven, they'd say yeah, how much does it cost?" Ella Arlene reached for the coin, picked it up, and threw it, rolling and spinning past his feet. The coin gleamed and dropped. Uncle

Bert, his face dark, stooped to pick it up. "Regular little mule," he muttered. "Always was. I took her in, gave her a home, and look how she acts. Just no good, I guess." And then his eyes began to gleam and Ella Arlene knew what was coming. "Maybe we better take you back to old lady Presser, uh? Maybe you wanta go back to live with her." Ella Arlene made her face blank and turned away. In her mind she saw the bathroom again, Mrs. Presser's dirty bathroom. The one little window, the worn linoleum, the big white tub with claw feet, the yellow stains under the faucets, the bolt on the door that slid back with a squeak. A voice cried out so loudly that she jumped. "Ella Arlene! Come out of there! Jim, she's locked herself in the bathroom again!"

Aunt Lil had grabbed Uncle Bert's hand and her face was red with fury. "I said to come and look at this cow!"

"Now what's the matter with you?"

"That farmer said the midget's dying!"

"Aw—she's just sick is all. Those farmers they don't know nothing."

"Listen to her breathe! Go look at her! Just sick! She's dying! Go around an' strut an' think you're a big shot but tomorrow we'll go hungry!"

Uncle Bert leaned over the pen and said, "What's the matter, little gal? Can't you breathe?"

"Maybe you got another one of your good ideas now that this one's dying off."

"Aw—you'll get better won't you?" Uncle Bert's voice was so soft that Ella Arlene could hardly hear. "Why, heck, we think a lot of you."

"You don't think a lot of anybody," Aunt Lil snapped.

"Come on, stand up——try it——"

"You always got a good idea about how to make money. Like when we were in Las Vegas and me going over to jail in the morning and that sheriff and his men laughing at me because my hair was still in curlers. Me, out of a good family!"

Uncle Bert laughed.

"Yah, Lil, I can see your good family now. Your old man half crocked, your old lady screaming down the steps and your sister Jean having a baby——"

"Don't you talk about the dead!"

Uncle Bert pointed to Ella Arlene and chuckled. "Well, I just wanted to remind you, Lil, before you start thinkin' you're a society lady."

"We're not carnival bums, that's all." Aunt Lil turned away.

Uncle Bert took a drag on his cigarette and threw it into a water pail. It sizzled. "I figured the midget cow was good for this week anyhow," he muttered. "Guess maybe I was wrong."

"Can't you call a vet?" Aunt Lil cried. "Can't you do something?"

"Had a vet last night. Nope, it was night before last. Monday night.

Vet says nothing he could do, didn't know what it was. Gave her a shot of something. Cost me two bucks."

One of the strap buckles of the trunk dug into Ella Arlene's shoulder. She looked at the pen and thought, "Maybe they'll fight and go out." The old broken-glassed clock on top of the trunk ticked away the seconds. Death was a hand, like Uncle Bert's, reaching out.

"We ain't got any money!" Aunt Lil said. "What'll we do? Look at that kid. She ain't grown any since we took her from the Presser's. You'd think she was eight years old! It's always the same with you. We always end up where we start."

"Shut up, Lil. I never knew a woman that talked so much. You never say nothing. Why don't you shut up?"

The organ played on, the same tune, over and over. There was the sound of voices and footsteps, people passing nearby. The sighs and gasps from the pen were loud and iregular. "Miss Gregg will come for me," thought Ella Arlene. "She'll be here right away."

Uncle Bert's voice was very soft. He looked into the pen. "It ain't enough that I took good care of you. Just going to kick, huh?"

"Took good care of that cow!" Aunt Lil snorted. "That's a laugh!"

"Hot!" Uncle Bert sighed, wiping his face. "It's too hot to breathe."

Aunt Lil sat down slowly on a bale.

"I'm getting out, Bert. I'm not going to take this no more."

"Nope. You sure don't have to."

"I don't have to stay with you."

"No law against you leaving."

"I guess I can get a job and take care of myself and Ella Arlene."

"It's just like you said, Lil. I ain't much good. You better go. I don't want to cause you any more trouble."

Ella Arlene watched the opening for Miss Gregg. "She liked me better than anybody else. I asked her and she said so. She liked me better than Elmer Grant." Ella Arlene listened, tense, because Elmer Grant was suddenly before her eyes, floating, leaning to say something, a whisper, "I know something about youoo!" And the yellow specks in his eyes were bright, dancing.

Uncle Bert was walking to the opening, spinning his hat in his hands. "Lil, I hate to say goodbye. I'd give you some money so you could get back to Omaha, but I don't have none." He grinned and waved, went out with one long step, and the canvas flap swung back. Ella Arlene watched Aunt Lil. She knew how it would be. Aunt Lil stood up, opening and closing her mouth. She ran to the opening. "Bert!" But there was no answer. "Bert!" She ran out. The canvas flapped back to close the opening.

The organ tune rolled on. Night was coming and the little light in the tent started to fade. A mosquito sang close to Ella Arlene's ear.

She waited a long moment, knowing that they would not come back until very late, with Uncle Bert singing and maybe kissing Aunt Lil—yes, Ella Arlene had seen him do that. She stood up, blinking and listening. There were other voices, other sounds to fear. She turned and ran to the pen, crawling up one of the bales and looking in.

"Midgey."

On the damp straw lay a little trembling thing, head touching the ground, eyes closed, rough matted hide covered with a swarm of flies. The midget cow's white face was gray now, the mouth open and drooling. With every ragged breath that tiny frame heaved, the sharp ribs moved out and then collapsed. The flies stuck to the hide, just gathered there without moving, hummed and buzzed. The smell of manure and sickness was close.

Ella Arlene dropped into the pen and on hands and knees, crept to the midget cow. She leaned forward and looked closely into the cow's face as she had done that first day, only the midget cow had looked back then. She had screamed, "I want the little cow!" and Aunt Lil pulled her away from the fence and Uncle Bert laughed, "Oh, no."

She hovered over the midget cow, slapping at flies.

"They went away," she said. "I had to wait but now I'm here." She lay down, pressed her face against the wet sticky hide of the midget cow's neck, dreamed, told how it would be, Mystery Valley where they would go, she, the midget cow, and Miss Gregg. Now everything was quiet. The organ had stopped playing, people were going home.

She sat up, senses pointed like the ears of an alarmed rabbit. She bent over the midget cow and whispered, begged, "Breathe right, Midgey!" But there was no sound and the ribs did not move out against her fingers. "Why, she's sleeping," thought Ella Arlene. "My baby is sleeping." Smiling again, happy, she lay back on the straw. She was very tired. She would sleep with the midget cow as she had done so often, bouncing in the back of the truck, with stars and clouds passing overhead. "Ella Arlene you go in back," Aunt Lil always said. "It's too crowded up here." And at first Ella Arlene had not gone close to the midget cow, only watching from a corner. Then one night rain fell and Ella Arlene took off her jacket to cover the midget cow. The stars were hidden, the wind howled past.

Sleep came walking on little fingers all over her body, a sleep of faces and scenes and fear. Men passed before her eyes, men who were the enemies. And the midget cow was there, but all of a sudden growing, growing! Her legs lengthened, her body swelled, her head reached up to touch the top of the tent. Canvas ripped, there was a tearing sound, and the midget cow's head went through. Poles toppled and the tent crashed to the ground. Out stepped the midget cow with a sound from her throat like thunder, stamping the ground to dust. People fled, screaming. Men ran too, flinging out their arms, before the cow that was not midget now, but mighty.

Erasure

By EDALENE MOONE

Well, he's gone now, shut up tight where no one need know about him. No one but Jim and me and the doctors. Happens in the best of families, does it? As though that would comfort me. Nine months for that!

"And how is the baby, Mrs. Thorpe," they will say. "Oh fine, just fine. Took it down to the Feebleminded Institution for a check up. Oh, he's a dear baby, such a nice large head, and dull eyes and that sweet way of holding his mouth open. No, Jim didn't enroll him in Yale. We thought we'd like to have him choose his own college.

"It's better this way, Janie. The place isn't bad and he'll be with others like himself and——" Ya, others like himself. I suppose on parents' day we all troop down there and try to pick what idiot is ours. "This is my son." My son.

Forget him. You never had a baby. Just Jim and you, like always.

Don't look at me, Jim; don't touch me. No more kids to be shut away. Happens in the best of families.

The Phoenix Flame

By ELEANOR MOHR

The hills of the heavens receive the sun
Into their purple valleys
While the sooty veils of night are sweeping
Over the stoney hills,
Melting a tree's wild arms
Into the night—into oblivion.
Before the spark from any star
Kindless the moon-fire,
Light the funeral pyre for this day;
Let the Hours fan the sunset ashes.
Then behold the mystery,
How tomorrow rises from the phoenix flame.

Aunt Gus' Bounden Duty

By ELEANOR MOHR

Aunt Gus pressed the edges of her pie crusts into neat scallops. She opened the black oven door, put in her hand to test the heat and then, satisfied, she set the three cherry pies inside. Wiping her hands on her apron, she took several sticks of wood from the woodbox and put them in the glowing stove.

"There," she said to Sadie, "those pies will be ready in two jerks of a lamb's tail."

"I'm sure glad you came, Aunt Gus," Sadie said. She was trying to stir up something, but she kept stopping to talk. Her faded blue eyes were red from crying.

"Well," Aunt Gus answered, "I felt it was my bounden duty to come over and help out at a time like this. I just told my Hank he'd have to get his own dinner. It won't hurt him. I got to look after my bounden duties." She wiped her forehead with a rough hand. Although she was a large woman, she worked with surprising efficiency, stacking the dirty dishes, wiping off the table, and sweeping the floor with as much energy as if dirt were the devil and she, an avenging angel.

Birdie came tripping through the kitchen all decked out in a frilly organdy apron. She was the youngest in the family, and the prettiest, with her long yellow curls that she was always shaking, especially when the men folks were around.

Sadie gasped. "That's Lucy's apron," she accused.

Birdie went to the water pail and tipped it to get the last cupful of water into the dipper. She drank it slowly while Sadie stared at her. "What's the difference?" she said at last. "Lucy don't need it any more."

"Lucy worked so hard to make that apron," Sadie went on doggedly. "She spent hours making those little blue for-get-me-nots all over the top of it."

"So what? She never wore it."

"She was savin' it for somethin' special."

Aunt Gus hung up the broom, and turning to the girls said in her sternest voice, "Take off that apron, Birdie. Put it back where you found it. The apron belonged to Lucy, and no rapscallion girl like you, even her own sister, is going to wear it now. Because poor Lucy is——"

"Don't say it," Sadie begged.

"All right," Aunt Gus said. "But Birdie ain't goin' to wear it."

Birdie flounced out of the kitchen.

Aunt Gus wiped her face again. "Sure is hot," she said as she went to get a drink of water. The pail was empty. "That Birdie," Aunt Gus scolded, "She should have filled the pail; she took the last drink."

"I'll get some," Sadie offered.

"No," Aunt Gus said. "I'll get it myself. Besides I want to know what the men folks are up to."

Outside the children played by the pump. They were throwing water on each other and screaming shrill, ecstatic laughter. This gathering of the relatives was like a picnic for them. They filed around the big table at meal time and helped themselves to the food the neighbors brought in. They played long hours in the grove, where Lucy used to play, sweeping imaginary rooms in the soft dust to mark the boundaries of their playhouses. Aunt Gus shooed them away from the pump and got her water.

She saw the men folks sitting under the scraggly box-elder tree beside the ramshackle barn. They were all there except Uncle Chad and Tick. Pa was drawing circles on the ground with a stick. He was surrounded by a ring of his own circles. Sometimes his hand shook and then he had to steady the stick with both hands.

The chickens scratched in the powdery dirt, sending up little clouds of dust. The pups, lying in the shallow beds they had dug next to the barn's crumbling foundation, were still, except for an occasional twitch to shake off the flies.

Uncle Chad followed Tick out the barn door, wiping his mouth on his fat sleeve. They had been sampling the liquor Pa Watkins kept on the shelf in the barn along side the curry combs and the horse linament. Uncle Chad took an ample bite of his plug of chewing tobacco and passed it around. He chewed slowly, his cheeks bulging. Then he spat between his teeth. The children watched wide-eyed as the amber liquid plopped in the dust two yards away, curling over itself.

Uncle Chad said, "I'm sorry that it was Lucy who had to pass on, but like I say, you might as well make the best of everything. Why, I remember the wake we had for Old Milligan. Now that was some party!"

Kenny and Junior yawned loudly. They had heard this story before.

Uncle Chad went on anyway. "Joshua Hokes brought a barrel of green apple jack because he owed Old Milligan ten bucks since 1921. Joshua was always one fer shrewd dealin'."

Kenny and Junior got up and went into the barn. Sammy pulled his long frame up and tip-toed around tree and followed them.

Uncle Chad pretended not to notice. "Of course, Old Lady Milligan sure had a conniption fit when she found us the next mornin'. All of us were drunker than a buzzard on the Fourth of July!"

Pa rubbed his stubbly chin. "Do you believe in the dead comin' back?" he asked Uncle Chad.

Uncle Chad took a deep breath and got ready to answer. Just then he spied Aunt Gus with the water pail, picking her way across the littered yard. Her iron-grey hair was pulled into its customary knot at the back of her rigid neck. As she advanced toward them, her eyes sparked. When Pa noticed her, he got up, tugging on Tick's shirt sleeve. Tick scowled at Pa. He took his time getting to his feet while she waited for him. Uncle Chad, who was leaning against the side of the tree, stood up straight and swept off his hat.

"How do, Aunt Gus," he said.

"I might have knowed you'd be here, Chad Hopkins," she scolded. "The first excuse you can codger up for leavin' your plow in the field, you leave it. He who labors not——"

Uncle Chad didn't let her finish. 'They toil not, neither do they spin," he answered, "Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as much as these."

"King Solomon," she countered, "didn't have tobacco juice drippin' down his chin."

All the men laughed.

"Well, now he had a thousand wives, if I recollect my scripture correctly. I reckon they must have kept him too busy for any tobacco chewin'."

"Some folks can't keep even one wife," Aunt Gus retorted.

Uncle Chad winced a little.

"There's only one thing you're regular for, Chad Hopkins," she went on scolding, "An' that's a doings. If there's a wake to be sittin', or a weddin' or a charivari, you're there. An' if there wasn't so much work to it, I bet you'd be comin' to the bornings too!"

Just then Kenny and Junior came out of the barn, laughing and wiping their mouths.

"I might have knowed it!" she exploded, "Boozin' again!" An' your own sister not cold yet!"

Sammy followed Kenny and Junior, laughing and calling to them.

"An you, Sammy Griffin, it was your own wife, an' she ain't been dead two days, an' this is the way you're carrin' on!"

"An' you," she said, pointing a righteous finger at Pa, "I hope you have learned this lesson. The sins of the parents shall visitate the children unto the third and fourth generation. All you Watkins men folks are the same. The only backbone you got is a whisky bottle. An' unless you realize the error of your path and renounce your wicked and sinful ways, then surely you'll be thrown into the firey pit forever

and ever, amen! Your sins have caught up with you, Abe Watkins," she preached at Pa. Because you have not minded His word, because you're a boozer and have taught your sons to be boozers, you have been punished. Your daughter has been struck down!"

Aunt Gus started toward the house.

"Just a minute, Aunt Gus," Pa's voice was strained and thin. The blue overalls sagged on his skinny body. His adam's apple worked up and down in his wrinkled throat.

Aunt Gus stopped and turned around.

"The reason Lucy died, Aunt Gus," Pa said painfully, "is because the Lord took her. It was His will. You know she was too good for this world."

"Amen," Uncle Chad said loudly. Nobody paid any attention.

Pa struggled, his mouth twisting with the words, "Oh, God A'mighty!" he finally confessed, "I hope she weren't struck down because of my sins!"

Aunt Gus walked slowly toward the house, carrying the water pail carefully.

Inside Sadie was working over the range. Her round cheeks were tear streaked.

'What's the matter with you, Sadie?" Aunt Gus asked.

Sadie burst out crying. "Them dad-blamed dumplin's won't dump."

Aunt Gus looked at the dough on the table. She shooed the flies away from it. Then pulling a piece off, she weighed it in her hand. Her capable fingers stretched it out, testing it. "You got too much flour in 'em."

"They're a little heavy."

"Heavy as whetstone."

Sadie started crying again. 'I can't help it, Aunt Gus. I do the best I know how to."

"Don't take on so," Aunt Gus patted her bent shoulder clumsily. "I better go in and see your Ma," she said in a solemn tone. "How is she?"

Sadie pointed toward the living room. "She's in there," she said.

Aunt Gus stood in the doorway and saw Ma Watkins sitting in the darkest corner beside the black coffin. She was rocking slowly back and forth, staring at the wall. The angles of her bony shoulders showed through her Sunday dress. Little whisps of hair stuck out from the soft roll at her neck.

"Hello, Martha," Aunt Gus paused, "I was sorry about Lucy."

The buzzing of the flies kept up a dull hum in the room. Ma Watkins kept looking at the brown wall paper. There were dark rings on the

ceiling where the water soaked through every time it rained. Some of the paper was beginning to peal off in strips, showing the flaky kalsomine beneath. Behind Ma in the middle of the room stood the pot-bellied heater. It had been black once a long time ago, but now it was an indifferent grey.

"If there's anything I can do to help out, just let me know," Aunt Gus told her. Ma was still as a stone angel in the graveyard. Aunt Gus looked at Ma for a long time. Then she crossed over and sat down in a straight back chair.

"I'm glad you're taking it so well, "Aunt Gus began. "You cried for a week when you lost that pair of twins—what was it, twenty years ago now?"

Mr Watkins remembered. That was the year when Lucy was two. The child had helped her plant two rose bushes, one on each side of the front steps, but the grasshoppers had eaten them too, until there was nothing left but the thorny pink stems. She had been young then, and she had cried and cried. Then when the twins had been born dead, she had cried too. But now Ma Watkins could not cry.

Aunt Gus began to get fidgety. She got up and looked in the coffin. "Why, Lucy looks like a little girl! An' that's a mighty pretty satin dress she's wearin'. Seems to me she always wanted a satin dress."

Ma remembered that summer day when Lucy had come into the kitchen, her slender face dirt-streaked, her shirt tail hanging out, complaining because Pa had said she had to quit wearing jeans. Ma Watkins could almost hear her saying, "Pa says I have to quit climbing trees and start wearin' dresses. I wouldn't mind the dresses, Ma, if I could be like the ladies in the Sears Roebuck catalog and wear a satin dress."

"There ain't any more dancin' for her," Aunt Gus said. "Dancin' is the devil's pleasure."

Lucy had loved to dance. She had danced all the time instead of walking. Ma Watkins thought about Lucy's bare brown feet gliding and whirling across the linoleum floor while she had chanted, "An' I could wear high-heeled slippers, an' my satin dress would swirl while I danced."

"Yes, she was always the foolish one," Aunt Gus recollected, "But then, Reverend Bergfield preaches a real nice sermon. He probably won't say anythin' about it."

"But I hate to quit climbin' trees, Ma," Lucy had said. "I can think real good when I'm sittin' up in a tree. Do you suppose it's the smell of the leaves, Ma, that's good for thinkin'? An' isn't it wonderful how the leaves come every springtime, all curled up tight like a baby's fist, cool and tender, and then in the summer they get smooth and nice to put your face against. In the fall they put on their satin dresses. Did you

ever notice how they dance, Ma, even in the smoke of the bonfires? An' then the next spring the same thing happens all over again. So they never really die, Ma, because there's always another spring."

Aunt Gus kept on talking, "I always say you want to watch the kind that reads too many books. It ain't good for their heads. Gives 'em funny ideas. An' her wantin' to go to high school even! Just as if our school weren't good enough for her. But she got over that in a hurry, didn't she? An' it's just as well; folks that spend their time in idleness readin' books is headed for perdition as sure as you're born!"

Ma Watkins knew why Lucy quit high school, why she came home from the city hurt inside. Lucy had said to her, "The kids laughed at my black stockin's, Ma. One day Grace Christianson asked me how I could wear the same dress every day, whether I washed it out every night, or if I just held my nose when I put it on. She said that to me, Ma, she said it!"

Ma remembered the tears welling in Lucy's black eyes and collecting on her thick lashes before they tumbled down her cheeks. Ma had wanted Lucy to have the things that she, Ma Watkins, had never had. Of all her children, Ma had put her hope in Lucy. Now she knew that she had loved Lucy too much, wanted too much for Lucy. She remembered how the two of them had wept together when Lucy told her, "Oh, I loved the books, Ma. But school was so hard for me. There was so much that everyone else knew that I didn't know. I loved every page in every book, Ma. But I guess I didn't love them enough, because I can't go back. I can't stand their makin' fun of me."

After that Ma knew that Lucy would never be able to get away. She would never do the things that Ma had dreamed for her.

"She was always the different one, wasn't she?" Aunt Gus made conversation. "The way she ran off with that Sammy Griffin! Like I told my Geraldine—the pretty ones might marry young, but lots of times its better to be a plain Jane."

Ma knew that Sammy Griffin wasn't any good. He didn't tend to his farmin', nor his stock.

"Sammy Griffin don't have any backbone," Aunt Gus declared.

He spent his time hanging around the pool hall, Ma knew. Yet he had a way with women. His brown eyes were bold and inviting. He had wavy red hair, a lanky frame, and a crooked grin that made women want to mother him.

"She went against her parents," Aunt Gus said. " 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' That's one of the commandments."

Lucy had been fascinated by Sammy. Ma knew how Lucy felt. She remembered that Pa had been right handsome when he was young, In-

stead of a farm plug, he had had an old race horse for his buggy, and she had felt so smart when they went riding. Pa had looked right handsome in his checkered shirts. Yes, Sammy might have been Pa years ago. Ma had tried to tell Lucy part of that.

But Lucy was crazy in love with Sammy. "I don't care what you and Pa think!" she had said fiercely, "I love him! I love him! An' nobody can stop me!"

Aunt Gus shook her head mournfully. "If she hadn't married Sammy Griffin, she wouldn't be dead now."

Ma Watkins didn't want to hear Aunt Gus say that. She had thought it a million times since Lucy had died while giving birth to Sammy Griffin's child. It was burned into Ma's mind. "If she hadn't married Sammy Griffin, she wouldn't be dead now!" But Ma knew that she mustn't think that any more. Because she knew Lucy was dead—for many reasons—and it would be sinful to give all the blame to Sammy. Ma Watkins knew that she had a share in Lucy's dying too. But she couldn't explain this to Gus.

Aunt Gus could see through the door at the other end of the room behind Ma. Birdie, Ma's youngest daughter was sitting on the sagging porch, daubing at her leg with a handkerchief. It was bleeding. She kept looking toward the men folks to see who was watching her. Her dress had been washed thin, and it was too tight. While Birdie rubbed her leg with one hand, she twisted her long blond curls with the other.

Aunt Gus walked softly down the long room and stood at the rusty screen door, watching Birdie. The glare of the sun on the screen hid Aunt Gus, but the big woman inside could see out clearly. She watched Sammy saunter up from the barn. He leaned aaginst the porch post. He didn't say anything.

Finally Birdie said, "You're lonesome."

"Naw, I ain't lonesome."

"Yes, you are, I can tell it."

He looked at her leg and then at the ground.

"Everybody gets lonesome sometimes," she told him.

"Yeh, I guess they do."

"I get lonesome too." She put her leg down.

He nodded his head in agreement.

"It must be awful for you."

"I'll get by somehow."

"When I get lonesome I like to talk to somebody."

"Yeh, Sammy agreed, "that helps when you're lonesome."

Birdie twisted the top button of her dress. "I cut myself," she said.

"How did you do that?"

"I was shaving my legs, an' I cut myself." She showed him the red streak on her ankle.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not so much. But the sun's awful hot here, I think I'll have to go someplace where it's cooler."

"Yeh, you don't want to get sun stroke."

Birdie wiped her forehead with her handkerchief. "It's awful hot, isn't it?"

"Sure is; I can hardly stand it."

"I bet a good swim would cool me off," she suggested.

"Me, too, that's just what I need."

"Okay, let's go down to the gravel pit."

They started off. Aunt Gus closed the door so Ma Watkins couldn't see them leaving together.

The flies kept buzzing around Ma Watkins. Once in a while one of them would settle on her shoulder; but she didn't seem to notice them, nor brush them away. They clustered on the rusty screen. Aunt Gus shooed them away, slapping at them.

"I'll go get a fly swatter from Sadie," she said, bustling toward the kitchen. Back she came, swatting viciously. "I can't abide flies—dirty, stealing things."

First she hit all the flies in the window sill. Then she began stalking the others, chasing them around the room, and the instant one lit, smacking it hard. "The least I can do," she breathed hard from the hunt, "is get rid of these nasty flies for you—make things a little more comfortable if I can."

Suddenly Ma Watkins felt grateful for Aunt Gus. Poor Gus, she wanted to be kind, but she didn't know how. When she could work with her hands she was comfortable, but when she sat down to talk, she was awkward, and her words were as sharp as chips from the chopping block.

'There," Aunt Gus finally declared, "I got the last one. Now you won't have to be bothered by those things."

Aunt Gus started to go. "All in all, though Lucy was a fine girl. A little sassy, maybe, but a fine girl. If it's any comfort to you," she said finally, "The good die young, the scriptures say, the good die young."

Ma Watkins leaned her hands on the arms of the rocker and helped herself up.

"No," she said quietly, "it ain't the good ones. It's the lucky ones. The lucky die young."

The Pasture

By DEAN HUGHES

Here was the pasture I had bought. The fence, the former owner had said, was good. Made of weathered gray timber, and old and feeble-looking, the fence fell all over itself on its way up the hill. In the beligerent November wind, it looked a little lonely and helpless.

I crawled over the fence, the lower rail cracking under my weight, and dropped down on the other side. Tall anemic grass covered the ground everywhere, the wind rasping through the blades on its way to wherever winds go.

I shuffled my way up the slight incline, wanting to feel through the soles of my shoes the essence of the first land I could call my own. My toe struck the back of a gray rock crouching at the roots of the grass. I stooped, tugged it out and flung it at another rock. In the sharp clack, a spark was born. Even the rocks of my land had life.

The water of my narrow stream was gray, reflecting the brooding sky, but clear and shallow as it was, I could see the countless pebbles cobbling the bottom. I reached down and let the water lick my hand. My water.

Continuing on my path, I came to the top of the rise, and from there I could see the fence on the other side of the pasture, still sprawling on its way. Several grand-daddy fir trees showed their gray faces and moaned at the look of the evening. But near at hand was another tree, a gaunt, rough-hewn slingshot of a tree, aimed at the sky. Its two trunks branched wide from the crotch which held a rumpled birds' nest, long deserted for one just like it in Mexico. The wind flailed the naked branches and set the twigs to chattering among themselves, and a few tattered leaves clung, straining against the wind. I leaned against the tree; I put my ear to it, wanting to hear its heart.

I leaned against my tree and looked around my kingdom.

The Merry-Go-Round

By EDALENE MOONE

Opposite me, on the whirling merry-go-round sat a blonde, pig-tailed little girl chewing on the Hollaway sucker which she held in one hand while clutching the reins of her horse with the other. She kept

staring at me, and just to be social I stared right back. After all, I assured myself, a man of thirty has as much right to ride a merry-go-round as a girl of eight. My money was as good as hers and surely my nonchalant manner of riding was much easier on the horse.

Just the same her stares flustered me a bit and after smoothing down my hair and giving horsie a poke in the ribs (at least in the proximity), I queried a pleasant "hello." Susie Q just sat there working the sucker backward and forward in her mouth and letting the sticky brown ooze out the sides. I tried again. "Nice horse you have there." This time she took the battered sucker from her mouth and mumbled, "It's just wood." We took a couple more turns around the track and then she added very smugly, "What are **you** doing on a merry-go-round?"

"I used to do this when I was a boy. Thought I'd like to try it again."

"You sure look awful silly."

Suddenly I knew that I did look silly. My legs were so long that every time the horse went down they had to come up. I hung over in all the wrong places. I wanted to run, to get away.

Sliding from the horse and onto the grass, I made for the gate without even turning to answer the squeaky, "Hey, where are you going?"

I pushed my way through the buzzing crowd, past the popcorn stand, the ferris wheel, the scooter cars. A barker gripped my arm. "How about a try mister, only ten cents for three——" "No." "All right, all right mister. Step right up, only ten cents——"

Let that sticky-faced little brat ride the merry-go-round, let her chew her suckers, I thought. I hurried towards my car, cursing a world that lets winter come too soon.

The Hungry One

By ELEANOR MOHR

When it comes up from the sea, lapping up the beaches,
And rolling the polished pebbles beneath its tongue,
Swallowing the dune road; claiming the scrubby little hills,
The pink barns and the grey shingled houses,
If some lonely owl whimpers when the fog horns bleat,
Hold the child closely who doesn't remember me,
Cover the child tightly that he may not hear the sea.

The Bus That Became Important

By JUNE SALIE

"I look sad," Lois thought, glancing at her reflection in a shop window as she passed on her way to the bus stop. She tried to smile as she walked on, but it was no use. The crowds, pushing, hurrying, jostled her, almost turned her around, and the wind was cold. "I can't look happy if I'm not," she told the world, turning into the department store doorway on the corner. She looked back to see if the bus was coming and instead she saw a certain walk, a raincoat and a loose belt, shoulders that had a strong look. Gladness came in a quick rush, in a queer way. But the face lifted, only a face and eyes that did not see her, and down went her heart, slumping back into place. She found a corner of the doorway, behind other people, all waiting for busses.

"I'll never see him again," Lois thought. It had only been some minor working of fate anyhow. Fate, Lois told herself, doesn't always have important things to do, like plane crashes or earthquakes. Sometimes for its own private amusement, it finds just a bus and gets two people on it at the same time—but don't think of that! Didn't Ruby say it was silly? "Honey, you can't fall in love with somebody you don't know. You have to talk to him, you have to know what he's like. My Lord! A bus!" Ruby was right; of course she was right. **Look, dreams, I'm so tired of you. You always tell me one thing and it never happens. Just because of you, I believed something. Nothing ever happens that I think will happen. Go away, you silly dreams! I'm so tired of you. I'll be very practical, yes, I will. I'll swear like Ruby and nothing will ever bother me. I won't think of him anymore . . . oh, if that bus would only come and he would be on it! Damn you, dreams!**

People were moving around her; paper crinkled as they gathered up bags and packages. There came the bus, looking over the little cars, lighted and warm-looking. Lois glanced at her watch. Why, it was only five o'clock! She looked again to make sure. But it was the five-ten bus that he had taken before. She stood there, trying to decide. It was so cold and wasn't it silly to wait ten minutes for a bus that he wouldn't be on anyhow? "Another time Miss Daniels let you off early, you waited half an hour," she reminded herself. Now the bus rolled up to the stop, the doors wheezed open, and people gathered at the curb, waiting their

turns to climb in. Lois took a step toward the bus, hesitated, turned back to the doorway. The bus went off with its load of people sitting, people standing, and Lois, her cheeks suddenly very warm, retreated to a corner of the doorway. Everyone was staring at her. "It's just that I don't want to get home first and have to make dinner. Ruby can do it once—it wouldn't kill her."

And if he is on the bus, wouldn't I be happy? Wouldn't I sing?

His name was Al. That was what the skinny young man with the girl's voice always called him. "Hello there, Al! How's everything?" She had heard Al talk a little to the skinny man—"Get your GI bonus yet?" or nice things like, "You'll be able to. Heck, you can tell them all about shoes." Usually Al wasn't the one who talked the most, though. It was the skinny man, the little Greek, or the tall girl who thought she was so cute, always smiling at Al. He didn't always smile back at her. Sometimes he looked past her. "But he smiled at me," thought Lois, "and he looked at me. Yes, Ruby, at me!" Once, as he walked past her seat, he had smiled, and Lois had been too dazzled to smile back. And there was the time he gave his seat to the tired-looking lady and came to stand close to Lois. Had she only imagined that he looked down at her again and again? When he came on the bus, just four blocks from this very corner, he always seemed to be looking for someone. Didn't their eyes always meet? And when he couldn't find her, when he sat down ahead of her, wasn't he restless, didn't he turn in his seat? At those times a little fiend of gladness started to turn cartwheels in her heart.

Fat Ruby, sitting in her slip and smoking one cigarette after another, with her fingers stained blue from the hair-dye she had given that day at her shoppe, saying "You have to know a person," and always chuckling about Lois' hero on the East 19th bus. Lois wished now she had never told Ruby, had never said, "His name is Al, and I heard him talking to somebody on the bus and he's not married because he said something about living with his folks. Oh, he's so quiet and nice. Ruby, do you suppose he really notices me?" "It's your imagination," was Ruby's reply. "You read all them books and see what happens? But look —if you really are interested in this guy—and he sounds like a freak to me, anyhow—but if you want to get to know him, start it yourself! Look at all the marriages. Nine out of ten times the woman did the chasing. So say something to him—get to know him." Oh, Lois had tried. But the words wouldn't come. Once, standing at the door just before her stop,

she thought, "I'll say something." Al was very close, sitting next to the door, staring at the floor. She took a deep breath, opened her mouth, and said something like, "Do you think it's going to rain?" and he didn't even hear her because it sounded as if she was clearing her throat. "Don't he ever say anything to you?" Ruby wanted to know. Oh, once! Once, he took the seat next to her and Lois thought, "I'll die! I'll die!" He turned his face toward her, didn't he? And wasn't he about to say something? Oh, she had **felt** that. He stood up to let her out at her stop. The bus came to a jerky halt and she bumped against his shoulder before she could catch herself. They looked at each other! He saw how red her face was. She ran the two blocks home. He had been red too!

And after that day, Al became bigger than ever in her mind, and other people were shadows. Each day she looked over the gilt letters on the window, "Smith Life Insurance," forgetting the dreary forms to be typed, thinking of him. There was the time when an angry old lady shoved her transfer at the driver and said in a high-pitched voice, "How often do these busses run? Every spring and fall?" Al looked at Lois and they laughed together, so naturally, as if the joke were just for them. But long after the laughter was gone, there was Al still looking at her. Oh, Ruby didn't know everything. She didn't even know about herself. "You know I've been going with Marvin for two years now, and I'm damned if I can figure out if I love the guy or not." Lois had answered, "If you don't know, you don't love him. Because when you're in love you know it." She couldn't understand why Ruby had to laugh so hard at that. Marvin, of course, was always there for meals, between the times he stood in line at the employment office. There was that one night, Lois remembered with a shiver, that Ruby told her to bring in the beer from the kitchen. Marvin ambled after her, opening all the cupboard doors and looking in, as usual, then coming over to Lois, who was struggling to open the beer cans, and putting his arm around her. "You don't like me very well, do you, honey? You ain't a bit sociable." It was lucky that Ruby came in when she did.

Lois wanted to quit that night and go home, to have the "cup of comfort" with her mother at night, to hear Mom say, "What a passionate nose you have, Lois!" Instead she decided she would move out at the end of the month and never have to see Ruby or bald-headed Marvin again. So the next day she went back to work at eight, and the dark-skinned girl in the lounge remarked again, "Don't you ever say anything? I never knew anybody so quiet. Are you always so quiet?" That same night—

Lois could remember every detail—all the voices that kept saying, "Quit! Quit!" all of a sudden just left, just walked out of her. For Al shouldered his way through the people in the aisle and stood next to her. Her hand held onto the bar and just above it was his head! One of the strong fingers was stained with ink. It was very noisy on the bus but she could hear him breathing. He looked at her; again he wanted to speak. The sun was shining; it had been warm that day. And Lois looked out at the sunny street and thought, "Go ahead and shine, sun. I've got something brighter than you shining inside me."

Standing in the doorway of the store now, Lois felt that warmth again. A newsboy came past, a little shivering fellow. If he sold his papers, he could go home. "I'll take one," Lois said, offering her nickel, laughing at herself because she knew she wouldn't look at the paper. Her smile died as the boy thrust a paper at her, took the nickel, and without a "Thanks" turned and shuffled away. A few scattered snowflakes were falling. People walked by, their breaths white puffs, hanging in air.

Lois knew she had been dreaming again. There was a policeman, directing traffic. Inside the store, clerks were covering the counters. If Al had thought of her at all, even a little, he would have made some effort to know her. He might have talked to her. He had looked at her those few times because she was familiar, that was all. What of the many times he had not looked at her? What of the time he had stood talking to the bus driver all the way? If he was shy, how had be been able to talk so easily to the skinny man, to the Greek? No, it was only a sum total of her up-the-hill dreams. She had not seen Al for weeks. If he had been interested in her, wouldn't he be on the five-ten bus as usual, just to see her, just to look at her? **Now hold on, dreams. We're going down!**

Miss Daniels came walking past, her red hair fuzzy under the rim of her be-sequined, feathered hat. Her rouge was on in splotches just under her eyes. Lois went back into the corner of the doorway so that Miss Daniels wouldn't see her. "She calls all the girls by their first names," Lois thought bitterly. "That's because she's read 'How to Win Friends and Influence People." Miss Daniels waited for the light to change and then started across the street. . . . Well, Lois, how do you like working here? Are you still homesick?" "No." "Oh, but you are a little homesick, aren't you?" "No." "Oh, but just a little?" . . . Lois wanted to shout that day, "I hate working here. I hate you. You remind me of a lion." And that was because she associated Miss Daniels and the

lion's den of the Bible, somehow and her red hair had something to do with it, too.

Lois leaned against the wall and put her hands deep into her pockets, staring out across the street. The snow was falling more rapidly, and everything was becoming dim—the lights, the world. Was it the snow or the tears in her eyes?

"I guess I must be crazy," Lois thought, "to think that he ever really saw me at all."

The bus was coming now, and her heart gave a queer little jump. The snow swirled in the yellow glow of the headlights. Maybe after all, he would be on the bus! **No, Lois, life isn't like that. It's Ruby's kind of world.** She moved with the other cold red-faced people to the curb. They were exclaiming about the snow. Lois looked at it with the expression of one who is thinking, "I expected you long ago." Yet she hurried into the bus; she looked for him. Then, before she sat down in the back, she thought, "But maybe he'll come on at the usual place." The skinny man was sitting opposite her. If only she coould ask him, "Where is Al?"

The bus started across the intersection. The skinny man was staring at her. Lois held her bag very tightly. The first block. The second block . . . **Oh, Al, I wish I could see you, just once more.** Three blocks. **I'm a fool. I imagine so much. He doesn't know me, not even my name. And I don't know a thing about him—except he's so fine . . . Honey, you can't fall in love with somebody you don't know . . .** The bus was stopping. **Heart, don't beat so fast!** She heard the doors opening. Someone was getting off. Nobody was coming on. She turned to look out, but the windows were frosted over.

She leaned back in the seat, hoping the skinny man had noticed nothing. But he was humming a tune and reading the bills above the windows. There was the Greek, blowing his nose. Just a few seats away sat the little boy that Al had grinned at so often and slapped in a friendly way. Someone stood up to pull the bell cord.

Lois wanted to cry. She opened her bag and brought out the library book she had selected hastily during her lunch hour. She thumbed through it. The bus slowed, was coming to a stop. A draught of cold air swept through when the doors opened. Lois turned to the last page and started to read.

> Albert turned wearily. His face was white.
> "You must know that I love you. That's what has been wrong with me all these years. I never wanted to admit it to myself, to you, to anybody."
> "No, no," she groaned. "It's too late!"
> He reached for her hand and pressed it warmly——

"Hello there, Al! How's everything? Say, how come you're on this bus I thought you told me your folks moved out to the south side."

The Masterpiece

By MYRL F. STOTT

The night had turned chill, with that peculiar penetrating cold which comes in late fall and which gets into the blood and settles around the marrow of the bones. The man walking steadily but slowly up the street shivered imperceptibly as the three-quarter moon, squeezing itself behind a cloud, erased the shadow from in front of him. His pace remained constant, however, until he reached the corner where he halted at the intersection of the walk coming from his right.

As he stood facing half-left, the light from a street lamp on the left side of the corner revealed him to be about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. He wore a somewhat whimsical smile, but his eyes stared with disconcerting steadiness. The mouth was well formed, the hair black and tangled, pushed back and partially held in place by a broad-brimmed, battered felt hat. He was tall—just past six feet—and slender, but he carried himself with an air, and his motions indicated a hard, muscled body.

The man turned back to glance up at the dark cloud that covered the fall moon. He saw, by the soft glow that emerged from its edges, that it was not large and would not be long is passing. Slowly his eyes searched the night sky, observing its mottled effect. Sections strewn with bright, glittering stars were separated by dark, moving splotches of varying sizes. His mouth grew grim.

"No . . . you won't catch me again," he muttered in the direction of moon as it appeared to race from behind the small cloud. "There's big ones coming . . . I'll wait like I should have that night."

He remembered that night with a further tightening of his lips . . . even in the periods like this one that came between the ones of dull, throbbing headaches . . . not all of it, but enough. He remembered too, the special bulletin that had been posted in the mess hall that early April day when the Sabine dropped anchor off Okinawa. All personnel, it had said, were to be extremely cautious in exposing themselves on deck at night . . . particularly on the open fantail . . . a favorite spot for enemy individuals to climb aboard after swimming from the islands. Pairs of alert, armed Security Guards were to patrol constantly.

But he had read something else that day too . . . the letter from

Alice with the long-awaited news that Jr. had a baby sister. She had assured him that everybody was all right but for his absence. Thus it was on a head filled with post-war dreams that the blow had struck as he passed the huge, shadowed winch just as the moon raced from behind a small cloud.

The thought pattern quickly spanned the intervening two and a half years and was back in the present. Alice would have the children in bed by now and would be waiting hopefully that the 'deal' he was going to see a friend about would resolve itself into a less exacting job physically. Well, maybe the 'deal' would lead at least to a firmer financial foundation to start from . . . or keep going on.

A slight wind acompanied the return of the moon and, as he moved around again, his shadow appeared on the walk. The added chill brought his ungloved hands out of the pockets of his dark-gray topcoat to turn up the collar around his neck. His left hand returned to its pocket while the other held the lapels together where the top button was missing. With evident familiarity his eyes turned to a dignified but ample sign back on the lawn across the intersection.

LARKIN HALL
Open to the Public
10 A. M. to 9 P. M.

Larkin hall was in one of the more exclusive residential districts of the city. Houses, set well back from the street, were fronted with bits of lawn, and their grounds were ornamented with well-kept hedges and trees. Larkin hall was more pretentious than the rest, occupying the top of a small knoll. There were no other houses within some two hundred feet on either side, and the knoll had been landscaped to set off the magnificance of the house. Once a private dwelling, it was designated in the will of its deceased owner and former world traveler to be a small museum. Its several rooms held many priceless treasures—precious stones, rare manuscripts, rings, paintings of masters and gems that had once belonged to royalty. Their former owner had devoted nearly a life time to this collection and, being blessed in spirit as well as in worldly possessions, he had desired that the beauty of them be shared by others.

The solitary figure on the corner, taking deliberate glances in all directions to see that the neighborhood was still deserted, stepped across the intersection as the moon once more went behind a cloud . . . a large one. Under darkness and away from the rays of the street light,

he turned across the well-kept lawn and, walking a little faster, headed for the building on the knoll. He walked around to the back and, away from where the moon woud shine when it came out again, he set to work cutting the glass from a window. In a deft yet unhurried manner he soon had a portion of the pane removed and the sash raised enough to permit his entrance.

Once inside he drew a small light from his pocket and flashed it upon an itemized list he took from another. With unmistakable precision he began to go down the list as he moved through the house gathering up small but valuable items and putting them in his pockets. He had proceeded through about half the list when his clothing would hold no more and then he pulled a bag from under his unbuttoned shirt. Transferring the pieces to the bag, he once more checked off his list as he continued about the museum.

The man had nearly reached the bottom of the paper when his eyes came to rest upon a famous painting which was lighted in part by his pocket flashlight. Standing close, he moved the light over the details of the picture as he studied it with revernce. The light lingered on the figure of Judas before passing on to the other portions of the masterpiece. He could understand the picture's greatness because, at one time he had sought to nourish his ambition to paint by study.

So engrossed was he by his attention to the picture that he didn't hear the steps behind him; a voice spoke just as something hard pressed against his back.

"Beautiful piece of work, isn't it?" The gazer stiffened as he felt himself being patted over his pockets.

He turned quickly to face the speaker as the pressure in his back was withdrawn. "Who . . . well . . . uh . . . I . . .," he stammered, lowering the beam of his light to the floor.

The voice continued rather kindly as its owner flashed a light in the face of the intruder. "Now no need to get panicky. Besides I could shoot you if I wished or if you started to run. But really I would rather not have to do that."

"Who are you?" asked the young man, regaining some of his composure.

"I'm the curator of this museum," continued the stranger softly. "I, too, love these works of art, but with my duties of seeing to all the vis-

itors I don't have a great deal of time to enjoy them as I should like—so I occasionally stay around after closing time to study them alone, just as you were doing."

"They are beautiful," the young man said rather dejectedly as he turned his flashlight on the one before them again. "But what are you going to do with me," he asked over his shoulder.

"Frankly I don't know yet, just what I shall do with you."

"Are you a painter?" the intruder asked as he turned again and directed the ray of his light to the face of the man behind him.

The light shone on a shorter, heavier man, about fifty years of age and with a shock of steel-gray hair. There was a kindly twinkle in the gray eyes.

The older man smiled as he answered. "No, not a painter, just one who can appreciate art. Were I an artist though, the greatness of these would certainly give me an inspiration. Here, let me show you this other" —he moved a few steps to the right— "this is another of Leonardo da Vinci's and comes from the same collection; it is a great favorite with the visitors."

He took the younger man around, showing him a number of masterpieces just as though he were a legitimate visitor during the open hours. At last they returned to the one where he had surprised the intruder and where the bag of stolen goods lay on the floor.

"You know I could have you arrested for breaking in here and stealing these priceless treasures don't you?" he asked softly.

"Yes, I know. But if you could only know . . ."

"Oh, I guess you have a pretty good story already to tell me . . . but I understand," the older man broke in.

"But it's true," protested the other bitterly. "I'm drawing fifty-five percent disability from the war and I have a wife and two . . ."

He felt an arm touched by a gentle hand. "Here here . . . you needn't go into all that. Your interest in these old masters has shown me that you are no common thief. You can not be all bad."

"Thanks. I wouldn't think of stealing—except right now I'm not able to get along on what I get. I haven't been able to find work, and my family——"

The older man had led the intruder to the massive front door.

"Come, don't be so upset. I am going to give you two things, perhaps three, and I hope that they will serve to keep you from erring again. First, I am going to give you a chance to reform and secondly, I am going to give you ten dollars to tide you over for a bit because you have done something for me which I am unable to explain. Then tomorrow, before nine, I want you to come and I may be able to get you a job. I am getting along in years and we really need another guide for visitors. Perhaps I can help you to obtain the position and we both can have more time to enjoy these beauties here. You might be something of an assistant."

"Ten dollars?" . . . A job? . . . Gosh! And one that I can handle . . . that I'd like! Gee Mister, I don't know what to say . . . nor how to say it. You . . . you are very kind," stammered the other gratefully. He shook hands at the now open door.

He heard the door close softly behind him as he moved across the porch and went down the steps. He reached the intersection again and hurried on to the busline he had used coming out.

At eight-thirty the next morning he alighted again from the bus that stopped two blocks from Larkin Hall. But before stepping on up the street he paused at the scale outside the drugstore on the corner. Gazing into the small mirror he inspected his tie, brushed a few worn places on his topcoat and polished the toes of his shoes on the backs of his trouser legs. Satisfied at last he headed for the museum humming softly to himself.

Reaching the intersection below Larkin Hall he noted that there were a number of cars parked at the curb and a crowd of people around and on the porch.

"Visitors sure get here early," he said half-aloud as he approached the building, using the cement walk this time. "Guess the old man does need help at that."

Reaching the foot of the steps he elbowed his way up till he was near the door. There he saw a uniformed policeman, arms folded, barring his way.

"And what will you have?" asked the officer skeptically.

"Why I came to see the curator about a job."

What kind of job?" queried the policeman suspiciously.

'Why as an assistant and guide!"

"Well you will have to come back some other time. The place was robbed last night and they have plenty other things to do just now."

"Robbed!" exclaimed the young man. "Who . . . did it?"

"That's what WE would like to know, Mister. Here . . . you folks had all better stand back now," he said as he turned the young man around by an arm, giving him a gentle shove, and motioning the others toward the steps with his other hand.

The Births of Man

By DEAN HUGHES

The births of man are many. His body is born, then his mind, then the spirit of God in man. And within these births are innumerable smaller awakenings.

His body is born amid spasm and agony. He is expelled, screaming and furious, from his mother's womb, dropped ingloriously into the world with only his red and wrinkled hide to cushion the blows of environment. In this birth, deep within, are planted the seeds of his final birth.

Childhood. Grasping, quaking, curious childhood. Probing eyes, probing fingers, probing mind. This is birth into reality, into the mundane, the common, the everyday. And the seeds of mortality within man stir, fretting for action.

His grubbing mind awakens and, baffled and thwarted, it digs shallow for knowledge and power. The seeds of his final birth sprout tiny leaves and reach their tremulous roots into his marrow.

Youth flows through man like hot lava, scorching and burning, awakening his senses. Youth, sensitive and cruel, certain and wavering, frightened and bullying all at once. And the seeds of mortality take on new life and grow and push.

The birth of the spirit of God in man can come at any time in his life. Until its birth, this spirit lies mute and dormant deep within, deeper even than the seeds of mortality. This birth exalts man, deepens, stabilizes.

The birth of maturity sees the culmination of development: the body completed, fulfilled, powerful; the mind still reaching, stretching, grasping—battling with that which is basic, fundamental, universal. The spirit of God grows great and real, enriched, comforting. But the seeds of his final birth build and expand, shadow him, move out to overpower him.

Then the birth of death, the last of man's births. Man's mind and body decay and enter the womb of the earth. The seeds of death have become the whole of man. And this plant called death shall last and increase and new branches shall grow. And it shall grow until the death of death, when the God in man shall rule for eternity.

Interview

By PATRICIA PENTONY

What it is like, Soldier,
Lying in a foxhole
Watching men die all around you?

Are you afraid, Soldier,
When you hear the bombs burst,
Hear the shells exploding near you?

Are you lonely, Soldier,
When all is quiet,
And the stars shine, and the moon is bright?

Do you feel brave, Soldier,
Seeing the enemy fall
On the hills, in the fields?

Do you hate, Soldier,
When your best friends die
Bloody and screaming at your feet?

Do you understand, Soldier,
What you are fighting for,
Why men are dying and children crying?

Will it be victory, Soldier,
When the truce is signed,
The drums beat, and the bullets cease?

Reincarnate

By ELEANOR MOHR

I remember a silvered house
Down by a troubled sea,
All around the brave dune grass
But never a flower or tree,
Except, perhaps, a scraggly pine
Outside the wind-worn door;
When I find it I will know
Who I was before.

Wood's Colt

By ELEANOR MOHR

He sows his seeds in the dark of the moon;
And when it gives him pleasure,
He milks his brindled cow at noon
And with his eyes he measures
His way past women in a room.

"A wood's colt," they whisper, "bewitched is he,"
Who pays no heed to signs, nor sighs, nor me.

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